It is often repeated that we live today in a 'post-truth' world. But this problem has a long history. Greek philosophers investigated the origins of truth (and the will to truth) in hope to separate truth from illusion. But already Machiavelli equated the concept of truth with the notion of what seems to be true. And today? Perhaps, we are paying the price of naivety. In this book, the author approaches the idea of deliberative democracy with reservation, attempting to expose the vain hopes rooted in the Enlightenment tradition, which placed the desire for truth at the fore, and relegated the desire for illusion to the shadows. The book encourages reflection on the appeal of deception in a world which has become the media’s ‘grazing ground’; a world which rejects metaphysics in favour of pragmatic theories, thereby transforming politics into a sphere where truth is replaced with ‘narrative’.

The Author

Stanisław Filipowicz is professor at the University of Warsaw and ordinary member of the Polish Academy of Sciences. His research concentrates on the history of political ideas and political philosophy, and, more recently, on challenges posed by the erosion of classical patterns of democracy. He has authored many books and publications addressing the main currents of liberal thinking, exploring the patterns of rationality originating in the tradition of the Enlightenment and investigating their decay.
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Truth and the Will to Illusion

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Truth and the Will to Illusion
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Truth and the Will to Illusion
The truth, he thought, has never been of any real value to any human being – it is a symbol for mathematicians and philosophers to pursue. In human relations kindness and lies are worth a thousand truths.

Graham Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, 1948
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Introduction

In The Trial by Franz Kafka we come across these words: ‘The lie made into the rule of the world.’ It is a significant remark which has become a motto for the century, a century well aware of the depth of its fall. Or so it seems. Kafka voiced a relevant idea, no doubt, but not an entirely new one. Earlier, Blaise Pascal confided in similar terms: ‘Man is then only disguise, falsehood, and hypocrisy, both in himself and with regard to others. He does not wish any one to tell him the truth; he avoids telling it to others.’ And then, somewhere between Pascal and Kafka comes Kant, repeating Horace’s motto: Sapere aude! Kant, of course, takes the side of truth, believing that there is no chasm between us and truth apart from ‘laziness and cowardice,’ as we can read in his famous essay What is Enlightenment? You only have to drum up some courage and overcome bad habits. Kant also insists that we should ‘use one’s own reason’ but ‘without the guidance of another.’ Only then will we be able to leave the state of ‘self-incurred immaturity’ and ‘stand firm on our own two feet.’

The Age of Enlightenment is, indeed, brimming with enthusiasm. It worships the human mind and delights in the idea of truth. But the fate of Joseph K. (The Trial) demonstrates that it failed to go far enough, to break man’s losing streak. So doubts reappear. The most famous of the Sophists, Protagoras from Abdera, said: ‘There are two sides to every question, exactly opposite to each other,’ as Diogenes Laertios recounted in the Lives of Eminent Philosophers. Therefore, what is true can simultaneously be untrue, and thus become a falsehood. Protagoras believed that everything depends on one’s point of view. A more radical sophist, Gorgias, claimed that truth simply does not exist.

What can we say of truth today when the world has become a grazing ground for the media? By placing the ‘image’ on a pedestal we enthusiastically pander to the play of appearances. In this context, do we still need ‘truth’? Maybe, on the other hand, our faculties have failed us and we have become too clumsy, easily discouraged in our pursuit of truth? Friedrich Nietzsche mercilessly poked fun at the eagerness of rationalists. He teased philosophers. He provoked: ‘Suppose

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that truth is a woman – and why not? Aren’t there reasons for suspecting that all philosophers, to the extent that they have been dogmatists, have not really understood women?" 

So what is the value of Enlightenment rhetoric? The Century of Reason has propagated the belief that thanks to the emancipation of reason, the search for truth will play a decisive role. The longing for truth has been glorified. The Enlightenment has created a vision of a total transformation establishing the reign of truth and the elimination of superstition, fiction and lies.

As we know, things are not that simple. The Enlightenment *credo* raises evermore doubts. Nietzsche poses a very disquieting question: ‘What in us really wills the “truth”? […] Granted, we will truth: *Why not* untruth *rather?* in which case, what is the significance of the will to illusion?

This is our point of departure: does the will to truth play a decisive role? Can the aspiration to truth be seen as the pivot for human action? The Enlightenment presumed that truth as a foundation established through public debate would serve as the support for all practices which consolidate the priority of reason. However, despite the efforts of the missionaries of reason, who use such fashionable labels as *rational choice* or *deliberative democracy*, we know only too well that this hopeful view raises many doubts. The doubts have to do with the critical importance of man's craving for illusion – but Nietzsche was not the first author to draw attention to this.

The history of his predecessors is very long. We cannot provide an exhaustive and detailed historical account in this volume, but we can do something else. The idea is to draw attention to the issue itself, to emphasize its relevance. But there are other constraints in dealing with this subject so, in Kant's words, the question we will be addressing is 'making a public use of reason.'

Irrespective of all inevitable constraints we will find ourselves addressing a subject defined by two notions: 'the will to truth' and 'the will to illusion.' It is a subject beset by tensions, arguments, doubts and controversies which have been with us since the very beginning.

From the times of Greek philosophers there have been numerous uncertainties related to the question about the role of truth and the quest for truth. This is where we will start, and proceed towards a confrontation more akin to a tectonic shock, namely, Nietzsche's feuds with the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

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5 Ibid., p. 5.
Nietzsche’s critique denounces the will to truth; it reveals the power of the will to illusion. His critique, of course, reaches beyond struggles over ideas and touches upon reality. It depicts a situation which we now find ourselves in: we have lost all illusions concerning the fundamental importance of truth. It reveals a world in which the will to illusion takes the form of the will to truth; a confused world that is encouraging us to gradually forget the difference between truth and deception. The destruction of the idea of truth – ‘the death of God’ to use Nietzsche’s words – buries the hopes of the Enlightenment. Illusion itself is becoming less of a stigma as it can play the role of truth. Where there is no truth there is also no illusion.

However, can we protect ourselves against extreme relativism, arbitrariness and randomness? What are we going to call truth from now on? Pragmatists will deal with this problem by offering solutions which allow us to abandon the realm of gnawing doubts, doubts which question the idea of ‘making a public use of reason.’

James, Dewey and Rorty make many suggestions, but the world will not take heed and will go its own way. The last chapter of this volume deals with the most pressing and disturbing issue: the weakening immunity to deception, in other words, a tendency, at the junction where technology meets marketing culture, which is taking on increasingly obvious and alarming significance. Will Nietzsche’s prophesies be fulfilled?

We tend to associate thinking with certain results: thinking should bring certain benefits. Thanks to our conscious efforts, as the Greek philosophers argued, our lives can change for the better. The traditional way of thinking presumes that thought is of use only when we can tell the difference between truth and appearance. Plato is the great patron of this view and argues that we can do much good by extricating ourselves from the trap of illusion. We need truth, in fact, it is our foundation. Thanks to metaphysics and religious convictions this has been the predominant belief for a very long time. But it would change. Not without reason Nietzsche declared: ‘God is Dead!’

The new way of thinking steers us in the opposite direction. We are led to believe that we can gain most when we cease to care about the difference between truth and illusion. Without doubt the patron of this view is Machiavelli who, in his famous treatise *The Prince*, argues that it is not important who the Prince is, but what he is taken for and what he seems to be. According to Machiavelli, the difference between truth and appearance is in practice irrelevant. He praises appearances, arguing that it is not essential that a Prince should have good qualities but only that he should seem to have them. Gradually, this view started gaining
more ground. The influence of the new way of thinking began to grow. Nietzsche was merciless in the way he framed the problem of truth versus illusion, demonstrating the fundamental role of the ‘will to illusion.’

In this volume, as mentioned already, we will also refer to the views held by the pragmatists. The repudiation of the classical concept of truth, and the interpretation of the world as relating to metaphysics, contributes considerably to expanding the impact of the new way of thinking. Richard Rorty will distinctly make us aware of this fact, arguing that the difference between truth and illusion is significant only as long as we are in thrall to the philosophical superstitions of the Platonists. Therefore, this way of thinking (which opens the door to the terror of irrefutable truths) must be repudiated, which, let us add, will become a standpoint typical of pragmatism. James, Dewey and Rorty believe that all metaphysical, ‘strong’ notions of truth, are a barrier to the quest for the best solutions. The rules governing the new way of thinking do not necessitate the rejection of the notion of truth. They merely assume that we are at our most effective when we reject the traditionally understood difference between truth and illusion, a difference made attractive by the belief in the ability to reach the ‘essence of things.’

The issue at hand is not a purely theoretical exercise. The last chapter in this volume will analyze the mechanism of a conversion of sorts, or rather an apostasy, which was responsible for traditional thinking losing its significance. Firstly, what we have in mind is the birth of a new type of culture and secondly, the forsaking of old deities. Both correspond to wide ranging phenomena. How was it possible that with no prior announcements, quite imperceptibly, the rules of new thought became vitally important, easing the development of a way of thinking which bridged the gap between truth and illusion? How was it that a readiness (and ability) to differentiate between truth and fiction became meaningless, ceding its place to the enthusiasm of deception, and the rule of illusion? This will be, in other words, a short visit to the land of ‘fairy tales.’ Fairy tales, which inevitably our ‘truths’ will become, as Nietzsche predicted some time ago.
1. Who Needs Truth?

Characterizing the modern European, Friedrich Nietzsche disdainfully said that he ‘absolutely requires a costume.’ He likes the play of appearances, adores a ‘maskerade of style.’ Therefore, in essence, he is someone dressing up. The modern European treats history ‘as a storeroom of costumes.’ Only when striking a pose does he become himself.

So the modern European has no need for truth or principles. All he requires is gestures and props. Staffage is all that counts. Thus, this careless joker inevitably becomes ‘a parodist,’ an unwitting pathetic parody of his own grandeur, emerging, in Nietzsche’s words, as ‘a buffoon of God.’

Can we subscribe to this opinion today or should we consider it misguided? Indeed, what suits us better: staffage or truth derived from the essence of things? In November 2002, the Paris Sorbonne hosted a debate where two eminent philosophers, Richard Rorty and Pascal Engel, argued about truth. The title was: *A quoi bon la vérité? Or What’s the use of truth?*

Making his argument, Engel remarked:

on the one hand, there has never been so much distrust of the values of rationality, scientific progress, truth and objectivity, either in advanced intellectual circles or in the media and society generally. On the other, never has the impression that we are being deceived by the authorities (political and scientific) that are supposed to guarantee precisely these values, and the need for trust, been so great.

In the vast space between the play of appearances and the desire for truth a genuine drama is unfolding, rife with tensions and paradox. The more eagerly we embrace doubt, the greater our need for certainty.

So which, in the end, is it? Let us address the central question: which is stronger in us, to seek the truth or to succumb to the enticement of illusion? Are we tempted to yield to the play of appearances? Which has the upper hand: the will to truth or the will to illusion?

The rhetorical power of reason rests wholly on the homage paid to truth. We treat our aspiration to truth as something obvious and settled, a foregone conclusion. We tend to identify rationality as fidelity to truth. Our trust in the

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inarguable and absolute predominance of the quest for truth – and its impartiality – was derided by Nietzsche. It was Nietzsche who made the interpretation of the will to illusion a crucial and groundbreaking issue. He puzzled over the nature, content and essence of the ‘truth drive,’ as he called it, in which we wish to see the steadfast guarantee of our intentions.

But the first cracks appeared far earlier: traces of a fundamental doubt which undermined the boastful rhetoric of reason and its glorifying of the will to truth. In Saint Paul’s Letter to the Romans we read: ‘For, we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions.’ What is the significance of the will to truth? A will stigmatized by sin, polluted by false imaginings and desires. Where is this effort – arising from an inability to comprehend – taking us? Truth, which draws its strength from sin, inevitably becomes an illusion. The will to truth, burdened with the flaws of sin, is leading us astray. The importance of the evangelical message revolves around the authority of faith and revelation. But the issue at hand is far wider and can be treated differently. From the very beginning, the imperfection of the will to truth was also explored by philosophers when they questioned the role played by illusion in shaping the aura of truth. Indeed, it is the philosophers who will stigmatize alleged truths or, as Plato used to call them, ‘boastful thoughts.’

Today, it seems, such ‘boastful thoughts’ can count on being received more favorably due to their growing prominence. The domain of the ‘Degraded Form’ is flourishing, to use the words of Witold Gombrowicz. In our relations with other people, Gombrowicz argued in his interview with Dominique de Roux,

we want to be cultivated, superior, mature, so we use the language of maturity and we talk about for instance Beauty, Goodness, Truth… But within our own confidential and intimate reality we feel nothing but inadequacy, immaturity: and then our private ideals collapse, and we create a private mythology for ourselves, which is also basically a culture, but a shabby, inferior culture degraded to the level of our own inadequacy. This world, said Bruno [Shulz – S.F], is composed of the remains of the official banquet; it is as though we were simultaneously at table and under the table.9

‘A private mythology’ instead of truth. It is of our own free will that we become people of the twilight (‘a deficient world’ or ‘quasi-world’ as Gombrowicz saw it) where the luminance of capitalized words means nothing. A play of appearances,

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or escapades into the reaches of ‘Degraded Forms,’ become more interesting and important than reaching the lofty heights of ideals.

To repeat our fundamental question: do we always side with truth, or illusion and deception? Do we seek truth, or do we prefer the play of appearances? What suits us better, serves us better, works in our favor? Above all, can we tell the difference between truth and illusion?

The last question, obviously, has an archetypal significance – Greek philosophers have asked it from the very beginning. During the Archaic period cognizance was identified with the ability to see, with the name of the Goddess Aletheia. ‘We learn about Aletheia mainly from Parmenides’ poem,’\textsuperscript{10} where its hero, ‘a youth’ climbs to the heights of knowledge leaving darkness behind him. Parmenides writes: ‘Along this way I was carried; […] the maidens, daughters of the Sun, having left the Palace of the Night, hastened their driving towards the light, having pushed back their veils from the heads with their hands.’\textsuperscript{11} At the end of his journey, the chosen one stands in front of the Goddess who bestows upon him the ability to see. She allows him to see, that is look at \textit{what is}, at what really exists, over and above the sphere made up of the ‘opinions of mortals.’

The motif of a journey towards light as a symbol of cognizance (knowledge and education) and the distinction between truth and the opinions held by mortals are at the heart of Parmenides’ legacy […]. The path of truth is the path of the identity of thinking and being. Non-being, non-existence is unknown: we cannot fathom it nor can we speak about it.\textsuperscript{12}

We can only speak about that which exists, which is the crux of the matter. Whoever fails to meet these requirements is laboring under an illusion.

The temptation to look is overwhelming even when the sources of light are dim. Parmenides’ motif will be developed by Plato in his image of the ‘cave.’ What does it mean to see? ‘Usually they think they see this house and that tree directly, and the same with every being. Generally they never suspect that it is always and only in the light of the “ideas” that they see everything that passes so easily and familiarly for the “real.”’\textsuperscript{13} ‘Cave’ dwellers see only the ‘shadows’ of

\textsuperscript{12} Buczyńska-Garewicz, op.cit. p. 11.
things. They are acquainted only with the sphere of illusion and their gaze does not fall on that which ‘is.’

They live in a prison and leave all “ideas” behind them. And since in no way do they recognise this prison for what it is, they consider that this everyday region under the dome of the heavens is the arena of the experience and judgement that provide the sole standard for all things and relations and fix the only rules of their disposition and arrangement.\textsuperscript{14}

Thus, the world we experience as eyewitnesses is ‘a prison.’ Our everyday thinking implies being imprisoned in a ‘region’ of deception. And illusion rules in the ‘everyday region.’ That which is unreal we treat as if it were real. We wander around, lost in the clutter of apparent truths. Indeed, our knowledge concerns appearances.

Can we break out of this circle of illusion? Yes, but this requires a thorough transformation, a transformation of the ‘soul’ – allowing it to soar above the chaos of daily life. Cognition requires a deliberate effort and the ability to see, unrelated to the prosaic fitness of the eyes themselves. One should leave the ‘cave,’ or, in other words, renounce the naïve wisdom produced by a direct inspection of the world. A sage must reject the image of things that everyone treats as obvious. Initially, everything seems confused; the images in the cave retain their shape, but in his stubborn search for light the sage sees the world clearly for what it is. He sees all that others fail to see: everything that lays open in the light of day.\textsuperscript{15} He can become, as Heidegger notes, ‘the liberator.’ He can bestow knowledge upon the ‘cave’ dwellers. But this is not what they desire, they do not wish to be cut off from their ‘world.’ A bitter conflict looms large. Cognizance has no healing power – genuine knowledge faces insurmountable obstacles. Moreover, it can only be known by the very few: after all, who wishes to concede that the sky overhead is just the dome of their ‘cave?’ The majority obstinately cling to their convictions generated by the natural ability to see. All interpretations which undermine this ability are treated as an eccentricity by the majority. Illusion has very deep roots, Plato argues; the will to illusion is a part of the ‘reality’ which is considered as the only possible form of the world. On the other hand, the will to truth, which guides the wise among us, will be discredited and perceived as evidence of ill adjustment. The majority are reluctant to part with their own way of thinking and so, when threatened, they react with enmity and resentment. The

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
liberator – a trailblazer for truth – cannot count on a warm welcome. He is also likely to lose his way. He is carrying his treasures but

the would-be liberator no longer knows his or her way around the cave and risks the danger of succumbing to the overwhelming power of the kind of truth that is normative there, the danger of being overcome by the claim of the common “reality” to be the only reality. The liberator is threatened with the possibility of being put to death, a possibility that became a reality in the fate of Socrates, who was Plato’s “teacher.”

Evidently, Plato is not much of an optimist. He concedes that an attempt to create a public space of truth (the un-hidden) stands no chance of success as there are too many obstacles. Only ‘shadows’ are considered ‘un-hidden’ in the ‘cave.’ The majority will never be able to accept a free exchange of ideas as it could lead to the sphere of the un-hidden expanding. The public sphere must remain one of illusion. It is well known that this was why Plato despised democracy. He thought that maintaining the beguiling illusion of good and justice gave the play of appearances an advantage over the ‘un-hidden.’ Truth requires a different system to the realm of ideas and the public message. For this reason, as he argued in his Politea, kings should become philosophers or philosophers should become kings, otherwise we will be thrown into confusion creating failure after failure.

Democracy gives emotions an advantage. According to Plato, when introducing the ‘democratic type’ we must speak of the growing role of lust, the jumble of desires which, in ‘secret intercourse breeds a mob of further desires.’ Over time, their power becomes despotic as these desires are not counterbalanced. ‘Finally, I imagine, they seize the citadel of the young man’s soul, realizing that it is empty of learning, good habits and true arguments.’ Instead of ‘true arguments, ‘seductive arguments’ come into play. There is no place for going to the trouble of thinking, or making the effort required to get distance from the sphere of ‘shadows.’ ‘Seductive arguments’ serve to deceive and preserve the notion that there is no reality beyond the sphere of desires. This is how ‘truths,’ which are binding and self-sufficient, come into being. Through interaction, these truths multiply with emotions. They are shallow and naïve, encouraging only one thing: the play of appearances. The will to illusion underpins them. Vain schemes are intended

16 Ibid. p. 171.  
17 Ibid. p. 170.  
19 Ibid.
to overcome the temptation to think, as this might raise doubts or cloud and obscure the clear ‘sky’ where the fireworks of the ‘orgy’ glow.\textsuperscript{20}

Democracy, then, discredits all truths which contradict the appeal of deceit. Truth is that which is taken to be true; that which facilitates and cultivates desire. Good, justice, all ideals must participate in the game of appearances.

Democracy creates a plane where people can mix, where diverse desires and preferences meet and come to a head. In the end, to use Plato’s words, ‘the liberation and release of unnecessary and useless desires’ occurs.\textsuperscript{21} How can a state of turmoil be avoided?

This question was taken up by the sophists, supporters of democracy, who believed that the art of persuasion could succeed as a barrier to the ensuing disorder. They were not interested in gods or ‘liberators’ descending from the heavens of ideas. Blurring the boundaries between truth and illusion, they gave the reins of power to the teachers of rhetoric, assuming that the will to illusion could take the shape of the will to truth. This determined their form of public activity and the public sphere they represented. It is irrelevant whether we consider what really is, it is important that we are convinced that we do. Thanks to the art of expression, it is enough to create the appropriate impression, or attitude, to be bathed in the glow of truth. For truth is what is taken to be true, making the bond between a thing and a word illusory. Truth is a state of mind. It does not pertain to ‘reality’ because all concepts of reality are produced by a particular way of thinking. What counts is verbal creations; rhetoric, the gift of persuasion and the art of expression.

The desire for truth – identified with the desire to move beyond the range of ‘shadows’ – would itself amount to mere illusion. We should not be searching for absolute and final gauges of truth since, as the most famous of the Sophists, Protagoras, said, ‘man is the measure of all things: of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not.’ Therefore all convictions are testament to our personal, purely subjective point of view. Protagoras, as Diogenes Laertios reported, argued that ‘every thing is true.’\textsuperscript{22} The weight and reach of certain ways of thinking are determined exclusively by their ability to convince. Any view can become a widely accepted ‘truth’ as long as it wins over a group of supporters. According to the Sophists, other measures of truth simply do not exist. They reject the symbolism of illumination, the symbolism of ascent,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 273.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} D. Laertius, \textit{Lives of Eminent Philosophers}, trans. R.D. Hicks, Book 9, Chapter 8, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1972.
\end{itemize}
which suggests initiation into the sphere of truth, truths of a higher order. Protagoras claimed that the ‘soul is a sensory impression’ and nothing more, therefore ascendancy is out of the question. In his dialectical debates Protagoras, as Diogenes Laertios said, ‘did not concern himself with the content of thought but focused on the words themselves.’

Sophist teaching furthers a purely instrumental concept of truth. Therefore, even the most bizarre opinions, as long as they find the right resonance, can be deemed true. Truth is a creation: we never venture outside the sphere of convictions established by a word. Each truth is at the same time an illusion as essentially it lacks a basis. Its existence stems solely from the art of expression. In his dialogue with Socrates, the sophist Gregorias boasts of the possibilities rhetoric offers. The art of persuasion offers power, absolute power, entrenched in the defenseless acquiescence of the auditorium hanging on the speaker’s every word.

What is there greater than the word which persuades the judges in the courts, or the senators in the council, or the citizens in the assembly, or at any other political meeting? – if you have the power of uttering this word, you will have the physician your slave, and the trainer your slave, and the money-maker of whom you talk will be found to gather treasures, not for himself, but for you who are able to speak and to persuade the multitude.

A word used correctly represents power, which can be used to create reality. It determines the way in which people understand their own conduct, their desires and behavior. So, what can we call truth, and what is illusion? Where is that which is?

Gorgias takes a much more radical stand than Protagoras: ‘no truth exists and everything is false,’ he observes. In his work On Non-being, which was later lost, he asserted that there is no being, even if it had existed it would have been unrecognizable. He reaches this conclusion after examining the failures of philosophers seeking arche, or the first tenet. Gorgias held the view that philosophers merely multiplied fanciful, self-contradictory and conflicting statements, which ultimately meant that thoughts about reality were deprived of a sensible foundation. In effect, human thought is suspended in a vacuum – it does not refer to reality. Gorgias contests ‘the capability of the word to signify, in a veridical way,'

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23 Ibid.
things other than itself.’ He also asserts, ‘he who speaks does not speak a noise at all, or a colour, but a word.’ Words create a closed circle beyond which human thought may not venture. Thinking has always belonged to the sphere of illusion – it does not refer to reality. Thus, the will to truth is a formula for deception. It is underpinned by the thirst for illusion, by the pursuit, at all costs, of a foundation, an anchor or a fulcrum. In the same fashion, language favors illusion. By imposing the play of imaginings, language becomes a showcase for deceit. Words never touch on things. Hence, in the words of Gorgias: ‘the divorce between being and thought becomes just as radical a divorce as that between word, thought and being.’

In this case, language represents the sphere of free creation, free establishment. In the Praise of Helena, Gorgias asserted that ‘speech’ is ‘a powerful lord,’ especially when we pause to consider its evanescent nature: ‘who with the finest and most invisible body achieves the most divine works: it can stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity.’ Life itself takes on a specific form thanks to the dexterous ploys of an indefatigable ‘ruler’ – speech. No other basis exists. All truths appear and disappear in the ambience of human speech. That implies that Gorgias saw the arena of public debate as the arena of suggestion. Everything becomes meaningful thanks to debate and the free confrontation of opinion. The weight of judgment, pending acceptance, is determined exclusively by the skill of argument. All existing ‘truths’ count for nothing, there is no place for protective formulas or exclusion. The power of words is infinite. Gorgias brushed off all objections, ‘almost the entire treaty [On Not-Being or On Nature – SF] was filled with paradoxical testaments invalidating all claims made hitherto by the Greek philosophical and literary tradition.’

Gorgias and the Sophists can no doubt be recognized as originators of the concept symbolized in the idea of an ‘open society.’ They believed that all decisions could only be reached following a free confrontation of opinion. They also argued that the only formula for validating a decision is effective argument. They were in favor of unfettered interaction made possible by speech and the free use of language. Sophists rejected the hierarchical notion of social order, basing their view on the fact that the lack of any certainty in elementary ‘truths’ concerning the

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26 Ibid., p. 167.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
world around us, precludes support for formalized authority. The public sphere must remain a sphere of constant confrontation: all opinions are, after all, provisional. We can never know for sure whether cleverer argument may trounce our views or provide a different perspective and a new ‘truth.’ Let us never forget: the word is the only ruler. The autonomy of words precludes arbitrariness and the peremptoriness of norms and principles. Only that which we can justify and substantiate becomes important. The word ‘is not bound by a law of existence.’ Its power is not decided by the pursuit of truth. It ‘is the vehicle (putting aside all truths) of suggestion, persuasion and belief.”

In comparison, Plato, having recognized the priority of truth with its objective and conclusive yardstick, rejected the notion of a public space providing the venue for a confrontation of views and the freedom to express doubt. He believed that the public sphere should be well ordered, to standards set by the ‘liberators’ who appeal to the authority of truth. The sophists, on the other hand, having rejected the idea of irrefutable truth and reconciled with the idea of the fluidity of norms and principles, presented a vision of an open public space. They sacrificed truth in favor of freedom. Plato while defending truth, opposed freedom which, he argued, represents the predominance of ‘boastful ideas.’ Under these circumstances, can we reconcile the values separated by the sophists and Plato? In other words, can the concept of a public space, which guarantees the freedom of thought and open debate, and, importantly, at the same time eliminates care-free relativism, be created? Aristotle, it seems, attempted to do just that.

Aristotle refuted both Plato’s objections and the sophists’ hasty disregard: he presumed that the confrontation of opinions can be conducive to the pursuit of truth. For him, the space of public debate, the space which sees discussion take place, serves to reveal salient and fundamental arguments. The point is, after all, a different understanding of truth. Plato despised opinions and suppositions, that is any convictions lacking solid foundations, as he supposed they always concerned the play of appearances. Aristotle did not question the importance of everyday thinking: he thought truth could be found in the currents of opinion. Unlike Plato, he refrained from treating eyewitness accounts as forms of delusion that ‘cave-dwellers’ fall prey to. According to Aristotle, the world is an open book all can and should read. Wisdom comes from experience as well. In other words, apart from theoretical knowledge derived from rational learning, there is also practical knowledge resulting from praxis, human activity, or direct, first-hand experience. Here also we can find truth – practical knowledge should play

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31 Reale, op.cit., p. 169.
a decisive role in a person's life. *Phronesis* (prudence, reason) need not seek justification in the truths of a theoretical mind. Indeed, it is a self-sufficient source of knowledge; an important domain of truth understood as ‘un-hidden,’ revealing the genuine nature of human desires, aspirations and capabilities.

For Aristotle, the quest for truth is of fundamental importance. People, he thought, are driven by a thirst for truth. Nature itself, as we can read in the *Rhetoric*, developed in people a desire for truth, and they devote most of their time searching for it.32 But, fundamentally, we are incapable of finding any absolute truths in the sphere of practice because everything changes. In *Metaphysics*, for example, Aristotle explains that it is theory alone which seeks to discover ‘about things that could not have been, and cannot now or in the future be, other than they are.’ Human beings change, therefore working on one’s own character becomes life’s crucial goal. Wisdom gleaned through activity cannot lead to the endorsement of ultimate judgments or the defense of unalterable truths. There is something more important than an absolute truth and that is probability. Indeed, the public space should be concerned with the assessment of probability, thus laying the groundwork for commonly acknowledged judgments. There is nothing offensive in this. Laying out his position in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that truth and probability have the same source. ‘The true and the approximately true are apprehended by the same faculty; […] Hence the man who makes a good guess at truth is likely to make a good guess at probabilities.’33 They differ only in the manner one or other is established. The sphere of public debate is no place for the verdicts of theoretical minds. We cannot allow for these matters to become confused. What counts is reasonableness and the ability to persuade. Those who participate in debate are not required to create theories or reach conclusive decisions. After all, they are not concerned with ‘that which cannot be other than what it is.’ Rhetoric aspires to demonstrate: ‘rhetorical study, in its strict sense, is concerned with the modes of persuasion. Persuasion is clearly a sort of demonstration, since we are most fully persuaded when we consider a thing to have been demonstrated,’34 says Aristotle. He then explains: ‘The orator’s demonstration is an enthymeme, and this is, in general, the most effective of the modes of persuasion. The enthymeme is a sort of syllogism.’35

It therefore follows that we should refrain from associating rhetoric with the shallow art of persuasion, the talent for winning support, the ability to enforce

33 Ibid., 1355a.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
any chance opinion. Aristotle refutes the sophists’ standpoint and says: ‘things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites’.\textsuperscript{36} Thereby, in contrast to the sophists, we must recognize that there exists an irrefutable reference point: reality. We must take into account the nature of things. By misinterpreting the world we will ultimately get nowhere; we will fail. Truth and probability concern that \textit{which is}. On this plane, the plane of \textit{what is}, everything will be decided in the end. We can thus debate, challenge and mull things over, but the autonomy of language is out of the question. Words refer to things. A word is not a self-sufficient power – it does not create a separate order of its own. Words represent a plane of communication where the confrontation of experiences relating to the same reality can take place. Sophism fails to exhaust all possibilities afforded by public debate. Aristotle does admit that ‘rhetoric is not bound up with a single definite class of subjects, but is as universal as dialectic’.\textsuperscript{37} It is possible to deceive human minds. We can act by using the power of expression, which in no way alludes to the fact that all truths must collapse, that expression is all that counts. We are reminded by Aristotle that ‘[w]hat makes a man a sophist is not his faculty, but his moral purpose’.\textsuperscript{38} Debates which adhere to the rigors of probability can serve pursuits beyond the sphere of current interests and temptations resulting from the struggle for influence. They can be concerned with the ‘good life,’ for instance. ‘And it is a characteristic of man,’ says Aristotle, ‘that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state.’\textsuperscript{39} Thus, the space of public debate is not bound to be appropriated by the sophists alone. The quest for truth and justice is both possible and desirable. Another issue altogether, and one open to debate, is that of practical arrangements.

How does Aristotle judge a model of life which offers open public debate? What about democracy? Are we capable of placing ourselves on the side of truth and justice and making full use of our natural talents? Or do we prefer, instead, to be tantalized by yielding to the allure of deception and cunning? What sense is there in confronting different opinions, taking on challenges and discussing? Does it bring palpable results? The answers are far from being self-evident. According to Aristotle, arguments have to be weighed very carefully. The postulated sense of public debate (postulated by nature: ‘The state comes into existence originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 1355b.
\textsuperscript{38} 1355b.
good life,) is realized not without impediment. It cannot be said that it is always
served by the best of human talents and intentions. What is more, the will to
truth never reigns supreme. Aristotle reluctantly speaks of the ‘crowd,’ of people
lacking virtue, which invites consideration of the meaning of a ‘good life.’ ‘There
is a similar combination of qualities in good men, who differ from any individual
of the many, as the beautiful are said to differ from those who are not beautiful.’
A note of desperation can be heard in his question ‘and wherein, it will be asked,
do some men differ from brutes?’40 The author of Politics, although hesitant, de-
sists from discrediting common skills, or advocating rule by the distinguished
and virtuous. He argues that ultimately the measure of all virtues is determined
by action, and this is the crux of the matter. Since no initiation is needed in the
sphere of praxis, the public debate need not go beyond the scope of practical wis-
dom. When it comes to the most salient issues, when the good life is considered,
each voice matters a great deal. Here is a typical statement:

the knowledge of the house is not limited to the builder only; the user, or, in other words,
the master, of the house will be even a better judge than the builder, just as the pilot will
judge better of a rudder than the carpenter, and the guest will judge better of the feast
than the cook.41

Hence, public debate is relevant. Who is entitled to discuss the state if not its
citizens? It can even be said that the number of votes becomes an asset of sorts.
In Aristotle’s view, a larger number of votes can counterbalance the exceptional
virtues of outstanding individuals. Therefore, the hopes raised by democracy
make sense.

For the many, of whom each individual is but an ordinary person, when they meet to-
gether may very likely be better than the few good, if regarded not individually but col-
lectively, just as a feast to which many contribute is better than a dinner provided out of
a single purse. For each individual among the many has a share of virtue and prudence,
and when they meet together, they become in a manner one man, who has many feet,
and hands, and senses; that is a figure of their mind and disposition.42

This could easily be the course followed in the pursuit of truth in public debate;
the democratic public sphere need not inevitably become a sphere of chaos or
lies. However, it all depends on ‘virtue and reason’ finally. In the same way, there
are different forms of democracy. Where principles collapse, ‘where the laws are

40 Ibid., p. 66.
41 Ibid., p. 67.
42 Ibid., pp. 65–66.
not supreme, there demagogues spring up.’ In which case we cannot count on much – falsehoods and the art of deception will take the upper hand, which is why we cannot let matters take their own course. We will not achieve much, says Aristotle, if we oppose the sophists without the possibility of winning over good and just citizens.

Many have drawn abundantly from Aristotle’s theories. Today, in the various currents of thought covered by the catch-all tag of ‘republicanism,’ Aristotle has become one of the most important mentors. His thoughts on the fundamental role of virtue relieve us of worries created by ‘demagogue’ governments which are making alarmingly deep inroads in a culture shaped by the mass media. Nevertheless, we must remember that there were times when Aristotle was unceremoniously and frequently rejected. In fact, opposition to the author of Politics has become one of the most typical traits of nascent modernity.

Let us look at what one of modernity’s patrons, Niccolo Machiavelli, has to say. In his own peculiar manner, he resists judgments which discredit sophistic patterns of politics. He acknowledges that the will to illusion plays – and should play – a decisive role.

‘Men never do good unless necessity drives them to it’ says Machiavelli. They are usually guided by selfish emotions. They are greedy, power-hungry and unscrupulous, ready to realize their own ambitions at someone else’s cost. Therefore, Aristotle’s idea of a common quest for establishing the rules of a good life cannot apply. Whatever happens in the public realm is an expression of selfish passion and ambitions. In addition, self-love and the pursuit of self-gain, makes everyone eager to be seen as free from evil, and full of noble attributes.

Thus hypocrisy is born and, according to Machiavelli, is invariably a crucial influence. There is, after all, an insurmountable difference between our hidden intentions and our efforts to fashion an image we intend to show. The great play of pretense is about to begin. We must delude and deceive. The will to deceive has always lain at the heart of the public realm. The will to truth counts for nothing. Irrespective of the form it takes, truth is of no use to anyone. In fact, everyone is making an effort to hide it. The art of deception becomes pivotal when serious ambition comes into play, in vying for power or prestige, for example. Efforts to create an illusory disguise to conceal dishonesty and evil

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43 Ibid., p. 87.
ambitions are continuously played out in the public sphere. This brings us back to the critical importance of the mastery of deception.

It is so easy to fool people, says Machiavelli: ‘Because men in general judge rather by the eye than by the hand.’ Sincerity can have disastrous effects, it is of no benefit. The performance is all that counts: ‘for everyone can see, but few can touch.’ In the end, everything is only what it appears to be. In public activity is there any difference between appearance and reality? The only reality, after all, is the effort of thought behind conveying the right impression. But what if the impression is already there? Do we still need other forms of verification? ‘Every one sees what you appear to be, few really know what you are.’ For this reason the prince, or anybody who wants to command respect and affect others’ behavior, should ‘but have known how to overreach men by their cunning.’

When Machiavelli lists the essential features of a ruler’s image, he says ‘the prince has no need of all the virtues mentioned here, he must only appear to have them.’ He will not have many problems. For ‘the vulgar are always taken by what a thing seems to be, and in the world there are only the vulgar.’

The will to truth plays no role whatsoever. It is confronted by mighty enemies who never allow it to speak, even as individual people leave the ranks of the ‘vulgar.’ This is true even of the most outstanding individuals – people love illusion. They eagerly deceive others, just as keenly as they delude themselves. They wish to live with delusion. When one delusion falls away, having fooled us all, we can be sure another one is just waiting to take its place.

The Florentine Histories, in which Machiavelli recounts the history of his own city, is an unusual work. The author writes about the untapped power of illusion. In doing so, Machiavelli resembles a diligent anatomist unpicking the individual strands of illusion one by one. He invites us to see the mechanisms, which strip the will to truth of all its significance, while placing the will to fiction always in the foreground. Why?

There are many Florentine Histories, and we can only spare a moment to delve into them in search of an answer to the above. How do people participating in the grand drama of passion and ambition behave? They are caught up in a struggle which raises the temperature of desire and temptation, increases determination, and allows one to clearly see the conspiracies of agitated minds.

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., p. 45.
48 Ibid., p. 86.
It is the year 1342. Enter Gualtieri, the prince of Athens, dispatched to quell the chaos sparked by the revolt of the people, acting on behalf of the King of Naples generously supporting the city. From the outset sycophants put the ambitious prince in a mood in which “These persuasions inflamed the ambitious spirit of the duke to a greater desire to rule.”\(^{49}\) This is how the heavens ‘willed that things prepare for future evil.’\(^{50}\) Rebelling crowds are vindictive ‘because their nature is to rejoice in evil.’ Those who oppose the common folk are eager to seek revenge for the humiliation they had suffered. This is the setting for the rise of the new star, the new ruler, who wants to achieve the ‘fame of a strict but just ruler.’ From the beginning he tries to create the right scene: ‘The duke, so as to give himself a greater mark of religion and humanity, had chosen the convent of Era Minori di Santa Croce for his dwelling’ but also from the very beginning he is guided by ignoble intentions.\(^{51}\) The Florentines are alarmed by his ambitions: representatives of the Signoria warn him: ‘Nor should you, blinded by a little ambition, be led to place yourself where, unable either to rest or to rise higher, you must necessarily fall with the greatest harm to yourself…’\(^{52}\) However, things will take a different turn. The ‘duke acquired lordship, so as to take away the authority of those who were accustomed to being defenders of freedom.’\(^{53}\) He makes all the necessary assurances and pledges, of course, he uses all the admirable watchwords and speaks of order, freedom and justice. Yet, he is bent on carrying out his own plans and disregarding everything else. Ignoring the warnings, he yields to the blinding power of excessive ambition while the will to truth is silenced. The duke will refuse to see that which really is. He will forsake truth for the play of appearances. Under the guidance of the will to illusion he will gradually reject reality and opt for the scene he has personally staged. However, when he forsakes the truth, he also parts with justice (let us not forget Parmenides’ poem!): ‘the severity and humanity that he had feigned were converted into arrogance and cruelty.’\(^{54}\)

Events take their inexorable course, ‘whence many great citizens and popular nobles were either fined or killed or tortured in new modes.’\(^{55}\) So instead of a

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50 Ibid., p. 90.
51 Ibid., p. 91.
52 Ibid., p. 93.
53 Ibid., p. 94.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
good ruler, a tyrant enters the stage. He governs by spreading fear and fueling a sense of danger. This is all that remains of the laudable declarations of peace and freedom. He pursues staffage and décor, relentless in his game of appearances. ‘Therefore, when the month of May came, a time in which people are wont to celebrate, he made more companies of the plebs and the lesser people, to which, honored with splendid titles, he gave ensigns and money.’ Yet beneath the deceitful façade there is a different reality. The city’s inhabitants are outraged when they see ‘the order laid waste, the laws annulled, every decent being corrupted, all civil modesty eliminated.’ Hypocrisy triumphs. The climax comes with the cruel treatment of a modest citizen who complained about taxes: as Machiavelli recounts, the duke ‘had the tongue of Bettone Cini cut out with such cruelty that he died of it.’ Here is an attempt to silence the truth, both, literally and symbolically, thus revealing the real nature of immoral government.

The duke has fallen, but the ambitions, passions and vile temptations which provide the fuel for the Florentine Histories to continue, have not abated. They continue in the same strain. The will to truth falls easily silent. Just a smidgen of desire and temptation is enough for fiction to take over. The staging of the game of appearances runs continuously. The protagonists of the historical scene behave similarly. They are always driven by ambition, vanity and a readiness to betray. This is the sense that ‘truths’ hide, and smokescreens boast of: they are full of lofty slogans and laudable promises. Machiavelli warns that all truths have a hidden agenda; when we delve deeper we arrive at wickedness and mendacity. We also find the irresistible will to delude oneself, which ultimately spells the end for all rulers. Therefore, in the public realm illusions have the upper hand. False signs of value reign supreme. ‘Truth’ becomes useful when it is borne from the will to deceive, the desire to beguile.

There is an abundant supply of illusions. Ambitious individuals are not alone in succumbing to temptation; this concerns everyone, not only rulers, but the ruled as well. The populace, once it barges onto the stage, also takes a liking to the game of deception. Returning to the Histories for a moment, we find telling and strong evidence: the outbreak of a popular uprising in 1378. Once again, the cloak of justice conceals vile ambitions:

because it is not enough for men to get back their own but they want also to seize what belongs to others and get revenge, those who put their hopes in disorders pointed out

56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., p. 95.
58 Ibid.
to the artisans that they would never be safe if their many enemies were not driven out and destroyed.59

The next struggle for truth and justice starts with revenge and cruelty. But the façade should look different, so we must pay tribute to the principles while cultivating duplicity and favoring fiction. The will to truth must be rooted out. ‘It is to our advantage, therefore, as it appears to me, if we wish that our old errors be forgiven us, to make new ones, redoubling the evils, multiplying the arson and robbery – and to contrive to have many companions in this, because when many err no one is punished, and though some faults are punished, great and grave ones are rewarded.’60 The point, therefore, is to eradicate sensible judgment and a sense of justice: let the many ‘err.’ Let us work in an atmosphere of lies and deception. Paradoxically, events are to become the cloak which obscures the truth. This is the significance of facts! They hide from view the true sense of evil acts performed earlier. The power of fiction will therefore be sustained. Consequently, as it turns out, political calculations are supported by the will to illusion. Even facts themselves can be subordinated to the power of fiction.

Therefore, let us consider the following for a moment: does anybody need truth when only haughty ambitions, vindictiveness and the willingness to betray matter? It seems very unlikely that the seeds of truth will germinate here, they are more likely to wither away. And, when everything calms down, the turmoil of ambitions subsides and the momentum of events slows, what then? All sorts of evil passions emerged when, in the end, such a day dawned in Florence. Clearly, then, the will to truth will never be able to play a significant role. It could possibly emerge for a moment, taking advantage of a lull in the tussle of emotions, but only to witness how it all begins again: falsehoods enter the stage and the need for fiction is reborn.

Interestingly, the great philosopher Francis Bacon is in unison with Machiavelli. While praising truth and expressing the opinion that ‘truth...is the sovereign good of human nature,’ Bacon had a similar regard for human susceptibilities and capacities as the author of The Prince. Unlike Machiavelli, however, he was not concerned with dramatic developments; he was interested in the susceptibilities which we encounter at every turn, irrespective of circumstance. It can be said that Bacon was interested in the everyday life of falsehoods. In his essay Of Truth he writes: ‘One of the later school of the Grecians examineth the matter and is at a stand to think what should be in it, that men should love lies

59 Ibid., p. 119.
60 Ibid., p. 122.
where neither they make for pleasure, as with poets, nor for advantage, as with the merchant, but for the lie’s sake.\textsuperscript{61} Here it is implied that there is a deeply rooted, fundamental, even primordial demand for fiction. The will to illusion overshadows the will to truth. People lie for ‘the lie’s sake.’ Bacon says ‘a mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure.’

Doth any man doubt that if there were taken out of men’s minds vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations as one would, and the like, but it would leave the minds of a number of men poor shrunken things, full of melancholy and indisposition, and unpleasing to themselves?\textsuperscript{62}

Human minds, then, are filled with falsehoods – a source of energy and strength. A lack of illusion breeds ‘melancholy and indisposition.’ ‘But I cannot tell. The same truth is a naked and open daylight that doth not show the masques and mummeries and triumphs of the world half so stately and daintily as candlelights.’\textsuperscript{63} So, we prefer to play by candlelight in the cozy dusk of the ‘cave.’ Too much light spoils the game, strips our feasts of their delights. Truth breaks the structure of ‘triumphant processions.’ Is the pursuit of truth worthwhile? In his essay \textit{Of Seeming Wise} the philosopher noted: ‘It is a ridiculous thing, and fit for a satire to persons of judgement, to see what shifts these formalists have, and what prospectives to make superficies to seem body that hath depth and bulk.’\textsuperscript{64}

An outstanding enthusiast of Machiavelli, Benedict Spinoza spoke in the seventeenth century about the crucial role of appearances, this time directly touching upon political issues. What is rational behavior? Can the fundamental demands of rationality determine the course of political practices? This is an extremely complex matter. Spinoza was acutely aware of the seductive nature of fiction, considering that truth is a hard won benevolence, that struggle often cripples the human mind, and that therefore, at times, the human mind is better left forgotten. Besides, what is it exactly that the human mind seeks in politics?

‘But men,’ says Spinoza, ‘are more led by blind desire, than by reason; and therefore the natural power or right of human beings should be limited not by reason, but by every appetite, whereby they are determined to action, or seek their own preservation.’\textsuperscript{65} Thus, the total agreement between action and reason has never been possible. All ambitious proposals or expectations regarding this,

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., pp. 61–62.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., p. 61.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., p. 136.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., p. 5.
lead us down a blind alley. Philosophers themselves are the biggest sinners in this respect. ‘Philosophers conceive of the passions which harass us as vices into which men fall by their own fault, and therefore, generally deride, bewail, or blame them, or execrate them, if they wish to seem unusually pious.’66 In this way ‘it has come to pass that, instead of ethics, they have generally written satire, and that they have never conceived a theory of politics, which could be turned to use, but such as might be taken for a chimera.’67

Spinoza, the pantheist, believes that emotions belong to the uncontested part of human nature. It is impossible to eradicate them, such a possibility should not even be countenanced. All that exists is but one of the aspects of the all-encompassing order of things – everything is embodied in the all-being, the Deity. In Ethics the philosopher puts forward the following thesis: ‘By God, I mean a being absolutely infinite – that is, a substance consisting in infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality.’68 Everything has an absolute right to exist. ‘God is the efficient cause not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence.’69 Thus we should not contemplate purification based on the eradication of passion. Reason is not a sovereign, overriding power, ruling unchallenged and imposing its unlimited authority. It is confronted with demands which can be inconsistent with its nature, and which stem from an individual, separate source. And it is these demands which determine the real role of reason:

and to this end I have looked upon passions, such as love, hatred, anger, envy, ambition, pity, and the other perturbations of the mind, not in the light of human vices of human nature, but as properties, just as pertinent to it as are heat, cold, storm, thunder, and the like to the nature of the atmosphere.70

So, what can rational behavior amount to? Once again we should highlight Spinoza’s crucial comment: ‘Experience, however, teaches us but too well, that it is no more in our power to have a sound mind, than a sound body.’71 We only delude ourselves by thinking that it is otherwise. So, what is the nature of the truths people can appeal to? Is there an unimpeded will to truth, which would serve as an effective and unyielding opponent to deceit? The answer is far from

66 Ibid., p. 2.
67 Ibid.
69 Ibid., p. 18.
70 B. Spinoza, A Political Treatise, ISN ETH Zurich, IR and Security Network, Primary Sources in International Affairs, p. 3.
71 Ibid., p. 5.
straightforward. We are dealing with a paradox: rationality must accommodate something which exists naturally, that is, non-rationality. At best, it can amount to the quest for balance as opposed to a total and final predominance (as the ‘chimeric’ concepts of many philosophers assume). This is no small thing. This is the sense of human freedom, explains Spinoza. Reason should not capitulate. On the contrary, it should enforce its demands. ‘The more, therefore, we consider man to be free, the less we can say, that he can neglect to use reason, or choose evil in preference to good.’

However, everything follows nature’s course, therefore complete freedom of action is out of the question.

How is it in the world of politics? Here, in Spinoza’s view, resistance increases. ‘Inasmuch as men are led, as we have said, more by passion than reason, it follows, that a multitude comes together, and wishes to be guided, as it were, by one mind, not at the suggestion of reason, but of some common passion.’ ‘Common passion’ is the basic binding material whilst simultaneously being a vast field of illusion and fantasy. A multitude succumbing to ‘passion’ no longer requires reasonable truth. On the contrary, they eagerly yield to the power of illusion. Bearing witness to religious conflicts, the philosopher proposes a total separation of faith from reason. He believes it would be desirable to achieve the full secularization of politics, separating political practice from all vague imaginings, unstable emotions and fantasy. But he knows it is not an easy endeavor, if at all possible. What role does the search for truth play? How strong is the will to truth? Let us briefly consider the issue of thought once more. The will to truth is invariably muddled up with passions, and unfortunately, easily succumbs to them. In Ethics, Spinoza devotes a whole chapter to this very issue calling it Of Human Bondage, or the Strength of the Emotions. There we find the following statement: ‘The knowledge of good and evil is nothing but an affect of joy or sadness, in so far as we are conscious of it.’ The will to knowledge, the will to truth, is not a pure and independent domain. It is manifested on the level of passions and bears the mark of passions. Reason does not control ‘passions,’ it plays no independent part. Spinoza claims that ‘an affect through which we are acted on can neither be restrained nor taken away except by an affect stronger than it and contrary to it.’ Knowledge and desire always go hand in hand. In another statement he says: ‘A desire which arises from a true knowledge of good and evil, insofar as this knowledge concerns the future, can be quite easily restrained or extinguished.

72 Ibid., p. 6.
73 Ibid., p. 17.
74 Spinoza, Ethics, p. 120.
75 Ibid.
by a desire for the pleasures of the moment.” We should be very careful when reflecting on the nature of ‘emotions’ which shape the sphere of knowledge and become the source of our understanding of good and evil, because of human pride. What can we expect when we consider the play of ambition in relation to power and politics? Either very great pride or very great despondency is very great ignorance of oneself,’ Spinoza stresses.

Consequently, a peculiar kind of ignorance is fundamentally important in human behavior. People driven by ambition occupy the realm of delusion. They do it willingly. The pressure of reality can become unpleasant. ‘The proud man loves the presence of parasites, or flatterers, but hates the presence of the noble.’ One can easily imagine the nature of good and evil in this case, the emotions they arouse and the hue of ‘truths’ born from such an attitude. Such truths always pay homage to illusion, because they stem from ignorance. A route to virtue, self-knowledge and freedom does exist, but who will choose it? The answer is, ‘he who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly loves God.’ Regrettably, most will not go to this trouble. Delusion and games of appearances are an easier path to fulfill naïve ambitions as they do not demand the full truth or genuine knowledge. Deception triumphs in the realm of mutual relationships. Fiction rules on the world stage. Therefore, can we speak of rational actions?

Spinoza ascertained the fundamental importance of superstition in his analysis of wide-spread predispositions. He explained his finding in the Political Theological Treatise: ‘But since people are often reduced to such desperate straits that they cannot arrive at any solid judgement and, as to good things of fortune for which they have a boundless desire are quite uncertain, they fluctuate wretchedly between hope and fear.’ Superstition encompasses far more than the narrow field of religious beliefs. In fact, it affects nearly every sphere of life. Naïve religion spreads far and wide. We can read in the Theological Political Treatise that: ‘Since dread is the cause of superstition, it plainly follows that everyone is naturally prone to it.’ A flood of emotion, passion and ambition causes superstition to flourish in a variety of forms. ‘It also follows that superstition must be just as variable and unstable as all absurd leaps of the mind and powerful emotions are.’ It ‘can only be sustained by hope and hatred, anger and deception.’ To

76 Ibid., p. 124.
77 Ibid., p. 145.
79 Ibid., p. 5.
80 Ibid.
Spinoza, this is a highly relevant issue. Superstition is not an innocent weakness to be indulged without fear. On the contrary, it is a formidable force eagerly used to scheme, to score political points, and to beguile. It can become a dangerous weapon. It makes it easier to win influence, to manipulate sentiments, and control the momentum of crowds, but only up to a point. Spinoza stresses that ‘it is easy for people to be captivated by a superstition, but difficult to ensure that they remain loyal to it.’ In the end everything slides into chaos ‘because the common people everywhere live in the same wretched state, they never adhere to the same superstition for very long. It is only a new form of credulity that really pleases them, one that has not yet let them down.’ Man’s behavior is driven by deceit. History is largely a brawl. ‘Such instability of mind has been the cause of many riots and ferocious wars.’ Only reason can ensure stability: its voice, however, is drowned out by the roar of emotions awakened by the spark of deception. Those who would like to employ persuasion stand a slim chance, ‘as is clear from what we have just said, and as Curtius quite rightly notes, “nothing governs the multitude as effectively as superstition.”’

81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.

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2. Illumination and the Public Sphere

The Enlightenment tried to deal with a scarcity of hope by waging war on bias and superstition. The Age of Reason demanded total certainty. At the height of its powers, human reason would attain truth. In this it was to be ruthlessly determined, rejecting all compromises, freeing itself from external influences and acting as refined and fully emancipated reason.

In the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant, these expectations found their strongest and most unambiguous expression. The critique of reason was designed to reject illusions and dangerous customs, which create impoverished and dubious knowledge. Reason needs to understand its own limits, define them and deny intruders any right of entry. It must, in the words of Kant, undertake (‘Preface’ to the first edition of his Critique of Pure Reason), ‘anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely that of self-knowledge.’ And then proceed to institute a court of justice, by which reason may secure its rightful claims while dismissing all groundless pretensions, and this not by mere decrees but according to its own eternal and unchangeable laws; and this court is none other than the critique of pure reason itself.

This is the only way to achieve the goal of rational and credible cognizance and to justify practical objectives in accordance with reason.

Reason, thus, must undergo a certain form of asceticism. This idea is fundamental and, as Bernard Saint-Sernin put it in La Raison au XXe Siècle, directs Kant’s entire philosophy. Reason must impose ‘discipline’ which means improvement, or asceticism. The critique of the faculties of cognition should remove temptations, which have made the achievements of reason uncertain and ambiguous. Kant decides to eliminate the will to false pretenses and illusion from the sphere of thought with unwavering resolve. His critical philosophy is meant to refine our cognitive faculties in order to make the quest for truth unequivocal and absolute, preventing it from venturing into the unknown when under the spell of delusion.

This pursuit is not peculiar to Kant, or a purely personal ambition of his. On the contrary, to glorify reason and truth grounded in rationality is, undoubtedly, the Enlightenment’s most typical trait. Criticism is of fundamental importance

85 Ibid.
for this great age. It facilitates the questioning of the foundations of all certainties. It is, as Paul Hazard notes, the 'soul of the contentious age.'\(^8^6\) He adds that 'this was *la critique universelle*, universal criticism, right enough! It got to work in every field, literature, morals, politics and philosophy.'

Kant, of course, went straight to the heart of the matter and wanted to deal with the most difficult problems. The foundations of rational cognition offered hope of controlling all areas of thought and customs (moral customs in particular). As he explained, he saw philosophy as the science ‘of the relation of all cognition to the essential ends of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*).’\(^8^7\) Consequently, 'the philosopher is not an artist of reason but the legislator of human reason.'\(^8^8\) It is the philosopher who defines the vocation and the aims of thinking. ‘The supreme ends of Reason,’ explains Gilles Deleuze in his commentary on Kant’s philosophy, ‘form the system of Culture. […] Indeed, only the cultural ends of reason can be described as absolutely final.’\(^8^9\) Reason, therefore, creates a space in which humanity can achieve completeness. This is a fundamental aim. Critical philosophy promises to change the human condition, to live in truth. One of the last chapters of the *Critique of Pure Reason* bears the meaningful title ‘On the Ideal of the Highest Good.’ This is the punch line and represents the true nature of Kant’s endeavor. It is what the critique of reasonaims for. Ultimately, the idea is to realize values which define the meaning of humanity. ‘Rationalism, for its part, indeed recognizes that a rational being pursues strictly rational ends. But, here what reason recognizes as an end is still something external and superior to it: a Being, a Good, or a Value, taken as a rule of will. […] An end is a representation which determines the will.’\(^9^0\) Human will, freed from the residue of illusion,can turn to the highest vocations of the human being, grounded in rational cognition. From now on we will be dealing with the pure will to truth. This, of course, requires a gigantic effort, a journey beyond the empirically understood sphere of the ‘faculty of choice’ (Willkur). Kant emphatically states:

> A faculty of choice, that is, is merely animal (*arbitrium brutum*) which cannot be determined other than through sensible impulses, i.e., pathologically. However, one which

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\(^8^7\) Kant, pp. 694–695.

\(^8^8\) Ibid.


\(^9^0\) Ibid., p. 2.
can be determined independently of sensory impulses, thus through motives that can only be represented by reason, is called free choice (*arbitrium liberum*).  

The shaping of ‘free will,’ capable of realising the postulates of rational cognition, of practical conduct based on truth, is not a simple and unilateral process. Separating the will from the senses is not enough to ensure it attains the desired features. Moreover, let us remember the difficulties reason itself must grapple with in its aspiration to the role of supreme arbiter of truth. The obstacles it comes up against are serious. In the ‘Preface’ to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant stressed the difficulties typical of human reason which arise from an eagerness to push the boundaries of justified certainty. It is a kind of rash boldness (forcibly created by the circumstances, one should add). Reason starts off ‘from principles whose use is unavoidable in the course of experience and at the same time sufficiently warranted by it.’ Later, with their assistance ‘it rises higher (as its nature also requires) ever higher, to more remote conditions.’ Experience plays an ever slighter role. Finally,

it sees itself necessitated to take refuge that overstep all possible use in experience, and yet seem so unsuspicious that even ordinary common sense agrees with them. But it thereby falls into obscurity and contradictions, from which it can indeed surmise that it must somewhere be proceeding on the ground of hidden errors; but it cannot discover them, for the principles on which it is proceeding, since they surpass the bounds of all experience, no longer recognize any touchstone of experience.  

Certainty on issues not directly related to experience is always dubious. The general ideas reason refers to are contentious. ‘The battlefield of these endless controversies is called metaphysics.’ Can criticism eliminate all the difficulties?

Yet by this I do not understand a critique of books and systems, but a critique of the faculty of reason in general, in respect of all the cognitions after which reason might strive independently of all experience, and hence the decision about the possibility or impossibility of a metaphysics in general, and the determination of its sources, as well as its extent and boundaries, all, however, from principles.  

An exegesis of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is not the aim of these reflections, nor is it to penetrate the complex matters of the Kantian oeuvre, or to present the main themes of critical philosophy. The aim is more modest and limited. It relates to the overall intent defining the thoughts presented here. We are after the

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91 Kant, p. 675.
92 Ibid., p. 99.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., p. 101.
will to truth and the will to pretense. Kant’s conclusions are of most interest to us from this point of view. What is the final verdict? Firstly, is reason capable of achieving a level of final and full unity, where temptation is excluded? Secondly, is it capable of remaining within the framework of justified and infallible certainty?

Reason has high ambitions: ‘Reason is driven by a propensity of its nature to go beyond its use in experience, to venture to the outermost bounds of all cognition by means of mere ideas in a pure use, and to find peace only in the completion of its circle in a self-subsisting systematic whole.’

That is a tall order. Not all representatives of the community of reason are philosophers. So, which average abilities can we count on? Kant naturally approaches general issues from an abstract perspective. He discusses the criteria of legitimacy of rational cognition. His is a philosophical rather than a psychological enquiry. The sins of the common mind, symbolized in the concept of arbitrium brutum, do not undermine critical philosophy, nor harm the credibility of the grand project. But these are still the sins of reason. By undertaking a general assessment of the rationality of human conduct, can they be disregarded? Not everybody can practice critical philosophy. How are we to imagine a world where reason is the arbiter, but one that is only poorly educated? How can the canon of pure reason that Kant describes be implemented? The ideas underpinning the critical philosophy project cannot be crammed into a questionnaire generated by the sociology or psychology of knowledge. That would be a futile, naïve and ridiculous exercise. After all, Kant’s philosophy represents a key reference point. Accordingly, his concept of rationality can be treated as a directive to be considered when we analyze reality. It is, after all, one of the most important directives shaping the Enlightenment message.

What can we say when emphasizing Kantian caution and restraint? How high can our hopes climb when soberly evaluating (without embellishment) reason’s competencies? For, remember, reason strives to ‘venture to the outermost bounds of all cognition.’ There is, therefore, a certain desperation in the actions of reason. To harbor ambitions of an ideal of truth grounded in rationality is seriously risky. Thinking naturally, as it were, becomes the source of dangerous temptations. Reaching those ‘outermost bounds’ carries the obvious threat of making one unbalanced and detached from foundations which ensure credibility.

The sum total of all possible objects for our cognition seems to us to be a flat surface, which has its apparent horizon, namely that which comprehends its entire domain and

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95 Ibid., p. 673.
which is called by us the rational concept of unconditioned totality. It is impossible to attain this empirically, and all attempts to determine it \textit{a priori} in accordance with a certain principle have been in vain. Yet all questions of our pure reason pertain to that which might lie outside the horizon or in any case at least on its borderline.\textsuperscript{96}

These are the greatest temptations. Disciplined minds are attracted to pains-taking observation, producing hypotheses which can easily be tested through experiments. On the other hand, the most unstable minds are attracted to speculation, which is detached from all experience and can lead to the strangest ideas. Therefore, reason does not always produce respectable results; not all ideas are credible. Reason eagerly approaches the horizon Kant speaks of: there it stands the best chance of satisfying its will to truth. But such high ambitions can easily lead us to stray into the sphere of delusion. Clearly, then, the will to truth lacks any absolute value.

This view informed the Kantian \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}. It is testament to doubts which arise from even the most commendable ambitions relating to the pursuit of truth. These may have momentum, but at the same time they are immature and dangerous. The exertion and sacrifice demanded by philosophy and science, creates ambitions which corrode lofty minds, whilst ordinary minds headed in the same direction, are derailed by sudden outbursts of vanity and curiosity. Surely the human mind yearns for truth. Reason as far as possible finds answers to the most difficult and vital questions.

‘The famous David Hume was one of these geographers of human reason, who took himself to have satisfactorily disposed of these questions by having expelled them outside the horizon of human reason, which however, he could not determine.’\textsuperscript{97} He considerably restricted the competencies of reason, ‘from the incapacity of our reason to make a use of this principle that goes beyond all experience, he inferred the nullity of all pretensions of reason in general to go beyond the empirical.’\textsuperscript{98} But, says Kant, there are limited benefits to such an arrangement. ‘One can call a procedure of this sort, subjecting the \textit{facta} of reason to examination and when necessary to blame, the censorship of reason.’ Such censorship limits the sphere of rational cognition significantly. Kant believes that in perfecting the notions of cognition we must go further. ‘The first step in matters of pure reason, which characterizes its childhood, is dogmatic.’ This is the most obvious state and the best known: these steps have already been mentioned.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., p. 653.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., p. 654.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
Action performed with determination, displaying an apparent sense of certainty, is how traditional metaphysics spreads vague ideas widely. Hume made the second step, ‘the just mentioned second step is skeptical, and gives evidence of the caution of the power of judgement sharpened by experience.’ But this is not the end. ‘Now, however, a third step is still necessary, which pertains only to the mature and adult power of judgement, which has at its basis firm maxims of proven universality.’ The subject matter of the _Critique of Pure Reason_ is inherent in this sphere. Kant will attempt to go in this direction. In defining the precise boundaries of rational cognition, his efforts will come to fruition. ‘This is not the censorship but the critique of pure reason,’ Kant will declare. Skepticism cannot remain ‘a dwelling-place for permanent residence’ for reason, he adds, as it would point to reason’s helplessness.

When presenting the Kantian point of view we should err on the side of caution. At a glance, it is hardly possible to take in the complexity of the _Critique of Pure Reason_. Keeping in mind the main objective of these reflections, to account for the role that the will to truth plays in rational cognition, let us try to address one other question. Let us consider for a moment the extent of Kant’s optimism, which allowed him to speak of the three steps. Is everybody able to take the three steps? Are there not grounds to believe that often the first step taken is also the last step?

Kant wishes to dispel all illusions. He exposes all doubts with remarkable persistence. The human mind is not innocent. Indeed, the will to truth is not flawless. Alas, it is easy to imagine abuses committed in the name of truth. Kant dedicates considerable space to this issue in the _Critique of Pure Reason_ in a chapter devoted to ‘The Discipline of Pure Reason in its Polemical Employment.’

There is a certain dishonesty in human nature, which yet in the end, like everything else that comes from nature, must contain a tendency to good purposes, namely in inclination to hide its true dispositions and to make a show of certain assumed ones that are held to be good and creditable. Kant repeats a belief here, that was popular in the seventeenth century, becoming an unchallengeable statement. People will do anything to fulfill a longing which stems from self-love and is the main influence on their behavior and relationships. Thanks to this longing, the foundations of morality can be built. Everybody wants to have self-esteem – to be admired. The self is seduced to sate puffed-up vanity. In the end, however, self-love benefits everyone. It improves human

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99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., pp. 647–648.
nature and customs. Egoism imposes strict requirements. In order to gain self-love, we must first gain other people’s sympathy. Those who fail to be appreciated by others are never able to feed their own vanity. This is a reliable formula. We continually strive to make the best impression on others and this affects the nature of our conduct. Blaise Pascal powerfully emphasized this: ‘We are not content with the life we have in ourselves and in our own being, we wish to live an imaginary life in the idea of others, and to this end we strive to make a show.’ Appearance carries the highest value and becomes more important than reality. We wear a mask and continually ‘strive to make a show.’ Vanity is the strongest of all motives. ‘We labour incessantly to embellish and preserve this imaginary being, and we neglect the true.’ All is done for the sake of fame: ‘we would even part with them [virtues] for this end, and gladly become cowards for the reputation of valour.’ What is the difference between vice and virtue? All intentions are tarnished by the effort of keeping up appearances. Morality is hampered by paying tribute to vanity. Moral deeds have no inherent value – at the heart of morality lies deceit. Pascal likened man to a mask, which not only deceives others but also the person wearing it, and, like a blank mask, reveals no truth to either. This point of view found wide recognition. The idea that self-love and the game of appearances is the crucial motivation behind human behavior inspired many authors to write treatises, essays and aphorisms, which became popular in the seventeenth century, amongst them Jean La Placette (Traite de l’orgueil, 1643), Descartes (Traite des passions, 1649), Francois de la Rochefoucauld (Reflections; or Sentences and Moral Maxims, 1665) and Jean de La Bruyere. As La Rochefoucauld said: ‘Our virtues are most frequently but vices disguised.’

All this laid a solid foundation for Kant. His voice thus echoes that of Pascal and La Rochefoucauld when he says:

It is quite certain that through this propensity to conceal themselves as well as to assume an appearance that is advantageous for them humans have not merely civilized themselves but gradually moralized themselves to a certain degree, since no one could penetrate the mask of respectability, honorableness, and propriety, and one therefore

102 Ibid.
found a school for self-improvement in the supposedly genuine examples of the good which he saw around himself.\textsuperscript{104}

The ‘mask of respectability’ merely offers a poor substitute for good; in Kant’s words it gives instruction on how to assume a ‘pretense of good.’

The hardest thing to accept is, of course, the fact that people side with illusion for the most essential reasons. Deceit lies at the very foundation; truth is not in the least a priority. Practical, ad hoc ideas are not the only ones that are tainted. The will to illusion penetrates the most subtle thoughts, and, in so doing, deforms the ideas developed by reason.

I am sorry to perceive the very same dishonesty, misrepresentation, and hypocrisy even in the utterances of the speculative way of thinking, where human beings have far fewer hindrances to and no advantage at all in forthrightly confessing their thoughts openly and unreservedly. For what can be more disadvantageous to insight than falsely communicating even mere thoughts, than concealing doubts which we feel about our own assertions, or giving a semblance of self-evidence to grounds of proof which do not satisfy ourselves?\textsuperscript{105}

So there it is: even when reason has no vested interest (for what could be behind a will to cognizance?), the will to truth does not play a decisive role. Falsehood can flourish in the sphere of ideas. ‘Masks’ are not only worn in an effort to exhibit a ‘pretense of good,’ but ideas themselves can wear masks.

[P]ure philosophy, on the contrary, fumbles around in nature with discursive a priori concepts without being able to make their reality intuitive a priori and by that means confirm it. Further, the masters of this art do not seem to lack any confidence in themselves, nor does the public seem to lack any great expectations of their talents.\textsuperscript{106}

Reason’s ‘fumbling around’ can be, (and indeed is) enthusiastically received. Reason can be a perpetrator of abuse. The concept of truth is ensnared by vanity. Advocates of truth wish to dazzle, to make themselves seem better in their own eyes. They win acclaim due to ‘fumbling around.’ Doubt, caution, reservation are all large stumbling blocks hampering the preaching of ‘truth.’

That in weighing up the rational grounds of a mere speculation everything must proceed honorably seems to be the least that one can demand. If one could securely count even on this \textit{minimum}, however, then the dispute of speculative reason about the important

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\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 648.  
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., p. 636.  
\end{flushright}
questions of God, immortality (of the soul), and freedom would either have long been decided or else would be brought to an end very soon.\textsuperscript{107}

But by donning the ‘mask’ one can satisfy vanity by prolonging the spectacle. Possessing ‘truth’ is no small advantage. Who wishes to remember the minimum? Of course, the ‘mask’ can be removed and the apostles of truth can be deprived of their camouflage offered by unfounded speculation. This is the meaning of Kant’s critique of pure reason.

One can regard the critique of pure reason as the true court of justice for all controversies of pure reason; for the critique is not involved in these disputes, which pertain immediately to objects, but is rather set the task of determining and judging what is lawful in reason in general in accordance with the principles of its primary institution.\textsuperscript{108}

It is the only way forward, the only way for the will to truth to be free from temptation, which accompanies all attempts to seek truth and encourages ‘mask’ wearing. This is the sense of Kantian ‘discipline’ as mentioned by Saint-Sernin and quoted above. Everything is to be judged according to the ‘principles of its primary institution’: ‘Without this critique,’ Kant argues ‘reason is as it were in the state of nature, and it cannot make its assertions and claims valid or secure them except through war.’\textsuperscript{109}

Has the Enlightenment made it possible for these hopes to be fulfilled? Has reason emerged from the ‘state of nature’? What was Kant’s thinking on this when he reflected on the ‘use of one’s reason’ (the expression used in the treatise \textit{What is Enlightenment?}) and posed questions about practice? Of course, that which is relevant for practice is decided in the domain of practical reason. It defines the rules of conduct. Practical reason does not draw justification from theoretical reasoning. Theoretical reason reveals truths about reality (nature) and the power of necessity. Practical reason is a manifestation of freedom. ‘In respect of what happens, one can think of causality in only two ways either according to nature or from freedom. The first is the connection of a state with a preceding one in the world of sense upon which that state follows according to rule.’ In this sphere everything is conditioned, it does not have its own beginning, ‘for the understanding does not permit appearances any condition that is itself empirically unconditioned.’\textsuperscript{110} Causality related to freedom has an entirely different meaning. By freedom, Kant meant ‘the faculty of beginning a state from itself, the causality

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., p. 649.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., p. 532.
of which does not in turn stand under another cause determining it in time in accordance with the law of nature. Kant places great importance on the idea of the autonomy of the subject. Moral laws, or, in other words, rules of action, are in no way conditioned by circumstances and are not subject to external factors. They are a manifestation of the autonomy of will. This is not tantamount to associating freedom with arbitrariness. After all, the autonomy of will, as Kant puts it, is finally ‘causality caused by freedom.’

The legislative power of practical reason offers great hope that laws, as the direct expression of freedom, will assert human independence and remove the influence of external circumstances. But how sincere can these hopes be? Are we entitled to put aside the doubts voiced in the Critique of Pure Reason? How can we view the aspirations of practical reason whilst bearing in mind that the human self wishes to be placed on a pedestal, to continue developing and making the best impression on itself? In the sphere of practical reason, can illusion and falsehood be excluded?

Kant, of course, stopped short of predicting spectacular, swift changes, which would guarantee the absolute rule of truth and freedom. Critical philosophy defined the necessary conditions for the self to be rid of delusions and forsake abuse. These, however, should be treated as encouragement, rather than relieving us of all limitations. Kant was only too aware that criticism, which allows reason to emerge from the ‘state of nature,’ demands effort. He was not in the business of proclaiming a new era. He was cautious in his thinking on history. He treated the Enlightenment as a process, which required a sustained and strenuous struggle. In his Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View, presented in nine concise theses, he combined optimism with a substantial dose of restraint: ‘All of a creature’s natural capacities are destined to develop completely and in

\[111\] Ibid., p. 533.
\[112\] Z. Kuderowicz, Kant, Warszawa, Wiedza Powszechna, 2000, p. 60.
conformity with their end.’ This is a heart-warming statement, which gives rise to the first thesis, but the second draws attention to its limitations:

Reason in a creature is a faculty to extend the rules and objectives of the use of all of its powers far beyond natural instinct, and it knows no limits to its projects. However, reason itself does not operate on instinct, but requires trial, practice, and instruction in order gradually to progress from one stage of insight to another. Therefore each individual man would have to live excessively long if he were to make complete use of all his natural capacities.113

And so, we arrive at the crucial issue: public interaction, and, more generally, the public sphere. Criticism, vital to the maturation of reason, is well founded only when it moves beyond the framework of personal experience, when it goes hand in hand with transparency, unmasking lies and recording the outline of truth through the experience of public activity. In his famous treatise, *What is Enlightenment?*, Kant distinctly says that the emergence from the state of ‘immaturity,’ represented by an inability to ‘use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another,’ will be decided by the ‘public use of one’s reason.’ This, he adds, is the only way to ‘bring about enlightenment among mankind.’114 The progress of freedom, the expanding circle of mutual networks, the increasing importance of public expression, allow us to be optimistic about the removal of obstacles restricting the power of reason. When he describes the Eighth Thesis in the above mentioned *Idea for a Universal History*, Kant emphasizes the following: ‘enlightenment will thus gradually arise, though folly and caprice will sometimes slip in, it arises as a great good.’115 Jurgen Habermas asserts that in Kant’s philosophy the idea of a civil public sphere is expressed as a fully developed theory of public transparency.116

So, transparency is crucial. It is the nature of illumination and the message of the Age of Enlightenment. The idea of a public sphere which guarantees transparency reveals the fundamental benefits of criticism. The public sphere is a space for the free exchange of ideas, a space in which words reign supreme, freed from servitude, commitments and restrictions. Removed from ritual, it facilitates confrontation and opposition.

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The Greeks were the first to experience the benefits of the free exchange of thoughts. In the culture of the *polis*, illumination and revelation played a fundamental role.

In the fully-developed Greek city-state the sphere of the *polis*, which was common (*kaine*) to the free citizens, was strictly separated from the sphere of *oikos*; in the sphere of the *oikos*, each individual is in his own realm (*idia*). The public life, *bios politikos*, went on in the market place (*agora*), but of course this did not mean that it occurred necessarily only in this specific locale. The public sphere was constituted in discussion (*lexis*), which could also assume the forms of consultations and of sitting in the court of law, as well as in common action (*praxis*).\(^{117}\)

*Polis* is the prototype, and the Greeks its forerunners. It is hard to speak of a well-developed tradition. The Greek example will become very important late in the day, but similar practices will set the scene for modern Europe. Starting in the seventeenth century, there is a gradual and distinct development of practices, which shape a common space for reflection, debate and judgment. The ‘literary public sphere’ as Habermas puts it, is the prototype: a space of critical debate linked to the existence of the ‘republic of scholars.’\(^{118}\) These are men of letters: writers, academics, publicists working for newspapers, which are increasing in number. We are dealing with ‘a public sphere in apolitical form – the literary precursor on the public sphere operative in the political domain.’ When the exchange of thought is institutionalized it means that ‘inasmuch as culture became a commodity […] it was claimed as the ready topic of a discussion through which an audience-oriented (*publikumsbezogen*) subjectivity communicated with itself.’\(^{119}\) This process of initiation takes a short time to complete. And in Marvin Becker’s words ‘new bodies and groups now colonized public space.’\(^{120}\) Gradually, the domain of participation and the range of debate become more extensive. Initially, the issues address elitist and sophisticated subjects and slowly begin to encompass areas more familiar to the wider public. The realm of debate begins to correspond to the realm of political practice. A new perspective becomes clear – the public, increasingly aware of the growing potential brought about by critical judgment, highlight its presence by taking a stand on issues that, until now, were solely the domain of the authorities. This is the birth of the political public sphere. It relates to ongoing social change

\(^{117}\) Ibid., p. 3.

\(^{118}\) Ibid., p. 105.

\(^{119}\) Ibid., p. 29.

and the development of new communication practices. At the same time, the demands imposed on public utterances increases. As Nicolas de Condorcet observed, the invention of printing, and the ease it offered in the dissipation of evidence and details, must have advanced the art of persuasion. The ‘reading public,’ to use Habermas’s expression, began to play an increasingly powerful role. The exchange of ideas transcended the narrow circle of connoisseurs. ‘An eighteenth-century contemporary has estimated that 20,000 Londoners met in various clubs each night.’ We are now in a world of large audiences. The incrementally rising number of readers goes hand in hand with the increasing rate at which books, periodicals and newspapers are published, the growing number of writers, publishers, bookshops, libraries and, in particular, reading societies as social hubs for the new reading culture. This ‘new culture’ encourages the development of aspirations, putting a premium on practices which relate to the public exchange of views. Reflection, critical analysis, conflict, a confrontation of views, all serve to enhance and consolidate transparency, not least because of a public manifestation. Something else is at stake apart from the mechanism associated with public discussion. Transparency involves disclosing opponents of truth; exposing superstition, lies, illusion and naïve faith. Ultimately, therefore, truth is at stake. This is the purpose of efforts undertaken to publically highlight criticism. Habermas writes, “The “domination” of the public, according to its own idea, was an order in which domination itself was dissolved: veritas non auctritas facit legem.” Truth establishes its own rights. The auctoritas non veritas facit legem formula conducive to the affirmation of absolute power, established in imperial Rome and recalled by Hobbes, is reversed. From now on, all authority must recognize the supreme role of truth to determine the limit of approved actions and verify public debate. This concept is a typical projection of the ideals of ‘bourgeois humanism’ expressed in the key ideas of subjectivity and self-realization, the rational shaping of opinion and the will, as well as individual and political self-determination. Within the framework of this new canon, the quest for truth, or the unambiguous affirmation of the will to truth, is the basic premise of public participation. ‘Bourgeois humanism’ will create, in the words of Habermas, a ‘utopian potential’ and become a vital source of inspiration despite the disappointments and criticisms leveled at the hope offered by

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122 Becker, p. 69.
123 Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, p. 82.
the Enlightenment. This inspiration is no doubt extremely important also today. The concept of representation, without which there would be no democratic political practice to speak of, reflects a utopian hope inherent in the belief that the will to truth plays a key role in public debate and determines its results and nature.

The concept of truth as developed in the public sphere is crystalized in the ‘*topos* of public opinion.’ Public opinion will become a synonym of credibility because debate which encourages argument is seen as a direct manifestation of rationality, and therefore a guarantee of truth. ‘The bourgeois public’s critical public debate took place in principle without regard to all preexisting social and political rank and in accord with universal rules.’ We have entered into the realm of pure thought, a sphere in which an abstract understanding of the will to truth plays a decisive role.

At the same time, the results that under these conditions issued from the public process of critical debate lay claim to being in accord with reason; intrinsic to the idea of a public opinion born of the power of the better argument was the claim to that morally preten-
tious rationality that strove to discover what was at once just and right. Public opinion was supposed to do justice to “the nature of the cause.” For this reason the “laws” which it now also wanted to establish for the social sphere, could also lay claim to substantive rationality besides the formal criteria of generality and abstractness.

Public opinion, therefore, is treated as the voice of reason. The nature of the validation of public opinion is general and abstract. The strength and significance of public opinion is not decided by the majority. In the Age of Enlightenment theoretically understood reason is conclusive. The era of public opinion ‘polling,’ which aims to squeeze patchy empirical data into an abstract conceptual form and represent the particular as general, will come later. Then, the concept of ‘public opinion’ will undergo a complete overhaul. Fragmentary opinions, reflecting various divisions, express diversity of thought – but using the label of ‘public opinion’ surely cannot deem them to be the voice of reason or the direct articulation of rationality. The importance of opinions, their weight and influence, is determined solely by their empirical content. An abstract perspective of the will to truth undermines its importance, which demonstrates the essence of ‘public debate.’ Priority is now given to statistics. Since ‘public opinion’ is no longer an idyllic whole, its conclusions can be associated with ignorance, illusion, superstition, propaganda, lies and the aberration of the mind. Opinion

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124 Ibid., p. 54.
125 Ibid., pp. 54–55.
ceases to be the gauge of truth; it is open to interpretation. There is no homogenous content, no a priori weight. So, in a sense, we have returned to the starting point. Initially, before public discourse became a formula for validation, opinion was identified with a particular point of view. In English and French the word “opinion” took on the uncomplicated meaning of the Latin opinio: an uncertain, not fully demonstrated, judgement.”

How did this transformation come about, allowing us to treat opinion as a general and abstract measure of credibility? The semantic double meaning of the word is largely responsible: “‘Opinion’ in the sense of a judgement that lacks certainty, whose truth would still have to be proven, is associated with “opinion” in the sense of a basically suspicious repute among the multitude.”

This ‘repute’ will become less and less ‘suspicious,’ as the ‘multitude’ transforms into a critical and debating public, thus, gaining increasingly in trust. In the end, universal ‘repute’ and recognition will be a basic formula of authentication. But the road will be difficult and tortuous. At the start: ‘Both of the original meanings – the mere opinion and the reputation that emerged in the mirror of opinions – were antithetical to the kind of rationality claimed by public opinion.’

Opinion will be treated as the voice of reason by linking ideas of general recognition and good repute to the notion of ‘universal,’ which will be approached as a concrete epistemological principle. In English this fusion will be made possible by concepts including public spirit and general opinion. In this sphere a new concept of validation will emerge and make public opinion a concrete concept. The new concept will be crystalized when the term ‘public spirit’ no longer refers to ‘the lofty and sacrificial attitude of human individuals,’ but rather to ‘that objective entity of the Zeitgeist – a general opinion, which from that time on could scarcely be separated from the instrument of this opinion, the press.”

In time, ‘general opinion’ will become ‘public opinion.’ To reiterate, everything stems from changes emphasizing the role of the enlightened, critically disposed public, with a penchant for seeking the truth. This is clearly visible in France. By emphasizing the notion of public eclair the physiocrats imparted a new meaning to the concept of public opinion. It no longer referred to widespread, uncompromising views, inspired by bon sens. ‘Only when the physiocrats ascribed it to the publique eclair it itself did opinion publique receive the strict meaning of an opinion purified through

126 Ibid., p. 89.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid., p. 90.
129 Ibid., p. 93.
critical discussion in the public sphere to constitute a true opinion. In *opinion publique* the contradiction between *opinion* and *critique* vanished."\(^{130}\)

The moment of glory is near. Summing up the achievements of the Age of Reason, Condorcet will say: ‘We may show that the principles of philosophy, the maxims of liberty, the knowledge of the true rights of man, and his real interest, are spread over too many nations, and in each of those nations direct the opinions of too great a number of enlightened men, for them ever to fall again into oblivion.’\(^{131}\) Condorcet’s thinking reflects motives typical of the Enlightenment: the glorification of opinion. What is more, the author is convinced that the progress made by reason is universal and general. The importance of truth has become, to his mind, a paramount and a priori rule, which affects the nature of all practices, rendering them irreversible. ‘Hence it is seen that all the intellectual occupations of men, however differing in their object, their method, or the qualities of mind which they require, have concurred in the progress of human reason. It is the same with the entire system of the labours of men as with a well-composed work.’\(^{132}\) The will to truth will be transferred from the anthropological to the historical plane. In fact, Condorcet presents the will to truth as a historical imperative of sorts.

What fear can be entertained when we find that the two languages the most universally extended, are, likewise, the languages of two people who possess the most extended liberty; who have best known its principles. So that no confederacy of tyrants, nor any possible combination of policy, can prevent the rights of reason, as well as those of liberty, from being openly defended in both languages.\(^{133}\)

But, has the will to truth simultaneously become a political imperative? Does the glorification of public opinion alone suffice to justify a positive reply? The answer is far from obvious. The transfer from the abstract (the general praise of rational opinion) to the practical (procedures which solidify political decisions) had the unavoidable effect of inviting reflection and hesitancy. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his *volonte generale* is a telling example. The *general will*, a will veering towards the good, constituted in the sphere of truth, never errs in Rousseau’s opinion ‘the general will is always in the right and always works for the public good; but it doesn’t follow that the people’s deliberations are always equally correct.’ The *general will*, essentially, has no empirical content – it grows *in opposition* to

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130 Ibid., p. 95.
131 Condorcet, p. 244.
132 Condorcet, pp. 243–244.
133 Ibid., p. 244.
specific convictions and aims as they are revealed. ‘The will of all is very different from the general will: the latter looks only to the common interest, while the former looks to private interest and is no more than a sum of particular wills.’ General will, therefore, has an abstract meaning; it reveals the notion of a common interest. It is not a projection of individual intentions, not even the noblest ones. As Rousseau emphasizes, ‘there can be no general will in regard to a particular object.’ The general will must be rooted in the concept of the whole. It develops only when ‘the whole people decrees for the whole people.’ The concept of the ‘whole’ has no empirical sense here, of course. The merging (of the people into a ‘whole’) takes place in the concept of the common good and common interest, not by counting votes. The people become a ‘whole’ only when they seek their truth in the concept of the common good. Rousseau states it clearly: ‘The populace left to itself always wills the good, but left to itself it doesn’t always see what that is. The general will is always in the right, but the judgement that guides it isn’t always enlightened.’ Truth, then, is revealed in the sphere of ideas, rather than the sphere of judgment. The development of the general will suggests that it is not judgment that must become the gauge of truth, but an opinion grounded in the concept of good. ‘Individuals must be made to bring their wills into line with their reason,’ reads the final verdict. In Rousseau’s world, politics pursued on the plane of judgment and reason can have nothing in common with each other. The will to truth is located in the abstract sphere of reason. To reject abstraction in favor of something concrete would be degrading. Political actions cannot be based on opinions associated with the empirically concrete. They must be grounded in rational opinions and soar high above the plane of judgment. This is the only meaning practices relating to people power can have. The will to truth must be refined – freed from the burden of individual desires. It must be shaped and censored.

This was not a lone view. The idea of opposition to the tyranny of individual opinions is not singular to Rousseau, but is a typical theme of the Enlightenment. Today’s undisputed and unqualified solution that is majority rule was excluded from the Enlightenment rationality formula. The difference between rational opinion (general) and individual opinion will be emphasized even when the concept of majority replaces the general will. Politics at the level of judgment

135 Ibid., p. 18.
136 Ibid., p. 19.
137 Ibid.
does not encourage trust. Praise levelled at opinion will always amount to the praise of reason. This comes across clearly in the views expressed by the American founding fathers and authors of the American Constitution, who, despite agreeing to the rule of opinion and appreciating its significance, at the same time imposed conditions, which amounted to the sharp censorship of views generated by individual interests and passions. The will to truth and the will to good can only be expressed in opinions which have been subjected to ennobling processes reducing the blinkered posturing of individual ambitions and desires.

Those governments that appeal to the authority of opinion bring hope and a break with despotism. ‘[A]ll governments rest on opinion,’ says James Madison presuming he has presented an undisputed truth. However, he qualifies his statement by warning against expecting too much; there can be no simple benefits. Opinion should be developed. ‘[I]n a nation of philosophers, this consideration ought to be disregarded. A reverence for the laws would be sufficiently inculcated by the voice of an enlightened reason.’ Reality, however, is different. More frequently than not, superstition has a stronger appeal than balanced philosophical wisdom. Opinions differ as their sources are different. They are heavily burdened with emotion, passion and ambition. We will not find there the pure element of truth. The art of public discourse, intended to develop rational opinion, must overcome many barriers. ‘So numerous indeed and so powerful are the causes which serve to give a false bias to the judgement, that we, upon many occasions, see wise and good men on the wrong as well as on the right side of questions of the first magnitude to society.’ At any moment, the following can take the upper hand: ‘Ambition, avarice, personal animosity, party opposition, and many other motives not more laudable than these.’ Reaching agreement is not an easy task. There are serious communication barriers, to use today’s terminology. Often it takes just a blinkered approach to put obstacles in the path. Reluctance is sometimes more powerful than the strength of an argument. According to Hamilton ‘Many often oppose a thing, merely because they had no agency in planning it, or because it may have been planned by those whom they dislike.’

139 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
However, the founding fathers did not capitulate to man’s imperfections. Measures curbing the impact of human flaws would thwart the ambitions forming the basis of the constitutional project. The authors of the American Constitution thought that rational action in politics was possible. Opinions are a medium, which can be subordinated to the power of reason; they just should not be left to their own devices. Hamilton, in the last issue of *The Federalist*, had some words of warning: ‘No partial motive, no particular interest, no pride of opinion, no temporary passion or prejudice, will justify to himself, to his country, or to his posterity, an improper election of the part he is to act.’

Therefore, the art of decision making should be honed. One should act as reason directs and lessen the impact of motives that could be indicative of narrow and biased views. Issues addressed in *The Federalist Papers* allow the authors of the Constitution to present the framework of a key concept, that is, the concept of communicating in keeping with Enlightenment ideals and guaranteeing the priority of reason. What is paramount here, what is fundamental? Undoubtedly, it is to abandon the narrow field framed by individual opinions. This should be the starting point as Alexander Hamilton states in the concluding essay of the last issue of *The Federalist*. Anybody who wants to have a say in public matters (here he specifically means in ratifying the Constitution – SF) ‘let him beware of an obstinate adherence to party; let him reflect that the object upon which he is to decide is not a particular interest of the community, but the very existence of the nation.’

A term that often crops up in political debate inspired by supporters of the Constitution is ‘enlargement.’ ‘Enlarged opinion’ is opinion drawn from the narrow circle of personal likes and dislikes, expectations and convictions linked to individual interests or those of one’s own community. Despite the veneer of refinement, if left there it will remain ancillary and petty. It will lack wider perspective. Decision-making processes and constitutional procedures should introduce revisions to alleviate the effect of innate flaws. Opinions should undergo ‘filtering’: the gradual freeing from the burden of narrowness and pettiness, imparting them with a final ‘refined’ character. During the Constitutional Convention James Madison said that spontaneously arising views should be ‘refined’ ‘by successive filtrations.’ Freed from the blemish of commonality, opinions should develop around issues which attract universal interest, and be formed in a debate which, by removing the stigma of ‘narrowness,’ creates a climate of ‘refinement.’

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144 Ibid.
146 Cited after I. Kramnick, op.cit., p. 41.
The weight of these opinions, their rationality, or, to put it another way, their common intelligibility, is never a foregone conclusion. After all, not everything depends on intention. The potential created by the language of public debate, which presumably serves to repudiate illusion and relates to apparent concepts of good and truth, is not unequivocal. The will to truth is forged in the continuous conflict between often subjective convictions. The ideas forming the basis of public debate are never transparent and unequivocal. The further we move from the source – our own experience – the more complicated things become. The plane of understanding does not always concur with that of debate. The will to truth never explicitly has the upper hand. Human thought does not move along a simple, clearly chartered course. Language itself is testament to chaos and imperfection. Madison explains ‘when the Almighty himself condescends to address mankind in their own language, his meaning, luminous as it must be, is rendered dim and doubtful by the cloudy medium through which it is communicated.’

How significant, then, can the communicative strategies of beings so much more imperfect be? We should not expect too much, as ‘no language is so copious as to supply words and phrases for every complex idea, or so correct as not to include many equivocally denoting different ideas.’ Confusion, to some degree, is inevitable at all times. Certainly public discourse will not lose its inherent ambiguity and therefore it will continue to contribute to the spread of deception. But, for the authors of the American Constitution, according to Morton White, fidelity to the voice of reason was a fundamental moral postulate. There is no way to erase the weaknesses of the human mind completely, but that is not to say that this should not be encouraged. Diversity makes it inevitable that some opinions will not be true, however, misconception should never dominate the debate.

147 ‘The Federalist,’ No. 37, in The Federalist, p. 245.
148 Ibid.
3. Nietzsche – Ruined Hopes

3.1 Truth and the Will to Illusion

The Enlightenment is dynamic and hopeful but the tenets it presented would not withstand criticism. At the gates of the philosophers’ temple of reason, ‘barbarians’ appeared with no respect for the axioms of the Age of Reason. The will to truth would be challenged.

‘Is Hamlet understood? It is not doubt but certainty that drives you mad. […] We are all afraid of truth…’¹⁵⁰ But we must not speak about it. It is a taboo created by philosophy, which introduced the concept of rational knowledge and glorified the notion of truth. This is something Nietzsche exposes and criticizes mercilessly. He depicts the aspirations of reason as the source of pitiful and dangerous delusion. He ridicules the philosophers’ faith in reason, calling it absurd. And so it has been from the very beginning, Nietzsche argues, ever since Plato, the great patron of philosophical mystification. In the Preface to Beyond Good and Evil Nietzsche condemns ‘Plato’s invention of pure spirit and the Good in itself;’ in the first chapter he analyzes the ‘prejudices of philosophers.’¹⁵¹ He believes they stem from the persistent predilection to emphasize the will to truth. In Nietzsche's view, a fundamental question should be asked: ‘What in us really wills the truth? […] We asked about the value of this will,’ Nietzsche notes.¹⁵² The consequences of this inquisitiveness will be shattering.

And so, philosophical concepts began to shift. Nietzsche decided to tear down the foundations of the cult of truth. He wanted to shock by shattering the idea of knowledge as isolated from the chaos of the world and originating from its own undisturbed source. It is a knowledge, according to Plato, which is related to the realm of ‘pure spirit,’ directly implementing ‘the will to truth.’ Nietzsche infers that

the belief in the “will to truth” is an illusion expressed by philosophers who take the human cognitive drive to represent the essence of human nature, and in human rationality see the highest distinctive feature of man. Nietzsche's criticism of the “will to truth” is

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 5.
nothing but a criticism of idealism, an element of the negation of the concept of the “real world” hidden behind the visible world. Nietzsche takes up the fight against philosophers’ original sin, the sin of Platonism. We must however tread carefully. By no means does Nietzsche reject the concept of ‘truth’ itself. On the contrary, he makes frequent use of it and does so vigorously. ‘The pathos of speaking the truth is a leitmotif in Nietzsche’s writing,’ explains Hanna Buczyńska-Garewicz, and adds that for him ‘truthfulness is a thinker’s principle virtue.’ Nietzsche tries to give voice to truth at all cost. But the truth he is talking about is different; one that does not need to be sought in the afterworld. He is after a liberating truth, one which destroys philosophers’ superstitions; which allows one to find oneself directly in the stream of life and experience all its temptations and paradoxes. It had been forbidden to speak of such truth in the past. It was discredited by philosophers who basked in the expanse of ‘pure spirit’ stretching out beyond the veil of phenomena. This kind of vision inspired idealists of all ages, including the eighteenth century and Kant, stating ‘the thing in itself.’ This vision now lies shattered. ‘The lightning-bolt of truth has struck precisely what stood highest hitherto: anyone who understands what has been destroyed there should look to see if he has anything left in his hands. Everything called “truth” so far has been recognized as the most harmful, malicious, subterranean form of lie.’

So ‘truth’ is now but the philosophers’ superstition; in actual fact it is only a concealed form of lie. All of Nietzsche’s accusatory observations move in the direction of this finding. In the Preface to the Anti-Christ, Nietzsche admits that what is needed is a ‘new conscience for truths that have kept silent until now.’ What the will to truth has exposed is pitiful. ‘What humanity has hitherto deemed important are not even realities, but merely illusions.’ By pursuing the will to truth the will to illusion came to the fore. The illusion of ‘the true world’ encouraged indulgence in the appeal of deception.

What final conclusions can be drawn from Nietzsche’s observations? In his re-evaluation of the concept of truth he does by no means suggest a carefree and nihilistic freedom. As he himself will say, his books are ‘written with blood,’

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154 Ibid., p. 48.
155 Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, pp. 94–95.
157 Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, p. 33.
implying that these are serious matters he is addressing, of utmost importance. Denouncing ‘the will to truth’ facilitates the exodus from the grotto of Platonic philosophers and thereby reveals the genuine play of elements determining human action. ‘By rejecting the “real world,” Nietzsche does not act as a defender of deceit, misconception, error or appearances. On the contrary – incipit Zara-thustra – this marks the beginning of the new way of thinking freed from the metaphysical error of the concept of transcendental being.’158 We can already discern what the key effect of Nitzschean reevaluations will be. ‘The repudiation of absolute truth is accompanied by the rejection of the absoluteness of appearance. Both notions acquire a relativistic perspective in place of the otherworldly inalterability. Truth and appearance together are one reality of life.’159

Nietzsche uncovers the mutual connections between the will to truth, the will to appearance and the will to delusion. The concealed intimacy between them, their continuous interpenetration, is an issue he takes up repeatedly with added emphasis. The will to truth and the will to illusion are fused into one. They constitute and strengthen each other. The belief that truth is an autonomous power is a superstition, which according to Nietzsche, testifies to the vital role of delusion.

In view of this, a one-sided affirmation of truth would merely amount to the affirmation of illusion. The will to truth has always been saturated with the will to delusion. There is no other way. Pure truth is pure fancy. Naturally, thinking which uncovers the power of paradox and ambiguity has a whiff of tragedy. Freeing itself from the allures of fantasy, from suggestions relating to images of the ‘real world,’ philosophy acquires tragic features, Nietzsche concludes. ‘But will our philosophy not thus become a tragedy?’160 Having made his discovery, all he has to do now is continue proving that ‘The whole of human life is sunk deeply in untruth; the individual cannot draw it up out of this well without thereby growing profoundly disillusioned about his own past.’161 The newly discovered truth reveals the fundamental importance of pretense and illusion.

That truth is concerned with reality is something we are most willing to accept. But do we know what reality is? Nietzsche denounces naïve realists. In The Gay Science he pronounces his anathema:

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158 Buczyńska-Garewicz, op.cit., p. 45.
159 Ibid.
161 Ibid., p. 30.
Ye sober beings, who feel yourselves armed against passion and fantasy, and would gladly make a pride and an ornament out of your emptiness, ye call yourselves realists, and give to understand that the world is actually constituted as it appears to you; before you alone reality stands unveiled, and ye yourselves would perhaps be the best part of it.\textsuperscript{162}

The concept of reality introduced by the realists, holding on to the image of the ‘real world,’ is pathetic. It is a projection of naïve and superficial ideas to which fearful idol-worshippers stick, that is, philosophers imprisoned in the narrow sphere of their own superstitions. Their concept of the world is actually a case of serious abuse: it has turned thinking into a mendacity.

In fact the ‘realist’ has no wish to address reality. Not once has he peeked behind the curtain separating him from reality. He tends to simplify everything, defending patterns of thought which enable him to experience the comfort of risk-free ‘good old thinking.’ ‘Ye still carry about with you the valuations of things which had their origin in the passions and infatuations of earlier centuries.’ Respectable philosophy has no appetite for new truth. From the very beginning everything is strange and confusing. Realists devise their fetishes in spite of experiences. But are we aware of how tangled and rough the yarn, which weaves the images of the world, is? ‘There is that mountain! There is that cloud! What is “real” in them? Remove the phantasm and the whole human element therefrom, ye sober ones.’ The human mind is certainly not a mirror strolling along a road. Every fact is a creation, quite arbitrary and puzzling at that. There is no ‘objective’ approach, no ‘objective’ way of seeing things. Each thought is a battle-field bursting with commotion stirred up by vying claimants. ‘In every experience, in every sense impression there is a piece of this old love [for the ‘real world’ – SF]; and some fantasy, some prejudice, some irrationality, some ignorance, some fear, and whatever else, has worked on and contributed to it.’\textsuperscript{163} Views of reality are born in these circumstances. Ecce veritas. There is no escaping from this verdict.

Rudiger Safranski argues that in The Gay Science Nietzsche takes a phenomenological stand point years ahead of Husserl.\textsuperscript{164} He presents a clearly framed concept of intentionality, although he does not use this term. He rejects the naturalist concept of consciousness: consciousness is not a sack into which subsequent ‘facts’ find their way; it is a place for creation. We call the world into being, imparting onto it a certain countenance, creating our own range of meanings,

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
establishing ‘objects’ one by one. Unlike Husserl, however, Nietzsche is not interested in a restrictive understanding of rationality, the problem of a narrow understanding of the cognitive competencies of reason. He believes that that which we consider ‘thinking’ is in fact a conglomerate of all kinds of factors in which thought plays only a limited role. In the end, says Safranski:

Although he did not call it a phenomenological program, that is precisely what it was. Nietzsche was setting out to render visible the jumble of the collaborative resonating stimuli and ideas as if under a magnifying glass, by means of heightened attentiveness and the aid of nimble language. He was aiming not at clarifications and constructions but at visualization and contemplation.165

Thus, Nietzsche’s peregrinations are ‘model analyzes of an intentional design of the world.’166 The author of The Gay Science is a master of nuance. He is interested in what at first glance seem weird subtleties, which have never hitherto attracted philosophers’ attention. Are you not rather, he says addressing his opponents, the realists, ‘most passionate and dark creatures, compared to fish, and still all too similar to an artist in love?’167 Exactly. ‘Nietzsche depicts acts of consciousness as arising from a “hunger.” Phenomenologists, for whom Nietzsche paved the way with his analyzes of consciousness, use the terms “intention” or the “intentional structure of consciousness” in this context.’168

It is extremely difficult to satisfy the hunger of an ‘enamored artist.’ Consciousness is an area of the most surprising alliances. The problem is that we are hardly aware of this. Our ‘truths’ resemble strange arabesques. They are not homogenous – they develop at the intersection of various desires, experiences, passions and delusions. Consciousness is under constant pressure from continually changing stimuli: it is in constant motion. ‘The same “object” differs for consciousness according to whether it is grasped in a context of curiosity, hope, or fear, or with a practical or theoretical aim.’169 So where are the rock-solid, ‘objective’ truths of the realists? When we lift the veil created by banal, superficial and one-sided interpretations of consciousness, just as the mirror reflecting the image of objects, we are faced with disorder, paradox, a torrent of motives and a mess of themes. So the concept of reality begins to lose its distinct contours.

165 Ibid., pp. 206–207.
166 Ibid., p. 209.
168 Safranski, op.cit., p. 208.
169 Ibid., p. 209.
‘Let us also not forget that in the long run it is enough to create new names and valuations and probabilities, in order in the long run to create new “things”’.

Thus, thought signifies creation. In Nietzsche’s opinion we are all artists. We create our own ‘reality.’ But we are always kept in the dark as to what is true and what is an illusion in this reality. The planes on which we move are constantly shifting.

Individual lives are perspectivist, enveloped in an atmosphere of delusion and ignorance […] It was certainly a great accomplishment on Nietzsche’s part to have depicted the subtle and varied manners in which our consciousness functions and the primitiveness and coarseness of the concepts that consciousness employs to understand its workings. Usually this process is accomplished by juxtaposing a subjective interior and an objective exterior.

Of course, these practices are made possible and sanctioned by language. Language is the bastion of the rigors which enforce the proper image of ‘reality,’ according to set patterns. More often than not, ‘primitiveness and coarseness of the concepts’ take the upper hand over outbursts of invention. Most frequently, most triumphant is the man ‘not predestined for knowledge,’ as Nietzsche puts it, who is driven by a sort of ‘stupid humility.’ In his heart resonates the principle: ‘I want to see nothing that contradicts the prevalent opinion.’

The reputation, name, and appearance, the worth, the usual measure and weight of a thing – originally almost always something mistaken and arbitrary, thrown over things like a dress and quite foreign to their nature and even to their skin – has, through the belief in it and its growth from generation to generation, slowly grown onto and into the thing and has become its very body: what started as appearance in the end nearly always becomes essence and effectively acts as its essence!

Thus only a real blow could tear down ‘this misty shroud of delusion.’ All the more so since delusions are always an element of the ‘truths’ that we use to pay homage to ‘reality.’

Nietzsche called attention to this in one of his earliest works, On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense, published only posthumously. The work, in Safranski’s words, is testament to ‘brilliant insights,’ showing the mind as a rebuttal, in which, the most diverse and strange elements connect and the concept of reality

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170 Nietzsche, The Gay Science, p. 70.
174 Ibid., pp. 69–70.
arises. That is to say, Nietzsche pulls down the magic veil which shrouds philosophers’ dogmas. The human mind, says he, ‘has no further mission that might extend beyond the bounds of human life. Rather, the intellect is human, and only its own possessor and progenitor regards it with such pathos, as if it housed the axis around which the entire world revolved.’ Philosophy has been living off its propensity to fantasize, ‘the philosopher believes he sees the eyes of the universe focused telescopically from all directions upon his actions and thoughts.’ This false picture has been perpetuated, causing all sorts of misunderstandings and confusion regarding ‘truth,’ which should reach beyond the sensations of the moment. A truth at once, lofty and impartial, resistant to trivial seduction and selfish desire. But the opposite is true. The human mind is like a comedian and a liar; thoughts never cease to partake in the game of appearance.

This art of dissimulation reaches its peak in man; here deception, flattery, lying and cheating, slander, false pretenses, living on borrowed glory, masquerading, conventions of concealment, playacting before others and before oneself, in sum, the constant flittering about the flame of vanity, is so much the rule and the law that almost nothing is more incomprehensible than how an honest and pure drive for truth could arise among men.

All truths are being shaped in the ‘drapery of convention,’ becoming a costume, disguise or mask. That which is taken for truth is a coded message. Nietzsche noted that people are inundated with dreams and delusions. But they steer their thoughts in such a way so as to hide this from themselves, and to make the illusion pass for truth. Philosophy should forget epistemology and turn to the language of pretense, study the trickster’s accessories of reason and the mechanism of beguilement. This is the direction mapped out in On Truth and Lies in the Nonmoral Sense. In Safranski’s words, in this work Nietzsche has discovered: ‘the practical necessity of reduction and simplification in knowledge. Knowledge that fully grasps itself discovers that it is above all creative and productive, and should not be taken to signify mere imitation. Knowledge is more poiesis than mimesis.’

How does creation proceed? ‘The pride connected with knowing and sensing lies like a blinding fog over the eyes and senses of men,’ says Nietzsche, it allows

176 Ibid.
177 Ibid., p. 247.
178 Safranski, op.cit., p. 211.
people to blissfully delude themselves. But our mind in fact remains in a narrow frame. What can people see? Nietzsche replies: ‘their eye merely glides around the surface of things and sees “forms”; their perception leads nowhere to the truth, but is satisfied with receiving stimuli and, as it were, playing a groping game on the back of things.’ The knowledge thus gained is coded by language. But, ‘what is a word?’, Nietzsche asks, and answers with the following explanation:

The portrayal of nerve stimuli in sounds. But to conclude from a nerve stimulus to a cause outside ourselves is already the result of a false and unjustified application of the law of causality. What would allow us, if the truth about the origin of language, the viewpoint of the certainty of terms, were alone decisive, what would allow us to say, “The stone is hard,” as if “hard” were known to us otherwise than as a subjective stimulation?

We try to impart the power of truth to our ‘subjective stimulation.’ Hence, the concept of ‘reality’ emerges. We treat our vague sensations as ‘things’ endowed with a distinct shape. Our ‘things’ are always simply a combination of fantasy, emotions and faltering suppositions. Language, which takes part in these ploys, becomes a realm of fiction. Thanks to the power of words we use the wizard’s assets to cultivate delusion and deception. Let us quote the famous statement uttered by Nietzsche: ‘What is truth? a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms […]. Truths are illusions about which it has been forgotten that they are illusions, worn-out metaphors without sensory impact, coins which have lost their image and now can be used only as metal.’

What value can the ‘will to truth’ finally have? Is there reason to hide behind the wall of fiction, which allows us to view ‘truth’ as a flawless element, a pure and precious stone? Nietzsche dots the ‘i’s and crosses the ‘t’s when he pokes fun at the views held by philosophers who develop their concepts of truth from perspectives ‘perhaps they are even viewed from below, like a frog-perspective.’ They cannot understand ‘How could anything originate out of its opposite? Truth from error, for instance? Or the will to truth from the will to deception? Or self-less action from self-interest? Or the pure sun-bright gaze of wisdom from a covetous leer?’ Although that is what it really is. Philosophers cultivate their

180 Ibid., p. 248.
181 Ibid., p. 250.
182 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 6.
183 Ibid., p. 5.
superstitions, seeking an unambiguous truth and dazzling us with the vision of opposing values. It is high time we asked the following question:

Whatever value might be attributed to truth, truthfulness, and selflessness, it could be possible that appearance, the will to deception, and craven self-interest should be accorded a higher and more fundamental value for all life. It could even be possible that whatever gives values to those good and honorable things has an incriminating link, bond, or tie to the very things that look like their evil opposites; perhaps they are even essentially the same.\textsuperscript{184}

Indeed, this is so. Let us not deceive ourselves, warns Nietzsche: the truths which were presented as the breath of ‘pure spirit’ stem from ‘desire and the will to deception,’ they are never innocent or unblemished.

3.2 Purification Through ‘Poison’

Can we remedy this situation? Surely, the Enlightenment was not concerned with praising deception; what is more, its concept of knowledge involved the praise of criticism. The Age of Reason rationalists, such as Kant, were convinced that the radical critique of cognitive faculties, exposing all the shortcomings of reason, should contribute to the eradication of habits which open the door to prejudice and illusion. Philosophers believed in the effectiveness of purification in order to eliminate the suspicious alliance between reason and passion. Therefore, is Nietzsche’s criticism justified? Is the chaos he speaks about the stigma of naïve awareness? An awareness which has no understanding of this chaos. Something, in fact, philosophers and academics have no reason to fear? Perhaps the philosophers’ hardened minds are capable of avoiding the dire consequences of this confusion?

Nietzsche’s criticism is also directed at the delusion of science and focuses on the cult of scientific knowledge. Faith placed in the calling of science, Nietzsche warns, is conditioned in the same way as all deceptions. It is a masked form of desire which eagerly adopts the appearance of noble aspirations guiding the mind towards truth. Instead it in fact speaks the language of brutal coercion and confusion. While repudiating the Enlightenment tradition, Nietzsche argues that scientific awareness signifies an aberration, which stems from mixing thought with passion. The purification of cognitive faculties is impossible. Science is imbued with ‘poisons,’ as he says in \textit{The Gay Science}. The basis of science is murky. Behind the gilded façade we find an assortment of secret and strange

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., p. 6.
feelings, ambitions, thoughts and deceits. In sum, a mess with little room for healthy stimuli.

So ‘poison’ it is! *The Gay Science* also includes *On the doctrine of poisons:*

So much has to come together in order for scientific thought to originate, and all of these necessary forces have had to be separately invented, practiced, cultivated! In their separateness they have, however, very often had a totally different effect from that which they have today when in the realm of scientific thought they mutually limit and keep each other in check: they have worked as poisons, e.g. the doubting drive, denying drive, the waiting drive, the collecting drive, the dissolving drive. Many hecatombs of human beings had to be sacrificed before these drives learned to grasp their coexistence and feel like functions of one organizing force in one human being."\(^{185}\)

Never then will the results be impressive. The language of science will forever remain, in no small part, a language of instincts. Is Nietzsche’s position fully original? Was he the first to mount this scathing criticism of science? Not really. Much earlier, in the eighteenth century Jean Jacques Rousseau took a similar view. In his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, he asked whether the rebirth of the sciences and arts improved customs? His reply dispelled all illusions: science lacks pure sources to draw upon. It actually remains a domain of desire which brings people no credit or honor. ‘Astronomy was born of superstition; eloquence of ambition, hatred, flattery, lying; Geometry of greed; Physics of a vain curiosity; all of them even Ethics, of human pride.’\(^{186}\) So science is not innocent or impartial. The development of science brings about the propagation of hypocrisy and deformity, which endangers the real interests of reason and conscience. Apparent refinement becomes deceitful buffoonery. Instead of seeking simplicity, man is bogged down in chaos. Rousseau also thinks that growing sophistication carries with it increased toxicity. ‘Athens became the seat of politeness and taste, the country of orators and philosophers.’ However, we should also remember that ‘From Athens we derive those astonishing performances, which will serve as models to every corrupt age.’\(^{187}\) There was only one Athenian who had the courage to incessantly undermine the conceited self-assurance of the apostles of knowledge, arguing that ‘though none of these people know anything, they all think they know something.’ Knowledge is caught up in the game of


\(^{187}\) Ibid., p. 24
appearances. Once the appearances are rejected knowledge becomes ignorance. Rousseau positioned Socrates as a role model.\textsuperscript{188}

Nietzsche despised Socrates, although he did not reject the idea of knowledge as a play of appearances allowing us to think that we know without knowing anything at all. He posed the question: what does cognition in fact signify, what is it aimed at? The following explanation appears in the \textit{Gay Science},

\begin{quote}
The origin of our concept of “knowledge”: I take this explanation from the street; I heard one of the common people say “he knew me right away” – and I asked myself: what do people actually take knowledge to be? What do they want when they want “knowledge”? Nothing more than this: something unfamiliar is to be traced back to something familiar. And we philosophers – have we really meant anything more by knowledge […] Is it not the \textit{instinct of fear} that bids us to know? And isn’t the rejoicing of the person who attains knowledge just rejoicing from a regained sense of security?… Take the philosopher who imagined the world to be “known” when he had reduced it to the “idea”; wasn’t it precisely because the “idea” was so familiar to him and he was used to it? Because he no longer feared the “idea”?\textsuperscript{189}
\end{quote}

‘Scientific knowledge’ is in fact an illusion. The actual intentions go in the opposite direction to the declarations. ‘Discoverers’ have no wish to address unknown truths. They cross no borders. Everything is reduced to meet the limits of their habits, prejudices and passions. They try to house all knowledge in the narrow frame of their imagination. ‘For “what is familiar is known”: on this they agree.’ But such a concept of truth is monstrous. This is why science is barren and banal. ‘The familiar is what we are used to, and what we are used to is the most difficult to “know” – that is, to view as a problem, to see as strange, as distant, as “outside us.”’\textsuperscript{190} So, ultimately, science is benign and banal. It lacks rapacity or determination. It is dominated by banality and a longing for comprehension. This gives rise to a stream of transformations which amount to the continuous reproduction of the scientists’ and philosophers’ own thought patterns, feelings and desires. Nietzsche will say: ‘I have kept a close eye on the philosophers and read between their lines for long enough to say to myself: the greatest part of conscious thought must still be attributed to instinctive activity, and this is even the case for philosophical thought. […] I do not believe that a “drive for knowledge” is the father of philosophy, but rather that another drive, here as elsewhere,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., p. 28. \\
\textsuperscript{189} Nietzsche, \textit{The Gay Science}, p. 214. \\
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., pp. 214–215. 
\end{flushright}
used knowledge (and misknowledge!) merely as a tool [...]. Because every drive craves mastery, and this leads it to try philosophizing.\textsuperscript{191}

There is hidden content in cognition and it is that part that is most important. Knowledge is an entitlement represented by ‘philosophizing’ instincts. Knowledge always enforces a certain form of power arising from desires and ambitions, totally unrelated to the ‘will to truth’ and the selfless passion for knowledge. It signifies the establishment of a certain canon of principles consistent with a vision of the world considered ‘real.’ Systems of knowledge are like tramlines along which people move in the belief that there is no other way. So, knowledge implies coercion; not only the pressure to think, but also the pressure to act in compliance with the imposed requirements of ‘getting to know the truth.’ ‘Impartiality’ is a costume worn by advocates of prejudice, fears and illusion and cultivated in the guise of ‘objectivity.’ For example, what is the sense of declarations made by philosophers who extol ‘natural order?’ Are they really the guardians of an ‘objective’ truth?

[S]omething quite different is going on: while pretending with delight to read the canon of your law in nature, you want the opposite, you strange actors and self-deceivers! Your pride wants to dictate and annex your morals and ideals onto nature – yes, nature itself – you demand that it be nature “according to Stoa” and you want to make all existence exist in your own image alone – as a huge eternal glorification and universalization of Stoicism!\textsuperscript{192}

Knowledge, aspiring to the status of ‘objectivity,’ is in fact a secretive moralizing formula. The idea is to present certain requirements, in line with one’s own habits and emotions, as a ‘natural’ necessity.

For all your love of truth, you have forced yourself so long, so persistently, and with such hypnotic rigidity to have a false, namely Stoic, view of nature, that you can no longer see it any other way, – and some abysmal piece of arrogance finally gives you the madhouse hope that because you know how to tyrannize yourselves – Stoicism is self-tyranny – nature lets itself be tyrannized as well.\textsuperscript{193}

This is how the scientific ideals of the modern world are born, together with the obsession with power and control which is an expression of ‘the madhouse hope.’\textsuperscript{194}

\textsuperscript{191} Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, pp. 6–9.
\textsuperscript{192} Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., pp. 10–11.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., p. 10.
In his devastating diagnosis Nietzsche thus creates the foundation for the interpretation which Heidegger will develop in uncompromising spirit. For modernity finds its own truth in technology and through this vehicle imposes a strategy of domination which amounts to the subordination of all activity to the effectiveness-criteria. The world becomes an ‘object’ which the triumphant ‘subject’ tries to take over. ‘Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral.’195 The belief in ‘neutrality,’ which conceals an obsession with power and authority, has Stoic origins. It is drawn from the perception that the forces of nature speak to us, preaching their own truth, while technology is merely a faithful servant. However, the problem is that in the homage paid to ‘nature’ – to return to Nietzsche – we ought to discern the projections of a madman. Unilateralism relating to the Stoic depiction of the world breeds obsessions which find their fullest expression in the cult of technology, which in turn, is based on the recognition of the ‘objective’ power of truth. Technology, as Heidegger will explain, ‘is therefore no mere means. Technology is a means of revealing.’ This ‘revealing’ is peculiar, one-sided, obsessive, showing the world as a product, a source of supplies. The reign of technology ‘threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth.’196

Nietzsche had this other truth in mind when he was concocting his own vision of nature – detached from the canons of modern science. ‘Imagine something like nature, profligate without measure, indifferent without measure, without purpose and regard, without mercy and justice, fertile and barren and uncertain at the same time, think of indifference itself as power.’197 Such a concept of nature would have to entail the birth of a science which would dictate totally different ‘truths’ and would not serve to perpetuate desires. Nietzsche speaks of the Stoic obsession with ‘tyrannizing’ desires, which will ultimately pave the way to the cult of technology. Scientific ‘truths’ are only story lines that are subject to alteration. Everything depends on the nature of the stimuli that will come to the fore, parading in the costume of the ‘will to truth.’ Science eagerly promotes the cultivation of deception, feeding the world with obsessions. It is no wonder since,

196 Ibid., p. 28.
197 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 10.
let us remember, science is only a combination of ‘poisons,’ which can mutually balance each other out, but will never lose their original properties.

If we examine the history of science, argues Nietzsche, we will notice that its development is far from being testament to the gradual maturity of ‘truth.’ The reverse seems to be the case. The history of science shows that errors play a decisive role in shaping the ambitions concerning science. Nietzsche said science developed ‘because of three errors’:

One has promoted science during the last centuries partly because it was through science that one hoped best to understand God’s goodness and wisdom – the main motive in the soul of the great Englishmen (such as Newton); partly because one believed in the absolute usefulness of knowledge, especially in the most intimate affiliation between morality, knowledge, and happiness – the main motive in the soul of the French (such as Voltaire); and partly because one believed that in science one had and loved something selfless, harmless, self-sufficient, and truly innocent in which the evil drives of humanity had no part at all – the main motive in the soul of Spinoza.198

To Nietzsche, these three paths represent the three errors, so, he concludes, the power of science is derived from delusions. ‘Science,’ he says should be examined as ‘prejudice.’199 Its ambitions arise from ‘spinning fables,’ which refers to the example of Herbert Spencer, who ‘raving in his own way’ imagined the ‘definitive reconciliation of “egoism and altruism”’ in the hope of having discovered irrefutable ‘truth.’ Empiricism – ‘counting, calculating, weighing, seeing, grasping, and nothing else’ – is a pitiful exploit. ‘Thus a “scientific” interpretation of the world, as you understand it,’ says Nietzsche addressing scientists of his age, ‘might still be one of the stupidest of all possible interpretations of the world, i.e. one of those most lacking in significance.’200

We can therefore repeat the fundamental question, asked by Nietzsche: what is the value of that which we call, to flatter scholarly ambitions, ‘the will to truth’? Is it not that what is at stake is a combination of dreams, deceptions, oversimplifications and suspicious ambitions? The place of ‘truth’ is in the realm of thought. But each philosopher should rise to the challenge posed by this statement:

When I dissect the process expressed in the proposition “I think,” I get a whole set of bold claims that are difficult, perhaps impossible to establish – for instance, that I am the one who is thinking, that there must be something that is thinking in the first place, that thinking is an activity and the effect of a being who is considered the cause, that there is

199 Ibid., p. 238.
200 Ibid., p. 239.
an “I”, and finally, that it has already been determined what is meant by thinking – that I know what thinking is.\footnote{Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, pp. 16–17.}

So, finally, what does arise from declarations which voice the primacy of ‘thought’? What provides the basis for our trust in ‘science’?

3.3 Morality: Resentment and the Way of Illusion

Morality is another area of delusional truths. As before, here also, the will to deception is decisive. What is more, the very idea of morality, Nietzsche claims, is a direct expression of the fundamental power of delusion. It has grown from the prejudice consolidated by metaphysics, from the belief in oppositions of values.\footnote{Ibid., p. 6.}

It is rooted in the realm of illusion, imposed by Plato’s philosophy, along with the invention of ‘good in itself,’ in Nietzsche’s words. If we give it up, accepting the ‘fundamental condition of all life,’ in other word, the principle of perspectivism, things start to wobble. In these circumstances, ‘revaluation of all values’ becomes the necessary step. Nietzsche’s fulfillment of metaphysics is primarily a reversal of metaphysics, admits Heidegger (what is sensuous becomes the real world and what is supersensuous – a false world). But since at the same time Plato’s ‘idea,’ in adopting its modern form, became a principle of reason that in turn became a ‘value,’ the reversal of Platonism becomes a ‘revaluation of all values.’\footnote{M. Heidegger, \textit{Nietzsche}, trans. D.F. Krell, New York, Harper Collins Publishers, 1991.}

The concept of the ‘good in itself’ must disappear. An exposed illusion becomes useless as there are no guises left to protect it. ‘The highest values lose their value’ Nietzsche will write in \textit{The Will to Power}, unmasking the essence of nihilism. Thus, the status of ‘values’ changes – the belief that they represent a higher order is no more. They are knocked off the pedestal. Their significance is found in a specific and temporary perspective. We should forget ‘objective’ values, ‘values in themselves,’ as these concepts contradict the elementary logic of life related to the principle of ‘perspectivism.’

When he presented the new science on the subject of values, Nietzsche simultaneously destroyed the foundation of traditionally understood morality (and the traditionally understood science of morality). He ridiculed the point of view which from time immemorial had sustained the noble illusion:

Philosophers have all demanded (with ridiculously stubborn seriousness) something much more exalted, ambitious, and solemn as soon as they took up morality as a
science: they wanted morality to be *grounded*, – and every philosopher so far has thought that he has provided a ground for morality. Morality itself, however, was thought to be “given.”

This is how the science of morality has become the source of prejudice. The idea is that morality is not *given*. In fact, ‘being grounded’ has always signified the creation of a certain perspective facilitating the birth of values. It was a perspective which revealed preferences bereft of all attributes of ‘objectivity’ and was shaped in keeping with the rules of a time and place. However, the primordial sin of Platonism thwarted any dispassionate assessment of the situation. The science of morality was a pretense, which encouraged extreme simplification. ‘Precisely because moral philosophers had only a crude knowledge of moral facts, selected arbitrarily and abbreviated at random – for instance, as the morality of their surroundings, their class, their church, their Zeitgeist, their climate and region.’ In fact ‘the problem of morality itself has been missing from every “science of morals” so far: there was no suspicion that anything was really a problem.’

It is, thus, no longer possible to speak of ‘morality’ in the singular. There is no ‘moral’ point of view which should be juxtaposed to that which is ‘immoral.’ Indeed, if judgments of this sort are made, they represent solely the will to deception; one can say, they thrive on illusion. They ignore the complex issue of ambiguous entanglements and contextures, which lie buried in various concepts of good. There is no single ‘objectively,’ just points of view. Can we really see a clear demarcation separating good from evil? Or is it a projection related to the will to appearance? If we forget the ‘frog’s perspective,’ the view from the metaphysicians’ ‘corner,’ everything turns out differently. Platonic interpretations of good shed their allure and we are beginning to understand that perhaps, ‘It could even be possible that *whatever* gives value to those good and honorable things has an incriminating link, bond or tie, to the very things that look like their evil opposites; perhaps they are even essentially the same.’

Morality, however, and the science of morality, has always imposed judgments which exclude this affinity. Moral judgments thus became the foundation of illusion. How could this have happened? How did man’s desire for appearance triumph in morality and the science of morality? Why has the ‘problem of morality’ been concealed, creating a guise of certainty ruling out all doubts concerning the issue of good and evil? How did it come to pass that morality became

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204 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, p. 75.
205 Ibid., p. 76.
206 Ibid., p. 6.
the domain of false convictions, which were awarded the status of praiseworthy
dogmas, thus, turning ‘moral’ convictions into coercive measures propagating
deceit? In the *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche tried to address these very issues.

It is crucial to answer the genealogical question about the concept of ‘good.’ How did the perspective develop in which the concept of ‘good’ has taken shape and the sphere of judgments, which underpin ‘morality,’ have been mapped out? Does the concept of ‘good’ contain a ‘truth’ of a higher order, a Platonian element of absolute credibility? Nietzsche observed that every perspective is only an interpretation. ‘Perspectivism is insight and imagination, always one of the sides of the view, and always a thought up fiction, which Nietzsche calls falsehood and error, but in the specific sense that it is not a falsehood in regard to a certain truth. Truth itself is also false.’

In his work *Human All Too Human*, Nietzsche linked the concept of morality with the concept of tradition. Telling good from evil has always been a question of habit. ‘But the order of rank of desirable things is not firm and the same at all times; if someone prefers revenge to justice, according to the standard of an earlier culture, he is moral, according to that of ours, immoral.’ The problem is that ‘Every tradition now continually grows more venerable the farther away its origin lies.’ And here we arrive at the heart of the matter: the nature of ‘morality’ is incidental but this is not apparent beneath the stone mask growing weightier over time. Nietzsche shatters the protective shell of the notion of ‘good’ rooted in the Christian tradition. He intends to decipher the ‘Christian moral’ and demonstrate that concepts of good, which have for almost two thousand years been pivotal, are only a projection of desires born ‘out of the spirit of resentment, not, as is generally believed, out of the “spirit.”’

*Ressentiment* – resentment determines everything. Nietzsche’s genealogical analyses are purported to explain ‘under what conditions did men invent the value judgements good and evil? And what value do they themselves possess?’ We will follow in the footsteps of these words: ‘we stand in need of a critique of moral values, *the value of these values itself should first of all be called into question. This*

208 Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*, p. 42.
209 Ibid., p. 51.
210 Ibid., p. 81.
requires a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances of their growth, development and displacement." These conditions were shaped by resentment. In the briefest possible terms, it means discarding values related to ‘noble’ awareness, to use Nietzsche’s term. Let us reiterate, the essence of resentment can be found in discarding. Resentment itself is not a source of valuation in its own right: it just expresses the force of negation. Noble awareness is shaped through affirmation.

The judgment “good” does not derive from those to whom “goodness” is shown! Rather, the “good” themselves – that is, the noble, the powerful, the superior, and the high-minded were the ones who felt themselves and their actions to be good – that is, as of the first rank – and posited them as such, in contrast to everything low, low-minded, common, and plebeian. On the basis of this path of distance, they first arrogated the right to create values.

The order of ‘noble’ values will not be lasting. It will be dealt a fatal blow by a ‘slave revolt’: ‘despicable’ awareness will become prominent. ‘The slave revolt in morals begins when ressentiment itself becomes creative and ordains values: the ressentiment of creatures to whom the real reaction, that of the deed, is denied and who find compensation in an imaginary revenge.” The source of values imposed by resentment is hurt self-love and a sense of helplessness. This will give rise to the concept of ‘good,’ which puts the highest premium on weakness, forgiveness, compassion and humility. It is the invention of despicable awareness, unable to move beyond the threshold of jealousy and fear. It results from the reversal of concepts stemming from the ‘noble way of valuation.’ ‘Slave morality from the outset says “no” to an “outside,” to an “other,” to a “non-self:”’ and this “no” is its creative act. The reversal of the evaluating gaze – this necessary orientation outwards rather than inwards to the self – belongs characteristically to ressentiment.

Resentment is essentially barren; to accuse and overthrow is all it is capable of. It is an expression of envy: the basic point of departure in ressentiment is the impulse of revenge. The desire for vengeance is transformed ultimately by the priest’s ethos, which assumes a deceitful form of selfless mercy. The ‘priest’ for Nietzsche signifies a symbolic figure – the most malevolent embodiment of the power of rejection. ‘Priests are, as is well-known, the most evil

212 Ibid., p. 8.
213 Ibid., p. 12.
214 Ibid., p. 22.
215 Ibid.
enemies – but why? Because they are the most powerless. From powerlessness their hatred grows to take on a monstrous and sinister shape, the most cerebral and poisonous form. This sees the birth of a concept of ‘good’ which represents contempt for the world and praises passiveness and resignation; its notions of humility, forgiveness and compassion are alluring. From then onwards, all concepts of ‘good’ mature in the perspective cast by resentment. This is the history of morality in the briefest possible terms.

The concept of good has been separated from desires and ambitions concerning dignity. The rules of evaluation (subordinated to the concept of good) flatter wicked resignation, which triumphs owing to the guise of ‘charity.’ Nietzsche suggests that this narrative has been running for far too long. False deities must be exposed: the jealousy and helplessness hiding beneath the mask of ‘goodness’ must be revealed. Value judgments, the foundations of ‘morality,’ argues Nietzsche, are mere projections of evil, a testament to the hostility cultivated by the commoners towards all that which is dignified. This conclusion can be drawn from the ‘genealogy of morals.’

Big changes have also taken place without philosophy’s unmasking role, through the relentless logic of resentment. Negation, rejection, continuous questioning, must all wreak irreversible havoc. Then, says Nietzsche in *The Will to Power,* comes the moment when the ‘highest values’ ‘lose value,’ the stigma of *nihilism* becoming ever more apparent. Values have been withdrawn – ridiculed, discredited and forgotten. In the era of the ‘death of God’ they lose all justification leaving behind just the staffage, because what counts now is the game of appearances. From now on, values will be ‘established’ directly by a projection of desires, a revolt seeking inspiration in negation. The demolition of barriers accelerates – the world of ‘values’ becomes fluid. ‘Nihilism is not only the process of devaluing the highest values, nor simply the withdrawal of these values. The very positing of these values in the world is already nihilism.’ Things look different: nihilism is fulfilled through the withdrawal of values, in the active removal thereof. In the end a non-stop value-pageant is taking place. We must be aware of the fact that the overthrow of current values does not result from a blind desire to destroy or from vain renewal. The world needs to be given a new shape, argues Heidegger. Hence the havoc: we are attempting to get out of a predicament in which the world seems valueless.

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218 Heidegger, *Nietzsche,* p. 44.
A world without God encourages the boldest steps. The logic of any act of renewal is inexorably unequivocal: it is the logic of resentment. This drives Heidegger to say that 'the very posing of these values in the world is already nihil-ism.' In the end it is a strategy of deceit based on opposition – removing all that hurts and annoys. After all, as Nietzsche has explained, this is the way 'values' are born.

Resentment breeds illusion. Illusion which mounts an onslaught becomes a typical feature of modernity. The nature of deception is determined by the pressure of various concepts of 'good:' new doctrines, new recipes for salvation, new ideas. All manner of flags and banners are seen billowing in the wind of the grand pageant of values. New beguiling slogans keep appearing in the crowd. In a void there is room for everything. The sense of establishing values anew, bereft of all blocks, is menacing all the same. In keeping with the logic of resentment, the formula of valuation involves starting with negation: for our 'values' to emerge we have to deny the reason for existence to those which are not 'ours.' Nefarious consciousness, while demonstrating the force of resentment, finds its truth in depreciation, in vengeful hostility. Memory linked to resentment, writes Deleuze, is itself hateful. The 'faculty of rumination,' as he calls it, wishes to annihilate all traces of humiliation. By repudiating and discrediting, they create their own 'values.' If there is any depth to them, it is the depth of human wickedness, the depth of fear and vengeful determination.

Nietzsche’s study of resentment has nothing to do with conventionally understood psychological analysis. ‘Ressentiment is not part of psychology, but the whole of our psychology, without knowing it, it is a part of ressentiment.’ Thus, it is about much more than trivially interpreted ‘motivations.’ When we speak about resentment we mean a certain type of culture and circumstances which amount to the establishment of a certain canon. ‘We must understand this as meaning that the instinct of revenge is the force which constitutes the essence of what we call psychology, history, metaphysics and morality. The spirit of revenge is the genealogical element of our thought, the transcendental principle of our way of thinking.’ To put it briefly, resentment is not one of the aspects of human activity, it is at its heart.

220 Ibid., p. 34.
221 Ibid., p. 35.
3.4 Politics: Profiles of Villainy

The deities of politics are vile. Despite its own ‘moral’ aspirations, politics is governed by the power of resentment. It is also the realm of illusion because politicians unfurl their flags and banners in the unfathomable depths of a great void. And the inexorable logic of a new ‘establishment of values’ reigns supreme.

Let us begin with the ‘death of God.’ This statement has aroused immense indignation, and still does. Quite unnecessarily so. More often than not, it simply results from ignorance, and ignorance of Nietzsche’s thought in particular. The ‘death of God’ should not be treated as a provocative declaration, or as an audacious challenge. Nor should we suspect that it expresses Friedrich Nietzsche’s personal beliefs. Speaking of the ‘death of God,’ Nietzsche shapes the *topos* of a void – one of the key elements of analysis which demonstrates the essence of nihilism. He turns to us: God’s murderers. He wants us all to take a look in the mirror. The ‘death of God’ motif appears for the first time in *The Gay Science*. In aphorism 125, Nietzsche introduces the figure of ‘the mad man,’ who ‘in the bright morning lit a lantern and ran around the market place crying incessantly: “I’m looking for God! I’m looking for God!”’222 just as Diogenes of Sinope in the light of day lit a lantern looking for a true ‘human.’ History repeats itself. Just as Diogenes before him, the madman invites only ridicule and laughter while trying to speak of things unrivalled in importance. The mad man accuses. “The holiest and mightiest thing the world has ever possessed has bled to death under our knives. […] Do we still hear nothing of the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God?’ All he hears in reply is laughter, derision, or, at best, surprise. Desperate, he

threw his lantern on the ground so that it broke into pieces and went out. “I come too early,’ he then said; “my time is not yet.” This tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder need time; the light of the stars needs time […] This deed is still more remote to them than the remotest stars – and yet they have done it themselves!223

‘God’s murderers’ have not yet recovered, they are still in a trance, they have not yet heard the sound of the thunderbolt. All that which will help them to become aware of the magnitude of the devastation is still to come. So far, the masquerade goes on: everybody is dancing, burning incense and waiting to join in the procession. The carnival of ‘values’ is underway, people are still pointing to the

223 Ibid., p. 120.
sky – but the sky is now empty. Their gestures become meaningless – everything is but a substitute. But it is too early to speak about it. A person lighting a lantern in broad daylight will obviously be considered a mad man.

In short metaphorical terms, this simultaneously recounts the story of the great fall and the great falsehood. ‘God’s murderers,’ who have annihilated the foundation of all beliefs and all values, now play the part of the supporters of these values. The festival of lies is underway.

Everything, however, also has a literal, tangible meaning. Tricksters continue to exhibit their stalls and pull out their banners. They urge us to visit their temples; they speak of justice, truth and freedom. The world of politics is full of glory. Enthusiasts of appearance and pretense see themselves as the advocates of truth. The light of the thunderbolt has not yet reached their eyes. So they solemnly devise their programs and present laudable projects. They juggle their slogans, their ‘seals of approval’ multiply; they strut about in priestly attire and surround themselves in a halo of saintliness. Truth, law and justice are words they never tire of repeating.

In reality, however, they are now nothing but clowns, Nietzsche argues, parodists of seriousness and sanctity. They drift in the void, intoxicated by delusion; there are no genuine foundations in the emptiness, just the game of appearance. Thus, politics is the domain of illusion. The emptiness within is skillfully masked with platitudes and costumes. ‘We are the first age to be educated in puncto of “costumes,” I mean of morals, articles of faith, artistic tastes, and religions, and prepared as no age has ever been for a carnival in the grand style.’

The remarkable masquerade is underway. The emptiness is concealed by decorations, the attributes of the triumphant lust for appearances: “the will to appearances to simplification, to masks, to cloaks, in short, to surfaces – since every surface is a cloak.”

An era of naïve excitement is setting in. A change of costume does not require much effort, hence the apparent excitement, deceptive vigor, constant commotion. New ideas, new views, new flashes of truth, new excesses. We become aware of ‘the spirits’ not quite harmless willingness to deceive other spirits and to act a part in front of them belongs here too, that constant stress and strain of a creative, productive, mutable force. What the spirit enjoys here is its multiplicity of masks.

224 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 114.
225 Ibid., p. 122.
226 Ibid., p. 122.
What is the sense of all these frenzied efforts, what does it really mean to establish ‘values’ afresh? What meaning can we find in the carnival repertoire? In emptiness, what really counts is only the will to power; it is the principle of all creation. In its naïve, immature and desperate form, the will to power turns into the will to appearance. Tantalizing with its glow of superficiality, it allows the emptiness to be concealed putting trust in the ‘world’ again, and in the system of ‘values’ it relates to. Politics, obedient to the expansion of the will to power, must become the art of deception. There is no other way. In a nihilistic atmosphere, the quest for ‘truth’ will from now on represent only imitation and displays of bravado. This is how world politics unfolds. ‘The Demagogic character and the intention to appeal to the masses is at present common to all political parties: on account of this intention they are all compelled to transform their principles into great al fresco stupidities and thus to paint them on the wall.’

In our analysis of the carnival style we must go further. The ‘great al fresco stupidities,’ which determine the allure of political buffoonery, resemble a layer of make-up. What will we discover delving deeper into the ‘truths’ behind the banners? Nietzsche keeps reminding us of the need to tear off masks. Deceits are never innocent, they themselves are masks. Establishing ‘values’ always calls for a code name. To recall one of Nietzsche’s ideas, knowledge is always feeding an urge. There are no innocent views or convictions. The world of deceit, in fact, is a world full of dangerous tension. The carnival style is at the same time a style of dread. The establishment of values is a projection of the will to power. Naturally, the will to power contains the full drama of destruction, characteristic of a world stigmatized by the ‘death of God.’ The will to power is tainted by resentment. In the end, politics, as a sphere where values are established anew, must become a grand manifestation of wicked consciousness, shaped by resentment.

Values merely become a ‘point of view’ in a reality devoid of any higher sanction, Heidegger believes. In line with resentment-logic, they conspire, push for war, declare annihilation; invariably they are born in the process of discrediting, of rejection. Actually, ‘morality’ has always been immoral. ‘By which means does a virtue come to power? – By exactly the same means as a political party: the slandering, inculpation, undermining of virtues that oppose it.’ As time goes by, Nietzsche concludes, morality is increasingly becoming a ‘sign of decadence.’ ‘Wicked consciousness’ begins to play an ever important role. We must beware – the ‘death of God’ is emboldening. From now on ‘morality’ becomes radicalized:

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227 Nietzsche, Human All Too Human, p. 161.
228 Nietzsche, The Will to Power, p. 166, 128.
of virtues on the ‘opposing’ side will proceed faster. Everything becomes easy. Val-
ues no longer have any roots. Finally, Nietzsche will note, describing the modern 
man, ‘everything resolved itself into play-acting.’

What is the content of the spectacle of ‘values’ in the age of acceleration? Evil
awareness is triumphant, evil epiphanies must set the tone. They shape the style
of the era which denounced gods and renounced all that was higher, noble and
dignified. The place is overrun with ‘democratic prejudice,’ says Nietzsche, which
is becoming ever more forceful. ‘There once again the plebeian nature of the
modern mind, which is of English origin, broke out on its native soil, with the
intensity of a muddy volcano and with the same over-salted, over-loud, com-
mon garrulousness with which all volcanoes have previously held forth.’ This
becomes evident in the area of moral convictions, political ideals and scientific 
theories. Let us not forget, the ‘truth drive’ is always used by some ‘other drive.’
As Nietzsche often repeats, science is a masked form of morality: it always carries
a moral. Modern science contains the moral of evil – undermining all that is dig-
nified, exceptional, and noble. It propagates commonness and mediocrity. And
this prejudice encroaches even on what are apparently the most objective areas
of natural science and physiology. Indeed, this is the ‘democratic prejudice,’
which favors ‘plebeianism,’ it establishes the point of view which paves the way
for the creation of new ‘values.’ ‘This is the age of the masses: they lie prostrate
in front of anything massive. And the same in politicis too. They call a statesman
“great” if he builds them a new tower of Babel or some sort of monstrosity of em-
pire and power.’ Thus, the darling of the masses is a liar, everything is based on
the game of appearances. The dream of freedom is fed to the ‘monster of power.’
But the masses, seized by the drive for illusion, desire deceit. The annihilation
of values, the pathetic one-upmanship of mediocrity, is seen as the victory of noble
ideas. The times of decadent illusion are drawing near.

The most persistent manifestation of the urge to illusion is the ideal of equal-
ity: put on a pedestal it became the true anthem of decadence. This ideal primar-
ily concerned politics. “Equality,” (a certain factual increase in similarity that the
theory of “equal rights” only gives expression to) essentially belongs to decline.
Why? The answer is simple – as equality progresses, the following become less
significant: ‘the myriad number of types, the will to be yourself, to stand out,
what I call the pathos of distance.” From now on, human beings can only see themselves as representatives of the masses, a large crowd of similar beings. They do not know how to be themselves in any other way. Voicing the glory of equality and democracy, humans are intoxicated with their own mediocrity. Standardization, which in fact signifies degradation, becomes the highest value.

My objection to the whole of sociology in England and France is that it knows from experience only the decaying forms of society and takes its own decaying instincts with perfect innocence as the norm of sociological values judgement. Declining life, the loss of all the forces of organisation, which is to say separation, division, subordination, and domination, is formulated as an ideal in sociology today.

There is no doubt that this way of thinking and acting signifies that the new order is ‘pulp’ to recall the title of Jerzy Andrzejewski’s well-known novel (published in English in 1992 as The Pulp).

These conditions are ripe for the illusion of freedom to flower – yet another ‘ideal’ of modernity steeped in deceit. ‘People live for today, people live very fast – people live very irresponsibly: and this is precisely what people call “freedom.”’

The illusion of freedom is shaped by the pressure of instinct and the dynamic of life in a crowd. Fear, anxiety, jealousy, hostility, the seeking of guarantees and protection; this is the plane on which the modern sense of ‘freedom’ is developed. Liberalism is the political emblem of freedom. Nietzsche was open about his dislike of ‘liberal institutions,’ which as he said,

stop being liberal as soon as they have been attained: after that, nothing damages freedom more terribly or more thoroughly than liberal institutions. Of course people know what these institutions do: they undermine the will to power, they set to work levelling mountains and valleys and they call this morality, they make things small, cowardly, and enjoyable.

All this carries the name of ‘freedom.’ The relevance of the Nietzschean criticism of liberalism, which exposes the pretense of an independent ‘subject,’ is emphasized by David Owen. Liberal institutions, consolidating the desire and will to deception as related to resentment, set in motion the machine which produces

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234 Ibid., p. 213.
236 Ibid., p. 213.
'mush.' In fact, these are institutions only in appearance. ‘For there to be institutions, there needs to be a type of will, instinct, imperative that is anti-liberal to the point of malice: the will to tradition, to authority, or a responsibility that spans the centuries, to solidarity in the chain that links the generations forwards and backwards ad infinitum.'\(^\text{238}\) Instead, the will to illusion is triumphant together with its most ambitious carnival creation – the illusion of the independent ‘subject.’ ‘Subjectivity’ is in essence a typical manifestation of resentment. The false idea of independence follows from the negation of authorities; the onslaught of freedom signifies destruction. In the void that is left, a giant phantasmagoria will finally appear – the emancipated ‘I.’ Beyond the façade of deception we will find the true hero: the crowd and its representatives. Frightened, weak, eager to take revenge on anything that hurts them, hateful of authority. Such ‘virtues’ are propagated by the spirit of ‘freedom’ while it unfolds the banner of ‘equal rights.’ The logic of resentment holds the crowd's instincts at bay, as it governs the behavior of its leader. '[T]he value-instincts of our politicians, our political parties, are so decadent that they instinctively prefer things that disintegrate, that accelerate the end...'\(^\text{239}\) which completes the circle. The establishment of ‘values’ facilitates the free expansion of illusion, which is no longer challenged. The force of resentment overwhelms everyone. Vengeful hostility transforms into an exhilarating illusion of freedom, criticism and independence. This is fertile ground for various concepts of ‘good’ to breed, encouraging all parties and factions to unfurl their flags: ever more colorful labels and emblems appear. The carnival goes on.

### 3.5 Deliberation and Illusion

The political concepts growing out of the Enlightenment tradition emphasize the idea of agreement. They are supported by the optimistic view that reason dominates and, in an open debate instructed by reason, that prejudice and superstition are eliminated. Speaking about the ‘public use made of reason’ Kant presents the idea of a transformation, which signifies the elimination of illusion. Faithful to this tradition, we are prone to believe that public debate condenses the power of the ‘light’ it lends to reason. It eases the passage to agreement by helping to expose deception and eliminate false convictions. Public debate, therefore, is illuminating, breaking down the barriers of estrangement and hostility. This pattern, following the Enlightenment tradition has a very obvious meaning – we can

\(^{238}\) Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings* p. 214.

\(^{239}\) Ibid., p. 215.
treat rational truth as a space for reconciliation. The belief in the decisive role of agreement – consisting in free communication ensuring the clear and adequate expression of one’s views – will become a typical theme of the liberal concept of politics.

Debate, deliberation and agreement, according to Nietzsche, are all illusory. The principles of political rationalism directly grow from the will to illusion. Is agreement at all possible? ‘I am affirming the phenomenality of the inner world as well: everything that becomes conscious to us is first thoroughly organized, simplified, schematized, interpreted.’ This produces clear patterns. But it is only the façade, beyond which there is chaos; everything is fluid, unstable and grim. We know about ourselves only as much as some pattern, some conceptual convention or imposed interpretation will allow. And only so much are we aware of. So, what are we not aware of? ‘Phenomenality means that we do not “have” even the inner world in the sense of a unity of consciousness and being.’ So can we speak for ourselves? What are convictions and declarations worth? ‘Nietzsche’s reflections are directed at what philosophical tradition calls individuum est ineffabile. The individual is indefinable.’ Individuals remain a secret: ‘profoundly mysterious or overflowing with inner riches that should not be squandered.’

So, are the forms of expression adequate and is communication reasonable enough to advance the creation of a basis of accord and understanding? Nietzsche holds the view that political rationalism enforces the rule of illusion. It focuses on the façade, the illusory veneer, and shies away from peeking under the surface of phenomena. Sober insight and knowledge are replaced with intoxicating platitudes, empty words and idle talk. Modern politics concentrates exclusively on the game of appearances, Nietzsche asserts. Liberalism is a pitiful mask of ignorance and helplessness, a pompous ‘idol’ of modernity. To a substantial degree, the topos of the ‘twilight of the idols’ is formed by the argument laying bare the flaws of liberalism. According to Nietzsche, the liberal concept of politics facilitates the spread of delusion. The idea of rational debate, he asserts, enforces the illusion of credibility and authenticity; it suggests clarity and the accuracy of insight which seemingly sets the scene for a useful exchange of views. But this is how illusion is born. Liberalism concerns only that which is on

241 Ibid.
242 Ibid.
the surface of things. The liberal concept of ‘agreement’ is very shallow, ignoring what is crucial. ‘Contenting oneself with people, keeping open house with one’s heart – that is liberal, but it is merely liberal. Those hearts which are capable of noble hospitality are recognizable by their many drawn curtains and closed shutters: they keep their best rooms empty. Why, though? – Because they are expecting guests with whom they cannot “content oneself.”’

Agreement which brings down barriers is, then, a fantasy. The strength of the message is decided by obstacles and tensions. Anything easy and obvious is irrelevant. What use can be made of superficial clarity, which owes its allure to clichés? How much is ‘freedom of expression’ worth, drawing its strength from truths which are a delight to the impassioned masses? Elucidating his notion of ‘freedom,’ Nietzsche wrote: ‘Sometimes the value of a thing is not what you get with it but what you pay for it – what it costs.’ So how much is freedom of expression worth, a freedom which requires no effort and is connected to trivial superficiality, with a ubiquity of empty words? The symbolism of ‘drawn curtains’ imposes a distance in relation to concepts of free discourse. ‘Everything profound loves masks; the most profound things go so far as to hate images and likenesses. Wouldn’t just the opposite be a proper disguise for the shame of a god?’

Real idols do not show their faces. Literalness follows the pathetic design of a village fair selling idols. Liberalism is pathetic. It produces naïve hopes which can satisfy only ‘herd’ enthusiasts. Nietzsche is uncompromising: he discourages us from seeking truth in liberalism. The truths we find there, if any, are compromised, have been overturned. ‘As long as they are still being fought for, these same institutions have entirely different effects and are actually powerful promoters of freedom. On closer inspection, it is the war that produces these effects, the war for liberal institutions, which, being a war, keeps illiberal institutions in place.’ And then it changes. Liberalism submerges itself, it immerses itself in the illusion of ‘free expression,’ debate and agreement, while actually favoring the birth of demagogy which turns communication into pathetic rituals of ‘herd’ loyalty (‘political correctness’ as we would call it today). Thinking must make way for clichés. All accords are drawn up on the plane of clichés. This is the nature of the ‘canon’ that modern man establishes, says Nietzsche, adding: ‘I want to see nothing that contradicts

244 Ibid., p. 27.
246 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 38.
the prevalent opinion. Am I made to discover new truths? There are already too many old ones.\footnote{Nietzsche, \textit{Gay Science}, p. 212.}

Nietzsche’s critique is irritating. Does man need consciousness, he asks. Is not consciousness a type of delusion? Is not the glorification of consciousness, so typical of Western culture, a typical ploy of illusion trying to impose its fantasies? ‘All life would be possible without, as it were, seeing itself in the mirror: and still today, the predominant part of our lives actually unfolds without this mirroring – of course also our thinking, feeling and willing lives, insulting as it may sound to an older philosopher.’\footnote{Ibid.} Thus, the ‘mirror of consciousness’ is a symbol of illusion. Consciousness does not play a decisive role, it is not the focus of truth organizing life in all its manifestations. The author of \textit{The Gay Science} indicates that ‘consciousness in general has developed only under the pressure of the need to communicate.[…] the solitary and predatory person would not have needed it.’\footnote{Ibid.} And he continues: ‘in short, the development of language and development of consciousness (not of reason but strictly of the way in which we become conscious of reason) go hand in hand.’\footnote{Ibid., p. 213.}

So, what are words? ‘Words are acoustic signs for concepts; concepts, though, are more or less determinate pictorial signs for sensations that occur together and recur frequently, for groups of sensations.’\footnote{Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, p. 163.} For language to come into being, ‘people have to have the same experience base.’\footnote{Ibid.} So language is, in Nietzsche’s view, symptomatic of banality. Can communication have a deeper sense, can it signify an urge to get to the ‘truth’? A thought which is conscious of itself is a result of the most common (superficial and repeatable) experiences. ‘[T]he easy communicability of needs (which ultimately means having only average and base experiences) must have been the most forceful of the forces that have controlled people so far[…]Immense countervailing forces will have to be called upon in order to cross this natural, all-too-natural progressus in simile.’\footnote{Ibid., p. 164.} ‘This is the plane of agreement, \textit{progressus in simile}’ as Nietzsche says, ‘people becoming increasingly similar, ordinary, average, herd-like, – increasingly base.’\footnote{Ibid.}
Consciousness, considered to be the abode of truth by ‘older philosophers,’ is, then, nothing more than a façade. A façade along which the crowds stroll, which pays homage to the idols of illusion, concealing everything that does not fit into the framework of fervently sustained stereotypes. The rhetoric of rationalists, which stresses the benefits of communication and agreement, is then a manifestation of the irresistible need for illusion. This rules out language which can get to the crux of the matter, or the authenticity of ideas. ‘Agreement’ itself, is a mystification which takes advantage of the strongly ingrained habits of ‘herd’ thinking. Consciousness is a costume.

My idea is clearly that consciousness actually belongs not to man’s existence as an individual but rather to the community and herd-aspects of his nature; that accordingly, it is finely developed only in relation to its usefulness to community or herd; and that consequently each of us, even with the best will in the world to understand ourselves as individually as possible, “to know ourselves,” will always bring to consciousness precisely that in ourselves which is ‘non-individual,’ that which is “average”.

‘Understanding,’ therefore, is a game of appearances. In order for it to be effective, humility is crucial; a humility which demands acceptance of the illusion we shape together, despite life, despite our own desires. This is the meaning of communication, these are the foundations of ‘agreement.’ It would take a devastating blow, a ‘slaughter’ of stereotypes, to liberate the energy necessary to disempower the idol of mediocrity. However, in ‘herd’ culture ‘a ritual killing’ to overthrow illusion – to begin again in opposition to the lies of the façade – is impossible. Artists are capable of delivering this blow, but not liberals. Let us not forget, liberalism, by fulfilling its ‘freedom’-related ambitions, turns inexorably into its opposite; it becomes, as Nietzsche indicates, a new ‘house of slavery’ where delusions of mediocrity can flourish.

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4. Pragmatism – In Search of Rules Governing the New Way of Thinking

4.1 William James – The Word as a ‘Work Program’

Nietzsche highlighted the fundamental role of the will to illusion. While ridiculing the Platonian ‘invention of pure spirit’ he stressed the role of ‘perspectivism,’ arguing that each new different perspective introduces a different way of thinking. This, therefore, led him to say that there are no general, all-encompassing and unalterable truths. On the other hand, he claimed, there are many various unstable and temporary points of view, which can serve as the pivot for different views and beliefs. And only this much. The search for general and irrefutable truths can only be seen as a symptom typical of the urge to illusion.

Can the extreme consequences of this position, amounting to the rejection of the idea of truth itself, be avoided? Does disenchantment with the world, the fall of strong concepts of truth related to faith and metaphysics, symbolically expressed in the formula ‘the death of God,’ necessarily lead to the destabilization of all criteria? As well as extreme relativism and the powerlessness of reason? And, ultimately, the destruction of the public sphere and the failure of all strategies to shape commonly recognized principles?

Let us reflect on this. Can a solution be found which eliminates on the one hand the categorical tone of revelation and absolute right, and, on the other, the radical relativism, which dismisses all common conclusions? Pragmatists tried to find a solution to this predicament. For pragmatism involved a rejection of absolutist notions of truth related to metaphysics and religion coupled, however, with a discipline which dismissed the temptations of extreme subjectivism.

Metaphysics has usually followed a very primitive kind of quest. You know how men have always hankered after unlawful magic, and you know what a great part in magic words have always played. If you have his name, or the formula of incantation that binds him, you can control the spirit, genie, afrite, or whatever the power may be.257

So, James places philosophy on the same plane as magic! Metaphysics created the illusion of rationality. It did not differ much from magical practices focused on the esoteric power of words. Philosophy, very much like religion, glorifies words. The word becomes the realm of revelation. ‘That word names the universe’s principle,

and to possess it is after a fashion to possess the universe itself. “God,” “Matter,” “Reason,” “the Absolute,” “Energy,” are so many solving names. You can rest when you have them. You are at the end of your metaphysical quest. Magic, religion and philosophy are on a par. James thinks that all hitherto recognized notions of truth were subordinated to the rules of speculation, which valued esoteric fantasies above that experience. Philosophy had much in common with the cult of false idols. Truth, in James’s words, became the ‘rationalists’ idol.

Turning away from idolatry he recommends a different path: radical empiricism. ‘Pragmatism represents,’ says James, ‘the empiricist attitude.’ It is a course which ‘turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions […] from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins.’ It refers to experience. Drawing on its fabulous richness it is just waiting to modify any arrangements or solutions. ‘At the same time it does not stand for any special results. It is a method only.’ This is how it is supposed to defeat the claims of ‘unlawful magic.’ Due, in other words, to its total openness and because it overcomes all temptations to create a definitive picture of the world, to search for the key to unravel the mystery. Pragmatism favors experiments. Its proponents think we should not fear risk; no doctrine should narrow the field of vision, nor should we adopt world views which would narrow the scope of our experience. ‘The whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one.’ Truthfulness, he added, can be understood purely ‘instrumentally’ – ideas ‘(which themselves are but parts of our experience) become true just in so far as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience.’ Supporters of pragmatism treat ideas and theories as tools expanding the scope of effective forms of experience. This is James’s famous statement: ‘The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events.’ The value of truth, in the words of the author of Pragmatism, is appraised by ‘the

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258 Ibid.
260 Ibid., p. 51.
261 Ibid., p. 51
262 Ibid., p. 50.
263 Ibid., p. 58.
264 Ibid., p. 201.
cash value for our actual experience.’ Finally though, “[t]he true,” to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as “the right” is only the expedient in the way of our behaving.  

The ‘valuation’ James has in mind has always been an open question. ‘Radical empiricism’ does not impose a closed system of verification. It does not make room for censorship to limit the freedom of thought. There should be nothing to hold back the impetus of curiosity and tame the will to act. Nor should any forms of action be discredited. It is rationalism that imposes limits together with the favored idea of the ‘system.’ We should not, however, bow to the whims of the ‘sages in wigs’ says James spitefully. He adds that the actual universe is wide open, but rationalism makes systems, and systems must be closed. Pragmatism, on the contrary, postulates authentic openness and is eager to encompass any type of experience, even ‘mystical experiences if they have practical consequences.’  

James’s criticism of ‘rationalism’ and ‘intellectualism’ was indeed revolutionary. His reevaluations alter completely the way of thinking about philosophy and initiate a new type of philosophical discourse. They represent the rehabilitation of common forms of wisdom and everyday experience. James topples ‘the sages in wigs’ from their pedestals, those, in his opinion, usurpers who deny common experiences their importance and make philosophy look like an esoteric science. He is distinctly consistent in the way he tries to free the language of philosophy from the burden of mannerism. He believes it should no longer remain the language of a caste. It should stamp out all pomposity: wisdom should find its own simple expression. Experience-related truth requires no magical special effects. Indeed, pragmatism’s message highlights the credo of democracy. As James Kloppenberg says, the founders of pragmatism are endowed with ‘democratic reformist sensibilities.’  

The impact of pragmatism, as it turns out, will be enormous, and just as expansive and inspiring. It will contribute to the enlivening of the intellectual environment, facilitate the development of new concepts of knowledge and change the face of many traditional scientific disciplines. James and Dewey will find many enthusiastic followers in American intellectual and academic circles. Most importantly and interestingly, pragmatism will further the development of a new type of intellectual culture by questioning the priorities related

265 Ibid., p. 222.
266 Ibid., p. 80.
268 Ibid., p. 88.
to tradition, making room for ways of thinking which allow us to forget the rift between the top tier and commonality. It will prove conducive to the development of new forms of democratic culture and new forms of public discourse.\textsuperscript{269} James himself, ‘quite seriously compared Pragmatism to the Protestant Reformation, which augmented the authority of individual conscience against the power of the Church.’\textsuperscript{270} Pragmatism will boost the status of common everyday experience. This is tantamount to a revolutionary change, opening the door to the ‘public use of reason.’ It will, as it soon turned out, facilitate the development of a new interpretation of the world of politics, which will put the idea of the ‘public’ and the concept of ‘public reason’ at the fore. ‘The public’ is a key word in the work of John Dewey, who contemplates the concept of public deliberation and public validation as vehicles for the establishment of rational, commonly accepted resolutions.

For the time being let us, however, return to William James who places pragmatism and the Reformation on an equal footing. If we adopt his suggestion we have to question the scope of the emancipation amounting to the destruction of the ‘systems,’ the temples of knowledge created by the ‘rationalists.’ Is reason becoming independent? Does it really resemble the Protestant conscience freed from the bonds of subordination to the Church? After all, conscience was shackled by the imperatives of faith, the discipline of revealed truth, placing religious experience on the intersubjective plane. But the complete independence of reason was out of the question. How are we then to understand James’s theses? Indeed, he had emphasized the subjective nature of experience and stressed the decisive role of choice over one’s own perspective (borne out in particular by his essay of 1896 \textit{The Will to Believe}).\textsuperscript{271} In his first dissertation, he intimated: ‘every thought is part of a personal consciousness. […] The only states of consciousness that we naturally deal with are found in personal consciousnesses, minds, selves, concrete particular I’s and you’s.’\textsuperscript{272} So the message of pragmatism leaves no doubt: the battle against the ‘systems’ is waged in the minds of individual people. It is here that freedom of thought takes on its real shape. Although for

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\textsuperscript{269} This is pointed out by H.S. Commager, \textit{The American Mind. The Interpretation of American Thought and Character since the 1880’s}, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1950, pp. 91–107.

\textsuperscript{270} M. Dickstein, ‘Introduction: Pragmatism Then and Now,’ in M. Dickstein (ed.), \textit{The Revival of Pragmatism}, p. 3.


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James the concept of consciousness was narrowed down to the concept of individual consciousness, he stopped short of becoming a supporter of extreme positions. In fact, over time, we begin to find more and more restraint and care to keep a balance in his views. At the time The Principles of Psychology is written, he depicts reason as a space of separation; consciousness is treated as a sphere of isolation. By and by, ‘James becomes more of a communitarian,’ as borne out by his later work. Pragmatism itself will become a significant testament.

Ultimately then, what is the sense of James’s concept of emancipation? Does it provide the grounds for some sort of intersubjective formula, a type of public reason? Is James a public philosopher – ‘a philosopher who plays a public role’? Regardless of all the difficulties that adopting such a thesis might create, the answer is yes. Contemplating the inspirational role of Pragmatism, Hilary Putnam, the contemporary American philosopher, defends James against extreme judgments and superficial accusations, which arise from, as he believes, biased simplifications. James’s famous thesis: ‘[t]he true, to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking’ was used, as Hilary Putnam says, as a stick with which to hit James. It was suggested that James’s concept of truth is naïve and voluntary. A vulgar reading of his work leads many to see any, even the most bizarre or problematic ‘use’ of it, as testament to truth. As Putnam emphasizes, such a vulgar reading meant that the issue of ‘verification’ crucial to James, was largely ignored. This over-simplification lies in attributing to James an inability to differentiate between the concept of ‘truth’ and that of ‘verification.’ As if James, the naïve, was to accept infantile voluntarism, casually adopting the absurd thesis that everything which is in any way useful is true. The fact is that James deliberated on how to depart from the sphere of naïve realism, the sphere of ideas lavish with notions of ‘truth’ and ‘reality.’ What is more, notions responsible for simplifying all arguments, enforcing decisions according to some ‘system,’ did not receive ‘verification’ at all. ‘To say that “truth” is correspondence to reality is not false but empty as long as nothing is said about what the correspondence is. If the “correspondence” is supposed to be utterly independent of the ways in which we confirm the assertions we make.’276 James had to grapple with this issue when forming his concept of truth. We can speak sensibly about ‘truthfulness’

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only when the issue of ‘verification’ is solved. This is why James rejects all forms of dogmatism and concepts of the absolute. He thinks they exemplify unreliability, simplification and blind faith, relieving us of the duty to seek validation. The openness of Pragmatism should be understood as the quest for reliability, for enforcing strict criteria of verification, which would not find itself subject to the logic of simplification arising from a ‘system.’ In this context it is hard to agree with the statement that ‘James’s idea leads to the absurd conclusion that every view that becomes my conviction, every view that I adopt is a true view.’ This thesis simply disregards the crucial question of ‘verification.’

If, on the other hand, James had indeed thought that way, his views would not have stood a chance of stepping out of a circle of exalted weirdos excited by the idea of ‘pure subjectivity.’ But this is not the case. James arouses the interest of serious philosophers, such as Hilary Putnam who contemplates the avoidance of the temptations of extreme subjectivism. He ponders the following question: ‘It is an open question whether an enlightened society can avoid a corrosive moral skepticism without tumbling back into moral authoritarianism. And it is precisely this question that has led me, in recent years, back to pragmatism – to the writings of Peirce, and James, and Dewey.’ He adds also: ‘I believe that James was a powerful thinker, as powerful as any in the last century, and that his way of philosophizing contains possibilities which have been too long neglected, that it points to ways out of old philosophical “binds” that continue to afflic

Let us look at James’s concept from a different perspective. Let us see to what extent pragmatism helps in finding the equilibrium between extreme relativism of subjective convictions, and the absolutism of revealed truth; to what extent can it become the foundation of the philosophy of public action and understanding? Let us go back to the key issue of ‘verification.’ It is here that pragmatism makes its mark. The sphere of verification is after all a sphere of relationships, a sphere of communication. When we receive some form of confirmation it is not the same as shaping a conviction which is relevant only in our own eyes. We get confirmation in the sphere of mutual relationships. Importance, the recognition of claims, or, in other words, traits inherent to the concept of confirmation, presume some sort of intersubjectiveness. By emphasizing the priority of a selected consciousness, James took into account the question of interaction and understanding. ‘The knower is

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278 Putnam, p. 2.
279 Ibid., p. 6.
an actor, and co-efficient of the truth on one side, whilst on the other he registers the truth which he helps to create.  

Truth, then, is not a purely subjective conviction immune to any other test other than the internal test of our consciousness. In Pragmatism James takes a standpoint precluding such a view. ‘I have already insisted on the fact that truth is made largely out of previous truths. Men’s beliefs at any time are so much experience funded. But the beliefs are themselves parts of the sum total of the world’s experience, and become matter, therefore, for the next day’s funding operations.’  

‘Men’s beliefs’ of course are of major significance to James. An individual’s subjective attitude plays a decisive role, but the language James uses when he speaks of ‘funding’ and the ‘sum total of the world’s experience’ points to a wider context. In the end, the ‘world’s experience’ cannot be considered an individual’s personal experience, as it concerns the ‘world.’ An individual, similar to a house without windows, would never find itself in the scope of the ‘world.’ Truth cannot be the product of daydreaming – it arises in the framework of specific ‘funding operations.’ And yet another important statement: “Truth lives, in fact, for the most part on a credit system. Our thoughts and beliefs “pass,” so long as nothing challenges them, just as bank-notes pass so long as nobody refuses them.”So it does not follow that our ‘truths’ are automatically ‘adopted’ by others. The notion of ‘passing’ calls for the acceptance of the intersubjective criteria of recognition and importance. (Language itself is a formula of intersubjectivity!) Of course, nothing restricts individual preferences: ‘You accept my verification of one thing, I yours of another. We trade on each other’s truth.’ However, communities have the right to question and challenge. Yet, truths should not be sought in a void, in the abstract space of ‘pure’ consciousness. Truths live in social circulation. And James’s ‘radical empiricism’ does not signify an end to cultural and historical context. Quite the opposite, according to James: experience does not belong to an abstractly expressed subject, an imaginary individual residing beyond culture and history. James has never entertained this situation as the historian, James Kloppenberg, emphasizes. For James the ‘most demanding’ test is ‘our experience as social and historical beings.’  

The life of any truth is of course highly uncertain. Once a dogma is rejected fluidity takes its place. James comprehends truth, as a process (we will return

280 Ibid., p. 17.  
282 Ibid., p. 80.  
283 Ibid.  
284 Kloppenberg, p. 102.
to this later). Systems of knowledge are vulnerable to continuous shocks. The end of convictions, if we accept the unrestricted right to question, must be of a permanent nature.

As I understand the pragmatist way of seeing things, it owes its being to the break-down which the last fifty years have brought about in the older notions of scientific truth. […] Up to about 1850 almost every one believed that sciences expressed truths that were exact copies of a definite code of non-human realities. But the enormously rapid multiplication of theories in these latter days has well-nigh upset the notion of any one of them being a more literally objective kind of thing than another.285

A view is gaining prominence that should no longer be associated with the poetizing fantasy of freaks and crackpots. All truths are born in the course of our experience, they are our most precisely understood product; we ourselves create our truths. Truths are constructs. James argues that ‘the notion that even the truest formula may be a human device and not a literal transcript has dawned upon us.’286 Thus, no truth can have an unequivocal and definitive nature. We are, after all, not transcribing the Book of Revelation. Each truth is a process in fact, a process of gradual transformations in the course of which we try to imbue our experiences with a more satisfactory expression. But there is no place for conclusions, which would preclude further changes. ‘We hear scientific laws now treated as so much “conceptual shorthand,” true so far as they are useful but no farther. Our mind has become tolerant of symbol instead of reproduction, of approximation instead of exactness, of plasticity instead of rigor.’287 This includes all aspects and forms of experience. All truths share this lot: they undergo never-ending reconstructions. ‘Truth we conceive to mean everywhere, not duplication, but addition; not the constructing of inner copies of already complete realities, but rather the collaborating with realities so as to bring about a clearer result.’288 So there are no ultimate truths, nor a closed catalogue of correct statements. This is primarily because the very concept of ‘reality’ is directly linked to our concepts of ‘truth.’ What we see depends on the way we look. Let us keep in mind the fundamental thesis of pragmatism: each truth is but a tool. With the aid of this tool we can elicit certain shapes. This is not to say that what we have in mind is a literally understood act of creation, that we are ‘creating’ reality with the use of instruments at the disposal of the mind. Pragmatism signifies the rejection of

286 Ibid., p. 58.
287 Ibid.
288 Ibid., p. 60.
the dualist concept, which separates ‘subject’ from ‘object.’ ‘We’ is our ‘reality,’ ‘I’ takes shape in the stream of events.

James eagerly uses the ‘stream’ as a metaphor to depict reality as a flow of events. ‘I’ does not exist separately from the world or apart from the current of reality. On the other hand, reality itself bears the stigma of subjectivity: it is invariably ‘our’ reality. Each thought defines a certain point of view. ‘Realities’ are directly linked to a certain way of perceiving things and a certain way of thinking. So, there can be no ‘reality’ in a closed form, decided beyond dispute. James is of the opinion that human action and the truths it generates can be associated with a form of dialogue. We ask the questions and the world delivers the answers. But the catalogue of possible questions to pose is not finite. There is also another thing: our mind, as James says, ‘has grown used to symbols.’ This rules out any form of complete adequacy. Ultimately, our ‘realities’ can always change. In the new ‘realities’ new truths take shape. This is the sense of experience. All ‘truths’ are only provisional and keep arising anew. ‘Experience is a process that continually gives us new material to digest. We handle this intellectually by the mass of beliefs of which we find ourselves already possessed, assimilating, rejecting, or rearranging in different degrees.’

Panta rei. In the end, however, let us repeat that James should not be suspected of manipulating the notion of reality in the spirit of extreme subjectivism. ‘Realities’ can appear in a host of ways but reality does exist. Whilst the first criterion of truth looks as follows to James: ‘An experience, perceptual or conceptual, must conform to reality in order to be true.’

The world is, obviously, not homogenous. Multiplicity is a word which merits positioning in first place. A pragmatic concept of truth is linked to a pluralist ontology. ‘The alternative here is known as that between pluralism and monism. It is the most pregnant of all the dilemmas of philosophy, although it is only in our time that it has been articulated distinctly. Does reality exist distributively or collectively. […] Pluralism stands for the distributive, monism for the collective form of being.’

The world should not be treated as a whole. Monism, according to James, is based on false assumptions adopted arbitrarily, based on fantasy and speculation. The truth about reality is revealed by ‘radical empiricism,’ showing the world to be a continually changing constellation of fragments. So any spontaneous form of coherence, continuity, or a whole existing a priori is out of the question. Each whole is a construct growing out of a certain type of experience.

289 Ibid., p. 61.
290 Ibid., p. 100.
We can easily conceive of things that shall have no connection whatever with each other. [...] They may be so unlike and incommensurable, and so inert towards one another as never to jostle or interfere. [...] We conceive their diversity, however; and by the fact that the whole lot of them form what is known in logic as one "universe of discourse."  

Every whole exists only in this way. 'Any chaos may become a “universe” by being merely named.' So there can be no interpretations which impose final solutions. Dogmatism never stands the test of experience. 'Objective truths' cannot constitute the foundation for demands which enforce coercion in the field of thought or action. The order of the world, intellectual, moral and political, cannot have a dogmatic nature – it should by nature be accommodating. Likewise, conformity to reason should be seen accordingly: as a result of negotiation, as a formula of mutual understanding. According to James, there are no 'objective' rules of rationality. This position has of course attracted the oft-repeated charge that pragmatism inexorably leads to relativism. The fact is that James understood the pragmatist position as a counterweight to relativism (as James Kloppenberg, one of James's contemporary interpretators, emphasizes).

The issue of accommodation was crucial. The rejection of the idea of absolute truth does not necessarily entail approval of relativity, which signifies a lack of clearly defined convictions, an instability of views, shifting in tandem with each change of conditions in which they are molded. In giving up metaphysics, mysticism and magic, James simply suggests another criteria of truth: one based on experience and grounded in a certain type of practice. One that excludes dogmatism and easygoing arbitrariness.

William James, as emphasized by John Patrick Diggins, rejected all concepts of rationality and interpretations of history, which imposed the idea of necessity. He did not accept Weberian conclusions. He refused to accept the picture of reality as captured in the metaphor of the ‘iron cage of rationality.’ From early youth he was terrified by the thought that ‘man may be merely a mechanism fated to act in a universe of ironclad laws.’ He believed the rules governing human conduct should not be tied to a concept of a higher order and superordinate authorities. Nor would he adopt interpretations referring to an image of anonymous powers, such as history, nature, reason, which dictate their own demands removed from the direct truth of experience. In the essay The Philosopher and Moral Life

292 Ibid., p. 125.
293 Ibid.
295 Diggins, The Promise, p. 123.
he would write: ‘The main purpose of this paper is to show that there is no such thing possible as an ethical philosophy dogmatically made up in advance. We all help to determine the content of ethical philosophy so far as we contribute to the race’s moral life.’296 The rejection of interpretations referring to ideas of ‘objective truth’ or ‘absolute necessity’ did not lead James in the direction of subjectivism and skepticism. He did not treat the exclusion of rigid and unchangeable rules as approval for the fluidity of principles undermining all foundations of morality. In the essay quoted above, James uses the term ‘moral reality.’ ‘Whether a God exist, or whether no God exist, in yon blue heaven above us bent, we form at any rate an ethical republic here below’297 There always exist some commonly recognized rules of conduct; those are to be studied and explained. A philosophy which rejects concepts of the absolute, cannot abandon the quest for more modest explanations.

First of all, what is the position of him who seeks an ethical philosophy? To begin with, he must be distinguished from all those who are satisfied to be ethical sceptics. He will not be a sceptic; therefore so far from ethical scepticism being one possible fruit of ethical philosophizing it can only be regarded as that residual alternative to all philosophy.298

Clearly then, James’s pluralism does not create dangers which could be associated with the concept of moral voluntarism arising from too much importance being given to separate, often subjective, experiences. The basic goal of reflection related to morality, James explains, is ‘is to find an account of the moral relations that obtain among things, which will weave them into the unity of a stable system, and make of the world what one may call a genuine universe from the ethical point of view.’299 And another important thing: ‘The subject-matter of his study is the ideals he finds existing in the world; the purpose which guides him is this ideal of his own, of getting them into a certain form.’300 As it transpires, then, morality is a sphere of ideals, of quests going beyond the sphere of immediate individual desires. ‘I contend, all of us act as if we believed that there are other people who share our world, that there are objective moral values, that while much of our behavior is habitual, virtually all our actions are potentially subject

297 Ibid., p. 75.
298 Ibid., p. 65.
299 Ibid.
300 Ibid.
to deliberate choice, and that what we do makes a difference in the world.\(^{301}\) It is fitting to remember that, as James highlighted, “good,” and “bad,” are objects of feeling and desire, which have no foothold or anchorage in Being, apart from the existence of actually living minds.\(^{302}\)

Moral ideals are tied to experience. In order for them to be reliably depicted what is required is a continuous emphasis on the decisive role of experience. Such is the role of philosophy, the role of moral reflection, which constitutes one of the key aspects of participating in – to use James’s expression again – ‘the race’s moral life.’ This is why the author of *Pragmatism* disagrees with Weberian scenarios. He does not want to hear of readings which question the fundamental importance of experience, pointing to the decisive role of ‘higher elements,’ mechanisms, ‘a system of objective conditions.’ He acknowledges that rationality is revealed in the direct effort of cognizance organizing our experience and not in abstract schemes, which call for thinking about processes rather than specific actions. This does not chime with the ‘iron cage of rationality.’ James deems rationality a challenge – a sphere of quest for creating a universe tailored to specific experiences, a universe subject to all laws of questioning, an arrangement which would not resemble an iron ring constricting all freedom of movement and exhibiting the superior and relentless logic of the system. James rejects all visions of the ‘end of history.’ For, as he says, human endeavor can have no end: ‘there can be no final truth in ethics any more than in physics, until the last man has had his experience and said his say.’\(^{303}\) This is the sense democracy should have, associated with continuous pursuits which should not be expressed in concepts such as ‘bureaucracy’ or ‘Caesarism.’

Driven by a deep conviction, James actually was a supporter of democracy. In democracy he perceived, as Kloppenburg explains, ‘much more than a form of government or a set of legal arrangements.’ Very much like Dewey, he considered ‘pragmatism inseparable from their commitment to democracy as an ethical ideal.’\(^{304}\) The democratic order was to signify a new system of mutual relationships, rather than a narrowly understood mechanism of regulations. James thought that ‘Democracy is a certain type of religion.’ Its power rested on noble convictions, which allow us to think in terms of ideals. This attitude should


\(^{302}\) James, *Essays*, p. 74.

\(^{303}\) Ibid., p. 65.

be enhanced and protected from the ruining influence of ‘cynicism.’ Ultimately, it has an enormous practical significance, as it inspires aspirations which can change the world. Bold ‘faiths and utopias,’ James argued, ‘are the noblest exercise of human reason.’

Strictly speaking, of course, democratic ‘faith’ differs from religious conviction. For James, the power of democracy is linked directly to the new rules of validation which exclude arbitrariness and unauthenticated claims, and which presumes the decisive role of joint arrangements. The new ‘faith’ draws its inspiration from views based on shared experience and acquiescence for an open confrontation of opinions. Dependable criteria of trustworthiness and validity should be seen as an effect of communication, practices which allow for the freedom to challenge. Such rules of validation determine the advantages of democracy. They give rise to an authentic voluntary approval with no place for traditionally understood subordination. James places the problem of normative order on the level of ‘communicative rationality,’ to use an expression common today.

Therefore, democracy should be viewed as a new communicative state. It is responsible for altering the manner in which issues are settled and, as a consequence, changing the sphere of social practice in the broadest possible sense. At the same time, it is a state which eliminates arbitrariness and principles enforced from above, shaped outside the sphere of free discussion; an arbitrariness, at that, which advances even the weirdest illusions as irrefutable ‘truths.’ Any truth, according to James, can turn out to be an illusion, and that, which in the right conditions we can treat as illusion, can become truth. We should not, therefore, persist obstinately in our defense of the rules of the traditional way of thinking, which accepts that the difference between truth and illusion is settled beforehand. The type of thinking, which allows us to maintain elasticity, diminishes the failure brought about by dogmatic obstinacy. For the dogmatist anything that does not suit their way of thinking is an ‘illusion.’ For James there is no absolute cut-off line between illusion and truth since there is no closed, preordained concept of ‘reality.’ In the matter of illusion, authentic empiricism rules out undisputed certainty.

The only authority that can restrict the scope of free criticism and the right to question is ultimately the ‘power’ of democratic discourse. All decisions must result from joint decisions based on experience. Democracy then becomes an

enormous ‘market’ of ideas allowing for the free testing of the credibility of various concepts of good. Therein lies its ethical force. It provides the means for eliminating delusions related to the philosophy of the absolute, providing, in James’ words, ‘moral vacations.’ In a way, democratic deliberation expresses the essence of pragmatism. It serves to reinforce principles which usher in the acceptance of a position described by James as ‘radical empiricism;’ a position best suited to express the hope vested in pragmatism. Characterizing its principle James said:

Radical empiricism consists first of a postulate, next of a statement of fact, and finally of a generalized conclusion. The postulate is that the only things that shall be debatable among philosophers shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience. […] The generalized conclusion is that therefore the parts of experience hold together from next to next by relations that are themselves parts of experience.

And finally the ‘generalized conclusion,’ ‘[t]he directly apprehended universe needs, in short, no extraneous trans-empirical connective support, but possesses in its own right a concatenated or continuous structure.’306 Radical empiricism cuts the human mind off from the sources of all metaphysical speculation. The truth of all ideas is directly tied to experience; it is not an independent factor as the rationalists would like. ‘The great obstacle to radical empiricism in the contemporary mind is the rooted rationalist belief that experience as immediately given is all disjunction and no conjunction.’307 However, a general abstract model of experience does not exist. The sphere of experience is the sphere of exploration. Each new situation creates a new model of experience, which is implemented in a specific manner. Metaphysics seeks to find apparent unity in the sphere of delusions, which spring up by negating experience. Pragmatism facilitates the creation of many new forms of unity. The world can be coherent in many different ways. Experience is a plane of knowledge, which does not impose any rules of exclusion. Radical empiricism is conducive to deliberation and the politics of agreement. James’s pragmatism is thus also a political program phrased implicitly, based on the recognition of the decisive role of communicative rationality formulas. These exclude, on the grounds of being delusional, the scornful discrediting of views which destroy canons and alter priorities. In the system James embraces, the absolute difference between truth and delusion cannot be taken into account as it does not allow for a conclusively defined image of ‘reality.’ Words are only ‘work plans’ as he said. So depending on the effects of the ‘work,’

307 Ibid.
truth or fiction will emerge as nothing is ever a forgone conclusion. William James thus introduces us to an area of the new way of thinking which leads us to accept that thinking is at its most effective when the difference between illusion and truth is not treated in terms of revealed wisdom. He will argue that ‘Quietism and frenzy thus alike receive the absolute’s permit to exist.’

Thinking which resorts to the idea of the absolute does not shield us from the most bizarre excesses of the mind. ‘By escaping from your finite perceptions to the conception of the eternal whole, you can hallow any tendency whatever.’ Consequently, each delusion can become a truth. Is it thus not better to presume beforehand that the traditional dichotomy of truth and fiction is itself just a convenient (but not always kindly) delusion excusing us from the obligation of real inquisitiveness, of seeking connections between ideas and experience or experience of any sort. The absolute, to refer to James’s known thesis, ensures ‘moral holidays,’ while the new way of thinking deprives us of these ‘holidays’ by questioning everything.

4.2 John Dewey – The Public and Expert Cultures

The growth of democracy brought about by the ‘era of the crowds’ will of course expose democracy’s weaknesses. So, can democracy be improved, refined? What is the point of the political mobilization of the masses? What can substitute the mechanism of political ‘recruitment,’ which only acknowledges the requirements of the fierce struggle for power, as mentioned by Max Weber when he wrote about the activity of political parties. This has the effect of turning the space of public debate into a sphere of cynical manipulation, using the rhetoric of political representation only so far as it masks their own hidden intentions, it turns democracy into a popularity contest which assists in the forgetting of all real commitments of representation or concern for the common interest, changing, finally, the rules of participation to a ‘Caesarist’ model of leadership.

Can this problem be remedied? John Dewey was of the opinion that it could and suggested specific solutions. He was a great enthusiast for democracy and rejected pessimistic and discouraging evaluations and forecasts. He was also a science enthusiast. Indeed, it was his faith in the power of science which informed and strengthened his democratic convictions. How to define this relationship?

Dewey argued that ‘[d]emocracy begins in conversation.’ He used this phrase on his ninetieth birthday, towards the end of his life, although this was

308 Ibid., p. 227.
309 Ibid.
the way he had always thought. Democracy should be seen as the free activity of reasonable human beings guided by the will to truth and reliable knowledge, seeking jointly accepted solutions in the framework of a never-ending ‘conversation’ held in the space of public debate.

All this was to be aided by science, providing patterns of democratic solutions and entering the sphere of knowledge, morality and politics. The cult of scientific knowledge Dewey represents should be addressed with necessary sensitivity. John Dewey was a pragmatist. Therefore, his defense of the authority of science was not made in the belief that it imposes irrefutable and final truths. Science for him was a continuous exploration; the readiness to challenge appearance and the dogged quest to overcome intellectual inertia, routine and conventions, which spoke with the voice of time-honored tradition. Tradition was to be replaced by courage enabling all certitudes to be questioned and all conventions undermined. We will be able to appropriately grasp Dewey’s hopes regarding the influence of science only when we keep in mind a concept of scientific knowledge which flows from pragmatism. To his idea of scientific inquiry he gave the name ‘experimentalism.’

Let us note, however, that Dewey treated the call of science very seriously. He believed it possible to solve the problems of democracy in a scientific way. This is also how he understood his own ambitions and plans, which aimed to create a conceptual tool-box explaining all epistemological, moral and political issues relating to democracy. Dewey was given credit for this. Hilary Putnam, the well-known representative of contemporary pragmatism, said that Dewey actually presented the epistemological justification of democracy, treating democracy as a ‘cognitive value.’

Richard Rorty, whose interpretation of Dewey’s concepts are diametrically different from Putnam’s, considered Dewey to be one of the three most important philosophers of the twentieth century, in addition to Wittgenstein and Heidegger.

John Dewey, could not complain about a lack of recognition. Even during his long life, tributes and admiration came aplenty. He was a mentor and a star. He is remembered in America as a sage, a prophet of the progress of freedom and truth, keeping his feet firmly on the ground, spreading his good news, and knowing how to arouse real trust and enthusiasm. As Henry Steele Commager said in his 1950 book, The American Mind, he was the ‘conscience of America,’ and ‘for a generation no major issue was clarified until

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Dewey had spoken.\textsuperscript{313} But let us return to the controversies. Interpreting Dewey is no simple matter. Fascination went hand in hand with contention, and it continues to this day when, incidentally, we are witnessing a renaissance of Dewey. New seminal work on his output is being produced. In the pragmatist community, and more broadly amongst the participants of various debates concerning democracy, Dewey’s concepts attract much attention. So what are the arguments and the doubts? Let us analyze some key issues.

The most serious objection concerns the question over whether Dewey’s credo, his belief in the unquestionable usefulness of the scientific method, does not praise rationality, but rationality seen purely instrumentally, excluding all key declarations of values. This uncertainty is extremely important. After all, we do not know in which direction the application of ‘scientific methods’ could lead. For instance, does not the lack of a clearly defined irrefutable hierarchy of values in Dewey’s concept signify a risk too high to accept? Can we exclude in advance all conflict between the demands of science and democratic principles? What happens when a clash, a collision takes place? As Dewey’s detractors argued, the lack of clearly defined aims of social action linked to a clearly defined value system can signify consent to a departure from the principles of democracy. Dewey’s ideas, they warned, impose a dangerous cult of the infallible method. They open the door to treating the means of effective action as the final sanction. Dewey’s ‘experimentalism’ does not provide strong guarantees concerning values. Dewey’s philosophy can, unfortunately, become a convenient alibi for those who, while invoking science, will favor the most despicable objectives.\textsuperscript{314}

Dewey’s supporters rejected this argument. The most typical and significant is the position held by Louis Hartz, author of the classical and influential work on American liberalism – \textit{The Liberal Tradition in America}. American political culture, according to Hartz, is par excellence liberal. Individualism, the inviolable rights of individuals and the limited nature of political power are the principles imposed by its genetic code, so to speak. The affirmation of these principles is a cultural imperative. The American tradition has been shaped due to the unshakable priority of ideas and notions of action rooted in the doctrine of John Locke. It is owing to this strong heritage that all departures from the


principle of liberalism are, according to Hartz, practically impossible.\textsuperscript{315} While reading Dewey one must have the cultural context in mind, enabling us to view doubts about his position as exaggerated and baseless.\textsuperscript{316} As it transpires, this is the predominant view.

An important conflict also loomed within the ‘family’ of prominent representatives of pragmatism. On the one hand there was Hilary Putnam who treated Dewey’s ideas as ‘the epistemological justification of democracy,’ and on the other, Richard Rorty who maintained that it was Dewey who led us into the sphere of free exploration which precludes all ambitions to create foundations, that it was Dewey who argued that democracy requires no philosophical justification.\textsuperscript{317}

What is the meaning of Dewey’s praise of democracy; his faith in the power of universal participation going hand in hand with the recognition for the decisive role of scientific methods and praise for ‘critical intelligence’? John Dewey is an author who puts those who interpret his output in a difficult situation. His collected works amount to 37 volumes. His style is also often criticized, as is his predilection to use slightly arbitrary and not always convincing expressions.\textsuperscript{318} Dewey was a prolific writer but his views were not monolithic. In the course of his long career spanning over sixty years, his views often changed.

And yet, an important and very distinctly crafted message is there for us to see. Many contemporary commentators share this view. They, including Mathew Festenstein for instance, argue that it is worth realizing the nature of the ‘normative’ aspect of Dewey’s ideas. What can we find in his reflections on the sense of democracy in an age of a deep crisis of views, which is triggering the disintegration of democratic ideals?\textsuperscript{319}

Let us focus on several select, narrow issues as we strive to maintain the parameters in which all arguments have been presented here: truth and the will to truth. How can we protect ourselves against the temptation of deception while at the same time eschewing arbitrariness and dogmatism? How do we overcome illusion in the sphere of political practice? What should be the sense of democratic participation? The reconstruction of Dewey’s ideas will take shape around these questions. His work, \textit{The Public and its Problems}, will be the focus of our


\textsuperscript{316} Ibid., p. 271.


\textsuperscript{319} Festenstein, op.cit., pp. 22–23.
attention. Dewey’s idea of the ‘public’ leads us to the crux of the matter, allowing us to see his intentions in an appropriate light. It shows the key meaning of his interpretation, whereby democracy is identified with a commune of reason, and the commune of reason is treated as a communicative community. It comes into being thanks to the use of the knowledge capital created by science and the expanding ‘critical intelligence.’

Dewey leads us in the direction of the idea of ‘public reason’ and the public sphere, which emphasizes the idiom of critique. This emphasis on communication arises in the sphere of words, thanks to continually sustained ‘talk’ and it warrants focusing attention on the problems of critique, polemic and negotiation. Let us not forget that in the realm of thought the key role is to be played by ‘critical intelligence.’ Accordingly, the public sphere should remain a space for the free confrontation of views and ideas, allowing for unlimited possibilities of questioning. This also includes the authority of science, which should never become a burden. For ultimately freedom of thought and freedom to criticize are crucial. Let us remember, Dewey is a pragmatist. Thus, he accepts no dogmas, axioms or irrefutable solutions. To reiterate, he called his position ‘experimental.’ He assumed that at any moment a new and important experiment could change the shape of solutions considered binding. A very obvious question arises: in this situation what shape can reconciliation take, what should determine the authority of knowledge, in what way can the will to truth be realized? Put simply, how can we reconcile the requirements of normative ordering, without which it is impossible to imagine sensible social practices, with the principle of free questioning? What role should scientific cognition and a critical, rational ‘public’ play?

Dewey considered the development of science and the growth of democracy to be complementary. This view gave rise to the ‘epistemological justification of democracy’ that Hilary Putnam speaks of. Science develops thanks to the unlimited freedom to question and experiment, thanks to its recognition of the vital role of rational decisions and the exclusion of all other gauges of prestige and credibility. According to Dewey, science shapes the patterns of behavior and criteria of credibility which are conducive to the development of democratic practices. He believes academic communities should be democratic if research is to be effective.\(^{320}\) Science spreads the system of values which fosters the development of democracy. At least, that is how Dewey saw it.

The freedom to challenge, of course, is not an end in itself. Questioning should serve a purpose. Academic communities are not into conflict; their trade

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320 Westbrook, op.cit., p. 136.
is research. Debate and conflict serves only to lead towards a goal. According to Dewey, democracy is a system of action which should and does resemble practices undertaken by academic communities. Here too, research is the name of the game: the search for solutions which enable rational human beings full self-realization. This is the main goal. All our efforts and ambitions should lead towards this goal. Arguments, discussions and controversies will become easier to understand only when this is kept in mind.

All debates, then, are ultimately about formulating an idea of good and establishing measures of virtue. Put simply, they represent the quest for ideas of a good life. To Dewey cognitive efforts always carried a definite moral message. They do, after all, regulate human behavior. Let us remember that scientific practices are the backbone on which the ethos of modernity and democracy is developed. Science, ethics and politics are combined into a whole. Reason is not an overriding and autonomous power with the capacity to make independent judgments. Dewey is a naturalist. He rejects the claims of rationalist metaphysics and the perspective of faith and theology. To the cognitive powers of the human mind he does not attribute any special privileged role. He believes that the mind is a part of the environment, one comprised of nature and culture. Thinking does not entail venturing beyond the borders of the environment. The mind does not soar to great heights to offer a view of the world from above. Thinking is conditioned in many different ways. It takes shape in the confluence of various aspirations, desires and ambitions. There are no ‘pure’ thoughts and cognitive powers do not function independently. We could say that the fabric of thought is ‘organic.’ Dewey removes science and knowledge from the realm of the soul. As a result, the connection between science, ethics and politics becomes obvious. It is shaped directly in the stream of life. Whatever it is we are thinking, whatever we desire, whatever we are ready to demand from ourselves, is strongly and clearly linked. It is also in this sphere that finally the contours of all debates, which determine the character of democratic practices, are drawn.

In summary, democracy is the search for solutions which serve to fulfil hopes relating to self-realization. But this idea should not be linked to the fulfilment of an overarching goal set a priori. In fact, there is no room for a priori formulas in Dewey’s work. Everything is settled and should be settled by experience. Dewey treats knowledge, which is detached from experience, as a hotbed for delusion and the realm of fiction.

According to Dewey, man is capable of fulfilling his aspirations concerning cognition and action in a manner that is close to perfection. Although this view has been contested, it must be stated. As we know, the 1920s saw Dewey’s views...
maturing. Interpretations, which came under the heading of ‘cultural pessimism,’ played a substantial role also in the USA. The volume that we are going to focus on, *The Public and its Problems* (a reprint of the 1927 edition) was a reply Dewey gave to Walter Lippmann. Two of Lippmann’s works, especially *Public Opinion* (1922) and the later *The Phantom Public*, received a great deal of attention and seriously influenced the discussion about democracy.

Lippmann disavowed the hopes pinned on democracy. He argued that all interpretations pointing to the existence of a rationally thinking and acting ‘public’ were baseless. In *Public Opinion* he ‘deconstructs’ the foundations of democratic optimism. He presents a bold and far-reaching thesis. In his mind, the idea of ‘sovereignty’ underpinning the democratic order and treated as the basic legitimizing format, has nothing to do with reality. Lippmann treats the issue of representation as an epistemological matter. According to him this is where the center of gravity of the whole concept lies, as emphasized by democracy-enthusiasts. The concept’s political sense is linked directly to the view that ‘representation’ is a simple unfailing mechanism, which ensures lawfulness and the meaningfulness of democratic practices. But this is not how it is. Representation is an illusion. Rational opinion and rational convictions, the potential object of representation and support for reasonable and just decisions, simply do not exist. The ‘public’ does not behave rationally. Lippmann goes back to the famous theses of Alexis de Tocqueville voiced in the first half of the nineteenth century. ‘Public opinion’ is an arena in which thoughtlessness and conformism reign supreme. People do not take advantage of the freedom to think. They are incapable of it. This becomes even more evident in the twentieth century. The ‘public’ internalizes patterns forced upon it by the media, as well as all sorts of ‘tailor-made’ ideas and interpretations, thereby eliminating the freedom to think. The debate that the people of the Enlightenment had in mind is replaced by social engineering, while the manipulation of the image of reality becomes an everyday occurrence. By saying this, Lippmann removes the independently thinking ‘citizen’ from sight. His place is taken by a political *homunculus* fashioned by the media. His ‘mind’ is a product of modern communication technology and persuasion techniques, shaped on the plane of stereotypes, of images created in order to exclude the unrestrained perception of reality. As Lippmann believes, the modern man lives behind a wall he is never able to breach; separated from reality and immersed in the world of fiction.

*Public Opinion* is a work challenging tradition shaped in the circles of American constitutional ideas. Lippmann rejects the position taken by Madison. To him, the concept of ‘filtering’ and ‘refining,’ which allows opinion to be treated
as a foundation for rational decisions, has failed completely; it has contributed to
the creation of a false image of reality. In fact, as borne out by political practice,
ilusion is becoming more convenient than reality, which thrives in conflict. So,
politicians favor illusion and gradually the media follow suit. This, then, is the
final meaning of ‘representation.’

Dewey counted Lippmann’s argument among ‘the most severe indictments of
democracy “ever penned.”’ He himself had many serious doubts. In The Public
and its Problems he speaks of the ‘eclipse of the public’ and devotes a whole chap-
ter to this subject. But he could not agree with Lippmann. So how can Dewey’s
perspective be presented? Despite all his reservations and doubts, what filled him
with optimism? What persuaded him to think that the public could act ration-
ally, transforming democracy into a source of hope?

We should look for answers to this question not only in the essay itself. Dew-
ey’s views should be approached more broadly, taking account of two of the most
general and basic issues, namely reason and consequently Dewey’s concept of
knowledge. Furthermore, in a related question, are people capable of defining
virtue and good, and how can they go about this? An analysis of these issues will
have to be brief and superficial.

Dewey rejects all metaphysical interpretations of reason, cognition and
knowledge. He does not agree with the view of the idealistic philosophy of the
conscience, which presents cognition as the effect of independently employing
reason’s cognitive faculties. All knowledge is related to experience and action.
The autonomy of reason is ruled out. Nor does Dewey accept the dualist idea
which presumes the independence of body and mind. Accordingly, therefore,
reason is not an independent authority. Thinking is bound up with various forms
of human activity in all sorts of ways; it is not a separate or superordinate plane.
And since it deals with action no conclusive solutions are expected.

Thus, Dewey rejects the idea of immutable truths stemming from the ‘higher’
forms of the conscience. He is the representative of the anti-Platonic move-
ment, which in twentieth century philosophy played an enormous role gradually
increasing its influence. Dewey is against general notions and abstract theories,
which can forgo specific testing as defined by experience. He concedes that all
truths have only instrumental significance. So all assertions, ideas and concepts
are always only instruments, which we use in order to define our own status in

322 J. Dewey, The Public and Its Problems, New York, H. Holt and Company, 1927 (re-
the community when we undertake certain actions. Our knowledge is always uncertain and experience continually imposes new tests upon us. The priority awarded to action means that all ‘truths’ are precarious. In *Experience and Nature* (1925) he argued that a sense of alienation and uncertainty are constant traits of the human consciousness.\(^{323}\)

Moreover, let us note, that Dewey resorts to the use of the term ‘truth’ rather reluctantly. The same is true for the notion of ‘cognition.’ He speaks about ‘research’ more readily. The term inquiry always plays a key role in his argument. ‘Cognition’ can suggest too much, offering the promise of fulfilling a certain goal. Dewey is of the opinion, on the other hand, that we are always journeying. His concept of knowledge stresses action over results. Peirce and then Dewey introduced an operationalist concept of knowledge defined through the act of research rather than as a set of obtained results or known truths.\(^{324}\) In three seminal works inaugurating the mature stage of his creativity, *Reconstruction in Philosophy, Human Nature and Conduct* and *The Quest for Certainty* (1919–1929) John Dewey clearly defined his position in the matter of truth, learning and knowledge.\(^{325}\) He criticized the ‘classical’ position taken by philosophy, which identified with the fiction of the perceiving subject. Together with the notion of ‘epistemology’ he rejected the epistemological perspective. He argued that there is no isolated ‘epistemological’ plane or a separate knowledge of the nature of cognition. All knowledge concerns human action. In *Human Nature and Conduct* he emphasized the notion of ‘intelligent conduct.’ He focused his attention on this very issue considering the ways in which people could make use of reason and knowledge, shaping increasingly more perfect relationships on the interpersonal level and with the environment.

So, Dewey is ardently against the sort of thinking that is bent on searching for permanent foundations. The very idea of an unalterable foundation is a delusion to him. Everything, he argues, appears to us in a certain context, or framework. It relates to certain ways of understanding and explanation. There are no ‘pure’ phenomena, ‘direct’ data, or ‘objects’ that would exist without the ‘subject.’ That which traditional philosophy sees as a duality is in fact oneness. Human beings cannot seek footholds beyond themselves. The only ‘reality,’ according to Dewey, is our own experience. There is no foundation, therefore, on which we could rest in the conviction that there are things which never change.

\(^{323}\) Digins, *The Promise*, p. 222.


Again, thinking in terms of ‘foundation’ and ‘truth’ encourages the cultivation of illusion. Dewey does not use the term ‘will to truth’ anywhere; he treats the eradication of delusions as a matter of great importance. He believes that templates of culture, nourished by faith, theology and metaphysics, feed into the great potential of fiction. He is an important supporter of the disenchantment of all forms of knowledge – this is the sense of his ‘experimentalism.’

The greatest fiction of them all, according to Dewey is the concept of ‘truth’ itself. It keeps human capabilities in check, suggesting the existence of some definite beneficial decisions. Fiction always speaks with the voice of ‘truth’ thus separating us from reality.

Dewey does not position his critique on the plane of epistemology but on the plane of culture. He thinks of shaping a new type of culture rather than arguing over various concepts of truth. He imagines that a change is possible – one that eliminates the cult of truth, the cult of the foundation, and unlocks reserves of human creativity.

There is one remaining question: what should replace the criteria of credibility that relates to the traditionally understood concept of cognition and has been challenged? Actually, we already know the answer. Science is to be the new authority. It is worth devoting more attention to this issue by taking a closer look.

Dewey was referring to concepts presented by Peirce who accepted that only findings adopted by academic and research communities could be reliable and binding. For only they can transcend the allure of rash decisions and use the methods of research which demand critical thinking. Only they can mutually question decisions taken earlier. The methods of scientific research presume that all results should be subjected to evaluation and cannot be final. Scientific study, therefore, creates patterns of reason, which make it possible to refer to the notion of truth.

These truths have no objective significance in the traditional sense. Pierce thinks that scientific research is but one of many facilitating the ‘fixation of beliefs,’ shaping solutions, which for a definite time become a gauge of credibility. This renders certain practices possible, helping to persuade people to accept a certain point of view as binding. The same goal could be reached in other ways, and can be found in history itself. Apart from scientific investigation, faith, tradition, metaphysical speculation, even authority based on the use of force, should also be considered. Each of these can become the source for certain decisions leading to the ‘fixation of beliefs.’

Only in this context can we use the notion of ‘truth.’ Beliefs become ‘real’ thanks to the existence of a definite system of conviction. Peirce (in contrast to
James) also emphasizes the formal rigors of validity linked to the existence of universally binding rules of logic. Of course, what finally convinces us of the value of any decision is the results. That is the substance of the pragmatic principles recommended by Peirce.

The corroboration of the value of scientific methods should not be sought in judgments made on an unwavering and a priori basis relating to faith or metaphysics. The authority of science is a specific cultural norm. There are many cultures which treat the problem of decision-making and authority quite differently. Both Peirce and Dewey are well aware of this. Peirce, ‘by selecting research as the method of establishing convictions, points to the fact that agreement between researchers has more persuasive power than other ways of opinion-making.’

And nothing more than that. Dewey deemed Peirce’s solution of rational justification as the most convincing by pointing to the existence of a culture which produced the most effective means of persuasion. He went even further. He accepted that Peirce’s credibility format could be considered as the best verification even outside the community of academics and researchers, namely the public itself. In other words, John Dewey is convinced that democracy is rooted in the same culture as that which has consolidated the authority of science and scientific research. For this reason we can consider the complementary nature of both.

It is Dewey’s belief that the rules of public discourse should reflect the exigencies of credibility and rationality as shaped by academic practice. The idea, of course, is not to replicate research methods, but to accept the same point of view disqualifying recklessness and arbitrariness. It also means the necessary adoption of clearly defined rules of argument, acknowledging unlimited freedom to question and linking all measures of credibility to experience. Having presented this standpoint, as John Patrick Diggins emphasizes, Dewey reveals a perspective in which the concept of communicative rationality would be fashioned. He is convinced that all ‘truths’ need to be seen as an effect of communicative practices, which, apart from the jointly recognized rigors of semantic correctness, cannot impose any other restriction. The acceptance of this perspective ensures the advantages of democracy. In this sense one can speak of its ‘epistemological’ justification. The necessary condition for all judgments and decisions should be mutually shaped beliefs; the credibility model ‘intersubjective understanding.’ As Diggins noted, ‘in this respect Dewey anticipated Habermas’s view of language as purposive action expressed in communication.’

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326 Buczyńska-Garewicz, Prawda i złudzenie, p. 104.
327 Diggins, The Promise, p. 461.
is not an end in itself. The ‘public,’ according to Dewey, is a community, which seeks solutions to directly determine the nature of human life. The aim of those seeking solutions, in short, always revolves around notions of good and ideas of the good life. Problems of communication are linked to problems concerning ethics. Indeed, this is the purpose of democratic practice. This is how the sphere of activity, which leads to the identification of the ‘public,’ should be viewed.

The concepts of good and values are naturally the subject of various disputes. Dewey is perfectly aware of the fact that the right to question, crucial to the democratic nature of debate, unavoidably fosters differences and divisions. Democratic culture rules out homogeneity – the pluralism of views is obvious. And yet his faith in science lays the ground for great optimism. Dewey thinks of creating an ‘empirical science of values.’ A divorce from teleology and metaphysics should, he assumes, encourage the seeking of validation directly linked to experience. He believes it is possible to define a set of values free from arbitrariness. Unsurprisingly, such a position elicits criticism. His opponents thought that Dewey overestimated the potential of science and was creating another illusion of ethical ‘objectivism.’ Similar opinions can be heard even today. ‘Pragmatism rests all knowledge on “experience.”’ But experience, he argues, is a ‘cognitively empty’ notion. We assume there are no other sources of knowledge apart from experience, that no knowledge can exist beyond it. But ‘can there be knowledge within or inside experience?’

In another work, *The Quest for Certainty*, Dewey argues that all values are a projection of our desires. His position here is close to David Hume’s – emotions are the basis of morality. A school for morality should be a school for desire. Any changes, which could bring us closer to creating a genuine human community, must take this path. But once again, Dewey’s views attract opposition. It is argued that his radical empiricism allows all distinctions underpinning value judgments to be forgotten, that it blurs the boundaries between what is ‘desired’ and that which is ‘desirable.’ But Dewey did not understate this difference. He actually accepted the fact that the aim of human action should be linked ‘not just to what we desire but to what we desire to desire – that is, to what we can endorse ourselves desiring.’ Our ethical judgment should be defined by ‘reflective desire.’ But it should not refer to abstract criteria leading to the establishment of priorities. Dewey thought that all value judgments are linked to experience in a very obvious sense, namely, that they always require a specific context. In this

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329 Ryan, op.cit., p. 234.
way they become understandable; only this makes for reasonable discussion and
dispute. Concepts of life devoid of all context would be unintelligible. And the
most obvious and distinct context is created by knowledge linked to experience.
In a democracy this is an obvious matter. Knowledge, which requires initiation,
as a rule, cannot be taken into account.

Hence, desires are born in certain, specific conditions. They are linked to cer-
tain ways of life and a certain type of culture. They are determined by the way one
understands life. It is here that the scope for reflection and deliberation opens up
and we enter the realm of education and upbringing, which for Dewey was a
source of great hope. It is from this perspective that his concept of the ‘empirical
sense of values’ should be analyzed. His concept assumes that the eradication of
bias and habits inhibiting unrestrained decision-making, creates the premise for
judgments justified by only one thing: subjection to shared experience. Science
should simply define the criteria for accuracy.

In his defense of Dewey’s ‘ethical objectivism,’ Hilary Putnam draws our at-
tention to the fact that it is by no means a new example of ethical absolutism.
‘And finally, believing that ethical objectivity is possible is not the same thing as
believing that there are no undecidable cases or no problems which, alas, cannot
be solved.’ Dewey is simply pointing in a certain direction. Everything finally
is to be decided by free criticism linked to the discipline of ‘intelligent conduct.’
Values can be evaluated to the same rational degree as matters which medicine
or engineering grapple with. All it takes is to reject the temptation of absolutism
and adopt the perspective which stresses the importance of context. Similarly,
just as there are no criteria adopted a priori concerning ‘health,’ all debate on
this subject amounts to interpretative practice, revealing the nature of human
expectation. They are meaningless. Apart from a certain language and group of
ideas, no criteria of ‘values’ has been adopted a priori.

Desire and perception can of course be shaped by taking advantage of free
discussion and an appropriate education. Both of these have been prioritized by
Dewey. In the words of Festenstein, Dewey believed in ‘moral, political or ideo-
logical convergence.’ He believed that people freed from bias cannot differ too
much, and moreover, that education programs based on sensible assumptions
must bring people together.

330 H. Putnam, ‘Pragmatism and Moral Objectivity,’ in H. Putnam (ed.) Words and Life,
331 Festenstein, op.cit., p. 43.
These programs should stress the idea of the common good. A proponent of personal freedom and the concept of self-realization, Dewey at the same time rejected the idea of individualism as connected to liberalism. These issues are at the core of two of his works: *Individualism, Old and New* and *Liberalism and Social Action*. Stressing the crucial concept of ‘individuality’ he would not listen to ‘individualism,’ which for him was a dangerous and fictitious ideology distorting the elementary sense of human experience. After all, experience is linked to community. A human being cannot realise his/her potential in isolation. The good life, a life which achieves self-realization, is only possible through cooperation. Dewey’s interpretation of the human condition, morality and politics, has a decidedly ‘community’ nature, as stressed by Alan Ryan.\(^3\) Dewey saw individualism associated with isolation as an expression of ‘mythologized social zoology.’ It belied the most obvious experiences and cultivated the fiction of an abstract and autonomous subject; an independent, separate ‘individual.’ In an expression of his disapproval he used the term ‘rugged individualism.’

In summary, all concepts of life, which refer to the primacy of egoistic motivations are, according to Dewey, contrary to experience and create false assumptions about morality. They should be challenged, exposed and overthrown. There is no point to traditionally understood ‘individualism.’ Democracy is, of course, capable of creating barriers to suppress the onslaught of illusion. This is made clear in Dewey’s deliberations concerning the advantages of developing ‘critical intelligence.’ Democratic culture creates an antidote to deception, awarding a decisive role to empirical gauges of what is relevant. In open public debate it becomes evident that only the joint creation of specific ways of life can determine that status of values. It is the way of life which creates the appropriate context for moral judgments. Anything that fuels illusion will disappear where ‘critical intelligence’ has the upper hand, where ‘intelligent conduct’ counts. The public formed in the arena of a free exchange of views becomes the real conscience of democracy. Dewey is one of the most consistent supporters of ‘participatory’ democracy.

In *The Public and its Problems* he muses on whether the Great Society created by industrialization could ever become the Great Community.\(^4\) The concept of community, after all, plays a key role in his thinking. Dewey’s interpretation of democracy assumes the mutual and obvious connection between that which is

\(^3\) Ryan, op.cit., p. 235.

public and that which is common. Thus, when we speak about the ‘public,’ what we have in mind is a certain type of community. Democracy is established in a sphere of practice linked to conscious participation. ‘Regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself. It is an ideal in the only intelligible sense of an ideal.’

So, as Dewey clearly stresses, it is an ‘ideal.’ When we speak about democracy we are in fact speaking about a certain course of action, about the postulated, perfect form of community venture. But in practice ‘Since things do not attain such fulfillment but are in actuality distracted and interfered with, democracy in this sense is not a fact and never will be.’

The form democracy takes is decided by the mechanisms of community life, by the activity thanks to which the public is heard. The public is the subject – its aspirations and requirements are crucial. The ‘public,’ in other words, the ‘Populus.’ Dewey consciously refers to the republican tradition. By referring to the republican vocabulary, he tries to root his idea in imagery which takes us back to classical republican models. That which is public, he explains, must be approached in terms reflected by the expression ‘res publica, the commonwealth,’ namely the common weal. Public conduct must express concern over common issues. That which is public, by its very nature, goes beyond the sphere of particular references. The nature of action is public, explains Dewey, when its consequences venture beyond the sphere of mutual relations between two individuals, or two parties, when they concern the welfare of many other individuals.

So public activity is always acting in the sphere of public good. This is the sense of democracy, this is how the public is constituted.

Dewey rejects concepts of democracy which take their origin from classical models of liberalism. Those could be specified as being linked with the idea of separation, highlighting the primacy of the original entitlements of the individual and identifying public action with the principle of representation. This way of thinking, according to Dewey, is responsible for distorting democratic ideals. Having accepted ‘the influential philosophy of John Locke,’ he says, we assume that the only aim of public ‘government was the protection of individuals in their rights which were theirs by nature,’ which have an original, non-political

335 Ibid., p. 148.
336 Ibid.
337 Ibid., p. 16.
338 Ibid.
339 Ibid., p. 18.
significance. Thereby, we enter on a course to ‘individualism’ and into the world of illusion. ‘Freedom presented itself as an end in itself,’ although in reality it signified a certain type of relationship able to negate ‘oppression and tradition.’ The abstract formula of individual natural rights inspires an abstract and vacuous concept of freedom. Dewey believes that a negatively understood freedom, which stresses individual rights and separation, actually destroys the likelihood of emancipation. It does, after all, impose a false image of the subject shaped a priori, hindering the development of practices which facilitate the genuine development of the individual and his self-realization within the community. The concept of negative freedom also creates a dangerous illusion of self-regulation – it imposes an image of infallible mechanisms which do not require civil participation and spontaneously stem the abuse of power. This misguided concept of freedom becomes the ultimate obstacle to mutual obligation and participation, and undermines the notion of commonwealth and public, reducing public conduct to an efficiently operating mechanism. This is the direction James Mill took in developing John Locke’s position. He devised a picture of a political machine operating efficiently with no involvement on the part of the citizen, thanks to the power of mechanisms encoded in the rules of election law and representation.

The ‘older theory’ of democracy as Dewey calls it, actually considerably limits democracy’s potential. Combining the principle of laissez-faire with the ‘doctrine of natural rights’ he creates a deceitful image of the ‘harmony of personal profit and social benefit.’ This deceit replaces rational interpretations of experience and enforces a formula of false reason. The individual, perceived as a separate subject, sees attributed to it features and predilections which it does not possess. Concern for one’s own interest, compliant with reason, is beginning to be treated as a ‘natural’ disposition, thanks to which all action in the social sphere becomes rational, and therefore just and deserving of approval. The problem, however, is that there are no abstract formulas of reason for an emancipated individual to turn to. According to Dewey, individualism is grounded in a false theory of knowledge and a false theory of action. Liberal democracy, exploiting patterns of Enlightenment metaphysics, inexorably immerses itself in illusion. The alleged ‘rationality’ of the supporters of individualism in fact signifies an interplay of various intentions, impulses and determinants, which are beyond the control of reason. Actions informed by false assumptions must be clumsy

340 Ibid., p. 87.
341 Ibid., p. 86.
342 Ibid., p. 157.
343 Ibid., p. 91.
and ineffective. Democracy, therefore, must be freed from the burden of illusion by rejecting false doctrines. These originated in speculation, and snuck out of political meeting rooms, creating a form of knowledge which gained relatively wide-spread trust. And this is the problem. In liberal cultures the dominant form of consciousness is drawn from metaphysical templates. The eager pursuit to establish irrefutable truths, which would be ‘reason’s revealed truths’ of sorts, has established the primacy of illusion. We can therefore clearly see that dogmatic thinking – we could even call it missionary thinking – in terms of truth and deception does not rule out the progress of illusion. It actually makes it possible. Dewey thought that what was required to defeat deception was the rejection of formulas of reason which dictate the compulsion to think in terms of irrefutable truths and final decisions. He was convinced that if we wish to maintain that the distinctive feature of liberal culture is freedom, it must be inspired and supported by a different concept of knowledge.

Dewey observes that ‘current philosophy held that ideas and knowledge were functions of a mind or consciousness […] But in fact, knowledge is a function of association and communication.’ The real foundations of knowledge are produced only by communication practices as part of the life of the community. The ‘older theories’ of democracy have completely overlooked this. A considerable change takes place already in tandem with the recovery of the ability to think in terms of community. This is the moment when a new type of knowledge is born, knowledge which could then be confronted with deception. Of course, it takes an effort to create this knowledge. It is connected with communicative practices which cannot be substituted by any, even the boldest and most refined, theory. What a theory can do is suggest certain interpretations when it addresses the issue of community life, which is how Dewey views the value of one’s own intentions.

So, a community it is. When he explains his position, Dewey stresses the decisive role of words and symbolic culture. Practices divorced from words entail various forms of separation. Language is the element holding everything together. By using speech and acquiring signs, human beings invariably become members of a community. ‘Events cannot be passed from one to another, but meanings may be shared by means of signs.’ This is the purpose of working together. It is the way to view the assumptions of community life. Signs, words and symbols can create complex entanglements. They result from various practices, and their sense can be

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344 Ibid., p. 158.
345 Ibid., p. 153.
very complex. Very often, interpretations distort the sense of real experiences. Very often symbolic culture becomes a cloak to conceal reality giving a false picture of common practices and mutual relationships. Nevertheless, a community, in the basic dimension of communicative ties, always exists.

In a democratic culture the community becomes the public – rising above the level of impulses and habits, consciously maintaining a communicative bond and a sense of common involvement, unleashing the creative potential which intelligent conduct, that is behavior based on the ability to question, involves. The element in which the public manifests its existence directly is debate, a practice which underlines the importance of criticism and, as Festenstein frames it, shapes the ‘ethos of experimentation.’ Debate makes unrestrained protest and the unrestricted pursuit of solutions, which lie outside stereotypes and templates, possible. It is an interpretation of common experience, progressing towards commonly agreed choices.

Dewey imbued his deliberation on the public with a dual sense: he combined description with a model approach stressing that the reasoning he presents is ‘hypothetical.’ He was perfectly aware of the fact that reality is not a mirror of the model. Although he disagreed with Lippmann on the conclusions, maintaining far-reaching hopes concerning the future, he accepted the latter’s interpretation of the facts. In his work, The Public and its Problems, a characteristic expression appears: ‘the eclipse of the public.’ Historical changes occurring with the birth of the modern state cause the inevitable disintegration of small communities and immediate contact between its members; face-to-face communities gradually disappear from view. They are replaced by the Great Society. At least, that is how it seems in America. ‘We have inherited, in short, local town-meeting practices and ideas. But we live and act and have our being in a continental nation-state.’ Local connections become less important. All crucial decisions require actions, which are in keeping with the logic of a new model of political integration – action taken up in the anonymous sphere established by the Great Society. Direct, personal ties are replaced by new forms of contact; technology to a large extent compensates for the loss of immediate relationships. But, according to Dewey, we should not seek easy consolation. The advantages brought by the development of new means of communication are in fact superficial. ‘The rapid and easy circulation of opinion’ is hardly equivalent to a direct meeting of

346 Festenstein, op.cit., p. 88.
348 Ibid., p. 113.
minds. Technology is no formula for salvation. ‘Mechanical forces have operated, and it is no cause for surprise if the effect is more mechanical than vital.’

‘Consolidation’ becomes possible thanks to the system of duplication. The freedom to think, the freedom to evaluate and knowledge based on experience are becoming less important. To use Lippmann’s vocabulary, stereotypes become the most important thing; they come into being due to the primacy of patterns and over-simplification. The consolidation of opinion, in fact, signifies ‘intellectual uniformity.’ Critical thought gradually loses its significance, and is superseded by the habit of judging which is driven by mechanisms of duplication. Reality is concealed behind a curtain and illusion gains the upper hand. Thus, in the end, we are left with intellectual helplessness, ‘confusion and apathy.’

Technology directly advances only the development of expert culture but the usefulness of thought models related to them is limited. Experts cannot replace the ‘public.’ Their knowledge concerns only certain narrowly addressed issues about the state and democracy. General issues can only be dealt with by the ‘public.’ In order to overcome the crisis we should forsake the expert model of knowledge and expert model of democracy and instead focus our attention on general matters to be undertaken by the ‘public.’ Dewey insists, that ‘the problem of a democratically organized public is primarily and essentially an intellectual problem.’

A change in mindset must be a social change, made with momentum and on a large scale. To overcome any helplessness or inertia, resulting from the ubiquity of various schemes, the creation of a new plane of identification and understanding is required. Communities call for their own signs of identity, according to Dewey. So transforming the Great Society into a Great Community will, to a large extent, depend on the resonance of the new symbolism. Symbols generate new frameworks in which joint projects take shape. As Dewey says, symbols ‘promote communication.’ Symbols ensure that ideas are ‘communicable,’ symbols award social status to ideas. Deliberation in its pure form, agreement in purely discursive forms, does not generate energy capable of stirring the imagination. Discursive practices gain relevance when linked to a message, which refers to a symbol. In which direction should the search for new symbols proceed? Dewey believes that historical change aimed at overcoming the crisis

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349 Ibid., p. 114.
350 Ibid., p. 115.
351 Ibid.
352 Ibid., p. 123.
353 Ibid., p. 126.
of democracy should reject the symbolism of individualism and false knowledge arising from the idea of separation.

Symbolism appealing to reality and to experience, rather than to a fictitious picture of the world created by individualism, is what is called for. A symbolism focusing on the motives of cooperation, interdependence and rootedness; one which allows for shaping that which 'metaphorically, may be termed a general will and social consciousness.'\textsuperscript{355} ‘Knowledge,’ in the words of Dewey, ‘is a function of association and communication’ rather than the effect of the cognitive activity of a separate subject.\textsuperscript{356} Finally we can state and reveal Dewey’s perspective, that it is an illusion to think that there is a clearly defined line between truth and illusion, attainable by pure thought revolving around ‘natural’ and unalterable truths, around the revealed truths of ‘reason.’ Very often truths of this sort are fraught with illusion. Therefore, missionary thinking, thinking in terms of a clearly defined difference between truth and illusion is dangerous. Each truth is linked to a symbolic culture. The peculiarities of the symbolic culture determine the peculiarities of the truths emerging from it.

4.3 Richard Rorty – Discourse as a Language Game

By questioning the classical concept of truth, pragmatism created a perspective in which the notion of deceit is no longer a stigma. The rejection of religion and metaphysics deprived truth of its restrictive features. ‘Radical empiricism,’ which James and Dewey set against the allure of dogmatism, facilitated an analysis of every type of experience, presenting ‘truth’ as a result of unrestricted experiments and pursuits. Truth, seen from this perspective, has no peculiar source of its own. Consequently it is impossible to speak of an unequivocally understood ‘will to truth.’

Pragmatists disagree with the assumption that thinking is of value only when we refer to the distinction between truth and deception understood in absolute terms. This difference is relevant only when the sources of truth are clearly defined. Pragmatism provides its own way of thinking.

The rejection of a restrictive notion of truth made it possible to overcome the rigors of reason connected to the Enlightenment tradition, and consequently led to the destruction of set patterns which the idea of ‘the public use made of reason’ was bogged down in. Pragmatism deals with the experiences of late modernity, expertly shaping formulas of reason, which take account of the crisis of

\textsuperscript{355} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{356} Ibid., p. 157.
strong convictions resulting from disenchantment with the world. Pragmatism tries hardest to find solutions for the reconstruction of the public sphere, countering the erosion of the system and replicating the credo of Enlightenment rationalism inherent in the concept of human rights and the idea of representation. Without doubt, the accomplishments of Richard Rorty are crucial. Admittedly, he is the most distinguished thinker following on from James and Dewey – ‘he has been the most influential American philosopher since John Dewey.’

Rorty focuses on the criticism of the Platonian model, which introduces the juxtaposition of opinion and truth (doxa and episteme). He consolidates the credo of pragmatism, using the potential of thought as shaped in the anti-metaphysical current of the most recent philosophy, going back to Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and taking advantage of the output of analytical philosophy. Rorty’s interpretation undermines the conceptual order established by Enlightenment metaphysics, which highlighted the notion of nature, rational laws of nature and truths reflecting the Light of Reason. Richard Rorty is of one mind with Nietzsche who in The Twilight of the Idols explained ‘how the “true world” finally became a fable.’ Rorty uses the term ‘story,’ but the idea is the same. The grand stories told by philosophers to explain what the world is about are always only ‘stories’. They should be treated with caution in order to avoid calling them revealed truths. Over time their genuine identity is exposed. Rorty points out that towards the end of the twentieth century, it is high time to say goodbye to Plato’s grand ‘fairy tale’ once and for all and to agree with Nietzsche who ‘asked us to treat “the true world” as a fable, a myth concocted by Parmenides and Plato. The problem, he said, is not that it is a fable, but that it is one that has exhausted its utility.’

The term ‘real reality’ coined by Plato was a stroke of genius, Rorty asserts. Plato wished to guide us inwards, to the crux of things, away from the sphere of appearances. ‘By tracing an argumentative path back to first principles, Plato thought, we can attain the goal that he described as “reaching a place beyond hypotheses.” When we have reached that goal, we shall be immune to the seductive effects of redescription.’ However, the appeal of this way of thinking

358 Ibid., p. 41.
360 Ibid., p. 118.
has been exhausted irrecoverably, Rorty concludes. Modernity has created new stories in which there is no place for the ideal of unalterable truth hidden away or suspended out of reach. In a ‘disenchanted’ world gods and all things godly fail to attract any interest. Curiosity is focused only on human ambitions and all things human. ‘As high culture became more thoroughly secularized, the educated classes of Europe and the Americas became complacently materialist in their understanding of how things work. In the battle between Plato and Democritus – the one Plato described as waged between the gods and the giants – Western intellectuals have come down, once and for all, on the side of the giants.’

The pathos of Platonian philosophizing has been exhausted. The realm of opinion generated in the dust of events has the greatest power. New innumerable tales do not claim to have the status of absolute and irrefutable truth. ‘Nietzsche and Wittgenstein both suggest substituting Emerson’s metaphor of endlessly expanding circles for Plato’s metaphor of ascent to the indubitable.’

By pampering to the public’s new tastes and fancies, philosophers can no longer demand special privileges. They cannot analyze their vocation using terms such as ‘height’ and ‘depth’ – the rhetoric of ennoblement is becoming less relevant. Truth must be found in the lows. The refutation of Plato’s ‘fairy-tale’ signifies a vital turning point – from this moment on, thought ceases to undergo purification procedures by exposing pretense, deception and illusion. The craft pursued by philosophers loses its anointed dignity. Dewey’s hopes have found their fulfillment: ‘John Dewey thought that the fact that the mathematical physicist enjoys greater prestige than the skilled artisan is an unfortunate legacy of the Platonic-Aristotelian distinction between eternal truths and empirical truth, the elevation of leisured contemplation above sweaty practicality.’

Philosophy has ultimately been knocked off its pedestal. It no longer enjoys playing the same role as it did in the culture of the Enlightenment when it glorified the idea of impartial and adequate cognition, getting to the heart of the matter and contributing to the birth of ‘objective’ truth. It has transpired that that is but a ‘temporary species,’ as Rorty puts it; it has no decisively established status. But the troubles besetting philosophy are symptomatic of a new historical situation. Philosophy is not the only concern. More broadly, it is a question of the role of thought in modern culture.

Since Hegel’s time, the intellectuals have been losing faith in philosophy. This amounts to losing faith in the idea that redemption can come in the form of true beliefs. In the literary culture that has been emerging during the last two hundred years, the question “Is it true?” has yielded to the question “What’s new?” Heidegger thought that that change was a decline, a shift from serious thinking to mere gossipy curiosity.  

It is worthwhile, therefore, to carefully watch the vicissitudes of philosophy, as they are not a peripheral theme significant only to connoisseurs. On the contrary it is a *leitmotif*, a relevant testimony of change which determines the condition of culture as a whole. The crisis of philosophy helps us to become aware of tendencies whose consequences reach far beyond its borders. It can also be treated, to use Nietzsche’s expression, as one of the most important elements of the ‘symptomatology of modernity.’ Philosophy is the mirror of our times.  

Rorty’s thinking in regard to philosophy is crucial. His conclusions reach far beyond the confines of philosophy. They concern the history of culture or, simply, history. Witnessing the fall of the authority of Plato’s ‘story’ we can say without doubt that philosophers can no longer usurp the right to delineate the border between truth and illusion. They can no longer serve as the masters of disillusion. Philosophy can no longer fight the battle for truth while at the same time opposing opinion.  

Philosophical concepts, as Rorty stresses, are always only a certain historical theme; philosophical tales are bound to age sooner or later. Thus, philosophers cannot be the judges in disputes over truth, fiction and illusion. They move in a circle of interpretations and stories they themselves have created, and the importance of these stories can in time seem deceptive. An undisputable, unconditionally recognized repertoire of philosophical questions and subjects does not exist. The status of philosophy is problematic, if only on account of the ‘repertoire’ problems it encounters today.  

Philosophers’ explanations of how the mind is related to the brain, or of how there can be a place for value in a world of fact, or of how free will and mechanism might be reconciled, do not intrigue most contemporary intellectuals. [...] Solving those very problems was all-important for contemporaries of Spinoza, but when today’s philosophy professors insist that they are “perennial”, or that they remain “fundamental,” nobody listens.  

What is more, philosophy is undergoing a breakthrough period, which sees everything dramatically changing. It is hard to think of a better example than the great rebellion initiated by Nietzsche and aimed against metaphysics – a tribal

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364 Ibid., p. 92.  
murder committed by the philosophers themselves. Let us remind ourselves of the key question: can the very people who wander in the labyrinth of deception become the arbiters of truth? The question is even more complicated because what is at stake is not philosophy alone. The fall of philosophy is a symptom of a fall much wider in scope. It concerns a concept of thinking linked to the Platonic fable, which facilitates the separation of truth from deception.

To return to Rorty, this is not the same as saying that the idea of truth itself has fallen. He argues that all we have to do is forget traditional concepts which encourage the search for truth hidden in things. Following the fundamental rule of pragmatism, Rorty rejects representationalism. ‘So Rorty’s aim, like ours, is to free us from the old mediational epistemology, which comes down to us from Descartes.’ In the well-known work Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Rorty embarks upon a thorough criticism of epistemological patterns linked to the idea of representation. He argues that the concept of cognition, which assumes the existence of an independent reason separate from things and works like a mirror showing truth understood as the adequate image of these things, is not an inviolable axiom or something we can take for granted. It is only a typical trait of philosophical tradition, the lifespan of which is slowly coming to an end. The ‘mind’ is the philosophers’ ‘invention.’ (In the work mentioned, Rorty devotes a whole chapter to this issue). It is an invention, which has played a large role in shaping our idea of truth, thinking and reality.

We have grown accustomed to think that ‘Discussions in the philosophy of mind usually start off by assuming that everybody has always known how to divide the world into the mental and the physical – that this distinction is commonsensical and intuitive, even if that between two sorts of “stuff,” material and immaterial, is philosophical and baffling.’ A dualistic concept, which separates body from mind and sets the mind against things, was a peculiar revealed truth of philosophy; it imparted a characteristic feature of culture. But, much like other great philosophical concepts, it is also extremely problematic. Pragmatism, to reiterate, will overthrow the concept of thought based on the idea of representation. The dualist distinctions, the alleged axioms, which create the basis of the Cartesian tradition, are treated by Rorty as ‘purported intuitions.’ They continue to play an extremely

368 Ibid., p. 17.
369 Ibid.
important part in creating an image of the world of thought, allegedly incontestable, and in various concepts of validation linked to the concept of truth. It is these thoughts and concepts that shape, as Rorty puts it, ‘an ultimate context for thought.’ The twentieth century however, will bring profound changes. Let us cite a slightly longer excerpt of Rorty’s argument:

Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey are in agreement that the notion of Knowledge as accurate representation, made possible by special mental processes, and intelligible through a general theory of representation, needs to be abandoned. For all three, the notions of “foundations of knowledge” and of philosophy as revolving around the Cartesian attempt to answer the epistemological skeptic are set aside. Further, they set aside the notion of “the mind” common to Descartes, Locke, and Kant – as a special subject of study, located in inner space, containing elements or processes which make knowledge possible.

‘They set aside,’ one could say, the context in which the idea of a mind-mirror and truth, treated as an adequate picture of things, could take shape. This is the course that Rorty enthusiastically supports while at the same time rejecting the concept of truth linked to the idea of representation.

So, there is no truth to be found in things; truthfulness is an attribute of ideas. ‘Truth happens to an idea’ to recall the famous statement made by William James. What we think, what we say, always has content. Rorty argues that when evaluating a concept or view, we should refrain from introducing restrictive rules of exclusion by appealing to some abstract, dogmatic criteria of truthfulness. ‘I try to avoid the expression devoid of meaning’ notes Rorty during the Sorbonne debate, mentioned in the introduction. ‘Any linguistic expression […] has a meaning if you give it one.’ Pragmatists do not delve into whether a ‘vocabulary possess meaning or not, whether it raises real or unreal problems, but whether the resolution of that debate will have an effect in practice, whether it will be useful.’ If a debate has no practical significance, then it has no philosophical significance.

The conflict between realists and anti-realists can be irrelevant. Rorty has no intention of arguing over ‘reality,’ over when our views refer to ‘realities’ and when they touch upon illusion; when, in other words, they are ‘irrelevant.’ Such a dispute would be a waste of time. In keeping with the rules of the new way of

370 Ibid., p. 5.
371 Ibid.
373 Ibid., 34.
374 Ibid.
thinking, which rejects the juxtaposition of the will to truth against the will to delusion, everything is to be determined by practical effects.

So? Are we allowed to say anything? Are no restrictions needed? Is the pursuit of credibility not required? Can we rely unreservedly on spontaneous reactions? Things are not that clear. Rorty thinks we need the idea of truth and the concept of credibility to facilitate communication or, in other words, we need to make use of language without exposing ourselves to ridicule. Of course, solutions should be sought in the realm of pragmatism.

Richard Rorty had to fight off charges of relativism. He thought them totally unsubstantiated. Indeed, he insisted that one could speak about relativism in a sensible way only when defending the traditional formula of ‘objective’ truth, a truth which resides ‘out there.’ He treated this view as philosophical superstition, which pragmatism refutes. ‘We need to make a distinction between the claim that the world is out there and the claim that truth is out there,’ he explained.375 The first statement is quite obvious – there are no grounds to doubt it. The second has become the subject of much debate. According to the pragmatists, every truth denotes a certain relationship; there are no independent truths existing separately from systems of relationships forged by human activity, thinking and action. For this reason the statement that truth exists ‘out there’ should be rejected. ‘To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations. Truth cannot be out there – cannot exist independently of the human mind – because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there.’376 Therefore all charges against relativism must be dropped. Nobody is able to formulate a statement which is not an example of a specific relationship, is not testament to a specific experience and a distinct point of view. Each utterance, each thought, is conditioned; it takes shape in specific conditions and a specific context. An ‘objective’ way of looking at things does not exist. Therefore, it is pointless to set that which is relative against that which is objective. ‘Philosophers are called “relativists” when they do not accept the Greek distinction between the way things are in themselves and the relations which they have to other things, and in particular to human needs and interests.’377 For a long time this distinction constituted the inseparable basis of philosophizing.

376 Ibid., p. 5.
the ‘ultimate context’ of thinking to use Rorty’s words. It cast a spell enchanting
the world of thought. Life went on in the shadow of Plato and Kant. Those who
dared to object were called ‘relativists.’ This happened to John Dewey, who in
Rorty’s words ‘was a thinker who spent 60 years trying to get us out from under
the thrall of Plato and Kant’³⁷⁸ These attempts still continue, ‘but of course,’ he
adds ‘we pragmatists never call ourselves relativists. Usually we define ourselves
in negative terms. We call ourselves “anti-Platonists,” “antimetaphysicians,” or
“antifoundationalists”’³⁷⁹

So how does Richard Rorty, the anti-Platonist, try to solve the problem of
truth while throwing off the bonds tradition imposes? By rejecting the concept
of cognition and knowledge related to models of ‘philosophy-as-epistemology’
influenced by Descartes and Kant.³⁸⁰ He seeks a solution which allows him to go
beyond the epistemological abstractions of the ‘cognitive mind’ and capture the
genuine sense of human experience.

The concept of ‘contingency’ plays a key role in Rorty’s thought. Contingency
concerns both the language and cognizance. This underpins all our ‘truths.’ The
basis of every language is vocabulary, there is no unchangeable, definitive vo-
cabulary which would delineate the framework of human cognizance. On the
contrary, even the most superficial knowledge of history reveals the number
of changes vocabularies undergo. Recent history leaves not the slightest doubt.
‘About two hundred years ago, the idea that truth was made rather than found
began to take hold of the imagination of Europe. The French Revolution had
shown that the whole vocabulary of social relations, and the whole spectrum of
social institutions, could be replaced almost overnight.’³⁸¹ We have thus become
revolutionaries; we have rejected the idea of a canon. Language has been lib-
erated from the bonds of tradition. New vocabularies are beginning to emerge
suited to new forms of experience. The ‘disenchantment’ of language becomes a
key feature of modern awareness. The concept of ‘word play’ replaces the concept
of the divine logos – the ultimate truth inherent in a word. The former, Rorty
argues, makes it possible to adequately present the subject of thought. Moving
within the parameters of a certain vocabulary we try to create configurations,
which give meaning to our experience. We are the authors of these dictionaries.
We create all sorts of truths within this framework. There is no higher power, no

³⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 50.
³⁷⁹ Ibid.
³⁸⁰ M. Williams, ‘Rorty on Knowledge and Truth,’ in Ch. Guignon and D. Hiley (eds.),
Richard Rorty, p. 64.
³⁸¹ Rorty, Contingency, p. 3.
model, which would allow us to appeal to the concept of necessity. Our experience is not subject to the power of necessity – we are doomed to contingency; to experiments and search. This is where we play our ‘word games’ in an attempt to give the fullest expression to our intentions. Our beliefs linked to these ‘word games’ are created on this plane. ‘The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak.’

So, there is no objective framework in which our cognizance could take shape. The latter, very much like language, is contingent. It is a configuration of various motivations, which we are sometimes unable to register, describe and explain. By adopting Rorty’s point of view we must reject patterns forced upon us by religion and metaphysics referring to the concept of spirit, reason and mind, and suggest the existence of an integrated center of thought and will. Rorty is a thinker who draws all necessary conclusions from the lessons of Freud – he devotes much attention to Freud’s ideas in his book *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. Thus, he warns against overestimating the role of consciousness. Let us set aside the illusion of an independent mind and the illusion of a disciplined conscience. Our life flows in another current. It lacks transparency and is puzzling despite the desperate solutions imposed by the philosophy of awareness. Thanks to Freud, today we are able to understand this. Likewise, Rorty is also faithful to the teachings of Nietzsche and his radical critique of the Cartesian concept of subject, which assumes the unalterable existence of internal structures of consciousness. ‘Rather, he saw self-knowledge as self-creation.’

It is a process which can only marginally reflect preconceived assumptions, limiting the significance of contingency.

The self cannot be an independent center of truth. The model of truth created by ‘philosophy-as-epistemology’ is, according to Rorty, totally useless. So where are we to get our knowledge of truth, how can we imagine its source? What are we to do after we have rejected all conventions relating to the vocabulary of epistemology? What should we judge important, binding, confirmed? What gauges of truth and credibility can we accept when forfeiting traditional, authoritative solutions dictated by concepts of ‘objective truth’?

The shortest answer to these questions is found in the term ‘conversation.’ ‘We have no trustworthy means of deciding what to accept as the truth other

382 Ibid., p. 6. For more see J. Rouse, ‘From Realism or Antirealism to Science as Solidarity,’ in Ch. Guignon and D. Hiley (eds.), *Richard Rorty*, pp. 81–104.
383 Ibid., p. 27.
than what goes on in the conversation,’ writes Gary Gutting, in his explanation of Rorty’s position.\textsuperscript{384} So truth is connected to interpretation. Each conversation represents an exchange of thought, it leads to the confrontation of different standpoints, it forces one to venture outside one’s own narrow point of view, and is therefore an interpretation. In this way our experience is subject to the test of joint judgment, and our way of thinking is free from the perils of being one-sided. By talking, we interpret reality and at the same time try to arrive at joint arrangements and decisions. Acting together we create our truths.

The fact this formula of truth has been accepted signifies that we are moving away from traditionally understood epistemology (which highlights the concept of the cognitive mind) to hermeneutics. We are ready to accept that all truths are linked to our ability to understand, are fashioned by the resources offered by a particular language and practice, which determines how these resources are used. Communicative practices become more important than ‘objective’ knowledge of ‘objects’ existing independently. The transition from epistemology to hermeneutics represents a genuine turning point, the importance of which Rorty stressed. What is at stake is not the fate of philosophy alone, although that is significant, but the fortunes of culture itself. What is at stake is the gradual elimination of the ‘genes’ of subordination, the elimination of all forms of authoritative thinking resulting from epistemological formulas of validation. Doing away with them paves the way to creating a culture free from the stigma of authoritarianism. ‘Epistemology,’ acknowledges Georgia Warnke, ‘functions as a cultural overseer.’ It imposes rules of thought which require that we build on a foundation of epistemology. A hermeneutical approach frees us from this forced subordination. According to Rorty, hermeneutics paves the way to ‘functioning without preexisting grounds.’\textsuperscript{385} Truth is to ensue from an arrangement. The idea of an indispensable foundation is replaced by the idea of a joint judgment. (Rorty deals with this subject in the last chapter of \textit{Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature}).\textsuperscript{386} ‘This solution alone, Rorty concludes, can consolidate the potential of democratic liberal culture.

But this stance marks a severance with the Enlightenment tradition, which demanded an objective enhancement of truth and emphasized the concept of nature, laws of nature and awarded reason (philosophy) the role of supreme

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authority able to gauge credibility. Liberal culture, as Rorty emphasizes, needs no philosophical basis, or set of steadfast principles which resemble revealed truths. He believes that ‘liberal culture needs an improved self-description rather than a set of foundations. The idea that it ought to have foundations was the result of Enlightenment scientism, which was in turn a survival of the religious need to have human projects underwritten by a non-human authority.’

We must sever our ties to Enlightenment scientism, in Rorty’s opinion. Faith in the exceptional calling of science, which appeals to ‘objective’ truths, charts the framework of our life and differs little from religious faith. The liberal community must disengage itself from this faith, which, moreover, excludes unrestricted judgment and exploration responsible for shaping the most promising new forms of life. The authority of science is overwhelming and enforces the cult of a foundation, the harness of ‘objectivity.’ Rorty is consistent in emphasizing his admiration for John Dewey and sees himself as his protégé, but does not share his enthusiasm for science. He indicates clearly, ‘I also said that literature and politics are the spheres to which contemporary intellectuals look when they worry about ends rather than about means’ and adds, ‘We need a redescription of liberalism as the hope that culture as a whole can be “poeticized” rather than as the Enlightenment hope that it can be “rationalized” or “scientized.”’ The tradition of the Enlightenment becomes a hurdle. Rorty notes plainly ‘The vocabulary of Enlightenment rationalism, although it was essential to the beginnings of liberal democracy, has become an impediment to the preservation and progress of democratic societies.’

This does not suggest however, that we are parting with the concept of rationality itself. Rationality, Rorty suggests, should continue to play a basic role in culture. But the concept itself should not be determined by the epistemological gauges laid down by the scientific tradition of the Enlightenment. ‘I want to define rationality as the habit of attaining our ends by persuasion rather than force. As I see it, the opposition between rationality and irrationality is simply the opposition between words and blows.’ One could say that we are dealing with a model of conversational rationality. Departing from the Enlightenment tradition, Rorty speaks of ‘conversational philosophy.’ The point is to put

387 Rorty, Contingency, 52.
388 Ibid., p. 53.
389 Ibid., p. 44.
390 Niżnik and Sanders, Debating the State of Philosophy, p. 45.
philosophy in a new and different place within culture. This is the abdication of philosophy which tries to settle everything, squandering the authority of epistemology; which overwhelms with its weight, and approaches 'scholastic' forms, of which Rorty speaks reluctantly. A philosophy which seeks inspiration in a model of conversation would be an intermediary trying to facilitate the discovery of important things, suggesting a certain strategy, creating the rules, in Rorty’s words, of 'cultural policy.' But philosophy’s representatives should not overestimate their role; they ‘are usually sympathetic to Hegel’s suggestion that “philosophy is its time held in thought.” They are inclined to think that philosophy makes progress not by solving problems but by replacing old problems with new problems – that is, problems created by one use of words with problems created by another use of words.'

We can therefore say that Kant’s ‘free use of reason,’ the Kantian gauge of freedom, should today be seen as the ‘free use of language.’ This draws on Rorty’s view that our image of the world and understanding of our own actions always depends on the resources of a given language. A change of vocabulary entails the unveiling of a new plane of communication. The debunking of the mirror metaphor makes it possible to reflect on innovations and modifications fearlessly and without bias. Thereby, the mechanisms of a coercion of sorts, as introduced by epistemology lavish with its use of ‘reality’ and establishing the dichotomy of truth and illusion, becomes irrelevant. ‘We hope to replace the reality – appearance distinction with the distinction between the more useful and the less useful. So we say that the vocabulary of Greek metaphysics and Christian theology – the vocabulary used in what Heidegger called “the onto-theological tradition” – was a useful one for our ancestors’ purposes.’ It follows that if we adopt this approach, all ‘strong’ notions of reality should be treated as superstition resulting from the ‘onto-theological tradition.’ Once discarded, this becomes the moment of genuine emancipation. Nothing really binds us. Language and the self are ‘contingent,’ as Rorty claims. In these circumstances can we still contemplate normative solutions or binding arrangements? To reiterate, and to focus on the key point, only agreement can become the basis for all decisions.

A rationally functioning community (that is, a community which, according to the assumptions made by Rorty substitutes violence with arguments) needs to become a debating community. Everything, to use Rorty’s words, should be decided by ‘language encounters.’ ‘A liberal society is one which is content to call

392 Ibid., p. 127.
393 Niżnik and Sanders, p. 56.
“true” (or “right” or “just”) whatever the outcome of undistorted communication happens to be, whatever view wins in a free and open encounter. All truths are, therefore, temporary. Final truths are ruled out. An unrestrained freedom to question is the basic rule in the system of ‘language encounters.’ However, truth based on agreement cannot aspire to the status awarded to the concept of truth by epistemology. Everything is finally settled and decided by agreement, which takes on meaning in a particular circle. Truths are no longer general as they are linked to a concrete vocabulary and concrete type of experience. These are always ‘our’ truths – we cannot demand that they be respected outside the context of their being established. One could say that such a concept of justification, as Festenstein stresses, is ‘ethnocentric.’ Rorty himself used this expression although he did not do so consistently. ‘Ethnocentrism’ is a metaphorical concept intended to draw attention to the critical change in the way of thinking and justifying, which have become more weighty following their separation from metaphysics. It should not be treated too literally in a way that is narrowing, by adopting strict ethnological criteria. Let’s not forget that the specifically understood ‘ethnocentrism’ we may have in mind when we speak of Rorty’s thought is a typical feature of liberal culture. It should therefore be directly associated with the relinquishment of violence as opposed to the creation of barriers and tribal acrimony. The point is not to create bastions of particular truths but to measure all truths with the modest gauge of specific experience and vocabulary. This is how we should view ‘ethnocentrism.’ At the same time we should keep in mind, that every truth can be tested by introducing it into the sphere of ‘language encounters.’ ‘Ethnocentric’ truths, according to Rorty, are never dogmatic. The liberal community is also only ‘contingent,’ according to Rorty; it is the product of time and circumstance rather than a manifestation of the law of ‘nature’ or the ‘irreversible’ laws of history.

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394 Rorty, Contingency, p. 67.
395 Festenstein, pp. 115–125.
5. The New Way of Thinking – *Animal Laborans* and the Appeal of Delusion

To what extent can we benefit from the new way of thinking? Is the dismissal of the credibility model, based on the opposition between truth and illusion, a convincing solution? Perhaps the will to illusion emerges triumphant precisely as the notion of illusion disappears? Does a light-hearted thought carry any weight at all? And finally, the crucial question, how convincing is Rorty? Have all doubts been cast out? Does the primacy of the jointly established ‘vocabulary’ really enable us to soar above the truth/deception dichotomy? Are ‘language encounters,’ of which Rorty speaks, a guarantee of the innocence of all language practices? Hence, can ‘pure’ language exist – a language of complete understanding? And, following on from this, can ‘innocent’ truths exist, incapable of doing harm, always serving us well, never creating a perilous sphere of ambiguity or illusion?

Charles Taylor was polemical about Rorty’s claims that it is impossible for such truths to exist. There is no ‘pure’ language to shape an ideal, undisturbed and absolutely transparent communicative situation. Thinking is not a free experiment based on words, and language does not resemble toy building blocks creating structures purely for fun. Words constitute links in a chain. The nature of our communicative practice is decided by our being in the world. Language is immersed in reality: ‘living with things involves a certain kind of understanding.’

All utterances are gauged in terms of their adequacy or inadequacy and therefore the difference between truth and illusion cannot easily be erased. Understanding signifies the defeat of the temptation of illusion. Language makes demands on us, it is always saturated with content. ‘We in a sense “know” much more than we know.’ Language lives in us and has a strong influence on what we think, even when what is concerned is ‘the as-yet-unarticulated sense we have of things.’ So words are not merely a ‘work program,’ as James thought. Such an assumption can be very dangerous as it creates the illusion that language is ‘transparent,’ devoid of hidden obstacles, an infallible instrument obedient to all intentions and

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397 Ibid., p. 171.
purposes. At the point of departure, Taylor notes, we have to consider the ‘reality of contact with the real world.’ And this is the métier of language.

Thus the relinquishing of ‘meditative epistemology,’ which Rorty opposes so categorically, does not indicate a praiseworthy purification, or the freeing of language from the burden of redundant meanings. The concept of one-track semantics, directly realizing the potential of a specific, fully accepted and transparent ‘vocabulary,’ does not preclude the existence of serious questions. The idea fuels belief in the self-sufficiency of unhampered and casually formed ‘vocabularies.’ The temptation of self-sufficiency is not innocent; it materializes in a manner which can raise serious doubts. Single-track vocabularies can easily become hotbeds of fantasy. They are incapable of defending against illusion as they lack points of reference; they can count only on themselves.

In fact, uniformity, which crowds out the truth/illusion dichotomy has become a serious problem. Transformations which discredit ‘meditative epistemology’ can be seen as a crucial cultural shift. We are witness to the development of a culture which has not only rejected metaphysics, but all deep reflection, and glorifies a one-dimensional language: the language of instantaneous broadcasting, exempt from all examination, which has no external points of reference. The aversion to both meditation and the cultivation of doubt (which encourages the contemplation of the distinction between truth and deception) has been welcomed as a new opportunity. The ‘new way of thinking’ is becoming popular despite philosophical advice. Its supporters are usually unaware that such advice exists. They are busking it, so to speak. Surprisingly, a one-dimensional ‘light’ language has become the most loyal ally of illusion.

Let us begin most importantly with the predominance of technology, which has become an irrefutable fact. We are living in a technological world, which has a number of serious and far-reaching consequences. A discussion of technology must first take into account the peculiar mindset it creates, and not the instruments. The development of tools is linked to the development of a certain type of thought. Martin Heidegger got to the heart of the matter in his treatise *Overcoming Metaphysics.* ‘The decline has already taken place. […] Its course is ordered historico-technologically in the sense of the last stage of metaphysics.’

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398 Ibid., p. 175.
400 Ibid., p. 86.
name “technology” is understood here in such an essential way that its meaning coincides with the term “completed metaphysics.”

The ‘order’ dictated by technology is, in a sense, the fullest expression of the way of thinking, achieved through the separation of ‘subject’ and ‘object.’ This way of thinking enabled the process of ‘bringing-forth,’ to introduce Heidegger’s terminology. ‘Bringing-forth,’ Heidegger explains, ‘brings out of concealment into unconcealment.’ This is how a circle of ‘things,’ a circle of ‘objects,’ begins to envelop the human being, providing objects which can be seen, which can be observed and which can be processed. ‘How does objectivity come to have the character of constituting the essential being of beings as such?’ Therefore, knowledge, which is bringing-forth from ‘unconcealment,’ and ‘bringing–forth,’ which signifies using and assimilating what is known, will be directly linked together. The history of metaphysics and the history of technology flow in the same stream. For this reason technology should be seen as the ‘completion of metaphysics,’ to recall Heidegger’s thesis.

Metaphysics however, has a particular meaning as it allows us to view the world as an ‘object.’ ‘[T]he last stage of metaphysics’ will reveal the extreme consequences of this approach, including some very nasty ones which puts the human being in an awkward position. As The Question Concerning Technology emphasizes, although technology is based on ‘discovery’ and inspires creative passion, it is also a quest to bring things under control, of ‘adjusting’ as Heidegger defines it, in an attempt to impose a discipline of purpose. By developing technology, man ‘sets nature.’ This will become relevant with the dawn of modernity. “The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging Herausfordern, which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such.” A purely instrumental attitude takes center stage. The world has become an ‘object’ stripped of all mystery. Its magnificence is trampled; modern science lays it bare to be exposed as a trophy. Everything is to serve aims dictated from the position of the ‘revealers,’ from the position of dominance. Heidegger sees a certain ‘monstrousness’ here.

401 Ibid., p. 93.
403 Ibid.
406 Ibid.
407 Ibid., p. 321.
The price we will pay for the discoveries of technology will be enormous. The price will be humanity. The ‘order’ imposed by technology brings with it the renouncing of the truth of ‘being,’ together with the ‘completion of metaphysics.’ Only that which is not genuine will become genuine. The world viewed as an ‘object’ dictates the absolute primacy of objects. Today we seek truth in objects alone. We discover it within specific subject areas thanks to applications provided by technology. That which does not guarantee an effective ‘adjustment’ in line with technology, becomes irrelevant. In the end, human beings no longer have any choice – they must become assimilated in the sphere of objects, adopting the rules of technological rationality. And so the unquestionable power of technology is enforced. ‘This order is the last arrangement of what has ended in the illusion of a reality whose effects work in an irresistible way, because they claim to be able to get along without an un-concealment of the essence of Being.’

We are nearing the moment of breakthrough: ‘Collapse and desolation find their adequate occurrence in the fact that metaphysical man, the animal rationale, gets fixed as the laboring animal.’

Animal laborans lives in a closed circle, where everything is arranged and set. There are no dilemmas. Science delivers all the answers. All problems are solved by technology. But in fact, the world is descending into a void. Metaphysics is according to Heidegger, ‘the misfortune of the West.’ Its ultimate truth is expressed by the ‘will to will.’ The blind urge to act is a terrifying vision. The ‘will to will,’ writes Heidegger, ‘forces the calculation and arrangement of everything for itself as the basic forms of appearance, only, however for the unconditionally protractible guarantee of itself.’

History is coming to an end – the circle is closing. An obsessive uniformity becomes a fact. ‘The correctness of the will to will is the unconditional and complete guaranteeing of itself. What is in accordance with its will is correct and in order, because the will to will itself is the only order.’ Let us act then, let us change. The will to will leaves nothing untouched. The way forward is simple: further development of technology, whilst excluding reflection which leads to questions; the gradual restriction of knowledge devoid of technological use; rejecting the idea of ‘truth’ associated with looking deeply or, to use Heidegger’s words, ‘unsecrecy,’ pushing it to the margins of spent, out of date thoughts. Truth has already been established. It must follow the dynamics of the ‘will to will.’ Truth ‘viewed in this sense – a truth which has import,

408 Heidegger, ‘Overcoming Metaphysics,’ p. 86.
409 Ibid.
410 Ibid., p. 93.
411 Ibid., p. 100.
which counts across the globe and across history – consists of only that which is conducive to the development of technology. This truth includes of course all the achievements of science. We find ourselves in a closed circle. We can no longer avoid the conclusion that opposition to technology is irrational. Philosophy, says Heidegger, is ‘a prey to the derivatives of metaphysics, that is of physics in the broadest sense, which includes the physics of life and man, biology and psychology.’\textsuperscript{412} The criteria of reason are shaped in this sphere only. Systems of knowledge within which seminal questions concerning the nature of human action can be posed, are becoming narrower in keeping with the criteria of technological reason.

Time now to come to a conclusion. To what extent does technology’s expansion spur on the temptations of the new way of thinking, which eliminates the truth/deception dichotomy? The answer is, of course, to a great extent. Let us for the last time give the floor to Heidegger: ‘Technology as the highest form of rational consciousness, technologically interpreted, and the lack of reflection as the arranged powerlessness, opaque to itself, to attain a relation to what is worthy of question, belong together: they are the same thing.’\textsuperscript{413} That is a powerful conclusion. Technology rules out reflection and calls for the continuous duplication of rationality formulas which serve the interests of technology. This lack of reflection, understood as a precondition of the very ability to think, means that the search for the distinction between truth and illusion becomes impossible.

This technological ‘attitude,’ the creation of an object, encourages us to form a one-dimensional picture of the world. Just one glance at the high-tech domain of culture is enough to see that it encourages the consolidation of fantasy. The point at which the relationship between thinking and that ‘which is worthy of question’ breaks down is just a short step away from the world of illusion. It is a world in which the horror associated with the emptiness Heidegger uncovered transforms into the infantile optimism of pop-culture which advocates entertainment as a fail-proof remedy. The ‘working animal’ has turned away from the world of thought – it yearns for entertainment.

The creation of the world of entertainment will become one of the key technological applications of reason. Entertainment today clearly competes with science. It can even make its own demands on science; science dressed up as entertainment is popular and fashionable. To combine entertainment and science is no longer shocking. Technological rationality formulas cannot arm reason

\textsuperscript{412} Ibid., p. 99.
\textsuperscript{413} Ibid.
with the weaponry needed to defeat illusion. Instead they speak about truth and error (treated as the violation of method), but not truth and deception. The latter distinction is becoming meaningless. This problem was raised by Max Horkheimer in his critique of ‘instrumental reason.’

Great philosophical systems, such as those of Plato and Aristotle, scholasticism, and German idealism were founded on an objective theory of reason. It aimed at evolving a comprehensive system, or hierarchy, of all beings, including man and his aims. The degree of reasonableness of a man’s life could be determined according to its harmony with this totality.\textsuperscript{414}

This objective notion of reason will be defeated. The modern age will introduce the idea of subjective reason which will become its typical feature. ‘There is a fundamental difference between this theory, according to which reason is a principle inherent in reality, and the doctrine that reason is a subjective faculty of the mind. According to the latter, the subject alone can genuinely have reason.’\textsuperscript{415} Thus, all objective measures of reason disappear: ‘there is no reasonable aim as such, and to discuss the superiority of one aim over another in terms of reason becomes meaningless.’\textsuperscript{416} This, of course, has far reaching consequences. Rationality is, in a sense, deprived of content; the notion of objective meaning loses its importance. ‘The present crisis of reason consists fundamentally in the fact that at a certain point thinking either became incapable of conceiving such objectivity at all or began to negate it as delusion.’\textsuperscript{417} The situation is reversed: all interpretations of human experience, which venture outside the sphere of individual convictions, can now be treated as delusion. Ultimately the rejection of religion and metaphysics will deprive reason of its status as a gauge to eliminate fantasy. In the new reality ‘In the end, no particular reality can seem reasonable \textit{per se}; all the basic concepts, emptied of their content, have come to be only formal shells. As reason is subjectivized, it also becomes formalized.’\textsuperscript{418} Therefore, truth becomes the projection of subjective beliefs. Reason is determined by form alone – a cloak, which takes on the appearance of rational judgment. Anything that disagrees with our judgment can be called deceptive. ‘Formal’ reason is no longer an authority.

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415 Ibid., p. 5.
416 Ibid., p. 6.
417 Ibid., p. 7.
418 Ibid.
\end{flushright}
The acceptability of ideals, the criteria of our actions and beliefs, the leading principles of ethics and politics, all our ultimate decisions are made to depend upon factors other than reason. They are supposed to be matters of choice and predilection, and it has become meaningless to speak of truth in making practical moral, or esthetic decisions.\(^{419}\)

So, without exaggeration, it can be said that the advanced *pauperization* of reason has become a fact. Reason no longer has at its disposal riches, capital or a legacy commanding respect. It is becoming a dexterous acrobat swinging back and forth in a sphere of beliefs scattered here and there. It lacks, however, any authority to make selection possible. Instrumental reason is incapable of separating truth from illusion and reality from fiction. ‘The philosophical systems of objective reason implied the conviction that an all-embracing or fundamental structure of being could be discovered and a conception of human destination derived from it.’\(^{420}\) The concepts of truth and illusion could not have been treated freely then. The subjective sense of what is right is yet to make any decisions about anything. Instrumental reason resembles a knight-errant who becomes defenseless in the face of illusion, just as Cervantes’ famous hero. ‘The particular preempts the place of the universal.’\(^{421}\) Rationality has become episodic or fragmentary. Sensible fragments do not necessarily combine to make a sensible whole. Don Quixote acted reasonably and methodically. Before he started off on his journey, he diligently assembled his belongings and equipment. Cervantes’ description of Don Quixote cleaning his weapons shows him to be a far-sighted man planning each move in detail. Don Quixote, then, acted rationally, perhaps only his goals seemed puzzling. As our hero ‘conceived the strangest notion that ever took shape in a madman’s head […] to become a knight errant […] to practice all those activities that he knew from his books were practiced by knights errant redressing all kinds of grievances […] and thus gain eternal fame and renown.’\(^{422}\) Hence, a flash of reason can sometimes be confused with a flash of madness.

Still, ‘instrumental reason’ tries to create its own realm. It becomes an overwhelming power; a power of pauperization. ‘Any use transcending auxiliary, technical summarization of factual data has been eliminated as a last trace of superstition.’\(^{423}\) The problem is that factual evidence can easily be the factual

\(^{419}\) Ibid., pp. 7–8.
\(^{420}\) Ibid., p. 12.
\(^{421}\) Ibid., p. 20.
\(^{423}\) Horkheimer, p. 21.
evidence of fantasy and deception based on the projection of a purely subjective image, albeit one that is created according to certain procedures and patterns. In these circumstances, the application of this method itself becomes a goal, which determines the rationality of the undertaking.

The pauperization of reason is a crucial problem. It thwarts the effective selection of values. It precludes the interpretation of human experience from the position of ideas and ideals.

According to the philosophy of the average modern intellectual, there is only one authority, namely science, conceived as the classification of facts and calculation of probabilities. The statement that justice and freedom are better in themselves than injustice and oppression is scientifically unverifiable and useless. So it is science which contributes to the pauperization of reason. This is an astonishing conclusion in terms of the atmosphere of the age. Science linked to technology, prescribing purely instrumental patterns of thought, continues to strengthen the premises of pauperization. But the scope of this pauperization is much wider: instrumental reason has taken over all areas of life. Keeping with the tone of the ‘Frankfurt school’ approach, let us briefly look at the fate of culture. The expansion of instrumental reason means that only that which becomes high-tech and is squeezed into the framework of a ‘rational’ form will have any **raison d’être**, irrespective of its content. Increasingly, culture becomes subordinate to the power of a rational form, in other words, the power of technology. Content has become immaterial. Every illusion, every deception can become an important piece of content. Formal reason, let us not forget, rules only over form.

Technological rationality is realized as the power of the system. To repeat: subjective reason is purely formal, its ideas are ‘empty shells.’ It finds life, so to say, in the application of methods. Methods of action are dictated by technology; instrumental reason is no longer able to accept any other authority. This is a closed system and anything in conflict with the system must be ruled out as irrational. ‘Each branch of culture is unanimous with itself and all are unanimous together’ as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer acknowledged in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Culture is produced using the industry method, its ‘artworks’ become commodities. The German philosophers’ work appeared for the first time in 1949, which, it could be said, was a long time ago. But despite the

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424  Ibid., p. 24.
years, their ideas have not lost their appeal or significance. On the contrary, they have become more conspicuous.

Manufacturing, dependent on modern technology, naturally leads to uniformity. ‘All mass culture under monopoly,’ argues the Dialectic of Enlightenment, ‘is identical and the contours of its skeleton, the conceptual armature fabricated by monopoly, are beginning to stand out.’ In the broadest sense, instrumental reason has the monopoly of course. It dictates the methods of action, and the nature of products. The method naturally leaves an imprint on the products but otherwise they lack an independent character. It is becoming increasingly easy to discern poverty and monotony disguised by variety:

the relentless unity of culture industry bears witness to the emergent unity of politics. Sharp distinctions like those between A and B films, or between short stories published in magazines in different price segments, do not so much reflect real differences as assist in the classification, organization, and identification of consumers.

The existence of variety creates the impression of splendor and suggests richness of content. But the opposite is true: molds dominate. It is easy to decipher the strategy of options which determine the nature of mass production. The same theme is repeated and processed to give the effect of diversity. Diversity, however, only in appearance. ‘Not only do hit songs, stars, and soap operas conform to types recurring cyclically as rigid invariants, but the specific content of productions, the seemingly variable element, is itself derived from those types.’

Everything is subordinate to a plan and is subject to the rules of ‘general construction.’ The technological solution is the fullest expression of all intentions. The rest is just a ‘shell.’ Technological solutions make it possible to achieve the planned effects: ‘the culture industry has developed in conjunction with the predominance of the effect, the tangible performance, the technical detail, over the work, which once carried the idea and was liquidated with it.’ No thought can any longer arise outside the system. We are approaching a time when the so-called mass-media will become emancipated and able to ‘slay’ reality. It becomes almost impossible to defend against illusion. Technological rationality destroys any criticism which could penetrate to the core of the problem.

Artists become helpless. Intellectuals and academicians, likewise. The predominance of the system is absolute. Anything that violates the system’s priorities

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426 Ibid., p. 95.
427 Ibid., pp. 96–7.
428 Ibid., p. 98.
429 Ibid., p. 99.
stands no chance of winning sympathy or gaining prominence. Only the effect counts and the effects arise within the system. Helplessness, the lack of genuine criticism, and enthusiastic conformism generates a culture dominated by the impact of technology, enslaved by the logic of manufacturing. The poverty of reason becomes increasingly obvious, as Theodor Adorno points out in *Minima Moralia*:

> While the schools drill people in speech as in first aid for road-accident victims of and in glider-construction, the pupils become increasingly mute. They can give lectures; every sentence qualifies them for the microphone, before which they are placed as spokesmen for the average; but their capacity for speaking to each other is stifled.\(^{430}\)

Words become mere stage props. Intellectuals become ventriloquists, ashamed of their own voice. Only catchphrases sound right. Thinking must be done in hiding. Thoughts, especially the more complex ones, are not that attractive; they do not sell well. ‘Speaking takes on a malevolent set of gestures. It is sportified. Speakers seek to pile up points.’\(^{431}\) The goal is to be liked, to say things that please. But this charm offensive fails to create important healthy thoughts. In fact, the opposite is true: everything finally is an aberration. Adorno claims that words ‘form a zone of paranoiac infection, and all the power of reason is needed to break their spell. The magic infusing all great and trivial political slogans is repeated privately.’\(^{432}\) In the ‘zone of paranoiac infection’ there is only a place for obsession (these may be cheerful and picturesque – presented to us in the form of advertisements). As Adorno suggests they bring ‘the deadly hardening of society.’ No living thought can appear – the system offers no room.

Just as, under the primacy of the autonomous production process, the purpose of reason dwindles away until it sinks into the fetishism of itself and of external power, so reason itself is reduced to an instrument and assimilated to its functionaries, whose power of thought serves only the purpose of preventing thought.\(^{433}\)

And the ‘functionaries’ themselves, the academics? They dream their dream, busy applying the method. ‘The collective stupidity of research technicians is not simply an absence or regression of intellectual faculties, but a proliferation of the thinking faculty itself, which consumes thought with its own strength.’\(^{434}\)


\(^{431}\) Ibid.

\(^{432}\) Ibid., p. 137.

\(^{433}\) Ibid., p. 123.

\(^{434}\) Ibid., p. 124.
All this is irreversible because: the ‘dislike of thinking rapidly becomes incapacity for it.’

Thus, in the system of instrumental reason the power of deception is actually impregnable. The ‘death of reality’ should not come as a surprise. The stage is set. We have entered the world of ‘simulacra.’ The French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard employ this term to denote signs which have been deprived of a referential nature. These signs do not call for a referential system. They do not need objects that exist beyond the world of illustration. In short, they do not need any form of reality – they simulate its existence. They are independent, becoming reality themselves, becoming ‘hyperreality,’ as Baudrillard notes. Nietzsche’s judgment that ‘the real world has become a fairy tale’ is substantiated. Everything is inverted. Gianni Vattimo interprets Nietzsche’s thoughts in the following way: ‘once the real world has been recognized as possessing the structure of a fable, the fable could then be said to acquire the ancient metaphysical dignity the (“glory”) of the real world.’

All things ‘fable’ have consistently been replacing traditionally understood reality – and their importance has been growing. We are dealing with a culture in which the strength of images, formed by indulged fantasy, increasingly counts more. ‘Fable’ imaging competes more and more effectively with imaging subordinate to the logic of mirroring. Mirrors become redundant. ‘Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.’ The sign itself becomes reality. ‘It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real.’ The problem of fantasy is that truth and delusion lose their previous significance. ‘A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences.’ A ‘procession of simulacra,’ in the words of Baudrillard, is incessant. With indomitable panache and with ever

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435 Ibid.
438 Baudrillard, p. 1.
439 Ibid., p. 2.
440 Ibid., pp. 2–3.
greater speed, the flood of images generated by the ingenuity of technical appli-
cances erases all ‘natural’ points of reference, which could have been relevant in a
time when images were treated as mirrors of the world. Hyper-reality means that
all possible effects are multiplied, accelerated and enhanced. The world of effects
that Adorno and Horkheimer spoke of, is developing at an unbelievable rate. The
world in its previous form is becoming boring and useless. The gods have forsak-
en the earth and moved to Disneyland. ‘Disneyland is a perfect model of all the
entangled orders of simulacra. It is first of all a play of illusions and phantasms:
the Pirates, the Frontier, the Future World, etc. The imaginary world is supposed
to be what makes the operation successful.’441 The sign has become more impor-
tant than reality itself, it has broken free from the burden of reality. Disneyland
is an illusion; it does not pursue traditionally understood ‘truth.’ But therein lies
its strength. Fictitious America becomes more real than reality itself. It stirs up
more emotion, more passion. In this sense, the image becomes the basis of real
experience. No other reality is needed any longer. But let us remember that the
strength of this scene, the introduction of crowds into this land of fiction, is
linked to simulation. The realm of enchantment, the ‘fairytales’ Nietzsche spoke
of, cannot be treated as a game of fantasy; the ‘fairytales’ recover their metaphysi-
cal status. The illusory image of the world is treated as reality. Let us remember,
the simulacra, as Baudrillard said, ‘generates’ reality. The power of Disneyland is
determined by the genuine ‘social microcosm, the religious, miniaturized pleas-
ure of real America, of its constraints and joys.’442 However, we are actually firmly
tangled up in the web of illusions which determine the nature of hyper-reality.
It becomes impossible to tell the difference between truth and deception, decep-
tion which we could have given a traditional meaning to in keeping with the
rules of the old way of thinking. Dominated by imitation, popular culture has
become a world of multilayered simulations. The suggestion that we are dealing
with images which respect the rules they mirror, settles nothing. This can only
point to another level of fiction. What we have become accustomed to call real-
ity is, to a large extent, organized in line with the rules of simulation. Systems of
images are continually being generated, and are evermore frequently becoming
a part of the reality of first encounters, which is the only reality. As Baudrillard
posits, this is how we can now look at the world, even when dealing with grass
and pebbles. The rules of image creation and those governing simulation have
come to dominate everything.

441 Ibid., p. 11.
442 Ibid., p. 12.
Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 12–13.}

The ‘fable’ suggests that there exists a stark difference between ‘reality’ and the world of the fairy tale. But this is just a ploy, a strategy. The ‘natural’ trait of hyper-reality is to conceal its own roots in line with the simulation principle. It is a closed system. Effective, multilayered simulation means that deception cannot be exposed. Signs refer to each other, but not one refers to reality as defined by the old way of thinking. The real problem lies in the fact that in a culture infused with simulation, one which emphasizes the strength of images, everything begins to (and can) be taken as ‘reality.’ Baudrillard’s conclusions are quintessential Nietzsche: ‘the impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real is of the same order as the impossibility of staging illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible. It is the whole political problem of parody, of hypersimulation or offensive simulation, that is posed here.’\footnote{Ibid., p. 19.}

Let us not delude ourselves, says the French author; hyper-reality is the sphere of power. Undoubtedly, popular culture has become one of the most important spheres of power today. It is a vehicle for ‘ideas’ allowing certain strategies of legitimacy to be considered. These are no longer based on religion or Enlightenment formulas of reason. Power is shaped in the stream of popular culture, which permeates its style. It adopts its mythology, and adjusts to the image of the world in keeping with the myths of consumerism. It derives its message from the templates of pop-culture. It is a power which realizes itself in hyper-reality. Power is no longer subject to tests imposed by the old way of thinking. It can bask in the world of fiction. It applies the language of images which do not need to be well established. The test of an image of the world imposed by the language of power can only ever be another image, another model or system of signs. To cast a critical, exposing eye on reality would require abandoning the formulas of instrumental reason. It would rely on a concept of reason imbued with content, one which would retrieve the riches lost with the impoverishment of reason.

The potential of simulation has been growing thanks to the development of electronic media and the expansion of television. Giovanni Sartori writes about this in his work *Homo Videns: Television and Post-thinking*. The world of images
created by the media is becoming a ‘natural’ environment for the human mind today. It is hard to overestimate this change. That which we call ‘thinking,’ Sartori observes, is losing its former character. We have entered the era of ‘post-thinking.’ Enter homo videns, the human being who forgoes thought in favor of imagery. We are in fact dealing with the emergence of a new anthropological matrix: the dominance of what is seen over that which is understood.\textsuperscript{445}

Language based on words makes reflection possible: we can think our thoughts. An image cannot lead such a ‘double life.’ It is locked irrecoverably in its own frame. Of course, images can be interpreted. But, then, this requires thinking. A culture based on words is worlds apart from one that is based on images. Civilizations have developed alongside the discovery of writing; indeed, the transition from spoken to written communication was the source of their development, writes Sartori. The discovery of writing was possible thanks to the genius of abstraction, thanks to the separation of the sign from the image. The alphabet is made up of signs which follow different rules to those governing picture writing. The power of abstraction becomes the power of the human mind. For a long time, letters, which homo sapiens combined into words, were the foundations of culture. Words rooted in writing made the creation of the world of thought possible; a world of thought which was amazingly diverse and rich, and far from the direct image that the eyes can see.

The predominance of television, in short, is a signal of the return of writing in pictures. Words are becoming superfluous; they are boring. They distort the image and provide an unnecessary impediment. This is the logic of television. Radio, on the other hand Sartori observes, uses spoken language and has continued to spread content expressed in words. The era of ‘post-thinking’ comes with the advent of television. While the capacity for symbolic thinking distinguished homo sapiens from animals, the propensity to watch brings homo sapiens closer to his primordial nature, to the species from which human beings descend. This is the problem. The influence of television should be seen as the enhancement of patterns of communication which are not related to thinking. The image becomes the idiom. Homo videns loses his ability to reflect. He is unable to distinguish truth from illusion. He is unable even to consider this difference. He is stuck in the closed circle of images which are becoming his only ‘reality.’ ‘TV is not simply a communication medium; it is at the same time

paideia, an “anthropogenetic” means, that is a medium which generates a new anthropos, a new kind of human being.\textsuperscript{446}

This ‘anthropogenic tool’ is at the same time a tool of power, which unfettered can apply the rules of the new way of thinking. That is the possibility afforded by television; it could be said that it is the most Nietzschean of all the means of mass communication, one that changes ‘reality’ into ‘fairy-tales’ and blurs the line between reality and illusion. Empathetic rhetoric, intrusively emphasizing the need for credibility, changes nothing here. Using the language of ‘facts,’ television creates its own fables, saying ‘this is the world.’ But we know only too well that every ‘fact’ constitutes an interpretation; there are no ‘bare’ facts. The world in its ‘natural’ form does not exist. How reality will be shown (starting simply with what will be shown and what will be left out) depends on the authors of the fable. Admittedly, they are the children of a video culture which dismisses the difference between truth and deception since it belongs to another order of reflection based on words. The rules of the old way of thinking, which includes the fundamental difference between truth and deception, become irrelevant in a context where everything is determined by the rules of writing in pictures. Unfortunately, this difference requires reference to be made to the concept of epistemology, a terrible word belonging to the vocabulary of the beast of reason, which homo videns should forget.

This is a critically important issue. It concerns culture, politics, and television, which has great power. Pierre Bourdieu, one of the most outstanding twentieth century sociologists, writes that the ‘power of television’ is largely linked to the abuse of the right to freely create images, and the renouncement of rules introduced by the old way of thinking.\textsuperscript{447} ‘Anti-intellectualism,’ which according to Bourdieu is one of the typical aspects of the ethos of television, allows the line separating illusion from reality to be casually crossed. Reflection is disliked, which rules out any mechanism to control the eruption of images produced by the cult of ‘facts.’ In the end, everything that is being shown becomes real. The importance of ‘facts’ is unquestionable; it guarantees that the television image receives absolute credibility. But we must remember that there are no neutral or innocent points of view in the presentation of images. Everything is a question of intention and interpretation. The media is a place where various interests meet: financial and political. It is also rife with passion and ambition. ‘Facts’ take shape in these very circumstances. ‘Truth’ is measured by ‘audience ratings.’ The

\textsuperscript{446} Ibid., p. 14.
cloak of impartiality worn by the preachers of ‘facts’ is threadbare. ‘As we have seen, this world characterized by a high degree of cynicism has a lot of talk about morality. As a sociologist, I know that morality only works if it is supported by structure and mechanisms that give people an interest in morality.’ Moral scruples and ‘audience ratings’ are two concepts which cannot be linked together.

Sartori presents a model of the world which suggests that the media have become a powerful instrument of power. They rule over a critically important sphere. The media determines how the image of reality is shaped; it resembles a pair of glasses without which it is impossible to look or see. While incessantly plucking the string of truth, the media imposes the rhetoric of ‘facts’ and evades all control since homo videns is no longer capable of judging anything in terms of truth and illusion. Therefore, the media have become producers of ‘nourishment’ which is exempt from being tested according to the rules of the former way of thinking. All that counts are gauges of effectiveness discussed already by Horkheimer and Adorno in their description of the ‘cultural industry.’ These are systemic features that we are dealing with. This idea is also embraced by Bourdieu: ‘I think that all the fields of cultural production today are subject to structural pressure from the journalistic field. This “journalistic field,” which is more and more dominated by the market model, imposes its pressures more and more on other fields.’ The rigors of epistemology, which highlight the difference between truth and deception, have little to do with the ‘market model.’ The ‘culture industry’ is guided by its own rules. Let us once again give the floor to an authority:

Things have come to pass where lying sounds like truth, truth like lying. Each statement, each piece of news, each thought has been preformed by the centers of the culture industry. Whatever lacks the familiar trace of such pre-formation lacks credibility, the more so because the institutions of public opinion accompany what they send forth by a thousand factual proofs and all the plausibility that total power can lay hands on.

The ‘discursive power’ of the media, as John Street frames it, simply signifies the ability to create ‘different versions of reality.’

‘Discursive power’ is best understood as political power, or simply power. Defining the nature of credible interpretations of the world, it settles the question of political legitimacy. Every form of legitimacy emerges within the framework

448 Ibid., p. 56.
449 Ibid.
450 Adorno, p. 108.
of a discourse; it must comply with a certain image of the world and correspond to a certain version of reality. The possibility of creating 'different versions,' mentioned by Street, is a sign of sovereignty; it expresses the essence of power. It now signifies control in the field of discourse, making it possible to create a picture of the world. Sovereignty, thus understood, is no longer tied to the idea of the 'pinacle' of power – we cannot provide a clear and precise location for it.

Today, political power constantly mingles with the power of the media. Sovereignty, which facilitates the creation of 'different versions of reality,' is a mix of complicated relationships. To reiterate: a single lonely pinnacle of power does not exist. Likewise, there are no traditionally understood gauges of credibility. The principles of the new way of thinking have become critically important. Since we speak in terms of 'different versions of reality,' we presume that classically understood truth is no longer of interest to us. The pathos of credibility does not become less important; the rhetoric of power is based on emphasizing the idea of truth. Illusion obviously cannot appear without a camouflage or use its own voice. It always speaks with the voice of 'truth.' After all, we are dealing with reevaluations, which without hesitation lead us to the conclusion that Nietzsche's credo emerges triumphant in the end: the 'fable' has been rehabilitated in politics, it has regained its strength and has become the foundation. Indeed, illusion is no longer threatening; the boundary between the concept of truth and that of illusion fades away.

The pathos of the human face, the solemnity of one's own countenance, has been replaced by the cult of the 'image.' The whole architecture of the systems of power are based on the concept of the image; in the era of 'picture language' things can hardly be different. The concept of the image belongs to the same family as the concept of illusion. Undoubtedly, it has nothing to do with the idea of truth as it is classically understood. Images are masks allowing truths taken from some 'fable,' depicting a certain version of reality, to be staged. The world as an unchangeable point of reference is losing its meaning – the imagination of images is all that counts. The 'image creators' have no need for the idea of a referential language; for them, the principle of the traditional way of thinking is a useless burden. Politicians reside in a 'hyper-reality,' they dwell in an archipelago of pictures. After all, images can only have other existing images as their reference points, and not the world understood in terms imposed by the traditional way of thinking which emphasized the dichotomy of truth and illusion.

Who, then, is able finally to state the difference between illusion and reality? Quite a long time ago Machiavelli pointed out that: 'most men judge more by
their eyes than by their hands.’ So the image it is.\footnote{N. Machiavelli, \textit{The Prince}, trans. R. Price, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 63.} Is there any point in contemplating the difference between appearance and reality? \textit{Homo videns} is no philosopher.

The effective exercise of power requires the effective shaping of opinion. The rules enforced by the traditional way of thinking are irrelevant in this area. On the other hand, care must be taken over the consistency in the presentation of a ‘certain version of reality,’ the enhancement of the impression of authenticity, as well as the vividness of the images. The criteria of credibility ensuing from the traditional concept of truth no longer have to be considered. Let us illustrate the extent to which political actions are linked to the rules of ‘hyper-reality’ with an example. John Gray explains the behavior of the former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, who stands accused of ‘Iraqi lies:’ ‘Blair’s complicity in deception in the run-up to war has led to him being seen as mendacious. This is a misreading. It is not so much that he is economical with the truth as that he lacks the normal understanding of it. For him truth is whatever serves the cause, and when he engages in what is commonly judged to be deception he is only anticipating the new world he is helping to bring about.’\footnote{J. Gray, \textit{Black Mass}, London, Allen Lane, 2007, p. 103.} In other words, he is fighting for his version of reality.

Everything takes place according to the rules of the art (or aberration) of ‘marketing,’ which nowadays is at the heart of politics. Indeed, ‘truth’ is a ‘product,’ as is an image, as is everything. The idea is to find an effective marketing strategy, to ‘sell’ oneself and one’s own version of reality successfully. The concept of a ‘lie’ is an anachronism that marketing scripts cannot take into account. In ‘hyper-reality’ lies have merely become a naïve superstition. There is no final version, no definitive picture of the world. At any given moment, everything can be altered and transformed. By switching between one version of reality and another, we deprive ourselves of all anachronistic objections supported by truth.

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\footnote{453 J. Gray, \textit{Black Mass}, London, Allen Lane, 2007, p. 103.}
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