

“POST-TRUTH” POSSIBILITY IN POPPER’S CONJECTURE AND REFUTATION PATTERN

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Abstract. Despite appearances to the contrary, we decide to turn ideals to reality, as we cannot perceive reality at the start. This is an endless and inconclusive attempt; but at the same time, it constitutes the rationale to Popper’s conjecture-and-refutation pattern. Once we trace his decision to accept sets of basic statements according to which our search for truth will be realised and identified, we understand the meaning of “post-truths”. “Post-truth” is associated with the working-class people. The right-wing populist rhetoric lures the working class into its trap, which entails nationalism and phobia of immigrants. The above-mentioned set is, indeed, incorroborable: neither falsifiable nor provable. But by accepting it, we accept the dismissal of Popper’s excessive zeal for rationalistic values, which cannot be pursued in abstraction from a well-defined set of circumstances. A “post-truth” can be understood in the process of trial-and-error, as regards, say, the said populist rhetoric. This process shows that we are not free from ignorance, so we cannot absolutely eliminate populism. According to Popper, we ought not make statements irresponsibly or at random, where we have no relevant knowledge, or are not in a position to pronounce, as quite literally we cannot, because part of the essential stage-setting for statement-making, properly so-called, is missing. A “post-truth” fills in that gap, as stressed by Popper’s demarcation line between what we can do and what we cannot do in science and philosophy.

Keywords: K. Popper, conjecture and refutation, post-truth, populism, falsifiability

TOOLS AND TRENDS

The statement (Laiou and Morrisson 2008, 205 and n. 93) made by Demetrius Cydones (1324 Thessaloniki – 1398 Crete)—a Byzantine

Greek theologian, translator, author and influential statesman, who served as Imperial Prime Minister or Chancellor of the Byzantine Empire, that before 1340 Thessaloniki was a commercial city frequented by merchants from all over the world—must be discounted as a patriotic exaggeration. Made on behalf of a man who was contrasting the glories of the city before the civil war at the time to the disasters wrought by the “popular” party in the course of it, this statement is virtually what we may today call a “post-truth statement”. That “alternative facts” replace actual facts and that feelings have more weight than evidence, is clear (Mcintyre 2018, xiv) despite the blurred line between the stages (*Ibidem.*) of falsehood and those of deliberate lies. The term “post-truth” was named the 2016 Word of the Year by *The Oxford Dictionary* (Mcintyre 2018, 1, 51, 70, 154-158). This is a catch-all phrase which epitomises modern times, given the obfuscation of facts, the abandonment of evidential standards in reasoning and the outright lying that marked the 2016 US presidential election (but also the Brexit vote, as argued by McIntyre). Popper’s excessive rationalistic zeal seems to preclude the allocation of such an idea within his scheme. However, his emphasis on the distinction between what we can and cannot do, following his social and political pattern as defined by his epistemology, makes ‘post-truth’ a possibility within that framework.

THE NOTION OF “POST-TRUTH” IS RULED OUT BY POPPER’S CONJECTURE-AND-REFUTATION PATTERN

In his account of the world, Popper, in attempting to dismiss induction as a means of attaining knowledge of the truth (1963: 34), emphasises the need, during his student days in Vienna after the First World War, for a radical revision of what had for generations been regarded as the standard pattern of intellectual and scientific certainty. The air, being full of revolutionary slogans and ideas, called for new and often wild theories, he avers. This need for a shift in values shows the inductive method (Popper 1963, 53) as one of

sheer myth: inference based on many observations is not a psychological fact. It is neither a fact of ordinary life nor one of scientific procedure, he concludes. This also means that any truth that rests by observation on an unrestricted generalisation also rests on an elementary logical fallacy.

It is a great error then to seek any infallible source of truth, whether determined by sense-experience or by reason (or by anything else). The criterion of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, refutability, or testability (Popper 1963, 36-37). What then remains for man as regards endeavouring to attain truth? Popper allows the future to be in many respects like the past, so that well-tested laws will continue to hold good (Popper 1963, 56). Eliminating induction from our everyday knowledge of the world does not make it easy for the role it plays in our lives. Acting on this assumption of laws means, he adds, that we have no better assumptions to act upon, notwithstanding any future pragmatic implications (Schilpp 1974, v. II, 686): any theory which has failed a relevant test at any time must be discarded as false. Popper, however, hastens to add that judging from past experience the future, in important respects, will be *unlike* the past. Hence, it is only a large chunk of any theoretical system that can be tested; scarcely the whole system, Popper admits (1963, 239). For him, it would be sheer guesswork which of the ingredients of that system should be held responsible for the falsification in question.

Popper's demarcation line between science and non-science stresses his zeal for rationalistic values. Science, he repeats (Popper 2002, 278), is not a system of certain and well-established statements. It cannot steadily advance towards any state of finality. Science thus cannot claim knowledge as it can never attain the Truth (science probably cannot attain any substitute for truth). There is still a motive for striving for knowledge and searching for truth (Giouli 2024, 60-65, 70-73). However, every "valid" scientific theory rests on the refutation of certain conjectures. Irrefutability is negative because a no-refutable theory by any conceivable event is non-scientific. (Popper 1963, 36ff).

Popper’s epistemological remarks here stress the tension between facts and truth as engendered in modern political arenas, and as advocated by McIntyre above. This tension concerns, we have seen, how “alternative facts” replace actual facts and how feelings have more weight than evidence. That the so-called alternatives must be falsified by the actual facts, can easily be understood with the use of Popper’s tools. And the standards of truth, of the scientific status of such cases and such angles, as regards the actual facts, will thus be realised, following Popper, by falsifying, refuting, testing and prohibiting these “alternatives”.

Does Popper’s epistemology, and consequently his idea of political and social philosophy, reflect the naïve view of the obedient servant and chronicler of facts? They certainly do, *prima facie*, at least. Popper would never allow for Feyerabend’s idea that we can change science and make it agree with our wishes by turning it from a stern and demanding mistress into an attractive and yielding courtesan who tries to anticipate every wish of her lover. This is certainly the case with “post-truths” playing the courtesan role in the modern political arenas. Being such, they have no place within Popper’s pattern, except insofar as they are refutable.

“POST-TRUTH”, MYTHS AND TRUTH

How is this dismissal to be done, if we adopt the neutral viewpoint of the refutation procedures as advised by Popper? As we have seen, this viewpoint highlights the logical fallacy implied by the validity of the unrestricted generalisations established through empiricist means. Popper finds such a disrespect for science. So he (2002, 41) demonstrates an asymmetry between verifiability and falsifiability. Thus, it is possible to argue from the truth of singular statements to the falsity of universal statements with this asymmetry, as resulting from the logical form of universal statements. Universal statements do not derive from singular statements, he adds. However, universal statements can be contradicted by singular statements. Hence, it

becomes possible by means of purely deductive inference, that is, with the *modus tollens* of classical logic, to argue from the truth of singular statements to the falsity of universal statements. To his relief, the logical respectability of science cannot be harmed by his remarks as regards the above-mentioned invalid induction inferences of Humean origin.

Popper thus seems open to discussing his propositions on a neutral viewpoint which dismisses induction, without dismissing learning from experience: what Plato has taken to be a trial-and-error procedure of knowledge. Complaining however that his angle was misunderstood by the 1936 audiences at the Aristotelian Society gathering, Popper stated that his propositions on induction were taken as a joke, and followed by laughter (Schilpp 1974, v.I, 87). A new generation of thinkers also failed to understand his angle half a lifetime later (Popper 1972, 1). He examines the question of whether we can start our enquiries using pure observations alone, without anything in the nature of a theory to guide us (1963, 46ff). Revisiting this idea, he finds it absurd. Observation, he adds, in need of a chosen object, a definite task, an interest, a point of view, is always selective. This implies, however, the use of a descriptive language with words that reflect properties of subjects as regards the philosopher's conjectures and anticipations which rest on her/his background theories. At this point, we must beware of that language which expresses "post-truth" with modern case tools. Following Adam Tooze (28 September 2022), a most plausible reading of "post-truths" as regards, say, the cases of the Scottish independence bid in 2014, and the 2016 Brexit case, was a return to the agenda of what Tooze calls Project Fear. This constitutes the campaign of elite consensus-building and intimidation. It was this campaign built on "alternative" facts which helped to stop the Scottish independence bid in 2014, but failed miserably to cow the Brexiteers in 2016, Tooze adds. The fire and brimstone that was promised in 2016 did not arrive.

Popper states that we need no longer be troubled by the blind alley of infinite regress (1963, 47). Going back to more and more

primitive theories and myths, we shall in the end find unconscious, inborn expectations, something absurd, he admits. We all have such inborn reactions, he adds, just as a newborn baby expects to be fed, protected and loved. These expectations are not conscious, as they are simply reactions and responses adapted to impending events. Is Popper hinting at such a physical reaction to impending events and dangers with the help and language of “post-truths”?

We recall here Popper’s anecdote about how he once asked a class of physics students in Vienna to observe carefully and write down what they had observed. Since they had not been told what to observe, or why, they were at a loss. They could not obey his instructions (Burke 1983, 45 and 1988, 217).

Induction, then, has to be understood within a framework that serves goals, interests and priorities inborn, or acquired within the knowledge procedures. But does this harm Popper’s excessive zeal for rationalistic values? Revisiting his search for the elimination of induction, we may ask, following Ayer (Burke 1988, 211), if the same tests as those carried out in the past can be repeated in the future; and also if the same sets of conditions can be realised again. Are these tests and sets analytically true? If we never allow anything to count as the same test yielding different results at different times, we may grant this to be an analytic truth –not an inductive generalisation. The reason why it is not an inductive generalisation rests only on our criterion of relevance in making any difference to the result, since the “same” means the same in all relevant respects. Then we should not talk about any analytic truth as regards those sets and those tests.

We are talking of an induction which ineluctably serves his conjecture-and-refutation pattern, in the sense of expanding inductive arguments from past to future. And yet, following Popper (Burke 1983, 46), whether we see two things as the same or different depends on the respects in which we compare them. Popper, indeed, accepts (1963, 44ff and 2002, 420ff) that expectations or general beliefs have less or more strength depending on whether they are repetitive. There is no guaranteed result in all sets of

circumstances regarding the strength or weakness of political beliefs and expectations. The results can hold good solely in specific sets of conditions. This means that we can also identify what really is within a specific set of circumstances; not what must or cannot happen in all sets of circumstances. We are thus prone to error; and prone, to sum up, to the use of “post-truths”.

Repetition (as understood in a Humean sense), is of less use here. What point of “logic” is involved in such a (faulty) use of such truths? There is no absolute sense according to which a certain set of experiences are repetitions of some prototypical experience: there is no absolute sense in which they are all experiences of ‘x’ where ‘x’ is a general term. This is enhanced by Popper’s idea that these repetitions can be taken, if at all, only from a certain point of view. We saw that comparing two things depends on the respects in which we compare them. And what affects one of a repetition, may not have this effect upon a spider, say. This presupposes, however, that there must always be a point of view before there can be any repetitions. This point of view cannot be merely the result of repetition, because it constitutes a system of expectations, anticipations, assumptions or interests. And here, we understand how the introduction of a “post-truth” within his conjecture-and-refutation pattern is possible.

We see how he accedes to the use of such a viewpoint which makes little use of the truth-values of statements about facts. What the reference is may be hinted at in the realm of the unknown as regards what facts we are prepared to establish and what evidence we shall consequently produce. This refers to our decision and it is the realm of that decision which links with the “post-truth” modern phenomenon. For the moment let us concentrate on the expansion of our conceptual armament from the known to the unknown real of values.

Popper dismisses the notions of “true” and “false” while attempting an expansion from the known to the unknown (2002, 273ff). Thus, rather than claiming a theory to be “false”, he prefers to consider it as being contradicted by a certain set of accepted basic

statements. This means, Popper continues, that we may interpret the acceptance of basic statements as a result of a conventional decision – not as “true” or “false”. This suggests that we can either confirm or deny theories according to whether their role is similar to that played by the set of statements we have decided to accept. Acceptance or rejection, then, is a result of a conventional decision, if it is impossible to attain and express the terrain of the unknown. That rejection (or falsification) is enhanced by his use of deductive reasoning from which the falsification of universal statements is attained by the truth of singular statements (2002, 41). Here, again we see how the notion of a “post-truth” can be traced, as there is no real difference between our accepted basic statements and those that we have decided to deduce from theories.

All we can say about theories and statements is that they might be inconsistent, not that any of them has been shown conclusively to be true or false. This can hold good for a “post-truth” also if we are unable to be conclusive as regards the falsification of the “alternative” facts by the actual facts. The logical remains impossible in Popper’s account of the world, as that which might be is impossible. We may decide what facts we may establish and what evidence we may produce, but we are unable to opt for the attainment of the realm of the Absolute. As basic statements, that is, those that assert that an observable event is occurring in a certain region of space and time, cannot be different in function from those pointing to that which might possibly be in the order of events, they are like any others within the realm of possible error and controversy (2002, 103). We can claim no more than that, he adds (2002, 104ff). Every test of a theory, however, which results in its corroboration or falsification, must stop at some basic statements or other that we decide to accept. This decision (Giouli 2022b), then, is ours as we are not limited in making it by any discoveries about what really exists out there. This decision, Popper avers, to accept a basic statement and to be satisfied with it, causally links with our perceptual experiences. Basic statements cannot be justified, he adds, by our experiences; nor by decisions. Our

experiences can motivate a decision and hence an acceptance or a rejection of a statement, he continues. A basic statement, he states, can be (*no more than by thumping the table*) justified by them. *Thumping the table* is his statement that suggests how little we can only know: things, say, that lie before us on a table. But we can certainly accept those statements to the extent they are conventions.

MODERN CASES

As with modern times, however, according to Tooze (28 September 2022), a perspective that regards political hegemony is at work underlying the expression of a “post-truth”. This regards, he adds, the struggle over the overarching ideas that govern and frame political choices. In this mode, we identify what Adam Tooze calls the performance of our leaders in the role of gatekeepers, a function which is at the heart of elite economic policy discourse. This suggests, indeed, that there are global norms for normalising policies to uphold (Giouli 2007, 27ff). Nowadays these policies showcase an overriding concern for inflation, but also a rather prim concern for inequality, he adds. Seen in this light, what he calls *Project Fear* is best seen not so much as an actual act of intimidation but rather as a ritualistic discourse through which the guardians of norms reassure themselves and the rest of the world of who is in charge, and what the rules are. Our being in ignorance is not an excuse for not even attempting as far as possible to eliminate “post-truth” logic, expressed by the language of such ritualistic discourse. We understand here how important a link with the ideas of Aristotle and Chomsky is because this link relates to the shortcomings of coercive steering in “post-truth” language functions (as they are found, e.g., in genetics). Myth being something other than faith, as expressed in the example relating to ritualistic discourse, referred to above by Tooze, can thus diffuse or enhance power images that guide political and social relations; as happens in the case of what language sanctions or forbids, as expressed by a child, or by man in the

primitive era of history. *Grosso modo*, despite the fact that, as Popper expresses it, our basic statements are inherently fallible, because it is impossible to expect a recurrence of future inductive patterns (Burke 1983, 46-47), we must attempt to eliminate the “post-truth” logic behind them (Giouli 2012a, 143-146; Giouli 2019a; 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; 2022a). Our prejudices related to our knowledge of sociology (Giouli 1996; 1997; 1998; 2000; 2002) would prevent us from eliminating “post-truth” logic. But what can possibly be done is to ensure democratic consensus against the elite consensus that triggers Tooze’s *Fear Project*. And that standard can, if only imperfectly, with the help of modern digital technology, ensure it. Widely accepted rules and agreements within democratic groups as to which statements should be accepted as “post-truths” might then possibly be formulated.

Popper makes the point that we ought not to make statements irresponsibly or at random, where we have no relevant knowledge, or are not in a position to pronounce, but he fails to note that quite literally we cannot do so, because part of the essential stage-setting for statement-making is missing (Burke 1983, 98). A “post-truth” fills in that gap as stressed by Popper’s demarcation line between what we can do and what we cannot do in science and philosophy.

Basic statements are accepted as the result of an agreement on the conventionally accepted criteria for making them and the commitments we undertake in making them (Burke 1983, 62-63). This agreement is not easy: it is conventionally decided and masks an unbridgeable logical gap between commitment and acceptance. We can demarcate the alternative facts of a “post-truth” in a non-arbitrary, ultra-pragmatic (Blackburn 2021, 657-670) and postmodern) way (Mcintyre 2018, 134-135, 126-127, 148-150). Our decisions are formulated by widely accepted rules for making the observations required in proceeding with the appropriate decisions. There must be various checks and supplementary tests to fall back on consensus in cases of political dispute as to what is a “post-truth” and what is not.

This does not mean that a definite, once-and-for-all demarcation of “post-truth” from truth would ever be conclusively possible: part of the essential stage-setting for demonstrating such statements is missing. This echoes the account of Adam Tooze, following Foucault (Tooze 2015), who announced in the very first of the Collège de France lectures (1970-1971), a project of a history of truth that breaks the frame of what a philosophy of truth is. We can see how, in his *Lessons on the Will to Know*, Foucault provides an extraordinary reinterpretation of the origin of Western philosophy that blows apart the borderline between what philosophy is and that which it is not.

In the second sequence of lectures that begins with the core issue *Society Must Be Defended*, in 1975, Foucault, is centrally preoccupied with power. He can clearly be seen to express Popper’s idea that part of the essential stage-setting for demonstrating statements on power is missing. Foucault, tempted to approach his subject-matter with an entirely open mind, stresses that there is nothing to tell him what to look for, or what to focus on (Burke 1988, 217), except his belief that it is important to proceed with the above-mentioned demarcation: “What I am doing—I don’t say what I am cut out to do, because I know nothing about that—is not history, sociology, or economics. However, in one way or another, and for simple factual reasons, what I am doing is something that concerns philosophy, that is to say, the politics of truth, for I do not see many other definitions of the word “philosophy” apart from this. So, insofar as what is involved in this analysis of mechanisms of power is the politics of truth, and not sociology, history, or economics, I see its role as that of showing the knowledge effects produced by the struggles, confrontations, and battles that take place within our society, and by the tactics of power that are the elements of this struggle”. It is easily seen how paralysing the abandonment of those beliefs would be, although they never be justified.

In 1975-6 with his *Society Must be Defended*, Foucault—Tooze continues—rebooted the project of the Collège de France lectures. The aim, as Foucault states and restates also in his *Security, Territory*

and Population, is a critical account of truth that is not trapped within the terms that philosophy and the will to find truth set for themselves. We can see here how Foucault strives to understand the unbridgeable gap between the conventional standards applied and the commitments undertaken in creating them. This is the reason why, following Tooze’s analysis, in a remarkably direct way in his *Security, Territory and Population*, Foucault identifies himself as a philosopher rather than a historian, sociologist or economist, while addressing himself to philosophy in terms that are not philosophy’s own. The function of Foucault’s statements operated outside the shelter of basic postulates, as he was determined to free himself from them. What he was determined also to show was that philosophy was “neither historically nor logically a foundation of knowledge, but that there are conditions and rules for the formation of knowledge to which philosophical discourse is subject, in any given period, in the same manner as any other form of discourse with rational pretensions”. This is the Popperian way of addressing any inquiry. Foucault sets himself to studying and analysing “the events” that can come about in the order of knowledge, and which cannot be reduced either to the general law of some kind of “progress”, or the repetitions of an origin. That repetitions indeed exist from a certain point of view is not controverted by Popper. We must understand, however, how Foucault elaborated on such angles and viewpoints.

Foucault’s response as determining his own angle alludes to the 16th and 17th centuries as the moment at which a modern sense of historicity emerged. This critical moment forms the framework of his beliefs and leads him to produce his statements on the subjects of his enquiries. Does he succeed in demarcating “post-truth” from truth as regards modern discourse of war? In his *Society Must be Defended*, Tooze avers, Foucault announces that the early modern discourse of war was “the first discourse in postmedieval Western society that can be strictly described as being historico-political. First because the subject who speaks in this discourse, who says “I” or “we,” cannot, and is in fact not trying to, occupy the position of

the jurist or the philosopher, or in other words the position of a universal, totalising, or neutral subject". This neutrality constitutes the core issue as regards the demarcation procedures in question. Lapsing into lazy scepticism does not make the demarcation easy, as we may be paralysed by the possibility of error if we adopt a non-neutral standpoint. What does this mean as regards Foucault's attempt to demarcate "post-truth" from truth? He appears to be calling into question the basic premise of the philosophy of truth against which he took aim in his *Lessons on the Will to Know*: "Ever since Greek philosophy, philosophico-juridical discourse has always worked with the assumption of a pacified universality, but it is now being seriously called into question or, quite simply, cynically ignored". Tooze points out that the sophists, the repressed heroes of the *Will to Know* make a cameo appearance. This, however, is an appearance Plato, himself, was very well aware of (Giouli 2019b). The point Foucault is making in his *Society Must be Defended* is "this partisan discourse, this discourse of war and history, which can therefore perhaps take the form of the cunning sophist of the Greek era. Whatever form it takes, it will be denounced as the discourse of a biased and naive historian, a bitter politician, a dispossessed aristocracy, or as an uncouth discourse that puts forward inarticulate demands". Being thus demarcated, as regards its "post-truth" status, this discourse, according to Foucault, was doomed to be "basically or structurally kept in the margins by that of the philosophers and jurists". What follows this demarcation is Foucault's questioning of the link between historical knowledge and the practice of war; an idea in circulation for the last one thousand or two thousand years, and which might be described as "platonic". Showing the difference between the platonic origin of the idea testifies to the demarcation of its "post-truth" from truth. This origin, Foucault avers, constitutes the idea that is probably bound up with the whole Western organisation of knowledge, namely, knowledge and truth do not belong to the *a priori* register of order and peace, as they are not found on the side of violence, disorder, and war. Foucault maintains that the important thing (and whether it is or is not

platonic is of no importance, he adds) about this idea that knowledge and truth cannot belong to war, and can only belong to order and peace, is that the modern State has now reimplanted it in what we might call the eighteenth century’s “disciplinisation” of knowledges. And it is this idea that makes historicism unacceptable to us. That means we cannot accept something like an indissociable circularity between historical knowledge and the wars it describes, which at the same time continue within it.

Foucault seems to have understood, together with Popper, however, that all such attempts must work with the tools provided by the commonplace. Defining the problem of the involvement of the commonplace in knowledge procedures, Foucault defines in his *Society Must be Defended* what is his chief task: “to try to analyse this perpetual and unavoidable relationship between the war that is recounted by history and the history that is traversed by the war it is recounting”.

Questioning the absence of promises and expectations as regards the end of historic man in Foucault’s works, Tooze questions how far Foucault has gone in the procedure of demarcation. Tooze, according to Popper, indeed dismisses any ready-made solutions as regards either the end of governmentality or relentless struggle and reinterpretation that Foucault’s *Society Must be Defended* would seem to imply. Might it be the case that Foucault in examining how society is governed, succumbed to his own temptation to escape historicism, Tooze asks. That escape was not at all easy, we may add, considered with regard to the Absolute. That the social no longer exists at the expense of the historical has been clearly understood by Popper also (Giouli 2012b, 39, n. 34). So all psychologism is to be ruled out. Foucault in despair could not dismiss the tools of the commonplace, as regards the attainment of the knowledge of history in absolute terms.

Aristotle’s formula, however, “to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not” is of no use here. A neutral standpoint is of no use in our pursuit of truth and our demarcating it from “post-truth”. Nobody can ever improve on it in demarcating “post-truth”

from truth. The formula is certainly incontrovertible as it goes. But it tells us nothing about what we must do, advocating a neutral viewpoint, in any given case, in order to agree with what corresponds with the truth (Mcintyre: 7 and Burke 1983: 118).

WORKING-CLASS AND RIGHT-WING POPULISM RHETORIC (NATIONALISM AND PHOBIA OF IMMIGRANTS INCLUDED)

“Post-truth” is associated with the working-class people. This regards specifically not only those who voted for Trump or the Brexiteers. The right-wing populist rhetoric lures the working-class in its trap, which entails nationalism and phobia of immigrants.

Adam Tooze (27 August 2022) comments on Chairman, Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Jerome Powell’s speech to the Jackson Hole 2022 Conference. His performance, Tooze adds, has about it an “18th Brumaire” sense, as in Karl Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Powell wishes the world (especially the working classes, we add) to understand his present decisions as guided by past traumas.

However, one must be aware that critical moments of change with regard to historical stances as hinted above within the historical process must be considered under conditions drawn from history—that is, not speculatively (Marx 1851-1852, 5-6). People make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past (Tooze 2021). Following this statement by Marx, however, the genealogy of the dead weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living. In like manner, the beginner who has learned a new language always translates it back into her/his mother tongue, but assimilates the spirit of the new language and expresses her/himself freely in it only when s/he moves in it without recalling the old and when s/he forgets her/his native tongue. The faculty of imagination foreshadows reality; its function is neither maximalistic nor

otherworldly. Here again, we see the difficulty in moving from an initial plan to the achievement of a final aim in history. This difficulty is raised and stressed by Aristotle’s idea of time and time only—not us—which can permanently qualify causes and sequences in its course.

Relativism here is seen in the form of Powell’s “post-truth” healing assertions for the working class. In his language, Tooze continues (27 August 2022), we apprehend the motions of reenacting Volcker’s 1979 interest-rate shock, whilst being fully aware that conditions are radically different.

Let us see how this shock provided the populist tools to escape the inflation problem at that time. The class-conflict model (Eich and Tooze 2015, 181) suggests that inflation was a populist path accepted with little resistance by the working class. Evidence, however, from across the developed world in the 1970s challenges this familiar picture of escapist inflationary politics. Far from viewing inflation as a lesser evil, the popular imagination was ruled from the early 1970s by a concern for inflation bordering on fear. Indeed, Tooze (4 January 2023) states that inflation is a process of distributional conflict. One wonders, however, how those participating in the conflict, especially the working classes, will stop it (Virginia Giouli, 4 January 2023).

These ideas call for a modern parallel. Using the 2020 paradigm of coordination in interest setting, Tooze’s warning (18 September 2022) against excessive tightening of fiscal and monetary policy in the name of stopping inflation recalls *mutatis mutandis* a Byzantine parallel (Virginia Giouli, 13 November 2022c) according to which ideological constraints as regarded the concept of just profit and just price influenced the behaviour of prices and the long-term stability in interest rates. Price instability after the thirteenth century occurred in a period when the ideological constraints had become significantly attenuated. When interest rates increased in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries in Byzantium, people still used older language that made it seem that the rates had not changed. This use heightened the idea of stability. We can thus understand

that a well-coordinated perspective as regards rate stability was at work. This perspective underlay communication through older language so that beliefs, norms, and comprehension as regards stability should be normalised. So, coupled, as mentioned in Tooze's account, with clear public communication, the aim of the coordination in question pointing to the stabilisation of interest rates may now be resolved.

Back in 1979 (Tooze 2018, 43-44), Paul Volcker, the Fed Chair announced that the Fed should regulate bank reserves and consequently raise interest rates so that the challenge of a wave of inflation would be met. Contrary to some fears, there was no runaway inflation. Prices accelerated, however, towards annual increases of 14 percent in 1979. So, the interest rate was used by the Fed as a weapon for exercising power over the working class. Volker indeed pushed real interest rates as adjusted for inflation to levels not seen, as Helmut Schmidt put it, "since the birth of Christ". A shuddering shock was sent through both the American and the global economies: the dollar surged, and unemployment surged. And inflation collapsed to 3 per cent in 1983. This shock put an end not only to inflation but to a large part of the manufacturing base of the Western economies. It also put an end to the bargaining power of the trade unions: The Thatcher government began with that crisis, Schmidt was unseated and replaced by Kohl and a forced Mitterrand aligned with that.

To return to the "post-truth" relativistic language used by Jerome Powell, we understand how it takes advantage of the precarious situation as regards the impending waves of inflation. Truthful assertions were used to heal such evils in the following environment. The Jackson Hole conference is unparallel, says Tooze (27 August 2022). It is not a jamboree like Davos or a giant global gathering like the IMF/World Bank meetings in DC. Jackson Hole is a wonkfest (to use a slang term meaning a self-congratulatory meeting of wonks, i.e., overly studious individuals) attended by barely more than 100 central bankers, regulators, economists and handpicked journalists. The conversation is dominated by central bankers and

the über-elite of academic economists who engage in friendly sparring over academic papers. How a conference of the world’s leading monetary policy thinkers and policy-makers ended up meeting in a mountainous resort in Wyoming, is a very interesting and entertaining story nicely recounted in a short history put out by the Kansas City Reserve Board. The fact that this world-famous conference emerged in the late 1970s from a regional meeting on global agriculture, reinforces the point that the Kansas City Reserve Board is an idiosyncratic but fascinating vantage point from which to view world economic history. The first meeting attended by a Fed chair, Tooze continues, was in 1982, when Paul Volcker, lured to Jackson Hole by the fly-fishing, clashed with his Keynesian critics.

The bottom line is that trade unions (being Volcker-shocked) would be no more able to drive up wages in line with prices. How could they tame the Fed’s power if convinced by such “post-truth” relativistic language? We should also not forget that the system of the housing finance in America’s postwar political economy did not survive the disinflationary shock of the 1980s (Tooze 2018, 44). It will not be a paradox then to understand (as regards especially Powell’s talk) how the working class would cherish not only the right-wing populist rhetoric which lures classes into its trap, but also nationalisms and phobia of the “other”, the “strange”, the foreigner as entailed by this rhetoric.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A “post-truth” is involved in seeking and finding not the truth of unrestricted generalisations about the world; but a specific truth (independent of epistemic modesty) about some humble assertions on, say, *the number of things on the table before us*. The limits of response, as regards the affirmation of two mutually contradictory statements, are open to a political philosopher concerned about facts and truth being engendered in today’s political arena. The fact remains, however, that our basic statements are inherently fallible for the

same reason as our generalisations are, while we attempt to distinguish “a post-truth” from truth. We must treat it as an open question, as this demarcation will always be a conclusion drawn from arguments or evidence (Burke 1995: 7). We must believe, however, our set of basic statements to be true out of necessity; and this without benefit of proof. To demand proof of everything *in abstracto* from sets of basic statements is not to show ourselves as ultra-rationals. Even Popper seemed to comprehend this in his attempt not to betray the understanding of the very nature of reasoning. Distinguishing ‘post-truth’ from truth is part of the framework of beliefs we bring to our interactions with the world, including our attempts to establish both truths and post-truths. That things do not arbitrarily pass in and out of existence, that our senses can give us accurate pictures of the world which undoubtedly exists independently of our consciousness, suggest that our beliefs determine the products of our enquiries on “post-truth”, and they are also presupposed in our enquiries on it. As Popper states, it is impossible to produce proofs for any of these beliefs; but at the same time, we can realise the paralysing effects if we seriously abandon them in our attempt to approach what a “post-truth” is.

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