

The Political and Intellectual Entanglements of *Post-Truth*

Three years after the term “post-truth” was made the word of the year by the Oxford English Dictionary, we still live in a time in which, according to the definition, “objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”. As both Nicholas Baer and Maggie Hennefeld pointed out in [their discussions on *Public Seminar*](#), post-truth is not simply an issue that emerged in the 2010s but a predicament that has its roots in the epistemology of post-modernism and the cultural debates of the 1970s. What is remarkable today is that a conception of the truth as something changeable, historical or dependent upon discursive practices has migrated *away* from the academic domain and into general public discourse: our current climate is increasingly marked by a deep mistrust in objectivity and even facticity. There is a widespread sensation that the eclipse of all reference points (the hallmark of the “post-truth condition”) opens the door to radical political agendas instead of fostering critical thought. In such an ostensible *sommeil de la raison* can a connection between knowledge and collective decision-making still be rescued? In this article I want to review a recent publication by the philosopher of science and social epistemologist Steve Fuller in order to comment more generally on the relationship between truth, science and public opinion and address the current crisis of knowledge politics.

In his new book, *Post Truth: Knowledge as a Power Game* (2018), Fuller propagates the post-truth teaching that the changeability of all scientific theories is actually revealing of one simple fact: knowledge is dependent on strategies of gaining and keeping power. As I want to show in my review, this definition has a striking resemblance to the post-truth worldview analysed by Baer and Hennefeld as well as the definition, quoted in Hennefeld’s article, that in fascism (or what is now known as the far-right) “there is no right and wrong, only winners and losers.” The resulting fluidity of the normative frameworks of science and society creates a space of opportunities for daring individuals who aspire to seize any chance to climb the ladder that leads to intellectual and political success. Fortune favours the bold: Fuller exploits the post-truth turn in knowledge theory and political theory to set an intellectual programme that navigates the crisis of liberal democracy and the mistrust in science.

Fuller’s *boldness* takes the form of a rhetorical performance of the very theories he discusses. He pirouettes, evades, and shocks his readers through unconventional views on evolution, climate change, and the Holocaust, among other topics. Lest the reader think that Fuller is

simply courting controversy, he writes a lengthy defence of the ancient Sophists—those who sold their opinions and rhetorical training for money—against the *totalitarian* Plato in a chapter entitled “What philosophy does and does not teach us about the post-truth condition” (Chap. 2). The Popperian cliché of Plato as the master of totalitarianism is recycled and used like leverage against political and scientific truth-claims. The philosophical quest for truth is equated to a monopoly strategy in the *market* of ideas: “They [the philosophers] see ‘truth’ for what it is: the name of a brand ever in need of a product which everyone is compelled to buy” (p. 25). According to Fuller, the only difference between Plato and Socrates and the Sophists is that the former two thinkers enforced a truth monopoly that silenced sophist (post-truth) democracy. Here, as elsewhere in the book, Fuller gives himself the freedom to write an ad hoc version of intellectual history tailored to suit his own idiosyncrasies. Did Plato ever occupy a position of power from which he dictated his truths to the polis? Not to speak of Socrates, who was condemned to death for his unconventional ideas and, unlike the sophists, did not adapt them to circumstances and potential personal gain. For Fuller knowledge is nothing but an adaptable, linguistic (power) game. Any philosophical or scientific attempt to reach an extra-linguistic truth is here dismissed as “veritism” or “fake philosophy” (p. 43). Fuller actually abolishes the distinction between *fact* and *fiction* (p. 142) based on what he sees as a precious insight derived from Kuhn’s notion of paradigm shift. In this light, he questions “scientific consensus”—for instance on climate change (!)—because, to his post-truth eyes, consensus must be a form of “cognitive authoritarianism” typical of (Kuhn’s concept of) ‘normal science’ (pp. 49-50). There is no nature outside the linguistic *fiction*. Fuller views knowledge as always dependent on agonistic circumstances in which competing individuals bend truth in accordance with the perceived advantages of the moment. Here, post-truth means something like ‘goal-dependent truth’. He regards any appeal to “consensus” as deceitful, since it postulates collectives and solidarities that infringe against the hard law of the market: *homo homini lupus*.

However, the competing individuals he draws his attention to constitute a limited portion of society. They are the ruling elites fighting for leadership. Fuller derives such conceptions from the economist and sociologist Vilfredo Pareto, whom he lifts to the status of “the patron saint of post-truth” (p. 2). One of the two main lessons he draws from this reactionary thinker of the early twentieth century is the anti-egalitarian 80/20 law. According to it, 80 per cent of the people have always been—and will always be—ruled by 20 per cent of the wealthy ‘aristocracy’ in all societies and epochs (p. 71). Fuller considers this conception to be the nemesis of the “ultimate hypocrisy of socialism” (p. 73). Such brief remarks are important since they offer some insight on Fuller’s opinion on socialism and perhaps Marxism. In spite of the relevance he attributes to the connection between politics and science, it is remarkable that he does not explicitly engage with the political-philosophical currents that most extensively dealt with this problematic during the twentieth century. The same neglect

applies to authors such as Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, whom he cursorily mentions and rapidly dismisses as fashionable within certain academic circles, as if their popularity implies that their views are irrelevant to a wider comprehension of power and knowledge (p. 81). As for Pareto's lesson, his theory of political developments has a clear conservative foundation: political change can occur in breaks or ruptures but does not involve transformation of the social order as a whole, because social hierarchy is posited as a meta-historical constant. Secondly, drawing on Pareto's dubious reading of Machiavelli's *Principe*, Fuller derives the distinction between two forms of (elite) rule: that of conservative lions versus that of subversive foxes. The two political classes of beasts control or mobilize the masses in different ways. The lions defend the rules that secure the maintenance of a status quo to their own advantage, whereas the subversive foxes try to prevail against their adversaries by changing the rules of the power game while playing it. Because the lions benefit from a position of privilege, they always have to maintain distance from the ruled masses. By contrast, foxes are capable of establishing an emotional tie with the masses, instrumentalizing their passions and mobilizing them. Although Fuller celebrates such rule as "radical democracy" we should not be deceived—in the light of his Pareto-inspired *elitist criticism of the elites* the adjective "radical" can be translated as "illiberal" or simply, "populist." Fuller portrays the divide between truth and post-truth as analogous to the polarization of today's cultural field, which features the two camps of elite experts versus populist demagogues. These types were recently embodied in the USA by the "lionine" Hillary Clinton versus the "foxy" Donald Trump, aided by his campaign strategist Steve Bannon (p. 3). The seismic election in 2016 shifted the conventions of political correctness and of media information while casting the stability of democratic institutions into doubt; in Fuller's view, these political events also marked a philosophical turning point. Post-truth emerges as an intellectual compass to navigate the *terra incognita* we have just entered.

Thus, Fuller views an instance like Brexit as a 'post-truth' phenomenon with implications that go beyond politics and economics. In Chapter 1 he broadens the discussion around Brexit to an intellectual event with consequences for the future of science. Despite the sense of uncertainty into which the British decision to 'leave Europe' by a 52/48 referendum has plunged both Great Britain and the European Union, Fuller salutes this *foxy* move as an expression of 'radical' democracy, and applauds the defeat of the *lionine* elites' self-confidence. Here Fuller builds a bridge between politics and epistemology (or the philosophy of science) that exemplifies his method well. Brexit anti-elitism, the *vision* of "the return to popular sovereignty" against *statistics*, i.e., experts' political forecasts, is compared with bottom-up pedagogy struggles in the US which target the scientific establishment. Fuller is especially supportive of the teaching of intelligent design ("a scientifically updated version of creationism") against scientists' Darwinian consensus; he discredits scientists as clerks who impose their creed in a manner akin to the top-down indoctrination of

Catholicism. Just as the Reformation once broke the Church's monopoly of truth, Fuller argues that the supporters of intelligent design might be able to discard the new scientific 'dogmas'. The connection of anti-Europeanism with religiously-driven anti-Darwinism and Church history is certainly surprising, to the point that one would dismiss it as groundless sophistry if one had not been cautioned in advance that the lack of ground is precisely what marks *our* "post-truth condition." And yet, analogies still have implications, despite whatever Fuller might wish; because he argues that scientists would hardly win a *referendum over Darwinism* in the US, does this mean he is proposing a biology Brexit? Fuller introduces populist reason into the realm of science. But how can a referendum decide on scientific issues? Or, to put the question in more general terms, has power ever been able to convincingly dispel any scientific controversies? Fuller's allusion to the 'legitimate' reaction of the Inquisition to Galileo's "prevarication" (p. 140) points to a concrete historical case. Does he mean to free us from another prejudice of science, the motion of the Earth?

To propose that the reliability of a scientific theory depends on power or the humour of the masses is a joke, but what if we were to take Fuller's world view seriously? The grave loss of life which can result when knowledge is treated as merely an opportunistic game is carelessly thrust aside. The earthquake that destroyed L'Aquila in 2009 is one devastating—even nonsensical—example. According to Fuller's post-truth perspective, the residents of the wasted town made two mistakes: first, they trusted the reassuring opinions of geologists, who "assumed that they know best how to interpret the data" (p. 116) and second, after the event they held scientists accountable for not forecasting a major cataclysm. "Clearly"—as Fuller concludes (p. 118)—"L'Aquila residents had not taken the 'Protestant' turn in their engagement with science." But what if they had taken the turn? Would they have escaped death and damage? What god would have saved the converts of the new faith? What would an alternative post-truth geology look like? When faced with reality, the post-truth compass simply keeps spinning, leaving us constantly disoriented.

Fuller's alternative model of knowledge is a facile conception of knowledge as—of all things—*shopping*. He presents the problematic as a matter of "science customization" (Chap. 5). In the free market of ideas, theories are 'products' to be sold, while citizens become "consumers of science" (p. 112). The commodification of knowledge implies that we do not expect scientists to tell us the truth but only to advertise the new epistemic product to be allocated. This was the mistake of the L'Aquila residents, for although they were *scientific shoppers* (p. 134) free to autonomously assess the quality of the scientific products on offer, they cannot complain if the seller overstated the value of his rotten merchandise. Fuller has internet shopping in mind, rather than shopping in a mall, as the most representative place of economic and knowledge transactions. Accordingly, he celebrates the new media that enables consumers' *democratic* access to information and which is destined to demolish the

unity of science... just as the Gutenberg printing-press revolution constituted the premise for the Protestant revolt against Catholicism. Wikipedia becomes a “democratic cure” to the “elitist disease” (pp. 125 ff.). Fuller dismisses as a form of “techno-illiteracy” any scepticism about the democratic promises of Silicon Valley and the expectation that “computer programmers be held externally accountable for their claims” about the free and democratic access to information (p. 113). Fuller, the techno-literate (post-truth expert²), has no doubts or concerns about the effective freedom of information disseminated and accessed via the internet, in spite of the commercial and monopolist policies of Google, Facebook and the like corporations and their political entanglements. If the market is left alone it will improve by its own dynamics. Fuller revives this ideological trope from the much admired Austrian school of economics and Friedrich Hayek, whom he refers to in order to argue that there is no *absolute* truth in science independent of epistemic transactions just as there is no absolute price independent of economic transactions. It is remarkable that, in spite of the postulated fluidity of knowledge and society, Fuller does not abandon a series of reactionary myths, which he posits as absolute although they are in contrast with post-truth philosophy: first, the eternity of elite power in accordance with Pareto and, second, the laws of the market according to the neo-liberal creed. The proposed relativity of truth obeys this hidden logic, or, in other words, this ideology.

Free market ideology, however, does not function without its most blatant contradictions also appearing, and this is why Fuller affirms the necessity to strengthen it through a form of “liberal interventionism.” The same political measures used to expand the market should be enforced in academia. He explicitly takes the model of the state in the service of ‘free’ capitalist expansion to imagine further incursions into education and research. He indicates academia as the next frontier of capitalist “anti-feudal” policy, and notes that capital has much to offer those ready to open the doors of scientific research to its interests. For instance, he declares his unconditioned support for constructivist sociologist Peter Berger and his pro-tobacco relativization of the medical arguments used in campaigns which damaged the tobacco lobby that, in turn, financed Berger’s own research in the 1970s and 1980s. The lesson is that scholars do not only have to sell their products in the free market, but also adapt the results of their research to the interests of their well-paying clients. Although scholars in the humanities and social sciences cannot contribute to economic production directly, they can at least serve as advocates of corporate interests and ideological servants. In the name of such perspective, Fuller dissociates himself from his colleagues in Science and Technology Studies (STS) who supported the scientific community on issues that concern the common good and who recommended political regulation of the market. Naomi Oreskes’ considerations in favour of scientists’ consensus on climate change is one such example. Fuller does not admit any form of public responsibility on the intellectuals’ part but only advances competitive strategies for individuals. Thus, he portrays himself as an anti-

academic academic, and calls for “liberal interventionism,” an external intervention to break down the “truth monopoly” of scientists. The ultimate goal he proposes for the sociology of science and STS as the post-truth sciences *par excellence* (Chap. 3) is the erosion of public trust in science and the achievement of “greater epistemic democracy” (p. 60). Still, his reference to STS’s “foxy roots” indicates the connection between such a proposal and demagogic strategies which are meant to replace the liberal establishment in politics and the academy with a new class of post-truthers (p. 62). But who will really benefit from the ban on experts and regulation? Furthermore, once the advocates of truth will be banned from the agora, what would shelter the citizens of the post-truth republic against the arbitrariness of power? A society following the elusive moods of the ruler typically generates fear and, in a vicious circle, is strengthened by this sentiment. It is in such a fear that ‘tyranny’, the worst form of political society according to the ancients, has its roots.

Fuller neglects the pernicious demagogical consequences of sophistry in antiquity and, by extension, those active in our society today. His sole focus is on the interests of the individual. For Fuller, the fact that the sophists sold their services in the agora is not inconvenient at all; he is well aware that post-truth magnifies the economic drives behind science. He specifically writes in favour of “the military-industrial will to knowledge” which he presents as the only force that can secure the “universalism” hindered by the idle particularism of “academic freedom” (Chap. 4). The historical examples he chooses are derived from militarized Prussia and the Second Reich. The Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft, the scientific society that preceded today’s Max Planck Society, instantiated the positive connection between politics, science, war and industry in dramatic years of world history. Fuller extolls chemist Fritz Haber’s “interdisciplinary genius” (p. 94) and identifies him as a model for those who wish to exploit institutional and political circumstances. The support Haber received from the German military-industrial complex made his discovery of the ammonia synthesis process possible, which later enabled the twentieth-century agricultural revolution (pp. 92-93). Fuller only hints at the flip side of the story—the creation of chemical weapons—and never mentions Haber’s defence of the ‘gentle death’ perpetrated through gas weapons during the WWI. The same gases were later used in Nazi concentration camps. Were these only undesired side-effects that scientific progress encountered along its triumphant march, as Fuller implies, or do they illuminate the problems produced by unbridled military-industrial uses of science? What sort of universalism is it? Fuller certainly misses the occasion for a non-reductive and non-superficial reflection on the entanglements of science, politics and economy.

His omissions, allusions and half-truths become even more worrisome if one considers the disturbing implication of the connection of post-truth to illiberal and anti-social movements of the Thirties. Why does Fuller, on the very first page of his book, signal that Pareto, “the patron saint of post-truth”, was “an inspiration to Benito Mussolini”? He adds that Pareto was

widely regarded in his time as the “Marx of the Master Class” in Italy as well as in the USA. The Harvard ‘Pareto Circle’, gathered around biochemist Lawrence Handerson in the 1930s, disseminated elitist ideas into the history and philosophy of science via Harvard president James Conant and his pupil, Thomas Kuhn, who is the most famous historian and philosopher of science. The fact that Conant “was among the last to support war against Nazis but among the first to propose use of the atomic bomb to end the war against Japan—Fuller claims—reveals someone who had learned his Pareto lesson well” (p. 4). Is he just pointing out the existence of sympathies towards Fascist Italy and Hitler’s Germany among the American elites of the Thirties? If such remarks were meant to signal the political risks, and not only the opportunities, of the present post-truth state of affairs, we would be grateful for his analysis. As a matter of fact, the political turmoil of the interwar period, the post-’29 crisis and the fragility of many parliamentary systems was a recognizably favourable terrain for political adventurers whose return we should not wish to see. If we can still learn something from the short-lived Weimar republic, it is precisely the danger posed by extreme political instability, as it opens the door to leaders who capitalize on collective hatred and a fear of uncertainty, and manipulate these feelings to infringe on the most basic rules of humanity and cohabitation. Intellectuals are nothing but the accomplices of this process unless they use their critical function to remind others of these lessons from history, rather than exploiting them for their petty agendas.

In case it is not enough to link the post-truth agenda to populism, militarist programs, corporations, controversial patrons and free market ideology, Fuller definitely pushes his provocation too far when it comes to historical revisionism and denialism. The topic is introduced with a description of what he calls “modal power,” the power over the *transcendental* conditions of truth, that is, the control over the rules of the epistemic game (Chap. 6). Once a new game regime is established, the new paradigm is entitled to rewrite the past. The Holocaust is a notable exception (p. 147) which Fuller glibly accounts for by mentioning the dictum that “history is written by the winners” (p. 148). In Fuller’s Orwellian worldview, revisionism and denialism were only obstructed so far “simply because no major political party finds it in its interest to capitalize on the Holocaust by linking it to events with which it wished to be associated” (p. 148, Fuller alludes to the misfortunes of the British Holocaust denier David Irving). Arguing with the Cold War political psychologist Philip Tetlock against “taboo cognitions”, he even ventures into a “what-if” historiography (pp. 164-165): “Had the Nazis won, their own rather diffuse—and even ‘banal’ (à la Eichmann)—understanding of the atrocities they committed would have been normalized.” But it is precisely against the normalization of violence and destruction—and the devastating psychological consequences of historical denial—that post-WWII historiography and philosophy has developed some of the most insightful arguments in favour of history as memory and the resistance of historical facts against the distortion of propaganda. In other

words, neither silence nor lies make a story of sufferance a different story. Fuller is probably unfamiliar with Primo Levi's magisterial pages on the psychological and moral difficulty of the "memory of the offence"—I particularly refer to the late work *I sommersi e i salvati* [The Drowned and the Saved] (1986). As for his reference to another writer who just barely escaped the camps herself, Hannah Arendt, it is so superficial as to be insulting.

On top of this, Fuller cannot conceal his sympathy for the most prominent Nazi jurist and political thinker Carl Schmitt, who argued for the centrality of action and enforcement (p. 105) against 'fair' procedures (Fuller's quotation marks) such as elections and universal rights. Fuller consistently sets his post-truth agenda against Hans Kelsen, the opponent of Schmitt who defended the existence of fundamental norms which lay the foundations of the "invocation of 'humanity' and 'human rights' in international law" (p. 144). Fuller expresses his scepticism for the stable reality these views presuppose. Post-truthers, as Fuller states, oppose the "perpetualist" idea of time as *chronos*, which was typical of Newtonian physics. They rather endorse a "quantum historiography" based on a conception of time as *kairos*, that is, the sudden moment which can be seized in order to overturn the rules of the game. Kairos opportunists *know* that political elections and the United Nations' goal to secure 'perpetual peace' (Fuller's quotation marks) perpetuate misconceptions about the stability of time, truth and political systems "with regard to the duration of any social contract" (p. 149). Fuller seems to be content with the post-truth dismissal of the legitimacy of human rights and elected representatives, however he does not expand on the consequences and the direction of such a move, unless we should take him to mean that the model of Carl Schmitt's Germany is appealing.

The concluding section of the book revives Schmitt's idea that power belongs to the one who takes decisions in a state of exception. Fuller calls it "precipitatory governance" (p. 174). It refers to a politics which always confronts the worst possible scenario in order to derive the best from harm. As an example Fuller mentions the Fascist 'farsightedness' of WWII Germany and Japan which shows that "one might even lose the war yet win the peace" (p. 169). It is ridiculous to argue for the unnoticed victory of Germany and Japan, as the economic growth of both countries during the Cold War has to be explained in the context of the competition between the opposing political and economic blocks and the new world order that emerged out of the war. But the convenience of the post-truth condition ensures Fuller doesn't need to capture anything more than a soundbite. Fuller's slogan of precipitatory governance even leads him to delve into futuristic scenarios from the past about the relative benefits for the US in case of a limited nuclear war, with particular reference to Cold War analyst Herman Kahn, who dared to "think the unthinkable". In this case, two militarists are indicated as a model for post-truth thought (pp. 83-84): "the mastermind behind... German's victory over France in the Franco-Prussian war" Helmut

von Moltke, (p. 168) who theorized about necessary improvisation in war (for Fuller the same logic applies to peace, that is, to the market, in a less violent manner, p. 86) and Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defense Secretary of G.W. Bush's administration who launched the Afghanistan and Iraq wars (2001 and 2003) in the name of preventive defence. "In other words—Fuller writes (p. 174)—we [we?] want a society that is not so dependent on the most likely scenarios—including the most likely negative ones—that one could not cope in the event of a very unlikely, very negative scenario. The knowability of Rumsfeld's 'unknown unknowns' is clearly a guiding assumption here." Fuller suggests an analogy between recent military interventions that took place outside the international framework of the United Nations and the Fascist aggressions of the 1920s and 1930s, which questioned the legitimacy of international diplomacy within the League of Nations and *precipitated* the events paving the way to WWII. The historical echo of the dangers that are implied by a militarist politics that throws society in a permanent *Ausnahmezustand*, Schmitt's 'state of exception', resounds in the background of Fuller's breezy account. Inevitably, the 'unknown unknowns' of Rumsfeld are the 'well-known consequences' of imperialism, colonialism and militarism.

In spite of its grand promises and the urgent topics it addresses, the book is far from transparent and argumentatively cogent. Rather, it is written in a convoluted and allusive style which is hard to follow and often confusing, if not openly provocative. However, almost two hundred pages of shocking material becomes, in the end, more boring than irritating. The book is like a puzzle that one leaves for want of a conclusive picture: its fragmentary nature forces the reviewer into a lengthy work of reconstruction but, at the end of the day, the effort appears disproportionate to the gain. The many references to authors, theories and problems are mostly incomplete and based on a superficial knowledge of historical subjects and conceptions, which are misrepresented and bent towards extrinsic aims. Fuller often leaves the most controversial implications of his arguments implicit or scatters their elements throughout the book, and the arguments themselves often appear contradictory: universalism is banned when it relates to human rights or science but not when it serves to promote the military-industrial complex as an "external driver of academic universalism, as it were" (p. 69); expertise is banned when it relates to evolution or climate change but the lack of expertise is directed against "techno-illiterate" critics of Silicon Valley promises and ideologically blinded critics of genetically modified organisms (p. 114); he dismisses the freedom of the academics but not that of the military-industrial lobbies; also, he criticizes liberalism insofar as it concerns rights and forms of democratic representation but not its economic interventionism. Such an argumentative strategy seems to be a shock strategy that permits Fuller to insinuate an overall ideology that only has the *appearance* of anti-dogmatism, but which, as his favoured examples show, actually takes the controversial position on virtually any issue with the goal of harnessing public discontent. Post-truth

ideology opens up the space for cynical opportunism and readies the ground for persecutory politics.

The book is dedicated to the Greek historian Thucydides, who described the cynicism of power and the way rhetoric can serve to legitimize violence in the context of the Peloponnesian wars that saw the rise and fall of Athens. Fuller celebrates him as the “purveyor of ‘fake news’” but, as usual, he only tells half of the story. Thucydides, it is true, illustrated the hypocrisy of rhetoric in the service of politics and the cruel logic of power. However, the acme of the Athenians’ Hellenic dominion, in the name of which the small island of Melos was crushed for its refusal to remain under Athens’ protection, also marked a turning point in the political parable as related by Thucydides. It revealed an excess of self-confidence, that is, the hubris that led the Athenians to ill-considered military actions (the failed invasion of Sicily), the loss of their hegemony and their eventual defeat. If, as Fuller assumes, the end justifies the means (cf. pp. 81-82 and p. 136), his half-truth philosophy should be judged by its ideological function. To be sure, his radical relativism and call for the subversion of all norms have finally laid bare the harm and the dangers intrinsic to certain ways of thinking that have become fashionable. Fuller himself does not seem to be disturbed by the fact that radical social constructivism, the STS criticism of scientific expertise and post-modern disembodied relativism strengthen cultural tendencies from which mounting populist ideologies benefit. In the long run, however, I seriously doubt that ‘post-truth philosophy’ can effectively serve a far right agenda. History teaches us. Gabriele D’Annunzio, Giovanni Gentile and Martin Heidegger are all instances of intellectuals who saw the rise of Nazi-Fascisms as an opportunity to be seized. Their intellectual radicalism might have been instrumental for the right to ascend, but once the new regimes were established these thinkers were rapidly marginalized, as the new rulers searched for *solid* ideologies to manipulate (such as the nation and the race) not aesthetic nihilism, idealist activism or a philosophy of *Sein*.

While far-right populists might benefit from post-truth radical questioning of all normative systems or from the post-modern idea that collective identities are discursive formations, eventually their agenda only leads to old-new intransigent identities, hinged on the ideas of nation, race, religion, and even ‘culture’. Post-truth ideology constitutes a political danger owing to its function as a vehicle of populism in present-day circumstances, but its doom is to be rapidly abandoned and replaced if or when the situation develops to the worst, when the post-truthers, or ‘*kairos*’ seizers, will be discarded by those whose journey to power they eased. At no point does *Post-Truth: Knowledge as a Power Game* step back from its paradoxical partisanship and provocation in order to address the more compelling historical development behind these contemporary slogans, beginning with the breakdown of the Westphalian order and the catastrophic environmental problems of the age that we are

currently living through. We fail to pay attention to this at our peril. How can we restore belief in democratic consensus and debate to the extent that we can address newfound global problems? And how can we genuinely do this as long as the elitist structures of society remain unchallenged, reducing the citizenry to a subjected and enraged mass to be manipulated? The resurgent race- and nation-based ideologies, so ghostly in their evocation of the Thirties, are a helplessly insufficient solution to these very pressing developments. If we only focus on the outrage that anti-political politicians and anti-intellectual intellectuals cultivate around themselves, in their different but interlinked fields, we will remain trapped within the terms of the framework they have set and which benefits them. Present circumstances, the urgency of reality, force us to acknowledge that facts and truth matter, as do science and responsibility. They are not only private tools for individual prevarication, but have public relevance, because they relate to democracy as a common good and constitute the ground for collective freedom. At no point in *Post-Truth: Knowledge as a Power Game* can the reader be enlightened on the most pressing questions of today. In fact, the red thread of Fuller's labyrinth—the *quintessence of post-truth*—is the constant refusal to face reality and take responsibility; but fleeing from problems will never lead to their solution.

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