Affective Capacity in Post-Truth Politics: Rereading Spinoza's *Ethics*

Ignas Kalpokas,

Assistant Professor, LCC International University

Post-truth: Its Basic Characteristics

As Mair (2017: 3) argues, what characterises post-truth is 'qualitatively new dishonesty on the part of politicians', particularly in terms of making up facts to support whatever narrative one is promoting instead of merely being 'economical' with truth. In other words, verifiable facts are no longer twisted, reinterpreted or conveniently omitted – they are made up and presented ad hoc simply because they fit a particular story or a broader agenda. To put it from another perspective, people are empowered to choose by themselves a reality in which they would prefer to live; as a corollary, if reality is simply a matter of choice, opponents face an even more difficult challenge in getting their facts across: facts that contradict a chosen reality can simply be opted out from (Lewandowsky, Ecker and Cook 2017). In such an environment, 'truth is simply a matter of assertion' (Suiter 2016: 27), the key question being who will manage to assert their claim more effectively. It is this effectiveness that becomes a measure for truthfulness: a claim must be true simply because people believe in it (i.e. it has been asserted effectively) or because people *would like* to believe in it. Moreover, arguing with post-truth claims is both futile and counterproductive: first, if the communicator had wanted to convey more accurate information, they would have double-checked their claims, so correction is pointless; secondly, by arguing with them, one only draws more attention to their persona and the claims that they are making (Davis 2017: 40).

The belief element indicates that opinions take primacy over facts and 'visceral and emotional' appeal trumps truth: post-truth is, then, 'an age where politics no longer functions through rational discourse' (Laybats and Tredinnick 2016: 204) but, instead, political statements are 'carefully calculated to get attention' (Davis 2017: xii). One could (and perhaps even should) be sceptical about the implied dominance of rational discourse in the politics of the past – after all, emotional appeal, misinformation, public relations, or outright propaganda are not something unheard of. And yet, reason and veracity had at least been present as basic principles of acceptable discourse, something that had to at least be feigned (Hopkin and Rosamond 2017) and, correspondingly, there was some kind of underlying shared reality that had to be either embellished or covered up. By contrast, in post-truth, political (and other) narratives simply exist without a strict relationship to an underlying reality – or, rather, they simply construct a parallel reality of their own. Thus, any claims that post-truth consists of 'misrepresentations at best, and at worst, lies', even including a routinisation of 'blatant lies' (Bilgin 2017: 55) are somewhat simplistic, since the idea of a 'lie' is itself anachronistic in the post-truth environment. Of course, at some level it still does matter whether a particular truth-claim has some relationship with verifiable facts or not. However, as long as that claim is capable of becoming true through its own effects (i.e. through producing and/or sustaining a social world that people are willing to live in), that relationship is no longer important. Of course, it is still crucial to stress that 'truth is not a philosophical abstraction' but, instead, a central feature of 'how we live and make sense of ourselves, the world and each other' (Baggini 2017: 108). However, the notion of 'truth' has to be problematised, particularly in terms of how truthfulness

is being judged. It must be asserted that in a post-truth environment, 'truth' is what works in a particular situation, i.e. that which enables making sense of oneself and the environment in a positively enabling way. While that goes against verifiability as a key value, a social world thus created becomes true through its own effects.

Once a narrative takes hold, subsequent filtering of facts is carried out by the adherents themselves as humans have an inclination to 'look for and accept information which supports our current beliefs' (Ball 2017: 180) and ignore data contradicting strong views that are already held – a tendency, known as confirmation bias (Strong 2017: 140). If one becomes convinced of something, it is unlikely that corrections or exposure to alternative information would change anything as previous opinions will still linger as 'belief echoes' (Thorson 2016). To make matters even more complicated, self-motivated filtering of facts is often behind the so-called 'backfire effect': when people get exposed to information contradicting their deeply held beliefs, this supposed debunking actually becomes counterproductive, entrenching them in their pre-existing positions even more deeply and eventually leading individuals to reach the conclusion that they had wanted to reach anyway (Bridges 2017; Harford 2017; Lewandowsky, Ecker and Cook 2017). Moreover, since a false claim is repeated even while being debunked, it is thus given new currency. Particularly if such a claim is part of a convincing narrative, over time the arguments wielded against it will fade but the claim and its narrative will remain (because it is so convincing) and will get entrenched even deeper after being repeated so many times, even by fact-checkers (Harford 2017). Hence, instead of strategies for 'fighting back', either through public scrutiny or through education or news literacy of some sort (see, characteristically, d'Ancona 2017), one should focus on developing strategies for 'living in' the new times.

There is, however, an even deeper psychological element behind the rise of the post-truth condition – one that is, in fact, central to it and characteristic to the new environment, perhaps its central distinguishing feature. Post-truth political narratives can easily become aspirational: just like in personal life one often pretends to possess attributes and qualities that one wishes to have but does not have, taken to a political level, such 'aspirational lies' are about the aggrandisement of the collective 'we' (and, through that 'we', of oneself), making it great (again) (McGranahan 2017: 246). It this context, the key criterion used to make a choice between completing truth claims is whether one would (or would not) *like* something to be true (Lockie 2016). Here one encounters '*primacy of anticipation over content*' (Marcinkowski 2014: 17), and that anticipation applies to both communicators and their audiences. The communicators anticipate their audiences to have a particular reaction in response to a particular message (and that anticipation is, as will be demonstrated below, increasingly informed) while the audiences expect their innermost drives to be satisfied regardless of the substance of the message. Hence, it is crucial to understand that audiences are not merely passively acted upon by post-truth leaders; in fact, post-truth is co-created through the joint interaction of the communicators and their audiences (Mair 2017). Post-truth is not manipulation of some sort – it is collusion.

Because of its aspirational character, engagement in post-truth politics could easily be seen as a coping strategy for those who feel marginalised as it taps into 'feelings of anger and loss, of being left behind and defeated economically and perhaps culturally as well' (McGranahan 2017: 246). This is certainly partly correct: if one was not marginalised, dissatisfied with one's social world, then there would be no need to fall for escapist fiction of some sort. However,

there is an inherent danger in straightforward equation of marginalisation and post-truth, namely, that post-truth thus becomes seen as almost exclusively related to social, economic, or cultural deprivation. Such ideas are not only patronising and adding to that same marginalisation – they also suggest false remedies (that reduction of inequality would in itself somehow eliminate post-truth) and false immunity (that those not displaying evident signs of marginalisation, e.g. those who are relatively well-off, are somehow naturally post-truth-resistant). Rather, the scope of marginalisation should be taken as broadly as possible. Of course, when considered from some detached vantage point, not all kinds of marginalisation are equal as some needs are just more basic than others. However, economic deprivation, lack of self-realisation opportunities, dissatisfaction with one's preferred candidate having lost an election etc. (the list could be continued almost ad infinitum) can all be causes for resentment and, therefore, perceived marginalisation, which in turn makes one yearn for an alternative world in which the problem in question has never existed or has already been solved.

Certainly, individuals have always tended to prioritise certain information and certain relationships over others, including based on criteria such as proximity of opinions; instead, the major change is 'not in kind but in scale' (Laybats and Tredinnick 2016: 204). Social media in particular have taken this 'homophilous sorting' to an entirely new level (The Economist 2016a), since in their ecosystem networks based on affiliative truths have become particularly effective in validating themselves: members become isolated from information that contradicts their beliefs as a narrative that circulates within the group and not only unites the members in their joint belief and shared opposition to the rest of the world but also provides an entire information infrastructure that is necessary to function in (their version of) the world (see also Benkler 2007). There is also a further element of belief: not only people believe that something is the case simply because they happen to believe that this is the case, this belief is also strengthened by the assumption that theirs is a belief that is widely shared within the society even if that popularity is itself more about belief than verifiability (Lewandowsky, Ecker and Cook 2017). Hence, the importance of affiliation and creation of narrative supporter groups acquires another facet: once one starts spending a significant amount of time conversing with likeminded individuals and consuming information shared by them, the idea of one's preferred narrative being widespread and thus correct appears more and more sustainable.

Moreover, self-validation of online communities based on truth-claims is further strengthened by the fact that user-generated content, either posted by ordinary individuals or by 'opinion leaders' of various sorts coexists on par with the content created by established media organisations, despite potentially differing wildly in its quality, with such information egalitarianism significantly aiding the spread of untruths and half-truths (see, among others, Lapowsky 2016; Rutenberg 2016; Economist 2016a). Traditional forms of authority, particularly based on the credibility of the source (individual credentials, institutional reputation etc.) are no longer enough because anything can be contradicted and doubt can always be sown, dragging any discourse into 'a polarizing war of facts' (Lockie 2016: 235). In this context, other criteria for trust (or, rather, belief) in the truth (actually or supposedly) inherent in the message must be found. Particularly, if one is permanently in receipt of information that is contradictory, if sets of facts are always parallel, or alternative, to one another, and both sides appear to coexist on an equal footing, then selection of sides based on one's own preconceptions and beliefs can easily seem a reasonable strategy: if there appears to be no fundamental difference, then at least one side makes a person feel good (Lapowsky

2016). The impact of the now-dominant online communication environment goes even further: not only information, both true and untrue, spreads more quickly online but also social reinforcement and positive feedback (though likes, comments, and shares) can rapidly inflate the value (including perceived truth value) of emergent claims, regardless of the substance behind them (Laybats and Tredinnick 2016: 204). In fact, there is proof that once people are herded into partisan communities, fake news stories, perhaps due to their design being particularly intended to reflect pre-existing views and opinions, tend to become more viral than truthful ones (Lapowsky 2016).

Post-truth as a Matter of Experience

While the Information Age has been all about the ability to access and, if necessary, accumulate unprecedented amounts of information, the Experience Age is all about interaction, momentary encounter, and instant experience-based connection with a given piece of information or lack thereof (see, notably, Wadhera 2016). The Information Age has produced an information overload, and the Experience age is, at least in part, an attempt at dealing with it through the employment of an affective criterion: the experience of – and pleasure in – encountering and potentially consuming a particular piece of information. The Experience Age is about arousal of satisfaction in a general sense, enabling the consumer of information to maximise their pleasure derived from the consumption process.

From the perspective of the audience, experience is the primary expectation: audiences have no desire of being merely passively exposed to information; instead, they expect affective connection, something that makes the story stick emotionally and allow people to be part of it (Newman 2016). The capacity to create data-informed accumulations of individuals also reinforces the expectation of tailor-made, individual-specific, and unchallenging (i.e. not contradicting one's worldview) content. After all, if people are increasingly used to receiving information that is constructed with their pre-known interests, wishes, and preconceptions in mind, anything that does not follow the pattern is easily seen as uninteresting or even irrelevant. Hence, not only the audiences simply 'want to be entertained' (Newman 2016) – because of user empowerment, caused by primarily social media, and data-driven tailoring of information, communication has to be adjusted to the 'me' age, in which 'the best content is the kind which makes the reader the star' (Newman 2016). Hence, engagement (political or otherwise) is becoming increasingly 'me-centric' (Couldry and Hepp 2017: 180; see also Langlois et al. 2009; Fenton and Barassi 2011).

A further factor necessitating quick pre-cognitive criteria for decision-making (again, experience/emotion playing a key role) is 'constant connectivity and 24/7 living' which is caused by today's media devices (Couldry and Hepp 2017: 108). Indeed, the ever-increasing demand to keep themselves permanently open to connection, interaction, and acquisition of new information (from the latest viral meme or cat video to information about significant political events) and 'the new intensity of time-challenges' that arise as a result, humans face the must to develop 'practices of selection' that help them to 'drastically *select from* the environment' thereby making the information overload as well as its overwhelming permanence and speed more manageable (Couldry and Hepp 2017: 113). In this sense, the experience age is about the (self-)management of experience, maximising some stimuli and minimising others that are seen as less pleasurable. Speed in choosing what to consume and

what is most conducive to such maximisation becomes paramount and here emphasis should indeed be on emotions as drivers of quick response and rapid decision-making (Davis 2017: 135).

There is strong (and ever-increasing) competition for attention in a largely entertainment-dominated media environment, replete with consumerism, popular culture, and mere noise (Dahlgren and Alvares 2013: 54), organised, as already shown, through incessant supply and use of information that enables description and prediction of target audiences and their consumption practices. Experience is a key factor in the competitive struggle between media of different kinds and it combines the entertainment value of content with its presentation and ease of access (Abramovich 2017) – anything that would make engagement with information more attractive (more exciting, stimulating, and pleasurable) than e.g. switching to a gaming app. In this context, the capacity of breaking through the noise and outperforming any potential alternative is of vital importance (Suiter 2017: 27). Therefore, the optimism about fact-checking and its potential to become a key weapon in the struggle against post-truth by providing unbiased (and therefore, it is claimed, convincing) information is simply naïve unless, of course, fact-checkers reinforce their information with an even stronger emotional load than that of the original statement (see e.g. Ball 2017: 255). But then, making facts attractive almost necessarily involves cropping and framing them, in turn defeating the very purpose of fact-checking.

Post-truth and the Experience Age are strongly dependent upon, if not caused by, today's media environment. Hence, it is important to appropriately conceptualise the effect that contemporary media have on the society and its institutions, and that aim is primarily approached through a discussion of the concept of mediatisation. The latter concept is used to explicate a process of social change whereby the media increasingly influence and penetrate various social spheres (such as politics), exerting a strong influence over them, not just as mediators (i.e. conveyors of a message) but also through their very existence, omnipresence, and internal logic (Strömbäck and Esser 2015). It is claimed that mediatisation 'captures on the one hand the increasing spread of technologically based media in society; and on the other hand, how different social domains are more and more shaped by this media' (Hepp and Hasebrink 2018: 17), extending various social domains (such as politics) and blurring the boundaries between them (Hepp and Hasebrink 2018: 20). Hence, politics, communication, and entertainment easily become hardly distinguishable, all subsumed under the internal logic of the media, and extremely conducive to the experience-based post-truth environment.

In today's world, the importance of media has grown to an extent that they 'have become co-constructive for the articulation of various social fields in their present form: politics, economics, education, and so on' (Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby 2015: 321). In effect, the social world is 'fundamentally interwoven with media' (Couldry and Hepp 2017: 16). In this new environment, 'media are institutionalizations and materializations of practices of communication' while simultaneously shaping those practices as well (Hepp et al. 2018: 4). Moreover, instead of being mere technologies that various institutions, from businesses to political actors, can put to use, the media have become a key part of the operations of such institutions while at the same time having reached a level of authority and self-determination whereby those same institutions submit to media logic (Hjarvard 2008: 106). Focusing on mediatisation thereby helps to understand the media's role in processes of socio-cultural change (Couldry and Hepp 2013: 197).

It is not only disparate institutions that are being affected: the entire social world is '*changed* in its dynamics and structure by the role that media continuously (indeed recursively) play in its construction' (Couldry and Hepp 2017: 15). In fact, while back in 2008 Hjarvard could still plausibly assert that '[t]he concept of mediatisation […] does not embrace the notion that mediated reality reigns supreme, or the contention that conventional ontological distinctions have "collapsed"' (Hjarvard 2008: 111), the advent of post-truth has clearly demonstrated that a new layer of 'reality' that has been either discursively augmented or completely manufactured altogether can be added almost at will.

Also of crucial importance is Schulz's (2004) idea of mediatisation as substitution, extension, amalgamation, and accommodation: following this perspective, communicative activities are being substituted from direct (e.g. face-to-face) to mediatised, no longer bound by time and place (if communication is not face-to-face, actors do not need to be at the same place and participate in the communicative act at the same time), mediated and interpersonal activities being increasingly merged (even intimate communicative acts acquiring a mediatised element), and such activities increasingly coalescing under media logics. While such a change is most easily relatable while imagining changes to personal communication brought forth by various messaging, video conferencing etc. programmes and applications, it is equally applicable to political communication, e.g. replacement of door-to-door campaigning with communication through social media. For Hjarvard (2008) as well, mediatised communication allows multiple simultaneous interactions unconstrained by time and space, management of such interactions in a way that accords a desirable advantage to the communicator (mostly in terms of managing self-presentation and controlling the direction of the interaction, something that is much more complicated in a face-to-face situation), and control of information which can be withheld or released at the time of one's choice. Such an environment allows for extensive planning of communication, only further strengthening the attention on serving the expectations of the audience. In this drive to meet expectations, the process of communication constantly moves in full circles as acts of communication and conversation (as well as broader engagement with such communication) are turned into agglomerations of data, collected automatically via a plethora of platforms, and this data is then fed back into the process of communication, informing the content of future communicative acts and also the perceptions that we have of both ourselves and of 'others' (Couldry and Hepp 2017: 29, Hepp et al. 2018: 5-6). Again, this is a key enabling condition for narratives that are based on audience preferences, likes, and prejudices, determinable in real or near-real time, thereby creating the post-truth condition.

Spinoza and Striving to Persevere in Existence

In order to further understand post-truth, one must delve into the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza and, before anything else, into his conceptualisation of particular things, such as human beings. In this context, the key proposition is undoubtedly the following: '[e]ach thing, insofar as it is in itself, endeavours to persevere in its being' (*E*IIIp6). Indeed, this endeavour, or striving (*conatus* in Spinoza's Latin original), is 'nothing other than the actual essence of the thing' (*E*IIIp7). Clearly, then, 'as an individual thing exists, it is exercising a power to maintain itself in existence' (James 2016: 116). The ability to interact with the environment and affect one's surroundings (or the ability to partake in affective exchange) is of absolute importance: the more is encompassed by one's *conatus*, the more nodal points for interaction with the

environment a particular thing has, the more reality and, therefore, existence belongs to it, and vice versa (*E*Ip9). *Conatus* thus refers to 'our capacity to affirm […] affects in exchange with other bodies that increases our power and capabilities' (Carnera 2012: 81). This greater or lesser capacity to exchange affects is perhaps the main difference between a simple particular thing with very limited affective capacity (e.g. a piece of rock) that nevertheless still manifests its striving to persevere in existence (the piece of rock does not disintegrate when kicked) and a complex social being, such as a human person.

The central role of *conatus* enables Spinoza to equate existence (or reality), power, perfection, and virtue. Definitely, since the existence (or reality) of a thing lies in its capacity to affect the environment, existence and power to affect must be one and the same (see e.g. *E*Ip9s). That allows Spinoza to subsequently assert that 'the perfection of things is to be estimated from their nature and power alone' (*E*Iapp). Again, the more power a thing has, the more it exists and, since perseverance in existence is the essence of each thing, more power to persevere leads to being a more perfect example of an existing thing of one's kind. Moreover, since perfection equals power, it must also equal reality (*E*IVpref). And then, since it is virtuous to persevere in existence and become a more perfect example of one's nature, virtue and power must be the same as well (*E*IVd8). As Spinoza puts it, '[v]irtue is human power itself', defined through *conatus*; therefore, '[t]he more […] each person endeavours to persevere in his being, an is able to do so, the more he is endowed with virtue' (*E*IVp20d). It is, therefore, of paramount importance that whatever one does in order to promote their power of existence, is (at least whilst driven by reason and adequate knowledge, as discussed later in this chapter) virtuous and leads to perfection, since virtue means acting 'in accordance with the guidance of reason, and on the basis of looking for what is useful to oneself' (*E*IVp24). And in today's mediated environment in which social interactions take primacy (as is demonstrated in what follows), power and virtue is found in that which increases one's social presence, including post-truth narratives that serve to fulfil the desire for an aspirational enhancement and fulfilment of the self.

A key implication of equating power and reality is that 'the more reality belongs to the nature of some thing, the more power of existence it has from itself' (*E*Ip9s). In other words, to the reality of a thing belongs the power to affect the environment from within itself, which Spinoza understands as action (i.e. a thing is in an active state): 'we act when something occurs either in us or outside us of which we are the adequate cause' (*E*IIId2). On the contrary, being affected from outside leads to a reduction of power and reality, which Spinoza understands as passion (i.e. a thing is in a passive state): 'we are passive when something occurs in us, or when something follows from our nature, of which we are only a partial cause' (*E*IIId2). Hence, passions can be destructive if the *conatus* of a passion-causing thing is stronger than that of one's own. This distinction between action and passion also leads to Spinoza's framing of pleasure and pain, the former leading the mind to a greater perfection and the latter to a lesser perfection (*E*IIIp11s). In effect then, one can extend Spinoza's equation of existence, power, and virtue to also encompass pleasure: pleasure is virtuous because it means action which means greater power which means more reality. On the other hand, though, this equation also sets clear boundaries on what can actually be considered pleasurable: it is only that which contributes to the striving to persevere in existence. The same reasoning applies to what is 'good' and 'bad', the former being 'every sort of pleasure, and also whatever leads to pleasure' while the latter refers to 'every sort of pain' (*E*IIIp39s). Again, since *conatus* is the essence of

every thing, humans included, what contributes to it is good and what hiders it is bad. Likewise, '[t]he mind endeavours, as far as it can, to imagine those things which increase or help the body's power of acting' (*E*IIIp12), and when extended beyond the mind, that must naturally involve acting in order to acquire the imagined thing.

The constant appetite for pleasure, which is simply another way of framing conatus as striving to persevere in existence, implies that existence is never full: there simply would be no need to strive for perseverance if it was full and self-sufficient. Instead, there is a permanent deficit[1] of existence which every new power acquired is supposed to fill but cannot fully achieve that nevertheless (see Kalpokas 2018). Of course, some interpreters of Spinoza (see e.g. Balibar 1998: 107) would disagree with the framing of *conatus* as deficit – for them it refers to something 'essentially positive'. However, the very presence of *conatus* as striving and the centrality of appetite clearly infers that every particular thing is never identical to its ideal state, and such perfect existence must always exceed the actual state of that thing, this difference between the actual and the ideal being the deficit. Hence, not only *conatus* but also a deficit of existence is at the heart of every thing. In fact, one must go even further: because *conatus*, as striving to persevere in existence, can only occupy its privileged position due to an underlying deficit (in fact, it can only exist if it is caused by a deficit), the deficit of existence must constitute an even deeper essence of human existence. Therefore, every thing, human beings included, is structured around a deficit that it strives to fill or cover, thereby giving rise to *conatus* (or appetite or desire), the essential feature that characterises that thing. Through *conatus*, being is produced out of nothingness, out of a deficit.

Since the essence of every thing is the striving to persevere in existence and thereby desire ultimately refers to an endless quest to cover the deficit of existence (*E*IVd7), it comes as no surprise that 'human beings do everything on account of an end' (*E*Iapp), that end being bringing forth of something that is desired for the purpose of perseverance in existence, i.e. for covering the deficit of existence. However, Spinoza's being a completely mechanistic universe, there is no real choice or free will in striving for a particular end; in fact, the illusion of free will is merely the result of being oblivious of causal relationships (EIapp). Instead, 'each volition cannot exist or be determined to operate unless it is determined by another cause, and that again by another, and so on to infinity' (EIp32d). Part of that causation must also be social: as Spinoza asserts, 'if we imagine someone to love or desire or hate something that we ourselves love, desire, or hate, by that very fact we shall love etc. the thing more steadfastly' while other people's adverse emotions will cause a reconsideration of the thing's value (*E*IIIp31).

Indeed, one of the key roles of the self is shaping behaviours and perceptions 'in such a way as to enhance [individuals'] views of themselves with respect to their social worlds' (Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1992: 13). Two implications are immediately evident: first, the self, as a consciousness of existence, is a clear locus of *conatus* and second, this mental side of *conatus* is about aspiration within a particular social world, meaning that whatever helps increase one's standing within their immediate context, is a virtuous goal to be strived for. The aspirational quality of post-truth is primarily determined, as already shown in the first chapter, through an (at least perceived) active role in determining political processes rather than being passively

---

[1] The term 'deficit' has been deliberately chosen instead of the more natural 'lack' due to the latter's adoption by Lacanian psychoanalysis (which is also often features Spinoza) in order to avoid confusion.

affected by them and by powerful elites or other actors that would otherwise be seen as the most powerful driving forces. In other words, adherents of post-truth narratives tend to strive to be active in a Spinozist sense – to be effective causes in their interaction with the environment. Here it must also be noted that '[o]f all the emotions which are related to the mind insofar as it acts, there are none apart from those which are related to pleasure or desire' (*E*IIIp59). By this reasoning, then, post-truth cannot but produce pleasure.

It has already been established in the previous section that a thing's existence, power, and perfection (all being the same) are determined through its affective exchanges with the environment. It is now important to further delve into the nature of affects themselves. Affect can, of course, be defined generally as the consequence of a particular encounter which 'takes the form of an increase or decrease in the ability of the body and mind alike to act' (Thrift 2004: 62). As argued by Deleuze (1988: 123), 'a body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body and its individuality' to the extent that an individual's very existence is based on being conceivable and intelligible to others (see e.g. Della Rocca 2008: 36). The two-way relationship characteristic of affect is captured very well by Jones (2012: 648): '[t[he affective capacity of a body can be seen as the extent to which it can have an impact on the world around it while absorbing what the world throws at it'. Although it is easier to imagine affect as a two-person interaction, it is, as Pile (2010: 8) correctly asserts, transpersonal and draws from many bodies simultaneously.

Spinoza is well-known for his refusal to separate the body and the mind (in contrast to many of his famous contemporaries, such as Descartes). As Hardt (2007: 3) demonstrates, this absence of separation clearly manifests itself in the experience of affects: 'the mind's power to think corresponds to its receptivity to external ideas; and the body's power to act corresponds to its sensitivity to other bodies'. However, it is not the case that both the body and the mind encounter affects simultaneously. For Spinoza, affects seem to primarily originate from physical interactions of things: '[t]he human body is capable of perceiving very many things, and the more so, the more its body can be disposed in several ways' (*E*IIp14). However, that does not isolate the mind, since 'the human mind must perceive everything that happens in the human body; therefore, the human mind is capable of perceiving very many things' (*E*IIp14d). Spinoza's parallelism between the body and the mind would simply render impossible separate affections or the affection of one without the other (Hübner 2017: 41). Modifications (positive and negative alike) in both the attributes of thought and extension (i.e. in both the mind and the body) 'occur in encounters between the individual and other finite things' (Brown and Stenner 2001: 89), and in face-to-face conditions those encounters used to clearly be primarily between things – extensions rather than thoughts, the latter being modified as a corollary. However, in today's environment the affective capacity of the mind takes clear pre-eminence: the current environment is more about thoughts encountering thoughts. Similarly, as in some types of mnemonic activity, here one encounters affective capacity without an immediate physical presence of affect but with the presence of mental affection instead, the latter acting as substitute striving to persevere in existence (see, generally, Kalpokas 2017). Due to the changes brought forth by today's communication technologies, a co-consciousness is being established that extends across both space and time (Couldry and Hepp 2017: 106). Prior to the current stage of mediatisation, '*we were where our bodies were*' (Couldry and Hepp 2017: 90), more or less confined in affective capacity to the physical confines of existence whereas today asking

where people are is relatively pointless as their physical and affective presence often does not coincide: a person might be sitting e.g. on a train, at a park, or in a classroom while simultaneously being engaged in multiple online affective interactions with individuals who are themselves physically present at multiple locations globally. Nevertheless, as Damasio (2018) demonstrates, the bodily element never goes away: even in an era of primarily mental affects, the body is not sidelined and the parallelism between the body and the mind still holds. It is not a disembodied mind that experiences the affects: instead, the mind needs the participation of the body for the relevant experience just like the body needs the mind to inform it as to what it is to be experienced.

Through the primacy of affective interactions, the dichotomy between exteriority and interiority must also be brought into question. As Jaquet (2017: 71) asserts, 'Spinoza reveals that *what we believe to be internal is in reality external*', i.e. 'what appears as a determination from within is a determination from without that is ignored'. The same inextricable relationality is also picked up by Deleuze (1988: 125) by stressing that a body's 'interior is only a selected exterior and exterior, a projected interior'. In other words, affective exchange, being affected and affecting in return, immerses all things into causal chains where even an action of which one is a cause has been determined by an earlier instance of being affected. Indeed, as research into the workings of the mind demonstrates, personal identity, at its core, is 'essentially linked to *the other*, that means the person we talk to and to whom we are responsible, be it a real or imaginary person' (Fuchs 2007: 380). Even more so, this social aspect of identity is internalised to an extent that '[t]here is an inner witness in most of our actions and intentions to whom we could give an account of what we did and justify what we are doing – an *implicit other*' (Fuchs 2007: 380). And in today's mediatised environment, communicative interactions are central, bringing forth an at least partly indeterminate socially co-created environment which takes primacy over the determinable physical environment. Clearly, affective capacity is key here. Coupled with the tendency to imitate affects, the above leads to appreciating the fact that even 'our judgments are not, strictly speaking, ours' but rather 'carry the trace of the way in which external things affect us' (Jaquet 2017: 72). Hence, decisions are typically made on the basis of expected decisions of others (Davis 2017: 144), which again brings back Spinoza's agreement in nature and imitation of affects. Also, such imitation opens up the self for internalisation of truth-claims that cause shared pleasure, particularly because, in doing so, the claims in question bring forth joint fulfilment of *conatus* as striving to persevere in existence through mediatised affective capacity.

There has indeed been 'a change in the *basic* conditions for any social actor to exist *as such*: the self is expected in many societies to be available for interaction through digital platforms and even feels a certain pressure to represent itself on these platforms' (Couldry and Hepp 2017: 145. The way in which humans '*are in the world*' has changed in this world of 'self-*projection*' and 'self-*promotion*' (Couldry and Hepp 2017: 148). As Kwon and Kwon (2015) demonstrate, there is an incessant need to constantly present and assert a certain version of the self, both symbolically (e.g. through publicly arrogating certain attributes) and literally (e.g. through selfies). In this way, '[t]he digital image inserts a technical framing into the present, expanding bodily affectivity' (Clough 2008: 6). One could easily label this new age – the Experience Age – as the age of an almost Baroque-like embellishment of the self, and this paradigm shift also has a direct effect on how affective capacity is played out. In fact, affect, disembodied from the physical extension of the person, becomes paramount, going beyond

what Spinoza had conceived. The human person is *in* their disembodied affect, and thus the striving to persevere in existence becomes about maximisation of the affective capacity of the digital effigy of the self. But this change also has an even broader corollary: if even at the heart of human existence – the domain of the self – disembodiment takes hold, it is not surprising that truth claims experience their own version of disembodiment as well: what characterises a truth claim is its affective capacity rather than correspondence with something that underlies it, such as verifiable facts. And a truth claim with a strong affective capacity is capable of imprinting itself on the affective effigies of the human selves, affecting the affective capacities of such selves and subsequently becoming entrenched in the social world through the affective interrelations of those effigy-selves on whom it had imprinted itself.

The self has to be *managed* and *performed* (Couldry and Hepp 2017: 145-146) – this, in a mediatised environment, is a true art and craft of the self. This idea of the self as a work of art further adds to the disconnect between the verifiable and represented truths, discussed in the previous chapter. If one is constantly immersed in crafting an embellished effigy of the self, one is more likely to omit an effort of verification in other circumstances as well – verifiability is simply relegated in the order of values, or else, the ever-increasing gap between the embodied self and the effigy of the self would become unbearable. Here, post-truth in and of itself clearly becomes a kind of substitute endeavour to persevere in existence by striving to eliminate negative emotions that are, by definition, passions.

Next, while moving towards Spinoza's take on knowledge and its adequacy, one also has to keep in mind today's mediatisation of the very essence of human existence. To begin with, for Spinoza, truth and error are highly contextualised. In fact, 'the mind does not err from the fact that it imagines'; instead, 'the mind errs only insofar as it is considered as lacking an idea which excludes the existence of those things which it imagines as present to it' (*E*IIp17s). And here immediately one is faced with the first of contemporary challenges: exclusion of existence is significantly less straightforward in an era dominated by primarily mental affects and mediatised access to the world. After all, what does it mean to have an idea of the presence or absence of existence of a particular thing, be it a human person or an artefact, that is only accessible in (or, at least, through) the media, social or otherwise, or has its affect on us as a digital effigy (or, at least, avatar) in an online environment? Here, presence or absence is best understood not in an absolute but, instead, in a functional-pragmatic sense: if it works, it must be present. In other words, if something (increasingly – a digital something) causes an affect in us, we simply cannot have an idea that involves its absence. For example, when a digital effigy of a person interacts (i.e. exchanges affects) with a digital effigy of another person (and it must be noted that a single person can have, and usually has, multiple effigies in multiple contexts) and one effigy is imprinted with the affect of another (and vice versa), it is immaterial whether the imprinted affect bears relation to the bodily presence (and bodily characteristics) of the person behind the affector effigy or not – the affect is imprinted on the affectee regardless. Not only the preceding is yet another manifestation of the primarily mental form of affective relations but also it is an indication of a novel criterion of truth and falsity. Both have to relate not to something absolute (like in the physical environment, where one can always check whether an object is present in a predefined place or not) but functional-pragmatic: something is true because it causes an affect (it becomes true through its own affect) and, likewise, false if we had considered something to be present but have failed to become affected by it. However, a notable caveat must be that the functional-pragmatic criterion of truth and

falsity cannot provide for universally valid judgements: a determination of truth and falsity is exclusive to a particular social environment and, even more narrowly, to a specific interactive context within that environment. Nevertheless, this still carries Spinoza's contextual reasoning on truth and falsity to an environment which he could not have foreseen.

Next, one has to revisit, by way of an update, Spinoza's claim of the primacy of the bodily aspect of affects and, therefore, knowledge. In times when bodily encounters and face-to-face interaction are the norm, it is correct to say that 'the mind does not know itself, except insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the body' (*E*IIp23). Essentially, inclusion or exclusion of existence can in itself only be adequately applied to physical objects that either have or not have an affective encounter and, thus, either leave or do not leave their imprint on the physical bodies to which the mind is parallel. Hence, mental affects necessitate their own criteria of (non)existence, and such criteria should relate to their ability or inability to leave an imprint on the mind and through that imprint, following Spinoza's parallelism, determine the body to action. When it comes to narratives, both empowering and disempowering ones can be conceived of as true in the sense that they leave either a positive or a negative, pleasurable or painful impression. However, only the former lead to action while the latter belong to the domain of passions. In the same vein, all affiliative truths have to be regarded as true in the sense that they foster either promotion or negation (thus leaving an imprint on the mind) but only positive affiliation produces action. One might object that even those negatively affiliated may appear outwardly active in the sense of striving to negate or counter the truth-claim. However, following Spinoza's classification, such strivings can be seen at best as attempts to counter the negation of (social) existence produced by the relevant claim.

And still, despite all the emphasis on reason and true knowledge outlined above, Spinoza does concede to the power of emotions: not only '[t]he knowledge of good and bad is simply an emotion of pleasure or pain, in so far as we are conscious of it' (*E*IVp8) but also 'true knowledge of good and bad cannot, in so far as it is true, restrain any emotion; it can do so only in so far as it is considered as an emotion' (*E*IVp14). Even more broadly, then, '[a]n emotion can neither be restrained nor removed except by an emotion which is contrary to and stronger than the one which is to be restrained' (*E*IVp7), clearly echoing the previous chapter in which it has been established that pure factual accuracy, regardless of the rigour of fact-checking, will be ineffective without special measures to strengthen its appeal. If that is the case, undoubtedly, opinion must trump reason (*E*IVp17s), since humans tend to judge things solely in accordance with emotion, particularly – by the expectation of pleasure or pain, imaginary as it might be (*E*IIIp51s). Such 'lack of power in controlling and restraining emotions' is referred to by Spinoza as 'servitude', since 'a man who is subject to the emotions is not his own master, but is mastered by fortune' and, therefore, 'he is often compelled […] to follow what is worse' (*E*IVpref). On the other hand, one must stress that despite the appeal of post-truth narratives in the current Experience Age being fundamentally emotion-based, due to the aspirational character of these narratives they are to be deemed actions leading towards greater power of existence, particularly since knowledge and accuracy of truth claims have to be primarily evaluated in their social context. After all, if one falls for a narrative that increases one's self-value by e.g. externalising (actual or perceived) failure and blame, that narrative 'works' by producing positive affective results within the ambit of one's (increasingly mediatised) social interactions and, in all likelihood, also fostering agreement in nature and collective partaking in the aspiration amongst those affiliated with a particular truth-claim. Then, once again,

emotion conflated with non-universally adequate knowledge becomes true, active, and positively contributing to the endeavour to persevere in existence through its own affects.

Given the aspirational quality of post-truth, it becomes a particularly apt tool for collective achievement of a shared experience of pleasure and temporary negation of the deficit of existence (a negation that can always be *only* temporary). One might object, of course, that falling for a pre-manufactured narrative that has specifically been designed to appeal to the preconceptions of the target audience is, in Spinoza's terms, a passion rather than an action. However, to reiterate once again, post-truth is a collusion, so we cannot assume that those falling for post-truth narratives are passive, i.e. that they are primarily acted upon. In fact, they are involved in active acclamation, realising the aspirational nature of existence, reflected in the constant endeavour to persevere in being. It is in the acclamative action – collective public exaltation – that a truth-claim acquires its political meaning and significance (see, notably, Schmitt 2008: 273), thereby becoming worthy of having been made (i.e. becoming an artefact within the political domain only through being acclaimed) while at the same time the acclaiming public is transmuted (or transmutes itself) from an agglomeration of individuals to its collective presence as 'citizens with an opinion' (Kennedy 2004: 133). Such is, then, the contemporary transformation of even a striving based on contextually adequate knowledge.

Bibliography

Abramovich, Giselle (2017) 'In the Age of Customer Experience, Content in Context is King', *CMO*, June, available at: http://www.cmo.com/features/articles/2017/6/21/in-the-age-of-customer-experience-content-in-context-is-king-adobesymp.html.

Baggini, Julian (2017) *A Short History of Truth: Consolations for a Post-Truth World*. London: Quercus Editions.

Balibar, Etienne (1998) *Spinoza and Politics*. London and New York: Verso.

Ball, James (2017) *Post-truth: How Bullshit Conquered the World*. London: Biteback Publishing.

Benkler, Yoshai (2007) *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bilgin, Pinar (2017) 'Resisting Post-truth Politics, a Primer: Or, How *Not* to Think about Human Mobility and the Global Environment', *Global Policy* 8(1): 55-59.

Bridges, Tristan (2017) 'There's an Intriguing Sociological Reason So Many Americans Are Ignoring Facts Lately', *Business Insider*, 27 February, available at: http://www.businessinsider.com/sociology-alternative-facts-2017-2.

Brown, Steven Dexter and Stenner, Paul (2001) 'Being Affected: Spinoza and the Psychology of Emotion', *International Journal of Group Tensions* 30(1): 81-105.

Carnera, Alexander (2012) 'The Affective Turn: The Ambivalence of Biopolitics within Modern Labour and Management', *Culture and Organization* 18(1): 69-84.

Clough, Patricia T. (2008) 'The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedia and Bodies', *Theory, Culture & Society* 25(1): 1-22.

Couldry, Nick and Hepp, Andreas (2017) *The Mediated Construction of Reality*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity.

d'Ancona, Matthew (2017) *Post Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back*. London: Ebury Press.

Dahlgren, Peter and Alvares, Claudia (2013) 'Political Participation in and Age of Mediatisation', *Javnost – The Public* 20(2): 47-65.

Damasio, Antonio (2018) *The Strange Order of Things: Life, Feeling, and the Making of Cultures*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Davis, Evan (2017) *Post-truth: How We Have Reached Peak Bullshit and What We Can Do About It*. London: Little, Brown.

Deleuze, Gilles (1988) *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.

Della Rocca, Michael (2008) 'Rationalism Run Amok: Representation and Reality of Emotions in Spinoza', in Charlie Huenemann (ed.) *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 26-52.

Fenton, Veronica and Barassi, Natalie (2011) 'Alternative Media and Social Networking Sites', *The Communication Review* 14(3): 179-196.

Fuchs, Thomas (2007) 'Fragmented Selves: Temporality and Identity in Borderline Personality Disorder', *Psychopathology* 40: 379-387.

Hardt, Michael (2007) 'Foreword: What Affects Are Good For', in Patricia T. Clough and Jean Halley (eds.) *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Durham (NC): Duke University Press, ix-xii.

Harford, Tim (2017) 'The Problem with Facts', *Financial Times*, 9 March, available at: https://www.ft.com/content/eef2e2f8-0383-11e7-ace0-1ce02ef0def9.

Hepp, Andreas and Hasebrink, Uwe (2018) 'Researching Transforming Communications in Times of Deep Mediatization: A Figurational Approach', in Andreas Hepp et al. (eds.) *Communicative Figurations: Transforming communications in Times of Deep Mediatization*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 15-48.

Hepp, Andreas et al. (2018) 'Rethinking Transforming Communications: An Introduction', in Andreas Hepp et al. (eds.) *Communicative Figurations: Transforming communications in Times of Deep Mediatization*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 3-14.

Hepp, Andreas, Hjarvard, Stig and Lundby, Knut (2015) 'Mediatization: Theorizing the Interplay between Media, Culture and Society', *Media, Culture & Society* 37(2): 314-324.

Hjarvard, Stig (2008) 'The Mediatization of Society: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change', *Nordicom Review* 29: 105-134.

Hopkin, Jonathan and Rosamond, Ben (2017) 'Post-truth Politics, Bullshit and Bad Ideas: "Deficit Fetishism" in the UK', *New Political Economy*, published online before print on 14 September DOI: 10.1080/13563467.2017.1373757.

James, Susan (2016) 'Why Should We Read Spinoza?', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 78: 109-125.

Jaquet, Chantal (2017) 'From the Self to Oneself: Subject and Interiority in Spinoza', *The New Centennial Review* 17(2): 63-76.

Jones, Phil (2012) 'Sensory Indiscipline and Affect: A Study of Commuter Cycling', *Social & Cultural Geography* 13(6): 645-658.

Kalpokas, Ignas (2017) 'The Wanderings of Displaced Memory: Immanence in the Essays of Czesław Miłosz', in Brynnar Swenson (ed.) *Immanent Expressions: Literature and the Encounter with Immanence*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, pp. 130-152.

Kalpokas, Ignas (2018) *Creativity and Limitation in Political Communities: Spinoza, Schmitt and Ordering*. London and New York: Routledge.

Kennedy, Ellen (2004) *Constitutional Failure: Carl Schmitt in Weimar*. Durham (NC) and London: Duke University Press.

Kwon, Yoo Jin and Kwon, Kyoung-Nan (2015) 'Consuming the Objectified Self: The Quest for Authentic Self', *Asian Social Science* 11(2): 301-312.

Langlois, Ganaele et. al. (2009) 'Networked Publics: The Double Articulation of Code and Politics on Facebook', *Canadian Journal of Communication* 34(1): 415-434.

Lapowsky, Issie (2016) 'The 2016 Election Exposes the Very, Very Dark Side of Tech', *Wired*, 7 November, available at: https://www.wired.com/2016/11/2016-election-exposes-dark-side-tech.

Laybats, Claire and Tredinnick, Luke (2016) 'Post Truth, Information, and Emotion', *Business Information Review* 33(4): 204-206.

Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ecker, Ullrich K. H., Cook, John (2017) 'Beyond Misinformation: Understanding and Coping With the "Post-Truth" Era', *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition* 6(4): 353-369.

Lockie, Stewart (2016) 'The Emotional Enterprise of Environmental Sociology', *Environmental Sociology* 2(3): 233-237.

Mair, Jonathan (2017) 'Post-truth Anthropology', *Anthropology Today* 33(3): 3-4.

Marcinkowski, Frank (2014) 'Mediatisation of Politics: Reflections on the State of the Concept', *Javnost – The Public* 21(2): 5-22.

McGranahan, Carole (2017) 'An Anthropology of Lying: Trump and the Political Sociality of Moral Outrage', *American Ethnologist* 44(2): 243-248.

Newman, Daniel (2016) 'In the Age of Experience: The Best Brands Tell Better Stories and Make You a Part of Them', *Forbes*, 8 March, available at:

https://www.forbes.com/sites/danielnewman/2016/03/08/in-the-age-of-experience-the-best-brands-tell-better-stories-and-make-you-a-part-of-them/#340acb217799.

Pile, Steve (2010) 'Emotions and Affect in Recent Human Geography', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35: 5-20.

Robinson, Dawn T. and Smith-Lovin, Lynn (1992) 'Selective Interaction as a Strategy for Identity Maintenance: An Affect Control Model', *Social Psychology Quarterly* 55(1): 12-28.

Rutenberg, Jim (2016) 'Media's Next Challenge: Overcoming the Threat of Fake News', *The New York Times*, 6 November, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/07/business/media/medias-next-challenge-overcoming-the-threat-of-fake-news.html.

Schmitt, Carl (2008) *Constitutional Theory*. Durham (NC) and London: Duke University Press.

Schulz, Winfried (2004) 'Reconstructing Mediatization as an Analytical Concept', *European Journal of Communication* 19(1): 87-101.

Spinoza, Benedict (2000) *Ethics*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Strömbäck, Jesper and Esser, Frank (2015) 'Making Sense of the Mediatization of Politics', in Jesper Strömbäck and Frank Esser (eds.) *Making Sense of Mediatized Politics: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*. London and New York: Routledge.

Strong, S. I. (2017) 'Alternative Facts and the Post-truth Society: Meeting the Challenge', *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 165: 137-146.

Suiter, Jane (2016) 'Post-truth Politics', *Political Insight* 7(3): 25-27.

The Economist (2016a) 'Yes, I'd Lie to You', 10 September, available at: https://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21706498-dishonesty-politics-nothing-new-manner-which-some-politicians-now-lie-and.

Thorson, Emily (2016) 'Belief Echoes: The Persistent Effects of Corrected Misinformation', *Political Communication* 33(3): 460-480.

Thrift, Nigel (2004) 'Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect', *Geografiska Annaler* 86B(1): 57-78.

Wadhera, Mike (2016) 'The Information Age is Over; Welcome to the Experience Age', *Wired*, 10 May, available at: https://beta.techcrunch.com/2016/05/09/the-information-age-is-over-welcome-to-the-experience-age.