

Chung-chi Yu and Kwok-ying Lau (eds.)
Phenomenology and Human Experience

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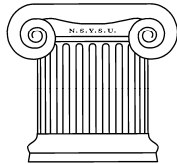
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Editors' Preface

The present volume of essays is generated from part of the papers presented at “Border-Crossing: The 4th International Conference of P.E.A.CE (Phenomenology for East-Asian Circle)” held in December 2010 at the National Sun Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Inaugurated in 2004¹ and continued to be a biannual meeting gathering phenomenological philosophers from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan as well as their counterparts from Australia, Europe, and North America, the P.E.A.CE conference has proved itself to be one of the most important platforms for the promotion of phenomenological research and intercultural philosophical exchange in East Asia. Under the general theme of “Border-Crossing,” the 4th P.E.A.CE conference invited reflections on intercultural understanding and interdisciplinary research, as well as on the crossing-over of different experiential genres of humankind from a widely defined phenomenological perspective. This volume, entitled *Phenomenology and Human Experience*, is comprised of essays related to the latter theme.²

The eleven essays collected in this volume are sub-divided into two parts. All the five essays in Part I are original phenomenological reflections on different aspects of human experience. In “Ethics and the Commitment to Truth,” Jeff Malpas undertakes a close discussion on the relationship between the space of the ethical and the space of truth. Referring to the Heideggerian usage of the term “truth” in the sense of unconcealment, i.e., the opening up of a space that renders possible what is perceptible in speech and in action, Malpas demon-

¹ The proceedings of the 1st P.E.A.CE conference is published as *Identity and Alterity: Phenomenology and Cultural Traditions*, ed. Kwok-ying Lau, Chan-fai Cheung and Tze-wan Kwan, series “Orbis Phaenomenologicus Perspektiven” (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2010), xii + 379 pp.

² A separate volume will be published under the title *Border-Crossing: Phenomenology, Interculturality and Interdisciplinarity*, ed. Kwok-ying Lau and Chung-chi Yu, series “Orbis Phaenomenologicus Perspektiven” (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, forthcoming, 2012).

strates with force that while the space of the ethical is a common space opened up in the world between self and other, between self and self, as well as between self and world, it grounds itself upon the space of truth. The space of truth is the very space which renders possible the space of speaking, of action and of decision. It is a primordial space to which our speaking refers and constantly returns in so far as such speaking always bears a truth claim while it tries to articulate meaningful speech acts in view of decisions and actions. Understood in this manner, Malpas draws our attention to the intertwinement of the space of the ethical and the space of truth. In contrast to discourses which undermine the importance of truth in the name of promoting dialogue, Malpas argues that “plurality and conversation, far from being opposed to truth, thus already presuppose it, and far from being a source of danger, truth turns out to be that which guards us and protects the possibility of human sociability and collectivity” (*infra*, p. 13). In short, it is within the space of truth that ethical life, namely the interactive and responsive modes of engagement with life proper to human existence, is possible.

Since the later part of the 20th century, the rapid development of biotechnologies has given rise to new ethical issues. In his essay “Crossing the Boundary of Being Human: Enhancement Technology and the Problem of Free Will,” Junichi Murata takes issue with the impact of advanced biotechnologies on discourses in bioethics and neuroethics. Envisioning the utopian effect of crossing the natural boundaries of human being brought about by the rapid progress of biotechnologies, some of such discourses hail the future arrival of a “transhuman” or “posthuman” era which is a kind of Brave New World. Yet underlying the optimistic outlook of a Brave New World is a technological determinism which, Murata insists, is neither desirable nor probable. A technologically deterministic Brave New World would be governed by a super-powerful world controller who will extinguish people’s desires and wills by all means and leave no room for expression of people’s quest for freedom and happiness. The utopist projection of technological determinism is neither probable according to Murata. Based on the critical insights in some recent trends of philosophy of technology which focus on the multidimensional, ambiguous, and contingent characteristics of technological development, Murata concludes that even in a technologically enhanced world “the concept of a free will that can be achieved without any ambiguity and contingency is nothing but a magical and unrealistic concept” (*infra*, p. 28).

The 20th century has also witnessed an immense growth of world population and the rapid extension of urbanization. These phenomena, while constituting a tremendous threat to the conservation of natural environment, have facilitated the

spread of ecological consciousness across geographical and cultural borders. Tetsuya Kono's article "Culture, Wilderness, and Homelessness: Eco-Phenomenology 2" is a courageous attempt to advance deep ecology from a phenomenological perspective. By distinguishing between pastoral nature, which is nature domesticated by human civilization in view of habitation, and nature as wilderness which is a place for passage and nomadic encounter, Kono's consciousness of deep ecology criticizes home-centrism. He calls for the safeguard of nature from human domestication and exploitation by virtue of the intrinsic value of nature as wilderness, which incarnates a form of value independent of any human utility. In opposition to the homogenization of the humanized environment through extension of pastoral nature and urbanization resulting in the loss of wilderness as otherness, Kono strives "to deepen our eco-phenomenology of place in order to celebrate the wilderness of otherness" (*infra*, p. 43).

While deep ecology calls our attention to nature as wilderness, nature can be approached through a more or less aesthetic attitude, namely by viewing it as landscape. In "Toward a Phenomenological Reading of Landscape: Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty, and Zong Bing," Kuan-min Huang embarks on the virgin soil of philosophy of landscape from a phenomenological approach. Extending the usage of the ontological term "flesh" coined by the late Merleau-Ponty, Huang tries to understand landscape as concrete illustration of the flesh of the world. Through preliminary discussions of landscape with respect to Bachelard's poetics of the imaginary and Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh as wild being, Huang arrives at a philosophical determination of landscape as the topos where the perceptual joins the imaginary and the corporeal intertwines with the spiritual. With this in mind, Huang goes on to expound the philosophical significance of traditional Chinese landscape painting. The latter is a creative activity initiated by the experience of landscape as bodily oriented. Joined by imagination which orients the strokes of the painter with a cosmic vision, the act of Chinese landscape painting is the interplay of the kinesthetic and spiritual orders which aims at bodily and spiritual transformation towards fusion with the universe. Traditional Chinese landscape painting is thus a dynamic corporeal and spiritual correspondence with the cosmic order which is never a mere mapping of an ocular vision onto the painting tissue. Viewed under this optic, landscape is neither a mere object of knowledge and design nor a place for construction; "landscape inspires thoughts and living art, it also deploys itself as a way of thinking and living" (*infra*, p. 62).

Human life is punctuated by ups and downs, activity and passivity, actions and reflections. Wisdom is often seen as locating a balance point between the

extremes. In a profession of faith unique in its genre, Lester Embree reviews his long and rich academic career in "Some Phenomenology of *Not* Retiring." Finding himself no longer needed to precipitate the formation of phenomenological organizations as he did in the past, he will continue to do research, especially in interdisciplinary phenomenology. He will foster reflective analyses as a means to train future generations of phenomenologist in the strict sense of the term, and not as mere scholars of phenomenology.

The six essays in Part II are devoted to novel discussions of classical phenomenologists' attempt to confront divergent aspects of human experience. Husserl's reflections on the transcendental meaning of death caught the attention of Xianghong Fang. In his contribution "A Phenomenological Attempt to Cross the Border: On Husserl's Meditation on Death in *Manuscripts C*," Fang scrutinizes the late Husserl's attempt to make sense of death, i.e., to constitute death from the standpoint of transcendental phenomenology. In some manuscripts Husserl considers that the death of the transcendental I, which as a pure monad has no psychosomatic existence, does not mean the material decomposition of the individual subject but the loss of consciousness of the world and the stepping out of the transcendental community of subjects. Thus the process of transition from life to death, considered transcendently, is analogous to the transformation of consciousness to unconsciousness, from awareness to sleep, from action to pause. However, an unconscious constitutive subject is a contradiction in terms from the perspective of transcendental phenomenology. Husserl himself has admitted in another manuscript that it is unthinkable that the I can "cease" in a transcendental sense. This dilemma has driven Husserl to ask the enigmatic question about the ontological status of a non-functioning constitutive subject: Is there such a being, "a not-functioning and still as something functional, a being in the other sense, that plays its role together as underground, as a condition—as a 'not-being,' which makes Being possible together through this Not-Being?" (*infra*, p. 88) Confronted to the human phenomenon of death, Husserl's transcendental phenomenology can never be as paradoxical as postulating the "existence" of some sort of "not-being" as the condition of the functioning of a transcendental subject.

Understanding is the dimension of human existence which underlies all human activities. It is then not surprising to see that hermeneutics as the art of understanding plays a prominent role in both the Eastern and Western traditions of philosophy. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is widely accepted as a consequential development of Heidegger's theory of understanding and interpretation presented in *Being and Time*. However, Ka-wing Leung contests this

view in his essay "Heidegger's Concept of Fore-structure and Textual Interpretation." Based on a subtle reading of the differences between Heidegger's own account of Dasein's fore-structure as one of the basic ontological conditions of the activity of understanding and the extrapolation of this conception by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, Leung points out that some well-known elements of Gadamer's hermeneutics are absent or even contrary to Heidegger's conception in *Being and Time*. It is well-known that Gadamer considers prejudice and tradition as conditions of understanding and has presented his famous criticism of "the prejudice against prejudice" ascribed to the Enlightenment by associating two different senses of the German word *Vorurteil*: prejudice as provisional judgment and prejudice as ungrounded judgment. Leung reminds us that while prejudice as provisional judgment can be assimilated to Heidegger's concept of fore-structure, the pejorative sense of prejudice as ungrounded judgment never receives rehabilitation in Heidegger. Leung also points out that to the author of *Being and Time*, tradition in itself not only bears no hermeneutic productivity, it even keeps us from having authentic understanding by blocking our access to the primordial sources of categories and concepts handed down to us through tradition. Thus in contrast to Gadamer who prioritizes tradition as an important form of authority, Heidegger advocates the destruction of tradition in order to release the primordial sources of understanding blocked by it. Leung guards against "those who know Heidegger's concept of fore-structure only through Gadamer's account might misunderstand it, especially in regard to its relation with tradition" (*infra*, p. 93).

Gadamer's hermeneutics is also the focus of Yiu-hong Wong's contribution. In his article "Understanding, Historically Effected Consciousness, and Phenomenology in Gadamer," Wong tries to resituate Gadamer within the phenomenological movement understood in the wide sense. While emphasizing Gadamer's open acknowledgement of his personal and theoretical debt to the young Heidegger and to *Being and Time*, Wong reiterates Gadamer's criticism of Husserl's phenomenology of transcendental subjectivity. Taking Husserl's idealist version of transcendental phenomenology presented in *Ideas I* (1913) as his clue, Wong criticizes Husserl's method of transcendental reflection as inapt to grasp the dimension of pregivenness inherent in the consciousness of historical human life which is a historically effected consciousness. To Wong, Husserl's method of reflection is based on his mode of understanding of inner time which presents no significant difference from that of external perception. Wong thinks that this mode of understanding purifies radically the dimension of absence in human experience, rendering it impossible to understand historicity. Wong also thinks that

Husserl's phenomenology unilaterally favours the selfsameness of the constitutive subject without giving due attention to the constitutive role played by the other in human experience; thus it neglects the ethical dimension of human life. Though Wong credits Husserl's concept of horizon as providing one of the basic elements of Gadamer's hermeneutics, he concludes, without referring to Husserl's later thematization of the life-world and history, that "as Gadamer has clearly demonstrated, the total condition of the historical life and the consciousness of this movement can never be constituted without the pre-reflective life-world and the negativity inextricably embedded in it" (*infra*, p. 135).

Affectivity is another basic dimension of human existence which receives particular attention in the French tradition of phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is well-known for taking the living body and the flesh as clues to the ontological investigation of affective phenomena. Chon-ip Ng revisits Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh in his study "Reversibility and Its Philosophical Implications: A Phenomenological Explication of a Late Concept of Merleau-Ponty." Proceeding from a patient analysis of the concept of reversibility through a careful reading of the late Merleau-Ponty's thematization of the phenomena of double sensation exemplified by the senses of touch and vision, Ng is able to articulate the triple meaning of reversibility conferred by the author of *The Visible and the Invisible*. Reversibility as circulation (may be "circularity" is a better word) is the fold within the sensible Being which liberates a self and thus the subject. Reversibility as reciprocity refers to the interlacement (*entrelacs*) between the touching and the touched as well as between the sensing and the sensed; such interlacement expresses the equiprimordiality of passivity and activity inherent to the ontological character of the flesh. Reversibility as divergence (*écart*) or escape pays attention to the fact that coincidence of the touching and the touched is never complete. Thus the flesh is not an ontological order of pure immanence. Exteriority and plurality of the other are preserved. Understood in this manner, reversibility captures the multitude of meaning of the term "chiasm," which characterizes the phenomenal field as an open space of interplay between different senses and as the interlocking region of in-between among a plurality of subjects never enclosed in their individuality, sovereignty and privacy. Such characterization of the phenomenal field implies that rationality can no longer be understood as the normative and regulative order of things constituted by a sovereign subjectivity from above. To Ng, Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh envisages an embodied rationality which in fact is in plural form as there are always a multiplicity of orders. Contrary to the traditional metaphysical conception of rationality in which the One

or the Unique prevails, Ng concludes that Merleau-Ponty's concept of reversibility liberates a new form of rationality in which "the generality of the wild reason of the flesh consists then not of the ultimate synthesis of the all, but of the reversible intertwining of a plurality of orders" (*infra*, p. 151).

The Czech philosopher Jan Patočka had close personal encounter with German phenomenologists (Husserl and Fink), but his philosophical sensibility seems to be closer to French phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty and Lévinas. In his illuminating essay "The Subjective Movement of Body and World: Observations on the Phenomenology and Metaphysics of Corporeality in the Reflections of Jan Patočka," Karel Novotný demonstrates the originality of Patočka with respect to his thematization of the body in correlation with the world through the mediating concept of subjective movement. Patočka uses this concept to underpin a pre-reflective corporeal subject as a being in the world which, although objectively inapprehensible, is nevertheless the ontological condition of phenomenalization. To Patočka the intentional operation of perception, belief, synthesis or ascertainment can emerge as object of conscious apprehension only on the basis of the subjective movement of the body as a being in the world. Like Merleau-Ponty, Patočka thematizes the subjective movement of the body with regard to her affective and emotional encounter with the world through the senses. The first movement of existence of an embodied subject is not the organizing activity of a free agent (the "I can" emphasized by Husserl), but her being moved in the world. It is through movement in the passive and instinctive sense that a corporeal subject is open to the world by responding to its stimuli by way of feelings and emotional expressions. Thus in contrast to Heidegger the world in which a human subject is immersed is not primarily a goal-oriented and practical milieu, but an all-encompassing sphere of warmth and coldness. To Patočka the world is revealed to the affective corporeal subject both as a warm surrounding which elicits her sympathetic resonance, and as a repellent milieu of alienation and coldness. Novotný concludes that the originality of Patočka's phenomenology of body consists precisely in disclosing this affectively negative aspect of the world which the early Lévinas had paid attention to in his analysis of the impersonal character of *il y a*, while Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of carnal existence did not.

Education is a constant concern across different cultures, ancient and modern. But in the overwhelmingly technological and market-driven mode of society today, is it possible to reactualize the Greek vision of education as *paideia*—as human fulfillment and realization of the whole person in view of intellectual and moral excellence, artistic harmony and physical beauty? Is it possible to attain cognitive development, maturity of emotional intelligence and rationality that, at

the same time, encourage moral perfection? These are the questions underlying Maybelle Marie O. Padua's article "Edith Stein's Phenomenology of Education." Padua finds in the first research assistant of Husserl a philosophical view on the human person which orients her philosophy of education. Against the Enlightenment view that education sets for itself the ideal of attainment of encyclopedic knowledge, Stein insists that education does not aim at external possession of learning, but rather the formation of "a *gestalt* which the human person assumes under the influence of manifold external forces." After a great effort of reconstruction from Stein's dispersed writings with the aid of other theoretical sources, Padua concludes that on the one hand education has the moral aim of helping the person to exercise her freedom in a manner that recognizes the obligatory character of the moral law, on the other that Stein's philosophy of education emphasizes the need to develop the affective life so that even obedience to moral precepts could be embraced with passion and drive. To Padua these two educational principles together can provide a practical guidance to help educators to face their challenge today: "to bring about a strong desire in the students themselves to attain moral growth and personal reform" (*infra*, p. 191).

The interconnection between ethical space and space of truth, freedom in the biotechnologically enhanced world, wild-nature facing the extension of urbanization, landscape as a way of thinking and living, Husserl's meditation on death, the subtle difference between Heidegger's and Gadamer's hermeneutics, Merleau-Ponty's reversibility thesis revisited, Patočka's phenomenology of body and subjective movement, and Edith Stein's phenomenology of education—these are original contributions or renewed reflections from East-Asian phenomenologists, joined by their Western colleagues, on the most divergent aspects of human experience. This volume is another concrete proof that more than a century since its emergence on German soil, phenomenology has spread across linguistic and geographical borders to become one of the most vibrant global philosophical movements.

Last but not least, the editors would like to express their gratitude towards Hans-Rainer Sepp, editor-in-chief of the collection *Libri Nigri*, who generously accepted this volume to be published in his collection. The editors would like to thank also Esther Tsang, senior editor of the Edwin Cheng Foundation Asian Centre for Phenomenology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, who has taken up gracefully and efficiently the task of coordinating during every stage of the editorial work that leads to this book's publication.

Kwok-ying Lau and Chung-chi Yu
February 2012

Ethics and the Commitment to Truth*

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I.

To what extent is any properly human engagement possible at all—even the engagement that consists in the leaving open of a space for others—without commitment, at some level and in some form, to an engagement with respect to questions of ethics and of truth? Surely one of the challenges of the contemporary world is to articulate a sense of the ethical, and a sense of truth, that can be seen to make demands on us independently of our cultural or ethnic background, yet is nevertheless sensitive to the inevitable plurality of the world. The force of this challenge is not derived from some merely practical imperative. Instead, it comes from the absolute centrality of notions of ethics and truth in the very possibility of collective forms of life, and, more fundamentally, for the possibility of a human form of life as such.

The very concept of the ethical, moreover, is itself closely linked to the idea of truth. Ethics involves commitments that can be formulated as *claims* about the appropriateness of actions and decisions, as well as about the values that govern and are expressed in them. To make such claims is to assert the truth of what is claimed. This is, after all, in the nature of what it is to make a claim, irrespective of the sort of claim that it is. In addition, the making of such a claim—the very act of speaking—immediately draws us into the realm of the ethical through the role of the commitment to truth in such speaking. To speak is immediately to be implicated in a network of ethical concepts that themselves enable and support such speaking—including, at the most basic level, concepts of honesty, responsibility, and even trust.

* An earlier version of this paper appeared in *Trópos. Rivista di ermeneutica e critica filosofica* 2 (2009): 15–29.

The commitment to truth that comes with the very act of speaking thus reflects the commitments we have to others, as well as to ourselves, that are presupposed by our speaking (and are presupposed even when we seek to act in ways that undercut our relations with others, or to act against them). This commitment to truth is surely at the core of ethical life—as well, one might add, as at the heart of the political. In the brief remarks that follow, I aim to do two things: first, to explore the connection between truth and speaking, in order to clarify certain key elements in the character of truth, including the relation between truth and the possibility of plurality; second, to explore the connection between truth and ethics, in order to show the role that truth plays in the very ground of ethics, and, therefore, in any proper response to plurality—including the plurality that is exhibited in the form of conflict or disagreement, as well as the plurality that is manifest in the possibility of conversation.

II.

Truth is a concept that is implicated in our very speaking, and it is this general point that constitutes the essential first step in any examination of the role or nature of truth—or, indeed, in the exploration of the connection between truth and the ethical. To speak is already to take a stand with respect to truth—either through the claim to truth made in the speaking itself (a claim that may be true or false) or through the claim to truth implied by such speaking (so that even to command, to promise, or to plead is an act that takes place against an assumed background of things held true).¹ It is the essential relatedness of truth and speaking, more so than the distinction between, for instance, truth and opinion (even justified opinion), that is central to any attempt to inquire into the nature and significance of truth, since it directs attention away from the impossible attempt to provide a definition of truth, and onto the more important matter concerning the *role* of truth, the way in which it connects *with other concepts*, and the human *practices* with which it belongs.²

¹ We can thus argue that every non-declarative utterance always stands in relation to some declarative utterance. See Donald Davidson, “Moods and Performance,” in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd rev. ed., 2001), pp. 109–121. The influence of Davidson, as well as Heidegger, will be evident throughout the account developed below.

² It was characteristic of Davidson’s approach to the question of truth to abjure precisely the attempt to define truth. See his comments in, among other discussions, “The Folly of Trying to Define Truth,” in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, pp. 17–36.

The necessary tie between truth and speaking underlies the obvious difficulties that afflict certain attempts to speak *about* truth—a difficulty most clearly evident in the so-called “truth paradoxes.” Such paradoxes usually involve a self-referentiality that requires the same sentence to be apparently both truth and false at the same time. They include not only paradoxes such as that of the liar in its various forms (“All Cretans are Liars, Epimenides the Cretan tells you this”), but also the paradoxes that arise on the basis of attempts to assert the relativity or irrelevance of truth. The relativist, for instance, in asserting the relativity of the truth of a statement to some social or conventional context thereby asserts both the truth and the potential falsity of that very claim, since, by its own account, the claim concerning the relativity of truth will be true in some contexts, but false in others. Similarly, if one attempts to assert the irrelevance or dispensability of truth, one must at the same time assert the irrelevance or dispensability of the truth of that claim. The significance of these paradoxes is not that they provide any “knock-down” argument against opponents of truth (they do not), but rather that they demonstrate the essential interconnection of truth with speaking. The moral is that if one wishes to relativize or to reject truth, one is best advised not to try and state it.

The way truth is connected to speaking itself has major implications for how truth must be understood—although they are implications that have often been neglected or ignored. At the most general level, it means that truth is not some “metaphysical” concept that points us to an eternal realm beyond human interests or out of reach of human abilities, but instead refers us back to the very realm in which we speak and in which we act. There is, then, no such thing as “the Truth” against which we measure ourselves or to which we vainly aspire. While we can talk of truth, as Heidegger does, in terms of the unconcealing of things that is also the opening up of world,³ this is not a usage that refers us to a “truth” that goes beyond human speech and action, but is rather intimately connected to it. The Heideggerian account concerns, in fact, that which is the proper ground for the truth that is evident in speech and action.⁴

³ See Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 136–154. The account of truth set out here is, of course, developed in many other places in Heidegger’s work.

⁴ In “On the Essence of Truth,” Heidegger argues that it is a mistake to suppose that truth belongs in the first instance or solely to statements (p. 142). Such a claim is quite consistent, however, with the idea that there is nevertheless a sense of truth that does attach to statements. In fact, Heidegger’s argument in “On the Essence of Truth,” and elsewhere, is precisely that the idea of truth as attaching to statements itself presup-

One way of putting the general point at issue here is to say that there is no body of truths to which “truth” refers that are eternal and unchanging. Inasmuch as it is our speaking that is true and false (at least in the ordinary sense of the term), so whether any particular instance of speaking is true or false is a contingent matter—although it depends on just two things: on what the words as spoken mean (which inevitably involves what others take those words to mean, and not only what we might mean by them), and on the way the world is arranged.⁵ Thus, as language changes, and as the world also changes, so too may the truth of what we say change along with it. If one wishes to find some relativity in respect of truth, then this is all the relativity one should expect to find—and it is a relativity of a quite innocuous and (mostly) unremarkable sort. “Truth” does not name some mysterious and ineluctable property or entity, but instead refers to the particular form of interconnectedness that obtains between instances of speaking—between particular sentences, utterances, or statements (which themselves express particular attitudes or orientations while also standing in a relation to particular instances of non-linguistic behavior) as they are spoken by individual speakers within a community of speakers, and between such speaking and the world in which that speaking occurs.

poses the idea of truth as unconcealment. Heidegger actually proposes two concepts of truth, one of which is a condition for the other, but in so doing cannot be said to eliminate the other. Moreover, while the idea of truth as unconcealment opens up the space in which statements can be both true and false (it opens up the space for the operation of truth as it applies to statement), this does not, *pace* the claims of Ernst Tugendhat (see Tugendhat, “Heidegger’s Idea of Truth,” in C. McCann, ed., *Critical Heidegger* [New York: Routledge, 1996], pp. 227–240), invalidate the claim that it is indeed truth that is at issue here. Not only can Heidegger retain both the idea of truth as “unconcealment” alongside the idea that there is a distinction between true and false statements, but one can also show how these two senses are connected, and why the first might indeed be referred to as a form of “truth.” From a Davidsonian perspective, the latter point is evident, although it requires further explication, in the idea that truth inheres in our “beliefs” as a whole, and that this is indeed presupposed by the possibility that any specific belief might be true or false (see the final chapter of Jeff Malpas, *Donald Davidson and the Mirror of Meaning: Holism, Truth, Interpretation* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], pp. 230ff.). For a more detailed discussion of the Tugendhat objection, see Malpas, “The Two-fold Character of Truth: Heidegger, Davidson, Tugendhat,” in Babette Babich and Dimitri Ginev, eds., *Essays in Memory of Joseph J. Kockelmans* (Dordrecht: Springer, forthcoming, 2012).

⁵ See Davidson, “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge,” in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 139.

The form of interconnectedness at issue here is one that can be elaborated upon in terms of notions of consistency, coherence, and correctness—although these notions cannot themselves be given content independently of the notion of truth. This reflects the essentially holistic and “externalist” character of content. Meaning thus depends upon truth—just as truth depends upon meaning—in the sense that for some utterance (or any attitude, action, or artefact) to be meaningful is for it to be embedded within a larger context of meaning (a larger body of utterances, attitudes, actions, and artefacts belonging to a community of speakers), as well as within the all-encompassing framework of the world (meaning thus depends upon a level of both rational and causal connectedness).⁶ The combination of holistic and externalist elements in the formation of meaning is itself reflected in the dual character of truth as encompassing both elements of coherence (the truth of a sentence depends on the way the sentence connects to other sentences—on its meaning) and of correspondence (the truth of a sentence depends on the way the sentence connects to the world—on what it asserts of the world and the way the world is).⁷

Much of the difficulty that attends discussions of truth derives from a tendency to treat both truth and meaning as transcendent of the actual context of communicative and interpretive practice. Yet truth and meaning arise only in that context—apart from it, neither truth nor meaning can even appear. This is precisely the point behind Heidegger’s claim that “before Newton’s laws were discovered, they were not ‘true’”⁸: truth is dependent on Dasein⁹ or, as Davidson put it, “nothing in the world, no object or event, would be true or false if there were not thinking creatures.”¹⁰ To understand truth in this way—which is neither to relativize it in the usual way nor to dismiss it—is to understand truth as emerging only in the space that is opened up between interlocutors in their engagement with one another and with the world around them. It is here, of course, that the Heideggerian notion of truth comes back into play, for it is the

⁶ There is a larger theory of meaning that is implicated here. See, for instance, Malpas, *Donald Davidson and the Mirror of Meaning*, esp. chapter 2, pp. 28–43.

⁷ See *Donald Davidson and the Mirror of Meaning*, esp. pp. 260ff.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), H.226 (note that the numbering here is to the 6th German edition which is given in the margins of the Macquarrie and Robinson translation).

⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H.226.

¹⁰ Donald Davidson, *Truth and Predication* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 7.

opening up of this essentially plural space that Heidegger calls the happening of the truth of being, *aletheia*, and that is also the happening and gathering of the world, *Ereignis*.¹¹ The idea that this opening up of the place of truth is both plural and also unifying reflects the character of truth (and so meaning or content), in its more mundane sense as both holistic and externalist in character (that is, as encompassing both coherence and correspondence).

At this point it becomes quite clear that far from being incompatible with a commitment to truth, the idea of a pluralistic society actually depends upon such a commitment. Only within the sort of space that Heidegger describes, and to which Davidson's work, in a rather different way, also draws attention, can plurality appear as even a possibility. The point can be put quite simply in terms of the idea that conversation, and the engagement that comes with it, cannot occur in a situation in which there is no common space in which to engage—whether because of the absence of such a space or our unwillingness or inability to acknowledge or to participate in it.¹² Thus, Paul Ricoeur, while emphasizing both the unity and differentiation that occurs within the concept of truth, also insists that “the spirit of truth is to respect the complexity of the various orders of truth, it is the recognition of plurality.”¹³

In seeking to relativize truth, then, or in seeking to dispense with the concept, we effectively attempt to deny or to set ourselves apart from that open, and yet common, space in which real engagement and conversation is possible, and in which alone can the fact of plurality appear. It is thus, in hermeneutical terms, that agreement always precedes disagreement as the basis of understanding—although the agreement at issue here is precisely the agreement that consists in our being already given over to the world, and our involvement in it, and so also our being given over to a concern with, and commitment to, truth.¹⁴ Our very being in the

¹¹ See my discussion of both of these notions in *Heidegger's Topology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), pp. 186–189, 213–219.

¹² It is this space that Arendt also refers to as “the space of appearance.” See *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2nd ed., 1998), pp. 199ff. See also Jeff Malpas and Andrew Brennan, “The Space of Appearance and the Space of Truth,” in Charles Barbour, Anna Yeatman, Magdalena Zolkos-Kavalski, and Phillip Hansen, eds., *Action and Appearance: Explorations in Hannah Arendt* (London: Continuum, 2011).

¹³ Paul Ricoeur, “Truth and Falsehood,” in *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 189.

¹⁴ This means that the agreement at issue here, while typically formulated and articulated in terms of certain sentences that are agreed to be true, does not reside in our

world is thereby a being in relation to truth at the same time as it is also a being in relation to others.

III.

Is it possible to speak on the assumption that nothing that one says involves a claim to truth, or in which the claim to truth is constantly effaced (whether by relativization or simple denial)? The liar paradox shows that the idea of universally false speech is impossible, since it undermines the grounds of its own saying.¹⁵ To speak is indeed to make a claim to truth, or to presuppose such a claim, even though the truth that is claimed is always something finite, limited, and contingent—a truth tied to the circumstances of our own situatedness in the world no less than it is tied to the act of speaking as such. Moreover, in the interconnectedness of truth with speaking, truth is also exhibited as standing in an intimate relation to the ethical—and while this may already be thought to be indicated through the connection between truth and plurality, it is also something worthy of further examination.

A key element in the way truth connects to speaking, at the most basic level, is through the idea of speaking as itself involving a claim to truth—a claim that cannot, and does not, carry its own certainty with it. Truth is thus not something over which we have final authority or control, but is rather that in the sway of which we already stand. Truth refers us to the character of the world as going beyond us, as involving more than we ourselves are, more than we can know, more than we can determine. In making a claim to truth we already move out into the world in a way that also opens us to the world, freeing ourselves up in a way that enables our engagement with the world, in a way that makes us vulner-

agreement about any particular set of such truths. It is, in fact, an agreement that consists in our common engagement in and responsiveness to the world. On the nature and role of agreement as it appears here, see my “What is Common to All: Davidson on Agreement and Understanding,” in Jeff Malpas, ed., *Dialogues with Davidson: Acting, Interpreting, Understanding* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), pp. 259–280.

¹⁵ Interestingly, this is a point that applies not only to the universal liar, but also to the universal skeptic. Universal skepticism—the idea that all or most of our beliefs could be false—is the epistemological counterpart to the liar paradox. Like the idea of the universal liar, skepticism is itself paradoxical, refusing even the knowledge of its own speaking, and thereby condemning itself either to an inarticulate silence or to a mode of utterance whose own intelligibility remains always uncertain.

able to the demands of the world, and also, of course, to the demands—to the claims—of others.

What appears at this point—and so the domain into which the inquiry into truth moves us—is nothing other than the very ground of the ethical as such. Indeed, the ethical could never take shape without this idea of a relatedness between self and other—and not merely between the self and the other person, the “face,” as in Levinas (although this is clearly an ineradicable element in any fully developed conception of the ethical)—but also the “other” that appears in the form of the world. Ethics is here exhibited as being tied to finitude, and to the recognition of finitude, as well as to respect for, and understanding of, the proper role of truth as itself essentially bound up with that recognition (even though this may not always be given explicit articulation). Indeed, the ethical failure that is evident in the refusal to acknowledge or to respond to the claims of others is often itself accompanied by a refusal to acknowledge or to respond to the claims of the world—a refusal to acknowledge or to respond to the possibility of error, of failure, of limitation. In this respect, Heidegger’s insistence, throughout his work, on the fundamental role of questioning, while not expressed in these terms, can nevertheless be seen as articulating what is an essentially *ethical* commitment—even if it is an ethical commitment that is so fundamental that it is seldom recognized as such.

The idea that there might be such a close and essential connection between truth and ethics is not without precedent, nor is it restricted to the philosophical perspective that derives from a solely European sensibility. It is central, for instance, to Gandhi’s idea of *Satyagraha*, the way of truth, as both a mode of life, and of political practice, that provides the surest counter to social and political oppression.¹⁶ Gandhi’s position might be construed, in fact, as expressing what is actually a quite deep and widespread understanding of the connection between truth and ethics, the widespread character of which may itself be indicative of the fundamental nature of the connection between truth and ethics in the possibility of any properly “human” form of life. The understanding of truth at issue here is one that is evident in such everyday ethical concepts as those of honesty and integrity. It is also evident in the commonplace idea of truth as connected

¹⁶ See Gandhi’s discussions of *Satyagraha* in Raghavan Iyer, ed., *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 222–236 and pp. 301–346. Although some have taken issue with aspects of Gandhi’s approach (as they have also taken issue with aspects of Gandhi’s personal life), the essence of the idea that truth is at the heart of any genuine attempt to engage with oppression remains an important one.