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Why Are Truths Counterintuitive?

Why is it that in a universe as monotonous as ours, great truths so often unsettle the very ground we stand on? How is it that we are said to be drifting along the edge of an indifferent cosmos, and yet every concept, every regularity, every law, every formula we manage to wrest from it still appears to us as an object of a kind of beauty? If truth is conceived merely as the form of the correspondence of a statement to a state of affairs, or of the adequation between the intellect and the thing, then we are fully justified in asking: Why do the key insights into the nature of the world crystallize in epochal breaks, scientific revolutions, unexpected discursive events, and sharpened verbal creations? How is it that the founding event of modern science is held to be the Copernican turn, which replaces the everyday experience of the Sun rising and setting with the doctrine of the Earth's rotation around it? Is it not strange that a human being who stands on solid ground rather than in water should prefer to derive the history of knowledge from Thales' thesis that water is the origin of all things – and not, as Aristotle wondered, from the more natural assumption that everything originates from earth? And what does it mean that in the 20th century, with the theory of relativity and especially with quantum mechanics, we are said to have awakened into a universe we don't even recognize anymore?

The Savanna Principle

Already in everyday life we can observe a certain disproportion between the silent horizon of the ordinary world of our lay existences and the simultaneous impulse to utter paradoxes and hyperboles for the sheer pleasure of expressibility. The more one day resembles the next, the more inclined we are, from time to time, to utter general declarations with the strongest possible negative charge, such as "Time opens ever new wounds," or "Silence is silver." But once we venture beyond these still relatively safe surroundings, a growing divergence becomes apparent: the duller, more inert and diffuse reality becomes, the more striking, condensed, and polished the sound of its truth. The disenchantment of the world goes hand in hand with the beauty of its laws, principles, and formulas, and it seems that reality loses its magic in precisely the measure that truth, in its symbolic completion, manages to steal it back. But what does this tell us about truth, and what about reality?

In a nutshell, there seems to exist a primordial irreconcilability between reality in its ineluctable facticity and truth as the form of its idealization. Moreover, the progress of the human spirit itself seems to anchor itself in this very rift and even to widen it, dislodging us from small, self-contained cosmic environments and casting us into an ever more boundless and nonhuman universe. Although the entire history of knowledge is but a long chain of turns and shifts that, step by step, deprive the human being of any self-indulgent support – a sequence of what Freud called the *narcissistic wounds of humanity* – the beginning of the twentieth century is said to have confronted us with an even more absolute caesura. Within the prevailing public narrative, a persistent myth holds that until the late nineteenth century we still inhabited a nature intuitively graspable by the human conceptual apparatus; and that only with Einstein's theory of relativity, and above all with the quantum mechanics of Bohr and Heisenberg, did a world open up before us that we may still describe mathematically and perhaps even reflect upon philosophically, but which we can no longer accommodate within the horizons of our intuitive representations. We are thus said to have suddenly realized that we populate

a universe unfolding beyond the reach of our natural intuitions – one in which any hope of concord between mind and world, between microcosm and macrocosm, seems to have come to an end.

Of course, we may here speak of a genuine epistemological break in the sense of Bachelard's *rupture épistémologique*, according to which the growth of knowledge is not continuous; rather, the human mind, in the process of cognition, repeatedly collides with its own unconscious obstacles that it can overcome only in discrete events of cognitive discontinuity. As Bachelard claims, "we know *against* previous knowledge, when we destroy knowledge that was badly made and surmount all those obstacles to spiritualisation that lie in the mind itself."[1] In this sense, our understanding of the world stands from the outset in an opposition to our own mind, and it is probably no coincidence that Bachelard developed his theory of unconscious obstacles, mental catharses, and the reform of the spirit precisely as an epistemology for the new age of relativity and quantum physics. Yet for the common view, which for Bachelard is both the lever and the first victim of knowledge, the transition between nineteenth- and twentieth-century mentalities is not merely another shift in the image of the world. Instead, the prevailing opinion wishes to see in it something more – perhaps a break in the very sequence of epistemological breaks. What seems to emerge here is a kind of cut beneath all cuts, a fissure that even Bachelard himself was likely not fully aware of or at least did not entirely articulate in his own theory. If his stated aim was to lay out the labor the mind must perform to cognize the world objectively, then with Einstein and Heisenberg we are said to have entered a reality to which the mind can no longer be adjusted – or readjusted – enough to ever again represent it adequately.

Of course, that the mind must undertake a labor upon itself is nothing new; the history of philosophy, from its earliest days on, has always advocated various forms of conceptual self-revision. But how far can such corrections reach? One of the most general philosophical operations is

1 Gaston Bachelard, *The Formation of the Scientific Mind: A Contribution to a Psychoanalysis of Objective Knowledge*, 24.

precisely the process by which, at a moment of "epistemological crisis" – itself merely a reflection of the difficulties of a given epoch, of social instabilities, advances in knowledge, shifting central concepts, cosmic uncertainties, and the like – the human intellect apprehends within itself certain eternal forms that then become the secure and immovable foundation of its understanding of the world, its practical engagement, and its place within creation. Thus, in Parmenides, the protagonist – perhaps unsettled by the developments in public thought that would soon usher in the age of the Sophists – follows the summons of the goddess who reveals to him the truth of Being and forbids him to think Non-Being; she places in his hands a timeless instrument that will allow him to distinguish false opinions from the single truth. Parmenides' journey to the other world in order to better understand this one is perhaps a kind of prototype for the great philosophical gestures to come: the mind, in its attempt to secure firm ground beneath its feet amid the abyssal conditions of its time, withdraws from its immediate, illusion-laden environment into itself and finds there the hinge of a new revelation of reality. The most famous such "Archimedean point" in philosophy is, of course, Descartes' *ego cogito*, which survives the method of doubt and becomes aware of its innate ideas – ideas that henceforth constitute the basis of its clear and distinct knowledge of the world. A similar gesture underlies Plato's project. Facing the disintegration of the polis, the trauma of the Peloponnesian defeat, and the discursive hegemony of the Sophists, he searches for a new locus around which truth may constellate. The burden now falls on the singular human soul: through dialectical examinations of ethical concepts, Socrates strives to awaken in each interlocutor the anamnetic memory of the perfect Forms once contemplated in a prior existence. In a somewhat comparable vein, Kant – confronted with the danger of ontological chaos that loomed after the empiricist critique of the rationalist doctrine of innate ideas – searches for a new root of conceptual order in sensible experience and finds it in the subject's timeless inner structure of the transcendental conditions of the possibility of cognition. By an analogy at this very specific level, in Fichte, every "you" addressed by the *Wissenschaftslehre* is solicited to apprehend within herself the original impulse of the "I," whereas in Hegel natural

consciousness retraces the route to absolute knowing already completed by the standpoint "for us." Thus, the temporal vagaries are always hinged upon a minimally extra-temporal reflex. Traces of this operation can be found everywhere in philosophy. When Heidegger's *Dasein* loses itself in the modes of inauthenticity, it becomes seized by *Angst*, withdraws from the world, and only in this detachment does it finally confront its own death as the last post-metaphysical lever of authenticity capable of granting meaning to Being. It is precisely the fact that death is never present but perpetually deferred into an indeterminate moment that gives it sufficient atemporal force to undergird the entire temporality of human existence. Perhaps, then, in Plato's *anamnesis* of the Ideas, in Descartes' demonstration of innate notions, in Kant's deduction of the transcendental forms, and in similar exemplifications of metaphysical *puncta firma* or *axes mundi*, we can discern a fundamental philosophical myth: whenever its accustomed world reveals itself as less than fully real, the human mind secures itself by anchoring in an *inner eternity* – a reservoir of universal concepts exempt from temporal flux – which then present themselves as guarantors of consistency for an otherwise wavering reality.

According to this "legend" of Western philosophy, the human spirit may well lose itself in the externalities of opinions, errors, and habits, yet it nonetheless remains capable of establishing within itself a certain commensurability between its inner forms and the concealed structure of being. And it is this bond – the last guarantee of the truth of cognition – that is said to have collapsed with the advent of twentieth-century physics. If until then it had sufficed merely to dispel the fog of everyday *doxa* and to polish away the accreted layers of illusion that had settled upon the original purity of the concepts within us, we are now supposed to have experimentally and mathematically uncovered a world to which no cognitive form in our interiority can even begin to correspond. Plato's soul, Descartes' *cogito*, or Kant's transcendental subjectivity could still, by withdrawing a step deeper into themselves, discover there an eternal source of truth; yet in the face of relativistic and quantum phenomena we are compelled to sacrifice not this or that inherited prejudice or tacit judgment, but our very deepest, hardwired conceptual apparatus. It is precisely the

human being's seemingly innate ideas, the structural concepts of her brain, the forms of intuition, and the standards of rationality by which she constituted her reality and scientifically mastered it, that suddenly appear as the chief obstacle to understanding nature. Thus, Kant's philosophy purports to be a propaedeutic to the natural sciences; with its *a priori* forms of space and time and its categories of causality, which reveal a world without leaps, gaps, chance, or fate, it provides a kind of philosophical grounding of Newtonian physics. Physicists of the nineteenth century therefore understood themselves as Kantians. By contrast, the founders of the new physics of relativity, Mach and Einstein, were the first to state explicitly that they were going beyond Kant's understanding of space and time and often – though not always! – declared themselves physical anti-Kantians. "If Kant had known, what is known to us today of the natural order," Einstein said in an interview with Chaim Tschernowitz for *The Sentinel*, "I am certain that he would have fundamentally revised his philosophical conclusions. Kant built his structure upon the foundations of the world outlook of Kepler and Newton. Now that the foundation has been undermined, the structure no longer stands."[2] Worse still, Einstein once told his student Ilse Schneider: "Kant's much-praised view on Time reminds me of Andersen's tale of the emperor's new clothes, only that instead of the emperor's new clothes we have the form of intuition."[3]

This creates, in effect, the appearance that we are witnessing a kind of "transcendental epistemological break," one that even surpasses the scope of Copernicus' displacement of the human from the center to the margins of the universe, or Darwin's relegation of *Homo sapiens* to the primates. For it is no longer merely a matter of man being forced to accept the humiliation of his empirical existence while still being able to indulge in the prestige of grasping this very degradation. After all, only an Earth-dweller whose ground literally shifts beneath her feet can comprehend the structure of the solar system, and only that ape which lost the most to the theory of evolution could have formulated it. With

2 Alice Calaprice, ed., *The Ultimate Quotable Einstein*, 130.

3 Calaprice, *The Ultimate Quotable Einstein*, 129.

twentieth-century physics we do not so much forfeit our creaturely place within a metaphysically guaranteed order of being as see our very mind break in the attempt to understand the new image of the world. Thus, quantum physicists, in particular, demand from us a continual mental effort, for phenomena at the level of elementary particles can be grasped only in defiance of intuition. The new world reveals itself only to those who are willing to be in perpetual war with the presuppositions of their own mind.

It is therefore no surprise that, in the twentieth century, Kant's formula for determining the conceptual conditions of possibility of every sensible experience begins to be replaced by an outright *anti-Kantian* gesture. Now we are supposed to become aware of our mental schemata and categorial forms only to determine what it is that we must bracket and set aside if the world is to appear to us at all in its objectivity. One such scientifically quite controversial, probably already outdated, not particularly important yet nonetheless symptomatic manifestation of this contemporary anti-Kantianism is, for instance, the "savanna principle" formulated by Satoshi Kanazawa.[4] This principle is a hypothesis in evolutionary psychology according to which the human brain developed primarily through adaptations to life on the African savanna and is therefore ill-equipped for the conditions of the modern world. Thereby, we are said to fear snakes and spiders instinctively – creatures that posed genuine danger in prehistory – yet to harbor fewer fears of electricity, automobiles, or cigarettes, which in the modern world are far more lethal. Likewise, the savanna human required energy in the form of sugar and simple fats, which now harm him in a society of abundance; his cognitive apparatus is programmed for life in small groups, and so in today's mass societies of millions of strangers, with their state forms and bureaucracies, it often functions in a disoriented manner; and so on.[5] More important for our purposes than these small

4 See Satoshi Kanazawa, "The Savanna Principle."

5 The principle should not be confused with the "savanna hypothesis," developed by Orians and Heerwagen within environmental psychology and landscape ecology, which holds that humans exhibit an innate aesthetic preference for environments resembling the African savanna in which our ancestors evolved. According to this

shifts in evolutionary psychology is the almost "transcendental" reversal of mentality according to which the mind suddenly conceives itself no longer as the last anchoring point and safety net in the process of truth, but as the greatest obstacle to the knowledge of the world. We often hear contemporary quantum and relativity physicists say in one interview or another that the human mind evolved on the savanna and will therefore never truly be able to imagine the cosmic vastness or the world smaller than an atom. According to a not entirely verified anecdote circulating since the 1910s or 1920s, the English physicist Arthur Eddington, when asked whether it was true that only three people in the world understood the theory of relativity, replied: "And who is the third?" But with quantum physics things went even further. Feynman famously remarked in the 1960s: "I think I can safely say that nobody understands quantum mechanics,"[6] by which he no longer meant that we might one day unravel it, but that as an object of thought it is fundamentally unintelligible to the human brain.

With this, the boundary between the contingent and the necessary, the temporal and the eternal, the *a posteriori* and the *a priori* dimensions of our knowledge of the world has shifted to an entirely new front. Once, the heterogeneity of the external world stood opposed to the fixed categories of the, arguably human, mind – categories to which one gained access through recollection of former lives, through divine inspiration implanting innate ideas, or at least through becoming aware of some timeless structure within us. Now, however, these seemingly "universal" human concepts – ultimately the very Platonic Ideas of motion and rest, identity and difference; the Cartesian mathematical and logical truths or the concepts of substance, number, being, thought, and will; and the Kantian categories of one and many, cause and effect, and so on – have revealed themselves to be contingent products of biological evolution, no more

hypothesis, humans universally favor landscapes with open grasslands, scattered trees, opportunities for prospect, nearby water, and available refuge – since such environments offered the greatest chances of survival in prehistoric times. See Gordon H. Orians and Judith H. Heerwagen, "Evolved Responses to Landscapes."

6 Richard Feynman, *The Character of Physical Law*, 163.

necessary than any phenomenon of the external sensible world or any inherited or assumed cultural prejudice. If, then, according to this "legend," Kant could still appeal to transcendental forms to unlock the ostensibly natural world of Newtonian mechanics, we must now remain constantly aware of our own savanna-mindedness; through such self-critique alone can we hope to grasp, if only conceptually and mathematically, a world that exceeds the limits of our imagination. And thus, we are thought to have passed from the "intuitively" intelligible world of the nineteenth century into the "intuitively" unintelligible world of twentieth-century physics – from the everyday, perspicuous Galilean physics and classical Newtonian mechanics to the humanly obscure terrain of relativity theory and quantum mechanics.

The Everyday and Its Repressions

And yet this widely accepted view – that only with Einstein and Heisenberg did we suddenly awaken into an incomprehensible universe – may nevertheless be a myth, a myth of the twentieth century. For one may argue, first, that Galilean and Newtonian physics and, with them, the entire succession of scientific revolutions were already profoundly counterintuitive; second, that truth, by its very nature, works against common sense and emerges only insofar as it destabilizes a settled conceptual framework; third, that already Plato with *anamnesis*, Descartes with innate ideas, and above all Kant with transcendentality find themselves in continual struggle with their own mind – so that one may say, loosely and figuratively, that they are already moving, unwittingly, within a consciousness of something akin to the savanna principle; and finally, fourth, that the *a priori* counterintuitiveness of every truth eventually encounters the real of the world and reveals it in its objectivity. From this standpoint, the rupture represented by the twentieth century may appear greater than it in fact is.

To justify this thesis, we must first ask: What exactly is an "intuitively intelligible truth," and what is a "counterintuitive" one? What, in the end,

distinguishes a world explained by common sense from one that defies it? What does it mean to dwell in a nature that is representable, and what does it mean to dwell in one that is unrepresentable?

At first glance – intuitively, so to speak – we would likely have to say that an intuitive picture of reality is simply one in which our inner sphere of representations and ideas is already in a kind of natural accord with the external space of things and facts. The true philosophical monument to this silent, taken-for-granted, "unobtrusive" horizon of the world's meaningfulness, in which things appear as handy tools within the "totality of involvements" and "context of equipment" constituted by *Dasein*'s care, was erected by Heidegger in the first part of *Being and Time*. What is crucial for this disclosure of the world is precisely that, within the framework of "average everydayness," a thing feels no need to be confronted with its own concept. The more its concept remains unspoken, the more meaningfully determined, contoured, properly situated, and in a sense protected in its very existence the thing becomes. "If it is to be possible for the ready-to-hand not to emerge from its inconspicuousness, the world *must not announce itself*."[7] As the famous analysis of the broken tool shows, a thing is one with its world whenever its particular existence goes unnoticed and unnamed; only when it is missing from its place, when it breaks, or when it no longer quite fits its function does it step out of the mute background and "catch the eye." At that point it may even deserve some explicitly spoken judgment – like Heidegger's example of the assertion of "concernful circumspection": "'The hammer is too heavy,' or rather just 'Too heavy!', 'Hand me the other hammer!'"[8]

Similar emphases were developed by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*, where he showed that any explicit contact between a thing and its concept – for instance when we say, "This is my hand!" – is already a deviant case of language use, situated within a much broader whole of implicit beliefs and convictions that we never articulate and never subject to direct conceptual analysis or argumentative scrutiny. "Must I not begin to trust

7 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 106.

8 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 200.

somewhere?",[9] asks the philosopher – and this "somewhere" is the horizon of pre-reflective, unproblematic acceptance of a world. "At the foundation of well-founded belief lies belief that is not founded."[10]

Perhaps it is no mere accident that the twentieth century yielded both the science of Einstein and Heisenberg, which thrust the human being into a wholly unintelligible universe, and the philosophies of Heidegger and Wittgenstein, which locate every process of truth in the silently assumed, unquestioned disclosedness of the everyday world. It is as if the sudden rise of scientific counterintuitiveness had all but demanded a philosophical response in the form of an originally intuitive revelation of being. And yet, with the advent of a new age, this tension between the two levels merely became explicit, though arguably it had always already been at work. As we aim to show, even before the epoch of relativity theory and quantum mechanics, truth was constitutively counterintuitive, and the intuitively disclosed world has never stood on its own feet; rather, the illusion of its primacy has always rested upon massive repressions – repressions that continually return through the back door precisely in the phenomenon of truth.

Thus, already in Heidegger, the consistency of reality is established by the "existential state of Dasein"[11] named *Bedeutsamkeit* or "significance," which he himself defines as the "worldhood of the world." Yet such implicit semantic normativity inscribed into *Bedeutsamkeit* seems to suggest that our immediate familiarity with the world is but a mute surface that is, behind it, upheld by concealed forms of some kind of ideal essences. Theories of "intuitively assumed worlds," therefore, are by no means free of conceptual structures; their trick lies merely in shifting the "loud," symbolically articulated ideal values into a "silent," unspoken medium that, within this seemingly unified, integrated, smoothly functioning world, does not speak in its own voice. The effect of articulated truth, which is always at least faintly at odds with mute reality, perhaps already arises in Heidegger, and it does so precisely where he himself would be most reluctant to

9 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 150.

10 Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, 253.

11 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 121.

find it. In his theory of language use, he sought to recast the propositions of classical logic, which divide subject from predicate, as "procuring" assertions, so as to strip concrete particularities of the abstract and differential universal categories that saturate everyday life with the ideal weight of metaphysics. But in order for the world to continue functioning smoothly, these repressed universals always and inevitably re-emerge from their silent background and thus mark their existence in one or another exclamation or command. The logically basic yet pragmatically meaningless sentence "The hammer is heavy," which serves no practical purpose, is translated by Heidegger into the more originary mode of assertion: "Too heavy, the other hammer!" However, this inversion of subject and predicate does not fully protect symbolic speech from the impulse towards predicative idealization. For one, the concrete piece of equipment here still receives the qualification of "too-heaviness," which inadvertently tears it out of the habitual circuit of practical work; and, what is more, it is also named by the general concept "hammer," which endows this or that thing with a wooden handle and iron head with an aura of abstractness, of portability from context to context, and of substitutability with other similar tools. To this unintended idealization there inevitably accrue all those additional semantic values and verbal expressibilities that *Dasein* is so averse to hearing. Therefore, even to such a thoroughgoing empiricist of the everyday as Heidegger is in the first part of *Being and Time*, it becomes evident that the world is from the outset interwoven with the discriminations of concepts, however adamant he may be in sweeping their articulation under the rug at every turn. That a "spontaneous metaphysics of language" lurks around the corner of every spoken word was sensed as well by Wittgenstein, whose "therapy" becomes the never-completed task of removing of plain nonsense and bumps that the understanding has got by running its head up against the limits of language.[12]

Both philosophers place the life of things, meanings, and words within some kind of prior framework of undisputed homeostasis of being. Admittedly, in both this primary totality of "average everydayness and

12 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 48 [§119].

form of life already borders on the possibility of crisis or transcendence: in Heidegger, the phenomenon of anxiety nullifies the world itself;[13] in Wittgenstein, the insight into the mystical truth of being outweighs linguistically articulated philosophy. According to our "counterintuitive" thesis, however, the "intuitive image of the world" is unstable already in its first appearance, for it comes into being only at the price of repressing the semantic structure that henceforth subsists in its muteness behind the veil of reality, yet continually breaks through its membrane and emerges from the unobtrusive background into the foreground of sheer expressibility. For since the human being establishes the horizon of the ordinary world only through the labor of concepts and their ideal values, he cannot help but endow that world with meaning; and this constant yet concealed surplus of sense occasionally surfaces in verbal excesses that interrupt the smooth unrolling of days, serve no pragmatic purpose whatsoever, and unsettle our accustomed sensitivities.

Say we take a brief walk in the forest; the moment we see an animal or a tree that slightly deviates from our expectations of the established order of things, we already mutter: "Ah, a doe!" or "Look, the hazel is blooming!" And it is this compulsion to verbalize that shows how, in temporally and spatially relative things, we unwittingly always recognize atemporal and transcendent forms; in real entities we perceive ideal values; in tokens, types. When, for instance, a cat appears before us, we quite unconsciously treat this particular animal as the instantiation of a fixed and durable kind, "the cat," to which we ascribe a certain semantic necessity. And even if, knowing evolutionary theory, we are well aware that the species *Felis catus* is the product of a contingent biological history in which no taxon is derived from a table of essential types, we are in fact incapable of perceiving a concrete feline without automatically incorporating it into a higher, ideal, and therefore logically binding conceptual structure. For with the abstraction of a single concept, we simultaneously initiate

13 For Heidegger, in anxiety, "all beings in their being dissipate into nothingness. The world is revealed as bereft of all meaning and homeliness. All the things lose themselves in the uncanny openness." Janko M. Lozar, "Nietzsche and Heidegger," 129–30.

the process of forming other concepts, of generalizing them, and of establishing their differential relations. Because of certain specifics of human domestication practices, then, we tend to semantically fixate and, in a way, finalize the concept "cat" only in opposition to the concept "dog." As a consequence, the phrase "fighting like cats and dogs" arises, as well as the belief that we divide into "cat people" and "dog people." And it is precisely this binary opposition that now confers on the concept "cat" an ideal necessity that no concrete animal could ever possess. Suddenly, when this or that cat appears before us, we instinctively feel as though we had in fact *deduced* its tiny singularity from the semantically *a priori* dichotomy "cat/dog." And so, it finally feels as if even this insignificant, contingent encounter had been placed in front of us by some necessary, well-nigh metaphysical structure.

It is by virtue of such unwitting idealizations that the world discloses itself before our eyes only through the prism of ideal distinctions, oppositions, and hierarchies – showing that no intuitive horizon of seamless, self-sustaining reality can be established without being simultaneously undergirded by constant, if unwarranted, idealizations of the real. Some form of "involuntary metaphysics of meaning" is therefore the perpetual reflex of the world's ostensibly most primary, inconspicuous, and straightforward givenness. One might almost say that the wager of human existence rests on our willingness to repress the knowledge of how strenuously words must labor in the background so that the world may remain effortlessly silent in the foreground. However, reality's hushing of its own conditions has its reverse side. The apparent calm of our instinctive familiarity with the world sits upon a powder keg of incessant verbal excesses and discursive perturbations.

Here, perhaps, lies the answer to the question concerning the very origins of something like an "intuitive image of the world." Why should reality don a mask of roundedness, stability, coherence, and closure at all? From where do the hyperbolic Heideggerian notions of *Bewandtnisganzheit* and *Zeugzusammenhang* arise? What underlies our impulse to round off being and clothe it in the idyllic surface of the everyday, the normalcy, the mere thereness? The first impulse of "world-making" may

well be the automatic idealization of concepts – concepts that, via idealization, always become too large for the concrete contexts in which they emerge. We therefore project them behind the veil of appearance, into the sphere of universals, archetypes, and essences, while at the front of experience the membrane of seeming ease and steadiness condenses. In this respect, "intuitiveness" is the effect of a fundamental repression that binds contingently arisen words to their illusory eternal meanings. And since it rests on borrowed assurance – "taken on credit," as it were – counter-movements are inevitably unleashed: movements that unravel the coagulated sense stored in the unintended heavens beyond the manifest world.

For instance, we tend to see in this particular cat the embodiment of the general concept "cat," a concept that even stands in opposition to the concept "dog." Yet evolutionary theory overturns this order of things and shows that the supposed timeless generality of "cat" is merely the name of a biological species produced by contingent adaptive processes that depend entirely on the singular reproductions of this or that feline ancestor. Such a reversal ultimately entails that, in biological terms, "cat" forms no antithetical pair with "dog" at all; rather, the two are merely locally evolved species, largely indifferent to one another.

Similarly, a cultural prejudice inclines us to think of ourselves in a binary opposition to the concept of "animal." And yet we cannot relinquish the supplementary verbal impulse that returns the human being to the kingdom *Animalia*, casts him as an ordinary ape, or even describes him by way of some marginal trait, so that in his animality he appears all the more contingent. In this vein, history has offered us a series of definitions of "the human" – *animal ridens*, *animal mendax*, *animal symbolicum*, *animal religiosum*, *animal amans*, *animal poeticum*. These definitions are perhaps not especially precise, experientially grounded, or experimentally verifiable; their capacity for generalization is, at best, limited. Rather, they attain the status of verbal creations which, in lieu of empirical confirmation, draw upon a surplus delight in mere utterance as their own mode of verification. And yet it is through these very definitions that they seize the lever by which the subject of the statement – "the human"' – allows itself

to be semantically constituted in the first place. This is the "loud truth" within the apparent silence of the average world.

This arc, which swings from profane reality into the heavens of its false presuppositions and returns in the form of their discursive subversion, could perhaps count as a kind of "process of truth." The human mind constructs its intuitive image of the world only as a reflex of unwarranted idealizations that arrange themselves into conceptual differences and oppositions – such as the contrast between "human" and "animal" – while relocating their origin to some absent place capable of sustaining the fiction that they are expressions of eternal, transcendent forms. But then a reaction follows, for the illusion created by this operation is ultimately shattered by the pleasure of turning language back on itself and reattach the spontaneous ideality of a concept to the point of contingency from which it arose. In a single movement, then, are condensed the establishment of the appearance of a consistent, "whole" reality, the repression of its semantic presuppositions, the delegation of these conceptual forms to a metaphysical instance, and finally the return of the repressed idealities to earth in the verbal delight of definitional disenchantment.

In other words, although the "intuitive image of the world" puts on the mask of an originary state of being – as if it were a kind of *perpetuum mobile* that sustains its motion without any auxiliary energy – behind it the displaced and sublimated meanings are "speaking" all the while, supplying the fuel for the chimera of its mere givenness. This is why even the most primary and ordinary reality does not in fact stand on its own, but must continually be fed by further articulations of meaning, which interrupt its silence and, in fleeting acts of utterance, represent all the reticent labor that must be performed ceaselessly so that the world may look as though it existed out of itself. And here the "primal repression" of a sort occurs, one that reverses the order of word and meaning. In order to help the world preserve its appearance of self-supporting coherence, we, in a concrete situation, quickly patch over the emerging gap with a spoken word, whose concept presents itself as though it were evoking a semantic content that has always already been there – as though its meaning were outside time, necessary, and metaphysically guaranteed. This reversal,

which places eternal meaning before the contingency of the word, could be called the "mother of all illusions."[14] Wittgenstein defined it brilliantly,[15] and Heidegger implicitly as well in his critique of abstract logical propositions; yet both failed to notice that these very meanings, which shut their eyes to their earthly genesis, constitute the condition for establishing the consistent reality of our primary and average sense of being. At the same time, all this repressed labor of maintaining the composed surface of things exacts its price. The displaced concepts that silently secure the quiet of our world sometimes speak – and when they do, they at least slightly unsettle the ground beneath our feet. They surface in startling predicates, in phrases that overturn commonsense expectations, or in sentential definitions that corrode their semantic eternity and reveal them in their full semantic contingency. And only at this moment, when it comes to light that there exists no universal category, no ideal form, no essential type that was not born in entirely singular, contingent circumstances, does truth actually *make itself explicit as counterintuitive*.

This anti-metaphysical procedure of continually undermining the metaphysical ground of reality is not, in fact, something that the so-called "classical metaphysicians" – Plato, Descartes, and, for some, even Kant – were not already practicing, albeit unconsciously. The idealist and

14 The ideality of meaning arises only *by the agency* of the word as a wholly contingent discursive formation; meaning is simply the effect of the fact that a repeatable verbal form is produced. And yet each word – precisely because it is repeatable and does not exhaust itself from context to context but remains the same – instills in us a certain fallacious surplus of ideal necessity. Consequently, we always experience words through the medium of this "linguistic primal repression," through which the word appears to emerge only *after* its meaning, as something secondary to it. The whole of Plato turns on this very hinge.

15 As he argued, this is "one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigation,"* 9. What the human mind cannot bring itself to accept is the fact that every word is merely a contingently formed conventional sign behind which there is no solid, guaranteed meaning. It therefore seeks for the word some more substantial, more enduring support – some sort of "thing" that would fully embody it. And since no such thing exists anywhere in this world, we relocate its dwelling place to one or another kind of "other world."

transcendental gesture of withdrawing into oneself and discerning the atemporal conditions for the constitution of temporal things contains the entire "counterintuitive" charge characteristic of the process of truth. On the one hand, Platonic idealism certainly reduces every concrete thing to a mere copy of a perfect Form, surrounding it with an aura of ideal meaning; on the other hand, and within the historical horizon of Plato's own moves, it simultaneously frees the thing from its mythical embeddedness in the chain of beings and allows it to appear in its bare serial producibility and interchangeability. Descartes' dualism indeed elevates the incorporeal mind into a spiritual realm of immediate access to divine ideas; yet this absolute separation of soul and body is, methodologically speaking, above all a way of purging material, extended substance of all the ideal values of Aristotelian qualitative forms, Scholastic essences, and Renaissance occult forces. Likewise, Kant's noumenality generates, on the one hand, the "bad infinities" of transcendental ideas and ideals, but on the other accomplishes the task of disclosing a causally continuous Newtonian world no longer carved at the joints of rationalist conceptual forms – modes, simple substances, or monads. The central ontological concepts in Plato, Descartes, or Kant are always redefined so as to give a counterintuitive twist to a new grounding of reality.

For this reason, the "metaphysics of two worlds" – perhaps the first and most persistent ideology of philosophy, the object of its deepest internal critiques, yet one that reconstitutes itself at every new level – must be read on two levels at once. On the one hand, the ideal forms of Plato, Descartes, and Kant threaten to pose as quasi-religious guarantors of truth; on the other hand, in the very same gesture, they function as dislocated levers that liberate this world from entrenched and rigid semantic structures and, in moments of historical crisis, grant it a new, thoroughly this-worldly consistency.

All of this shows that the boundary between the intuitiveness of reality and the counterintuitiveness of truth is not fixed in stone but is continually redrawn according to the demands of the age – each of which sustains its own image of the average world, its own illusions of eternal meanings, and its own pleasure in subverting them.

To conclude, the "primal scene of being" that this essay seeks to advance is neither Heidegger's unobtrusive average everydayness of concernful *Dasein* nor Plato's vision of a celestial realm of eternal ideas, but rather an originary irreconcilability between reality and truth – between the silent world that continually restabilizes itself in a representationally acceptable image and the loud utterances that, through their subversive effects, both erode this world and set it upon new ground. And it is precisely through this configuration that "counterintuitiveness" crystallizes as the most authentic organ for the cognition of the world.

Truth Has Always Already Been Counterintuitive

If the collapse of prevailing conceptual frameworks is a kind of primordial reflex of truth, then we must of course also be able to show that it was not the twentieth century alone that thrust us into the unnatural world of counterintuitive prospects, but that we have always lived between the temporarily stabilized membranes of intuitive worlds and the intermittent disturbances of new insights. Even everyday life, in its entirely ordinary, largely pragmatic functioning, continually produces both its own idealizations and their undoings – turns of phrase, jokes, bons mots. But the most famous examples of counterintuitiveness breaking into our world – next to art, though in a wholly different register – are offered by science, which has always operated as a kind of boundary condition of everydayness and at the same time as its antithesis. Indeed, one may even say that science has revealed reality only through reversals of our intuitive representations.

Let us consider a few examples. Today it is commonly, but mistakenly, believed that Newton's framework of absolute space and time is natural and self-evident to us, and that our imagination breaks down only when confronted with Einstein's wrinkled space and the relativity of time, which flows differently from each point of measurement. But this is the wrong antagonism, for Newton's absolute space and time were themselves introduced *against* the prevailing mental models and habits of their

age. If, before Newton, we lived in an Aristotelian and Scholastic cosmos differentiated by meaning – a cosmos in which every thing had a name, expressed its eternal essence, and tended toward its natural place (which, retrospectively, would count as an intuitive representation of the world) – then Newtonian mechanics all but expelled us into an undifferentiated medium of empty, infinite space, in which objects lose every qualitative inner substance, become conceptually anonymous, and are reduced solely to the quantitative relations of massive bodies attracting one another.

Similarly, we generally assume that our intuitive picture of the world is deterministic: that everything has a reason, and that between cause and effect there holds a seamless bond of complete calculability and predictability. By contrast, the counterintuitive picture is taken to be that of quantum indeterminacy, where the link between cause and effect is broken and can be specified only within a range of probabilities. But again, this is to some extent a false alternative, for modern scientific determinism – the very view whose philosophical conditions Kant sought to derive – was itself formulated *against* intuition. It posited a strict continuity of causal chains, one that left no room for any ideal cause to intervene from outside: no sufficient reason, no divine intervention, and ultimately no free human act. Kant's world without leaps, gaps, chance, or fate is fundamentally unintelligible to common sense, which continually contours things according to the ideal values of concepts and thus experiences them as discrete, autonomous entities whose symbolic meaning withdraws them, however minimally, from the flux of the world.

Perhaps the most classical example of Western counterintuitiveness is the Copernican turn. Instinctively, we cannot imagine our earthly life otherwise than as standing on the solid ground of the Earth while the Sun rises and sets. And yet the opening gesture of modern science declared – quite flagrantly against common sense – that *we* are the ones in motion, whereas the Sun remains at rest at the center. Moreover, once we had reconciled ourselves to this reordering, we could at least cling to the idea that a celestial body as large as the Sun occupies a fixed, immobile position near the center of the solar system, while the planets move along regular, fixed orbits. This mental framework was first shaken by Kepler, who

shifted the Sun from the center to a focus and replaced circular planetary paths with ellipses; and then by Newton, for according to his law of gravitation it is not only the Earth that orbits the much heavier Sun, but the Earth's own mass causes the Sun to move as well, making it orbit the solar system's barycenter.

In much the same way, even in elementary-school physics Galilean inertia – echoed, in a slightly different form, in Newton's first law – and Newton's third law of action and reaction already struck us as a kind of rupture in our imagined world. Thus, upon learning with some astonishment that every force exerted by one body on another is accompanied by an equal and opposite force exerted by the second body on the first, we would slap a classmate during recess and reproachfully declare: "Your cheek just hit my hand!" Cognitive psychologists such as diSessa and McCloskey showed in the 1980s[16] that people naturally reason in an Aristotelian way and expect that bodies on which no force acts will come to rest; that a force "remains in the body" and is consumed during motion; and that motion as such already "tends" toward rest. The law stating that a body on which no force acts will continue in motion indefinitely therefore stands in direct conflict with what is known as "naive physics" or our "intuitive theory of motion."

But modern physics is not the only field that supplies us with these impulses of fundamental "counterintuitiveness"; breakthroughs in other sciences – from biology and economics to linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology – likewise seem able to articulate their truths only at the very membrane where the ground of our imagined world begins to give way.

Thus, our mind instinctively "substantializes" every perceptible thing and unwittingly imbues it with an eternal essence; it may do so because its mental structures are from the outset linguistically mediated, or perhaps because this pre-discursive "nominal form" is inscribed in it biologically. In either case, it seems that in mere things we cannot help but see the embodiment of an eternal, immutable species occupying a discrete place

16 See Michael McCloskey, "Naive Physics: The Curvilinear Impetus Principle and Its Role in Interactions with Moving Objects," 146–56.

among other things. Say, when we encounter a lion on the savanna, we inadvertently get the feeling that its "lioness" could almost be deduced from a taxonomic system that assigns this big cat hierarchical superiority over zebras and gazelles, sets it in opposition to the tiger, and elevates it to the imagined rank of "king of the animals." Whenever we observe a plant or an animal, we involuntarily assume that, if it did not exist, it would have to be invented – that its absence would leave a structural gap in nature's supposedly consummate and tightly knit scale. Our conceptual schemas inevitably falter the moment we try to imagine that every biological species has arisen simply through a contingent branching event from another, equally contingent species; that taxonomic units never form closed, symmetrical, oppositional, or neatly differential systems; that they sometimes intrude into already crowded ecological niches, sometimes fill ones vacated by chance, and sometimes carve out new ones; and that every individual organism is merely a provisional representative of a transient species which is never settled or finished but always somewhere midway along its evolutionary path. Not only is the lion before us merely a bundle of sometimes more, sometimes less successful adaptations, co-options, and exaptations – products of a highly imperfect history without essential origins or developmental teleology; when it appears to us in its considerable beauty, it becomes all the harder to imagine that, a hundred thousand years from now, its species may well have gone extinct, fragmented into a multitude of new forms, lost its mane, shed its fur, or diminished drastically in size. Perhaps the descendants of today's lions will have become so unlike them that one will no longer be tempted to set them in opposition to tigers or to place them on the throne of the animal kingdom. By the same token, whenever we look at the human being, we must actively and with some effort remind ourselves that it represents neither the pinnacle of evolution nor any particularly disastrous biological anomaly; that its genetic material contains traces of Neanderthal ancestry; and that, in all likelihood, it too will one day no longer exist.

To continue with the examples, the first operation of Marx's economics – the complete translation of every use-value into exchange-value – is something the human mind can of course *think*, though it cannot

really *imagine*. In every price a commodity receives on the market, we still tend to look for a remnant of the "natural value" the thing supposedly carries within itself and that somehow, as we instinctively suppose, must squeeze through the narrow passage of its exchange. Yet Marx's political economy stands or falls on the willingness to renounce the idea of "natural value," a notion that, however stubbornly it clings to our intuitions, remains wholly absurd. Similarly, Saussure's linguistics of differences preceding positive terms is a form of *thought* rather than of *representation*: one cannot use language without spontaneously believing in fixed, solid, guaranteed meanings of words. Freud's unconscious, as "the general basis of psychic life," is conceived precisely as a place (indeed as a *non*-place) that exceeds the representability of the conscious world. Lévi-Strauss' structuralist anthropology explains the emergence of culture not through any positive ground – such as an original social nature of the human being or a fully formed social contract – but through a purely negative, and therefore conceptually non-intuitive, fact: the empty structural place preceding its elements, one generated within symbolic systems of kinship rules, myths, and language. The central aspiration of Luhmann's systems is, likewise, to derive the entirety of social relations not from intuitive *Einheiten* – say, Weber's individual actor, Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft* as the organic unit of social life, Durkheim's institutions, Marx's classes, or the social contracts of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Locke – but from non-intuitive *Differenzbildungen*, the operations in which the distinction between system and environment is first constituted.

Finally, we might recall that Greek–European knowledge was very likely born as a counterintuitive truth in all its flagrant audacity.[17] If,

[17] It would be fruitful to extend this focus on a specifically Western propensity to other traditions. What Greek philosophy inaugurates through audacious, counterintuitive theses is carried to its limit in Pyrrhonian skepticism. By turning against the intuitive image of the world, Pyrrhonism restricts the epistemic authority of conceptually structured cognition. Where early Greek philosophy shattered intuitive certainties by advancing bold theses, Pyrrhonism radicalizes this gesture by suspending the authority of theses as such. Suspension of judgment (epoché) thus follows "the overcoming of all dichotomies and the rejection of both positive and negative dogmatism, since whatever we take to be determinate knowledge is

at its beginning, there stands a single proposition – Thales' "All things are water" – then we may reasonably surmise that this dictum was retrospectively elevated to the status of the first truth of the West not because it said anything contentful, meaningful, or verifiable about reality, but because it dared to postulate, and to release into the public space, an utterance that, under the given circumstances, most violently shook the ground beneath our feet.[18] A further case could be made that each subsequent position of the Presocratics, following one another almost in cadence, pursued the search for precisely that element – from Anaximander's *apeiron* and Anaximenes' air, through Heraclitus' fire, Parmenides' Being, and Empedocles' Love and Strife, to Anaxagoras' *nous*, Socrates' identification of the good with knowledge, and Plato's institution of the Ideas – whose sheer discursive thrust could pierce the barriers

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ultimately merely a convention, an arbitrary agreement that does not reflect the nature of things as they truly are." Nina Petek and Franci Zore, "Buddha in Piron. Od praznine stališč do polnosti bivanja," 26. Although articulated within a Greek context, Pyrrhonism was historically shaped by Pyrrho's encounter with Buddhist and other Indian skeptical traditions, whose philosophically prior articulation of non-assertion and conceptual restraint informed his stance. In Buddhism, conceptual proliferation (papañca) generates the illusion of essence (svabhāva); its curtailment – together with the suspension of metaphysical questions (avyākata) – is directed precisely against the intuitive framework whose collapse is the very condition of truth. Discursive cognition remains pragmatically indispensable yet epistemically disqualified, opening a path "from the conceptual (papañca) toward genuine truth (nippapañca)." Petek and Zore, "Buddha in Piron. Od praznine stališč do polnosti bivanja," 26. Within this Buddhist horizon, intuitiveness itself is the primary site of metaphysical illusion, and truth emerges only through the breakdown of the intuitive framework that posits essence – hence, as constitutively counterintuitive.

18 This is, in fact, the thesis of my 2014 Slovenian volume *Svet in njegov predikat II. Preizkušanje meja izrekljivega* (*The World and Its Predicate II: Testing the Limits of the Utterable*). A faint allusion to this line of thought can already be found in Blumenberg, who in his *Shipwreck with Spectator* writes: "This protophilosopher [Thales] thereby builds the earliest bridge toward an understanding of the strange paradox from which I began: that human beings living on land nevertheless prefer, in their imagination, to represent their overall condition in the world in terms of a sea voyage." Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, 8.

of our entrenched mental schemas and make us see the world anew in its unheard-of universality.[19]

These examples may, still only circumstantially, point toward the hypothesis that truth as such is counterintuitive – that it is, in fact, impossible to formulate a true proposition that does not speak against the expectations and valuations of common sense and thereby dissolve the self-evident world. Yet to advance the stronger claim that "counterintuitiveness" is a structural and necessary – indeed, an *a priori* – property of any truth insofar as it manifests and articulates itself within this world, a more compelling logical argument is required. What, then, is the logical nature of truth? Why is it that every genuine insight into the structure of being invariably collapses the frameworks of our imagination? Why should truth not present itself straightforwardly, without detours? What prevents it from being already fully embodied in things? And why is it not enough simply to open our eyes and prick up our ears?

The Logical Conditions of Counterintuitive Truth

We have described the intuitive image of the world as hanging suspended between the foci of its apparent soundness and normality and the posited and unwarranted ideal values that silently sustain it from behind. Only within this interval can the everyday sense of reality uphold the illusion that the world as a whole somehow expresses an intrinsic meaning. This creates the impression that, for the intuitive *Befindlichkeit*, reality in its well-worn givenness already exudes a certain "truth-surplus." And yet,

19 See, for instance, Heit, who argues: "Anaximenes certainly did not acquire his conception of air by observation and experience, but rather by a speculative elaboration of the theses of Thales and Anaximander." He further writes: "Systematically speaking, criticizable [*kritisierbar*] theories are those that can be subjected to empirical verification and thus falsified. This is precisely what is not possible with the metaphysical speculations of the Ionians. So, while we have a critical social practice – Anaximander and Anaximenes do not feel obliged to reproduce their teachers faithfully – we do not have a set of criticizable theories." Helmut Heit, *Frühgriechische Philosophie*, 40, 41.

because this ordinary and average feeling of existence rests on repressed presuppositions, it also functions as a screen that prevents us from ever fully grasping the essence of truth. This is perhaps most clearly visible in Heidegger. For him, the primary, everyday "world as world" already exudes a minimal ideal surplus, insofar as it is *bedeutsam*; nevertheless, our existence within it remains inauthentic. Only by breaking out of this familiar horizon do we become susceptible to the "meaning of Being." Yet this ideal of sheer authenticity is itself structurally displaced and postponed, since it depends on the never-present moment of death.

The phenomenon of counterintuitive truth teaches us something further. At times we are overtaken by momentous insights which, in a single stroke, lift the veil from our eyes and allow the world to appear as it has never appeared before. The very pleasure we take in coining an apophthegmatic utterance, in the sudden illumination of a cosmic law, or in the writing of a formula seems to assure us, almost involuntarily, that no higher or purer truth could possibly lie elsewhere. The price, of course, is that such a truth, precisely because it leaves nothing to be desired, inevitably runs counter to our intuitions. We may therefore pose the question: What does this counterintuitive vision disclose about the nature of truth?

To account for, or to mitigate, the discrepancy between, say, the familiar affective texture of day-to-day existence and the unsettling propositions of science, we tend to fall back on two auxiliary hypotheses, though each, in its own way, is too hasty and risks missing the very gist of the event of truth. Put simply, the way of coping with the quandary that "big truths" do not flatter our instinctive, habituated outlook usually takes the form of supposing either that the world is strange in itself or that we human beings are somehow congenitally out of place.

On the one hand, from the apparent groundlessness of truths we might conclude that, by some accident, we simply inhabit a queer universe – one that is in itself contradictory, exotic, botched, or at the very least unfinished. Twentieth-century physics, we are told, has revealed to us a world that is not only epistemologically unmanageable for our savanna-bred brains, but is itself a kind of cosmic monstrosity, an ontological misfire. According to a well-known joke that Žižek likes to repeat, God simply did

not finish building reality at its smallest scales, since He never anticipated that we would one day invent devices capable of peering into the interior of the atom. And in some interpretations of quantum mechanics, one even gets the impression that the universe is astonished at its own incompletion on the subatomic level and, in order to compensate for this fundamental porosity, collapses wave functions and normalizes the irrationality of quantum phenomena by giving them the face of middle-sized objects. Such a view assumes, however, that although we were unlucky enough to have been born into this unfinished creation, there could at least be – and perhaps somewhere there is – another cosmos that, by contrast, was completed to the end. There our natural image of the world would coincide with its fully realized inner structure, and intuitive truths would, in fact, be possible.

On the other hand, we might take all the blame upon ourselves and claim that there is an incipient human misalignment with being. According to this view, it is the human who is poorly constructed, whereas the world itself is, in principle, in order. Indeed, there exists a whole range of instant anthropologisms that defend such a primordial discordance between members of the species Homo sapiens and the environment in which they appeared, against all likelihood, at some contingent point in cosmic history. On the metaphysical level, human beings are thus built around an originary lack or rendered transcendently homeless in an oversized universe. On a more scientific level, we are at odds with the world either by the already mentioned savanna principle; or by the specific prematurity of human birth – productively exploited by Freud and, above all, by Lacan; or, finally, by theories claiming that the human brain is an evolutionary botch, a kind of pastiche of heterogeneous adaptive processes that never coalesce into a fully functioning whole.[20] Although these

20 It is through this kind of naturalism, for example, that Adrian Johnston has interpreted Žižek's philosophy. As he puts it: "The brain is a hodgepodge contraption slapped together by a plethora of blind, noncooperating evolutionary eras and pressures, resulting in, within the human organism, an intraorganic crystallization of the 'uneven development' (to borrow a Marxist phrase) of natural history." Adrian Johnston, *A New German Idealism: Hegel, Žižek, and Dialectical Materialism*, 215.

theories may well be correct in themselves, supported by observations, evidence, and experiments, and thus entirely legitimate within their own domains, the error arises the moment we attempt to find in them "empirical" reasons for why our path to truth is blocked "transcendentally." For insofar as we claim that we are born into ill-conceived bodies, we simultaneously presuppose that, by some evolutionary accident, we might just as well have been made a little better, thereby innately more open to the world and endowed with intuitive representations more inclined to coincide with things themselves. If only we had not been born on the savanna but somewhere else, perhaps on another planet, we might, in the end, also understand the peculiar world of relativity theory and quantum mechanics. But this second answer still assumes that the world reveals its essences for free to anyone lucky enough to have been well born, and that it is therefore at least conceivable to wrest a full truth of things from the medium of immediate intuition and natural representation.

If we therefore conclude that the fault for truth running counter to our intuitions lies either on the side of reality or on our own, we are presupposing that a "frontal" cognition of the world is, in theory, possible, and that if the adequation between the two poles fails, it is only because either the object of knowledge or its subject is defective. And this implies that such auxiliary attempts to explain away counterintuitiveness still operate within the ambit of the *correspondence form of truth* – a form that tacitly underwrites any stance that regards the world as, in and of itself, representing and emanating a certain surplus of truth-value. The examples of counterintuitive truths, however, seem to belong to an entirely different register and to produce wholly distinct effects. What, then, changes in the very *form of truth* when we shift from an intuitive to a counterintuitive universe?

Let us, then, consider the conceptual structure of some of the major epistemic turns in the history of Western knowledge. What is it, precisely, that the interventions of, say, Newton, Darwin, Marx, or Saussure – restricting ourselves to a mere handful of examples – have brought to light? If pre-Newtonian physics conceived things as bearers of inner substances, the laws of classical mechanics reconceived the thing as a mass-bearing

body devoid of any intrinsic force independent of its relation to another body. In pre-evolutionary theories, biological species were understood as expressions of essential types forming a finite, numerically symmetrical, and, in their closure, almost deductive system; with evolutionary theory, species became ever-shifting products of adaptations to contingent environmental conditions. Classical political economy sought to establish an equilibrium between a commodity's "natural" and its "market" value, whereas for Marx a commodity has no intrinsic value whatsoever apart from what it acquires through exchange. Similarly, classical linguistics attempted to ground a commensurability between pre-given ideas in the human mind and their phonemic expressions, while Saussure shows that both the concept (the signified) and the sound-image (the signifier) arise only through their mutual articulation – that is, through the sign.[21]

On the one side, then, persists the belief in the substance of things manifesting a concept at least minimally exempt from time: the body that contains an inner force; the species that embodies its essential type; the commodity that carries an intrinsic value; the sign that adequately conveys an eternal meaning. On the other side, however, there emerges a world that possesses no inner reserves of ideal value but gives itself its lawful form only where the absence of any prior ideal structure becomes manifest. A body moves only by a force imparted to it by another body –"force," therefore, cannot be captured as a property corresponding to the substance of a thing but only as a relation between things. A commodity acquires value only because it has none by nature – "value," likewise, cannot be grasped "frontally" in any isolated good but only through exchange between two or more goods. Organisms constitute a species precisely because no taxonomic essence shelters them – "species" thus refers not to an ideal type but to the reproductive dynamics of its members. And signs are

21 To this highly selective series of "scientific revolutions" many others could be added that are just as momentous and are omitted here only for reasons of space: Galileo, Freud, Einstein, Heisenberg, Lévi-Strauss, Luhmann, and so forth. For a more extensive overview, see the third chapter, "The Neglected Historical Origins of Contingent Universality: The Revolutions of Modern Science," in my forthcoming *The Contingent Universality: A New Ontology*, (Bloomsbury 2026).

never expressions of pre-given meanings – "meaning" arises only in the differences between signs.

If in this series of scientific ruptures one indeed discerns a sequence of transitions from an intuitive to a counterintuitive image of the world, then the difference between the two may be elucidated on the basis of a shift in the very form of truth. The intuitive outlook relies on the essential substances of things, to which its "truth" can then only hope to correspond. Counterintuitive truth, by contrast, takes an ideal concept of ordinary intuition, detaches its content from any firm essence behind appearances, and through this semantic collapse delineates the locus for a new revelation of the world – one in which ideal order emerges only from relations among appearing things.

Consider Newton's appropriation of the traditional concept of "force." Intuitively, force referred to an inner power or inherent tendency of a body; Newton, however, dislodges it from this framework and reconceives it as a relational quantity manifest only in the interaction between bodies. What once expressed the innate state of a thing now designates the measurable counteraction of bodies, formally captured by equal and opposite forces. Darwin performs a similar inversion with the concept of "species," which formerly expressed the essence of a type; he reverses the causal order so that the type no longer determines the traits of organisms, but the reproductive success of organisms determines the ideal form of the type. Marx, drawing on the ideality of "value," conventionally thought to reside as a natural property in a commodity, attaches it solely to the act of exchange. And Saussure, finally, makes "meaning," previously regarded as an eternal mental idea, dependent upon the differential articulation of signifier and signified.

In each case, the very ideal surplus of "force," "species," "value," "meaning," and so forth, which in the intuitive image of the world still referred back to the heavy, opaque substance of things, is reassigned to an external, adventitious predicate. And this finally intimates that a world with no deep essence can no longer give its truth away in the form of correspondence. It seems, then, that what earned the great revolutionaries of science their decisive place in intellectual history is that they shattered

the entire framework of truth as conventional representation, exposed as illusory the idea that the world reveals itself in a medium of immediate, parallel adequation, and thereby opened a vista onto another, perhaps more objective, reality.

This transition from ambiguous homeliness to a certain fortunate homelessness may also explain why the intuitive concept of truth so often presents itself as a perpetual dissatisfaction, a sense of never quite reaching its object, whereas counterintuitive truth converts the very enjoyment of its groundlessness into a consummate disclosure of the world. As we have argued, intuitive familiarity with things seems to function as a compromise formation between the spontaneous production of universals – concepts such as human and animal, cat and dog, but also substance and accident, the one and the many, cause and effect – their projection onto the external world, the world's inability ever fully to embody them, and their withdrawal into the background realm of metaphysical conditions. In this way, the fragile membrane of representational self-evidence serves as a mask concealing from us the fact that the ideal elements of reality are of our own making, and that we seek to perceive and discern them "out there" in the form of correspondence only because we have already displaced the responsibility for our idealizations onto the world itself. Pseudo-truth that wishes to present itself as intuitive thus tends to assume the form of *deferred correspondence*: each thing appears to express some non-temporal essence, but insofar as we ourselves have unknowingly produced its ideal contours, we can, within the limits of this world, only approximate it and never truly grasp it.

By contrast, a "counterintuitive truth" is not some frivolous disclosure of the world's oddities, but the very process by which we bring our own conceptual forms – those we have illegitimately projected onto the world – to the point of collapse and thus confront our illusions. The verbal pleasure and declarative flash of a truth honed to a sharp edge arise precisely in the interval between the institution of a universal concept, which we have smuggled into the order of being, and the insight that this concept is an ideality lacking any real substance. In this sense, "counterintuitiveness" is at first a property of truth-production rather than of given reality; it is

an effect that emerges when a universal, which we once took to express the world's inner essence, is redefined in a manner that exposes its lack.

However, and this is as crucial as the negative labor of reduction, the exposure of such lacking essences designates the very site from which reality begins to acquire its lawful form. Although counterintuitive truth is reactive, since it takes shape only by subverting intuitive expectations, it is essential to recognize that its scope is not purely negative, as if it merely stripped being of the ideal forms we have grafted onto it. Were that all, truth would remain imprisoned within a structure of what could be called "negative correspondence": after its intervention, we would be left with nothing but the privative fact that nothing positive can be known about the world. Yet the reality disclosed by a counterintuitive truth is in no way diffuse, bland, gray, or chaotic. As the scientific revolutions abundantly show, it is precisely through its semantic collapses that truth acquires its formalizable, mathematical, and formulaic stringency. Thus, Newton's universe is not one without forces; Darwin's is not one without species; Marx's is not one without values; Saussure's is not one without meanings. Rather, the emptied idealities of "force," "species," "value," "meaning," and so forth function as non-representable elements that are no longer to be embodied directly, but instead designate the loci at which the idealizable structure of reality first emerges. The mathematically calculable "truth" of physics appears in the actual transmission of force according to the law of action and reaction; the evolutionarily reconstructible "truth" of biology manifests itself in the concrete reproductive events that maintain the consistency of a species; the computable "truth" of economics arises solely in the acts of exchange that endow commodities with value; and the systemically analyzable "truth" of linguistics emerges in the differential articulation of signifier and signified that produces meaning.

In short, counterintuitive truth collapses the very framework of reference, exceeds the form of adequation, interrupts any journey toward an ever-deferring essential truth, and – by assuming a place within the world – establishes a kind of coincidence between its own flash, articulated in an accomplished discursive form, and the full disclosure of a world unfolding from its immanent loci, without any residue to which one would

have to approximate. Instead of projecting its own idealities onto reality, "counterintuitivity" lays bare a world without first principle, noumenon, logos, or meaning, and thereby maps out the site at which the collapse of "anthropogenic" ideal values coincides with the world's lack of any "metaphysical" grounding. Thus, the subject of modern astronomy can no longer look upon the solar system from some external vantage point, but must assume the position of the Earthbound observer whose own ground is in motion; the subject of Marxian economics can never establish the value of things in themselves, but must become the buyer or seller who produces value only in the concrete act of exchange; and so forth. By freeing itself from the yoke of endlessly approximating some essence thought to lie behind appearances, the ideal surplus of "truth" descends into the midst of things and catches the world at the very moment in which it constructs its intelligible, describable, and categorizable structure. The epistemology of creating, repressing, and redefining concepts, and the ontology of absent essences, of the compulsion to assume a place in the midst of things, and of sheer happening in the here and now, turn out to converge in the event of truth. Thus, the pleasure we take in uttering counterintuitive truths arises precisely at the junctures where our recognition that the ideal forms we had projected onto the world are of our own making encounters the world's own admission that it contains nothing in itself beyond what it is now bringing to the surface.[22]

In other words, it would appear that counterintuitive insights do not convey "the truth *about* the given world," but uncover the world in the very process of giving itself its truth. They disclose a world that would possess no truth – no lawful structure, no describable elements, no reconstructible events, no analyzable phenomena – were there not points within its midst from which its entire ideal order could unfold. And it is

22 A specific temporality is at work here, as discussed by Bara Kolenc: "When we say that reality is constituted anew in every single moment, we thereby mean that it sprouts in the very incision between the existence and the non-existence that only actualizes temporality as some canvas on which a *moment* itself is established as an event of the human experience of time, and through which reality is always already temporal for the subject, and temporality is always already real." Bara Kolenc, "Ne-vidni 'alien' interneta – kako je računalniški zaslon prevzel funkcijo ogledala," 116.

in this sense, finally, that we may claim that there is no better or worse access to the truth of the world. The African grasslands may well not be the real source of our cognitive unease before the discoveries of modern science, whether relativity theory or quantum physics. Even had our brains evolved on another planet, or in interstellar space without savannas, gravity, or cyclical temporality, we would still have to provoke the world into revealing itself in the absence of any *a priori* ideal structure that might present its essences in a grid of direct correspondence. And for this "eliciting," indeed, this "arousing" of being to yield its secrets, some form of counterintuitive truth would always be required, no matter where in the universe we were born. To put it starkly, truth is counterintuitive because it reveals a world that, in and by itself, happens only by continually being counterintuitive to itself.

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