

## On Thinking in a Thoughtless Time

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If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face, for ever' – George Orwell, *Nineteen Eight-Four*.

### 1. *The flight from thinking*

“Thoughtlessness is an uncanny visitor who comes and goes everywhere in today's world”, declared Martin Heidegger in 1955, “For nowadays we take in everything in the quickest and cheapest way, only to forget it just as quickly, instantly... Man today is *in flight from thinking*”.<sup>1</sup> At the end of 2016, and in the aftermath of the election of Donald Trump to the Presidency of the United States, Heidegger's comments seems especially apt. Regardless of the merits of his principal opponent, Hilary Clinton, Trump seems to epitomise the triumph of a mode of celebrity culture and populist politics that substitutes the slogan for the idea, braggadocio for strength, and impact for truth – to symbolize a time in which politics has become a reality TV show and public discussion is conducted by Twitter feed and Facebook post.

In such a time, and in the midst of the larger state of world affairs in which deceit seems more prevalent than truth, violence and threat more often employed than persuasion or reason, and in which poverty, oppression, and violence continue to dominate the lives of many, questions about the contemporary relevance of *philosophy* might seem almost beside the point. Yet if the present ills of the world can indeed be seen as symptomatic of a refusal of thinking, which surely implies a refusal of genuine feeling also (especially of that felt thoughtfulness that is manifest in compassion), then philosophy must indeed come directly into the picture, since, no matter its institutionalised forms, the real character of philosophy is surely to be found in its own character as a mode of thinking.

### 2. *From value-in-itself to value-for-money*

If philosophy is indeed a mode of thinking, and a particularly important mode at that, then to ask for a reason why philosophy might be relevant today is partly to ask after the relevance of

thinking itself. Moreover, this question is itself an essentially philosophical question. Yet for the most part the contemporary questioning of philosophy is typically assumed to come from outside philosophy – from the perspective of the ‘real’ concerns of the practical world. What is assumed here is essentially the priority of the practical, and more specifically, the instrumental and this is directed at both philosophy and at thinking. Yet the idea that thinking itself needs justification, and especially that thinking requires instrumental justification, is itself strange, if not incoherent. Justification arises only as a form of thinking, and depends for its value and significance on the significance already given to thinking. The value and significance of thinking has to stand outside of any merely instrumental understanding, since such instrumentalism already presupposes thinking. The value of thinking is a value thinking has *in itself*.

The attempt to construe thinking in instrumental terms readily leads, not merely to misunderstanding, but also to distortion. The way this occurs is partly through the way instrumental desire affects judgment. As various forms of cognitive dissonance show, we are highly prone to favour judgments that are consistent with existing desires, interests, and prejudices. When we frame our thinking in strongly instrumentalist terms, then we also give added strength to such prior desires, interests, and prejudices. Effectively, we reinforce the already present instrumentalist tendencies that are there in thinking anyway. The result is that we tend to value particular outcomes, not on the basis of whether they accord with the demands of thinking, but on the basis of whether they fit with a set of, often short-term, instrumentalist concerns.

The tendency for instrumentalism itself to distort thinking turns out itself to be instrumentally misguided, but that is simply a reflection of a more fundamental deficit in thinking that arises from the imposition of external considerations on the process of thinking. This is not something that can be evaded or avoided by declaring that instrumentalism is not so much about *how* we think, but rather concerns that *to which* our thinking is directed. Such a distinction is not only false in itself, but also begs the question in its treatment of thinking as if it were indeed an instrument that could simply be directed to different objects.

It is nevertheless the prioritization of the instrumental, and of an instrumental view even of thinking, that is at the root of the antagonism that is nowadays often expressed towards philosophy. Moreover, it is not just that the instrumentalism at stake here is one that prefers the ‘practical’ over the ‘theoretical’ or ‘academic’. It is a much more specific form of instrumentalism than just that – an instrumentalism that operates in a way determined by a narrowly business and commercial orientation (essentially an orientation derived from

modern capitalism), that looks to render all value in terms of the common currency of quantity and number, and that in fact assumes, if we are blunt about it, the *monetization* even of utility: the only real ‘value’ is effectively taken to be monetary value and ‘value-for-money’ replaces any sort of ‘value-in-itself’. Thinking then appears either as mere ‘calculation’, or as one of the means by which things can be produced for calculation – the contemporary emphasis on ‘creativity’, ‘design thinking’, and ‘innovation’ are themselves examples of this transformation of thinking into a mode of commercial production. Thinking is not alone in being threatened in this way – all of human life is threatened with such conversion and reduction. In the case of thinking, however, it is especially problematic, since it threatens our very capacity even to see or to analyse what is happening here.

### *3. Money’s boundlessness and thinking’s limit*

It is often argued that the prioritization of the monetary, the commercial, and the financial is itself instrumentally grounded in the fact that, especially in modern societies, all other forms of well-being depend on financial and economic well-being. Ensuring sound monetary and financial management is thus presented as simply prudent, and to do anything else as foolish and irresponsible. Yet this is to overlook or ignore the point already made above: *that it is only on the basis of what we already value that we can determine what is prudent or useful – prudence and utility are both relative to a prior evaluative framework.*<sup>2</sup>

The prioritization of the monetary and the financial not only leaves this point out of account, but it also obscures it, since that very prioritization often brings with it a tendency to treat money as itself the primary locus of value, and similarly, for all forms of well-being to indeed be seen as derivative of and secondary to financial or economic well-being.<sup>3</sup> When monetary and financial considerations become primary in this way, when what is not properly a value comes effectively to function as one, then other values are either lost or else, if they continue to function, do so in ways that are often hidden. Frequently this means that those values are not subject to broader societal scrutiny or moderation. Self-interest, for instance, is more likely to flourish in a context in which monetary and financial considerations are prioritized, since not only does such prioritization itself tend to reinforce forms of self-interested behaviour, but it can itself allow such behaviour to appear as if it were simply another aspect of the sort of sound monetary and financial decision-making that supposedly benefits all. Self-interest thus becomes covertly – and sometimes, it has to be said, *overtly* – legitimised.

Undoubtedly, instrumentalist thinking constitutes *a kind* of thinking. Where such thinking operates in recognition of its character as instrumentalist (which includes some awareness of its own desires and interests), and so in acknowledgment of the prior determination of the ends to which it looks to find the means, then instrumentalism does not present itself as especially problematic. Yet in the form in which instrumentalism is today so widespread – the form in which instrumental thinking, and especially monetized instrumental thinking, is taken to be primary, and in which the only end is the furtherance of monetized instrumentality as such – then it becomes unclear even what sense can be attached anymore to the idea of the instrumental.

Instrumentality depends on ends that lie outside of the instrumental system. As things stand in the contemporary world, however, it is increasingly harder to identify such non-instrumental ends, since properly understood, money is itself valuable solely in its own character as instrumental (in terms of what it enables one *to buy*), and inasmuch money comes to function *as if it were an end*, then so there is no end to be found other than in the instrumentality of money. The very act of monetising what is valuable thus translates such value into a pure system of instrumentality alone, which is to say, a system in which there are no ends but *only* means, but in doing so the system properly ceases to be even instrumental, since the distinction of means from end, of instrument from purpose, is lost. The way this happens mirrors the loss of value that also occurs when financial and monetary consideration are similarly prioritized.

In fact, what we lose touch with when think purely instrumentally – or purely calculatively – is precisely the idea of *distinction*, but so also of *limit* or *bound*. This is evident in the very fact that an orientation towards the instrumental or calculative alone itself involves a forgetting or ignoring of the particular character of the instrumental and the calculative, which is to say, a forgetting or ignoring of their own bounds. The tendency towards just such forgetting and ignoring of distinction, of bound, and of limit<sup>4</sup> has been one of the main criticisms that philosophers, from Plato onwards, have made against money and the dominance of the commercial. The way money operates in this way is itself at the heart of money's often remarked-upon tendency to corrupt, which is not simply a matter of money having a tendency to encourage greed or avarice, but rather concerns the way in which it tends to distort and obscure the real character of things (including its own character as instrumental).

The latter point appears in the work of Georg Simmel in his claim that money, through its transformation of everything into a system of pure number and quantity,

effectively destroys the very possibility of differentiation.<sup>5</sup> The problem at issue here arises because of the way number and quantity lack any basis in themselves for their own boundedness – and it is boundedness that is the basis for differentiation and distinction. This lack of boundedness can be seen, in the case of money, in the way in which, unlike most other things, money offers neither an upper limit to its accumulation nor any lower limit that would constrain its loss (there is thus neither an upper limit to monetized wealth nor a lower limit to monetized debt<sup>6</sup>), and this lack is made all the more evident in contemporary societies in which money has become almost entirely abstract – credit cards replace cash, payments are made electronically, and money appears most often in the form of a line of numbers on a computer screen or print-out.

This absence of bounds – which is what really underpins the loss of any sense of genuine ends, and so of real means also, as well as of any sense of proper value – is what sets the monetary and commercial so much against the philosophical, since it is precisely the attentiveness to bounds, and their exploration, that is central to philosophy. This is so, not only because philosophy can be construed as an inquiry into the natures of things (and the nature of a thing is determined by the bounds that belong to it), but also because philosophy as just that mode of thinking that takes thinking as its object, and as such, it is essentially concerned with the nature and bounds *of thinking*, and may even be said to have its origin in the very recognition of thinking's own boundedness – its own limitation.

Thinking always arises out of something that calls us to think – perhaps some perplexity or problem, something that requires decision or action, something that provokes or reminds us, something that simply calls us to listen and respond. Thinking thus always stands in relation to something – something that thinking is turned towards, that thinking is 'about' – and this is so even when our thinking is confused or vague and even when our thinking has a more contemplative character. What calls for thinking is that to which thinking itself has to respond and to which it must attend. Thinking falters when it forgets or loses sight, not only of that which calls for thinking, but also when it forgets or loses sight of the ground on which thinking already stands – when it ignores the prior judgments out of which it emerges and ceases to be mindful of the way in which its approach to its objects always depends on the inevitable particularity and partiality of thinking's own standpoint.<sup>7</sup>

When we think, we do *so from* somewhere and in relation *to* something, and this is already indicative of the necessary boundedness of thinking. That boundedness is not what prevents thinking, but is actually what enables it, since it gives thinking an orientation and direction, as well as an object. The very distinction between thinking and what is thought

about already indicates the way boundedness is involved here, since *distinction* itself depends on such boundedness – for there to be a distinction is for there to be a mutual bounding or delimitation. One might say, in fact, that thinking arises only in the ‘between’ of thinking and what is given to thinking. It is in that ‘between’ that is opened up a space for thinking – and so for attending, responding, questioning, judging, deciding, connecting, identifying, inferring, hoping, desiring, believing and so on – in relation to something that is at issue in thinking. It is in the openness of this between that both ignorance and knowledge are possible, both error and veracity, since it is precisely the space that separates what we think from the reality of that which we think about, but also connects it.

There can be no thinking – nor anything *to be thought* or anyone who thinks – without bounds. To be bounded, to be limited, is also to be *placed*, and so when we talk of the essential relation between thinking and bound we are also talking of the essential relation between thinking and place. It is in being-placed, which is to say being in the world in a certain way, here and now, that thinking is oriented, and it is in being oriented that thinking is opened to the world – and so is opened to that which calls upon thinking, opened to that which calls thinking into the world, opened *to that which calls us into thought*.

When thinking is itself turned towards thinking, when thinking takes the form of a genuine philosophizing, then thinking must also turn itself to its own bounds, and so to its own place, and its relation to that place.

From this perspective, Heidegger’s talk of the contemporary “flight from thinking” can be taken to refer to a flight from the engagement with our own bounds, a flight from the very place in which we ourselves are, a flight from that in which our own being is grounded, and, indeed, this is just the way Heidegger himself takes it. The flight from thinking is itself tied to a seeming loss of connectedness to those places in which our lives are supported and nurtured, and at the very same time, a loss of any sense of, or of any capacity to engage with, the wider expansiveness of the world.<sup>8</sup> The flight from thinking and into thoughtlessness is thus also a flight into homelessness and worldlessness.

This flight from thinking is one that Heidegger argues is itself inextricably bound to contemporary technology. Yet in talking of technology, Heidegger is not concerned with particular devices or mechanisms, but with what the rise of what he himself calls “calculative thinking” and with the systems of organization that are part of it. Monetization, and the dominance of the financial and commercial, is an essential element in the forms of calculation and organization at issue here – and so contemporary technology has become deeply enmeshed with the structures of contemporary capitalism.<sup>9</sup> It is monetization, as a

mode of pure quantification in which everything is rendered the same, that both enables and also drives the flight from thinking. Monetization erases any proper sense of the bounds within which human being is constituted and within which difference arises. It is thus that even the bounds within which the monetary itself operates – as a phenomenon that emerges out of and on the basis of human being – are obscured and forgotten, and by means of which the illusion of a generalised boundlessness is erected and maintained.

#### *4. Thinking and the primacy of the non-instrumental*

Although it may present itself as instrumentalist, the monetized instrumentalism of the contemporary world is indeed such that it has ceased to function, in any genuine sense, as instrumental. This is partly because its refusal of boundedness is a refusal of the boundedness that constitutes even the instrumental itself – the instrumental being constituted through the contrast between the instrumental and that with respect to which it is instrumental. The result, however, is that, for all that the contemporary emphasis on, for instance, efficiency, economy, or ‘value-for-money’, it is arguably the case that there is now greater waste, greater dysfunctionality, greater difficulty in meeting even the most basic of goals.

When thinking operates only instrumentally, then it already has a tendency to ignore its bounded character – and this is simply because the instrumental tends to lose itself in the focus on the instrumental relation itself and so on the relation between means and a particular end. Yet so long as the instrumental does indeed operate in relation to some such end that is outside of the system of the instrumental, then the narrowness of instrumental thinking is not necessarily problematic. In effect, the boundedness of instrumental thinking is operative in such thinking, whether implicitly or explicitly, by the ends to which the instrumental is subordinated. What then becomes important are the ends that are at issue – and especially the relation between different ends and so the way the entire system of ends may constrain instrumental decision-making.

The monetization of instrumentality is problematic precisely because of the way it obliterates the distinction between instrument and end, and the very idea of there being different, distinct, and sometimes incommensurable ends. Neither as instrument nor as end does anything within the structure of monetized instrumentality appear as open to question, and so the legitimacy of that structure cannot be questioned without, as it were, already standing outside of the very structure that grants legitimacy to any question. When that structure appears to fail, then that failure is either not recognised or else it is seen as a function of some other interruption to its normal functioning – thus not even the global

financial crisis of 2008, and whose repercussions are still being felt, led to any radical and genuine change in the system of monetized instrumentality.

The ‘dysfunctionality’ of the system of monetized instrumentality is not a dysfunctionality that appears within that system itself. It appears only if one allows that there may indeed be another standpoint from which that system can be viewed – most obviously, the perspective afforded by the human context in which that monetized instrumentality remains embedded and out of which it originally arose. From this perspective, the monetized instrumentality of the present – and, with it, the radicalised form of capitalism that it embodies – is itself *instrumentally* dysfunctional. Yet although this dysfunctionality is indeed connected with the way in which it has dissociated itself from any genuinely human ends, this dissociation is itself more a symptom than a cause. The dysfunctionality of the system of monetized instrumentality does indeed have its origin in its refusal of its own properly instrumental character, its inability to recognise the inadequacy of the monetary to operate as a genuine end, in its blindness to its own boundedness, in its essential thoughtlessness.

One might be tempted to say, at this point, that what has actually been revealed, in spite of what might have been said earlier about the non-instrumental character of thinking or about thinking as ‘an end in itself’, is precisely the instrumental value and significance of thinking. Thinking matters, and philosophy with it, one might say, because it allows us to recognise and explore the conditions under which thinking, and everything that follows from thinking, including even instrumental thinking, must operate, and so there can be no viable instrumental thinking without thinking in this broader sense – such broader thinking is itself *instrumentally valuable* even though it is *not instrumentally oriented*.

Yet even though it is true that thinking has instrumental value, the value and significance of thinking does not rest *primarily* in its instrumentality. It is characteristic of an instrument that it can be taken up or put down as the need serves. Yet thinking cannot be taken up or put down in this way, and this is so even though it may be true that there is a contemporary ‘flight’ from thinking. Thinking belongs to our very character as human, so much so that we might say that the ‘between’ that thinking opens up is precisely the space in which human being finds its own place.

The flight from thinking is thus an impossible flight – a flight from what we already are, a denial of that to which we are already committed. This is why the monetized instrumentality that has occupied so much of this discussion, and that dominates so much of contemporary discourse, turns out itself to be dysfunctional and contradictory: it operates in a way that is inconsistent with that in which it is itself grounded, in a way that fails to accord

with the very bounds by which it is constituted. As Heidegger points out, only that which can be a ground for growth can lie fallow, only those who have a capacity for hearing can be deaf, only those who have been young can become old, and only those who have a capacity for thinking, can be thoughtless.<sup>10</sup>

### *5. Thinking, Truth, and the Human*

The contemporary dominance of monetization and instrumentalism is closely tied up with the flight from thinking, but also with the loss of truth. When thinking itself becomes merely instrumental, then the very processes of thinking come to appear as themselves determined by that same instrumentalism – in its public forms, in public discourse and decision-making, thinking becomes simply a way of advancing or realising an already identified outcome. What matters, then, is not consistency, which can be simply ignored, nor truth or evidence as such (the significance of which depends on a prior commitment to truth and knowledge, and so to thinking, as important in themselves and not merely as instrumentally valuable), but simply the ability to get approval of or commitment to an outcome, and nothing more. If truth and evidence count all, it is only as they are themselves instrumental, and instrumentally, at least so far as gaining approval and commitment is concerned, all one needs is the *appearance* of truth and evidence. As monetization and instrumentalization tends to erase bounds, limits, and distinctions, so it erases or obscures even the distinction between good evidence and bad, between truth and what is taken to be truth, between truth and lie. So we find ourselves in a world of ‘spin’, a world of ‘alternative facts’, a world that is ‘post-truth’.

Significantly, the era of ‘post-truth’ did not begin in 2016, with the ascendancy of Trump (or even with Brexit), but instead has its origins in earlier shifts in media, management, and organization that are not only part of the larger history of modernity,<sup>11</sup> but are also evident in developments over the last thirty to forty years. The undermining of professional authority, seen as a key instrument in public service reform beginning in the United Kingdom in the 1980s<sup>12</sup>, itself meant the establishing of the dominance of instrumentalist over other considerations, but it also implied a genericization of judgment and expertise. Questions of truth and evidence became part of the same instrumental calculation more reliably undertaken by a manager or administrator than anyone with more specialized capacities (who would anyway be liable to be distracted by concerns particular to their specialization). The attack on science that has been part of the conservative opposition to attempts to combat climate change over the last decade or so<sup>13</sup> – an opposition that itself derives largely from the prioritisation of a set of narrow economic interests and is funded by

them – has further contributed to the corroding of truth and the loss of any genuine sense of what constitutes knowledge, objectivity, or expertise.

The concentration of power and authority – whether in the commercial sphere through the increasing dominance of large corporations, or in the governmental and public sphere through the erosion of institutional independence (partly through the use of audit and compliance mechanisms to ensure centralised control) – has resulted in both the increased capacity to ‘manage’ information at the same time as it also made such ‘management’ more and more instrumentally important. The ‘media’ has itself become a domain driven by the need to manage, control, and also to commercialise what is now generically understood as ‘information’ – with such ‘information’, and the media generally, more and more subject to manipulation and control by individuals and organizations according to their own agendas and interests. The rise of new forms of media has enhanced the capacity for management, control, and commercialization of information, but it has also hugely proliferated information at the same time as the overall quality and reliability of information has been degraded. Distinctions between is ‘real’ and what is ‘constructed’, between the ‘factual’ and the invented, between ‘news’ and entertainment, have all contributed to the loss of truth or of any commitment to truth that seems to characterise the present.<sup>14</sup>

Plato famously says in the *Republic* that the philosophers “are those who love the truth”,<sup>15</sup> and although Plato contrasts the philosopher in this regard with those who love honour (soldiers) or money (merchants and traders), there is a sense in which we are all committed to truth, even if we may not all be its ‘lovers’. The commitment to truth derives, in part, from certain simple facts about the relation that connects truth and thinking, but that also connects both to human life. Truth is that which is the ultimate concern of thinking as well as that which constrains it (it is thus both its ground and its bound). It is truth, and the concern with truth, that orients thinking in the space ‘between’ in which thinking resides. ‘Truth’ here does not name some eternal or unchanging transcendence, but rather the everyday sense at issue when, to paraphrase Aristotle, we say of what is that it is and of what is not that it is not.<sup>16</sup> Our own being as human is bound up with our character as *thinking* beings, and so also is it bound up with a commitment to truth. To be human is to find oneself in the space of thinking, in a space oriented towards truth, and it is in this space, this *place*, that we also find the possibility of *freedom*, of *self*, and of *commonality* that are themselves essential to a properly human mode of existence.

In Orwell’s *1984*, a work that has acquired a new-found popularity with Trump’s ascendancy, the triumph of Big Brother involves *both* the assertion of Big Brother’s control

over truth itself *and* the destruction of any genuine humanity. In Orwell's novel this is brought together in the use of the torture *which appears as both a violation of the human and a violation of truth*. The idea that "2 + 2" should equal whatever the Party or Big Brother says it equals and the vision of the future that Winston's torturer O'Brien presents as "a boot stamping on a human face"<sup>17</sup> are thus intimately connected<sup>18</sup> – as indeed the history of totalitarianism in the twentieth century demonstrates. Donald Trump's own endorsement of torture, reaffirmed in his first television interview as President in January 2017, is thus both chilling and, perhaps, unsurprising. The flight from thinking is a flight from truth, and it is also a flight from the human – as such, it is a flight, not only into thoughtlessness, ignorance, and lie, but into violence and horror.<sup>19</sup>

The value and significance of philosophy is, indeed, not found primarily in any instrumental and monetised end to which it may contribute. The value and significance of philosophy, as with all of the humanities, as with science, with knowledge, with truth, lies in its intimate relation to our own human being. To refuse thinking, to refuse the bounds within which thinking is itself engaged, to refuse truth, is to refuse that which makes us what we are. Moreover, since the value and significance of philosophy stands alongside the value and significance of questioning, of attending, of listening – all of which are at the very heart of thinking – so the denigration of philosophy, whether in its institutional or other forms, is also a denigration of just such questioning, attending, and listening. What have we become, one might ask, when we cease to question, cease to attend, cease to listen. Perhaps there is no question here – or at least it is a question to which we already know the answer all too well. What we become is what we see too much of in our contemporary world, what we have seen over too much of over the last one hundred years: we become deceivers as well as deceived, oppressors as well as oppressed, victims as well as executioners. The real question is not whether there is value or significance to be accorded to philosophy – or to thinking, truth, or the human. The real question, and the question that is most urgent, is whether we can regain a proper sense of the value and significance that philosophy already has; whether the contemporary world can be other than as determined by the instrumental and the monetized; whether we can restrain the flight from thinking, and so return to thinking, to truth, and to ourselves.

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<sup>1</sup> Heidegger, 'Memorial Address', in *Discourse on Thinking. A Translation of Gelassenheit*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 45.

<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that we can simply assume our values, since they themselves can and ought to be subject to scrutiny, but rather concerns the fundamental point that the question of the end is always prior to the question of the means.

<sup>3</sup> So, for instance, inequality of distribution is often justified on the grounds that it nevertheless enables increases in wealth overall or for a significant part of the population. Whether this is factually correct can be disputed, but more problematic is the underlying assumption that it is wealth as measure in monetized terms that is important there, and the tendency to ignore other effects besides those that relate simply to monetized wealth or income.

<sup>4</sup> There are occasions in which bound and limit might be distinguished - for instance where bound is seen as presupposing an external body and limit not - but here I am using the terms more or less synonymously.

<sup>5</sup> G. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. T. Bottomore and D. Frisby (London: Routledge, 1978), 272.

<sup>6</sup> This lack of limit is particular to monetary wealth - it does not apply in the same way to forms of wealth that are based in commodities, not only because supplies of commodities are always limited, but also because, land aside, most commodities need to be stored, and so there are spatial constraints on the capacity for commodity accumulation, and because some commodities cannot be stored beyond a certain point without spoilage or loss. This can present problems when commodity wealth is understood only in monetized terms, since such monetization can itself obscure the limitations of the commodity or commodities at issue. Thus even though commodity wealth can be monetized, there is still an important difference between monetary and commodity wealth - although it is worth noting that this doesn't operate in quite the same way in respect of debt, which is not restricted, even if understood in commodity terms, by any considerations of limit that derive from issues of supply, storage, or spoilage. Indeed, when the notion of debt is coupled with the idea of interest on debt, so that debt (and so too wealth) becomes self-generating, then the possibility is opened up of forms of debt that constantly increase and so also of forms of debt that can never be discharged.

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Interest is itself facilitated by monetization, and one might argue, as does David Graeber, that debt and money themselves go together, since debt depends on the abstract quantification that money allows – see Graeber, *Debt: the First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2011), Chapt.2.

<sup>7</sup> This is a key point in hermeneutics – although it is usually expressed in terms of the dependence of understanding on some prior understanding (the essence of the ‘hermeneutic circle’). I have argued elsewhere that this is a phenomenon itself best understood in terms of the placed character of thinking and understanding. See Malpas, ‘Placing Understanding/Understanding Place’, *Sophia* 55 (2017).

<sup>8</sup> See Heidegger, ‘Memorial Address’, pp.47-55. The language Heidegger uses here can all-too-easily be read as simply the invocation of a backward-looking and conservative clinging to tradition and native belonging. Yet the ‘Address’ can also be read in a way that goes beyond this, and such a reading is supported both by Heidegger’s emphasis on the growth beyond one’s native ground alone and on his argument for the importance of the notions of ‘releasement’ (*Gelassenheit*) and openness. Both of these, I would suggest, involve exactly the sense of attentiveness to place and to bound, and one own being given over to these, that I have emphasised here. For more on the idea of releasement as it might be thought in relation to place, see my ‘From Extremity to Releasement: Place, Authenticity, and the Self’, in Hans Pedersen and Lawrence Hatab (eds), *The Horizons of Authenticity: Essays in Honor of Charles Guignon’s Work on Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Moral Psychology* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), pp.45-62 and also ‘What is architecture for?’, *Wolkenkuckucksheim/Clouduckooland – An International Journal of Architectural Theory* 22 (2017) – <http://www.cloud-cuckoo.net/intro/>.

<sup>9</sup> In diverse ways, new technologies have themselves enabled, among other developments, greater concentrations of wealth, the increased dominance of globalised corporations, the rise of unpaid work, de-skilling, and the disempowerment of labour. In their effect on financial and other systems, new technologies also contribute and are themselves reinforced by the rise of monetized forms of thinking and operation.

<sup>10</sup> *Discourse on Thinking*, p.45.

<sup>11</sup> It is just such a history that Heidegger sketches in his own critique of technology so that although his talk specifically of the ‘flight of thinking’ dates from 1955, the developments with which he connects it go back much earlier. What we see now is the further radicalization of trends and tendencies that have long been in play – trends and tendencies

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that may even be seen, as Max Weber pessimistically saw them, as tied up with the very nature of the human world in which we live, and so as trends and tendencies that cannot be avoided.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Max Travers, *The New Bureacracy: Quality assurance and its Critics* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Attacks that nevertheless have an important precedent in the vitriolic and often *ad hominem* criticisms levelled against Rachel Carson and her ground-breaking book *Silent Spring* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1962) in the 1960s.

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger warns of the ‘flight from thinking’ in 1955, and the phenomenon that constitute the ‘flight from truth’ are clearly at issue in his own discussion, but his concern with the issues at stake here, especially as connected with modern technology, goes back much further. Many other thinkers have identified similar trends and tendencies, including those that relate to truth, in the rise of modernity itself. What we see now is thus the further radicalization of developments that have long been in play, developments that may even be seen, as Max Weber saw them in 1918, as inextricably tied up with the very nature of the human world in which we live – see Weber, ‘Science as a Vocation’, in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. And ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 129-156.

<sup>15</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 4475e.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1011b1

<sup>17</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eight-Four* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1949), pp.214-5.

<sup>18</sup> See my discussion in ‘Truth, Politics and Democracy: Arendt, Orwell and Camus’, in Andrew Schaap, Danielle Celermajer, and Vrasidas Karalis (eds), *Power, Judgment and Political Evil: In Conversation with Hannah Arendt* (Franham: Ashgate, 2010), pp.133-145.

<sup>19</sup> One might argue, perhaps by setting against Orwell’s *1984* Aldous Huxley’s dystopic *Brave New World* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932) in which a paternalistic state retains control through the effective drugging of its population, that the ‘flight from thinking need not a flight into violence or horror. There are different forms of violence and horror, however, and not all are immediately evident as violent or horrific – it is thus a moot point whether we should view Huxley’s world as indeed free from either violence or horror. Moreover, the argument Orwell advances is that the connection between violence to truth and violence to truth is so deep and fundamental that there will always be a form of inhumanity that accompanies any denial or denigration of truth – even if it may sometimes be covered over or

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hidden. Although it may not be an inhumanity that will be experienced the same way by all, it will be an inhumanity nonetheless. In any case, truth and humanity are both also at issue in Huxley's novel, and, one might say, in similar ways even though by means of a very different narrative presentation.