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On the Lived Experience of Truth in an Era of Educational Reform: Co-responding to Anti-intellectualism

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Abstract

The severity of the challenges made to traditionally and historically accepted understandings of truth, what is true, what is false and “fake,” and even what is real, continues unabated in American public discourse. Nevertheless, the primary argument in this paper does not aim to identify the causes of the breakdown of representation (i.e. in the Trump administration, within the education reform movement) and the correspondence-based conceptions of truth. Instead, the focus is on discussing the hermeneutic phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and offering a conceptualization of truth as lived and experienced. Challenges to truth are to be understood not as an attack on the foundations of Western rationality, but as built into the presuppositions that inform the taken for granted representational understanding of truth. Democracy requires a space whereby a multitude of ideas can flourish alongside one another. Truth as aletheia, a more pragmatic and phenomenologically-attuned conceptualization of truth, can serve as a way forward in honoring this key tenet of democracy. The results of this reflective analysis of truth as aletheia is a broadened description and tentative definition that can offer new insights for living into a more democratically-driven future than can reductive, correspondence-based conceptions of truth.

Keywords: *Truth, Aletheia, Martin Heidegger, phenomenology, educational reform*

Martin Heidegger is most often known and referenced for his fundamental ontology of Da-sein. This analysis is the primary aim of his most famous work *Being and Time* (1927/1962) and continues to exist as an inspiration for many Continental philosophers who appreciate his project to raise anew the question of the meaning of being. Indeed, in his analysis of the ontological structure of Da-sein he names and describes various concepts and existential terminology that many take to be his most influential. For example, Andrew Feenberg, who first introduced me to Heidegger’s philosophy as a graduate student, argued that it is perhaps Heidegger’s concept of world as a meaningful totality or context that is his most important contribution to modern philosophy (Feenberg, 2012). What is less appreciated from and beyond *Being and Time* is Heidegger’s interpretive account of truth as *aletheia*.

In what follows I begin to unpack and think through an unfinished thread from an earlier research project (Kruger-Ross, 2016), specifically an account of truth as *aletheia*. My doctoral work retraced Heidegger’s conceptualizations of world, attunement (*Befindlichkeit*), and Enframing/Positionality (*Ge-stell*) as they might inform and transform a phenomenology of “being a teacher” while neglecting the powerful analyses of language and truth provided in *Being and Time*.

However, given the oddly public interest in the relationship between Heidegger and National Socialism with the recent publication of the Black Notebooks, it may be helpful to note that I specifically address this concern in Chapter 2 of the earlier project. Even a tentative reflective analysis of truth as *aletheia*, or the interplay between unconcealment and concealment as first described by Heidegger, was beyond the ontological analysis of teaching I originally took aim at a few years ago. Truth as unconcealed and concealed names a fundamental grasping of how truth is experienced, as at once bringing an understanding to the light while also acknowledging the shadow. A simple visual example is helpful. An object (e.g., a coffee cup, a book) is visible from only one perspective or angle, but there are always perspectives and angles that remain hidden, that cannot be seen or remain concealed. In short, Heidegger argues (and Greek philologists have begrudgingly agreed) that truth as *aletheia* (as the interplay between unconcealment and concealment, revealing and concealing) exists *prior to* any understanding of truth as correlation, as one logical proposition representing the meaning of another.

As it may already be clear, an analysis of truth can quickly become complex and abstract. This must be so, however, for our lives as human beings are wrapped up within, constituted even, our understanding of truth. Yet, if we recall that phenomenology, both as a methodology and philosophical perspective, is grounded in the lived experience of human beings we needn't be too worried. Phenomenology aims to return to the nature and character of the lived experience of a particular phenomenon *as it is experienced*. Heidegger (1927/1962), in his opening descriptions of phenomenology as a method in *Being and Time*, writes that the phenomenological maxim "to the things themselves" is more accurately described as "to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself" (p. 30). This confounded play with words does not need to be read as obtusely as it often is. Phenomenological work begins and ends with understanding experience, as it is experienced. What is like to be a novice teacher in a New Orleans "charter" school? How do people of color experience the curriculum? How do immigrant parents experience their relationship to the neighborhood school? With phenomenology, the familiar becomes strange; we cannot forget though that the strange remains familiar as it is grounded in our lived experience.

I begin first with an introduction and overview of Heidegger's understanding of truth as *aletheia* as it is situated within the larger arc of this thinking before more fully addressing the transformation in the traditional distinction of truth. This overview is no doubt incomplete but can offer a sketch of the necessary background needed before I turn to a number of examples to explore how truth as *aletheia* might occur in at least two contexts, the classroom and in the educational reform movement. A final summary and notes for further thinking follow.

If we, the general public, were better able to grasp a phenomenologically-grounded understanding of truth, we might, I believe, be able to survive the dramatic challenges to our democratic institutions in the midst of educational reform. Unpacking and analyzing simple binaries such as true/false and right/wrong from the stance of truth as *aletheia* transforms and stretches these reductive understandings of truth. Truth, as the interplay of concealing and unconcealing, may, for example, be better grasped as hermeneutical circles that include many more possibilities rather than simple continuums between binaries. In this writing, I analyze this path of thinking in such a way that a non-philosopher or phenomenologist will be able to think differently about lies and truth in their everyday lives. Democracy forces us to live in a lived experience of true and false—of MSNBC, Fox News and between. We should have descriptions of how all of these lived experiences of "truth" can co-exist. It is my hope that this manuscript corresponds to this kind of description.

The Post-truth Era?

Nearing the end of 2018, some news organizations (and scholars as well) have named our current time as the domain of “post-truth.” The “post-” prefix is an explicit reference to postmodern thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty and their destruction and deconstruction of Truth. I reserve Truth, capitalized, to indicate the conceptualization of a singular Absolute Truth, determined either by faith in a larger or more powerful being (e.g., God or gods) or the powers of the rational or scientific mind. When truth, lowercase, is named I am acknowledging space for multiple accounts of or cases of truth, but these should always be contextualized within the sentence, paragraph, or argument.

In the narrative of contemporary thinking, periods of time and therefore thinking and also conceptualizations of truth can be structured into three parts: the premodern, modern/modernity, and postmodern. Truth in premodern time was whatever was determined by religion or those who spoke for and interpreted religion for large groups of people. The God or gods were primarily responsible for what was seen as True and not True. Modernity, the period of time between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, represented the height of scientific thinking and methodologies, of humankind’s ability to examine and identify the truth of nature and culture. The perspective was that human beings were able to appropriate and utilize the tools of science, tools as in conceptualizations as well as various technical instruments, to uncover and determine Truth once and for all. These methods were to prove what is true and false in both the natural and the human sciences. Postmodern scholars, largely working after World War II, argued that truth is constructed and can only be understood as correct within particular cultures or contexts. Instead of referencing Truth, humans should be considering truths (plural) as they (truths) are historically and socially situated.

Given this historical background, it may seem reasonable or even pertinent that the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year for 2016 was “post-truth.” The Oxford editors define post-truth as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” In the analysis I am offering here post-truth could reasonably be seen as resulting from earlier understandings of truth. If humankind has, according to postmodern scholars, transitioned from taking Truth to be whatever a deity says it is to the results of scientific experiments and is now the result of social construction and agreement, does not post-truth follow logically? From one Truth defined by the gods, to Truth determined by the scientific methods, many truths that are only true within historical contexts, to there is no such thing as truth? Have we regressed? Have we moved beyond truth?

Michael A. Peters (2017), in a special introduction to an issue of *Educational Philosophy & Theory*, offers a cautionary tale about how to think and conduct our work in what may be a “post-truth” world for those concerned with educational scholarship and practice,

In the era of post-truth it is not enough to revisit notions or theories of truth, accounts of “evidence,” and forms of epistemic justification as a guide to truth, but we need to understand the broader epistemological and Orwellian implications of post-truth politics, science and education. More importantly, we need an operational strategy to combat ‘government by lying’ and a global society prepared to accept cognitive dissonance and the subordination of truth to Twittered emotional appeals and irrational personal beliefs. Rather than speaking truth to power, Trump demonstrates the enduring power of the lie. (p. 565)

While it is difficult to offer any sort of “operational strategy” that Peters calls for, reframing conversations around truth with a greater phenomenological sensitivity may help others “understand the broader...implications of post-truth politics, science and education.” Phenomenological thinking and methodologies challenge human beings to account for the *experience* of phenomena. Specifically, phenomenology offers a conceptual strategy, bracketing, that allows for a different kind of thinking and reflection that opens new possibilities for action where there were seemingly none.

The argument in this manuscript is phenomenological to the core and this can be summarized as follows: Regardless of whether or not Truth is Truth, or many truths in various contexts, there remains an ongoing exploration of how human beings *experience* these conceptualizations of truth. To this end, and this is what I believe is one of the key distinctions offered by Heidegger’s account of the interplay of the unconcealing and concealing nature of truth, it matters more *how* human beings experience truth than *whether or not there is* such a thing as truth that could be empirically, ontologically, or logically (pre)determined. While this may sound radical, it is simply the result of a phenomenological bracketing. We are setting aside the debate regarding T/truth, from premodernity to so-called post-truth, to focus on *how truth is experienced by human beings first and foremost*. A brief example may offer clarity and context.

Research and public dialogue surrounding educational and school reform offers a fertile context for exploring this alternative conception of truth. Specifically, conversations about charter schools and other free market-driven schooling options are particularly useful. Schools in post-Katrina New Orleans have served as a testing ground for large scale system reform, that is, by converting publicly funded and administered schools into charter schools run by independent contractor-operators. This experiment, while overshadowed by recent efforts by Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos to champion alternative schooling models, has largely been viewed positively by the media. New York Times Opinion columnist David Leonhardt (2018), for example, writes favorably about the success of the charter school overhaul in New Orleans. In a September 2018 *Washington Post* article Carol Burris indicates that the story of the “success” of charter schools in New Orleans post-Katrina is not quite as clear or straightforward. As to the success of the transformed system, Burris references Douglas Harris and Matthew Larsen’s (2018) recent policy brief on the matter: “high school graduation rates and college outcomes all improved for students who attended school in New Orleans post-Katrina.” However, Burris concludes, “It is true that outcomes are up. The important question to ask is *why* the improvements occurred.” Before jumping to the *why*, however, it is still worth pausing to clarify the *what*. As the journalist acknowledges, the graduation rates and college outcomes did increase and is no doubt true, *in a sense*. Borrowing from Heidegger’s later analyses of technology, the statement made by Harris and Larsen is “correct,” but is it True? On the face of it, the statement is experienced as a revealing or unconcealing, that the charter schools were successful. What is ignored, overlooked, and rendered mute are the many other truths the statement conceals, covers, or hides.

This example may resonate with individuals in many ways: as a parent, academic staff member, or as a community member. Depending on these perspectives, and there are quite a few more, there are multiple ways and compartments that can unconceal a covered over or ignored truth. How do poor families experience the truth of this seemingly obvious successful experiment in schooling? How might an investor or investment firm experience this truth? What of the experience of an ill-prepared teacher? These questions indicate how different groups of people might experience the truth of the general media opinion, but this does not even begin to approach the question of how each experiences the charter school experiment as a whole. Regardless of any grasping toward the Truth of the matter, rarely is one’s experience of the truth taken into account.

This is the contribution of phenomenology, highlighting and emphasizing lived experience. We turn now to Heidegger's particular phenomenology of the experience of truth.

Truth in Heidegger's Thought

Heidegger is often described as a prominent existential philosopher, a title and description he rejected throughout his life (see, for one example, Heidegger's letter to Jean Beaufret that was later published as "Letter on Humanism" (1946/1998). While existentialism is aimed at unpacking and exploring the nature of existence, and, arguably, *human* existence, Heidegger saw his thinking as engaging in phenomenological questioning, in philosophy. In this regard, Jean-Paul Sartre is more appropriately described as an existential philosopher than Heidegger. Heidegger's various inquiries into being, temporality, metaphysics, technology, and art, to name only a few, are consistently focused on getting at or grasping the particular phenomena under examination. It is also the case that many areas of study have drawn inspiration from Heidegger's writings from technology to literature, yet these are best understood as inspired by rather than denoting a "Heideggerian" approach to, for example, art or design.

Heidegger is most well-known for his 1927 text *Being and Time* and also shorter lectures and essays on technology, dwelling, and art. What is less recognized is Heidegger's interpretive reading and account of truth as *aletheia*. In fact, many thinkers get lost and therefore dramatically misinterpret Heidegger along the way by presupposing a representationalist account of truth. All philosophers want to be read and understood on their own terms and Heidegger more so than all others. For Heidegger, truth, *understood as a phenomenon*, is worthy of phenomenological inquiry (Nicholson, 2015). While his primary work on truth is often referenced in his 1930 essay *On the Essence of Truth* (that was given as a lecture three years after the publication of *Being and Time*), truth also receives treatment in Section 44 of *Being and Time* and later becomes fundamental in Heidegger's thinking of being. Specifically, the later Heidegger shifts from speaking and writing about the *meaning* of being to the truth of being. Understanding Heidegger's phenomenological grasp of truth as *aletheia* is the task of the following section.

Truth as *Aletheia*

Our everyday understanding of truth is commonsensical. This everyday approach to truth is often described as representational or correspondence-based, but the meaning is the same if not identical. Truth as correspondence/representation names the relationship between words or phrases and a particular state of things in reality. Thus, the exclamation "It is sunny!" is said to be true if we check outside to confirm that it is, indeed, sunny. The state of affairs (seeing sunshine outside) corresponds to the verbal exclamation. Or, put differently, the words adequately represent what is named (that it is sunny). This account of truth can also be applied to social interactions and relationships. For example, we can consult Harris and Larsen (2018) to determine if there was an impact on student test scores due to the New Orleans charter school initiative. According to their policy brief showcased on their website, they claim "The reforms increased student achievement by 11-16 percentiles." Therefore, we can affirm the truth of the impact. Yes, Harris and Larsen are reporting "the truth."

Or are they? Representationalist/correspondence-based theories of truth have been under attack for decades within philosophy, yet its dominance in the everydayness of lived experience is undeniable. Witness the cries of "fake news" from the Trump administration toward any news

media personae or outlet that publishes a story or statement that is unfavorable of the administration or its policies. Climate scientists' findings are rendered mute and news organizations regularly post transcriptions of elected officials with detailed annotations unpacking and contextualizing the words to get at the "truth" of the matter under discussion. *The Washington Post's* Fact Checker, which was last updated on February 3, 2019, reports that "In 745 days, President Trump has made 8,459 false or misleading claims" (para.1). Is truth dying? Or is it already dead?

In *On the Essence of Truth* Heidegger (1930/1998) conducts a phenomeno-ontological deconstruction of the representationalist theory of truth that is the foundation of the history of philosophy, logic, and metaphysics. This destruction, as Thomson (2005) notes, is pursued not in the spirit of the critic or nihilist, but rather in an attempt to uncover and analyze the concept or idea in question. The representationalist approach, or the correspondence theory, is and has been understood as common sensical for so long that it is often considered illogical to question it. Put simply, a propositional statement is uttered that, should it be considered "true", marks an adequate representation of a state of affairs. "The pen is on the table" is a true statement once it is confirmed that my pen is indeed on the table. Put differently, if a statement corresponds to the way things are at a given moment, the statement is evaluated as true. The representationalist/correspondence theory of truth then informs the foundational structure of language and grounds the ability of human beings to communicate. An example from the classroom is easy to name; consider the common assessment tool of the "True or False" exam question.

Through his analysis into the essence of truth Heidegger uncovers a more primordial, in Heidegger's jargon, meaning of truth in the Greek word *aletheia*. *Aletheia*, translated as unconcealment, is best grasped as the interplay between the unconcealing/revealing and concealing of a phenomenon. (It may be helpful to imagine this unconcealing and concealing in relationship to a physical being or entity, but for our purposes it is worth emphasizing that we are engaged in a reflection on the lived experience of a phenomenon which does not necessarily have a physical existence). For Heidegger, the representationalist/correspondence approach is only partially correct. When we grasp truth as what is revealed or unconcealed (as represented), we are only partially correct because we must also, in order to honor truth as *aletheia* and as *lived or experienced*, consider what remains concealed or hidden. This interplay between unconcealing and concealing is ongoing and is never completed for there are always elements that remain concealed while others are simultaneously unconcealed. Heidegger also uncovers additional insights such as "untruth" that while remarkable and insightful, must be left unaddressed in this analysis. Obviously, grasping or understanding truth as *aletheia*, while a fruitful ground for further thinking, complicates communication and traditional understandings of language. This complication was referenced earlier in how various groups and individuals may or may not experience the "truth" of school choice "success."

Harman (2007) situates *aletheia* specifically as an interplay between concealedness and unconcealedness:

Things are not just visible phenomena, but are partly hidden from view. We never gain an exhaustive understanding of things, but can only gradually draw them out of concealment by degrees, and this process never comes to an end. The Greek word for truth, *aletheia*, seems to point toward the same idea, since it means to draw something out of forgottenness. (p. 174)

Heidegger does not believe that truth as certainty, represented, or correspondence is incorrect, only that it is grounded in a more fundamental and prior understanding of truth as *aletheia*, or unconcealment *and* concealment. While student achievement data rendered via test scores may represent a particular truth, it is inherently and fundamentally incomplete or partial. A colleague recently commented that the construction of statistical models are also a good example of this. If you do not have a variable, then concealment occurs in the unexplained variance.

Instead of adopting a traditional understanding of truth as certainty or correctness (correspondence), Heidegger wants truth to be approached as a phenomenon that is formally indicated. In formal indication, we gesture toward a phenomenon without gripping the idea or the language too firmly so that the phenomenon can show itself as itself (a transformation of the phenomenological method, to be sure). If we take Heidegger's originary meaning of truth as the constant and neverending interplay of unconcealing and concealing seriously, however, we must be mindful of too quickly misunderstanding Heidegger (1) when he uses the word truth and (2) as offering a representational theory of existence when he is more interested in formally indicating the "truth" of a particular phenomenon under inquiry. Polt (1999) writes: "Heidegger does affirm that there is truth, and he does hold that some interpretations (including his own) are better than others— but no interpretation is *final*. Heidegger is a relentless enemy of ahistorical, absolutist concepts of truth" (p. 5).

In Heidegger's work, we can see the interplay of concealing and unconcealing of truth as *aletheia* in its relationship to formal indication as it shows itself in historical and contextual interpretation. His radical phenomenology of truth is often overlooked or misunderstood in postmodern scholarship and philosophical inquiry. Gordon and Gordon (2006) argued that a lack of engagement with Heidegger's thinking on truth "impoverishes contemporary thinking and life" (p. 4). They find that some postmodern scholars and philosophers, including Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida, read and gain only superficial insights from Heidegger's writings on truth as *aletheia*. After presenting and discussing Heidegger's reflections on the unconcealing and concealing character of truth, Gordon and Gordon offer a compelling critique to key postmodern thinkers who, they argue, misinterpret, misappropriate, or neglect altogether Heidegger's work on truth as *aletheia*.

***Aletheia* as Lived**

Van Manen (1990) noted that "phenomenological research is the description of the experiential meanings we live as we live them." Therefore, following an overview of Heidegger's interpretive account of truth as *aletheia* rather than as representation/correspondence, in this section we will apply *aletheia* to a few examples to illuminate the possibilities made available. I first offer two examples from my own classroom before turning to concluding thoughts and a final vignette from the broader social realm. It is my hope that in offering these examples a more thorough account of truth as it is lived will be made available.

There is one cautionary note. Many of the metaphors that I will call upon to help bring into definition Heidegger's interpretation of truth will rely on sight, on the capacity of human beings to see. One of the critiques of the representationalist/correspondence-based theory of truth has been its over reliance on visual metaphors to inform its understanding. This overreliance comes at the expense of other senses such as hearing and touch and, more importantly, has contributed to the elimination of alternative voices from philosophical inquiry including women and minorities (as well as within conversations surrounding educational reform).

However, I draw inspiration from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962) work in *Phenomenology of Perception* where he argues that seeing as perceiving is more than a simple sensing with the eyes. Seeing/perceiving is more accurately a naming of the use of the totality of senses as a bodily comportment within the world. Thus, in using visual metaphors I am not, I hope, saying that truth is only informed or impacted by vision or sight, or that truth as *aletheia* is only accessible or knowable via human seeing. For example, in an ongoing inquiry I am exploring the distinction provided by *aletheia* with aural spatiality. This reservation named, we turn to the first example.

Heidegger's (1977) thinking makes its first appearance in one of my graduate courses on the social and cultural implications of educational technologies in *The Question Concerning Technology*. Heidegger's account of modern technology as Enframing and his distinctions of bringing forth and standing reserve, while providing the philosophical groundwork for the remainder of the course, does not address truth as *aletheia* at any length. Students begin to notice early in our class discussions that the way that we talk about Heidegger's ideas don't necessarily align with representative truth. My answers to student questions typically begin with "You're partially correct" or "That's almost right, but you also have to consider..." Inevitably a shortened introduction to truth as *aletheia* occurs where I roughly sketch out this underappreciated element of Heidegger's thinking.

To demonstrate the concept, sometimes even before I try to describe it in semi-philosophical language, I glance around the classroom and ask to borrow a student's water bottle or coffee cup nearest me. Placing the bottle in the center of the room on the table, I ask students to describe to me what they see, from their perspective. I purposefully choose students sitting on opposite sides of the room for their descriptions and press them to account for their descriptions of what they *cannot* see. "Of course you are able to see the lettering on *this side* of the bottle, but how can you *know* what is on the other side? Do you really know?" Sometimes the student might respond, "Well, I could always ask someone on that side of the room." Yes, indeed! At this point, I shift the discussion back to truth as *aletheia* and note that the interplay of unconcealing and concealing is happening right before their eyes all the time and they were not even aware of it. "What do we do with truth now?" is often asked about now. First, we account for, recognize, and confirm the interplay of concealing and unconcealing inherent in truth as *aletheia*. Then, we open our minds and bodies to gathering as many "truths" as we can while acknowledging, as Polt remarked, the unconcealing/concealing of truth never ends.

A second example that can contextualize the abstract nature of truth as *aletheia* I call triangulation. This term will be all too familiar to qualitative researchers as well as other scholars who utilize mixed-methodologies in their research (see, for example, Bogdan & Biklen, 2006, or Cohen & Manion, 2000). Within research methods, it is believed that utilizing multiple data sources can assist in accurately accounting for and describing the object of study, usually human behavior or experience. In practice this might look like conducting face-to-face interviews with research participants, while also completing on the job observations, and collecting demographic data via a survey. The transcripts from the interviews, the researcher notes from observations, and the participant provided data on the surveys would then serve to triangulate the phenomenon and thus facilitate the answer to a particular research question. If we take this idea of triangulation and use it to further illuminate truth as *aletheia* we might be better able to ground this idea.

An additional real world educational reform example will help. Over the past few decades in Chile the number of voucher-based schools and students enrolled in non-public schools has steadily increased. For reference, Portales and Vasquez Heilig (2015) note that,

The system has grown steadily, increasing its enrollment throughout the years to a point where about 93% of all students are now included in the voucher system, with the roughly 7% of remaining students attending private-paid independent schools that do not receive vouchers. (p. 196)

Portales and Vasquez Heilig continue to describe the Chilean voucher implementation with specific attention paid to the ways that educational administrators respond to school choice. The truth of voucher programs is based on a market-driven assumption: that increased competition between private and public schools will ultimately create better schools. While quantitative data and feedback might at first reveal/unconceal that schools are doing better (increased student achievement, greater effectiveness), truth as *aletheia* would encourage us to pause and take account of what is also concealed or hidden.

What is missing or not reported in the first wave of data that “proves” success? For one, after more careful research into the lived experience of school administrators, Portales and Vasquez Heilig (2015) have shown that “in practice, a universal market system appears to enhance stratification relative to economic conditions in a community, student test scores and behavior,” (p. 216). This finding runs directly counter to the traditional argument that voucher programs can be an equalizer for disadvantaged students. In fact, these truths seem to be at odds with one another. How can they both be true? Considering both of these perspectives (or unconcealings) together, we might be able to develop a more accurate or whole and complete truth/*aletheia* of the encounter.

Is it Really all just Relative?: Final Thoughts and Future Directions

The critique of relativism is often lobbed at postmodern scholars, as well as anyone who challenges or questions belief in Absolute Truth. Philosophers and other thinkers who elect to utilize phenomenology or phenomenological methodologies are also charged with a bias of relativism because of their focus or reliance on lived experience. This is also a charge aimed towards education reform friendly researchers that presuppose that quantitative studies are the *only* studies important in the discourse about whether reform “works” or not. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines relativism as: “the view that truth and falsity, right and wrong, standards of reasoning, and procedures of justification are products of differing conventions and frameworks of assessment and that their authority is confined to the context giving rise to them,” (Baghrarian & Carter, 2017, para. 1). Is it really all just relative? I do not believe so, but the critical point for the argument at present is that this designation is not a necessary condition for the argument. The question of how truth is experienced remains regardless of whether truth is relative or truth is Absolute. This does not mean, however, that considering truth as *aletheia* is an unproductive or frivolous endeavor.

An additional example of how this analysis can contribute to a greater understanding of what has been contextualized as the “post-truth political era” is helpful and warranted. Brewer, Vasquez Heilig, Gunderson and Brown (2018) have recently described the failures and misinformation surrounding the privatization of schools in Chicago. The authors describe in detail the ways that teachers and community activists have distinguished, responded to, and challenged public school privatization in Chicago. For market-based privatization school reform initiatives to make sense they must presuppose that education, teaching, learning, and curriculum, to name but a few educational phenomena, can be treated as any other commodity. However, as this is one unconcealing of truth, there remain corresponding concealed accounts that activists in Chicago have been able to indicate, uncover, and exploit to the benefit of public education. One such account

narrated by Brewer et al (2018) includes how teachers and community-based activists have reaffirmed the power of organizing, union membership, and participation as a common and foundational unconcealment of truth. They note forcefully that,

Community-based activists have called upon education reforms to refocus on inequality rather than privatization and private-control of education. They are seeking to move the discourse concretely from choice to equity. They are asking questions such as: Why does one child have the opportunity to learn a world language and the other does not? Why does one school have debate teams, robotics clubs, social emotional support and the other does not? Separate and unequal education is about access to resources and opportunity, not how many different schools are available. (Brewer et al, 2018, p. 147)

These questions expose or bring into unconcealment truths typically concealed by traditional rhetoric surrounding school reform and privatization. By changing the conversation, new unconcealings can be revealed and new pathways or possibilities imagined and realized.

In this same way, the Trump administration and Trump himself have sought to emphasize the concealing character of truth (as *aletheia*) to the detriment of its unconcealing/revealing character. If Heidegger's interpretive account of truth as *aletheia* is to be taken seriously, then truth, *as it is lived and experienced*, must be acknowledged as always in fluctuation, constantly and consistently bouncing back and forth between unconcealing and concealing, an ongoing interplay, that we must come to terms with in our everyday lives. On this account and within this context, the Trump administration's "lies" or misdirecting/misleading statements are transformed into concealments—concealments that are always already co-related to the unconcealing nature of truth as *aletheia*. This is not a flaw in the systematic understanding of truth; it is co-constitutive of truth as *aletheia*.

How does a democracy account for, define, and survive the education reform movement and leaders who so irascibly engage in exploiting the concealing character of truth as *aletheia*? Indeed, can it move beyond simply surviving to thriving? The rejection of academic and intellectual life is nothing new for the United States. Over fifty years ago Hofstadter (1963) diagnosed and contextualized the problem or challenge to American society. Rather than creating or drafting "fact checking" websites evermore, perhaps it is time to consider truth as experienced, as *aletheia*.

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