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Epistemic Justice: Urgent but Still Rare
Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

Peter Trnka

Preamble

Truth, and some other, old concepts, seem to have faded recently, been put on pause, at least for a while. A worry: is language—in this case English—overworn in patches, with wordy overstitches making do—displacing, substituting, correcting somehow, vaguely? Remember ideology?

Epistemic justice: correcting—better, constructing—ways of knowing; addressing—speaking to—colonial, classist, capitalist, racist, sexist, ableist, extractivist and other prejudicial forms: false universals, assumptive frameworks and perspectives, violent epistemologies and attendant, corollary ontologies, ways of knowing-being; resisting "imperial epistemologies of domination" (Moradi 36). Speaking truth to power, following Edward Said (1972).[1] Following Antonio Gramsci (2011) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2012), listening to and taking the lead from the subaltern.

Two 'cases' here: contemporary Gaza and 18th century slavery. Two 'problems': international justice (Palestinian indigenous land rights and right to exist) and Enlightenment (in its connection to 'race'). One issue: knowing what is going on, as all is being done to block such knowledge.

Palestine and Amo

Palestinian mourning holds—virtually, in the spacing of this issue—the mourning of Anton Wilhelm Amo and the 'lost' African slaves in vibrant motion, as vivid and vivacious as can be. Maryam Qawash's "Lands on the Edge of the Winds"—dare you to read it and not bawl in tears, knowing what is happening in Gaza right now. Unspeakable atrocity? Unnameable? Law today requires the name genocide. Justice requires the *right to co-habit the world and to narrate*, as Said (1984) would have put it, exposing the full weight of what the name 'genocide' alone cannot contain.

To tear up right now with hope, with attention to beginnings, as Said (1985) insisted, as Qawash echoes, thinking "the first hours" that then are followed by "the hours of interpretation," what meditation do we have from the heart of violence and suffering on the power of the imagination and creative thought: "Be patient, we are told, among other ways of wise guidance, noting that time is not straight and clear but a 'riddle' with wide beginnings" and "this life is vast in the eyes of one who's hopes have broadened" (Qawash 94). Beginnings, in the plural, for the multiplicities and multitudes, not in the singular, as per some

founding, archaic origin: "a root is always one among many … [T]he beginning[:] … a method or intention among many, never the radical method or intention" (Said, 1985: 380).

The mission, the mourning, the dealing with the haunting - no easy matter, every case being different. To begin with, there 'are' good ghosts and bad. Hauntology, tendential analysis: of the killed, dead, martyred, and the traces born, and the wide beginnings, people-to-come, of the new bright futures.

Olive rich Palestine. Not the Palestine of Israeli prisons and scabies. Not the life produced by global Israeli biopower where disease is turned into "a weapon of control and degradation," as Bilal Hamamra and Michael Uebel tell us in their "Letter from Palestine: The Spread of Scabies among Palestinian Prisoners in Israeli Prisons" (11).

What lives, what *bios* or biological life forms and what *zōon politikons* or political life forms, can be written/graphed, graphically inscribed, marked, on papyrus or rock, of the gravestones, graven tablets of the living remembering? Hate, excoriate, act on the outpouring of unbearable passion? What cannot be born, carried, held in living memory—when does prospect, potential wither? When is it erased? Can it be erased permanently, without trace, as per the intentions of the torturers and mass killers?

Nonsense takes over. The creative (eventually sense producing) nonsense of Dada, the manifesto and shock of the surreal/absurd. Make the impossible possible. Make intolerable the intolerable. Refuse the manufactured, imposed, impoverished Real. Expel, destroy, refuse settler colonial violence, micro and macro, subjectivized and objectified.

Spectres of Amo

Fazil Moradi and Stefanie Bognitz, the editors of the special issue *Spectres of Anton Wilhelm Amo*, argue in their Introduction that Amo's ghost indicates—groans, if you will, or gestures towards—the idea that the Enlightenment is not finished, that there is, in line with Jacques Derrida's New Enlightenment, an Enlightenment to come: "The Enlightenment to come is tangled with the future to come and of becoming receptive to haunting and the spectrality of Amo" (15). The Enlightenment to come is to fulfill the existing promise and disappointment of Enlightenment: one corrupted, tainted, inhabited by a most countervailing tendency, violence and enslavement: "The imperial-colonial conditions made the work of certain Enlightenment thinkers and the era of the Enlightenment known to the world as exclusive embodiment of the Western 'race' … while homogenizing and annihilating its relations to other intellectual traditions" (15). Hence the need to think the future, for a future, better, more adequate and just or truer Enlightenment, free of its failure to mourn its corpses: "This is where the *Enlightenment to come* is also a question of democracy to come, beyond state sovereignty and citizenship" (15) following the lead on hauntology and the deconstruction of the present stirred up by Jacques Derrida, in *Specters of Marx* and elsewhere.

The indistinct, trace-like, clear and obscure character of the spectre, Amo, is similar to the indistinct, trace-like, still-to-be-settled-and-still-contested cha-

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racter of 'Europe' and 'Africa': "Similar to the two imaginary coordinates of 'Africa' and 'Europe,' … Amo is both present and absent, real and imagined, between worlds, and European and African. We are committed to allowing Amo's ghost to hover between life and death, here and now and then, making certainties vacillate" (16). Instead of sharpening the epistemic arsenal to choose just the right concepts for the case, Moradi and Bognitz take a contrary tack, multiplying and proliferating options rather than narrowing down preferred instruments, in favour of a "pluriversality of epistemic practices and knowledge regimes" (17). Epistemological revolution for epistemic justice, by way of—and for—epistemic pluralism; expressing, imagining, experimenting, improvising, generating.

One thing is clear, as Souleymane Bachir Diagne shows in his "Postface":

> As a symbol, Amo's biography and identity have long taken precedence over what Paulin Hountondji has called the need for a "systematic study" of Amo's work independent of his biography (*African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (2nd ed, Indiana University Press) 1983, 112). Recent publications about Amo's thought indicate that the time for such a "systematic study" has come. In addition to this special issue [*Spectres of Anton Wilhelm Amo*, edited by Fazil Moradi and Stefanie Bognitz], two very similar books have been published recently, one in English and one in French. The first, titled *Anton Wilhelm Amo's Philosophical Dissertations on Mind and Body*, was authored by Stephen Menn and Justin E.H. Smith and published by Oxford University Press in 2020). The latter, published by *Présence africaine*, is titled *Anton Wilhelm Amo, une philosophie de l'implicite* (Anton Wilhelm Amo, a philosophy of the implicit). (84)

Amo's importance "as a philosopher *of* his time and place lies in his original perspective on the enduring problem posed by Descartes' dualism of *mens* and *corpus* and the question of the union of the *res cogitans* and a *res extensa*" (85). Amo emphasizes "the purely actuated nature (mere actuosa) of the mind" (85). As Diagne explains, "[a]ctuosa is an important concept for which Dauvois (2020, 267ff) chooses to create *actueux* in French: central to Amo's thought is the idea that the nature of the *mens* is to be *mere actuosa*" (85). Mind, purely active, impassive: "Impassivity," Diagne states, "means that what belongs to the mind is the ideas it forms in its spontaneity (as a power of representation, a *vis repreasentiva*) without being compelled by anything external" (85). This generative aspect of mind is not, for Amo, the imagination, which Amo defines negatively—in various senses—in the "Philosophical Disputation containing a Distinct Idea of those Things that Pertain either to the Mind or to our Living and Organic Body" of 1734 (in Menn and Smith, 221): "V IMAGINATION. Imagination is the mind's momentary act of understanding prior to sufficient reflection in which the mind according to the character of natural instinct and of the affects that are present represents something to itself as existing which is however absent in reality."

Moradi engages with Amo's philosophy on a related point, namely, the scale of Amo's definition of liberty, i.e., as a question of the condition or situation of the whole person, mind and body, and not mind alone: "It is important that

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Amo begins with *human* instead of 'mind' or 'Man' " (35); as Amo states in the aforementioned treatise:

> IV. LIBERTY. This we understand either concerning the mind alone, or concerning the whole man. With respect to the mind liberty is spontaneity, or that faculty by which the mind sets up something to do or to omit if it is not otherwise impeded. This liberty is never absolutely such, because the mind cannot operate other than by means of its commerce with the body, inasmuch as it operates by means of sensations. (Menn & Smith 221).

Diagne formulates the central points of this special issue hauntology of Amo precisely and concisely:

> This special issue*, Spectres of Anton Wilhelm Amo: The Enlightenment Philosopher*, is committed to highlighting his enduring significance with both clarity and conviction. It emphasizes two important points. First, Amo's philosophy serves as a striking counter-example to the "absurd prejudices" of those who think of themselves enlightened, and offer a compelling argument in favor of the abolitionist cause. Second, it undoubtedly manifests the African presence in addressing philosophical problems." (85).

Moradi, in his "Anton Wilhelm Amo Beyond His Time and Place," argues that "Amo's non-present present, anchoring him in the here and now, is the coming back of spectres and an unknowable future," the unknowable future holding the potential for "a re/turn to the possibility of hospitality," a turn to a broader, more inclusive, more pluralist hospitality than the unjust, repressed, falsely universal western European philosophical hospitality of the predominantly 18th and 19th century German form of the Enlightenment, as Diagne argues in the first memorial Amo lecture of 2018, "Decolonizing the History of Philosophy":

> In order to decolonize the history of philosophy against the fabrication of *translatio studiorum* as the unilinear path connecting Greek thought and sciences to medieval European Christianity, we need to *pluralize that history*. And to manifest in our textbooks that *translatio studiorum* is not just Jerusalem-Athens-Rome-Paris or London or Heidelberg … but, as well: Athens-Nishapur-Bagdad-Cordoba-Fez-Timbuktu … To decolonize the history of philosophy is also to take into account the *plurality of languages*, in order to consider the perspectives introduced by tongues other than European, and thus undo the "ontological nationalism" upon which rests the assumption that philosophical exercise is intrinsically tied to certain (European) languages. (16)

Ontological nationalism as a form of violent imposition of part for whole, partial perspective for view from above/nowhere. Epistemological nationalism as well. Forming ways of being and ways of knowing walk hand in hand. As do ways of valuing. Epistemic justice corrects biases, false universals: becoming truer and truer to becoming. The perpetual activity and vigilance of epistemic justice: ongoing interrogation, an unending unsettling of unjust knowledge regi-

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mes. An ethical commitment to exploring and exploding the limits of knowledge. As we have learned from Spivak, the subaltern cannot speak within structures that refuse to hear; epistemic justice requires not only inclusion but transformation of the conditions of learning and knowing and heterogeneity of knowledges themselves.

Spivak figures her position to the European Enlightenment as a double bind:

> [T]he double bind of the universalizability of the singular, the double bind at the heart of democracy, for which an aesthetic education can be an epistemological prescription, as we, the teachers of the aesthetic, use material that is historically marked by the region, cohabiting with resisting, and accommodating what comes from the Enlightenment. (20)

Working one's way out of—or through and in to weave another—such a situation of double bind—a weaving and unweaving at one and the same time—attempts to wake up, to stimulate, proliferate and generate imaginative desires:

> [w]e must learn to do violence to the epistemo-epistemological difference and remember that this is what 'is' and thus keep up the work of displacing belief onto the terrain of the imagination, attempt to access the epistemic. The displacement of belief onto the terrain of the imagination can be a description of reading in its most robust sense. It is also the irreducible element of an aesthetic education. (26)

Epistemological revolution, by imaginative acts of radical desires.

Spivak usually prefixes Enlightenment with the historico-regional specifier "European" and figures the double bind in the playful polysemous grammar of "ab-using" it (37): "Can this be historically our role? To make the Enlightenment open to a(n) (ab)-use that makes room for justice …?" Perhaps this is not the justice of Kant's trial bench—and giving Derrida more slant on the abusing than using side—may the figure of justice here be saved from trial correction and sidle up with the unconditional ethical and the infinite task of hospitality? What the law/justice distinction promises.

Justice as the displacement and abuse of existing law, as violence, as schizophrenia: "The Euro-US subject must court schizophrenia as figure. In our dwindling isolation cells, we must plumb the forgotten and mandatorily ignored bio-polarity of the social productivity and the social destructiveness of capital and capitalism by affecting the world's subalterns, in places where s/he speaks, unheard, by way of deep language learning, qualitative social sciences, philosophizing into *unconditional* ethics" (43). Aka hospitality, aka openness to the radical Other:

> Imagination is structurally unverifiable. Thus, the image of the other as self-produced by the imagination supplementing knowledge or its absence is a figure that marks the impossibility of fully realizing the ethical. It is in view of this

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> experience of the figure (of that which is not logically possible) that we launch our calculations of the political and the legal. The gift of time grasped as our unanticipatable present as a moment of living as well as dying, of being hailed by the other as well as the distancing of that call is launched then as reparation, as responsibility, as accountability. (120)

Ontology and epistemology, the study of being and knowing, become arenas for the trial of colonial violence: "Colonial power is not just a rhetorical or material force – it is a metaphysical imposition, creating, shaping reality and dictating what is deemed knowing and knowledge, truth, and being" (Moradi 36); and, as such, theatres for the construction of and experimentation with new desires, new bodies and minds, new ways of thinking, being, and valuing.

Witness, archive, curate ongoing colonial violence: physical, mental, epistemic, ontological. How to imagine, to think, to know, to love differently. To be differently.

Avram Alpert, in "To Philosophize is to Learn How to Live with Others," continues the grand theme of hospitality, false and truer, in relation to the spectres of the Enlightenment and Western thought, finding a meaning in Amo's separation of philosophy from the issues of race and culture, namely, that "universalization occurs by going out into the world and attempting to integrate yourself with it, not by turning into one's 'own mind' " (47). Stefanie Bognitz in "Signposts of a Precarious Biography" addresses the fragile, risky character of any attempt to define or describe a life by asking her reader to consider the possibilities of "speculative epistemology" and what it means "to engage possible archives" (56). Anticipation and memory, projection and retrojection, the key operators in self-production and recall: "the archive is a memory laboratory, a mediated site of imagination and representation" (55). In writing, constructing, or remembering a life, she notes that "there is no final draft in the script of everyday life" (55-56). Her positioning of the problem in the case of Amo is acute: "What is of interest here is the involvement of the empire state of Brandenburg, situated in the very middle of the German territories, in the trade in enslaved persons on the brink of the Enlightenment era" (57).

Memorial acts—remembering and engaging with spectres—are multiple, multitemporal, and multimedic. Bognitz, in her second contribution, "In-Between Worlds," points out that "The archive is oral, written, ethnographic, and ephemeral" (74). Photographic and poetic, in the case of Akinbode Akinbiyi's gift of our cover image, untitled, and his work, "Attempts at Understanding," in which he tries "to intuit" a figuration of Amo the everyday, wandering man, feeling our way through the traces of his mind and body. Connecting with existing threads and traces, knowing that there is "constant weaving still going on from then to now" (78). A "prayer to be haunted" (Spivak 218) in the right way, open to the other, desiring and open to desire of the gestures of others.

Thank you for the humility and grace of all the contributions, tied together so clearly by their respect for the difficulty and multiplicity of ways of knowing,

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and their recognition of the importance of that respect, and its attendant hospitality, for the ongoing project of a future-to-come.

New Enlightenment, Truer Enlightenment, includes a Free Palestine.

Biography

Peter Trnka is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Memorial University. He has taught at Karlova University, Prague as well as Toronto and York. He has published scholarly philosophical and transdisciplinary articles in various international journals, most recently the chapter "Disjoint and Multiply: Deleuze and Negri on Time" in the edited volume *Deleuze and Time*, as well as poetry and a cookbook.

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Notes

1."The goal of speaking the truth is, in so administered a mass society as ours, mainly to project a better state of affairs, one that corresponds more closely to a set of moral principles—applied to peace, reconciliation, abatement of suffering—applied to the known facts. This has been called 'abduction' by the American philosopher C.S. Peirce … Certainly in writing and speaking, one's aim is not to show everyone how right one is, but in trying to induce a change in the moral climate whereby aggression is seen as such, the unjust punishment of peoples or individuals is either prevented or given up, the recognition of rights and democratic freedoms is established as a norm for everyone, not invidiously for a select few" (1972, 7).

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