

The Depressing Dead End of “Your Truth”

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Your Truth

In her lifetime achievement award acceptance speech at the 2018 Golden Globes, Oprah Winfrey said, “What I know for sure is that speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have.”¹

Your truth. Those two words are so entrenched in our lexicon today that we hardly recognize them for the incoherent nightmare that they are. Among other things, the philosophy of “your truth” destroys families when a dad suddenly decides “his truth” is calling him to a new lover, a new family, or maybe even a new gender. It’s a philosophy that can destroy entire societies, because invariably one person’s truth will go to battle with another person’s truth, and devoid of reason, only power decides the victor.

“Your truth” also puts an incredible, self-justifying burden on the individual. If we are all self-made projects whose destinies are wholly ours to discover and implement, life becomes a rat race of performative individuality. “Live your truth” autonomy is thus as exhausting as it is incoherent. As French sociologist Alain Ehrenberg points out in *The Weariness of the Self*, the self-creating person turns out to be fragile and “weary of her

¹ <https://abc7.com/oprah-winfrey-cecil-b-demille-award-golden-globes-globe-awards/2879380/>

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sovereignty.” Depression is the inevitable result and “the inexorable counterpart of the human being who is her/his own sovereign.”²

“Your truth” autonomy invariably leads to loneliness. It erroneously suggests we can live unencumbered and uninfluenced by the various structures that surround us (families, churches, cultures, biology, etc.). But it becomes impossible to form community when everyone is their own island, with no necessary reliance upon larger truths or embeddedness within a bigger story.

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*The idea of total autonomy is not only foolish
and foreign; it's deadly.*

Again, these ideas were unfathomable in former eras, when to “go it alone” in life was seriously dangerous. In agrarian cultures the power of the communal is essential. Everyone plays a vital, interdependent role on the farm. You need each other to survive. Each person’s identity is naturally understood in terms of how it relates to the whole. The idea of total autonomy is not only foolish and foreign; it’s deadly. In his excellent book, *The World Beyond Your Head*, Matthew B. Crawford challenges the idea that everything outside one’s head is a potential threat to the self. His thesis is that the environments we exist within *constitute* rather than *compromise* the self. Humans are not just brains in vats. We are *situated* in real worlds we didn’t make up, and we know ourselves not through abstract projections or self-conceptions, but in our **situatedness*: “We live in a world that has already been named by our predecessors, and was saturated with meaning before we arrived.”³

From cradle to grave, we are formed by others. Contrary to what a “look within” world would suggest, the world outside our heads defines our existence in ways we are foolish to ignore. Rather than seeing this as oppressive, or simply pretending (foolishly) this isn’t the case, we should accept this situation as a gift: truth comes, in large part, from *outside* ourselves. We can choose the *sources* of where we look for truth. We can choose how we *synthesize* truth and *apply* it as wisdom in everyday circumstances. But we don’t get to choose whether or not something is true. We don’t invent truth. We don’t determine it. We search it out and accept it with gratitude, even when it’s at odds with our feelings or preferences. Thanks be to God.

² Alain Ehrenberg, *The Weariness of the Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 218–19.

³ Matthew B. Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2015), 145.

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This article is adapted from [The Wisdom Pyramid: Feeding Your Soul in a Post-Truth World](#) by Brett McCracken.

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