JUDGING FOR THE WORLD: PHILOSOPHIES OF EXISTENCE, NARRATIVE IMAGINATION, AND THE AMBIGUITY OF POLITICAL JUDGEMENT

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Maša Mrovlje

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Abstract

The thesis inquires into the theme of political judgement and aims to rethink it from the perspective of twentieth-century philosophies of existence. It seeks to take up the contemporary challenge of political judgement that remains inadequately addressed within recent theorizing: how, given the modern breakdown of metaphysical absolutes, to reinvigorate the human capacity for political judgement as a practical activity able to confront the ambiguous, plural and complex character of our postfoundational world. Against this background, the thesis aspires to reclaim the distinctly historical orientation of twentieth-century existentialism, in particular the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus and Hannah Arendt. It draws on their aesthetic sensibility to resuscitate the human judging ability in its worldly ambiguity and point towards an account of political judgement capable of facing up to the challenges of our plural and uncertain political reality. Retrieving their vigilant assumption of the situated, worldly condition of human political existence and the attendant perplexity of judging politically, the aim of the thesis is to suggest how the existentialists' insights can be brought to bear on contemporary problematics of political judgement that seem to elude the grasp of abstract standards and predetermined yardsticks.

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Introduction: Tracing the turn to political judgement

Over the past decade, the theme of political judgement has assumed increasing prominence within political theory. Thinkers as diverse as, for instance, Brown (2010) and Ferrara (2008), look to practical judgement as a central lens through which to approach the varied ethical and political dilemmas troubling our world at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In foregrounding the contemporary importance of political judgement, the recent turn at the same time draws attention to the prevalent tendency within the Western philosophical tradition to treat the concept with relative neglect. Certainly, one might object that the long tradition of moral and political thought abounds in theories of moral and political judgement and point to the Kantian categorical imperative, natural law tradition, utilitarianism, or Aristotelian virtue ethics, to name but a few, as examples of genuine engagement with the faculty of judgement. However, as Beiner (1983, 169, n. 6) succinctly points out, these theories provide us with "grounds of valid judgement," that is, the foundations for forming reasonable judgements, rather than delving into the ability of judging itself. This surprising omission, as a number of scholars have argued, can then be attributed to the predominant philosophical focus on constructing abstract and universal principles of the right, the good and the beautiful (Denneny 1979, 248–9, 254). Judgement, in turn, came to be demoted, to evoke Kant's (2007, IV, 15) phrase, into the role of a "determinant" function that, always already in possession of a universal rule, proceeds as mere application of pre-given standards onto the particularities of political affairs.

The recent "rise of the judgement model" (Ferrara 1999), accordingly, is characterized by a move away from the paradigm of universal principles, laws and norms, and towards political judgement as a situated, context-specific activity, bound to the particularity and plurality of its subject-matter, the practical realm of political affairs. Chris Brown (2010, 72–89), for his part, mounts a critique against all forms of ethics, either cosmopolitan or communitarian in orientation, that are concerned primarily with providing proper (either universal or community-specific) foundations for moral judgement and thus reduce moral reasoning to the application of a set of rules. In our ambiguous and plural age, Brown (2010, 230–45) elaborates, the security of general rules is not only illusory, but also potentially harmful in that it dulls our capacity

to pay due regard to the particularities of specific circumstances. Invoking the Aristotelian virtue ethics tradition, Brown proposes to reorient the problematics of judgement from the theoretical quandary of "what rule we should follow," to the practical concern of "how we should live," that is, how to develop the appropriate capacities that will help us respond adequately to particular situations and moral dilemmas that confront us in real life (Brown 2010, 79–80, 230–1). In a similar spirit, Ferrara writes against the predominance of the "force of principles" or what *ought to be* and their determinant application to the world of the *what is* (Ferrara 2008, 2–4). Instead, Ferrara turns to the Kantian paradigm of reflective judgement, where no universal is simply given, but must be found out of a particular at hand (Ferrara 2008, 20). He thus directs attention to the process of judging as a situated activity that bears upon and is oriented towards the cultivation of the sense of "self-congruity" or "authenticity" of one's (individual or collective) identity (Ferrara 1998, 6–7; 1999, x; 2008, 8, 20–3). Much like for Brown, then, for Ferrara the validity of judgement is no longer tied to "generalizing, principle-based universalism," but is "exemplary" (Ferrara 1999, 1). It is based in concrete, unique choices as "optimal" for the flourishing of a particular identity (be it of an individual or of humankind) and, as such, is better able to respond to the irreducible pluralism of contemporary political life (Ferrara 2008, 6–7, 30–1; 1998, 10–12, 17).

In its attentiveness to the pluralism and context-based specificity confronting political judgement, the recent turn thus is framed to participate in the postmetaphysical or postfoundational horizon of contemporary thought (see Brown 2010, 26–7; Ferrara 1999, 2). It can be seen, that is, as responding to the broader and yet unfinished narrative of the crisis of modernity. Gaining preeminence in the course of the twentieth century, this narrative coalesced in a staunch skepticism of the modern Enlightenment project and its unlimited confidence in the powers of human reason to provide us with ultimate, indubitable foundations on which to fashion a politics of liberty, equality and eternal progress of humankind (Isaac 1992, 3–9). Instead of an autonomous, rational subject and its supposed capacity to ground universal standards of morality, the critics of modernity have discerned an advance of domineering instrumental reason. Imposing upon the world abstract and self-certain principles and ideals, Enlightenment reason not only is oppressive of the particularity of the world, the critics say, but also is prone to

reduce political judgement and politics itself to the rule of mere utilitarian, strategic means-ends calculation and adjudication.[1] Similar concerns continue to animate recent thinking, most notably in the postmodern distrust and deconstruction of all universal knowledge claims and normative standards as repressive attempts to conceal and entrench existing relations of power within society, while marginalizing and subduing the irreducible play of difference.

Postmetaphysical political judgement: Some conceptual clarifications

The recent turn to judgement thus arose against the background of the contemporary widespread awareness of the modern lack of firm, stable, ahistorical ethical and political foundations that we could ultimately appeal to when judging our historical realities and practices with any degree of past confidence (see Ferrara 1999, 2; Brown 2010, 26–7). Yet, it likewise is characterized by a prescient recognition that the postmodern "incredulity towards metanarratives," its persistence in overthrowing all possible grounds for the making of political judgements as oppressive, ultimately fails to pave the way forward (Lyotard 1984, xxiv; see e.g. Ferrara 2008, 6–7). For all its critical import, indeed, the postmodern celebration of particular, local and contingent narratives that allow for no common meaning claims could arguably be said to remain on the level of abstract concepts, falling short of meaningfully addressing and critically responding to the exigencies of our historical reality and thus abandoning politics to "the spectre of [continued] uncertainty and disillusion" (see Isaac 1992, 3, 5–10; Kruks 2001, 11–21; Ferrara 1998, 3–4). The challenge taken up by recent theorizing on political judgement then reflects a broader postmetaphysical orientation within political thought, perhaps most notably articulated in the writings of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. There, as part of their larger project of reviving political theory and renewing debates about justice and democracy in the wake of the fallen metaphysics, the question becomes how,

[1] This critique was powerfully articulated in Carl Schmitt's charge against liberal thought and its supposedly universal normative principles of the common good – for him an ideological justification for the reduction of the distinct character of the political to a mere technical matter of furthering and channelling the rivalling utilitarian motivations of private individuals (Johnson 1998, 16–18). Similarly, it colours both critical and conservative insights into the advance of instrumental reason (Adorno and Horkheimer) or of nihilistic relativism (Strauss) at the heart of the modern humanist project (see Isaac 1992, 69–70).

given the absence of eternal absolutes, to reinvigorate the human capacity for political judgement in a way that is better attuned to the ambiguous, plural and complex character of our postfoundational world (see e.g. Ferrara 2008, 4–9; Azmanova 2012, 28–36).

The challenge of rethinking political judgement, in Rawls and Habermas, starts from their rejection of the traditional modern penchant to ground absolute principles of morality upon the transcendental, solitary conception of the subject and its rationality of self-interest (Habermas 1996, xli, 449; Rawls 1996, 10, xviii, xxxviii). In an age when "comprehensive worldviews and collectively binding ethics have disintegrated" and after the events of the twentieth century have "taught us the horror of existing unreason," Habermas claims, political judgement can no longer appeal to a "higher" or "deeper" reality nor lay faith in "the surviving posttraditional morality of conscience" (Habermas 1996, xli, 448). It must start from our particular, situated, and plural forms of life (Habermas 1996, xli). For Rawls, similarly, a feasible conception of justice must take as its point of departure what he calls the "burdens of judgement" (Rawls 1996, lvii). Irreducible to mere differences of interest, human error, irrationality or stupidity, these arise from "reasonable disagreement" – the fact that in judging we are confronted with an experientially shaped and deeply entrenched plurality of perspectives, interpretations and evaluations (Rawls 1996, 55–8; Lassman 2004, 267–8). Given the plurality of political life, the purpose of political judgement then cannot lie in the quest for universal moral standards, a new overarching philosophical "truth" that would impose itself on the world, seek to adjudicate between conflicting views of the good, and coerce agreement (Rawls 1996, e.g. 216–19). Instead, Rawls and Habermas set out to foreground judgement as a dialogic, intersubjective practice of public reason that is immanent, attuned to the plural reality of our political world (Azmanova 2012, 31–4).[2]

To confront the burdens of reasonable disagreement, for Rawls, judgement of matters political must bear in mind the limits of "reasonable" argumentation and justification (Rawls 1996, xx). The process of public deliberation, in other words, must pay heed to the moral "duty of civility." Based on the citizens' recognition of each other as equal, free and reasonable members of a society, this duty enjoins all participants in public

[2] For my purposes, the discussion of Rawls is limited to his efforts towards a *political* conception of justice, as spelled out in his *Political Liberalism,* where he departs from his earlier attempt, in *A Theory of Justice,* to offer a philosophical account of justice based on individuals' private rationality of self-interest (Azmanova 2012, 65–7).

discourse to refrain from imposing upon others their own private, comprehensive beliefs, truths and goals, and propose for debate only those reasons that all members of a particular (democratic) society can be expected to accept (Rawls 1996, 217; see also McCarthy 1994, 50–2, 60). Rawls's appeal to public reason then leads to a shared conception of justice not because it would constitute an *a priori* moral principle, but because it is not based "in any specific doctrine," and so can be expected to be embraced by different particular perspectives as presupposing their shared "idea of society as a fair system of cooperation between free and equal persons" (Azmanova 2012, 79; Hayden 2002, 75). Nevertheless, Rawls's solution to the burdens of pluralism thus comes to lie in a conception of political judgement that removes divisive issues from the sphere of legitimate public debate (see McCarthy 1994, 52, 63; Rawls 1996, xxvi). In this respect, as Habermas argues, Rawls's public reason remains within a philosophical, "individually isolated perspective," imposing onto the plural world a supposedly universally valid and unchanging rule on how individuals "*ought to reason*" (Habermas 1995, 117–19, 128; Benhabib 1994, 36). While motivated by the desire to avoid deep-seated strife between individuals' private conceptions of the good and secure a stable democratic order, Rawls's judgement then not only excludes from consideration the very plurality and the conflict-ridden nature of political life that it had initially sought to confront, but also is unable to account for the possibility of social criticism and change (see Azmanova 2012, 86–8).[3]

To avoid what he calls Rawls's lingering "functionalist" bias and secure a firmer ground of normative validity, Habermas, in contrast, proposes judgement to proceed by way of an ideal procedure of deliberation, where, however, the question of communal agreement is tested and answered in the course of an "open" process of deliberation between plural equals (Habermas 1995, 117, 122, 131; McCarthy 1994, 45). Habermas's judgement thus aims to leave "substantial questions" and the practices of finding, constructing and challenging common ground "to the more or less enlightened engagements of participants" themselves (Habermas 1996, 461; 1995, 131; see also

[3] Admittedly, Rawls also introduces the "inclusive view" of public reason, which allows "citizens, in certain situations, to present what they regard as the basis of political values rooted in their comprehensive doctrine" (Rawls 1996, 247). And yet, Rawls quickly adds, this only holds for claims that can be seen to "strengthen the ideal of public reason itself" (Rawls 1996, 247). Even if inclusive of particular perspectives, political judgement then remains tethered to a pre-given, externally determined conception of the reasonable, by virtue of which nonpublic views are to be redeemed (Zerilli 2012, 13–15, 21).

McCarthy 1994, 61). In this respect, Habermas's model seems better suited to respond to the contingent, historical and changing nature of political affairs in that the plurality of value and truth claims does not represent a troubling condition to be bracketed for the sake of a stable consensus, but something to be discussed, contested and defended in an open-minded, critical dialogue, considerate of opposing views (McCarthy 1994, 62–3, 51; Bohman 1995, 265–6). Yet, much like in the case of Rawls, Habermas's account is tied strongly to the end of achieving agreement, where the final, impartial outcome of the judging process seems already presupposed as something all "participants in rational discourse 'must' accept" based on the inherently moral, "inclusive and non-coercive" character of reasoning itself (Habermas 1995, 117, 127; McMahon 2002, 123). Habermas's judgement, too, then remains mired in a "monologic," determinant conception that, in the guise of an "ideally extended we-perspective," imposes onto the situated, plural character of the world a "singular" and supposedly universal form of political dialogue and agreement (Habermas 1995, 117; Bohman 1995, 266–7).

While important for their recognition of the distinct character of political affairs, Rawls's and Habermas's efforts to avoid the rule of strategic means-ends considerations thus win "a pyrrhic victory" (Azmanova 2012, 120). For in their preoccupation with securing absolute standards of (procedural) justice, they, paradoxically, again reduce political judgement to a model of instrumental reasoning, where the plural and situated nature of politics is to be viewed, measured and determined in accordance with a pre-given end. It is this lingering rationalist penchant that also colours the current turn towards the paradigm of judgement. Brown, for instance, ultimately is concerned not so much with overcoming the cosmopolitan-communitarian divide and their respective grounds of judgement. Instead, he seeks to provide an account of basic human capacities or virtues that, while context-specific, also are universal, "reflecting common human responses to common human experience" and thus capable of providing a ground on the basis of which particular social arrangements can be judged (Brown 2010, 81–2). Similarly, in Ferrara, the centre of attention rests on reconstructing the dimensions of authenticity to unearth "the universal human experience" or "the universal capacity to sense" what constitutes the flourishing of human life that lies "before" or is "independent" of a plurality of interpretative perspectives (Ferrara 2008, 34, 31–2). He thus claims to have resolved the problem of how our situated judgements

can also be said to possess "transcontextual validity" and point to a "truly postfoundationalist" way of distinguishing right from wrong (Ferrara 1999, 156, 12; 2008, 7). Even though recognition of the practical character of judgement within the recent turn departs from Rawls's and Habermas's rule-based, procedural accounts, the focus in Brown and Ferrara then nevertheless remains on furnishing judgement with an adequate foundation that would allow us to accommodate and control, rather than properly engage with, the pluralism of contemporary political life (see Weidenfeld 2011, 234–5). The recent rise of the judgement paradigm, in other words, reinstates political judgement as a determinant shelter from the ambiguities of worldly reality – only to thereby again reduce politics to a realm that can be readily managed and contained by a set of certain standards and rules, and lose sight of its paramount feature "as something not calculable but essentially dramatic" (see Azmanova 2012, 72; Beiner 1983, 169, n. 6).

Even though attuned to the loss of metaphysical foundations, then, the recent attentiveness to the problematics of judgement also falls short of a sustained analysis of the historical roots of the modern predicament. In its abstract, ahistorical focus, arguably, it not only has failed to provide an account of political judgement able to confront the ambiguous, plural character of our political reality and thus move beyond the current "impasse," where the awareness of the loss of fixed, stable and reliable bedrocks seems to nurture new escapes from the common world of human affairs (Kruks 2012, 3–4; Bernstein 1983, 18–19; Weidenfeld 2011, 232–4). It also has obscured from view the insights of another intellectual tradition that has long before the contemporary turn sought to revive political judgement from its twentieth-century slumbers.

Against the background of the present predicament of political judgement, this thesis seeks to reclaim this other, now largely forgotten voice – the perspective of twentieth-century philosophies of existence, in particular the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus and Hannah Arendt. While part of a highly variegated intellectual tradition, the four thinkers are distinguished for their particularly bold insertion into history. Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Camus are often regarded as forming the definitive expression of the twentieth-century existentialist movement. Even though he denounced the label, Camus shared with Sartre and Beauvoir the engaged tone and

import of existential philosophizing, as well as a steadfast commitment to the social and political concerns of their age. Marking the height of existentialism's intellectual and cultural influence, the three thinkers could thus indeed be said to have definitively crossed "the frontier from the Academy into the world at large" (Barrett 1990, 9). Hannah Arendt's thought, in contrast, remains subject to contested categorizations. Yet, and despite her equivocal assessment of *Existenz* philosophy, her thinking likewise manifests a deep-seated existential commitment to bringing political thinking back to the realm of lived experience (see Hinchman and Hinchman 1984, 183). In their awareness of the depth of the moral and political crisis in modernity and their vigilant assumption of the situated, worldly condition of political judgement and action, the thesis discerns a valuable prism through which to take up the contemporary challenge of political judgement devoid of metaphysical assurances and guarantees.

The thought horizon of the four thinkers was thoroughly shaped by their attempts to respond to a quickly unfolding series of political events, whose overwhelming novelty and often mind-numbing horror, in their view, profoundly challenged the most entrenched certainties and most cherished moral bulwarks of the Western philosophical tradition. Steeped in the experience of the twentieth century – that, along with the advancements of science and technology, the emergence of centralized states and mass society, the increasing internationalization of human life, and the waning of traditional authorities and relationships, brought about the scourge of two world wars, the Holocaust and the emergence of totalitarian ideologies (Hayden 2013a, 156) – their imagination provides distinct insight into the depth of the modern predicament of political judgement (and action). As dramatically expressed in their notions of "absurd," "anxiety," "nausea," "ambiguity" and "dark times," the four thinkers illuminate the modern crisis of judgement in terms of a deeper and more fundamental predicament of human existence which, with the loss of traditional guarantees and justifications, henceforth finds itself thrown into and abandoned in the midst of an incomprehensible world shorn of any pre-given purpose – a universe divested of "illusions" and "lights" which used to provide reasons for thinking, judging and acting (Camus 1991, 6).

The modern crisis of judgement was for the existentialists no mere abstract philosophical conundrum. The series of historical events they conceive of as a terrifying occurrence in that it simply could not be understood within the established standards

and categories of moral and political thought, and so put a profound strain on the individuals' fundamental human need to make sense of experience and ascribe themselves in meaningful worlds. The sudden upsurge of history brought forth a situation where, as Arendt (1994, 316) notes, "[t]he very framework within which understanding and judging could arise is gone." For the selected thinkers, then, the modern crisis of judgement and understanding not only denotes the irreversible breakdown of absolutes, but also tragically exposes the failure of traditional philosophical categories and ways of thinking to relate to and meaningfully address the experiential realities of human worldly existence. The modern breakdown of standards, in turn, merited no easy reassertion of the humanistic promise of Enlightenment reason, but required a thorough inquiry into the roots of the Western love of wisdom. In their attempt to delve into the historical sources and developments of the modern predicament, the thinkers thus shy away from simply attributing the modern confusion to an insubordinate reality, which all of the sudden burst forth with a shameless disregard for the rules and categories of thought that were once in place to tame it. Instead they trace the roots of the modern malaise to a number of disconcerting elements and contradictions plaguing the Western tradition of political theory itself. An adequate response to the modern crisis of judgement, accordingly, they see in a radical rethinking of the traditional ways of relating to the world of human affairs.

The existentialist approach, in this respect, was helpfully defined by Arendt (1994, 445) as signalling a "reformulation of the philosopher's attitude toward the political realm […]." Following in the footsteps of their nineteenth and twentieth-century predecessors like Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers, the four thinkers staunchly reject the prevalence of the detached, theoretical attitude in much of Western thought, as much as of the corresponding metaphysical desire to penetrate to the ultimate reality of being, standing under, behind or above the realm of "mere" appearance as its supposed ground, cause or purpose (see Warnock 1970, 136). Incited by fear and disparagement over the "melancholy haphazardness" of human affairs, the story goes, philosophers have traditionally sought to escape the temporal, contingent and unpredictable world of politics into the safe haven of eternal and immutable essences and ideals (Denneny 1979, 248). Yet, they consequently reduced the human capacity of political judgement to an act of a pure, rational, self-

constituting subject, presumptuously purporting to be able to remove itself from the world so as to be able to survey it from on high, from this position of mastery intuit the ultimate truth of being, and apply this knowledge onto the political world as a rule of all judgement and action. What they thus denied human affairs, however, was what Arendt (1994, 445) called "that *thaumadzein*, that wonder at what is as it is." What they obscured and failed to meaningfully address, in other words, was nothing less than the world of appearances, the realm of concrete worldly existence. In their courageous dismantling of metaphysics, the selected existentialist thinkers thus proved worthy heirs of their spiritual forebears. However, their commitment is distinct for their decidedly ethical and political orientation, tying their philosophical rebellion intimately to their efforts to find a way to work towards freedom and justice in a world shorn of reassuring certainties and consoling myths of the tradition.[4]

To account for the modern predicament of political judgement and offer conceptual tools to confront it, the four thinkers abolish the traditional dualism of being and appearance, and conceive of human existence as embodied, situated and practical being-in-the-world. This conceptualization foregrounds the existentialists' crucial insight into the peculiar character of human existence: humans do not perch in the world as self-enclosed, thing-like substances, as pebbles or trees, but are free, that is, always-already oriented towards the world as a meaningful context of their perceptions, judgements and actions (see Aho 2014, 34–47). While we are "factical" beings, enmeshed in social contexts, practices, relationships and intersubjective horizons of meaning – in Sartre's well-known formulation – our humanity truly manifests itself in our ability to assume the given situation as our own and "transcend" it towards as yet non-existent ends (see e.g. Sartre 2003, 223, 461). Human existence, in other words, is inherently temporal in that every "now" represents a point of intersection between the dimensions of past and future (Guignon and Pereboom 1995, xx). While our present is always-already geared towards and assumes meaning in light of our future projects, any projection into the future also is made possible only by our constantly taking up and reinterpreting the past as its resource and horizon (Guignon and Pereboom 1995, xx).

With different respective brushes and colourings, the selected existentialists then

[4] Their deep personal and philosophical commitment to the ethical and political realities and challenges of their time distinguishes their orientation, too, from the religious direction existentialism took in the works of, for instance, Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel (see Solomon 1972, 245–6; Aho 2014, 14).

draw a portrait of the human condition as one of situated or worldly freedom, unfolding as an indissoluble yet tension-filled interrelationship between humans and world, self and others. This portrait, in turn, amounts to a vision of the world of political affairs characterized by irreducible and incalculable plurality, "flesh-and-blood presence" and contingency, "infinite richness," complexity and unpredictability (Beauvoir 2004d, 207). According to the existentialists, then, it was only a matter of time before the traditional determinant conception of political judgement tragically failed. For in its vain temptation to approach the world with abstract, pre-given concepts and rules, it reduced human beings, too, to mere objects with certain identifiable characteristics or a given (human) nature – and thus signified a dangerous forgetfulness and disregard for our situated, finite, or, in other words, distinctly human way of being. This lurking danger was revealed especially clearly with the unparalleled affirmation of human powers for rational knowledge, certainty and control of the world that characterized the modern age. Not only did political judgement thereby come to rest on standards that became increasingly distanced from the particularities of human existence, and thus unable to recognize and offer adequate defences against the denials of human freedom plaguing the political world. It itself risked becoming oppressive, bearing more than a trace of the assumption that the particular, plural character of human lived reality can be mastered and transformed in accordance with a predetermined blueprint (see Isaac 1992, 69–82).

The modern predicament of judgement and understanding, for the existentialists, does not then refer simply to the fact that traditional standards of thought have suddenly become obsolete – as if all that was needed was to determine what was wrong with them and on this basis erect a new set of yardsticks, more adequate to the present realities (see Arendt 1966). The demise of old categories and frameworks of thought, rather, exposed as "a tangible reality" and "a fact of political relevance" the ambiguity of political judgement as it arises out of the situated, historical condition of human political existence (Arendt 2006a, 13). The four thinkers' historical consciousness thus aptly exposes the limits of contemporary postmetaphysical thinking, where the initial awareness of the distinct character of political affairs quickly yielded to the rationalist comforts of obscuring or seeking to contain its ambiguity under pre-determined standards of thought. For the existentialists, as pointed out above, any such merry

returns to the past were not only unfeasible, but also dangerous. For they circumvented the crucial precept to be drawn from the experience of the twentieth century: that, as Arendt (1966, 113) succinctly observes, there simply "are no general standards to determine our judgements unfailingly," no rules that could subdue and stabilize "the enormously changed and daily changing realities of our world" (Arendt 1966, 113). Yet, if the modern crisis of judgement has abandoned humans in the midst of a chaotic world that would no longer be tamed by pre-given absolutes, it has also confronted them, perhaps to an unprecedented degree, with their freedom, their capacity to "snatch the world from the darkness of absurdity" and "unaided create [their] own values" (Beauvoir 2004f, 326; Camus 1995h, 58). Their awareness of the complexity of political affairs, in other words, led the four thinkers away from the quest for valid, seemingly universal and indubitable grounds of judgement to delve instead into the lived experience of judging as a "spontaneous" activity that, rather than seeking to flee, assumes and faces up to the ambiguity of our worldly existence (see Arendt 2003, 27; Camus 1970f, 202).

To illuminate the experiential reality of political judgement, the four thinkers look outside the firmly entrenched confines of their discipline and seek inspiration in aesthetic and narrative sensibility. Their insight into the ethical and political significance of narrative voice is most evident in Arendt's attempt to rethink political judgement by way of a creative reworking of Kant's account of aesthetic judgements of taste. Yet, it equally well colours the imagination of Sartre, Beauvoir and Camus, who often gave expression to their ethical and political thinking through novels, short stories and plays. Even though none of them inquired explicitly into the concept of political judgement, their narrative judging sensibility can be discerned from a constellation of related concepts, like freedom, choice, responsibility or commitment, and stands at the heart of their efforts to rethink the terms of our engagement with the world.

The model of aesthetic judgement, for the four thinkers, serves well to illuminate the distinct character of political judgement because it represents an instance of reflective judgement that can rely on no pre-given universal under which singular events and situations could simply be subsumed. It thus offers insight into political judgement as free creation that must engage the experiential reality of the world without prefabricated standards of thought and "invent" the law in each particular case (see Sartre 2007, 38;

Arendt 2003, 27, 41). The activity of political judgement then is characterized by a constitutive ambiguity. While always-already part of and situated in the world, it can never reach for ultimate knowledge supposedly lying beyond the realm of appearance nor lay claim to some other-worldly objectivity or universality. Leaving behind the order of absolute truth, the aesthetic sensibility of the four existentialists, instead, foregrounds political judgement as an activity that is open and attentive to the world and diverse others, proceeding by way of a situated, intersubjective process of constantly creating, disclosing, sharing and negotiating the plurality of meanings and values inhabiting human lived reality. The challenge of judgement as free creation thus highlights the existentialists' urgent appeal to each and every one of us to assume our responsibility for others and the common world as the very way of our human, situated existence. Their appeal is even more pressing considering that, given the structural ambiguity at the heart of our being, the awe-inspiring responsibility of judgement can be denied in various forms of so-called "bad-faith," attempts to forfeit our freedom and that of others in front of some seemingly pre-given value or end (Guignon and Pereboom 1995, xxvii; Solomon 1972, 279–87).

After this initial insight into the existential worldly account of political judgement, it would be unseemly to look to the existentialists to provide a "solution" to the modern predicament. Within their horizon, indeed, we search in vain for a *theory* of political judgement that would provide us with a new determining bedrock or procedure by which to arrive at the "right" answers and deliver us from the ambiguity of political affairs (see e.g. Parvikko 2003). Its distrust of normative standards, in turn, has often exposed existentialism to the charges, most notably coming from the critical tradition of thought, of harbouring individualist, elitist or even aestheticist tendencies and pretensions. While perhaps well-suited for a morality of personal salvation, the critics complain, the existential imagination represents an ethically and politically vain outlook that is hardly adequate to answer the pressing concerns of freedom and justice in the contemporary world (Aho 2014, 141–2; Cooper 1990, 11–18; see e.g. Jay 1986; Habermas 1977). And yet, the existentialist rebellion against traditional philosophy, in contrast to many other "crisis of modernity" narratives, does not lead to the wholesale rejection of modernity's most noble aspirations – nor does it share in the postmodern flights from the common worldly reality and its despair over the emancipatory

potentials of politics (Katznelson 2003, 87–96; Isaac 1992, 68–71). On the contrary, it is precisely their insights into the failure of standards in modernity and their attendant honest assumption of the historical, situated condition of political judgement that cannot be tamed by pre-determined rules, as Patrick Hayden (2014a, 170–2) has aptly argued, that can be said to reveal the challenge and promise of judging in its utmost political significance.

Existentialism, narrative and judgement: A preliminary overview

In seeking to illuminate the activity of judging in its worldly ambiguity, this thesis argues, it is the distinct contribution of the existentialists' narrative account to direct attention to the ways of reinvigorating and enhancing our ability to confront, make sense of and respond to the particular and context-specific uncertainties and dilemmas that cannot be contained under pre-fabricated, final answers or procedural schemas of resolution. Stirring political judgement to awake from the traditional dream of a self-certain and masterful self, in other words, the four thinkers reclaim the promise and perplexity of judging for the world. Thus, I argue, they offer a worthy perspective towards an account of political judgement able to face up to and confront the challenges of our political reality that continue to frustrate the hope for new indubitable verities and ready-made yardsticks (see Hayden 2013a).

To begin setting out this argument, I next turn to briefly explore the existentialists' narrative approach to political thinking, seeking to illuminate how it reframes the traditional philosophical understanding of the relationship between thought and action, and thus foregrounds the distinct political significance of their aesthetic account of judgement. In this way, I also aim to show how their narrative sensibility underpins the approach to the topic of this thesis.

The existential aesthetic way of thinking, most explicitly developed in Hannah Arendt's "old-fashioned storytelling" approach to political phenomena (Arendt in Disch 1993, 666), is highly indebted to the phenomenological-existential lineage of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Following their example, all four thinkers depart from the traditional philosophical (and specifically Cartesian) subject-object opposition,

along with the accompanying tendency to conceive of humans as primarily cognitive, knowing beings. Positing a disembodied subject, the desire has been to reach a neutral, objective standpoint, untrammelled by worldly environment and relationships, from which to reach certain knowledge about reality as the object-world separate from the subject (see e.g. Secada 2000, 18; Guignon and Pereboom 1995, xxiv). The existential narrative imagination, in contrast, rejects as presumptuous the traditional quest for a mysterious Archimedean point from which it might be possible to achieve a view of reality from "the standpoint of eternity." Equally well, the existentialists leave in abeyance or explicitly denounce the traditional preoccupation with the questions of method – which, as its very starting assumption, presupposes that a theory can remain detached from its object and develop "appropriate" tools through which to approach, control and master it from the outside and above (Vollrath 1977, 162–4). In the tradition of existential phenomenology, the narrative imagination of the four thinkers instead is characterized by a shift of focus away from reaching for pure knowledge to disclosing and accounting for non-rational dimensions of human relationship with and engagement in the world (Warnock 1970, 54). Their orientation, however, is not a matter of mere phenomenological description nor does it remain rooted in a primarily ontological concern with the fundamental structures of human being-in-the-world. It can be seen as intricately interwoven into their attempt to revive and cultivate an account of political judgement capable of kindling the human potentials for concrete freedom and meaningful political action (Solomon 1980, xii).

The detached, epistemological attitude grounding the traditional determinant conception of political judgement was, for the existentialists, politically troubling because it purported to confront the perplexities of political affairs by erecting thought and its objective ideas onto the position of mastery, while reducing action into the role of mere instrumental application and/or realization of a pre-given essence or end (Arendt 1958, 222–5). What the philosophers thus fled from and denied, however, was the distinctly human capacity of action, which, based in human freedom, always brings into the world something new that could not have been known or predicted, and whose outcomes, appearing in the midst of the intersubjectively shared, plural world, are bound to remain uncertain and uncontrollable (Arendt 2006a, 150; 1958, 188–92). This troubling omission, for the existentialists, took on an especially disturbing tone in the

modern age, in particular in the tradition of positivist social science and the rise of teleological, historicist approaches to politics. For there, in the face of a collapsed order of metaphysical absolutes, the unabated quest for objective knowledge was entrusted to processes of logical deduction and instrumental reasoning, which demoted the whole of human reality to a set of supposedly self-evident, natural and necessarily unfolding laws (Arendt 1994, 318; 2006a, 39, 56–63; see also Warnock 1970, 76; Guignon and Pereboom 1995, xxiii; Barrett 1990, 292). Not only was the meaning of any particular action or event thus reduced to the place it was assigned to assume in the overarching whole or process – portraying it as an inevitable result of an underlying cause or higher end (see Arendt 1994, 318–20). Humans themselves, as most evident in eighteenth and nineteenth-century philosophies of history, came to be conceived in the role of mere passive and malleable objects of inhuman forces and processes, lying beyond the powers of human judgement or even comprehension (see Arendt 1978a, 216).

The existentialists' narrative imagination, in contrast, bears a pronounced political significance because it takes as its starting point the reality of the gap between past and future that, with the break in the thread of tradition, can no longer be bridged by prefabricated standards of thought (Arendt 2006a, 12–13). It is thus well suited to respond to the challenge of political judgement because it answers to the fundamental temporality and historicity of human existence: the fact that, as situated beings, our freedom and aspiration to project ourselves towards uncertain futures depends on our capacity to retrieve our past and assign meaning to what once was. For starting from the gap in the linear succession of time, narrative sensibility liberates judgement from the quest for deeper or higher causes, purposes and ends. It thus affirms it as a free, worldly activity, able to consider and endow with significance single actions, gestures and events in their particularity, and weave them into a meaningful story that can help us address the concerns and intricacies of the present and the future (Arendt 1968a, 205–6; Benhabib 1990, 170–1; Sartre 1992a, 14, 17–18).

The existentialists' aesthetic sensibility thus reveals the paramount political danger behind the lingering rationalist bent of contemporary approaches to political judgement. For in abstracting from the particularities of political affairs in their quest for pure procedures and rational solutions, they risk sweeping from under our feet the very fundamental existential ground of the world on which we depend for our capacity to

respond to worldly events – thus leaving politics at the mercy of deeper, inhuman causes or laws. In contrast, I argue, it is the distinct political significance of narrative judging sensibility to retain attention on the existential process of illuminating the particularity, plurality and contingency of the world – and thus affirm the human character of politics as a realm that is not amenable to rational calculation, but whose tensions and impasses are *ours* to assume and confront. For all the charges of aestheticism and individualism, the existential narrative judging sensibility can be said nonetheless to carry a pronounced critical, resistant potential because it elicits the sense of our selves not as passive objects, but as free and acting beings (see Luban 1983, 239; Hill 1979; Kearney 2002, 129–33). In the thesis, I aim to illuminate in particular how, bent on exploring the boundaries of the world, it is capable of strengthening our capacity to come to terms with and confront the perplexity of political action that comes from engaging and responding to the world that is precisely not solely of our own making and that is bound to remain resistant to rational ideals and control of the solitary subject (Arendt 1994, 166; Zerilli 2005a, 128). On this basis, further, I explore how it points to a way of fighting for greater freedom and justice within, rather than outside or above, the possibilities and limits of the common world and our political existence as such.

This thesis therefore aspires to tell a story of political judgement. Situated in the present horizon of the perceived challenge of political judgement that nevertheless remains inadequately addressed in contemporary theorizing, it turns to the past and finds in the existential imagination a promising source of illumination. Through textual and conceptual analysis of the selected existentialist essays, novels, plays and short stories, it draws on the existential aesthetic sensibility to resuscitate the judging ability in its worldly ambiguity and thus point towards an account of political judgement able to address and face up to the uncertainties of our postfoundational world. The aim, however, is not to undertake a definitive exposition of existentialists' ideas nor to construct a theory of political judgement that could be applied as a blueprint for political action and that would assuage the ambiguity of our situated existence. It is rather to reclaim the existentialists' attempts to grapple with and confront the perplexities of judging politically and suggest how their insights can be introduced into recent debates and brought to bear on contemporary problematics of political judgement and action that seem in particular to elude the grasp of abstract theorizing.

The structure of the thesis

The thesis's argument proceeds as follows. The first chapter briefly inquires into the ambiguous presence of the concept of political judgement in the history of political thought and attempts to tell its story against the background of the moral and political crisis of the twentieth century. On the one hand, it traces in history the growing sense of the perplexity of political affairs, seeking to discern how it inspired increasingly sophisticated attempts to think judgement as a situated, worldly activity that cannot be reduced to mere rule-bound reasoning, but can better be approached through the lens of aesthetic sensibility. On the other hand, the chapter reveals in past accounts the persistence of the rationalist penchant to escape the distinctly political, complex character of judgement into the realm of abstract concepts, pointing to how these inadequacies coalesced in the widespread sense of the breakdown of reliable standards in modernity. Thus delving into the political significance of judgement and its failures, the chapter prepares the ground for the existentialists' urgent appeal to a thorough rethinking of our ways of relating to the world by turning to the voice of narrative.

Chapters two and three are dedicated to unearthing the existentialists' insights into the roots of the modern crisis and their narrative efforts to rethink political judgement as a worldly ability capable of addressing the richness and complexity of the world of political affairs. Chapter two begins this ensemble by engaging Sartre's and Beauvoir's distinctly existentialist orientation. Tracing their respective critiques of the ideal, abstract notions of truth and knowledge, it delves into how their aesthetic sensibility foregrounds the ambiguity of political judgement as a creative practice of world-disclosure that confronts us with our responsibility for the world and at the same time always-already contains an appeal to the freedom of others. On the basis of this initial exposition, the chapter next focuses on Sartre's and Beauvoir's increasing recognition of the worldly perplexity of political judgement as it stems from the complex, constraining web of (oppressive) structures and forces that frustrate any easy assumption of freedom and confront political action with the inevitable spectre of risk, tragedy and sacrifice. Against this background of the perceived difficulty of political judgement, the third chapter explores Camus's and Arendt's existential orientation that nevertheless resists the conventional world-view of "existentialism." In their efforts to understand the

breakdown of traditional standards of thought, it unveils a deeper sense that the recognition of the ambiguity of political judgement requires heightened efforts to creatively confront, rather than simply resign to, the perplexing and complex character of the political world. The chapter thus inquires into how Camus's "artistic" sensibility and Arendt's reworking of Kant's account of aesthetic judgement further illuminate the activity of judging in its worldly ambiguity, envisioning it as a ceaseless intersubjective practice of disclosing the limits of the world and of others and of kindling the sense of the common world between a plurality of human freedoms.

After reconstructing the existentialists' insights into the worldly, ambiguous character of political judgement, I turn in chapters four, five and six to explore how they can be engaged to speak to contemporary horizons of thought. Chapter four seeks to further foreground the distinctly political significance of the existential aesthetic judging sensibility by bringing it into conversation with the recent yet contested turn within political theory to find in narrative a promising prism through which to confront the ethical and political perplexities of contemporary times (Nussbaum 1995; Rorty 1989). It thus aims to highlight how narrative sensibility articulates and cultivates the process of judging by embodying and responding to the strained and fluctuating dynamics of intersubjective recognition as it emerges from under the weakened validity of traditional verities. At the same time, it discerns within the recent discourse on narrative a lingering predominance of the epistemological, moral concern with ensuring a proper way of grasping and responding to others' experience (of suffering and injustice), which again risks abstracting from the particular and plural character of our worldly reality. Against this background, the chapter reveals how the existentialists' aesthetic imagination is distinct for retaining attention on the process of judgement in its worldly ambiguity, and thus well-suited to account for and confront the perplexity of engaging the world in political action.

Chapters five and six, accordingly, explore how the existentialists' insights into the worldly character of the human judging ability can be brought to bear on two topics that have risen to prominence in recent theorizing and that can be said to embody a particularly clear-sighted recognition of the complexities of political judgement as they stem from the ambiguity of individuals' communal, political existence. These topics are the problem of dirty hands and the challenge of transitional justice and reconciliation.

While steeped in awareness of the seemingly ineliminable spectre of difficulty, tragedy and failure haunting the realm of human affairs, the selected problematics of thought and action also remain mired in the penchant to conceive of political judgement as a determinant, problem-solving exercise bent on providing a final, rational resolution to the intricacies at stake – while obscuring the fundamental existential sources of the recognized ambiguity of political action. In this light, the existential narrative judging sensibility offers a valuable lens through which to illuminate the human, political significance of the challenges involved. In its attentiveness to the worldly process of judging, I argue, it can illuminate the roots of tragedy and failure in the perplexity of human engagement in the world and thus stimulate our capacities of responding to them by respecting the limits of our plural, unpredictable and all too human world.

1 Political judgement in the history of political thought and the modern crisis

Although the topic of political judgement has traditionally been obscured under the predominant focus on constructing abstract and universal standards of morality, the problematic does make persistent appearance. Even if the inquiry into the concept has for the most part not been systematic, the orienting concern figures in a plethora of thinkers who elevate judgement, and the corollary notions of choice, discernment, deliberation, and practical reason, into one of the most pressing issues of ethics and politics. If the relevance of political judgement has commonly been submerged under the preoccupation with pre-fabricated standards of thought, then, it is also those attempts to delve into the judging ability itself, that is, to undertake a sustained scrutiny of its proper and perhaps previously unquestioned "grounds," that bring forward its distinct political nature. The purpose of this chapter thus is not to determine what judgement *is*, but to disclose the role awarded to judgement in the political realm. It is an inquiry into the faculty of judgement as a distinctively *political,* deeply situated and relational affair, untangling a historical appreciation of how judgement stands at the very heart of and represents in crystallized form the main dilemmas of individuals' communal, political existence.

The chapter sets out to tell the story of political judgement in the history of political thought against the background of the modern crisis that, for the existentialists, came to represent an inescapable horizon of thought. It seeks to trace in history the growing sense of the perplexity of political judgement, disclosing how a number of difficulties specific to particular historical periods can be seen to herald the acute awareness of the breakdown of reliable standards in modernity. Given its focus on judgement as a distinctly political ability, the chapter views the difficulties of political judgement as recognized in history through the lens of a broader philosophical problem inhering in the ambiguous relationship of the individual to society or of the subject to the outside world and separate others. On the one hand, it aims to discern how the growing awareness of the complex, historical character of political affairs inspired increasingly sophisticated attempts to think judgement as a situated, worldly activity that cannot be reduced to mere rule-bound reasoning. In this vein, it draws attention to how the recognition of the ambiguity of political judgement often inspired a turn to the realm of

aesthetics as a valuable prism through which to account for and illuminate the dilemmas of human worldly existence. On the other hand, the chapter discloses in the confrontation with the topic of judgement the persistence of the rationalist, philosophical tendency to escape its distinctly political, complex character into the realm of abstract concepts. It points to how these inadequacies failed on the free, plural, contingent and incalculable world of human affairs, and thus coalesced in the widespread sense of the breakdown of reliable moral standards in modernity. Thus delving into the political significance of judgement as an activity in which the free and situated condition of our collective, political existence itself is at stake, the chapter prepares the ground for the existentialists' urgent appeal to a thorough rethinking of our ways of judging and relating to the world by turning to the voice of narrative.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is not an exhaustive account of how the notion of judgement has been theorised in the history of political thought. Nor does it aspire to offer a comprehensive overview of the theoretical issues that oriented the imagination of individual theorists. It relies instead on a select number of thinkers, who arguably emerge as representatives of particular concerns with political judgement as manifested in history, seeking to discern their distinct contributions and omissions as they bear on the topic. To this effect, however, it does not seek to tell the story of the crisis in political judgement in a linear, progressive or necessary fashion. It instead hopes to illuminate the communicative engagement between the selected thinkers – the ways in which each responds to, criticizes and builds on the previous accounts of the human judging ability – so as to reveal the ruptures, creative new possibilities as well as the impasses, orienting their overarching concern with the problematic of political judgement. In this way, it opens the space for the existentialist attempt to confront the modern breakdown of absolutes, both by exposing the inadequacies in traditional accounts and by seeking to disclose valuable examples on which to draw when any complacent resort to pre-given standards is no longer possible.

Judgement as a paramount political ability and its twilight: Aristotle and the Stoics

An examination of the distinct human faculty of judgement as well as its paramount

political significance receives an insightful starting point in Aristotle's notion of *phronesis,* practical wisdom. In contrast to Plato's faith in the knowledge of universal ideas, Aristotle believed that the end of living well, that is, a life of virtue and *eudaimonia* (the good life, also happiness), consists significantly in practical wisdom, the capacity to bring ethical ends to bear on particular circumstances that confront us in the world (Larmore 2001, 58). *Phronesis* then cannot be reduced to mere application of universal rules, the proper realm of theoretical wisdom *(sophia)* or scientific knowledge *(episteme),* which deal with the necessary and the unchangeable (see Steinberger 1993, 107; see also Aristotle 2000, 1140b1–4). It is instead committed to what the philosophers before Aristotle have opposed to or even denounced as detrimental to the quest for genuine knowledge and truth: the appearing, *human* world, the world "as perceived, demarcated, interpreted by human beings and their beliefs" (see Nussbaum 1986, 241–2, 290–1). Or, as Aristotle writes, *phronesis* "is concerned with human affairs" as "what can be otherwise" and "what we can deliberate about:" that is, with affairs that go on between a plurality of human beings and that are, for this reason, changeable, intricate and unpredictable (Aristotle 2000, 1141b10–17; see also Nussbaum 1986, 294). In this realm, the philosophers' knowledge of eternal principles – as "extraordinary, wonderful, abstruse, godlike" it may be – also is "useless," because it is distanced from practical, worldly, human interests and values (Aristotle 2000, 1141b5–9). Yet, *phronesis'* practical field of operation similarly means it cannot be identified with mere technical calculation of means in order to achieve the desired end, as if the end in question were external to its exercise (see Aristotle 2000, 1140b1–4; Steinberger 1993, 107; Beiner 1983, 93–4). *Phronesis* is itself a virtue and an excellence of character that, contrary to production, has no "end distinct from itself" (Aristotle 2000, 1140b5–10). It is guided, in other words, by a practical concern with deliberating and acting well or "nobly," involving an adequate responsiveness to the particularities and contingencies of a given situation that confronts us in the world (Aristotle 2000, 1140a25–30; 1104a11–1104b3; see also McDowell 1996, 21–2).

This initial exposition of *phronesis'* practical nature points to Aristotle's understanding of judgement as a crucial human capacity that gains its highest significance in the political realm (see Ferrara 1987, 260). *Phronesis* is a crucial political ability because it has "a goal that consists in a good achievable in action"

(Aristotle 2000, 1141b10–17). It refers, that is, to the distinctly human capacity of freedom, of choosing what action to undertake as "something in our own power" to achieve (see Korsgaard 1996, 214–16, 227). Furthermore, *phronesis* points to the situated character of this freedom, where the process of deliberating on what action is good pertains to choosing what is good for *us* as human beings embedded in a particular context (Nussbaum 1986, 293–4; Gadamer 2004, 310). Thus, judgement also is immediately established as a practice guided by the concern for our communal life, our shared interests and our involvement in situations that we, as individuals of a particular community, hold in common (Beiner 1983, 79–80; see also Aristotle 2000, 1140b9–12, 1141b).

As a crucial political capacity that requires the ability to engage the particularity and plurality of our situated existence, *phronesis* for Aristotle then cannot be a matter of a detached, abstract analysis. As Gadamer (2004, 319–21) and Nussbaum (1990) have emphasized, it is instead intimately related to empathetic understanding, entailing a perceptive reading of the circumstances at hand, the capacity to entertain the perspectives of others and to imagine what it would be like to be in their situation (see also Aristotle 2000, 1142a). As such, too, it involves a kind of sensibility akin to aesthetic, literary imagination, figuring Aristotle's praise for literary works, especially the genre of tragic drama, as a valuable source of illumination concerning ethical practice and the performance of good actions (see Nussbaum 1986, 378–94; 1990, e.g. 141). The political significance of *phronesis'* aesthetic, imaginative way of proceeding is brought out in Aristotle's account of deliberation in his *Politics.* In contrast to portraying it as a prerogative of a solitary expert that is supposed to possess an intuitive grasp of the truth, Aristotle conceives of political judgement as a virtue that can only be reached and exercised through a situated process of confrontation between a plurality of opinions *(doxa),* when many people come together and deliberate in common (Beiner 1983, 90–1). Even though "[e]ach individual may indeed be a worse judge than the experts," Aristotle writes, "when they all come together it is possible that they may surpass […] the quality of the few best" (Aristotle 1997, 1281b; see also Beiner 1983, 91).[5] In the common reaching of judgements, thus, the citizens come to a shared view of

[5] Aristotle's distrust of self-evident ethical standards in the realm of human affairs and his insight into the importance of common deliberation goes hand in hand with his emphasis on the role of persuasion and rhetoric as crucial to the practice of judging (see Beiner 1983, 83–101).

what is just and what constitutes the common good, kindling among them the sense of political friendship and embedding them into a political community (Beiner 1983, 79–82). The political significance of *phronesis* then refers to the more fundamental humanizing purpose of endowing the world with relative stability and coherence as bases of individual and communal identity, and so rendering us better prepared to confront in action the challenge of the inherent complexity, changeability and particularity of the political world (see Kearney 2002, 3–14; Nussbaum 1986, 302–5).

Yet, despite this understanding of the crucial political significance of judgement, Aristotle approaches its way of proceeding by outlining a set of required virtues of character to be habituated in practice, which, in turn, leads him to rely on "a somewhat determinate picture" of the substantive conception of the end of acting well (Larmore 2001, 58; Aristotle 2000, 1141b18–22; McDowell 1996, 22–3; see also Nussbaum 1986, 306). His notion of political judgement, in other words, would seem to presuppose that the universal, the ethical substance of the good life and a sense of community he proposes, is already in place and shared by his audience, because they have been properly habituated into the performance of right actions (McDowell 1996, 28–33; Larmore 2001, 58; see also Aristotle 2000, 1179b–1180a). In this respect, *phronesis* remains firmly embedded in Aristotle's teleological metaphysics, where the knowledge of what is good concerns universal and eternal principles of ethics and is to be determined in accordance with a being's natural function, essence or end (Reeve 1992, 26, 97). What thereby remains obscured, however, is precisely Aristotle's initial insight into the practical, situated and deliberative, process of judging – begging the question of what political judgement is "over and above the knowledge of moral rules" (Larmore 2001, 61; see also Cooper 1996, 265–6). Emphasizing its rootedness in the tradition of established customs and mores as if "the content of a conception of doing well is fixed once and for all," it thus remains doubtful whether Aristotle's *phronesis* is capable of responding to new and unforeseen situations or of creatively addressing the political reality of competing values and goals (see McDowell 1996, 31; Larmore 2001, 61; Herman 1996, 37). Finally, if the sense of an ethically coherent world is presupposed by virtue of fixating an individual actor into a predetermined place or function as assigned by nature, Aristotle's account of political judgement risks betraying its most crucial political purpose: how to confront the contingent and ambiguous nature of political

affairs that cannot be resolved into a predetermined all-encompassing whole and so kindle our capacity of engaging the world in political action (see Nussbaum 1986, 305, 310).[6]

Aristotle's teleologically grounded vision of the harmonious relationship between individuals and the world, gains a troubling mirror image in the Stoics' discovery of the ultimate standard of judgement in the universal law as inscribed in our nature as rational beings. As Cicero and Diogenes Laertius, for instance, develop this position, virtuous judgement and the goal of living a good life are determined not only by virtue of being rooted in a natural endowment. Nature itself is posited as "a benevolent, reasoning agent," inherent and at work in all of us, which reduces judgement to individuals' rational capacity to intuit and follow their rational, natural ends as assigned by nature (Cooper 1996, 267–9, 272; Frede 2003, 201–2; Schofield 2003, 243–5). Yet, judgement in this way also remains strangely indifferent to the eventual success or failure in achieving these "natural" objectives in the worldly realm of human action – always aware that any intended and seemingly required course of action might not in the end turn out to chime with the overall plan of the universe and, by implication, tender the needs of our own lives as its "organic parts" (Cooper 1996, 277). In identifying judgement and human freedom with individuals' rational capacity to obey nature's harmonious design of being, the Stoics thus paradoxically portend an escape from the particularities and vagaries of the political realm. In submitting the human judging ability to the "reason" of the universe as a whole, that is, they forfeit in front of the overwhelming given of an eternal Being Aristotle's crucial insight into the human ability to shape ethical and political values and concerns, and effect a meaningful change in the world (see Cooper 1996, 278; Schneewind 1996, 292–5).[7] In this respect, the Stoics announce the twilight of judgement as a crucial political capacity, its submersion under the rationally accessible order of the universe and its universal standards of ethics that will persist in Neoplatonism and Christian metaphysics.

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[6] At the very least, it could be argued that *phronesis* does not adequately answer to Aristotle's otherwise apt recognition of the risk, vulnerability and tragedy involved in the leading of a good human life (see Nussbaum 1986, 318–19; see also Annas 1996, 246–7).

[7] This tendency is perhaps most evident in their perplexing insistence that the "necessary" losses or evils that nature puts on our path are not only to be accepted as inevitable sacrifices, but welcomed as part of nature's master plan and as "what we as parts of that universe needed too" (Cooper 1996, 274, 277).

The distinctly modern challenge of political judgement

It was this presumption of and confidence in a harmonious and benevolent natural order believed to garner to human concerns that was shattered with new scientific discoveries and the crumbling of established authorities characterizing the advent of the modern age. The most notable proponent of modern sensitivity in this respect is Descartes, whose radical doubt liberates from under the weight of the world the special character of human (free) consciousness and consigns within the realm of human powers, rather than some natural design, the capacity to know and judge reality. Yet, grounding the modern unyielding quest for certainty, the Cartesian horizon also conceives of (political) judgement as an act of a transcendent, self-sufficient subject removed from the outside world, who, through the ideas of pure reason, is capable of reaching indubitable, objective knowledge of external reality before concealed under the deceitful functioning of the senses, and applying this knowledge as a foundation of all morality and politics (see e.g. Bowie 2003, 16–17). Descartes' rationalism, however, also inspired among his successors, most notably Hume and Kant, the awareness that, even though free, the judging subject remains embedded in the world, questioning the conception of judgement as a mere technical application of pre-given abstract ideals. In the wake of the shattering of the ancient unity of thought and being, Hume and Kant instead turn to the realm of aesthetics and offer insight into the significance and ambiguity of political judgement as a worldly activity, placing under sustained scrutiny the question of how individuals' autonomous judgement is to relate to the outside world and others, and inspire political action in the world.

Descartes' rationalism was first seriously challenged by the tradition of Scottish Enlightenment, and perhaps most notably by its prominent representative David Hume. In many ways reflecting the insights of British moralists like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Hume profoundly questions the ability of reason and its abstract ideas to not only approach and judge external reality but also to inspire the passions and our will to act (Hume 2000, 2.3.3.1–3, 265; Foot 2002, 78; Deutscher 2013, 122–4).[8] He points to a fundamental flaw at work in the predominant (rationalist) systems of morality, which he

[8] Hume, for instance, exposes the fallacy of the most entrenched rationalist dogmas, like the principle of causality and law of induction, arguing that they represent an unjustified foundation of science and are unable to grant access to matters of (empirical) fact (see Solomon 1972, 13–15).

famously refers to as the gap between "is" and "ought." Theories of ethics and morality, Hume claims, all proceed by first rationally ascertaining the truth of Being and then, on this basis, moving unproblematically to make assertions about what ought to be done – assertions which however belong to a different, practical realm of human activity that is not amenable to be instructed by abstract reason alone (Hume 2000, 3.1.2.27, 302). The human judging ability then cannot be conceived as an act of subsuming actions or events under abstract general rules, which "pure reason" has intuited to represent the ultimate truth of reality. Instead, Hume envisions individuals' interaction with the outside world to proceed by way of an immediate response to particular, concrete objects of perception, finding an alternative foundation of moral and political judgement in experience (see Hume 2000, 3.1.1.2, 293; Morrow 1923, 62–3; Kivy 1967, 59). Moral judgement, for Hume, thus is based on a direct feeling of pleasure or displeasure, moral approbation or disapprobation that humans experience at the sight of certain actions or traits of character and that corresponds to the workings of aesthetic taste (Foot 2002, 75). In Hume's words, "virtue is distinguish'd by the pleasure, and vice by the pain, that any action, sentiment or character gives us by the mere view and contemplation" (Hume 2000, 3.1.2.11, 305).

Hume thus questions the Cartesian conception of a self-sufficient, transparent and solipsistic subject, and envisions judgement as an activity of sentient, natural beings, embedded in the world and therefore "infirm" and "fallible" (see Singer 2000, esp. 230; Baier 1993, 452; Morrow 1923, 61–2). The freedom of judgement, in other words, is situated in the world, which first of all allows the subject to engage his or her experiential reality in its particularity, yet which also brings to light judgement's subjective nature (see Ferguson 2007, 4–5). In our judgements, we cannot ascend to a god's eye perspective on the world nor lay claim to objective truth, but only access the world as we perceive and experience it. Like the aesthetic judgement of beauty, Hume notes, the sentiment of moral (dis)approbation does not represent "what is really in the object" or a "quality of things in themselves," but "exists merely in the mind which contemplates them" and "marks a certain conformity or relation between the object and the organs or faculties of the mind" (Hume 1998, 136–7; see also Hume 2000, 3.1.1.26, 301). Yet, grounded in experience, judgement also becomes an activity that is always-already oriented towards others, a characteristic Hume highlights by evoking the

principle of sympathy, "that propensity we have to sympathize with others" (Hume 2000, 2.1.11.2, 206). The human capacity for sympathy, importantly, does not correspond to mere passive feeling of pity for another (human) being in pain; in contrast, it foregrounds the activity of judging to proceed by way of "communication" of sentiments between human beings, that is, of experiencing and sharing our sentiments with plural others (Hume 2000, 2.3.6.8, 273; 2.2.7.7, 238). While remaining in direct contact with the concrete particularity and multiplicity of individuals' standpoints, Hume's judgement then also is able to transcend mere subjectivism towards more general validity (Morrow 1923, 64). This is because sympathy as communication of feelings of approbation or disapprobation on this account serves as a ground on which to conceive of a fundamental commonality of human experience, something like a common human nature or "frame" (Morrow 1923, 64). The activity of judging thus grants access to and embeds us as participants in a common worldly reality, "a moral world, which is objective and yet formed by the contribution of all individuals" (Morrow 1923, 64).

From Hume's account then follows an apt recognition of the ambiguity of moral and political judgement as it stems from its situated, plural nature, noting the lack of any ultimate, universal standards of appeal. He acknowledges, for instance, that given the different circumstantial factors shaping our lives, some disagreement in judgement is "unavoidable" and cannot be resolved by rational argument (Hume 1998, 149–51). In the same spirit, he challenges any conception of "final judgement" "for so frail a creature as man" (Hume in Baier 1993, 440–2). Yet, Hume also shows that it is precisely the ambiguity of judgement that first of all establishes its practical, political character, that is, draws attention to the ways of enhancing our capacity of recognizing and responding to the plurality of the world and inspires the search for (shared) criteria by which to distinguish right from wrong. He accordingly appeals to the need to kindle what he calls the "delicacy of taste," the need to, for instance, develop through practical training our capacity of sympathetic, imaginative seeing and the ability to make comparisons and distinctions (see Hume 1998, 141–6). Importantly, he also emphasizes the importance of keeping one's mind free from prejudice. Evoking the criterion of an impartial spectator, he finds an adequate ground for moral judgement in the ability to distance oneself from "my individual being and my peculiar circumstances" so as to

consider any feeling of pleasure or pain as it arises from the sight of individuals, actions or events, from the standpoint of "myself as a man in general" (see Hume 1998, 145–6; 2000, 3.1.2.4, 303).[9]

Nevertheless, in thus outlining the qualities of a good judge, Hume puts forth a determinate set of virtues, such as not only courage or benevolence, but also cleanliness and wit that are deemed valuable and useful for the common life of a society (Foot 2002, 74–5; Baier 1993, 447–8). In an Aristotelian vein, then, Hume finds a new ground of judgement in an already presupposed societal unity, the shared customs and norms of a society. The principle of sympathy in this way becomes less a faculty of communicating sentiments by virtue of which a community is to be brought into being, than a definitive idea, a natural given or endowment that in fact posits, rather than explains, an essential similarity of human beings and their rootedness into a shared moral order (see Morrow 1923, 62, 65–7). Hume thus ends up furthering a somewhat self-explanatory thesis that individuals experience pleasure at the sight of virtuous actions because such actions are deemed to be useful or agreeable to themselves, broader society and/or the whole of humankind (see Foot 2002, 75–6; Morrow 1923, 67–8). Basing judgement in (societal) utility, that is, Hume betrays his own "worldly" starting point, reducing the human judging ability along with the sphere of political affairs, justice and government more generally, to the supposedly objective and rationally discernible set of causal laws (Morrow 1923, 67–8). He thus risks betraying not only his insight into the experiential, free and situated, reality of judging, but also judgement's distinctly political significance as a capacity of relating and responding to the particularity of the political world and plural others.

Nevertheless, it was Hume's distrust of abstract reason and his aesthetically-inspired attempt to rethink judgement as a situated ability that could be said to have formed a backdrop for Kant's explicit turn to the model of aesthetics to inquire into the human capacity of judgement as an independent faculty, forming a mediating link between the individuals' (universal) moral law of reason and the disorderly world of nature or political affairs. If Hume ultimately subsumed judgement under the laws of causality ruling the outside world, however, Kant's turn to judgement is oriented by his

[9] The notion of impartiality as well as the awareness of the ethical and political relevance of sympathy also assumes a prominent place in the account of judgement as developed by Hume's contemporary, Adam Smith (see Morrow 1923, 69–78).

determination to preserve the space for human freedom amidst the phenomenal world of cause and effect (Deutscher 2013, 130–2). Kant's "critique" of judgement, in this respect, can be seen as a reflection of his broader critical project – what he called the "Copernican revolution" in philosophy. If Hume questioned the rationalist claim that being can be grasped by abstract ideas of reason, he also left intact the traditional, fixed division between subject and object as well as the attendant quest for certainty, asserting that we gain knowledge of what "truly is" through sensory experience. Kant, as Jaspers (1962, 17) notes, on the contrary sets out to examine the relationship between subject and object itself. Rather than trying to address the "traditional" question of how to reach correspondence with reality, he inquires into the necessary or *a priori* conditions of the *possibility* of knowledge for *us*, as rational and embodied beings (see Solomon 1972, 19–20). Kant's turn to judgement of taste thus can be seen as a response to his recognition of the "worldly" limits of human reason, finding in the model of aesthetics a sensibility well-suited to approach the plural and ambiguous nature of political affairs that cannot be adequately confronted by simple allegiance to the universal moral law.

Kant famously grounds the rule of practical judgement in the universal moral law of reason, which, in the form of a categorical imperative, demands of all individuals to act so that each of their actions could at the same time be made into a universal law. Because the universal is thus always given and the particular needs to be merely neatly subsumed under it, moral judgement is what Kant calls "determinant" (Kant 2007, IV, 15). Thus conceived, as several commentators have pointed out, the role of judgement in Kant's practical philosophy seems "rather perfunctory" (Benhabib 2001, 191; see also Larmore 2001, 56). Yet, already in his *Critique of Pure Reason,* dealing with the possibility of knowledge and experience, Kant recognizes judgement as an autonomous faculty that is itself not rule-governed but consists of "a special talent that cannot be taught but only practiced" (Larmore 2001, 48; Kant 1998, A133/B172, 268). Similarly, he appeals to the importance of judgement in his practical philosophy. Practical judgement confronts "special difficulties," he says, because the abstract, supersensible moral law must be applied "to an action *in concreto*," that is, "to actions, which are events taking place in the world of sense, and which, so far, belong to physical nature" (Kant 1909, 159–60).

In light of Kant's critical project, the "special difficulty" of judgement stems from

our perplexing position as rational *and* sentient beings, free to think and go beyond the given, yet, as parts of the world, also unable to ever transcend it completely so as to reach the totality of the world. We are subjects split at the heart of our being between our freedom and ability to discern within ourselves the workings of the universal moral law of reason and our private inclinations that render us subject to the causal laws of nature (Jaspers 1962, 45–6, 51–3, 98). In showing how our sensibility is rooted in subjective forms of intuition, space and time, and our understanding dependent on subjective categories of thought, Kant limits valid knowledge to the phenomenal world, that is, the world as it appears to us as the only one that we can perceive and know – leaving in abeyance as unintelligible the question of *noumena,* that is, of how the world is in-itself (Solomon 1972, 20). The recognition of the limits of human reason, in turn, represents the condition of possibility of human freedom, which, if it is to be indeed free, cannot depend "on anything empirical," belonging to the phenomenal world of cause and effect, but must be posited as a *noumenal* reality, existing at the very boundary of our knowledge (Kant 1909, 159; Jaspers 1962, 73). The importance and perplexity of political judgement, then, is not exhausted in the difficulty of applying onto the world of phenomena the universal moral law of reason as if it were an already known substance that only needed to be realized in practice. Instead it would seem to consist in a more radical challenge of how to judge in freedom, in pursuit of the moral law, while part of and conditioned by the particular, plural and contingent political reality that is bound to frustrate any clear-cut realization of our strivings and aspirations (see Jaspers 1962, 98).

This recognition of the situated character of our existence and the attendant difficulty of political judgement, allows a better grasp of Kant's ultimate turn to the model of aesthetic judgement. Kant reflected on the relevance of aesthetics to moral judgement already in his early essay, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime.* There he argues that the universal principles of morality cannot be intuited through pure formal reason or embodied in abstract rules, but are importantly based on *feeling*, and further that the recognition of the morally good is tied intimately to the feelings of pleasure and displeasure that characterize our intercourse with the beautiful (see e.g. Kant 2011, 2:215–2:217, 2:225, 22–4). In *The Critique of Judgement* Kant develops these claims by tracing the relevance of the model of aesthetic judgement to its

reflective nature. As opposed to determinant judgement that subsumes the particular under a pre-given determining concept, reflective judgement is called for when "only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it" (Kant 2007, IV, 15). In this case, the universal, that is, beauty, is an indeterminate concept that "ascends" from our engagement with "the particular in nature," rather than defining it, so to speak, in advance (Kant 2007, IV, 15). In this respect, the reflective character of aesthetic judgement is closely linked to its disinterestedness. While both morality and sensual life, where the object of delight is called "good" and "agreeable" respectively, are necessarily based on some or other interest, that is, dependent on an already defined end, aesthetic judgement contains "pure disinterested delight" at the existence of a beautiful object (Kant 2007, §2–4, 36–9). The disinterestedness of aesthetic judgement thus affirms the subject's freedom to confront the phenomenal character of the world without prefabricated standards of thought. In this way, aesthetic judgement displaces the traditional, "cognitive" divide between subject and object, which grounds the desire to know the whole of the world as it is in-itself. Instead, it relies on the power of imagination, which represents an object to the mind without eclipsing its particularity under a determinant concept and gives rise to a feeling of pleasure at "appearance *qua* appearance" (Kleist 2000, 9). The feeling of aesthetic pleasure, that is, contains an awareness of one's free subjectivity – what Kant calls the "free play" of our cognitive powers – that at the same time recognizes its situated character and the limits that arise from it, and commits to an unpremeditated openness to the givenness of the appearing world, necessarily standing beyond the determining powers of the subject (Kant 2007, §9, 48–9; Kleist 2000, 3, 19).

Just as the subject is free with regards to its pleasure or displeasure, so, too, then the givenness of the world comes to light only as it appears to the judging subject, and not objectively (Kleist 2000, 19). For this reason, as Kant says, judgements of taste cannot "compel" agreement (Kant 2007, §8, 47). Yet, because they are based on a distancing from any personal interest, our judgements can presuppose "a similar delight from everyone" and "involve a claim to validity for everyone" (Kant 2007, §6, 43). It is in this sense that our judgements are neither subjective nor objective, but carry an assertion of "subjective universality" (Kant 2007, §6, 43). Rather than reaching for absolute truth, Kant elaborates, we judge by appealing to the idea of *sensus communis,* "the idea of a

public sense," that is not limited to an empirical or psychological category (for instance, human sociability), but is posited as an *a priori* principle of communicability: "a faculty of judging which in its reflective act takes account *(a priori)* of the mode of representation of everyone else, in order, as it were, to weigh its judgement with the collective reason of mankind" (Kant 2007, §40, 123). As such, aesthetic judgements of taste do not merely depend on the rational principle of self-consistency, but rely on the capacity of enlarged thought, envisioning the activity of judging as a process of weighing our judgements, "not so much with actual, as rather with the merely possible, judgements of others, and by putting ourselves in the position of everyone else" (Kant 2007, §40, 123–5).

In contrast to Hume, thus, Kant explicitly emphasizes that it is not that the pleasure in the object as an empirical feeling of agreeableness would give birth to the communicability of our judgements, but that it is "the universal capacity for being communicated" that underlies the pleasure involved in judging (Kleist 2000, 10–11; Kant 2007, §9, 48). This resort to a transcendental *a priori* principle, in turn, led many commentators to view Kant's account of aesthetic judgement as "strictly formalistic" (Steinberger 1993, 141; Beiner 1983, 43–50). Gadamer, perhaps most notably, criticized Kant for reducing aesthetic to an essentially subjective affair, removed from practical, substantive ethico-political concerns of communal life (Gadamer 2004, 37–70; Dostal 2001, 155). Yet, in line with his critical project, Kant's appeal to the *a priori* principle of communicability can better be seen as his rejection of the tendency present in both Aristotle and Hume to found on the conception of a virtuous character or the substantive ends of a community a new, this time empirical, attempt to reify the whole of the world into a knowable object and thus eliminate human freedom (Jaspers 1962, 45–6). For Kant, on the contrary, it is the disinterested distancing from any objective, moral or empirical interest that first of all allows our judgements to embrace the fact of human plurality and face up to the ambiguity of our situated existence (see Kleist 2000, 22). In this respect, Kant's appeal to the *a priori* principle of communicability can be seen to ground the *political* significance of aesthetic judgements of taste: its ability, as Ricoeur (2000, 103–4) writes, to recognize and confront the constitutive plurality of political life as "life in common," and, as such, stimulate our capacity to assume our freedom and respond to the given world of political affairs by respecting the limits and conditions

inhering in its plural and unpredictable nature.

Judgement's appeal to common sense is inherently political because it contains an *a priori* principle of purposiveness (of nature) (see Kant 2007, VII, 25). Kant, to be sure, recognizes the contingent and arbitrary nature of politics, "made up of folly and childish vanity, and often of childish malice and destructiveness" (Kant 1991a, 42). What he staunchly resists, however, is the empiricist, realist tendency, which, insisting on the need to acknowledge in one's judgements and actions "men as they are," not as "they ought to be," in fact ends up furthering the very state of affairs it describes as true – rather than opening up the space for improvement (Kant 1991e, 177–8; 1991c, 86–7, 88–9; 1991d, 119). The political import of aesthetic judgement, in this respect, is revealed in Kant's enthusiasm about the French Revolution. While not concerned with the greatness or infamy of the event itself, Kant observed in "the attitude of the onlookers as it reveals itself *in public*" a disinterested "*sympathy* which borders almost on enthusiasm, although the very utterance of this sympathy was fraught with danger" (Kant 1991e, 182). This attitude, for Kant, testified to the "moral disposition within the human race," "an aptitude and power" to strive for an expansion of the sphere of individual freedom as embodied in a republican constitution (Kant 1991e, 182, 184). In this sense, as Kant says, aesthetic judgement and its appeal to common sense assumes a public or "*exemplary* validity" because it is able to disclose in a singular phenomenon belonging to the world of sense the broader moral purpose of the human race (Kant 2007, §22, 70; Ricoeur 2000, 104; Kleist 2000, 40–1, 34, 38). While shying away from prescribing the purpose of nature in terms of a determinant concept of the moral law of reason,[10] the communicability and publicity of aesthetic judgement thus nevertheless allows us to posit as a regulative idea "a harmony between human and human and between human and world" (Kleist 2000, 41). In "an otherwise planless aggregate of human actions," that is, it is able to reveal "a regular progression among freely willed actions" and thus open up the "comforting prospect" of seeing history *as if* it were ordered so as to favour the realization of the rational ends of human subjectivity and morality (Kant 1991a, 52, 41, 52–3; Kleist 2000, 40–1, 34, 38).

Kant's appeal to aesthetic judgement of taste thus can be said to carry his recognition of the distinct and ambiguous character of political judgement that cannot be reduced to

[10] In this respect, Kant strictly dissociates the "formal finality" of aesthetic judgement from the "objective finality" of teleological judgement (Beiner 1983, 45).

evaluating actions on the basis of whether or not they conform to the moral law – as if human freedom were a state or an idea that could be possessed or realized. Reflectively revealing the prospect of a favourable history, aesthetic judgement instead kindles the sense of the human potentials to struggle "with ourselves and the world" (Jaspers 1962, 98) towards the realization in politics of the universal principle of right.[11] Yet, it also recognizes the limits of the world and the attendant ambiguity of the task at hand, as manifested, for instance, in the contradiction of having to work towards expanding the realm of freedom for everyone, but also seek to uphold the existing constitution so as not to fall back upon the state of lawless or uncivil freedom (Kant 1991c, 79–84). Assuming the fact of human plurality, the recognition of the ambiguity of political judgement thus is mirrored in Kant's appeal to "the public use of one's own reason," his insistence on the need for everyone to be able to work to improve existing arrangements by "freedom of the pen," that is, by public criticism of any existing law or measure – provided it remains bound by respect for the constitution (Kant 1991b, 55; 1991c, 84–5; 1991b, 55–7, 59). Taste's communicability then contains an essential aspect of properly political judgement, an ability to affirm the human capacity for political action – not in the sense of "producing" a realm of freedom, but in furthering the conditions under which individuals "gradually become increasingly able to *act freely*" (Kant 1991b, 59; see also Kleist 2000, 124–5).

At the same time, however, Kant's efforts to avoid reducing judgement to a pre-given substantive principle (of a community), paradoxically, also lead him to rely on a "naturalized" conception of common sense, where the presupposition of universal communicability is based on a vision of a common "cognitive apparatus," universally shared by all human beings (Ferrara 2008, 25–8). Judgement thus again becomes based on an already presupposed and supposedly natural idea of human similarity, while hardly capable of harbouring the diversity of human perspectives and the moral dilemmas involved in judging between them. For presupposing as it does that any differences of opinion can only arise out of simple mistake, ignorance or an insufficient awareness of the moral law within one's self, it also is bent on eliminating any genuine conflict under the presumption that, if only able to exercise their freedom, human

[11] As an outward application of the universal moral law of reason, the universal principle of right conjoins everyone to judge and act in a way that "each individual's freedom [is restricted] so that it harmonizes with the freedom of everyone else" (Kant 1991c, 73).

consciousnesses are bound to finally meet in the greater harmony of ends (see Kant 1991b, 84). Moreover, aesthetic judgement's appeal to an *a priori* principle of purposiveness would seem to reintroduce the traditional notion of human subjectivity, standing at a remove from the world of politics and capable of *knowing* the higher purpose of the world and of history – thus reintroducing a new universal standard in accordance with which the particular and plural character of the world is to be judged and ordered. While Kant explicitly warns against conceiving of practical judgement as "the art of utilising nature for the government of men," he also asserts, for instance, that "the problem of setting up a state can be solved even by a nation of devils (so long as they possess understanding)," appealing to human "self-seeking inclinations" and natural discord between individuals as a force that compels them to do what they ought to do, that is, create a civil state (Kant 1991d, 117, 112–13). In this respect, taste's positing of a form of providence that helps produce, so to speak behind our backs, the ends of morality and reason, to argue with Hutchings (1992, 52–4), risks forfeiting the significance of human, political judgement and action in front of the judgement of history, rendering it "equally justified in condemning or endorsing the status *quo*" (Kant 1991d, 117; Hutchings 1992, 52–4). If Kant's account of aesthetic judgement thus ends up affirming, against the limits of human reason, the human capacity to read into nature a progression towards pre-determined moral ends, it not only betrays its worthy attempt to uphold the reality of human freedom. It also remains but a step short from the Hegelian bent to portray history itself as amenable to the subject's powers of moral determination (see Kleist 2000, 130–3).

Historical consciousness and the breakdown of eternal standards

In contrast to what he denounced as the abstractness of Kant's philosophy, Hegel conceived of human subjectivity and judgement as historical datums, concretely situated in particular contexts and, likewise, seeking to realize their ends in the course of a historical process. Absorbing all particular, historical, fragmentary occurrences, actions and events into the all-embracing dialectical movement of the World Spirit, however, Hegel's cunning of (practical) reason could also be said to signify the end of history.

Nonetheless, the increasing awareness of the inherent historicity of human existence brought forth the ultimate demise of all seemingly eternal, ahistorical, objective standards of judgement that continued to exert their appeal in both Hume and Kant. Thus finally expunged from the realm of transcendental yardsticks and guarantees, as perhaps most clearly evident in Nietzsche and Marx, political judgement becomes an inherently worldly, political activity, confronting us inevitably with the challenge revealed already in Kant's critique of taste: how to judge freely, that is, face up to the particularity of the world and the reality of plural others without external points of support. Judgement, in other words, becomes an explicitly *practical* quandary, concerning the human capacity of engaging the world in action, its involvement in relations of power as well as the structural forces of inequality and domination. The increasing awareness of the historical, complex character of judgement, however, also exposed all the more clearly the lingering philosophical ineptitude to adequately come to terms with its ambiguity, beaconing the growing predicament of judgement to turn into a sense of the full-fledged crisis in modernity.

Nietzsche's insight into the ambiguity of political judgement stems from his radical awareness of the profound crisis of modern consciousness – what he calls the present reality and danger of nihilism. For Nietzsche, therefore, judgement is in crisis, manifesting itself in the spreading awareness of the irreversible loss of "absolutes" that used to provide individuals with a sense of value and meaning in life, ascribe them into the common world, the relevant traditions and pasts (Roodt 2001, 326). Yet, Nietzsche's loud pronouncement of "the death of God" not only denotes the demise of transcendent values, but also serves as a reminder to traditional philosophy that those standards never were anything more than "transient" and "all too human" constructions (Guignon and Pereboom 1995, xvi). The modern sense of crisis, for Nietzsche, thus is inextricably linked to the traditional philosophical fear and contempt of the changing and contingent worldly reality and the consequent penchant to place faith in a higher world as a cause or ground to be applied to bestow meaning on an otherwise ambiguous web of appearances. With the collapse of the supersensuous world, by implication, the loss of meaning came to plague also the sensual, appearing world (see Bowie 2003, 291–2). As Nietzsche (2005, 171) writes with usual poignancy: "The true world is gone: which world is left? The illusory one, perhaps? … But no! *we got rid of the illusory world*

along with the true one!"

The relevance of Nietzsche's radical awareness of the inappropriateness of the traditional, determinant conception of political judgement, in this respect, can be helpfully illuminated if developed in parallel to his critique of Kant's critical project. On the one hand, Nietzsche praises Kant for setting limits to human reason, thus rendering judgement a matter that is properly concerned with the world of appearances, not some other out-of-worldly realm below, outside or above them. Yet, he also blames Kant for leaving his critical project unfinished, establishing judgement as judgement of phenomena only to ultimately ground it in a higher, mysteriously elusive and unfathomable, sphere of *noumena* (see Doyle 2008, 184). For Nietzsche, in contrast, the danger of nihilism can only be confronted if we abolish the dualism of subject and object, of appearance and things-in-themselves, abandon any lingering desire for eternal truths and finally recognize the appearing world as "the only world there is" (Guignon and Pereboom 1995, 108–9).

Accordingly, Nietzsche reinterprets the human judging ability as perspectival knowledge. Here, like Kant before him, he resorts to aesthetics to confront the perplexity of political judgement, yet turns from Kant's emphasis on disinterestedness towards a focus on free creation (see Zangwill 2013). Perspectivism contains an acknowledgement of the fact that any judgement is only possible and meaningful from a particular perspective – that is, as an *interpretation,* revealing a particular aspect of an object or an event as it manifests itself from a particular point of view that we occupy in the world (see Nietzsche 2006a, III, §12, 86–7; Fairfield 2011, 10–12). Yet, it is not as if judgement as interpretation were to then allow access only to "an appearance of the world *instead of* that world itself." "What is seen," Nehamas (1985, 50) writes, "is simply the world itself […] from that perspective." Judgement then is recognized as an activity that is oriented and conditioned by our sensual and embodied, interested and practical engagement in the world. As such, however, it does not signify a mere embrace of relativism. What it exposes, instead, is the traditional philosophical penchant for what Nietzsche calls the "falsification of consciousness," the tendency to mistake our interpretations of reality for the ultimate truth of Being, to disregard the always partial and interested aspect to our seeing and portray our judgements, concepts and evaluations as corresponding to the objective state of the world (see Fairfield 2011, 14–

5). Nietzsche thus not only unmasks "the absurdity" of such notions "as 'pure reason', 'absolute spirituality', 'knowledge as such'," which all demand a seeing from nowhere and "turned in no direction at all" (Nietzsche 2006a, III, §12, 87). He also reveals that all seemingly objective, natural and inevitable systems of morality themselves are effects of particular and contingent histories, within which there lurk subtle attempts at domination and usually well-hidden hierarchies of power (see e.g. Nietzsche 2002, I, §187–8, 77–9).

The recognition of judgement's situated, worldly character, for Nietzsche, on the contrary also implies the need to acknowledge its subjective aspect, where the impossibility of reaching the ultimate truth of being also grounds the possibility of assuming our freedom to create value on the ground of a world shorn of inherent meaning. He writes: "Truth is […] not something there, that might be found or discovered – but something that must be created and that gives a name to a process, or rather to a will to overcome that has in itself no end […]" (Nietzsche 1968, III, §552, 298). Acts of judgement, then, do not approximate to a teleological exercise with an already known result, a realm of eternal Being. Instead, judgement belongs to the realm of Becoming, reflecting a creative arising of human subjectivity within the world in accordance with the concerns of human existence itself (Doyle 2008, 202–4; Nietzsche 1997, 76–7). This is not to say, however, that our judgements would lose their normative import or amount to a lapse into arbitrariness. As Nietzsche (2006a, III, §12, 86–7) writes, "There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival 'knowing'; and *the more* affects we allow to speak about a matter […] that much more complete will our 'concept' of this matter, our 'objectivity' be" (see also Nehamas 1985, 49; Cohen 1999, 280). By exposing the arbitrary origins and oppressive effects of conventional moralities, on the contrary, Nietzsche's perspectivism liberates the space for the appearance of new and resistant values previously dismissed or even pronounced as dangerous (Ferguson 2007, 13–14). It enables, that is, the possibility of original and different judgements as they manifest and serve the free, transcending movement of human life.[12]

Nietzsche's aesthetic sensibility thus can be said to encapsulate the distinctly worldly

[12] In this context emerges the significance of Nietzsche's oft-invoked claim that our most entrenched truths are illusions and even that errors may be deemed equally valuable as truths (Nietzsche 2002, e.g. I, §1–5, 5–8).

and perplexing character of political judgement. Embodying the ambiguous relationship between an individual and the world and plural others that can no longer hope for a resolution or anchor in some extra-phenomenal standard or value, it is an aspect Nietzsche further brings to light through his tragic sensibility.[13] In contrast to the traces of a cognitive, transcendental ego lingering in Kant, Nietzsche's perspectivism discards the traditional philosophical notion of the subject as a supposedly "free" and self-contained substance that would seem to pre-exist the process of forming a judgement, denouncing any attempt to attach a doer to the deed, a being behind doing as a dangerous metaphysical fallacy (Ferguson 2007, 12–13, 16; Nietzsche 1968, III, §485, 268–9; Nietzsche 1997, 119–20; Roodt 2001, 329). Nietzsche's perspectival judgement, in contrast, furthers a performative view of identity. Portraying the subject as split, multiple, and plural, it envisions the human judging ability as an incessant poetic activity of self-invention, of constantly engaging the world in freedom and courageously facing up to the disorderly chaos, heterogeneity and complexity of reality (Eagleton 1990, 250–2). As such, however, our judgements also are unable to provide any ultimate answers to the riddles of human existence nor predict the significance our actions are to attain in the world, tragically striving for meaning, which however is bound to remain provisional, partial, incomplete, always open to further amendment and re-evaluation (Roodt 2001, 340–3, 338).

Likewise, Nietzsche's perspectival judgement rejects any *a priori* presumption of communicability or universal agreement (see Ferguson 2007, 12–13). Yet, its questioning of the self-sufficient subject could also be said to enable the recognition and embrace of genuine plurality. For freely engaging the world, as Ferguson (2007, 14–5) notes, perspectival judgement brings to light the relationship between the deed, actor and spectators, inviting a plurality of different selves to participate in the process of creation and binding them together in the production of new worlds. It is on the contrary precisely in the traditional notion of selfhood and the search for communal standards it engenders that Nietzsche discerns a desire to escape the vagaries of human existence into the haven of one's inner self (Eagleton 1990, 237; Roodt 2001, 329). This solipsistic penchant for him represents "the actuality of nihilism," a condition in which individuals are no longer able to "recognize in [themselves] the validity of another's

[13] For Nietzsche's attempt to reclaim the pre-Socratic Greeks' insights into the ethical and political relevance of tragedy see Nietzsche (1999). See also Roodt (2001, 342–7).

judgement," and, thus severed from others and the world, prone to yield to "a naked admiration for success" and "an idolatry of the factual" (Strong 1988a, 163; see also Roodt 2001, 329–30; Nietzsche 1997, 105, 113).[14] Questioning the vision of self-contained subjects that are posited to converge in some pre-given conception of consensus and agreement, instead, Nietzsche's aesthetic, perspectival judgement is inherently intersubjective in that it always already "takes us outside ourselves" and establishes connections with others and the common world (Ferguson 2007, 14, 12; see also Strong 1988a, 162). It assumes the form, that is, of an incessant communication, sharing and contestation between a plurality of perspectives that can never be expected to yield a final reconciliation (see Owen 2008, 121–3). In this respect, it illuminates the inherently political and tragic tension between the various forms of human commonality and the uniqueness of human action that always reaches beyond them, into the unforeseen and the extraordinary (Roodt 2001, 342–3).

Nietzsche's attempt to affirm the distinctly political, free and worldly character of judgement also is stymied by his interpretation of perspectivism and its plural, ambiguous vision of human political existence in terms of the concept of will to power (Nietzsche 1968, III, §552, 298). Aesthetic judgement as an embodiment of individuals' free, creative engagement with the appearing world, that is, becomes reduced to the human life-enhancing capacity, where, in the absence of an universal standard, the affirmation of our freedom to create our own values is put in the service of power, or of the pursuit of life and "its sphere of influence" as an end in itself (Fairfield 2011, 16–17; see also Eagleton 1990, 247–8, 255–7). Its overarching tone, most notably in Heidegger's interpretation, in turn has lent Nietzsche's will to power to the criticism of atrophying into a new metaphysical principle or end of judgement in accordance with which the world is to be ordered and transformed. Despite a number of contending interpretations,[15] that is, perspectival judgement oriented by the principle of will to power could be said to retain a strong focus on the individuals' powers of interpreting,

[14] For Nietzsche, this danger is most present in the speculative philosophies of history *pace* Hegel that attempt to conclusively explain and master the whole of life by appealing to rational, self-contained systems of thought or abstract, teleological laws of development, only to ultimately subdue and betray the plural, contingent, unpredictable or, in other words, *real* character of human existence (Nietzsche 1997, 104–5, 112–13; Roodt 2001, 327–8).

[15] In contrast to Heidegger's reading, it is important to mention the agonistic interpretations. In Deleuze and Lyotard, for instance, the concept of will to power is characterized by a staunch resistance to any overarching synthesis, to affirm instead the relationality and incessant power-play between a plurality of diverse perspectives (see Schrift 1996, 330, 339–40, 341–4).

evaluating and fashioning the "material" of the world, while "underplaying" its resistant, plural, complex and ambiguous character and the way it may condition and limit the determining aspirations of the subject (Strong 1988b, 234–5; Fairfield 2011, 21–3).

This lingering trace of the traditional penchant to escape the contingency of the appearing world into a dream of the unique and solitary Self, in this respect, is well-evident in Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence. The problem of the untameable outside reality is here resolved by an affirmation of everything that happens with the pronouncement of "thus I willed it" (Nietzsche 2006b, 110). As Nietzsche writes, aesthetic, perspectival judgement becomes a means of redeeming the tragedy of human action, of enduring "the terrifying and questionable character of existence" by fitting it into a reconstructed, transparent whole of the world "in which suffering is willed, transfigured, deified" (Nietzsche 1968, III, §853, 452). While seeking to affirm the human capacity of confronting the weight of reality, the doctrine of eternal recurrence then also signals an attempt to provide an ultimate answer to the ambiguity of human existence by submitting it to the fate of the world. What Nietzsche's will to power thus obscures, however, is precisely the temporal, intersubjective and unpredictable – or, "human-all-too-human" – character of political affairs, along with the existence of "moral problems" and the political significance of making judgements and sharing them with others (see Strong 1988b, 267, 281). Affirming freedom outside or above the ambiguous ground of the world and inter-human relationships, that is, it risks lapsing into an ultimate submission to the higher, supposedly necessary law of Being (see Eagleton 1990, 250).[16]

Nietzsche's attempt to confront the ambiguity of political judgement as it stems from and epitomizes human sensual, embodied existence in the world as well as the eventual impasse he lands in can be further illuminated if paralleled with Marx's contribution to the topic. Along the lines of Nietzsche, Marx conceives of the perplexity of political judgement not as an epistemological quandary, but as a problem of human *praxis* (Dupré 1980, 93–4; Habermas 1972, 35–6). In the (in)famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, he explicitly exclaims: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in

[16] For in-depth interpretations of Nietzsche's concepts of will to power and eternal recurrence, as well as the relationship between them see Strong (1988b, 218–293) and Reginster (2006, esp. 103–47, 201–27).

various ways; the point is to change it" (Marx 2000a, 173). In Marx's reinterpretation of Hegelian dialectics, the operation of judgement thus is conceived in terms of, or indeed "emerging" from, the human practical engagement in the world and with nature, in the course of which individuals must start from and assume their given situation, yet are also able to go beyond it and change it (Dupré 1980, 93).

Like Nietzsche then, Marx furthers a critique of Kant's aspiration towards disinterestedness and universal agreement. Rather than a repudiation of normative standards *per se,* this critique refers to his insight that the supposedly universal concepts of morality themselves are ideological, advancing the interests of those in power. Under the principles of abstract autonomy and equality of all, they obscure from sight the materially, structurally entrenched sources of oppression and injustice, and thus in fact work to keep the large majority of the world's population under the yoke of necessities of material survival, incapable of realizing their full human potentials (see Booth 1993, esp. 252).[17] True emancipatory judgement, for Marx, must on the contrary start from human beings' "sensuous, individual, immediate existence," and seek to liberate individuals not as abstract citizens, in their artificial moral and legal subject-hood of the political state, but as real human beings, in their empirical existence, their day-to-day lives, work and relationships (Marx 2000b, 64; see also Eagleton 1990, 209–10). Like Nietzsche, thus, Marx recognizes the distinctly political, ambiguous character of judgement, envisioning it as a deeply situated affair, suffused by the material, structural forces and power relations ruling our worldly environment, and unable to reach an objective view of the world. Yet, if in Nietzsche this recognition amounts to an appeal to the individual's capacities of (self-)creation in the face of a meaningless world, Marx's "authentic" judgement inheres in the call for social, political transformation, introducing the additional challenge of how to establish collective forms of resistance and work to refashion the objective, institutional, material conditions of human life (see Eagleton 1990, 202–3).

If in Marx the goal of political judgement and action mirrors the "profoundly aesthetic" concern with the realization of human powers and capacities as an end in itself, however, it is also an end tethered to an instrumental conception of human *praxis* (see Eagleton 1990, 201–3, 206–8). While there is considerable disagreement on the

[17] In this respect, Marx prefigures Bourdieu's social critique of taste (see Ferguson 2007, 66, 70–1, 114–16). See also Sayer (1999).

role that the Marxist dialectics assigns to morality and thought itself – in particular as to whether they, as superstructural factors, should be seen as merely reflective of the forms of economic activity[18] – judgement on how to emancipate human potentials nevertheless remains strongly rooted in the given needs of the working body and the process of material production, themselves supposedly determined and developing in accordance with the seemingly natural laws of history. The human judging capacity thus is reduced to instrumental reasoning, fastened to a new universal law, which however is no longer a regulative idea guiding action as in Kant, but assumes the form of a necessary and inevitable dialectical movement, a historical process which it embodies and in the course of which it is realized (Dupré 1980, 115–16; Eagleton 1990, 205–6, 212–13, 226–7). Marx's insight into the situated character of political judgement and his awareness of the collective nature of human action, paradoxically, leads to the discovery of a new absolute in the human productive activity itself, which, unlimited by any standard or given outside of itself, turns the whole of the world and others into passive material to serve the transforming process of *praxis* (Dupré 1980, 119–20).

Marx, like Nietzsche, in this respect remains trapped in the traditional philosophical conception of the self-sufficient subject, only this "absolute ego," as Habermas (1972, 44) observes, here appears in "the more tangible productive activity of the species." What is thereby again collapsed, however, is the space for critical reflection, obviating the need for the processes of intersubjective communication and argument to evaluate and determine not only how human potentials can best be realized, but also the desirability of the proposed conception of the end of self-realization itself (see Eagleton 1990, 224–5). Marx's perspectival judgement, as Eagleton (1990, 206, 228–9) elaborates, easily leads to a situation where the "vision of a symmetrical, many-sided humanity" is harnessed "to highly partial, particular, one-sided political forces," where "an ultimate plurality of powers flows only from the most resolute partisanship," and where all failure, sacrifice and loss can be redeemed by a future vision of a just society. Envisioning the realization of human powers to come about in the course of a necessary, teleological development, however, judgement thus conceived also amounts to an ultimate betrayal of Marx's affirmation of the human capacity for action, the ends of which can never be known or determined in advance if it is to remain a living, creative

[18] See for instance Dupré (1980) and Nielsen (1987) for engaging discussions on the subject.

practice of transcending the merely given (Dupré 1980, 107). Marx's and Nietzsche's attempts to confront the modern lack of standards of judgement and the attendant need to confront the world of political affairs in its particularity and contingency in this respect miss out on Kant's crucial insight into the interdependent relationship between thought and the outside world as well as his recognition of the limits that this "antinomy" imposes upon human reason. Ultimately affirming the freedom of judgement outside or even against the intersubjective realm of human, political affairs, they end in an impasse, where the most resolute assumption of human freedom gives rise to the elimination of the human capacities for independent judgement and action under seemingly inevitable fate.[19]

The crisis of judgement as a crisis of Existenz

The exposed crisis of judgement came to represent an inescapable condition of contemporary political thinking in the work of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, thinkers commonly seen as the founding fathers of the phenomenological approach to philosophizing and the leading forerunners of twentieth-century existentialism. Grounded in the perplexing and horrifying events of the modern era, their distinct insight is to think the modern crisis of judgement explicitly as part and symptomatic of the broader crisis of human existence, that is, as an urgent question of thought's meaningfulness as at once a concern in which our existence itself is at stake (see e.g. Reynolds 2006, 20–1; Murungi 2006, 443–4; Dodd 2004, 46–8). Husserl and Heidegger in this respect follow in the footsteps of Nietzsche, offering a theoretical horizon within which to understand the perplexity of political judgement as a manifestation of the fundamental human condition of being-in-the-world. The crisis in modernity they accordingly trace to the traditional philosophy's inability to adequately approach and come to terms with the ambiguous interrelationship between human consciousness and

[19] This predicament of the withering of the space for critical judgement was explicitly recognized by a group of thinkers broadly referred to as the Frankfurt School or the Critical Theory tradition of political thought. Writing against the background of the unprecedented atrocities of the twentieth century, they attribute the modern crisis of judgement to Enlightenment reason's atrophy into instrumental reason. It was the unprecedented affirmation of the emancipatory powers of human reason in modernity, critical theorists argue, that in the end developed into an instrument of repression and domination (see e.g. Horkheimer 2002; Roberts 2004; Kaufman 2000).

world. Their attempt to come to terms with the modern crisis, by implication, manifests an explicit call for a radical rethinking of traditional ways of relating to the world. Rather than resorting to pre-fabricated standards of thought, it envisions judgement as an activity that assumes and seeks to respond to the perplexing condition of human being-in-the-world as at once a free and worldly being.

For Husserl, the modern crisis is not a predicament limited to a specific field of scientific inquiry nor to any distinct sphere of human activity. It represents a profound crisis of philosophy or thought in general, which, in turn, endangers the distinctively human character of our existence itself. Or, as Husserl has it, it is "a more and more prominent crisis of European humanity itself in respect to the total meaningfulness of its cultural life, its total *'Existenz'*" (Husserl 1970a, §5, 12; see also Murungi 2006, 442–4). This crisis Husserl traces to the predominance within philosophy of what he terms "naturalism" or "objectivism" (see Husserl 1970b, 273). Under attack, that is, is a species of rationalism imported from natural science (and inclusive of the historicist-teleological approaches), envisioning judgement, and all forms of human perception and knowledge, as an act of a detached mind that is able to reduce the whole of the world, and human subjectivity itself, to a series of natural occurrences, a set of logical, seemingly self-evident and inevitable causal laws (see Moran 2008, 403–8). For Husserl, this approach not only is "countersensical" in failing to account for the abstract, absolute standards and ideals it relies on (Moran 2008, 402, 406). Reducing the human capacity for judgement to deductive reasoning whose desired goal lies in the sphere of "'logical' evidence" and self-evident, axiomatic truth, "naturalist" rationalism also glosses over the more fundamental and in a sense primordial purpose of thinking as a distinctly human ability to make sense of experience and endow the world with (a human) meaning (Husserl in Dodd 2004, 29–30). Uplifting the human capacities for explaining and shaping the outside world to previously unimaginable heights and drawing a picture of the never more rational(ized), yet also increasingly "objective," factual, given world, that is, judgement thus construed also leads to a situation of exile, where the world has become "incomprehensible" and "uninhabitable" and where "human existence itself appears not to have a legitimate claim to being counted among those things that are meaningful" (Dodd 2004, 37–9).

An attempt to reinvigorate the human judging capacity, within this horizon, must

start from a radically different notion of subjectivity. In contrast to the rational, absolute subject of traditional metaphysics, Husserl views human consciousness as "consciousness of the world," or "world-consciousness" (Husserl 1970a, §28, 109, 103). The crucial characteristic of consciousness, in other words, is its intentionality (Solomon 1980, 18–19). Consciousness, for Husserl, is always *of something*, that is, it always intends an object in the world. In response to the crisis, Husserl thus institutes a phenomenological approach to theorizing, which comprises an insistence on making the relationship between human consciousness and the world, and the fundamental structures that underpin this relationship, into an explicit and essential focus of study – prior to any preconceived philosophical systems or absolutes (Solomon 1980, 1–4). Echoing the contours of Kant's critical project, however, Husserl rejects his dualist metaphysics and his accompanying lingering penchant for objective knowledge. *Meaning,* for phenomenology, on the contrary emerges only from consciousness's direct encounter with the world, and is in fact coterminous with consciousness's "intending" or seeking to describe appearances or "things themselves" without previously formed theoretical standards or presuppositions (Solomon 1980, 24–5).

Placing under scrutiny the intentional relationship between consciousness and the world, Husserl's phenomenology thus is well-suited to acknowledge and confront the ambiguity of (political) judgement. For in distancing itself from any predetermined goal, most notably from the scientific desire for certainty, it allows for the recognition of consciousness as always-already enmeshed in a given "lifeworld," which as a historically constituted, intersubjective horizon of meaning shapes and makes possible all experience, judgement and action (see Husserl 1970a, §9, 50–2; see also Husserl 1973, §6–9, 27–40). Evoking the ancient conception of *doxa* as opposed to knowledge, Husserl envisions judgement as an activity that always starts from our pre-reflective belief in the givenness of the world and that is characterized by an unpremeditated openness towards the concrete and particular stuff of reality (see Husserl 1970a, §5, 12–13; §44, 155–7). As a horizon of our understanding, however, the givenness of the world does not possess the fullness or clarity of an absolute or a totality as an object of knowledge in-itself, but is ambiguous. It always-already presents itself "in the form of a question to be both formulated and addressed" and thus first of all founds, motivates and orients the human quest for a meaningful world (Dodd 2004, 155, 150–3). To

assume this ambiguity, Husserl resorts to the manner of proceeding that he calls reduction or *epoché.* Reduction refers to the process of bracketing "the natural standpoint," "*this entire natural world therefore,*" that is, the whole of our experiential reality, along with all the theoretical or scientific presuppositions that relate to this world and represent it as given (Husserl in Solomon 1980, 116–17). Freed from the presuppositions and interests of everyday existence, then, judgement contains a reflective movement of transcending the mere "natural" givenness of reality, of capturing the previously unseen or concealed meaningfulness of the world as "*a phenomenon,*" achieved as a world-disclosing accomplishment of a subjectivity (see Husserl 1970a, §41, 152; Dodd 2004, 175–9, 188–91). Just as our situatedness in a lifeworld constitutes the precondition of all subjectivity and judgement, it is also only a subjective movement of consciousness that first of all makes possible the seeing of things as things in and of this world and brings into existence the concreteness and "objectivity" of the outside reality (Dodd 2004, 34–7).[20] It is not, that is, as if the subjective element to judgements of engaging, assembling, ordering and unifying the world would be a hindrance that would need to be controlled or excluded, but is itself constitutive of a meaningful, worldly realm of human, lived experience (see Dodd 2004, 150–3, 155, 175).

Thus disclosing the interdependent relationship between consciousness and the world, Husserl also points to the distinctively human significance of conceiving political judgement as a reflective practice. For as an activity that is not exhausted in the search for correct knowledge, judgement itself contains the movement of a life and, further, illuminates the way of a distinctively human existence. In its awareness that the sense of value and meaning in and of the world must be constantly created, Husserl's reflective judgement always is engaged in shaping the sense of the relevant histories and pasts *as ours* and thus also disclosing a field of future possibilities. In its perpetual questioning of the merely obvious or the established, and subjecting its results to careful scrutiny, in other words, it is bent on constantly kindling "a sense of and for the meaningful to provide a context of thought and action in which it can unfold" (Dodd 2004, 31). It also poses ever anew the question of who we are, a concern most relevant

[20] Husserl explicitly distinguishes his method of reduction from Descartes' radical doubt, which, with the aim of reaching absolute, "indubitable" truth, puts into question the very existence of the outside world (see Husserl in Solomon 1980, 113–16).

precisely in moments of crisis, when established ways of judging and understanding the world have been put in question (see Dodd 2004, 18–23, 31–2).

Nevertheless, it is precisely this humanizing import that remains obviated in the primarily epistemological focus and purpose of Husserl's judgement. Ultimately, the goal of Husserl's method of reduction is knowledge and certainty, the quest for what he calls "essences," the *a priori,* necessary or absolute of experience (Husserl in Solomon 1980, 253–4; Dodd 2004, 190; Keller 1999, 40–1). Husserl's phenomenological account of judgement, as has frequently been pointed out, contains the echoes of the rational subject of traditional metaphysics, which, in the form of a "transcendental Ego," purports to be able to reduce the ambiguity of experience to an essentially inner "sphere of ownness," and reach a transparent view of the world (Husserl in Solomon 1980, 391–3; Keller 1999, 53, 43; Moran 2008, 420–2). In this vein, however, Husserl misses the point that the situated, worldly character of judgement also means, as Merleau-Ponty has argued, that it can never embrace the totality of itself and world (see Merleau-Ponty 2002/1962, xv).[21] Despite its ground in the lifeworld, the judging subject's quest for essences ultimately removes it from the meaningful realm of worldly plurality and of intersubjective, shared experience.[22] Abstracting from the mutually constitutive interrelationship of subject and world, Husserl betrays his own fundamental insight that all judgement and subjectivity is only possible on the grounds of an (in-itself never completely transparent) worldly reality, and thus also ends up obscuring the possibilities for individuals' practical, transcending engagement in the political realm.

It is this rationalist bias that leads Heidegger to discern in Husserl's phenomenological approach lingering vestiges of the fundamental flaw plaguing the whole Western tradition of political theory: forgetfulness of being. The modern crisis of judgement, for Heidegger, can be traced not so much to the prevalence of naturalism as to the traditional metaphysical tendency within philosophy itself (Guignon 1993, 5).

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[21] The fundamental insight brought forth by the recognition of the importance of reduction, for Merleau-Ponty (2002/1962, xv), "is the impossibility of a complete reduction."

[22] As many commentators have pointed out, Husserl's method of reduction encounters difficulties in recognizing the knowing and judging ego as not only a constituting, but also a constituted being, as well as in accounting for the experience and points of view of others. In consequence, it envisions the public, objective world to come into existence through the presupposition of an *a priori* harmony between human consciousnesses, which, however, is not based on the negotiation of a plurality of perspectives on the world, but in the positing of a singular, common structure of human experience. See Husserl (1970a, §57, 202), Husserl in Solomon (1980, 420–30), Mohanty (1995, esp. 71–4), Moran (2008, 222–8), and Keller (1999, 45–58).

This tendency, going as far back as Plato, manifests itself in the predominance of the detached, theoretical attitude, purporting to find an indubitable ontological foundation in the primacy of mind, *cogito* or the subject that thinks and knows. Positing a detached subject, philosophers conceived of judgement (and thought in general) as an ability to order and control all concrete, singularly existing things by imposing upon them a set of universal, determinant principles and concepts (see Elliott 2005, 69, 75–8; Dahlstrom 2010, 403–4). Thus reaching for (eternal) substance in things, the traditional metaphysical conception of judgement also misses out on a more fundamental question of what it means for things to exist in the first place – a flaw of no small importance, primarily because it risks obscuring the way of being that is properly human (Dahlstrom 2010, 401).

An adequate response to the modern crisis accordingly must take as its point of departure a radical dismantling of all metaphysical systems, concepts and standards, along with the correspondence theory of truth they rely on. A promising alternative, Heidegger finds in the Greek notion of truth as disclosure, "uncoveredness" or "unconcealment" of being (Heidegger 2001, §44, 256–63; Heidegger 1993b, 117–19, 125). Drawing on the notion of truth as disclosure, Heidegger discerns in Kant's critical, aesthetic project a fruitful starting point to institute an alternative way of philosophical inquiry, what he calls "fundamental ontology" (Heidegger 2001, §39, 226–7; Palmer 1997, 11–16). Thinking, he states, must find its purpose in the quest for meaning, that is, in the disclosure and (self-)understanding of one's concrete, worldly existence, which, for Heidegger, corresponds to one's being-in-the-world or *Dasein* (Heidegger 2001, §39, 225; Badia 2006, 223–4). An adequate account of judgement, in short, must dispense with the traditional dualism of the subject confronting an object and start from a primordial, indissoluble structural unity of human and world.

Heidegger thus further expands on Husserl's recognition of the indissoluble relationship between human and world, offering an attenuated grasp of the ambiguity of (political) judgement. Heidegger's unity of being-in-the-world allows for a understanding of the human judging ability as grounded in our practical engagement in and with the world. In this attitude, things of the world are understood in terms of our practical possibilities of dealing with them, what Heidegger calls "ready-to-hand," as opposed to and preceding the rationalist attempt to make the world present as a

transparent object of a cognitive gaze (Heidegger 2001, §15, 98–102; see also Dahlstrom 2010, 403–4). His insight into our always-already practical comportment towards the world, in turn, allows Heidegger to view judgement as underlain by a pre-reflective understanding of our worldly existence as temporal and historical – a recognition that remained for the most part dormant in Husserl. Explicitly acknowledging the fundamental temporality and historicity of human existence as the very conditions of human judging ability, Heidegger states that all judgement, interpretation and evaluation is "grounded existentially in understanding" (Heidegger 2001, §32, 188). It depends on what Heidegger calls the "forestructure of understanding" as a field of socially and historically shaped possibilities for interpretation and evaluation (Heidegger 2001, §32, 192). Presented in the form of already constituted presuppositions, meanings and relationships, the forestructure of understanding comprises our particular worldly situation, which, however, can never be made fully transparent and thus constantly appeals to our capacities to take it up as ours, render it explicit, judge, evaluate or clarify it – and thereby project it towards new possibilities of being (see also Reynolds 2006, 35; Dahlstrom 2010, 404–8).[23]

Following the path charted by Husserl, then, Heidegger portrays the recognition of the situated character of our judging ability as the very constitutive condition of seeing judgement as a "task" of making the world and the past our own, and, at the same time, assuming the distinctively human, or "authentic" way of being (Dahlstrom 2010, 408–9). In our everyday being-in-the-world, however, this sense of judgement is prone to get obscured in what Heidegger calls the public life of the "they." It is the life of behavioural patterns, idle talk, customary explanations and normative expectations, which keep *Dasein* constantly preoccupied and endow it with a sense of security and coherence, yet which also alienate its possibility of turning its being into an issue (Badia 2006, 224–5). The dismantling of traditional metaphysical categories of judgement, in this respect, opens up the space for *Dasein* to recognize that its being does not correspond to the manner of being of a (pre-determined and eternal) substance or a thing, but is *free* (see Hinchman and Hinchman 1984, 190). This recognition, for Heidegger, is accompanied by and first of all brought forth in the radical existential

[23] In place of Husserl's phenomenological reduction, Heidegger thus institutes a "hermeneutic" phenomenology (Heidegger 2001, §7, 60). For insightful analyses of the Husserl-Heidegger engagement and confrontation see Palmer (1997) and Hopkins (2001).

experience of anxiety (Badia 2006, 226). In anxiety, *Dasein* is confronted with its "thrownness" into the world, which, now robbed of the significance and coherence bestowed upon it by the customary and established ways of judging and acting, dons the appearance of the strange and the "uncanny" (Heidegger 2001, §29, 174; §40, 233; see also Heidegger 1993a, 100–1; Badia 2006, 229; Reynolds 2006, 39–40). Shattering the refuge of the everyday social values and roles, however, anxiety also confronts *Dasein* with "the nothing," the finitude and contingency at the heart of its being, which allows for it to recognize the (limited) field of possibilities of its being-in-the-world – its "facticity" – as its own and, on this basis, also assume itself as a potentiality of existing differently in the future (see Heidegger 1993a, 103–6; Badia 2006, 229; Reynolds 2006, 22). It is its very worldliness, its "thrownness" into a world that is bound to forever elude its complete grasp and mastery, then, that enables and inspires *Dasein* to assume its freedom and judge and endow with meaning whatever happens in its worldly particularity and ambiguity, without pre-conceived categories of thought. Judgement thus becomes an aesthetic, reflective act as creative disclosure or unconcealment of being in the sense that its assumption and evaluation of the past and its possibilities is oriented by the horizon of the future, which as a (non-determinant) "potentiality-for-being," shapes any present moment of transcendence (Dahlstrom 2010, 411–13; Badia 2006, 228).

Building on Husserl's insights, Heidegger in this way allows for further recognition of the political import of human reflective judging capacity in that the problem of judgement is no longer conceived as a problem of knowledge, but explicitly recognized as a "(proto-)ethical" issue of human choice, action and responsibility (see Solomon 1980, 30; Elliot 2005, 102). Evoking Aristotle, Heidegger distinguishes practical judgement from *techne,* the "productivist" model of knowledge that, grounded in the traditional metaphysics of substance, conceives of (human) action as realization of a pre-given end or *telos* (see Tchir 2011, 59–61). Heidegger's practical judgement, in contrast, contains the disclosure of an individual, unique "who" of a distinctively human existence, rendering political judgement into an issue in which the possibility of authentic existence itself is at stake (Tchir 2011, 60–1; Badia 2006, 229).

Yet, Heidegger ultimately envisions authentic judgement and existence to proceed by way of a distancing from the public realm of the many. The (authentic) activity of

judging, that is, is based on an individualizing and solitary "resoluteness" of *Dasein* to realize its potentiality to become a (unique) Self, its capacity for self-creation, which itself comes from an essentially inner confrontation with *Dasein's* "ownmost" possibility, its own death (Heidegger 2001, §54, 314–15; §53, 304–8; Tchir 2011, 62–4). As such, this conception of judgement chimes with Heidegger's portrayal of the utmost mode of authentic existence in the serene aloofness of the thinker who is called upon to grasp the ultimate truth of being lying above the intersubjective realm of shared experience (see Tchir 2011, 64–5). The main concern, in other words, corresponds to the essentially metaphysical quest for an ultimate ontology, a (self-)transparent view of the modes and possibilities of being, which, in its desire for finality, remains at a remove from the very ground of the world that *Dasein* depends on for a meaningful, distinctly human way of being (see Tchir 2011, 64–5). Abstracting from the particularity, plurality and ambiguity of (human) reality, Heidegger's judgement thus again ends up forfeiting human freedom in front of a new homogenizing given, seemingly necessary and natural law (see Eagleton 1990, 310).

This troubling tendency becomes explicitly manifest in Heidegger's later turn towards *Gelassenheit,* or the attitude of "letting beings be." Tracing the crisis of judgement explicitly to what he saw as the modern triumph of (the Nietzschean) will to power in the form of instrumental reason, Heidegger envisions an "authentic" alternative in the mode of judging as a disposition of removing oneself from engagement in the world so as to penetrate the true reality of things, of acquiescing in and guarding over their essence, "the house of the truth of Being" (Heidegger 1993c, 217–18, 223; Eagleton 1990, 299, 307). Trying to offset the modern tendency to subjectivize being, Heidegger thus also rejects his earlier insight into the distinctly human, political character of judgement as a creative, meaning-bestowing projection into the future. The aesthetic, poetic sensibility in contrast becomes the paramount model of an attitude, where *Dasein* turns away from the intersubjective public sphere of *doxa* to become a passive medium through which the history of being is allowed to reveal itself (Heidegger 1993c, 227, 240–1; 1993b, 124–7; Eagleton 1990, 299, 301, 310–11; Guignon 1993, 15; Elliott 2005, 119, 122). Yet, the pervasive alienation from the world brought forth by instrumental reason's triumph over the whole of public sphere is here confronted by an ultimate renunciation of the meaningfulness of the

human capacity of judgement and action – submerging all events, individuals and actions under what "happens" within the broader totality of Being, which increasingly assumes the form of a divine destiny, unfolding independently of human control or even comprehension (Heidegger 1993c, 222–3; Eagleton 1990, 299–301, 306; Guignon 1993, 21).[24]

Husserl's and Heidegger's insight into the modern crisis of judgement as a profound predicament endangering the distinctly human way of being, thus leads them to recognize and confront the ambiguity of political judgement as it arises from our situated, worldly existence itself. In this way, they draw attention to the distinctly human, political significance of conceiving judgement as a reflective, worldly activity. Even if, in their lingering epistemological and metaphysical focus respectively, they ultimately fail to relate their judgement to the vagaries of the political world, their thought then nevertheless contains an urgent appeal to confront the modern crisis by rethinking political judgement as an activity able to respond to the often incomprehensible and threatening, and always plural and contingent, character of our political reality.

Concluding thoughts

The chapter traced how the increasing recognition of the situated, worldly condition of human political existence through history inspired the growing sense of the perplexity of political judgement as an activity that can no longer hope for a secure guarantor or yardstick lying outside of the world of human affairs. It followed the turn to the realm of aesthetics as a fruitful lens through which to delve into the experiential reality of judging and approach political judgement in its worldly ambiguity. The increasing awareness of the interdependent relationship between human consciousness and world revealed the ambiguous freedom of judgement, which, always already situated in the intersubjective worldly reality, cannot reach for absolute truth, but rather is predicated on confronting the particularity of the world and oriented towards a communicative engagement with a plurality of diverse others. Yet, the thus recognized

[24] For a brief overview of Heidegger's thought in relation to his involvement with Nazism see Guignon (1993, 26–36).

ambiguity of political judgement was equally persistently denied in the thinkers' lingering rationalist pretension to affirm human freedom outside or above the bounds of the world and grasp for complete knowledge of reality, tethering judgement to a new pre-determined end. The chapter pointed to how this obstinate penchant abstracts from the very particular, plural and contingent ground of the world that serves as the necessary condition of freedom – and in this way risks obliterating the significance of the human capacities for judgement and action under seemingly necessary, given laws. Revealing the political import of judgement as an activity in which the distinctively human character of our political existence itself is at stake, the chapter signals the paramount significance of the existentialist thinkers' explicit attempt to confront the modern crisis by imagining political judgement on the model of aesthetic sensibility and rethinking it as an activity capable of coming to terms with and responding to the fundamental and ambiguous human condition of being-in-the-world.

2 Sartre and Beauvoir: The ambiguity of political judgement and the challenge of freedom and responsibility

This chapter starts the attempt to rethink political judgement through the lens of philosophies of existence and their aesthetic sensibility by engaging Sartre's and Beauvoir's existentialist vision of the situated condition of human political existence. Tracing their insights into the roots of the modern crisis, it seeks to unearth their respective narrative efforts to rethink political judgement as a worldly ability capable of addressing the richness and complexity of the world of political affairs. The analysis of each thinker opens with a brief biographical preface, bringing forth in particular their practical ethical and political engagements. Based on their critiques of what they call the ideal, abstract notions of truth and knowledge, the chapter next seeks to disclose how their aesthetic sensibility foregrounds the ambiguity of political judgement as a creative practice of world-disclosure that confronts us with our responsibility for the world and at the same time always-already contains an appeal to the freedom of others. Building on this initial exposition, the chapter examines Sartre's and Beauvoir's increasing recognition of the worldly perplexity of political judgement as it stems from the constraining web of (oppressive) structures and forces that lie beyond any individual's control and frustrate any easy assumption of freedom. It seeks to discern how their narrative judging sensibility becomes oriented towards grasping the complexity of a given political reality and confronting the challenge of engaging the intricate web of the world through political action.

Jean-Paul Sartre

Jean-Paul Sartre was born in Paris in 1905. He was schooled at the prestigious *École Normale Supérieure,* where he studied philosophy and psychology, earned his *agrégation* in 1929 and, shortly after, started work on what was to become one of the most prolific and influential philosophic and literary careers of the twentieth century (see Thody 1971, 25–6). It was also around that year that he met Simone de Beauvoir, who, from that point on, became his close friend and intellectual companion until his

death in 1980 (Thody 1971, 26). With the publication of *Nausea* in 1938 and *Being and Nothingness* in 1943, Sartre gained international acclaim and firmly established himself as the founder of the twentieth-century existentialist movement. His vision of the absurdity of human existence after the "death of god" and the ensuing realization of human freedom and responsibility stirred the complacency of the predominant "bourgeois" world-view, and established the vogue of existentialism for decades to come.

Throughout his career, Sartre was at pains to distance himself from the idealism of the philosophical tradition that still dominated French philosophy in the 1920s, which plunged him into an enthusiastic embrace of Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenological approach to reality. But it was only during and especially after the war that "Sartre's great theme" of how to engage his ontological and ethical notion of freedom in the real political issues of the day came into its own (Aronson 2004, 95). After the Liberation, Sartre became the editor of *Les Temps Modernes*, the highly influential left-wing philosophical, literary and political journal, and increasingly associated himself with a number of political causes and movements. In the immediate post-war years he attempted to establish a non-communist left-wing alliance, *Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire* (RDR), which would bring together freedom and the struggle for social equality and thus provide an alternative to the two visions of the world that occupied political space after the war (Aronson 2004, 103; Howells 1988, 98). The movement's failure, as Beauvoir (1965, 6) notes, "gave Sartre a lesson in realism." Later Sartre accordingly placed greater emphasis on the constraining historical circumstances and the actual possibilities for change within these circumstances, which "forced him to choose" the communist side of the Cold War divide (see Sartre 1983c, 33; Aronson 2004, 106). Still, he never became a party member and always retained the status of an independent thinker.

For many, he thus came to embody the ideal of a politically engaged intellectual, who, in his literary and philosophical works as well as his practical choices, displays a commitment to human freedom and is willing to speak on behalf of those whose freedom has been denied and who are "less able to plead their own cause" – all the while determined to maintain his or her independence from political parties and institutions (Ungar 1988, 8, 15–16). Yet, it was also in the midst of his growing

involvement with practical knowledge that Sartre realized that "the process of *becoming-an-atheist* is a long and difficult enterprise" (Sartre 1983a, 168; see also Sartre 2000b, 157; Howells 1988, 273). It could indeed be argued that, despite his early rejection of idealism and rationalism, and despite making every effort to sink down and engage with the real world, Sartre was continuously grappling with the remnants of the traditional philosopher's ideal of a "glorious substance" beholding the Universe from its "perch" on the rooftops of the world (Sartre 2000b, 39–40). "The itinerary of his thought" (Sartre 1983c, 33) thus importantly points to both the necessity of radically rethinking the traditional understanding of political judgement as well as to the difficulties involved in such an enterprise.

The modern failure of absolutes and the experience of absurdity

The experience of modern times, for Sartre, is characterized by the pervasive spread of meaninglessness brought forth by the irreversible demise of the traditional standards of judgement. In his first novel, *Nausea,* he conveys this experience with a powerful vision of "metaphysical doubt" that overwhelms its hero, Roquentin. The "metaphysical" experience of meaninglessness comes from the realization that things exist and just that, without meaning or purpose, in their utter superfluity and arbitrariness, that "*behind them* …there is nothing" (Sartre 2000a, 176–85, 140). The very words we use to fix things in their meanings and by extension all forms of knowledge and morality, those traditional poles of judging certitude that seek to endow appearances with a necessary and justified being, a supposedly "given" purpose or function, in turn, become but vain attempts to clothe the fundamental truth of the world's contingency. In the midst of things and events which can no longer be comprehended in a meaningful way, Roquentin realizes that his existence, too, is superfluous, that he literally exists for Nothing and Nobody, facing a freedom that is so absolute that it resembles death (Sartre 2000a, 241, 223). In the person of Roquentin, Sartre thus depicts the modern crisis of judgement in terms of the nauseating experience of the fundamental absurdity of human existence that is no longer provided with "a given that it is *for*" (Sartre 2000a, 185; Barnes 1992, 23). In a world shorn of meaning,

where freedom to do anything and freedom to do nothing become one and the same, the significance of political judgement is lost.

The modern crisis of judgement Sartre traces to the presumptuous advance of bourgeois humanism and its abstract or what he calls "analytic" reason, which claimed for itself the ability and privilege to remove itself from the world, from this position intuit the ultimate truth of being, and explain the whole of reality in terms of its abstract, supposedly universal categories and essences (Sartre 1988a, 263; Sartre 2000a, 225). Political judgement, accordingly, became a determinant exercise that proceeded by reducing the meaning of each particular action or event to a clearly demarcated and justified place in "the Universe" governed by the immutable laws of Reason (Sartre 2000b, 55; see also Howells 1988, 7). In this way, however, it got caught in the lures of what Sartre (1992a, 57–8), in *Truth and Existence,* calls an "idealist" or abstract type of truth, which aims for absolute knowledge, but refuses to *"see"* and which is consequently only capable of producing "statements about Being without contact with Being." As such, political judgement is no longer based in reality, but becomes a self-enclosed and self-referential "totality of all knowledge," growing increasingly distant and in the end completely detached from real problems of human situated existence (Sartre 1992a, 58).

Armed only with its abstract and universal moral standards, assuring it that "nothing important will ever happen any more," not least the twentieth century, and that humanity was "advancing gently towards perfection," political judgement of the humanist tradition, needless to say, found itself helpless and without any adequate tools to confront reality when the completely unforeseen and unprecedented events at once abruptly situated it in the flux of history (see Sartre 2000b, 111; 2001a, 111–12). Unable not "only to solve but even to formulate the problems [it] intuited obscurely," this conception of political judgement was desperately trying to lift itself above the real antagonisms at work in society and hide from them behind its illusory idealism of universal human rights (Sartre 1988a, 263). Conceiving of human beings as abstract, rational, autonomous, self-contained and isolated subjects, lawful owners of abstract "Rights of Man and Citizen," however, it missed out on their concrete, embodied existence in the world (see Sartre 1988a, 262; 2000a, 131–2; see also Howells 1992, 324). It thus ended up making concessions to reality only in the form of vain

opportunism (Sartre 1988a, 263). But what for Sartre ultimately discredited bourgeois judgement was not only this somewhat benevolent ineptitude to relate to the real, but the fact that it itself became "a practice of exclusion" (Sartre 2004b, 752; see Howells 1992, 341). The false universalism of bourgeois morality was first exposed already in 1848, in the bloody suppression of the revolt of the Paris commune. Then, according to Sartre, the humanist conception of political judgement renounced the right to continue to present itself as a proponent of the rights of all citizens and revealed itself as a justificatory device for the perpetuation of injustice in the interest of the privileged classes (Aronson 1992, 282–3; see also Sartre 1988a, 259, 262).

To confront the modern crisis of judgement and the abyss of meaninglessness yawning in its wake, according to Sartre, we need to salvage political judgement from the clutches of the, at best, ineffectual and at worst hypocritical and positively harmful universalism of bourgeois morality. An adequate conception of political judgement, capable of endowing the world with greater freedom and justice, Sartre insists, must aim to liberate humans not as abstract substances, but in the concrete "totality" of their being-in-the-world (Sartre 1988a, 261). To that end, abstract morality must yield to a way of judging that will be able to relate to the particularities of our political reality and rekindle our capacities for concrete freedom and political action (Anderson 1993, 51).

Judgement as a creative practice of world-disclosure

The determination to confront reality in its concreteness and particularity leads Sartre to reject the traditional rationalist temptation of "philosophies of immanence" to imprison the human being within his or her pure intellect and its abstract ideas, detached from the world of political affairs (Anderson 1993, 5; Sartre 2003, 27). Instead, Sartre embraces the phenomenological emphasis on judgement and truth as a disclosure of the world by a human consciousness itself situated in the midst of the world (Sartre 1992a, 8, 13, 52–6, 58–9).

Striving to transcend the traditional subject-object dichotomy, Sartre affirms Heidegger's being-in-the-world as the fundamental ontological condition of human existence. At the same time, he remains careful not to deprive it of "the dimension of

consciousness," or, in other words, of human freedom, emphasizing that the relationship between human consciousness and the world is not one of identity, but of opposition and difference, or, said differently, of negation (Sartre 2003, 97; Howells 1988, 15). In illustrating this relationship, Sartre draws upon Husserl's idea of intentionality, his insight that "all consciousness is consciousness of something." In Sartre's hands, this insight indicates that consciousness, in itself, is Nothing, and thus alone able to relate to, intend, evaluate and judge the world as something which it is not (Anderson 1993, 5; see also Sartre 2010).

This structural gap within human consciousness firmly grounds Sartre's understanding of freedom as an inescapable fact of the human condition, as well as his conceptualization of judgement as free creation (Sartre 2003, 62–3, 239, 241; 2007, 38). In contrast to the object-like, self-contained existence of things – what Sartre calls an in-itself way of being – the nothingness at the heart of human consciousness grounds the insight that human beings are free, that is, exist in the mode of for-itself, of constantly engaging the world as it is given and transcending it towards as yet non-existent ends. While we are deeply enmeshed in our facticity, confronting a material world where meanings have already been determined by others, we also are free to detach ourselves from the given situation and project ourselves towards new possibilities of being (Sartre 2003, 223; Anderson 1993, 19–22). Sartre's ontology thus staunchly repudiates the so-called "spirit of seriousness," any attempt to ground our judgements on values or truths considered as "transcendent givens," written either in "an intelligible heaven" or coming from the world as obligations imposed upon us from the outside (Sartre 2003, 646). The sole foundation of judgement, for Sartre, lies in human freedom, envisioning the human judging ability on the model of aesthetic judgement that can rely on no pre-given, either idealist or realist standard or rule, but must "invent" the law in each particular case (Sartre 2007, 58–9). Judgement in other words becomes a reflective, creative practice of a human consciousness that thrusts itself towards future goals and in this transcending movement discloses or "saves" a dimension of the in-itself from its "timeless night," and groups it into an orderly environment for its projects (Sartre 1992a, 5, 14, 17–18). In this practice of "progressive unveiling," judgement corresponds to the temporal, situated condition of human political existence because it also affects "the temporalization of Being" (Sartre 1992a, 5). In the movement of transcendence towards

the end "that is not," judgement makes the "rich and undifferentiated raw material" of worldly events appear as a meaningful past, and in this way also reveals the world as a field of future possibilities (Sartre 1992a, 18–19). The model of aesthetics thus discloses the thoroughly human character of political judgement that is not reducible to detached contemplation or technical calculation, but corresponds to "consciousness' *means* of existing," embodying and offering support to human lived engagement in the world (Sartre 1992a, 46–7).

Thus conceived, judgement must confront the challenge of what Sartre (2003, 511) calls the ambiguity or paradox of (situated) freedom. This paradox manifests itself in the fact that while the practice of creative judgement is conditioned by and dependent on the grounds of the world of which it is consciousness, the given also is unveiled only from the subject's particular perspective in the world and in light of its free projections into the future (see Sartre 1992a, 5; 2003, 503–27). As a finite being situated in the midst of the world, the judging subject then can never achieve "a total and detailed knowledge" of this world or effect an ultimate, conclusive "totalization" (Sartre 1992a, 65, 72, 9). It must unveil being under the condition of necessary ignorance, of never being able to reach a completely transparent view of its possibilities nor fully predict the outcomes that its judgements are to assume in the world (Sartre 1992a, 72–3). Any desire to flee this ambiguity, for Sartre, amounts to a form of "bad-faith," an attempt to deny either of the two constitutive elements of our existence, and to escape the structural tension within our being in order to become a self-identical, substantial, absolute being – what Sartre calls "the in-itself-for-itself" – that would no longer need to choose itself in the world (see Sartre 2003, 70–94, 640–3; Cox 2006, 8–9, 39–40, 91, 116; Anderson 1993, 16). The ambiguity of judgement instead must be assumed in the attitude of so-called "pure reflection," where we abandon the desire to endow our existence with a determined foundation and become our "own self-cause", to instead choose to face up to the anguish of freedom and take its creative potential "itself for a value" (Sartre 2003, 640, 647).

The model of aesthetic judgement thus is well-suited to confront the modern failure of standards because, assuming our ambiguous condition of being-in-the-world, it is not oriented to our own, personal salvation, to reaching a state of a necessary or essential being, but commits to the salvation of the world, that is, to the ceaseless creation of

meaning and value on the ground of the undifferentiated in-itself (see Sartre 1992b, 515; Anderson 1993, 54–6; Howells 1988, 37). Even if we can rely on no pre-determined standard, the model of aesthetic judgement discloses the source of meaning and value in the relation between our creative freedom and its final "product" (Sartre 2007, 58–9). For while particular and relative to our situation, our judgements also contain our free, creative response to the overall situation of our being-in-the-world. An authentic ethical and political judgement, for Sartre, then contains a willingness to engage and disclose the particularity of the world with courageous lucidity and assume the responsibilities that this disclosure implies, yet, at the same time, accept the fact that its creations are "human, not divine" (Sartre 1976, 90; Anderson 1993, 58).

This should not be taken to mean, however, that our creative judgements amount to a lapse into mere subjectivism (Sartre 1992a, 7, 67). For engaging the world in freedom, aesthetic judgement also always already contains a "universal" claim of value and issues an appeal to the freedom of others to be recognized as such (Sartre 1992a, 67; 1960, 172; 2001a, 39, 35). The revealed truth, Sartre writes, must not "remain the property of the unique absolute-subject," but is a specifically "interdividual phenomenon" and is only meaningful "in the exteriority of *Mitsein,*" that is, if it is given and recovered by another (Sartre 1992a, 9, 7, 75). In this respect, aesthetic judgement embodies the realization that in the world devoid of an overarching subjectivity to effect the final totalization, it is others alone who can transform our particular unveiling into a transcendent end or value, and recognize our freedom as the creator of that particular unveiling (Sartre 1992a, 7; 2001a, 35). The practice of judging then presupposes our responsibility to offer our truth as a gift to other freedoms, who, in turn, are placed before "an exigence" and a task to recover it, to create what is disclosed *for themselves*, assume responsibility for it and decide on the course of action with respect to it (see Sartre 2001a, 46, 28–38; 1992a, 42).

Yet, because they are free, human consciousnesses are ontologically separated, that is, plural. Once I give my truth to other freedoms, then, their look transforms me along with my judgement into an object and alienates my subjectivity. They transcend it further in light of their own projects and confer on it a new dimension of being that "escapes me" and that I cannot know or predict (Sartre 1992a, 65–6). Ideally, others can share their vision with me in turn, but they can also keep it for themselves or exclude

me from their community of addressees; thus, Sartre (1992a, 65–6) says, any of my judgements "receives an external limitation" by the freedom of the other. The ambiguity of political judgement here stems from Sartre's insistence that, because consciousnesses are ontologically separated, I can never grasp others in their subjectivity and can only reach their "being-as-object" and their "probable existence in the midst of the world," thereby degrading them from their existence as subjects (Sartre 2003, 326, 281). While my totalizing grasp of the situation alienates what used to be their situation and their possibilities in the world, the others can of course always reapprehend themselves as free subjects and objectify me in turn (Sartre 2003, 286–9, 310–13). Thus, each judgement and the truth it discloses is simultaneously "total," "an absolute event," because "the absolute-subject is totalizing" and "absolutely transmits Being," and partial or, in other words, open insofar as it is a gift to the others to "make of it what they will" (Sartre 1992a, 5, 67, 64–5). Aesthetic judgement assumes this ambiguity arising from human plurality and, rather than clamouring for a final unveiling, a "dead" truth, wills the truth to live in its being a "commitment for the other" (Sartre 1992a, 12, 67). Predicated on recognizing itself to be a freedom in the midst of other freedoms, it commits to the constant sharing and communication of its truths to others (see e.g. Sartre 2001a, 39, 35).

Sartre's creative sensibility thus foregrounds political judgement as a practice that is no longer the prerogative of a few, expert politicians, but is "ontologically grounded" as a universal human capacity and, moreover, a "moral imperative" for everyone (see Sprintzen 2004, 22). Every decision to judge or not to judge, to unveil or not to unveil, and to participate or not in the unveilings of others, becomes a question of ethical choice between actively facing reality and assuming the related responsibilities or, on the other hand, fleeing reality and the responsibility that it implies (Aronson 1992, xiii). In the next section, I explore how this ethical imperative underlies Sartre's early conception of politically committed judgement.

Responsibility for the world and judgement as *praxis*

During and especially after the Second World War Sartre became increasingly

preoccupied with the political realities of his age, which also led him to turn his attention to the concrete, worldly constraints imposed upon the realization of human freedom as envisaged by his ideal of pure reflection (see Sprintzen 2004, 21). Confronted with the reality of history, the call for creative, authentic judgement becomes a matter of political *praxis*. As embodied in Sartre's call for committed writing, it comes to entail an active commitment on the part of human freedoms to free themselves from the temptations of bad-faith and work against particular instances of oppression within society that alienate humans from exercising the fundamental trait of their human condition. Sartre's insights into the political significance of judgement as creative disclosure thus represents his first attempt to reclaim the moral, human import of political engagement, and approach more concretely the ambiguity of political judgement and the uneasy relationship between ethics and politics that was to preoccupy him for the rest of his life (see Sartre 2001a, 172, 176, 184).

In his call for committed writing, Sartre develops the political significance of his insights into the worldly character of aesthetic judgement. Literary works, in particular prose, are of utmost political importance because they have a capacity to reveal the concreteness, particularity and ambiguity of our lived experience (Goldthorpe 1992, 147). For there, words are not regarded as ends in themselves (objects that please or displease in themselves) like in poetry, but primarily as designations for worldly things, actions or events, and so tear the writer away from himself and plunge him or her out into the world (Sartre 2001a, 5–8). By engaging his or her freedom to disclose the things of this world, as Sartre (1960, 169–70) writes, the writer's mission is to move events or situations "on to the plane of reflection" and into the intersubjective, human world. His or her judgement thus becomes part of our lived reality; it makes us accomplices of what has been revealed, confronts us with the overwhelming burden of responsibility "for what we have neither created nor wanted," and establishes new demands upon our freedom (Sartre 1992a, 46–7). Sartre's vision of politically committed judgement thus distances itself from Kant's conception of disinterested aesthetic judgement as finality without end. Limited only to arousing the "free play of imagination," such aesthetic judgement for Sartre fails to appeal to the creative freedom of the readers and remains at a remove from any ethical or political ends-oriented activity in the real world – thereby prefiguring the irresponsibility of art for art's sake

(see Howells 1988, 133–5; Sartre 1960, 177). Sartre's understanding of the political significance of aesthetic judgement, in contrast, is not based on its literary ability to describe, narrate or explain, which only serves the function of "pure contemplative enjoyment" or, alternatively, implies "acceptance" and "excuses everything" (Sartre 2001a, 224). The proper purpose of literature instead is "praxis" (Sartre 2001a, 224). By disclosing the world in its particularity, it also points to the possibilities of changing it and should thus kindle in its readers their concrete power of political action (see Sartre 2001a, 224).[25]

In this light emerge the dangerous political implications of the idealist conception of political judgement that seeks to confront reality from the standpoint of absolute morality, and its abstract principle of universal human dignity. For in adopting a perspective of a transcendent consciousness positing itself above history and in this way attempting to "transcend [its] age towards the eternal or towards a future of which [it can] have no grasp," idealist judgement severs and conceals the link between truth and human existence that brings it into being (Sartre 1992a, 79–80; 1960, 174–5). It thus represents a bad-faith attempt to diminish its relationship with the world, and, by extension, deny its freedom and responsibility of engaging it in action (Sartre 1992a, 28, 33, 38–41). By the same token, Sartre's aesthetic notion of political judgement rejects the historicist or realist tendency to define a given end of political action and "blindly accept" the means supposedly necessary to realize it, while being unable to "judge them" (Sartre 1960, 180–2). Rather, Sartre (1992a, 80) argues, "we must make ourselves historical against a mystifying history, that is, historialize ourselves against historicity." Sartre's aesthetic sensibility, that is, resists the temptation to assume a standpoint outside and above historical struggles and read history as a necessary, objective law of movement, which would render political action into an instrumental practice and reduce human beings themselves to mere means to be used in order to achieve an already determined end. Political judgement instead should seek to define "our 'end of history' within a larger history," that is, engage *our* particular and human world, which at the same time implies a recognition of our limited view of the future and a willingness to assume the inherent ambiguity and risk that, in the midst of the

[25] This is of course not to suggest that Sartre in any way supports the degradation of literature into a tool of propaganda, a mere means placed in the service of either bourgeois or communist utilitarianism (Sartre 2001a, 201–3).

world and plural others, our actions might produce "infinite" consequences – even to the point of destroying the very end pursued (Sartre 1992a, 10, 73–4).

Aesthetic judgement of the writer aims to confront this ambiguity by appealing to the readers' freedom to judge the present and its injustices from the "viewpoint of the City of Ends," to recognize plural others as free equals and work towards the realization of freedom for everyone (Sartre 2001a, 225–6, 1960, 172). This writers do by detaching themselves from their personal feelings and selfish concerns in a movement of self-reflection and transforming their emotions into free, generous, "selfless" and disciplined emotions (Sartre 2001a, 41). These correspond to "Kantian good will;" they take as their aim to always treat human beings as ends and not as means, and to inspire the same attitude in their readers (Sartre 2001a, 208–9). In this way, aesthetic judgement appeals to the readers to convert the "imaginary" freedom and the implicit community of the City of Ends that they experience in the act of reading into a demand for concrete freedom, realized in a socialist democracy, and to strive for "an objective modification of the historical situation" (Sartre 2001a, 123, 209–11; 1960, 175).

Yet, while Sartre's aesthetic sensibility thus acknowledges the complexity and ambiguity of the political world, it falls short of sufficiently exploring the problems that this ambiguity poses for the exercise of political judgement (Goldthorpe 1992, 143). Even though Sartre recognizes the situated character of free judgement – that it is not a "quasi-miraculous ability to do anything one wishes," but should always be understood as "a response to concrete and constraining circumstances" – he also strongly emphasizes "the transparency of consciousness," its capacity of detachment from its embodied, practical situation and its ability to reach a transparent view of the world (see Howells 1988, 23; 1992, 336; Anderson 1993, 7, 20–2). Even in "the darkest possible situation," Sartre (2001a, 205) writes, it is possible to reach a "clear-sighted" judgement, which, in turn, implies that "we can break away from [the worldly situation], at least in spirit, that we can examine it and thus already go beyond it and take up our resolutions in the face of it, even if these resolutions are hopeless." Sartre's aesthetic judgement, as noted by Goldthorpe (1992, 143), then "seems to lead to a confrontation of thesis and antithesis, in which the opacity of the situation is recognized on the one hand, and its intelligibility is simply asserted, against all the odds, on the

other."[26]

Sartre's insight into the political significance of aesthetic judgement in this respect remains mired in the traditional conception of the rational, absolute subject that is concerned less with confronting the concreteness and complexity of our situated, plural political existence than with resisting the "evil" "unintelligibility of our finite condition" and reaching a complete, comprehensive grasp of "the broken totality" (Murdoch 1980, 50–1, 55).[27] Even though Sartre recognizes the importance of acknowledging a plurality of diverse standpoints and approaching through them the "multi-dimensionality" of situations or events, for instance, his creative judgement also simply posits the reconciliation between them to occur by presupposing in all a universal capacity for freedom, regardless of the situational factors that shape and/or alienate it – thereby again abstracting from individuals' particular existence in the world. While acknowledging the existence of constraining social and political structures, further, Sartre's aesthetic judging sensibility discloses the given reality and the possibilities for change only through the perspective of an individual subject and the adequate or inadequate exercise of his or her freedom (see Kruks 1995, 86). Thus, it leaves us with a vision of political judgement incapable of moving beyond the vision of a plurality of separate absolute subjects towards a form of intersubjectivity and reaching a view of the general situation, the "concrete factual basis" necessary for collective political action and objective transformation of repressive political structures and relationships (Beauvoir 1965, 45; Kruks 2001, 42; 1995, 86; see also Pilardi 1999, 34–5).[28]

Indeed, Sartre himself soon came to see this aesthetic vision of political judgement through which he sought to carve out a possibility for a "third force" between capitalism and communism as overly idealistic in that it failed to pay sufficient attention to the complexity of social and political reality and the pervasive restrictions placed upon the exercise of human freedom by the historical situation. For the later Sartre, the political

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[26] This tendency chimes with Sartre's early view, espoused in *Being and Nothingness,* that human beings are equally, that is, wholly, free in any and all situations (Sartre 2003, 463, 569–71).

[27] It could be argued with Murdoch (1980, 75) that Sartre's vision of literary commitment betrays a certain "impatience […] with the *stuff* of human life," forgetful of the function of prose, not as "analysis, the setting of the world in order, the reduction to the intelligible," but as "creative of a complete and unclassifiable image."

[28] See for instance Sartre's (1976) analysis of the factual situation of anti-Semitism, which he approaches through the mind of the anti-Semite and the Jew and which he accordingly attributes to what he sees as the inauthentic exercise of freedom on the part of both (see Sartre 1976, e.g. 11–17, 90–3; Pilardi 1999, 34–5).

significance of aesthetic judgement lies not so much in its ability to communicate clear ideas, teach and change the world, as in its unique capacity to approach the lived experience of another person, at once characterized by the irreducible singularity and revelatory of the broader historical context (Goldthorpe 1992, 164; Howells 1988, 144). Thus, Sartre leaves behind his earlier faith in the free emotions' ability to realize a happy "symbiosis between writer and reader;" the writer is now as conditioned by the social world as the reader, and unable to reach a fully transparent view of political affairs (Sartre 1983b, 278, 273–5; Howells 1988, 172–3). The work of art is rather a manifestation, without ever being able to be a full disclosure, of the totality of human being-in-the-world, of a "singular universal" in its richness, ambiguity and opacity that can never be adequately approached through concepts, knowledge or ideas, but only as it is "*lived* without being *known*" (Sartre 1983b, 275–6, 283; see also Sartre 1988b). This aesthetic sensibility colours Sartre's adoption, in his *Search for a Method* (the preamble to his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*), of the approach of comprehension, through which he aims at an account of political judgement capable of engaging the concrete worldly reality of repressive political structures, and revealing to us the possibilities of liberating ourselves through common praxis.

Confronting "the vanity of morality with the efficacy of *praxis*"[29]

Later Sartre turns the centre of attention on objective, material, human-made structures – the so-called practico-inert – that both constrain and enable human action and represent, in Sartre's words, "the necessity of freedom" (Sartre 2004b, 489; see Caws 1992, 306). Accordingly, he draws on the framework of Marxism as the only philosophy of today that "takes man in his totality, that is, in terms of the materiality of his condition" as its point of departure and, as such, also "clarifies our individual and collective *praxis*" (Sartre 1968, 175, 178). To confront this field of alien and alienating historical, political forces and structures, Sartre writes, human beings must reach consciousness of their making history in common and steer history towards a single overarching meaning, which is progress towards the reign of actual freedom for all

[29] Beauvoir (1965, 242).

(Sartre 1968, 90; Barnes 1968, xxvi–xxviii). Political judgement must assume the form of dialectical reason, discover and interpret the plurality of meanings and actions in history in light of "a future totalization," that is, in light of the overall end of liberation, and thus "get a grip" on history as a realm of common human *praxis* (Sartre 1968, 88–90). Yet, political judgement must be careful not to succumb to Marxist historicism, the troubling tendency to make of the movement of history "the object of an absolute Knowledge," while again missing out on the lived experience and ambiguity of political action (Sartre 1968, 175). The challenge of approaching and judging worldly reality, for Sartre, instead should be taken up through the existential, situated, aesthetic sensibility called understanding or "comprehension" (Sartre 1986, 175).

The notion of comprehension builds on Sartre's earlier emphasis on the mutual recognition between human freedoms. Situated in the world, it refuses the possibility of any final totalization. It accordingly refrains from eliminating particular perspectives and actions too quickly by subsuming them under *a priori* frameworks and ideas, and instead involves a dialectical movement and "an enriching cross-reference" between the singularity of individual experience and the broader processes and practices that situate and produce the individual within a class, a society, and a history (Sartre 1968, 148–54). Sartre's understanding judgement in this way allows a grasp of plural others as subjects, that is, not only as abstract freedoms, but as embodied, situated and acting beings. For in disclosing both how their actions were conditioned by the objective situation and the way they responded to, assumed and transcended the given, it reveals them in their "lived surpassing" (Sartre 1968, 153–4; see also Kruks 2001, 120; Flynn 1992, 224). While affirming their difference, in other words, it also enables us to recognize them as our equals, that is, as "singular universals," bearing the same "existential structure" as we do: as both embedded in the world and as free intentionalities engaging the world in action (Sartre 1983a, 155, 167–8; Anderson 1993, 162; Kruks 2001, 120). Even though comprehension does not entail simply adopting the others' goals, it thus also discloses an "inner bond linking our singularities," and points to the possibility of transcending conflict towards mutual reciprocity and engagement in each other's projects (Sartre 1968, 167–8; Goldthorpe 1992, 154–5).[30] Nevertheless, judgement's ability to grasp the general situation and disclose the possibilities for political action, for Sartre, is based on

[30] Sartre explored the approach of comprehension in this light already in his *Notebooks for an Ethics.*

the perspective of future totalization, that is, the overarching framework of the historical dialectic. As Sartre (1968, 30–1) writes, "[p]articular facts do not signify anything; they are neither true nor false so long as they are not related, through the mediation of various partial totalities, to the totalization in process." Sartre's aesthetic attentiveness to considering situations and events in their plurality and complexity thus gives way to the emphasis on identifying the general structures, institutions and practices of oppression, and the forces and ends of political *praxis* capable of bringing about universal human liberation (Aronson 2004, 172).

His conception of political judgement as dialectical reason allows Sartre to offer insight into the structural violence and oppression of the capitalist and colonialist system that effectively keep certain groups of people in the state of subhumanity and maintain themselves by transferring responsibility from individuals to seemingly objective "demands" imposed upon them by the system (Aronson 2004, 205; Bernasconi 2008, 122; see also Sartre 2001b, 55–61). It thereby not only shows how such systemic factors easily blind us to our complicity in their perpetuation, creating "prefabricated crimes that are only waiting for their criminals" (Sartre in Aronson 2004, 205). It also draws attention to the ways in which the broader repressive political structures and forces can significantly limit the range of possible choices as to how to bring about their demise and points to how the remaining scope of freedom in a given situation can become, as Howells (1988, 91) notes, "the most terrible burden, for it carries with itself a concomitant responsibility" (see also Sartre 2001b, 66).

For Sartre, responsible politically committed judgement requires of us to assume our responsibility for the oppressive relations, engage ourselves "in every one of the conflicts of our time," and each time find ourselves firmly on the side of the oppressed (Sartre 1983b, 254). He repudiates the claims of the so-called "false intellectuals," who judge events from the perspective of universal morality and, while perhaps suggesting some reforms to confront the obviously unjust structures, condemn the violence of the oppressed in "the same breath" as that of their oppressors (Sartre 1983b, 253, 249–50). In this way, Sartre says, the false intellectual thwarts "the effort of various particularities towards universalization," that is, the attempts of the oppressed to liberate themselves, and, in effect, makes him or herself an accomplice of the established order (Sartre 1983b, 253, 261). Sartre's political judgement thus effectively dismisses with the liberal

humanist opposition to oppression and suffering on the grounds of moral principles which at the same time falls short of questioning and attempting to transform "the political conditions that generate [them]" (Butler 2008, 217–18). Proper political judgement instead is "a moment of praxis" that involves itself in the real world and at once illuminates and participates in the concrete political endeavours of bringing about an end to oppression (Sartre 1983b, 261). This means that an action cannot be judged by pre-fabricated moral absolutes, which would amount to an *a priori* rejection of violence. On the contrary, Sartre claims, means employed in action should be judged from the perspective of the end pursued; since an end "is always […] the unity of its means," the latter should be judged "in light of the principle that all means are good if efficacious, *provided* they do not deform the end pursued" (Sartre 1983b, 263).[31] Political judgement must confront the ambiguity of political affairs; it must accept the necessity of "contradictions" in our "universalizing endeavour" as well as of the fact that the constraining worldly circumstances will often confront our freedom with the necessity of making a clear-cut choice between being either a victim or a perpetrator (Sartre 1983b, 263–4; Sartre 2001b, 66).

Sartre's "political realism" should therefore not be interpreted as a mere submission to the necessity of things. It is the task of political judgement to retain attention on the human character and humanizing purpose of political action, to respond to the constraining circumstances with a view to the overall end of human liberation, and assume responsibility for the end projected as well as for the means accepted as necessary to bring it about – all without being able to claim for itself the confidence of a future standpoint. Political judgement must then preserve the space for critical reflection and continually evaluate concrete actions in light of the end pursued (Anderson 1993, 127). Nonetheless, judgement's recognition of the irreducible plurality and complexity of human existence, in Sartre's thought, leads not to moderation or an attempt at a partial reconciliation of the opposites that is characteristic of the ancient tragic confrontation between the protagonist and the forces beyond his control (Howells 1988, 81). Sartre instead furthers a conception of political judgement which insists on "a

[31] Sartre's attitude towards violence had been shifting significantly throughout his career. At his most radical, Sartre defended violence as not only a necessary means to end oppression, but also as in itself generative of the subjectivity, humanity and freedom of the oppressed (see Sartre 2001b, 145–8; Butler 2008, 220–3). He later moved to a more moderate position in his *Rome Lectures,* where violence becomes a legitimate means to achieve human liberation only under certain conditions (see Anderson 1993, 127–8; Aronson 2004, 280).

unitary supersession of opposites" and thus a conclusive transcendence of the conflict – which, in accordance with the dialectical movement, in turn is "creative of further contradictions" (Sartre 1983b, 164; Howells 1988, 81).

Sartre's dialectical notion of political judgement represents a worthy attempt to address the problem of how to confront the deeply ingrained structures of violence and oppression that can hardly be dismantled by an individual effort. Yet, in his insistence on the possibility of internalizing all of the contradictions of a given situation and reaching a totalizing response (McBride 2004, 245; see also Ciccariello-Maher 2008, 132), Sartre could also be said to remain in important respects within the absolute-subject perspective. In his efforts to "unify theory and practice" through committed judgement (McBride 2004, 245), indeed, could be discerned a new rationalist temptation to rise above the ambiguity of the human condition, subsume the plurality and complexity of the world under an intelligible schema (of the dialectic) and again reduce the human reality of political action to mere technical realization of a pre-given standard or value. On this point, Sartre has been harshly criticized by Merleau-Ponty, who detected in this strong assertion of intentionality a dangerous forgetfulness of the essential contingency of the human condition and of the future. For Merleau-Ponty, in contrast, the ambiguity of the political world only allows for judgements of "probability" and repudiates any claim to rationality so sure of itself that it is no longer open to others' perspectives (see Merleau-Ponty 2000, xxxvi–xxxix, 187–8, 1974, 186–94; see also Isaac 2004, 255–6). By embracing the overall framework of the dialectic, Sartre's "law of a 'transcendental *praxis*'" (Merleau-Ponty 2000, xxxi) also reduces the heterogeneity and plurality of human existence to the struggle between antagonistic dualities. Endowing one side with the mission to free the world, while destining the other to oblivion, political judgement precludes the possibility of any agreement and can in this way all too easily end up justifying "many things, if one wants to try to change a few of them" (Sartre 2004a, 147; see also Merleau-Ponty 2000, xxv; 1974, 185–6). Sartre's efforts to release political judgement from the confines of the false universalism of humanist morality and engage it in the real world through the lens of aesthetic sensibility thus risk leading to a new "serious" betrayal of the fundamental ambiguity of the world of political affairs. His presumptuous attempt to reduce the complexity of human lived reality to an abstract pattern (of the dialectic), that is, can be said to

embody a new temptation to forfeit the human capacities of judgement and action in front of a seemingly inevitable force of the given. For a contrasting vision, the next section turns to Simone de Beauvoir, in whose thought the recognition of the ambiguity of political judgement is much more explicitly felt.

Simone de Beauvoir

Simone de Beauvoir, arguably one of the most insightful thinkers of the twentieth century and largely recognized as the founder of modern feminism, was born in Paris in 1908 (Tidd 2009, 11). She studied philosophy at the Sorbonne, thus becoming one of the pioneering women to enter a predominantly male dominated profession, earned her *agrégation,* and later taught at various *lycées* for girls (Tidd 2009, 32–3).

Yet, despite her lifelong engagement with ethical and political issues of her time, Beauvoir became "a tremendously well-hidden philosopher," traditionally relegated to the position of Sartre's philosophical follower (Le Doeuff in Tidd 2009, 45; see Simons 2006, 29; Klaw 2006, 8). Recently, however, Beauvoir has gained increasing recognition for making an original contribution to existentialist thought and political theory more widely (see e.g. Hutchings 2009). Already in Beauvoir's student diary we are able to discern a pronounced sensitivity to the fundamental ambiguity of the human condition, stemming from her dramatic awareness of the essentially interdependent nature of the relationship between human freedoms, and a determination to confront this ambiguity through a highly original literary-philosophical approach to human reality (see Beauvoir 2006, e.g. 66, 162–5, 256–8, 279; Simons 2006, 30–5, 38–45). Both elements, this section argues, crystallize in an account of political judgement that provides us with a compelling alternative to the inadequacies of Sartre's model.

Largely apolitical before the war, the experience of collective suffering immersed Beauvoir in the world, leading her to develop the political implications of her view of the human condition and ground the exigency of political engagement and solidarity with others on the need for "mutual *recognition* of consciousnesses" (Beauvoir 2009a, 43, 319–20; see also Simons 2009, 17–28; Beauvoir 1973, 470). The post-war years thus saw the publication of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex,* which contain

the crux of Beauvoir's view of political engagement and responsibility and prefigure her later more direct political activism. The height of Beauvoir's political engagement, however, came with the Algerian war, which she experienced as "a personal tragedy" (Beauvoir 1965, 652; see Marso and Moynagh 2006, 6–7). Beauvoir defended the Algerian cause of independence and wrote in support of a young Algerian woman, Djamila Boupacha, accused of terrorist activities against the French state, imprisoned, raped and tortured by the French Army (see Tidd 2009, 120–3; Shelby 2006, 101–6; Caputi 2006, 109–26). Later she lent her support to a number of initiatives of the radical feminists and also engaged in the thorough study of society's oppressive and discriminatory attitude towards its elderly population (Tidd 2009, 140–50; Beauvoir 1996). Until her death in 1986, Beauvoir honoured the role of a committed intellectual forever vigilant and determined to publicly denounce the cases of injustice and oppression that plagued her world.

Traditional disregard for the human condition of ambiguity

A central concept in her writings and the underlying foundation of her explorations into ethics and politics, the notion of ambiguity, in Beauvoir as in Sartre, refers to the paradox at the heart of human existence: the fact that human beings are both free and also deeply situated in their social and political world (see Beauvoir 1948, 7). The modern crisis of political judgement, accordingly, Beauvoir traces to the traditional philosophical penchant to try "to mask" this fundamental truth of the human condition. Reducing political judgement to the application of predetermined standards of either idealist or realist kind, philosophers have ensnared human beings into the security of either "pure inwardness" or "pure externality," while detaching them from the realm of lived experience and rendering them unable to relate meaningfully to concrete, worldly reality (Beauvoir 1948, 8; 2004c, 189).

Like Sartre, Beauvoir mounts a rigorous attack against the rule of abstract idealism and its attempt to ground political judgement in universal and eternal moral principles. Predicated on the presumption of being able to rise above its concrete existence and survey the world from on high with complete transparency, the abstract, idealist

conception of judgement, for Beauvoir, encloses humans within "pure subjectivity," severed from others and outside world, and signifies an escape from worldly concerns into the haven of one's "virtuous soul" (Beauvoir 2004c, 177). Not only is it thus unable to address and respond to the complexity of the world and the ambiguity of engaging it in action. It places the necessarily risky and impure character of political affairs "forthwith outside of ethics" (Beauvoir 2004c, 177). As such, the abstractness of traditional moral judgement in fact furthers, as its other side, a realist understanding of politics that submits the human judging ability to the ends supposedly inscribed in reality, while eliminating human freedom under the "objective" necessity of things. But the fateful move, for Beauvoir, occurs in modern times when political judgement comes to be based on the principle that "[humans] themselves are their own end" and finds in this claim the objective foundation and justification for political action (Beauvoir 2004c, 181). Once the end is determined and depicted as an absolute, however, "all means [are] relative to the end," which opens the way for a judgement willing to sacrifice everything, even humans themselves, to the realization of that end (Beauvoir 2004c, 181–2; 1948, 48–9). In this way, political judgement becomes stripped of all human content and significance and reduced to a technical matter of calculating the means, in themselves inessential, necessary for the achievement of a pre-given goal (Beauvoir 2004c, 181–2).

Beauvoir then delves deeper into the modern malaise than Sartre, disclosing how the supposedly absolute standards of morality became perverted in the rise of the teleological understanding of political judgement and action. For seeking to realize in politics the reign of absolute ends without regard and even in opposition to the particularities of human existence, the modern teleological understanding of political judgement ultimately exposed the dangers behind the traditional fallacy of approaching the situated and plural world of politics with the abstract, supposedly universal philosophical systems and constructions conceived in the mind of an individual thinker (see Moynagh 2006, 14; Holveck 1995, 70–1). The modern assertion of human powers, Beauvoir writes, thus also brought to light to an unprecedented degree the fundamental ambiguity of political judgement. This ambiguity became clearly evident in the experience of an increasingly unbearable and tragic tension between the human capacities of taking hold of and controlling their lives and the untameable resistance of

the world and plural others:

> They know themselves to be the supreme end to which all action should be subordinated, but the exigencies of action force them to treat one another as instruments or obstacles, as means. The more widespread their mastery of the world, the more they find themselves crushed by uncontrollable forces. Though they are masters of the atomic bomb, yet it is created only to destroy them. Each one has the incomparable taste in his mouth of his own life, and yet each feels himself more insignificant than an insect within the immense collectivity whose limits are one with the earth's. Perhaps in no other age have they manifested their grandeur more brilliantly, and in no other age has this grandeur been so horribly flouted. (de Beauvoir 1948, 8–9)

To face up to the modern confusion, Beauvoir (1948, 9) argues, we need to "try to look the truth in the face:" that is, abandon the traditional quest for the security of universal standards and rules and conceive of political judgement as an ability able to recognize and confront the ambiguity of political affairs stemming from our at once free and situated existence.

Confronting the ambiguity of political judgement as free creation

To reinvigorate the human ability to relate to the ambiguity of politics, Beauvoir, like Sartre, rejects all "reasonable metaphysics" and "consoling ethics" of traditional philosophy that seek to approach and tame the particularity of the world with clear, timeless and abstract ideas, gratifying theoretical constructions and systems of thought (Beauvoir 1948, 8, 13–14). By extension, she dispenses with the traditional conception of political judgement as an abstract, rational exercise, untrammelled by worldly reality, that proceeds as a technical application of a set of pre-given standards and rules (see Kruks 2012, 124). Like Sartre, Beauvoir instead takes as her point of departure the human condition of being-in-the-world and conceives of political judgement as a reflective, creative practice of world-disclosure. Yet, in contrast to Sartre's emphasis on the intentional, totalizing power of consciousness, Beauvoir's orientation is distinct for its persistent focus on the judging subject's situatedness in the world and its entanglement in relationships with others (see Beauvoir 2004b, 160–3). As such, Beauvoir manifests a greater attentiveness to the worldly process of arriving at a

judgement that escapes philosophical elucidation, but corresponds to the literary, narrative ability to approach and respond to the ambiguity and complexity of our lived reality and the particularity of diverse others (Beauvoir 2004d, 275). Indeed, as Kruks (2012, 130) notes, Beauvoir's insight into the ambiguity of human existence illuminates political judgement as "the unfolding of the lived experience of deliberating, deciding and acting within the complex, shifting field of possibilities and constraints that is the world of politics."

To assume our situated human condition, for Beauvoir, the judging subject must adopt the attitude of conversion, which, following the example of Husserlian reduction, involves a suspension of all pre-fabricated, metaphysical claims about the ultimate truth of the outside world, along with the attendant philosophical desire to reach self-coincidence or a necessary, god-like way of being (Beauvoir 1948, 12–14; Holveck 1995, 73). Judgement thus is conceived as a situated, practical activity in which the subject engages the particularity of the world as phenomena, transcends itself towards as yet non-existent goals, and in this upsurge creates meaning and value on the grounds of the world and among a plurality of other freedoms (see e.g. Beauvoir 1948, 13). Like in Sartre, Beauvoir's aesthetic sensibility discloses political judgement as a distinctly human ability that is not reducible to detached contemplation nor lies within the prerogative of the wise few, but corresponds to the lived movement of engaging the world in "support or rejection" – which, in turn, contains an appeal to each and every one of us to judge and assume our responsibility for the world and others (Beauvoir 2004c, 180–1, 188, 176). Yet, in this activity of detaching itself from the world, human freedom, for Beauvoir, is never "a pure for-itself," a nothingness opposed to the givenness of the in-itself, as for Sartre (Beauvoir 2004b, 163). It rather resembles "a hollow" or "a fold" that comes closer to Merleau-Ponty's conception of the concrete, embodied freedom always-already indissolubly linked to others as to the world (Beauvoir 2004b, 163; see also Kruks 1995, 88–9). Our reflective capacity of judgement then remains conditioned and suffused by our worldly situation that stands to a large degree beyond our control and significantly shapes our possibilities of perception and choice (Kruks 2012, 134–8, 141, 149; 2005). Shying away from the lingering "Cartesian ghost" and the quandaries of the absolute subject plaguing Sartre (Butler in Simons 1995, 258), Beauvoir thus offers a heightened understanding of the

constitutive ambiguity of political judgement. While in our judgements we always transcend the given towards new perspectives and possibilities, it is also only on the ground of the world already revealed and endowed with a plurality of human significations that our disclosures gain meaning (Beauvoir 1948, 71; see also Bergoffen 1995, 183–4). And while in judging we get a hold of the world and "root" ourselves in it, "the same movement" also distances the world from us, pushes it away "to the always inaccessible horizon of [our] experience" (Beauvoir 2004b, 162–3).

A situated activity, political judgement can never reach a complete, lucid grasp of the situation as an object in-itself, but discloses a world that is at once familiar and mysterious, "at one moment translucent, at another utterly opaque," encompassing multiple aspects and forces that can never be fully mastered by the rational mind (Beauvoir 1965, 276; see also Pilardi 1999, 118–9; Zakin 2006, 32). Yet, her insight into the incompleteness of our judgements, also draws Beauvoir to affirm the inherently intersubjective character of our judging ability. In a world devoid of transcendental yardsticks and absolute standards, it is other freedoms alone who can recognize our disclosures, thereby affirm our freedom, take up our judgements and thus also hold the future open for us (Beauvoir 1948, 71; see also Bergoffen 1995, 183–4). Similarly, an individual's refusal to engage with the perspectives of others and consider their judgements constitutes an attempt to deny or alienate their freedom, to reduce them to the way of being of a mere object – by which, in turn, that individual is excluded from the human world, destining him or herself to the existence of "a thing among things" (Beauvoir 2004a, 132–3). As Beauvoir (2004a, 140) writes, human consciousnesses "support each other like the stones in an arch, but in an arch that no pillars support." In this way, our judgements and actions are provided with both "limits" and "content:" they must seek to recognize and respect the freedom of others, and work towards the liberation of those whose freedom has been denied (Beauvoir 1948, 60; Bergoffen 1995, 184). But, Beauvoir (1948, 73) quickly adds, "the others are separate, even opposed." Precisely because human consciousnesses are free, "they do not agree among themselves," and can never be expected to come together in a City of Ends, "where the reconciliation of human judgements is accomplished" (Beauvoir 2004a, 131).

Beauvoir thus conceives of political judgement as an activity that contains and must be able to respond to the ambiguous dynamics of intersubjective recognition that

eschews Sartre's lingering desire for a conclusive, universal agreement. Instead, Beauvoir retains attention on the worldly dimension of judging as a practice of constantly communicating our perspectives, truths and values to others and appealing to their freedom, which simultaneously implies a willingness to put ourselves in danger before them, and to consider their judgements in turn (Beauvoir 2004a, 129, 133, 136). Beauvoir's persistent focus on political judgement as a creative, communicative practice is of utmost political significance because it offers a heightened awareness of the distinctly human import and ambiguity of politics as a sphere of action. Rather than a technical activity amenable to the rule of prefabricated standards, calculation or governance, Beauvoir writes, politics is a realm of human freedom and "begins only when [humans] surpass themselves toward general human values," "tear [themselves] away from [their] individual situation, transcend [themselves] toward others, and transcend the present toward the future" (Beauvoir 2004c, 183).

Relying on its universal moral principles, the idealist, abstract type of judgement may well be able to recognize others as freedoms and absolute ends of political action, yet do so in abstraction from their particular situation in the world. Thereby failing to recognize others in their embodied, situated existence, it cannot but miss out on the worldly constraints imposed upon their freedom and thus also is incapable of conceiving of concrete goals of liberation. Worse still, as Beauvoir writes evoking the example of conservative bourgeoisie, judgement based on guarding universal values, paradoxically, easily lapses into mere "realist" utilitarianism, reducing differently situated perspectives to the manner of mere material, thing-like being and excluding them from the realm of the legitimate exercise of freedom (Beauvoir 2004c, 182). The workers' struggle for justice, for instance, is interpreted as an expression of natural, material needs to be met by charity or aid, while denying the element of human freedom contained in their demand for bread and alienating their possibilities for political action (Beauvoir 2004c, 182–3). The teleological, historicist type of judgement, in contrast, recognizes humans in the particularity of their situated existence and aims to affirm their transcending movement towards liberation. Yet, in conceiving of this movement in terms of a necessary progression towards a pre-defined end, it similarly places faith in "the idea of a ready-made self toward which the subject that I am would transcend itself," while reducing the world and others to mere means, inert material to be

employed for its realization (Beauvoir 2004c, 183; 2004a, 136). Thus, it again misses out on the distinctly human capacity of political action, which, if it is to remain free, is "by definition" a transcendence towards as yet non-existent ends and must accordingly confront the ambiguity of free engagement in the world without "ready-made answers" (Beauvoir 2004c, 179, 181, 187). For Beauvoir, the political challenge and promise of creative judgement lies in its ability to recognize others in the ambiguity of their worldly existence, that is, as both free and also deeply embedded in the social world and inter-human relationships. Its aim is not to take the others' freedom an *a priori* end, but appealing to them as freedoms "so that [their] end may be freedom" (Beauvoir 1948, 142). In our appeal to the freedom of others, in other words, we should not be guided by the desire "to fulfil the other," to make our judgement "the foundation of his [or her] being" and actions (Beauvoir 2004a, 121). The purpose of political judgement instead should be to disclose the world in a way that reveals "points of departure" and "possibilities" for the free engagements and projects of others (Beauvoir 2004a, 121–4).

Beauvoir confronted this challenge through a distinct novelistic, literary approach to theorizing, which shies away from the lingering rationalist penchant at work in Sartre's notion of committed writing. The political significance of narrative judging sensibility, for Beauvoir, lies in its ability to imitate and bring to light "the flesh-and-blood presence," ambiguity, complexity and contradiction of human lived experience, which "exceeds any subjective interpretation" and "is disclosed in the living relation that is action and feeling before making itself thought" (Beauvoir 2004d, 270, 275). In this way, literary judgement appeals to the freedom of others to engage "with a movement of [their] entire being" in the same "work of creation," in the process of reflecting, doubting, choosing and taking sides, of confronting and responding to the ambiguity and plurality of lived reality (Beauvoir 2011b, 294; 2004d, 270). The unique function of the narrative approach towards the world, for Beauvoir, thus consists of communicating and acknowledging of each other's lived experience, and thereby facing up to the contingent, multifaceted and often tragic character of reality by building bonds with others "through that which is the most solitary in ourselves and by which we are bound the most intimately to one another" (Beauvoir 2011b, 286, 297).

However, if the novelists assert their subjectivity in too sovereign a way, if they turn their story into a vehicle for expounding a prefabricated idea, a doctrine or lesson, if

they force their conclusions upon the reader they impoverish the very world and its ambiguity that they were supposed to disclose and also betray the literary purpose of "genuine communication" (Beauvoir 2004d, 270–2). Instead, Beauvoir thought that the writer's ability to communicate "the density of the world" could be greatly enriched by employing multiple viewpoints, that is, presenting the world through the eyes of various characters, none of whom "is the repository of absolute truth" and all of whom only possess a limited knowledge of the situation (Beauvoir 1965, 264; 1973, 344). Beauvoir later built on this insight, developing further the significance of Sartre's notion of the singular universal. In the two talks on the importance of literature that she gave in 1964 and 1966, she traces the distinct political significance of literary sensibility to its ability to express, in a singular and unique way, "a world" and thus disclose a more general meaning of our worldly existence (Beauvoir 2011a, 198–9; 2011b, 284–7). By appealing to others to engage with and participate in individuals' lived experience in its particularity and plurality, in other words, it enables humans to recognize each other as "situations" or as situated freedoms that, while remaining distinct, also "intersect," revealing their lived reality as a world that they share in common (Beauvoir 2011a, 200–1). Literary judging sensibility thus acts as "the privileged place of intersubjectivity" or "a mediation" between oneself and the world and diverse others, allowing us to adopt the perspectives and situations of others without eliminating their otherness and to venture out of our own standpoint while remaining ourselves (Beauvoir 2011a, 201; 2011b, 287–8, 296). In this way, Beauvoir's political judgement can be seen as an affirmation of solidarity between a plurality of human freedoms that, in disclosing and embedding themselves in their shared worldly reality, find a common ground on the basis of which to recognize each other in their distinctness and communicate "in what separates [them]" – furthering a vision of politics based on the mutual recognition of human freedoms as plural equals (see Beauvoir 2011a, 199–200).

It was this narrative sensibility that refrains from claiming total knowledge of the world to focus instead on the exploration of human lived experience through a variety of its exemplary variations that guided Beauvoir's examination of the situation of women in *The Second Sex* (Holveck 1995, 73–4). There, Beauvoir shows how *a priori* truths or "myths" of "the eternal feminine" essence, a fixed identity, have reduced women to the status of "the Other," denying their subjectivity and alienating their

possibilities of engaging the world in action (Beauvoir 2009b, 12, 5–6; Moynagh 2006, 13–18). Yet, she does not confront this oppressive situation with an abstract universalist perspective, which, in abstracting from the particularity of individuals' embodied, situated existence – in denying that women (or Jews or Negroes) exist – would amount to a "flight" from reality and thus also thwart the possibilities for emancipatory political action (Beauvoir 2009b, 4; 1973, 165–6). Instead, her judgement emerges from a systematic exploration of the multiple and varied examples of women's lived experience and allows for an understanding of women's general situation in the world – "without enslaving them to a timeless and deterministic pattern" (Beauvoir 1973, 166; see also Beauvoir 2009b, 289, 766–7).[32] In contrast to Sartre, Beauvoir's narrative judging sensibility allows for an understanding of the ways in which a particular situation shapes and constrains the possibilities for certain individuals or groups to engage the world in freedom, yet without yielding to a temptation to "view the truth behind 'reality' in terms of a synthesis," to subsume particular experiences and facts under an overarching grasp of a historical dialectic (Kruks 1995, 88–9; Beauvoir 1973, 488; Simons 1995, 248–51). Revealing how women's existence is shaped by their broader worldly environment, it exposes that their situation does not constitute a given necessity or a natural fact, but corresponds to an instance of oppression established by what human society has made out of "certain physiological characteristics" and female embodiment (Beauvoir 1973, 367; 2009b, 6–13, 16–17).[33] Disclosing how women's capacity for freedom is suffused by a web of worldly relationships, structures and forces, however, it also reveals their situation as a source of powerful constraint that is not caused simply by individual bad-faith and that, by implication, cannot be changed by any individual effort, but requires collective political action (see Beauvoir 2009b, 776; Kruks 2001, 43–5).

Illuminating individual experience in their broader meaning, tying them into a broader narrative and transcending them towards a more general validity, Beauvoir's narrative judging sensibility also discloses the possibilities for change – yet without tying the promise of emancipatory political action to a totalizing teleological law of

[32] The same method also underlies Beauvoir's exploration of the situation of the elderly in *The Coming of Age* (1996) and her autobiographical writings (see Beauvoir 2011b, 291–2; Pilardi 1999, 110–12, 119–21).

[33] Beauvoir's distinct contribution, in this respect, is to draw attention to individuals' particular embodiment as not only an instrument of their practical involvements, but as thoroughly shaping their lived experience and their possibilities of engaging the world in action (see Kruks 2001, 47–51).

praxis (see Vintges 1995, 49; Moynagh 2006, 26; Kruks 2001, 46).[34] Instead, as Kruks (1995, 89) notes, Beauvoir's judgement can only give rise to claims of generality and probability. By inspiring individuals to venture "out of the limited frame of their own subjectivity" towards the world and others, however, it for instance reveals to women the commonalities in their situation, and also suggests the possibilities for them to act in order to transform these oppressive conditions, both individually and collectively (Shelby 2006, 98; Moynagh 2006, 21–3, 12). Moreover, trying to find common ground precisely in the irreducible singularity and uniqueness of individuals' experience, it resists attempts to reduce the world to the struggle between two opposing poles, striving to escape the pattern of the unfruitful polemic between feminists and "masculine arrogance" (Beauvoir 2009b, 15, 770–1). Beauvoir's judgement instead invites both men and women to realize that "the wrongs of one do not absolve the other," assume the ambiguity of their situation with "lucid modesty," acknowledge that, while different, they also are essentially interconnected and interdependent through their common worldly reality, and recognize each other as equals (Beauvoir 2009b, 774, 779–80).

Political judgements of probability, risk and sacrifice

Nonetheless, Beauvoir's narrative insight into the contradiction, plurality and complexity of the world also led her to refrain from regarding the mutual recognition of human freedoms as a panacea for the world's evils (see Zakin 2006, 33–41). Her pronounced sensitivity to the ambiguity of "freedom within constraint" honestly confronted the outrageous fact that some situations might compel us to treat others as objects and use violence to further the cause of liberation – that, as Beauvoir says, when "persuasion fails, only violence remains to defend oneself" (Kruks 2012, 150; Beauvoir 2004a, 138; 1948, 97).

Shorn of the security of the progressive movement of Sartre's dialectic, Beauvoir's narrative judgement staunchly resists any attempt to justify the use of violence as a necessary course of action, imposed upon us by a pre-given future end. Because it

[34] Beauvoir refused to subsume women's struggle for emancipation under the general framework of class struggle and was less than convinced that the modification of the economic situation and the realization of the socialist society could by itself bring about gender equality (Beauvoir 2009b, 776–7; Ward 1995, 229; Simons 1995, 248–51, 260).

cannot place faith in the certainty of a pre-established (universal) rule, but itself contains the lived movement towards others and towards general human values, her narrative judging sensibility allows for no easy acceptance of the sacrifice of individuals to community, of the present to the future (Beauvoir 2004c, 186). Instead, it retains attention on the interdependency of means and ends – coalescing in a heightened recognition of how easily the employment of unjust means can pervert and destroy the meaning of the desired end (Beauvoir 2004c, 184–7). And yet, Beauvoir emphasizes, political action can proceed only on the grounds of the world, "on the basis of givens, of corporeal presences," which means that an insistence on respecting the purity of ends amounts to a flight from the world that risks to "ensure the defeat of those values that one wants to triumph, out of respect for them" (Beauvoir 2004c, 189; 185). For a politics to be valid, claims Beauvoir (2004c, 180), "it must first and foremost be successful," foregrounding the need for judgement to be attentive to issues of "opportunity and efficiency" (Beauvoir 1948, 89).

Beauvoir confronted this ambiguity of political action with the advent of the Algerian war, where she was firm in her denunciation of colonial injustice, which at the same time entailed her support for the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale,* National Liberation Front), an organization fighting for an independent Algeria. In the essay written in defence of Djamila Boupacha,[35] she engages sympathetically with the young woman's lived experience of torture and rape by the French Army, revealing in the singular instance a broader system of injustice that the French state instituted beyond its "democratic" borders (Beauvoir 2012b; 1965, 500–4; Murphy 1995, 281–2). Beauvoir thus appeals to her readers to assume responsibility for a world of structural oppression that cannot be adequately confronted by mere moral condemnation of torture and violence, but requires direct political action to end the unjust war and grant Algeria its long-awaited independence (Beauvoir 2012b, 280–1; see also Murphy 1995, 281–2, 285). As Beauvoir writes in her polemical essay on Boupacha, there exists a single, clear-cut choice: either you align with the victims and yield support to their cause of independence or "take sides with the torturers of those who are suffering today and passively consent to the martyrdom they endure in your name, almost under your noses"

[35] Approached by Boupacha's lawyer, Gisele Halimi, Beauvoir agreed to commit herself to the cause by rallying public opinion and confronting her readers with the injustice of French colonial oppression in Algeria (see Kruks 2012, 113–15).

(Beauvoir 2012b, 281). For Beauvoir, then, French colonial oppression presented a situation, where a refusal to inflict violence amounted to a choice to perpetuate the existing structural violence and conditions of oppression – which led her to regard the terrorist means employed by the FLN as the "only" means at the rebels' disposal to resist the French armed forces (see Langer 2003, 100; Beauvoir 1948, 96–155; 1965, 340–1).

Beauvoir's narrative judging sensibility in this respect seems to come close to Sartre's embrace of historical necessity, where we are forced to endorse one side of the conflict in order to free ourselves of our complicity with the other. Nevertheless, in contrast to Sartre's affirmation of the subject's totalizing powers, Beauvoir's narrative sensibility retains attention on the ambiguity of human engagement in the world and among separate others, allowing it to uphold the necessarily partial, probable and uncertain character of our judgements. Beauvoir's main contention is that our judgements remain grounded in our freedom, that we are the ones who are "forced to choose," in concrete circumstances and without the guidance of an external standard or rule, which at the same time implies the necessity of accepting risk and the possibility of failure (Beauvoir 2004c, 190). In particular, Beauvoir's narrative judgement upholds the "unique and irreducible value" of each particular event or individual, and thereby also affirms the reality and value of sacrifice involved in judging politically (Beauvoir 1948, 107). A decision to "kill only one man in order to save millions," Beauvoir (2004c, 190) writes, brings into the world "an absolute outrage" that cannot be relegated to the status of a stage or a contradiction in an overarching teleology, that cannot "be compensated for by any success," "be overcome or remedied, nor integrated into the totality of action." This means that, for Beauvoir, a judgement on the use of (violent) means must be the outcome of "the painfulness of an indefinite questioning" and should not be "taken hastily and lightly," while at the same time reconciling with the inevitability of "defilement, failure, horror" that attends the reality of worldly engagement (Beauvoir 1948, 133, 150; see also Hutchings 2007, 123).

Dispensing with the rational faith lingering in Sartre in the ultimate reconciliation between human and world and separate others, it is then the distinct contribution of Beauvoir's narrative sensibility to assume the ambiguity of political judgement, insisting that judgement is "a wager as well as a decision" (Beauvoir 1948, 148). For it

is only in assuming this ambiguity, in the forever vigilant willingness to judge and engage the realm of political affairs, to accept the possibility of failure rather than fleeing it in the traditional dream of purity and certainty, that, for Beauvoir, lies the promise of arousing and sustaining the world of politics as "a human world" (Beauvoir 2004c, 190–1).

Concluding thoughts

Sartre's and Beauvoir's aesthetic sensibility brings to light the distinctly human import of political judgement, disclosing how the human judging ability as a creative, communicative practice foregrounds our common responsibility for the world of political affairs and kindles our capacities of engaging it in action. The chapter sought to illuminate in particular how their aesthetic judging sensibility is employed to confront the ambiguity of political judgement as it stems from engaging the weight of the world, the plurality, complexity and opaqueness of political reality that necessarily stands beyond the completely transparent grasp and determining powers of the subject. In Sartre's eventual embrace of historical necessity, it discerned a new rationalist temptation to reduce the intricacies of human lived reality to an abstract schema (of the dialectic), thereby risking to forfeit the human capacities of judgement and action in front of a seemingly inevitable force of the given. Sartre's solution, in turn, it contrasted with Beauvoir's greater attentiveness to the intersubjective, plural and uncertain character of political judgement, pointing to how her narrative judging sensibility reveals both the possibilities of confronting the ambiguity of politics through mutual recognition between a plurality of human freedoms as well as the inevitable spectre of risk, tragedy and sacrifice involved in judging politically.

3 Camus and Arendt: Confronting the ambiguity of political judgement and illuminating the limits of the world

Against this background of the perceived difficulty of political judgement as identified by Sartre and Beauvoir, this chapter explores Camus's and Arendt's existential orientation that nevertheless resists the conventional world-view of "existentialism." In their efforts to understand the breakdown of traditional standards of thought, it unveils a deeper sense that the recognition of the ambiguity of political judgement requires heightened efforts to creatively confront, rather than simply resign to the perplexing and complex character of the political world. The chapter first engages Camus's "artistic" sensibility, beginning with a brief biographical overview of his ethical and political orientation and commitments. Based on his insights into the depth of the modern crisis of judgement, it continues by illuminating the political significance of his aesthetic attentiveness to the limits of the world and of others – revealing how it coalesces into an account of political judgement bent on confronting the exigencies, conflicts and injustices of the political world not by making the seemingly necessary choice between "victims and executioners," but by resisting the ideological reasoning of absolute ends and instead constantly striving to reveal common ground for dialogue between a plurality of human freedoms. The next section starts by bringing into view Arendt's distinctly political – and oft contested – existential orientation. In this light, it aims to reveal how her reworking of Kant's account of aesthetic judgement further illuminates the humanizing import of Camus's artistic sensibility by foregrounding the human judging capacity as a specifically political ability that is oriented to invigorating human plurality and thus disclosing a worldly, public space for the appearance of human words and deeds.

Albert Camus

The thought of Albert Camus is characterized by a thoroughgoing rebellion against traditional philosophy's taste for abstract reasoning and system-building. In this rebellion, Camus rejected the label of a philosopher altogether, and counter-posed to the

ways of thinking, prevalent in the Western tradition of political thought, the sensibility of an artist (see e.g. Camus 1995g, 239; Camus in Todd 1997, 408). Indeed, it was his profound "distrust of ideas" that led Camus to distance himself not only from traditional philosophy but from existentialism as well, which, at least in Sartre's version, for him represented "a complete philosophy, a vision of the world, which presupposes a metaphysics and an ethics" (Camus in Aronson 2004, 283). Nevertheless, his recognition of the tragedy of human existence in the world of the dead god coupled with his ceaseless affirmation of "the clairvoyant love" of the human condition (Camus 1970d, 152) firmly established him as one of the main representatives of the existentialist movement and one of the leading voices of his generation. In the history of modern political thought, though, his voice got somewhat obscured; while generally acclaimed for his artistic talent, Camus was largely disregarded as a political thinker worthy of the philosophical canon (Novello 2010, 3). In the recent resurgence of interest in his thinking, however, Camus came to be recognized as providing a peculiar ethical and political orientation that, while defying "conventional theoretical labels and methods," is of continued significance for addressing the dilemmas and concerns of contemporary political life (Hayden 2013b; Isaac 1992, 15; 2004, 267; Zaretsky 2010; Srigley 2011).

Camus was born in Algeria in 1913, into the poor family of French settlers, and studied philosophy at the local *lycée* in French colonial Algiers (Sprintzen 2004, 33–4). Under the influence of his professor, Jean Grenier, he drew inspiration from the tragic sensibility of the pre-Socratic Greeks and Nietzsche (Isaac 1992, 14; Spritzen 2004, 37). From the beginning, then, and even though he became friends with Sartre, Beauvoir and a wider group of Parisian intellectuals, Camus was somewhat of an outsider to the idealist tradition of French philosophy as well as to the overall atmosphere of Parisian intellectual life (see Sprintzen 2004, 32–6). Political engagement, on the other hand, came to him "much more naturally," seeing no need for prior philosophical elucidation and justification (Aronson 2004, 25). Already at the age of twenty-two he joined the Communist Party, and became increasingly concerned with the unjust treatment of the native population under French colonial rule (Zaretsky 2010, 40). It was also Camus's commitment to the rights of Arabs that led to his break with the Communist Party; after it refrained from its earlier adherence to the cause of Arab rights in order to be able to

create the widest possible coalition against fascism, Camus refused to follow suit and got expelled in 1937 (Aronson 2004, 25). This same stubborn refusal to place strategic, ideological concerns over the reality of suffering guided his political involvement during and after the war. Camus published *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* in occupied Paris in 1942, and a year later became editor-in-chief of the clandestine newspaper *Combat,* which soon came to embody the spirit of the French Resistance movement (Sprintzen 2004, 36). In 1951 followed the publication of *The Rebel.* Its idea of a rebellion "faithful to its first noble promise" (Camus 1971, 28) levelled a strong challenge to both ideologies that came to dominate the political sphere after the war and also led to a hostile public confrontation with his former friend, Sartre, whose support for the Communist movement and its embodiment, the Soviet Union, at that time reached its peak (see Sprintzen 2004, 19–27). Camus thus persisted, until his tragic death in a car accident in 1960, in his struggle to carve out a space beyond the politics of ideological denunciation, silence and contempt that he saw devouring the human world. In his distinct artistic sensibility this section discerns a heightened attentiveness to – and "even anguish" over (Isaac 1992, 15) – the ambiguous, tragic character of political judgement and a steadfast commitment to confronting it by disclosing and respecting the limits that reside in our common human condition (see e.g. Camus 1966, 78, 140).

Humanity in "the prison of its crimes"[36]

Like Sartre and Beauvoir, Camus conceives of the modern crisis of judgement in terms of "a human crisis" or "a crisis in human consciousness" – and exposes its core in the pervasive experience of nothingness and absurdity confronting an individual abandoned amidst a universe "divested of illusions and lights" that used to provide reasons for judging and acting (Camus 1946, 21–2; 1991, 6). In Camus, however, this metaphysical account of the crisis in judgement is more firmly grounded upon the concrete historical experience of the unprecedented horrors of the twentieth century. Indeed, at the roots of his explorations into the modern predicament lies a simple

[36] See Camus (1971, 74).

question: how could it be that "men could torture others while looking them straight in the face," that "the death or torture of a human being" could generally come to be considered not "with the horror and shame it should excite," but "with a feeling of indifference, with friendly or experimental interest, or without response" (Camus 2004, 205; 1946, 22)?

The answer springs forth in the first pages of *The Rebel* (Camus 1971, 11–12):

> In more ingenuous times, when the tyrant razed cities for his own greater glory, when the slave chained to the conqueror's chariot was dragged through the rejoicing streets, when enemies were thrown to wild animals in front of the assembled people, before such naked crimes consciousness could be steady and judgement unclouded. But slave camps under the flag of freedom, massacres justified by philanthropy or the taste for the superhuman, cripple judgement. On the day when crime puts on the apparel of innocence, through a curious reversal peculiar to our age, it is innocence that is called on to justify itself.

What is most troubling and what truly "cripples judgement" then is not so much the sheer horrendousness of the crimes but the fact that they were made *"reasonable,"* justified by some or other doctrine or conception of humanity that they were believed to help further (Camus 1971, 11–12). Such a "perversion of values," according to Camus (1946, 22; 2004, 205), cannot be adequately dealt with by simply tracing the roots of the modern excesses to a number of "criminal souls," condemning their crimes and envisaging, after their downfall, a happy convalescence. Like Sartre and Beauvoir before him, Camus instead traces the perversion and ultimate breakdown of traditional standards and absolutes in modernity to the ambiguities and contradictions plaguing the humanistic tradition of political thought. Yet, while Sartre and Beauvoir directed the gist of their critique against the false universalism of bourgeois humanism, Camus delves deeper into the Western philosophical tradition and follows its contradictory logic to what he considers to be its culmination in the spirit of history that permeates twentieth-century Marxism (Isaac 1992, 68).

This tradition and its failures Camus seeks to illuminate by inquiring into the problem of rebellion, a specifically modern problem that arises when individuals repudiate the authority of the divine order and, placing faith in the powers of human reason, decide to take their destiny in their own hands (Camus 1971, 26). In their rebellion against grace, however, moderns failed to pay heed to and adequately address

Nietzsche's challenge of nihilism: having "killed" traditional deities and absolutes, they have been less willing to accept the implications that this murder entails and never abandoned their desire for certitudes "that only a God can provide" (Camus 1995g, 245–6; Isaac 1992, 69). In this respect, modern humanist thought remains within the Platonic-Aristotelian metaphysical tradition, grounded upon the subject-object dualism and "will to truth." Here the proclaimed ability of the subject to remove itself from the world and reach the underlying essence or *telos* of things, furthers the conception of political judgement as a determinant application of pre-determined, supposedly universal standards or ends in accordance with which the particularity and human reality of the world is to be ordered, measured and transformed (Isaac 1992, 69, 73; Novello 2010, 7). In its unlimited confidence in the powers of human reason, however, the traditional conceptualization of political judgement betrays a nihilistic tendency to place human existence at the mercy of an abstract finality – posited either in heaven as universal, eternal principles of morality or at the end of history – that is not based in reality but imposed upon reality from the outside (see Camus 1971, 61). Seeking to master and mould the entire universe in accordance with human will and purpose, for Camus, it thus cannot but fail to account for the ambiguity of human situated, worldly existence. What it risks destroying, that is, is what Camus praises among the ancients: the recognition of the "equilibrium" or unity between humans and world (Camus 1971, 158). Instead of enlarging the scope of human freedom, in turn, it ends up "incarcerating" humanity in new "reasonable" churches and deities (see Camus 1971, 74).

Camus, for instance, discusses how the philosophers and practitioners of the French Revolution, having dethroned the king as the bearer of divine right, established a new absolute in the idea of (natural) justice. Based in the unlimited faith in human reason capable of grasping the ultimate truth of human existence, the universal laws of (human) nature, political judgement was to proceed as application of the principles of abstract, formal virtue, supposedly embodying the general will of the people, yet removed from the particularity and plurality of political life (Camus 1971, 84–93). French revolutionary Reign of Terror, for Camus, thus amply, if horribly, demonstrated how an attempt to realize within the human world the reign of absolute, pure virtue transforms any form of difference or dissent into vice that can only be cured by "infinite

repression" and extermination, and lead, "with implacable logic, to the republic of the guillotine" (Camus 1971, 93–4). Yet, Camus is even more horrified by the teleological conception of judgement permeating the rise to prominence of philosophies of history, which, rejecting the abstractness of Enlightenment reason and morality, purports to be able to know the course of history and envisions truth and justice to reach their essence only at its end. In this way, however, these principles "[cease] to be guides in order to become goals," which also means that there is no value that could help us judge the means, "in other words life and history," required to attain these goals (Camus 1971, 103–4). The human capacity of judgement becomes "no more than a calculation" based on the criterion of success rather than human dignity (Camus 1971, 104; 1946, 22–5). Denouncing the hypocrisy of abstract bourgeois morality, teleological judgement, for Camus, falls into the opposite extreme, that of the justification of impurity, which is "the equivalent of history," and even the willing acceptance of errors and "painful stages" – coalescing into the ultimate negation of the ambiguous, plural and particular character of the human world (Camus 1971, 105, 107).[37]

Subsuming the particularity of human worldly existence under pre-determined ends considered absolute, political judgement yields to what Camus calls the "cult of efficiency and abstraction" that, eclipsing the very humanity in human beings, is able to justify most terrible crimes (Camus 1946, 22–4). The human ability to judge in other words is crushed under the weight of an official function, idea, doctrine or theory, rendering humans into mere "cogs in the machine" or, alternatively, into inert, waste material to be disposed at will (see Camus 1946, 22–4; 1971, 152). To dispense with this "murderous" way of political reasoning and confront the modern crisis, Camus was convinced, we need to face up to the distinctly human and ambiguous character of political judgement as it emerges from under the fallen deity of traditional absolutes – which for him implies a determination to look upon the world from the point of view of the artist.

[37] These politically troubling implications brought forth by the ascent of teleological judgement, Camus traces to the advent of Christianity, its idea of history and of Final Judgement at its end (Camus 1971, 158).

Sensitivity of the artist is born: The absurd

The ambiguous condition of political judgement in the wake of the breakdown of traditional verities, Camus conceives of as the awareness of the absurd. As Camus compellingly argues in *The Myth of Sisyphus,* the absurd sensitivity springs from the "confrontation" of the human cry for meaning, the need to understand, unify, and arrange the world in accordance with human value and purpose, and the irredeemable silence of the world that is neither rational nor irrational but bound to remain forever unreasonable (Camus 1991, 17, 28, 49). The absurd is therefore not to be found in individuals' "insistence upon an impossible transparency" as such nor in the incomprehensibility of the world as such, but only "in their presence together" (Camus 1991, 54, 30). Human existence for Camus then is characterized by an indissoluble bond between humans and the world that both binds and separates them and that is affirmed in "an unceasing struggle," in the individuals' assumption of freedom and their constant rebellion against the meaninglessness of the world, devoid of hope to ever penetrate to the ultimate truth of reality (Camus 1991, 31, 54).

Camus's absurd sensibility thus powerfully brings forth the fundamental ambiguity of political judgement, portraying it in terms of the awareness of the limits of human reason that stem from engaging the world that lacks any pre-given or fixed purpose. The awareness of the absurd, that is, refuses to ground judgement upon a transcendental yardstick, "[t]hat universal reason, practical or ethical, that determinism, those categories that explain everything" (Camus 1991, 21). As a situated activity that is inextricably linked with and embedded in the world as an indispensable horizon of experience, judgement cannot clamour for absolute certainty and transparency, and must abandon the desire to endow the world with absolute foundations that would seek to "transcend" and "refine" this life, only to ultimately "betray it" (Camus 1991, 8). Liberating political judgement from all metaphysical absolutes, theoretical constructions and systems of morality, the awareness of the absurd dispenses with the philosophical reason of the tradition, dominated by the idea of finality and "will to truth" (Camus 1991, 43). It instead opens the way of imagining political judgement on the model of artistic sensibility, whose rebellion against the absurd is affirmed in free creation. Like in Sartre and Beauvoir, and in line with the "phenomenological" challenge to the

foundationalism of traditional philosophy, Camus's artistic sensibility grounds an appeal to lucid and forever vigilant judgement that is committed to engaging the world in its phenomenal particularity and plurality, that is, to only those truths that "can be touched with the hand" – while aware that all of its meanings and values are human and therefore provisional in character (Camus 1991, 89; see also Hayden 2013b, 198–9). Yet, Camus's attentiveness to the limits of the absurd also mounts a rigorous challenge to the underlying mode of thinking grounding the traditional quest for essences that neither Sartre nor Beauvoir seriously questioned. If their primary focus lay on reclaiming the human judging ability to engage the world, order phenomena and transcend them in light of non-existent ends, Camus remains wary of the instrumental logic underlying the traditional postulate of freedom, which in fact enslaves human liberty to the teleological reasoning and its emphasis on measuring, managing and utilizing the world in accordance with the future achievement and realization of a certain purpose or end (Camus 1991, 57–8; Novello 2010, 93). His artistic sensibility, instead, is characterized by a radically different way of relating to the world, one that affirms that it is possible to revel in "describing and understanding every aspect of experience," without claiming thereby to discover its "essence" and submerging its particularity under some "idea of finality" (Camus 1991, 43–4). Based in the awareness of the limits of human reason, Camus's aesthetic judging sensibility thus institutes a decisive shift away from the traditional dream of an absolute, self-sufficient and masterful self capable of grasping and unifying a given reality as a knowable object of thought. Instead, it directs the focus towards recognizing and taking pleasure in the independent existence of the world, in its untameable richness, ambiguity and plurality, "in all its splendour and diversity" (Camus 1991, 65). It consists of "learning all over again how to see," of strengthening our ability to "step back" and "pay attention," to let the world reveal itself to us, attempt to perceive it and others clearly, as free as possible from ideological glosses and personal idiosyncrasies (Zaretsky 2010, 3).

Camus's aesthetic orientation then remains steadfast in its resistance to any attempt to deny the absurd through either an irrational or rational "leap of faith," retaining attention on the ambiguous, worldly activity of political judgement. In this respect, it is important to note that for Camus the awareness of the absurd must represent the necessary starting-point for any exploration into ethics and politics in the world of the

dead god, yet it cannot be taken as an end (see Camus 1970f, 201; 1991, 2). One should not attempt to "live the absurd" in the sense of trying to make it into a rational foundation or rule for one's judgements and actions, but only aim to discern "the consequences and rules for action that can be drawn from it" (Camus 1995a, 28; 1971, 13; 1970f, 202). As Hayden (2013b, 199) has recently argued, consciousness of the absurd thus becomes the existential condition of responsible political judgement and action given the irreversible breakdown of eternal foundations. It affirms the worldly ambiguity of judgement, foregrounding the incomprehensibility of the world as the very condition of possibility that renders meaningful human freedom and the human ability of engaging the world and endowing it with human value and purpose. At the same time, however, it also contains a refusal to simply accept and submit to the ambiguity and contradiction of the political world, orienting the focus to the challenge of how to resist it, how to kindle the human judging capacity of creatively responding to it and providing grounds for a meaningful human existence in a world shorn of absolute guarantees (Hayden 2013b, 199). While starting from the absurd contradiction and rejecting the lure of final answers, in Camus's (1970a, 135) words, it is the fundamental task of artistic judgement to "refuse this contradiction and do what is needed to reduce it," to "mend what has been torn apart, make justice imaginable again in a world so obviously unjust, give happiness a meaning once more to peoples poisoned by the misery of the century."[38]

Rebellious judgement: "I judge, therefore we exist"

Born of the awareness of the absurd, rebellion for Camus is an expression of human freedom, an affirmation of the inherent value and dignity of human existence in the world shorn of all "aboves," "beyonds," or "later-ons," and as such also a testimony of a "hopeless love" for the world and the human condition (Camus 1991, 55; Camus 1970b, 101, 104). In an act of rebellion against an incomprehensible or unjust situation, the rebel says "no" and "yes" simultaneously. In rejection of injustice he or she implicitly affirms the existence of a limit beyond which oppression can and will no longer be

[38] I thank Patrick Hayden (2013b, 196) for drawing my attention to this passage.

tolerated and thus also of "a standard of values" or human dignity that should be upheld "at all costs" (Camus 1971, 19–20). Rebellion in this way illuminates the political significance of artists' creative judgement because it contains a realization that the absurd condition of human existence is not merely an individual perplexity to be suffered in solitude, but a common human fate (Camus 1971, 28). By the same token, rebellious judgement embodies a recognition that the value affirmed in revolt "does not belong to [the rebel] alone," but is instead something he or she has in common with all others (Camus 1971, 22). A particular judgement on the unacceptability and injustice of oppression thus always-already contains a transcendence towards common human values and a universal demand for respect of that "elusive value" "on which is founded the common dignity of man and the world he lives in" (Camus 1971, 224, 241–2). This "elusive value" affirmed in creative judgement represents the justification of its rebellion against injustice – and also brings to light the existence of a limit that it must not transgress (see Camus 1971, 27–8). Situated in the world and arising in response to particular instances of suffering and oppression, Camus's rebellious judgement then is bent on confronting the ambiguity of political affairs not by seeking refuge in an external principle itself lying beyond the boundaries of the world, but in endeavouring to recognize and remain loyal to the particular and plural character of the given political reality. Affirming human solidarity as the only point of support in the fight against the "revolting fate," in other words, Camus's artistic judging sensibility is distinct for its commitment to rebelling against injustice by retaining attention on the limits of the world and those of others (Camus 1995a, 28).

Camus develops these observations in his insistence on the "free essence" of creative judgement, which recognizes no external rule, but "lives only on the constraints it imposes on itself" (Camus 1995b, 269, 268). Rebelling against the absurd, artistic judgement aims to create unity on the ground of the "chaos" of reality, yet, aware of the impossibility of total knowledge, shies away from reducing the human judging ability to a teleological exercise in the realization of an already determined, absolute end (see Camus 1971, 16). In Sartre's vision of committed judgement and its desire to respond to the exigencies of a historical situation with a synthesizing vision, Camus discerns a temptation towards a denial of the absurd contradiction in a rational "leap of faith" that can easily end up enslaving the artist's rebellion to an end that is "alien" to it and reduce

human freedom to mere production of a pre-fabricated result (see Camus 1995b, 268, 261–2; see also Sprintzen 2004, 51; Aronson 2004, 56–60). Artistic rebellious judgement in contrast does not aspire to final answers; its aim, for Camus (1995b, 266), is not "to legislate or to reign supreme, but to understand first of all." Building on the absurd freedom's attentiveness to the rich ambiguity of the world, Camus envisions rebellious political judgement as importantly grounded upon an aesthetic, imaginative ability to describe others "faithfully" and "with consideration," which "demands not just eyes but imagination," that fundamental human faculty that enables us to engage others' perspectives on the world with empathy (Zaretsky 2010, 86–7; 155–7). Political judgement, in other words, must aim to honour always what Camus (1995b, 267, 269) calls the "secret of art," its ability to make "the human face more admirable and richer" (see also Camus 1970c, 286–7). The political significance of aesthetic judging sensibility, for Camus, then lies in its persistent resistance to the tendency to subordinate the particularity and embodied presence of others to a pre-given idea, to instead always strive to see them as concrete freedoms, regard the other as a "living creature" and discern behind the veil of an abstract problem the concerns and hopes of real human beings (Camus 1995b, 266; 1946, 26, 29–31; Zaretsky 2010, 33, 159).

Camus's vision of committed judgement in this respect receives illumination in his novel, *The Plague,* which recounts the sufferings and struggles of the inhabitants of a small coastal town suddenly struck by the plague. Rieux, a doctor and the story's narrator – who, confronted with the reality of pain and death, becomes the leader of town's organized resistance – embodies the artistic judgement's affirmation of human solidarity in the face of injustice and the experience of exile and separation it engenders. The political significance of Camus's artistic judging sensibility here is manifested not in an attempt to gain complete knowledge of the causes of the injustice and provide clear-cut "instructions" on the goals of rebellious action. It can best be described as a ceaseless imaginative watchfulness against the danger of succumbing to the bacillus of the plague, the danger of allowing humanity to collapse under the weight of an abstraction (see Camus 2002, 49, 95, 192–6; Aronson 2004, 55–6). Human solidarity, accordingly, is affirmed in the narrator's effort towards impartiality, truthfulness and understanding, by collecting and engaging faithfully the perspectives of multiple characters, rather than in a form of engaged writing that would aim to appeal to and

influence people's emotions at the expense of truth (Zaretsky 2010, 86–90; Camus 2002, e.g. 237, 8, 232, 105, 138–9). The ambiguity of political engagement, similarly, cannot be confronted by mobilizing people to an already defined, definite cause, but only by offering a faithful description of the given situation, in all its concreteness and particularity, and revealing it as a situation shared by all – in "the only certainties they all have in common, which are love, suffering and exile" (Camus 2002, 237, 232; see also Camus 2006a, 274).

Camus's aesthetic refusal to submit to the rule of teleology to instead retain attention on our common reality and human solidarity thus brings us to the core of his conception of political judgement: its determination to resist all cases of oppression and injustice, yet not forget in the way to recognize in everyone, including the oppressors, the human value and dignity affirmed in its rebellion – or, in other words, its resolve to only repudiate the oppressor as an oppressor, not as a fellow human being and a peer (Camus 1971, 217, 22, 29). Every act of creative rebellious judgement, Camus (1971, 28) writes, reveals the "I *rebel* – therefore we *exist.*" For in its rebellion against an oppressive situation, Camus's artistic sensibility shies away from resorting to any pre-conceived conception of human solidarity, for instance one based on psychological identification, community of interest or an idea of abstract humanity, but simply appeals to the recognition of others as concrete, embodied freedoms, in their common humanity (see Camus 1971, 22–3). In its striving for unity, by implication, the artist's political judgement displaces the Hegelian dialectical conception of intersubjective recognition lingering in Sartre, which, while claiming to lead to the eventual reconciliation of the contradictions of the political world, for Camus, ultimately amounts to the domineering elimination of difference in a final synthesis (see Camus 1971, 130). Instead, in Camus's aesthetic sensibility, the ambiguity of political judgement as manifested in the artist's tragic confrontation between his or her quest for unity and the irredeemable plurality of the human world is confronted by the recognition of the need for moderation. Camus's judging sensibility thus is characterized by "the affirmation of the contradiction" and a refusal to ever venture "beyond the frontier where opposites balance each other" (Camus 2004, 213). This in other words means that Camus's conception of political judgement is inherently dialogical in orientation, always striving to create conditions for and insistent on taking its bearings from "real dialogue" (Camus

1995c, 70). Rather than trying to press others into agreement with its own perspective on the world and aiming for universal agreement, a truly rebellious judgement must be willing to acknowledge others as plural equals, "grant that [its] opponent may be right," agree to consider his or her arguments, and strive to bring to light common humanity precisely by embracing the differences that compose it (Camus 1995d, 63; 2006a, 287). Camus's artistic sensibility, that is, envisions political judgement as a process of constantly disclosing the limits of the world, which are the "limits where minds meet and, in meeting, begin to exist" (Camus 1971, 27).

Artistic politics

When this vision of political judgement plunged onto the political scene, at the height of the Cold War ideological polarization, its reception was, unsurprisingly, less than welcoming. Since then, too, critics have pointed to Camus's lack of attention to the workings of traditional power politics and to his inability to address adequately the deep-seated, structurally, historically and culturally grounded antagonisms between different groups within and between societies in the increasingly globalized world (see Sprintzen 2004, 18; Aronson 2004, 91, 122). Arguably, Camus was hardly ignorant of the structures of power and oppression or of the firmly entrenched antagonisms that they foster. But he remained convinced that the main source of "modern follies" can be traced to the persistence of traditional ways of political reasoning, which, forgetful of their limits, confine political imagination to the alternative of being "either a victim or an executioner" (see Camus 1995d, 112; 2006a, 257–76). While deeply aware of the ambiguous and tragic character of political judgement, he also sought to preserve the space for the individuals' free, creative response to the exigencies of the historical situation, persistently affirming the human character of the world of political affairs.

Camus's aesthetic judging sensibility and its attentiveness to the limits of the political world bespeak his staunch resistance to the rise of the historical spirit, the teleological tendency to wed political judgement to a predetermined law of movement, supposedly embodying the progressive self-realization and emancipation of "an essential subject" as representative of a "unitary" humankind (Isaac 1992, 82; 2004,

256–9). The troubling implication is that teleological judgement is bent on justifying the use of any means, willing to sacrifice concrete, living beings as a necessary step on the path towards the future, and therefore necessarily abstract, ends of perfect justice. Subordinating the plurality of the political world to the workings of a total narrative with the already set outcome, according to Camus, historicist judgement arranges the whole of humanity into the clearly defined categories of good and evil, "[denies] everything that [it does] not extol" and reduces the human reality of political affairs to the world of masters and slaves (Camus 1970d, 149). It thus breeds "the infernal dialectic" (Camus 2013, 153). For by dividing the world into forces of good and evil, it allows each side in a conflict to justify its own crimes in light of the excesses of the other, plunging the world into an ever growing spiral of barbarity and violence (see Camus 2013, 25–8, 31–2; 1995e, 92–3; 2010, 131). Especially among the left-wing intellectuals associated with *Les Temps Modernes,* Camus's critique of revolutionary violence was largely denounced as insufferably idealistic and moralistic, paying little attention to the structures of exploitation and oppression, and, in fact, thwarting the possibilities for the emancipatory transformation of society. Sartre and Jeanson attached to Camus the label of a "beautiful soul" that refuses to dirty its hands and believes it can remain above the fray of historical events to judge them from on high – while, in effect, "reentering history" by affirming its complicity with the existing situation and becoming an accomplice of the bourgeois executioners (see Jeansen 2004, 99, 179–83; 195; Sartre 2004a, 156).

In Camus's view, however, it was Sartre's tendency to demote the human capacity of political judgement to a servant of historical necessity and reduce the possibilities of choice to the alternatives of being either a victim or executioner that was out-of-worldly and moralistic. For him, it embodied the danger of excess in the face of the absurd world. For starting from the recognition of the particularity, plurality and contradictions of political affairs, it also purported to be able to know the final end of rebellious political action to be realized in the future, thus lifting itself onto the position of mastery above the world and others. Failing to acknowledge the human, free and ambiguous, character of political reality, it could not but end up reducing the whole of the world, and the particular reality of those suffering in the present, to mere inert material to be transformed in accordance with a pre-given blueprint. Renouncing the guidance of a

glorious future and remaining attentive to the ambiguity and risk inherent in worldly freedom, Camus's artistic orientation, in contrast, is bent on judging on the ways of resistance from within the given worldly reality, recognizing and respecting the irreducible plurality of the world. Camus poetically brings to light this judging sensibility when insisting that the tragic character of politics should be confronted by a ceaseless affirmation of love of the world and of the human condition – by constantly revealing political affairs in their particular, plural and unpredictable character and thus illuminating the political world as a human world (see Camus 1970d, 152–3; 1970e, 168–71). In this respect, rebellious judgement consists of Rieux's modest attitude, reclaiming the freedom to always take "the side of the victims" and denounce all instances of oppression and injustice regardless of the noble ends pursued by the perpetrators (Camus 2002, 196; 1995b, 266–7). It entails a commitment to constant reflection on the possibilities and limits of action in specific instances; while aware of the impossibility of final redemption and reconciliation that would constitute an ultimate end of injustice, it foregrounds an inspiration to "continuous rebellions suited to the injustices of every present without finality" (Hayden 2013b, 201–2; see also Camus 2002, 237).

Rather than an escape from the world, then, Camus's insistence on the limits of political judgement can be said to ultimately displace the traditional conceptualization of the human judging ability as calculation of means with regard to the chosen end that, despite their apt recognition of the risk and sacrifice involved, retained some of its luring appeal for both Sartre and Beauvoir. Instead, Camus's rebellious sensibility is oriented towards providing a platform for dialogue where opposing political groups could "confront one another without clashing," that is, bringing to light a space for politics between plural equals (Camus 2006a, 251). Its attentiveness to disclosing the limits of the world, however, is not to be understood as a technical matter of measuring different elements and devising sustainable forms of compromise (see Zaretsky 2013b, 62–5). It can better be imagined as a willingness to persevere at the point of a profound tension "where opposites confront each other" and to recognize in the thus affirmed and unresolved contradiction "the path which leads further on" (Camus 2004, 213).

In this spirit, Camus sought to reverse the "infernal dialectic" of torture and terror ravaging his native Algeria. Denouncing the injustice of colonialism, yet equally

dismayed by the terrorist means employed by the FLN, Camus's "Appeal for a civilian truce" was above all an appeal to both sides to cease all hostilities towards civilians (Camus 2013, 149–59). Disclosing the mutually reinforcing spiral of denunciations and violence binding the opposing sides – where "any action by one side will bring a riposte by the other" – Camus warned against a fixation on the "endless rehashing of past sins" without a future (see Camus 2013, 152–3, 116, 32). Within Camus's rebellious judging disposition, in contrast, the only way to "bear witness on behalf of the victims" and honour their memory, lies not in trying to avenge them and in this vein unleashing onto the world additional injustice and terror, but in rejecting "everything that, directly or indirectly, makes people die or justifies others in making them die" (Camus 2002, 237, 195). By distinguishing "the respective limits of force and justice in each camp," seeking to disentangle from under the violent excesses what is legitimate in their claims, Camus's judgement, further, invites both sides "to think about [their] adversary's justifications" (Camus 2013, 32, 152). In this respect, it reflects the rebellious recognition that the ambiguity of political affairs requires not only moderation in terms of the employed means, but also "an approximation as far as [the] ends are concerned" (Camus 1971, 254). It resists, that is, the logic of absolute ends, formed in isolation and abstraction from the common world, and appeals to the pursuit of "relative" values, shaped in dialogue with and through a consideration of a plurality of other perspectives (see Camus 1971, 254). Seeking to inspire the adversaries to recognize each other as equal members of the shared reality, Camus's artistic judgement thus aims to resist the fatalistic resignation to the dialectic of violence, affirm "that there is still a chance for dialogue," and appeal to the human, creative potentials of imagining possible solutions that would take into account all sides in the conflict (Camus 2013, 149).

The distinct political significance of Camus's aesthetic judging sensibility then can be said to lie in its awareness that the desire for justice cannot be divorced from the pursuit of freedom. As Camus (1995e, 94) writes, just as freedom is impossible without bread, "if someone takes away your freedom, you may be sure that your bread is threatened, for it depends no longer on you and your struggle but on the whim of a master." His aesthetic sensibility foregrounds the crucial insight that while the recognition of others' freedom and the emphasis on the importance of the free confrontation of differences may not necessarily result in greater justice, they are

certainly "the indispensable conditions" for it (Camus 1995f, 171; see also Camus 1995e, 87–97). It thus commits to constantly striving to recognize the others as distinct, yet also equally human and establish the conditions under which all individuals will be able to exercise their freedom and their right to state "what is just and what is unjust" (Camus 1971, 255). Camus's artistic judgement, to be sure, lacks the finality of a clear-cut rule that would determine unfailingly how we should act in a given situation. So, too, it remains aware of the ever-present possibility of failure attending the ambiguity of political judgement and action; as Hayden (2013b, 210–11) has observed, the aspiration towards dialogue is no "panacea," it may fail, be misinterpreted or even breed further hostility, as it did in the case of Camus's intervention in the Algerian conflict. Nevertheless, for Camus, it constitutes the crucial principle of the only viable and truly realistic political attitude: one that, aware of the ambiguity and imperfections of political affairs, is free of "any nostalgia for an earthly paradise," painstakingly aware of its limitations and also only willing to embrace relative utopias (Camus 2006a, 273, 261).[39] Far from encouraging "the feeling of powerlessness, distaste for politics, pessimism turning into indifference" (Jeanson 2004, 199), then, Camus's artistic imagination can be said to importantly develop Sartre's and Beauvoir's insights into the ambiguous and tragic character of political affairs by not simply accepting it as inevitable, but eliciting the human judging capacity of creatively responding to it and constantly illuminating on the debris of history the contours of a shared, human world. As such, Camus's worldly sensibility importantly echoes in Hannah Arendt's explicit attempt to rethink judgement as a crucial political ability that manifests and kindles our sharing-the-world-with-others.

Hannah Arendt

Hannah Arendt's insights into the radical crisis of political judgement in modernity and her attempt to rethink it by way of a creative appropriation of Kant's *Critique of*

[39] Camus's praise for revolutionary trade unionism, his support for Gary Davis, the "citizen of the world" (see e.g. Sprintzen 2004, 56), and his appeal to rebuild a "living society" by establishing communities of labour and intelligence within and across borders (Camus 2006a, 272), all display his confidence that even acts that cannot claim or hope to have a substantial and immediate political effect, carry political weight, even if only by affirming that different ways of thinking about politics are still possible.

Aesthetic Judgement inspired much perplexity among commentators of her work and continues to manifest a stubborn resilience against all attempts at an easy categorization within established frameworks of thought. This can no doubt be at least partly attributed to the fact that Arendt's emphasis on judgement as a paramount political ability brings to the fore most clearly her general lack of interest in philosophical and epistemological debates, to instead reveal a rare attentiveness to the living experience of ever-changing reality – to which, in her words, "thought must remain bound [. . .] as the only guideposts by which to take its bearings" (2006a, 14; see Hinchman and Hinchman 1984, 183). While various interpreters have found in this focus a stimulating resource for reflection upon contemporary concerns (see e.g. Berkowitz, Katz and Keenan 2010), surprisingly little sustained attention has been paid to the ontological and epistemological premises that underlie it.

To be sure, many commentators have recognized Arendt's philosophical origins in the tradition of *Existenz* philosophy, specifically in the phenomenology and existential ontology of Husserl, Heidegger and Jaspers (see Hinchman and Hinchman 1984, 185; 1991, 435; Parekh 1981, esp. 66–83, 173–85; Young-Bruehl 2004, 217–20; Vollrath 1977, 160–82; Yeatman, Hansen, Zolkos and Barbour 2011). So, too, critics have been sensitive to point to the significant departure Arendt makes from her philosophical influences to make room for and resuscitate the "lost treasure" of political action and politics, and have referred to her political theory variously as "political existentialism" (Jay 1986) or "existentialism politicized" (Hinchman and Hinchman 1991; Canovan 1992, 190). Nevertheless, the nature of Arendt's existentialism and its implications for her account of political judgement remain contested and elusive. Much of the confusion, in this respect, can be traced to the interpretation furthered by Martin Jay, who was probably the first to explicitly point to *Existenzphilosophie* as the appropriate background against which Arendt's work should properly be read and understood. Yet, he somewhat unfortunately situated her thought in the "political existentialist" tradition of the 1920s that formed around Carl Schmitt, Ernst Jünger and Alfred Bäumler (Jay 1986, 239–40). In Jay's hands, the issue of Arendt's "political existentialism" thus became reduced to a desperate attempt to salvage politics from the state of disrepute into which it has fallen in the modern age, only to lapse into the vanity of aestheticized decisionism that refuses to be tamed by socioeconomic concerns or any other normative

and instrumental considerations (Jay 1986, 241–2). In a similar spirit, Arendt's appropriation of Kant's aesthetic judgement of taste has often been chided for its alleged aestheticism and its lack of solid normative foundations to serve as a yardstick by which to distinguish good from evil (see e.g. Garsten 2007, 1072; Kateb 2001, 135–7). On this reading, it is only after this existentialist sensibility has been somehow "tamed" that it can be seen to retain its relevance to speak to and relate meaningfully to the realities and problems of modern politics (see e.g. Benhabib 1996, 198). Only recently, however, have Arendt's interpreters warned that the foundationalism/anti-foundationalism nexus and its epistemological grounding might not provide an appropriate framework within which to understand Arendt's theoretical position in general and her account of political judgement in particular. Rather, critics have argued that this focus might in fact destine Arendt's "existentialist" element to a reductionist reading and risk obscuring the continuing relevance and promise of her response to the perplexities of modern times (see e.g. Buckler 2011, 9–11; Biskowski 1995, 59; Zerilli 2005a; 2005b).

Against this background, this section aims to re-examine Arendt's account of political judgement in light of her phenomenological-existentialist commitment to making sense of ever-changing worldly reality, seeking thereby to illuminate the specifically worldly, political character of her existential orientation. To this end, the section follows two interlinked trains of thought. First, it situates Arendt's preoccupation with the question of political judgement alongside her recognition of the pressing need to confront the unprecedented political realities of the twentieth century that, in her view, ultimately exposed the inadequacy of traditional yardsticks and absolutes. Second, the section illuminates the distinctly political import of Arendt's existential judging sensibility by reading her recourse to Kant's aesthetics as a response to the breakdown of the Western tradition of political thought, the roots of which she traces to Kant's critical philosophy itself. In both these respects, Arendt's turn to Kant's account of aesthetic judgement reveals her indebtedness to and her joining "the ranks" of existential philosophy as the only mode of thinking that has honestly confronted the perplexing condition of thought and action after the demise of metaphysical foundations (Arendt 1978a, 212). Reimagining Kant's aesthetic judging sensibility as a specifically political ability, further, it can be seen as an attempt to build on the existentialists' efforts towards an account of political judgement capable of confronting the plural,

unpredictable and changing political reality without prefabricated standards of thought. Rather than a matter of knowledge that would provide us with a set of rules or procedures on how to unfailingly determine the right answers to the perplexities of political affairs, this section argues, it foregrounds political judgement in a Camusean spirit as a distinctly worldly ability oriented towards illuminating and sustaining a public space of appearance, a human world and thus recognizing the possibilities and limitations inherent in political action and our worldly existence as such.

Facing up to "the burden" of our century[40]

Even though Hannah Arendt turned to explicitly address the question and importance of political judgement only later in her life, she displays throughout her work an abiding concern with the ambiguity of judgement as the political ability *par excellence.* The urgency of this focus arose directly from her attempt to come to terms with modern political experience, in particular the radical evil of totalitarianism. What Arendt found so frustrating was not the sheer gruesomeness of the crimes, but the fact that, in their overwhelming novelty, they simply could not be understood and judged within established frameworks of understanding and have thereby "brought to light the ruin of our categories of thought and standards of judgement" (Arendt 1994, 318). For Arendt, thus, the twentieth-century events revealed a pervasive crisis of judgement at the heart of modern societies, one indicative of the growing atrophy of the fundamental human capacity to relate meaningfully to the world and make sense of living experience (see Hinchman and Hinchman 1984, 185; Biskowski 1993, 65). From Arendt's recognition of the depth of the crisis of judgement in modernity then follows an awareness that she shares with the broader tradition of *Existenz* philosophy: by so tragically exposing the ruin of established yardsticks, modern events have also exposed the inadequacy of traditional philosophical categories and moral standards to meaningfully address the experiential realities of human worldly existence as a "tangible" and pressing "political reality" and confronted political theory with the urgent need to rethink its own attitude towards the public, political realm (Arendt 1994, 430–1, 444).

[40] See Arendt (2004, xxvi).

Much like the three existentialists, Arendt traces the modern predicament of political judgement to what she calls the "basic fallacy" at work in the venerable tradition of political thought, the fallacy of submerging the human judging capacity under the philosophical, metaphysical desire to reach the ultimate truth of Being (Arendt 1978a, 15). Driven by the will to truth, philosophers have claimed for themselves the ability to uplift themselves onto a solitary, supposedly objective position detached from the disorderly realm of political affairs so as to be able to access the realm of eternal, absolute ideas of the true and the good. Yet, they have yielded to a troubling belief that the objective, rational knowledge conceived in the mind of a solitary thinker also possessed universal validity in the political realm of the many, reducing political judgement into the role of mere determinant application of prefabricated standards onto the particularities of the political world from the outside and above. The philosophers thus sought to offset the awe-inspiring spontaneity of political action and the ensuing plurality and unpredictability of political affairs by erecting a hierarchy. Thought, by virtue of its alleged ability to reach true knowledge of reality and determine unfailingly how to make judgements between right and wrong, was identified with rulership, while demoting the human capacity of action to mere execution of a pre-given standard or idea (Arendt 1958, 225; see also Hayden 2014a, 168–9). In this way however, according to Arendt, they have in fact opened "an abyss" between thought and action, philosophy and politics – an observation that gains a terrifying concreteness in the ease with which, in the course of the twentieth century, absolute standards of judgement were time and again "reversed" to award the law of murder the status of a new moral truth (Arendt 2005, 6; 2003, 54–5; 1978a, 177–8).

In Arendt's view, the traditional conception of political judgement harbours the seeds of the modern crisis because it cannot but fail to account for the phenomenal nature of the political world and threatens to obscure the existence of the public realm. The world of political affairs, as Arendt develops the political implications of the existentialists' view of the human condition, is grounded upon the constitutive existential condition of human plurality and represents a space of appearance. The sense of the common world and the very reality of the public realm, she persistently points out, thus only emerges in relationships *between* a plurality of individuals manifesting their distinct human capacities for action and speech, beginning anew and appearing to each other (Arendt

1958, 55–7). The traditional tendency to reduce judgement to a mere determinant function – as manifested most clearly in traditional "two-world" metaphysical fallacies – in contrast attempts to explain and construe the realm of "mere" appearances in terms of supposedly deeper and truer realities, thought to lie above or beneath them, grounding or causing them (see Arendt 1978a, 10–12, 216). Armed only with absolute standards of morality as earthly representatives of "what is forever invisible [. . .] and truly everlasting," in other words, it falls short of adequately addressing and endowing with meaning the contingent, plural and unpredictable realm of human words and deeds (Arendt 1978a, 131). For as a practice of subsuming whatever happens within preconceived frameworks of thought, Arendt writes, determinant judgement allows for nothing new to happen "under the sun" (Arendt 1994, 309). As such, it is bound to grow less and less informed by and increasingly distant from particular occurrences and facts in the realm of human affairs and ensue in an atrophied sense of worldly reality.

The identification of political judgement with rational knowledge of absolute yardsticks is for Arendt politically highly troubling because humans are essentially worldly beings. As Arendt (1978a, 20) writes in the tradition of her existentialist forebears, humans are not only *in* the world as perceiving subjects, but also *of* the world, as appearances to be perceived by others. As such, they depend on a shared sense of the world for the very sense of their own selves as autonomous agents, able to engage with and respond to ever-changing political reality. For what thought's prolonged severance from experience puts into question is what Arendt calls the "preliminary understanding", the very basic sense of one's self as a worldly being which grounds the possibility of all thought and action (Arendt 1994, 310; 2004, 614). This danger came particularly clearly to light in the modern age. The crucial shift occurred when, unhinged from the realm of eternal absolutes, yet without abandoning the traditional quest for certainty, humans moved away further from the common world and turned inward to reclaim the lost security of eternal foundations within their own selves (Arendt 1958, 254, 283–4). The activity of judging thus came increasingly to resemble mere instrumental reasoning or logicality, whose main characteristic is that it carries within itself a claim of compulsory validity regardless of others and the world, that is, regardless of our situated existence (Arendt 1994, 318). Much like Camus, Arendt saw in the rise of confidence in the unlimited powers of human reason grounding the

reinterpretation of political judgement in modern times the culmination of the traditional belief that the plural, contingent and unpredictable character of political affairs can be contained from the position of "solitary mastery," above and apart from all others – purporting to be able not only to know and master the world as a totally transparent object of thought, but also to "produce," order and transform it at will (Isaac 1992, 78–9; Arendt 1958, 220, 252, 228). The politically most disturbing result, for Arendt, was the ascent of the teleological conception of political judgement, most notable in eighteenth and nineteenth-century philosophies of history. For claiming to have found a decisive answer to coming to terms with the ambiguity of political action by seeking salvation in history, reading it as a story of unlimited "Progress" of humankind, teleological judgement could explain and justify "every evil" in terms of the next stage in the overall development – yielding the distinctly human judging capacity in front of the criterion of "Success" (Arendt 1994, 430–1, 444; 1978a, 216). It thus ended up reducing the meaning of each particular event to the place it was awarded in an all-encompassing process and subordinating reality itself to the supposedly self-evident and necessary, yet essentially arbitrary, movement of some inevitable "higher law" (see also Arendt 1978a, 26–7, 53–5; 1958, 296–7, 304; 2006a, 57). In this way, however, it in effect reduced humans to mere objects of inhuman forces and processes, and also finally destroyed the sense of the common world as a frame of reference within which human words and deeds could appear. Indeed, Arendt counts the radical worldlessness of modern thought among one of the main conditions that made individuals so susceptible to the lure of totalitarian movements and their ideological interpretations (and recreations) of reality.

For Arendt, then, the modern crisis of judgement was no mere historical "aberration," but radically exposed the paramount political danger lurking in the traditional tendency to escape the perplexity of political action into a realm of prefabricated standards: that of a loss of a distinctively human existence, loss of our sense of selves as beings endowed with the capacity of freedom and political action (see Isaac 1992, 68; Arendt 1994, 316–17; Hinchman and Hinchman 1984, 185, 202; Fine 2000a). The pressing challenge of reinvigorating the capacity of judging and making sense of experience, and bringing to life again, in the midst of the desert-like conditions of modern life, a public realm able to house properly human action and speech, in turn, could not be addressed

by simply erecting a new set of yardsticks, more adequate to the present realities (see Arendt 1966). It consisted in confronting judgement in its worldly ambiguity, that is, reimagining it as a capacity capable of wondering at and facing up to the world, in all "its grandeur and misery," its plurality and particularity, its "stubborn thereness" and contingency (Arendt 2005, 38; 2006a, 253).

Arendt's existential appropriation of Kant's aesthetic judgements of taste

The possibility of reclaiming the human capacity of judgement as a paramount political ability Arendt discerns in Kant's account of aesthetic judgements of taste. This is because, in his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement,* Kant starts from the understanding of human beings not as intelligible or cognitive beings of traditional metaphysics, but as a plurality of concrete, worldly beings, "as they really are and live in societies" (Arendt 1989, 13). For Arendt, his account of aesthetic judgement signifies an abandonment of the traditional position of a solitary, "wise" philosopher as well as of the accompanying desire to reach the ultimate truth of reality; judgement becomes a general human capacity "within the reach of the great mass of [human beings]," grounded in the fundamental human need to grasp the meaning of everything that is (Arendt 1989, 29, 35). Kant's aesthetics, in Arendt's reading, then contains a manifestly political sensibility because it confronts the ambiguous, worldly character of political affairs by envisioning judgement as an autonomous, reflective activity that is not bound to the rule of determinant standards, but proceeds as a situated process of recognizing and negotiating between a plurality of perspectives inhabiting the common world.

In her essay *What is Existential Philosophy?,* Arendt engages Kant as an important forerunner of existentialism. His critical project of illuminating the structures and limits of human reason, she notes, radically shattered the metaphysical pretensions of the tradition and thereby expelled humans from their previously predetermined place in the rational totality of the world (Arendt 1994, 169–70). While thus liberating human beings from under the yoke of the great chain or circle of Being, affirming them as free and autonomous subjects, Kant also placed them face to face with an incomprehensible world whose workings they can no longer know, that they "did not create and that is

alien to [their] very nature" (Arendt 1994, 171, 166). In this way, Kant's critical philosophy illuminates the perplexing condition of political judgement that, for Arendt and the three other existentialists, became a pressing political reality in light of the modern predicament: the fact that humans, as worldly beings, are free to judge, engage, question and transcend the given in their quest for meaning, yet can also never assume an Archimedean position above the world and reach a completely transparent view of political affairs. In this respect, Arendt discovers the specifically political appeal of Kant's critique of taste in that it corresponds to the ability of reflective judgement, where, like in the case of a beautiful object that we cannot simply subsume under the pre-given universal concept of Beauty, "only the particular is given for which the general has to be found" (Arendt 1989, 76, 13). Rather than fleeing, as Arendt (1973, 9) notes in her remarks to the American Society of Christian Ethics, it assumes the perplexing condition of political judgement by calling upon us to "meet the phenomena, so to speak, head-on, without any preconceived system."

Eschewing the reliance on abstract principles, aesthetic judgement is expressly political because it answers to the temporal condition of human existence. It is able to cope, in other words, with the reality of the gap between past and future that, after the break in the thread of tradition, becomes "a tangible reality and perplexity for all" and that must be constantly negotiated without the security of established standards (Arendt 2006a, 13). This is because, as Arendt writes, taste is determined neither by "the life interests of the individual nor the moral interests of the self," but parallels a "disinterested" pleasure or delight at the sight of "the world in its appearance and in its worldliness" (Arendt 2006a, 219). Liberated from the quest for deeper causes and realities, purposes and ends, and distanced from immediate interests in the world, taste thus affirms human freedom to look upon the past anew, salvage individual actions and events from their predetermined place in a larger whole or process, and endow with (a general) meaning the particularity of the world of appearances. Taste then bespeaks Arendt's specifically phenomenological-existentialist stance that the only way to reinvigorate the human capacity of political judgement and reconstitute on the grounds of an alien being once again a meaningful world lies in an aesthetic attitude of "loving care" for things of this world that have no external purpose or end, but whose essence is to appear, be seen and heard by others (Arendt 2006a, 208, 222; 1989, 30–1, 76–7).

The reflective nature of aesthetic judgement for Arendt is of an immediate political import because it encapsulates its ability to "reclaim our human dignity" (Arendt 1978a, 216). For in its attentiveness to "the particular qua particular," taste is able to affirm human freedom as a source of worldly events (see Arendt 1989, 66; Hill 1979, 298). Indeed, the peculiar political significance of aesthetic sensibility, according to Arendt, can be traced to its unique capacity of revealing the "who" rather than the "what" of the protagonists' identity (Arendt 1958, 186). The reflective character of aesthetic judgement, in other words, enables us to affirm "the revelatory character" of action and speech, the fact that they, apart from being "about some worldly objective reality," involve a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent (Arendt 1958, 182). In this way, aesthetic judgements of taste foster the view of human beings as actors and sufferers, not passive victims or objects of deeper and truer realities, metaphysical or historical purposes or ends. Arendt foregrounds this concern in her insistence that the aim of political judgement proper is not to unearth a previously concealed essence or origin of a phenomenon, explain it (away) in terms of its supposed "causes" (Arendt 1994, 319, 403–5, 407). For this would not only deny the reality of the new and the unprecedented in history, but also mean that the future, too, can be foretold. Taste instead resembles the "digging quality" of Heidegger's "passionate thinking" (Arendt 1968a, 202; 1971, 50–2). Drawing on Walter Benjamin's historiography of a fragmented past, Arendt conveys this quality with the metaphor of a "pearl diver" (Arendt 1968a, 206). The pearl diver reaches into the depths of the past, but not to reveal "some ultimate, secure foundations" (Arendt 1971, 51; see also Arendt 1968a, 205). The aim instead is to "redeem" those "corals" and "pearls" of past experience long buried or concealed under the segmented layers of traditional categories, illuminate them as a living reality in our world, and thereby make them speak with new vigour and unexpected significance to the concerns and intricacies of the present (Arendt 1968a, 205–6; 1971, 51). The guiding concern of Arendt's aesthetic judging sensibility, in other words, is to reclaim actions and occurrences in the particularity and plurality of their appearance in the world and weave them into a meaningful story, capable of offering points of orientation for the future (see Benhabib 1990, 171–3). Arendt's embrace of aesthetic, narrative sensibility then rests on the claim that because it by its very form imitates the structure of human acting and suffering, it is able to establish the distinctively human significance of politics and

kindle the sense of our own selves as political agents, capable of responsible action in the world (see Kristeva 2001, 7–8). This emphasis is crucial because human freedom and the status of an acting being, for Arendt, is not a matter of a self-evident or natural fact, but exists only "as a political and as a human reality" (Arendt 1994, 408). In other words, it is predicated upon our recognizing each other as equal members of the public realm and can, by implication, be denied or even completely obliterated if such intersubjective, political recognition is refused.

It is this distinctly political concern guiding Arendt's appropriation of aesthetic judgements of taste, however, that also lent her account of political judgement to the charges of subordinating all moral and practical concerns "to the aesthetic potentiality of politics" (Kateb 2001, 122; see also Kateb 1983; 1977, 163–8). Moreover, critics have claimed that this slide into "an unwarranted aestheticization of politics" is prone to assume implications, discomfitingly reminiscent of the very impulses she had most wanted to resist (Beiner 1989, 138; Kateb 2002, esp. 351–6; 1983, esp. 28–31).[41] Yet, it should be noted that Arendt persistently warned against the danger of an aestheticist reversal lurking in the wake of the breakdown of absolutes in modernity and remained steadfast in her insistence on a fundamental distinction that needs to be kept in envisioning political judgement on the model of aesthetic taste. While aesthetic sensibility contains a distinctly political attitude in endowing with meaning the particularity of the world, she emphasizes in her reflections on Isak Dinesen, it is a highly dangerous error to view political action as if it were "a work of art," that is, try to make a preconceived (aesthetic) ideal come true in politics (Arendt 1968b, 105, 109). The danger of this aestheticist reversal, to be sure, is present in the method of drilling itself. As Arendt elaborates in her reflection on the troubling political implications of Heidegger's philosophy, however, this reversal occurs only when aesthetic judgement, based as it is on a reflective distancing from prefabricated theoretical perspectives on the world, forgets to return to the common phenomenal reality and turns inward towards itself (see Arendt 1971). For in its desire to liberate past experiences from their predetermined place within some larger whole, it easily lapses into conceiving of a new end of judgement in the cultivation of a unique, isolated Self and ends up affirming

[41] Other critics, specifically those coming from the postmodern orientation, in contrast praise her aestheticist leanings for salvaging the unique and self-revelatory nature of political action from being extinguished under the tyrannical morality of traditional metaphysics (see Villa 1992, 282–4; Honig 1988, 84, 89–90).

what is supposedly purely original or authentic, too genuine, in short, to reveal any broader meaning that would be communicable to others and able to speak in the present (see Arendt 1994, 180–1; 1968a, 198–9). For Arendt, Heidegger's thinking and its attempt to resolve the ambiguity of political judgement in an embrace of "absolute Selfness" thus represents a politically highly dangerous disregard for Kant's critical recognition of the limits of human reason (Arendt 1994, 181). For based on a distancing from common, intersubjective reality, it cannot but fail to affirm the independent existence of outside reality and mistakenly assumes that the plural character of the world can be resolved into, and in fact reduced to a mere function of, the essentially subjective thought process (see Hinchman and Hinchman 1984, 206). It can thus only lead to action by an "absolutizing of individual categories of being" – thereby furthering the view of the world and others as mere material to be moulded at will and representing the ultimate manifestation of the traditional philosophical prejudice against the political realm (Arendt 1994, 185, 176–82; Fine 2008, 161–3). It is also these perceived vestiges of subjectivism that made Arendt shy away from an unequivocal embrace of the broader tradition of *Existenz* philosophy. While she praised it for what she saw as its most promising "prerequisites" for the first this-worldly, properly political form of thinking, she also reproached the existentialists for failing to adequately confront the ambiguity of political judgement brought to light by Kant: that human freedom and political action is only possible on the grounds of a recalcitrant worldly reality, a reality that can no longer be "resolved into thought without losing its character as reality" (Arendt 1994, 183). Much like Camus, Arendt instead was convinced that a properly political account of judgement lay in facing up to, rather than seeking to flee, this ambiguity by remaining loyal to the plurality of the world.

Kant's aesthetic judgement, in Arendt's view, is capable of confronting the ambiguity of political affairs because it relies on the ability of "enlarged mentality" or "representative thinking" (Arendt 1989, 43; 2006a, 217, 237). Representative thinking represents a distinctly political sensibility in that, in the reflective process of moving from the particular to the general, it remains always in close contact with the world by tying into its exercise a consideration of a plurality of other perspectives on shared reality. For this aesthetic taste relies crucially on the faculty of imagination, which allows it to distance itself from private, subjective conditions that shape its particular

perspective on the world, represent in its mind what it looks like from other people's viewpoints and take them into account while forming its judgement (see Arendt 1989, 67–9). Thus, it is the ability of representative thinking, as Arendt notes, that corresponds to the actual "operation of reflection," to approbation and disapprobation, the approval or disapproval of taste's initial subjective choice between it-pleases or it-displeases (Arendt 1989, 68–9). Aesthetic judgement in this way honours the insight that Arendt admires in the thought of Karl Jaspers: that meaning, as opposed to truth, and thought itself only come into existence *between* human beings, that is, "in communication," and can only assume the form of "a perpetual appeal" to the freedom of others (Arendt 1968c, 85; 1994, 182–3). Touching upon "the borders of reality" and standing face to face with its own "failure" to grasp it as a "pure object of thought," Jaspers's thought recognizes that the possibilities of reconstituting a meaningful world can only lie in community with others, acknowledging the very condition of its exercise in the presence of a plurality of perspectives who take it to account and thus constantly reinvigorate its conclusions (Arendt 1994, 183–4; 1989, 14, 74, 32–4, 38–42).

Envisioning judgement as representative thinking, Arendt develops further the political significance of Jaspers's shift to the plural. As she explicitly emphasizes, representative thinking is not a matter of trying to understand "one another as individual persons," "to be or to feel like somebody else" – that is, to penetrate to the utmost kernel of each other's subjectivity thought to exist in the mode of the in-itself, outside of the world and the web of human relationships constituting it – but aims towards an understanding that comes from looking upon "the same world from one another's standpoint, to see the same in very different and frequently opposing aspects" (Arendt 1989, 43; 2006a, 51). In contrast to Jaspers's imagining of communication on the model of an "I-thou" model of a personal encounter between myself and a friend, Arendt believed that this "intimacy of dialogue" harbours in important respects the transcending aspirations present in the solitary, "I-and-myself" dialogue of thought and cannot be simply extended to the plurality of the political realm (see Arendt 1994, 443; 1978b, 200). She feared in particular that it might give rise to a kind of mutual understanding that would collapse the difference between distinct equals and grow increasingly distant from common worldly reality (see Hinchman and Hinchman 1991, 445–50). Arendt's shift of emphasis from understanding others in their inner

subjectivity to considering their perspectives on the world in this respect brings to light what is at stake in her distrust of rational or moral truths. In contrast to the oft-made criticisms of her account of political judgement as lacking a cognitive foundation that could subject a plurality of opinions to rational processes of validation and provide a normative basis for reaching an informed agreement in the public sphere (see e.g. Habermas 1977, 22–3; Benhabib 1996, 193–4; 2001, 200–2; Wellmer 2001, 169; Beiner 1989, 137), Arendt's concern is not to deny argumentation a necessary part in the process of judging. It is to warn against the view that it might be possible to simply deduce our judgements from our acceptance of certain initial premises in accordance with the logic of rational self-consistency – irrespective of a plurality of opinions constituting the political world, that is, "even if they could not be communicated" (Arendt 1989, 68–70; Zerilli 2005b, 170–1; Buckler 2011, 27). For Arendt, on the contrary, the plurality of political affairs is not something to be overcome, but the very condition of possibility of bringing into existence a shared, public world (see Zerilli 2012, 21–2, 23).

Here Arendt echoes Camus's distrust of attempts to envision the communicative practice of judging in terms of a synthesizing movement that would aim for an ultimate reconciliation of opposites, only to eliminate the others' difference in its quest for a universal agreement (see also Young 2001, 211–25; Nedelsky 2001, 106–18). Instead, representative thinking is capable of creatively confronting the complexity of human affairs because it is bent on constantly bringing into view and articulating a plurality of perspectives on the world and thus cultivating what Arendt, following Kant, calls *sensus communis,* a "specifically human sense" of what we share in common that enables us to orient ourselves in the public realm and respond to the ever-changing worldly reality (Arendt 1989, 70, 74; 2006a, 218). For by travelling freely about the world and imagining what it looks like from a plurality of different perspectives, representative judgement brings into existence a space of appearance, where the "redeemed" contents of the past can be brought into a "playful" communication with each other and "illuminated" – in Jaspers's phrase – in their worldly, intersubjective existence (Arendt 1968d, 79–80; 1968c, 85; 1994, 186). In disclosing actions and events in their worldly appearance, as Arendt (1989, 77) notes, aesthetic judgements possess "exemplary validity." In a particular occurrence, that is, they are able to reveal a broader, general

meaning that manifests and appeals to a community of others – yet without eliminating its uniqueness and difference under a universal rule (Arendt 1989, 77, 67; see also Hayden 2014a, 175–6). This emphasis is crucial because it grounds the distinctly political challenge and promise of judgement: its ability to reveal the political world as a shared, human world, and appeal to previously unrecognized or concealed potentials of human freedom in the present. For in revealing humans in the way they appear on the temporal and spatial plane of the world, in the web of human relationships constituting the public realm, rather than in their inner, self-contained subjectivity, it first of all furthers their recognition as acting and speaking beings, rather than abstract substances or passive instantiations of inhuman forces – as distinct, yet also equal members of the shared public realm.

Representative thinking and reconciling with the ambiguity of political action

An inquiry into the existentialist underpinnings of Arendt's creative reworking of Kant's aesthetic judgement of taste, then, reveals the distinct political significance of the aesthetic judging sensibility in its ability to shift the focus away from the self and its absolute standards of morality to an attitude of "loving care" for the plurality of the appearing world – what Arendt named "love of the world". Like aesthetic judgement, Arendt (2006a, 219) writes, political judgement too concerns "not knowledge or truth," but "the judicious exchange of opinion about the sphere of public life and the common world, and the decision what manner of action is to be taken in it, as well as how it is to look henceforth, what kind of things are to appear in it" (see also Hayden 2014a, 178–9). This worldly focus, in turn, importantly speaks to critics, reproaching Arendt's account of political judgement for offering a weak normative framework through which to fight for justice and resist instances of oppression in contemporary world (see also Bay in Arendt 1979, 303–11). For it reveals the critical, resistant potential contained in displacing the rational, moral quest for completeness and finality to be able to instead retain attention on judgement's proper aim – what Arendt called "reconciliation with reality" – that is, of weaving the multiplicity of actions and events into the fabric of the common world, and thus constantly engaging in reinvigoration of our sense of worldly

reality and of the possibilities and limitations of political action (Arendt 2006a, 257; see also Zerilli 2005b, 161–3; Buckler 2011, 12, 45–6, 57–8, 107).

To be sure, Arendt was generally sceptical of the view that judgement should "instruct," provide a "normative basis" or a "blueprint" to be followed in political action (Arendt 1979, 303–10; Zerilli 2005b, 177–9). Just as she rejected the traditional aspiration towards a supposedly objective, "god's eye view" from nowhere, she also renounced an "engaged" form of judging that would seek to assume the standpoint of the victims (see Arendt 1994, 402; see also Disch 1993, 667, 672). For based as it is on an attempt to identify with others' experience of suffering and injustice, from Arendt's perspective, this focus again harbours an attempt to reach actual knowledge of a given (oppressive) situation and reduce the meaning of particular events to a moral lesson or idea that would inspire appropriate (emotional) responses and forms of political action. Yet, short-circuiting the worldly process of considering and negotiating between a plurality of different perspectives, it for Arendt amounts to a "worldless" form of human togetherness that is bound to abstract the experience of suffering or oppression away from its phenomenal manifestation in the common world, and thus reduce it to an essential, seemingly eternal trait of the victims' identity (Arendt 1968e, 16). As such, it in fact risks justifying their victimhood and obscuring the possibilities for the oppressed to affirm their freedom in the future (see Arendt 1994, 402). Worse still, left without a solid ground of the common world, such judgement can easily lead to a willingness to sacrifice human freedom and plurality to abstract principles or causes of liberation (Arendt 2006b, 80). Any attempt to make the identification with others' suffering – whether grounded in the supposed universality of reason or sentiment – into a basis for political action, as Arendt writes in her observations on the French revolutionary terror, can easily be distorted into a "boundless," abstract emotion that drowns the sensitivity "to reality in general and to the reality of persons in particular" and again submits the human judging capacity to the rule of a necessary, pre-determined law (see Arendt 1968e, 16; 2006b, 80).

Rather than assuming the standpoint of the victims, representative thinking instead aims towards a perspective of worldly impartiality, which Arendt praises in the great ancient historiographers and which highlights the distinct political significance of the aesthetic judging sensibility, its ability to resist closure to instead retain attention on the

ambiguity of judging "for the world's sake" (Arendt 2006a, 51; 1968e, 7–8). The perspective of worldly impartiality is of paramount political import because, seeking to remain loyal to the plurality of political affairs, it refrains from resorting to any pre-fabricated moral(istic) framework that would seek to order and judge the world in terms of the simplistic categories of good and evil, while precluding the process of understanding and coming to terms with worldly reality (Fine 2008, 169–70). For by looking upon the world from a variety of diverse perspectives, representative judgement lets the meaning (or value judgement) of actions (as unjust or oppressive) surface tentatively, and never unambiguously, out of a consideration of how they echoed in the common world, how they bore upon the human, political status of a plurality of individuals constituting it. In this way, it reveals past occurrences in their human, political character, illuminating how they arose not from "the moon," imposing themselves as some outer-worldly force from outside politics itself, but "in the midst of human society" (Arendt 1994, 404). As such, it also invites us to acknowledge the past as something which is part of our own world and for which responsibility needs to be assumed, while at the same time kindling the awareness that it could have been otherwise and thus also disclosing the possibilities for acting anew and differently in the future. Importantly, however, the solidarity with the victims here is not based on an identification with their suffering, but on their recognition as equal members of the common world, whose humanity has been unjustly denied and who should be restored in their status as acting beings, equally worthy of participating in the shared efforts of reconstituting the public realm (see Marso 2011, 20).

Bringing out the phenomenal reality of the political world, by the same token, worldly judgement also furthers the political insight that a new beginning, too, cannot be conceived in terms of an absolute, predetermined end transcending the realm of human affairs, but can only be meaningful if it takes into account the newly emerging bounds of human plurality and of the shared world. For disclosing past suffering and oppression in their intersubjective, political significance, representative thinking also reveals the world as "a new political arena," as something both the victims and the oppressors "share in common" (Arendt 2005, 178). It thus displaces the view – which Arendt chided in the Zionist depiction of the relationship between the Jews and Gentiles in Western nation-states – of the conflicting sides as "opposing abstractions" or

essentially foreign "substances," which confront each other in an eternal struggle and where final reconciliation can only occur with the annihilation of one side by the other (see Arendt 2007, 50–1, 55). Rather than fixating individuals in their past identity as passive victims or evil perpetrators, in other words, it links them indissolubly together through the mediation of the shared reality. It thus also discloses a space for former enemies to recognize each other as acting beings, differently situated in the world, yet also capable of engaging in a shared endeavour to rebuild and preserve for each other a properly human world (see Schaap 2005a, 83).

Arendt's worldly judgement then shies away from offering a remedy for the perplexities of political action in the sense of providing it with a secure foundation and offsetting its awe-inspiring spontaneity and unpredictability. Rather, it suggests a way of moving meaningfully in the gap between past and future (Arendt 2006a, 14), coming to terms with whatever is past which always bears the mark of the new and the strange and thereby being better able to face up to the uncertainties of the future. For by bringing into existence a space in which things of this world can appear in their plural, human character, it reveals "the conditions of [our] freedom" and also "what [we] can and cannot do" (Arendt 1994, 186). As an incessant worldly activity of coming to terms with the phenomenal character of our human, political existence, representative judgement becomes "the other side of action" (Arendt 1994, 321) – helping us to recognize and reconcile with the possibilities and limitations of political action as they inhere in the framework of the public realm in all its plurality and unpredictability.

Concluding thoughts

This chapter sought to disclose how Camus's artistic sensibility and Arendt's reworking of Kant's account of aesthetic judgement further illuminate the activity of judging in its worldly ambiguity. Building on Sartre's and Beauvoir's apt recognition of the worldly perplexity of political judgement, it traced in Camus and Arendt a heightened awareness of the recalcitrant and untameable character of the world as the very condition of human freedom and creative judgement. It revealed their distinct contribution in a staunch refusal to yield to the traditional desire for finality and

perfection to instead retain the focus on confronting and wondering at the world in its plurality and complexity – envisioning political judgement as an inherently communicative, intersubjective activity of constantly kindling the sense of the common world between a plurality of human freedoms and thus strengthening our capacity of recognizing and responding to the possibilities and limitations of political action. Their aesthetic sensibility thus can be said to enrich Sartre's and Beauvoir's emphasis on confronting individuals with their responsibility for the world by its attentiveness to disclosing the possibilities of fighting for greater freedom within the bounds of our human, worldly political existence.

4 Political judgement and narrativity

The preceding two chapters have sought to rethink the notion of political judgement and bring out the paramount political significance of the human ability to judge through the perspectives of the four selected existentialist thinkers. Their awareness of the need to confront the realities of their time without traditional categories and patterns of thought, as the foregoing discussion has showed, amounted to a radical questioning of the high barriers erected between the realms of ethics and politics on the one hand and the realm of aesthetics on the other, and an attempt to reinvigorate the capacity of political judgement by recourse to the distinct features of narrative form. In this reconsideration they could be said to prefigure the recent turn within political theory towards the narrative as a promising prism and voice through which to confront the ethical and political perplexities of contemporary times. Thinkers as diverse as, for instance, Martha Nussbaum, Richard Rorty and Paul Ricoeur, all dwell on the boundaries of the traditional distinction between political theory and literature, and insist that our capacity for practical judgement could be greatly enriched by an engagement with literary works. A literature-inspired sensitivity, in this story, is said to be able to nurture just those ethical sensibilities that lie beyond the reach of abstract theorising. This narrative about narrative however has not remained uncontested. Critics warn against awarding narrative any too presumptuous a role. They point to the potentially troubling political implications of narrative empathy and radically question the very ability of narrative that is so enthusiastically praised among its supporters: the ability to approach reality in its particularity and thus offer a valuable means for recognizing and representing difference and otherness in an ever more plural world. While a nuanced recognition of the political and ethical import of narrative discourse can be traced as far back as the ancients, then, it seems to have acquired a new and, as it were, urgent relevance in contemporary political thought.

Against this background, this chapter aims to explore how the existentialists' narrative sensibility maps onto this broader space of the vigilant, yet contested turn towards narrative as a way of facilitating ethical and political judgement. In particular, it seeks to examine the epistemological and ontological premises and concerns that underlie the contemporary narrative turn and, on this basis, further foreground the

distinctly political significance of the existential aesthetic judging sensibility. It first briefly engages the main arguments for the ethical and political promise of narrative form in recent thought, and confronts them with the main criticisms. What emerges from this examination is the contested issue of narrative (in)ability to approach the contingent, plural and unpredictable character of the world of human affairs and the reality of (radically) different others. Engaging the existentialist lens it, second, attempts to illuminate why the question of recognition as the main concern of the narrative approach becomes so pressing and at the same time so fraught with difficulty, and points to how narrative form can be said to articulate and cultivate the process of judging by responding to the strained and fluctuating dynamics of intersubjective recognition as it emerges from under the weakened validity of traditional verities. On this basis, thirdly, it seeks to highlight the distinct political promise of narrative sensibility by bringing the existentialists' aesthetic reimaginings of political judgement into conversation with contemporary probings into the ethical and political value of narrative voice. Within the recent discourse on narrative, it discerns a lingering predominance of the epistemological, moral concern with ensuring a proper way of grasping and responding to others' experience (of suffering and injustice), which again risks abstracting from the particular and plural character of our worldly reality. The existentialists' aesthetic imagination, in contrast, emerges as distinct for retaining attention on the process of judgement in its worldly ambiguity, which makes it well-suited to account for and confront the perplexity of engaging the world in political action.

Concern with narrative in recent political thought

While recent engagements with narrative differ in their respective philosophical positions, emphases and aims, they converge in praising stories' ability to cultivate in the reader the kind of moral awareness and sympathetic understanding believed to be essential to political judgement and public deliberation. Thus, and not unlike the four selected existentialist thinkers, they all more or less explicitly challenge Kant's separation of the spheres of morality and aesthetics and the ensuing divide between the

realms of philosophy and literature. Against the traditional relegation of literature to a marginal position within the field of ethics, as Rorty (1989, 82, 94) for instance argues, it is now the attentive and rich description of the particular, private, and idiosyncratic that is awarded the primary role in public deliberation about shared values and goals. This challenge implies further a reconsideration of the judging activity and ethics as such. The ability to judge and ethics in the broadest sense is no longer understood merely or even primarily as knowledge of universal rules and their application onto particular cases. It instead mirrors a novelistic sensitivity, an ability of compassionate and just attentiveness and perception, of "getting the tone right," of being able to recognize others and worldly occurrences in their particularity and unpredictability, and formulate an adequate response (see Nussbaum 1990, 156; Murdoch 1970, 36–40).

In this shift of focus the contemporary supporters of narrative echo ancient and modern arguments for the positive ethical significance of literary imagination and narrative understanding. The first philosophically formulated statement on the ethical and political relevance of stories we may trace to Aristotle. Recent supporters of narrative find a welcome starting point in his insight in the *Poetics* that "poetry is more philosophical [...] than history" (see e.g. Ricoeur 1981a, 296; Nussbaum 1997, 93). Stories, according to Aristotle, are inherently ethical and political because they are able to imitate the structure of human action and are thus also able to reveal universal aspects of human existence – as opposed to history, which remains of the plane of particular and contingent facts (Ricoeur 1991, 22, 28). This ability, further, was held to rest on stories' capacity to inspire in the spectators the sense of cathartic release, what Aristotle defined as "purgation by pity and fear" (Kearney 2002, 137). They were believed to embody "both empathy and detachment," that is, inspire empathetic identification with the suffering of others and at the same time afford sufficient distance so that the spectators would not become overwhelmed by it and would still be able to see the whole (Kearney 2002, 137–9). In this respect, narrative understanding could be seen as closely linked to the capacity of *phronesis,* practical wisdom of ethical and political judgement, insofar as it, contrary to theoretical wisdom, better attunes us to recognizing and learning to respect the singularities of particular situations and helps us discover in human responses to these situations general ethical values and meanings (see e.g. Ricoeur 1991, 22–3).

Defence of the positive ethical value of narrative voice regained intensity in the eighteenth century philosophy, with Adam Smith and David Hume. In their thought, arguments for the positive ethical and political significance of narrative became explicitly anchored in a questioning of the traditional division between reason and emotions, and increasingly linked to what was seen as the socially beneficial effects of exercises in vicarious imagination and empathetic identification. Thus emerged Smith's model of a judicious spectator, where the cultivation of emotions represented an essential part of good ethical judgement and public rationality (see e.g. Nussbaum 1995, xvi; Keen 2007, 42–4). This view was perhaps most powerfully expressed in Romantic and Victorian theories of literature and ethics. In Shelley, for instance, we read that a "man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own" (in Black 2009, 787). Similarly, Eliot sees the ethical promise of her writings in their power to increase the readers' ability "to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures" (in Keen 2007, 54). Especially with the rise of the novel, literature's ethical and political promise came to rest explicitly on its ability to extend readers' capacity to imagine beyond the confines of the solitary self and empathize with distant others.

In recent explorations into the ethical and political value of narrative these arguments appear with an increased sense of urgency. Specifically, recent inquiries into the ethical and political value of narrative are explicitly formulated as a response to a deep-seated awareness that abstract principles and norms of traditional philosophy, in particular the disembodied and allegedly clairvoyant reason of the Enlightenment, have become profoundly inadequate to meaningfully address the particularities of specific situations in which we are called upon to judge. Theirs, in turn, is an attempt to explore the ways in which the kind of emotionally engaged and embodied understanding characteristic of literary works could provide a corrective to the abstractness of the Enlightenment thinking and point towards a humanism better able to acknowledge the plurality and ambiguity of an ever more complex world (Nussbaum in Kearney 1995, 121–2; Nussbaum 1995, 44–52). Narrative sensitivity can do this, according to its proponents, because it breaks with the traditional philosophy's emphasis on the autonomous and

self-contained self – or, as Rorty (1993, 123) calls it, "the rather rare figure of the psychopath, the person who has no concern for any human being other than himself." For what this break entails is a departure from the presupposition of a pure constituting consciousness that is able to, in each situation, retain complete mastery over the whole of reality, dissolve its unpredictable, plural and temporal character into its own pre-fabricated thought-frame. Instead, the focus rests on the attentiveness to things, people and events in the world in their particularity, that is, on their own terms. Murdoch, for instance, explicitly links our ability to appraise beauty with an ethical stance that involves a distancing from the self and its "self-aggrandizing" motives to instead employ freedom as "a function of a progressive attempt to see a particular object clearly" (Murdoch 1970, 23).

More attentive seeing here translates into the improved ability of judgement and morally beneficial action. As Murdoch (1970, 65–6) elaborates, a directing of attention beyond the confines of self-interest and towards other people, results in a concern with recognizing others in their "separateness and differentness," as valuable in themselves, irrespective of the needs or desires of one's self. This connection is perhaps most extensively developed in the philosophy of Martha Nussbaum. Novelistic sensitivity, Nussbaum draws on Ellison, helps us keep constant guard against "refusals to see," those lapses of attention in which we make others "invisible" by looking at them through constructions created by our own minds, from the outside, as it were (Nussbaum 1997, 87). Literary imagination, on the contrary, teaches us to see others, not as abstract entities, but as human beings endowed with dignity, that is, as both different from us and in this respect constantly challenging our capacity of sympathetic identification, and at the same time bound to us by our "common vulnerability," "similar weaknesses and needs, as well as similar capacities for achievement" (Nussbaum 1997, 91–2). Moral sensitivity contained in novels helps us judge, Rorty (1989, xvi) argues much like Nussbaum, by "increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of others" and thus recognizing alien others as "fellow sufferers." Lynn Hunt, too, similarly argues that, by cultivating the ability of empathetic imagination, the rise of the novel in the eighteenth century inspired people to see in hitherto alien or different others human beings that in some fundamental way participated in the shared conception of humanity, and so contributed to "advancing the

concept of human rights" (Hunt in Keen 2007, xx). It is precisely because narrative engagement inspires us to see others in their particularity and difference that it also allows us to recognize in them our equals, that is, human beings worthy of loving and just treatment.

In this way, it is possible to give voice to hitherto silenced members of society, yet bear in mind that they are agents in their own right, and not mere passive objects of our benevolent gaze (Nussbaum 1997, 96–7). In other words, it is possible to judge particular practices as unjust, while resisting any simple utopian and abstract solutions that would obliterate freedom and difference in the other (Nussbaum 1995, 34). At the same time, this position avoids the temptation of renouncing the very possibility of extending our empathy beyond the frontiers of our existing group identities (Nussbaum 1997, 109). Such a view, according to Nussbaum (1997, 110), goes so far in denying our common humanity as to question the very possibility of dialogue across difference. It thus threatens to lapse into a non-reflective celebration of difference that reduces politics to a power-play of self-contained and opposing interest groups (Nussbaum 1997, 110). Against this view, Nussbaum is insistent on affirming the promise of literature to make others "comprehensible or at least more nearly comprehensible" (Nussbaum 1997, 111). By inspiring us to imagine others' motives and actions in the context of their situational complexity, it makes us less prone to treat them as wholly alien or evil, but rather as rightful participants in public deliberation about common needs and goals (Nussbaum 1997, 97–8). Thus, Rorty (1989, 192) elaborates, it trains in us "the ability to see more and more traditional differences as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation," and inspires us to work towards social and political arrangements based on the values of dialogue and mutual understanding (see also Rorty in Kearney 2002, 154). Narrative engagement can thus be held to embody a commitment to a fight for greater freedom and justice that is based on a careful consideration of the plural, intersubjective and ambiguous nature of the political world. As such, it does not aim at a final synthesis that would claim to have absolute and universal validity, but is guided by an awareness of limits and insistent on connecting "the present with the past and utopian futures" in ways that are provisional, open to contestation and dispute (Rorty 1989, xvi).

However, it is precisely the alleged narrative ability to acknowledge and account for

the irreducible difference we confront in political life that remains highly contested. A particularly powerful critical strain emerged with postmodern, postcolonial and feminist theory and criticism in the late twentieth century. Prominent in this respect is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which exposes behind supposedly well-intentioned and benevolent Western depictions of the "Orient" an imperialist desire to control and appropriate the Other (Black 2010, 23). In the writings of Foucault and Derrida, in particular, the assumptions guiding recent narrative discourse of being able to faithfully represent difference and transcend otherness towards forms of commonality – especially if conceived to carry emancipatory aspirations – remain in the clutches of an overly-confident Enlightenment reason that ends up imposing on other people and cultures the supposedly universal values and emotions of those in power. The supposedly selfless and other-directed beautifying gaze and the very assumption of common humanity across difference on which it rests, is here regarded as a condescending gesture on the part of the privileged that appropriates the subjectivity of the oppressed and denies their capacity for political action. It is thus bent on justifying unjust practices, and in fact reproducing hierarchies of social power (Black 2010, 2–3; 24; Keen 2007, 143–8, 159–60).

In this powerful counter-narrative merge the two seemingly divergent strands of criticism of the ethical value of narrative as they took shape among several eighteenth and nineteenth century writers and literary critics. On the one hand, beauty was believed to inspire mere passive beholding and was thus in fact held to benumb readers' ability to judge (see e.g. Scarry 2006, 61). Literary sensitivity and imagination, on this account, were thought of as being prone to assume the form of self-indulgent and self-complacent empathizing with an image of the destitute and oppressed other, while removing the readers further away from real-life problems and dulling their sense of responsibility to people in reality (Keen 2007, xx, 46–7). Other critics, on the other hand, reproved beauty's "apparent directional quality," and warned that beauty's acts of attention and representation might "actively" do harm to or even destroy its object (Scarry 2006, 58–9). In particular, critics and writers like William Godwin, Wyndham Lewis and Laura Riding, distrusted a certain spontaneous, automatic and non-reflective element at the heart of sympathetic feeling and evoked the vision of the uncontrolled spread of a spontaneous emotion, able to obliterate under its sway any and all

individuality (Keen 2007, 47; Black 2009, 788). Like the claims of universal reason, the presumptuousness of universal feeling, too, was believed to display a disregard for the historically and socially shaped particularities of human experience and a betrayal of the stated goal of just representation and recognition (Keen 2007, 57).

In the twentieth-century critics, however, the recently evoked narrative ability of adequately representing and recognizing difference came explicitly to be seen as implicated in the social, economic and political hierarchies of oppression and injustice. With this linkage, the ethics and politics of narrative become deeply entrenched in the broader contours of the crisis of intersubjective representation and recognition, where the unbridgeable difference between the subject and object of representation mirrors "dramatic visions of alterity that invoke troubling [...] hierarchies of power" (Black 2010, 2). The postmodern criticism and its attendant embrace of only particular and contingent narratives, however, not only led to a thorough questioning of the very possibility of representing the perspectives of others and implied the claim that the right and the possibility of reliable and just representation lies exclusively in the hands of one's own group or community (Black 2010, 24–5). What came to be held in suspicion was the very impetus to put the narrative form in the service of an ethical or political goal outside the text itself (Black 2010, 202; Newton 2002, xx). This broader counter-narrative could be seen as a direct legacy of twentieth-century atrocities, which, in particular, generated much scepticism about the humanising capacity of empathy. What stood confronting this capacity was a troubling question of not only how empathy could have failed so tragically and how such horrors were possible at all, but also whether they can even be represented in a way that does justice to the victims' suffering. Many critics have since for instance asked whether the very idea of aesthetic representation in light of such atrocity does not instead border on "dehumanizing pornography" that mocks "the very idea of human solidarity" (Black 2009, 789). In this way, the broader end-of-the-century crisis of representation places the arguments for the ethically and politically positive value of narrative before a profound challenge only hinted at in previously expressed doubts about the value of literary empathy and understanding. At issue now is not only the challenge of how to constantly scrutinize the adequacy of our acts of recognition and representation with a view to unmasking their potential injustice. Rather, the concern is that this moral framework has become profoundly inadequate to

relate to our historical experience and serve as a meaningful bridge to reality (see Dean 2004, 7). What so radically challenges the alleged positive effects of literary empathy then is a yawning gap between narrative representations of reality and the potential feelings of empathetic identification it inspires on the one hand, and the willingness on the part of readers to assume responsibility for the represented as part of their own reality and make this assumption reflect in responsible ethical and political judgement and action in the world.

What is notable in this analysis is that this powerful counter-narrative puts into question the very characteristic of the aesthetic that drew the recent supporters of narrative to turn to literary imagination as a resource for the making of ethical and political judgements: its ability to be better able to approach the particular, historically conditioned and contingent nature of human experience. What invites further exploration then is the vexed question of whether and how narrative sensibility can be envisioned to be able to reinvigorate our ability of political judgement and lead to responsible political action in the world. Why, in fact, would it be more resistant to the imposition of individual categories and experiences upon others and more welcoming to difference? Against this background, the next section engages the existentialist lens to inquire into the ontological presuppositions grounding the explorations into the ethical and political promise of narrative form and explore further how specifically it can be said to embody the vexed issue of intersubjective recognition and its discontents.

Existentialist underpinnings of narrative sensitivity and the troubled horizon of intersubjectivity

Ontologically, the arguments for the ethical and political promise of narrative form could be said to rest on stories' ability to answer to, and in fact embody, the "proto-existential" account of human experience (Kearney 2002, 130). By this is meant that stories answer to the horizon where human existence has become unhinged from the realm of eternal ideas and values, and where, consequently, the points of support can be looked for only among others, in the finite being-in-the-world itself (see e.g. Murdoch 1970, 86; Rorty 1989, 45). This fundamental condition of human existence, as has

already been amply demonstrated, dispenses with the traditional philosophy's conception of a self-transparent and autonomous cogito that could lay claim to a self-contained substantiality. Instead it confronts the horizon of thought with a vision of a plurality of "split, decentred, fallible" subjectivities, always already "traversed by meanings other than [their] own," mediated by intersubjective meanings, values and material conditions, or, in existentialist terms, constituted as uneasy amalgams of freedom and facticity (Ricoeur in Kearney 1984, 15, 32). This condition Ricoeur calls "historicity," "the fundamental and radical fact that we make history, that we are immersed in history, that we are historical beings" (Ricoeur 1981a, 274). As formulated in the thought of the four existentialist thinkers, the way of judging, acting and living, and the very way of human freedom, then consists of a constant negotiation between the need to retrieve and assign meaning to what once was, and the aspiration to project oneself towards uncertain futures, all without a stable bridge of traditional verities.

The relevance of narrative within this horizon lies in what Ricoeur calls the "mutual belonging between narrativity and historicity," or "the pre-narrative capacity of life" (Ricoeur 1991, 28–9). In these terms is contained a two-way acknowledgement. As finite beings, on the one hand, our lives are always-already storied, implicitly caught in a temporal plot that consists of an interplay between the elements of past, present and future. As such, on the other hand, human life constitutes "an activity and a passion in search of a narrative" that would draw the divergent temporal elements together and organize them into an explicit life-story (Ricoeur 1991, 28–9; Kearney 2002, 129–32; see also Ricoeur 1981c). At work then is an awareness that any all-embracing doctrine that presupposes an all-knowing subject, possessing a clear awareness of his or her possibilities and capable of predicting the consequences of his or her actions in fact all to easily loses its ground in reality and obscures our ability to view it clearly (Murdoch 1970, 1, 7, 47). Beauty, on the contrary, acknowledges the worldly and conditioned conception of the self as well as the lack of an external *telos* or finality to human life, and is accordingly determined to confront the realm of lived experience and endow with meaning the particular, plural and unpredictable nature of the world (Murdoch 1970, 79, 86). It is this shift then that also leads to a changed understanding of judgement and ethics. If traditional ethics speaks the language of "obligation and autonomy," envisioning judgement's operation to be predicated upon the knowledge of

preformulated moral norms and their application upon the world of human affairs, narrative ethics answers to the immediacy of an encounter with a particular and unique moral situation (Newton 1995, 12). It thus leads to a reinterpretation of the human judging capacity – along the lines conceived by the existentialist thinkers – as an activity of confronting and responding to the particularity of others and the world, of recognizing their obscure character, while constantly striving for a clearer, more compassionate and just vision (see e.g. Murdoch 1970, 65; Scarry 2006, 28–31).

Hence comes to light, at its most fundamental, existential-phenomenological level, the political relevance of narrative ability to imitate the structure of human action and suffering in the world as it has been first discerned by Aristotle and embraced by recent supporters of the literary form (Ricoeur 1991, 28; Kearney 2002, 131–2). It is because narrative does not aspire to a totality and is willing to approach the particularity of human action in its radical contingency, plurality and unpredictability that it is able to answer to the human need to give voice to and understand experience, recreate it so as to give it a more tangible form and endow it with a general meaning, and thereby kindle the process of reconciling with ever-changing worldly reality (see e.g. Arendt 1994, 307–8; Kearney 2002, 131–2). Their attentiveness to the distinct characteristics of human lived experience that does not simply subsume individual actions under a prefabricated standard or rule – as most explicitly emphasized in Arendt's insight into the distinct ability of aesthetic, narrative-inspired judgement to reveal the "who" rather than the "what" of the actors' identity – thus allows narratives to effect a transition from a merely biological life to a truly human one, to humanize our lives which before they are examined and recounted in the form of a story consist of no more than a heap of unrelated biological facts and processes (see Kearney 2002, 3; Ricoeur 1991, 27–8; Kristeva 2001, 7–8). For in this way, narratives are able to "redeem" past occurrences from the oblivion of history, make them part of our common, human world and let them speak to us in the present (Arendt 1968a, 205–6; 1971, 51; see also Benhabib 1990). Or, in other words, they are able to enrich our sense of the common world and our own selves as part of this world, which simultaneously involves a transcendence toward "new possibilities of being," a reconsideration of the possibilities of human action in the present and the future (Kearney 2002, 132–3). Narratives, then, are crucial in strengthening our sense of ourselves as "political-ethical subject[s]," capable of

responsible action in the world (Kearney 2002, 151–2).

This existential insight into the political relevance of stories thus also reveals the utmost importance of the vexed question of recognition of the particularity of others and worldly reality as the core of a process of arriving at a judgement in the world of the dead god. In *The Course of Recognition* Ricoeur compellingly shows how the notion of recognition, while an essential attribute of the traditional conceptualization of truth, gains "full autonomy" and warrants investigation on its own terms only once it is liberated from the theory of knowledge strictly speaking, specifically with the granting of philosophical significance to the vicissitudes of human being-in-the-world (Ricoeur 2005, 36, 27). Only once the temporal and contingent nature of human experience is acknowledged, and the concomitant uncertainty and doubt, the possibility of error and misrecognition given full weight, can the process of recognition be approached in its dramatic character, its inherent urgency as well as difficulty (Ricoeur 2005, 36, 63–8).

Drawing on the existentialist thinkers, this newly established situation confronting political judgement refers first and foremost to the ambiguous conditions confronting the recognition of ourselves and others as judging and acting beings, beings "'capable' of different accomplishments" and thereby also responsible (Ricoeur 2005, 69–70). Among the ancients the idea that a certain happening can be traced back to an agent as its cause found less anxious a reception, because each action immediately found a secure place within the ontological and cosmological whole of Being, and was thereby also redeemed (Ricoeur 2005, 96). With the shattering of this whole in modern philosophy, the idea of "making things happen" implies for the first time an explicit recognition of the autonomy of the agent, yet an autonomy that constantly engages the outside world and confronts the reality of other freedoms (Ricoeur 2005, 96, 90–96). The ambiguity of recognition here emerges in two interlinked aspects. Political judgement must now confront a temporal dimension and respond to the dialectic of what remains the same through time and what changes, or in Ricoeur's (2005, 101–2) words, the dialectic between *idem* and *ipse* identities. So, too, it must acknowledge the dialectic between the self and others, or "the dialectic of identity confronted by otherness" (Ricoeur 2005, 103). This ambiguity is well encapsulated in Sartre's and Beauvoir's aesthetic reimaginings of political judgement that can no longer rely on the supposedly self-evident or natural character of values, but corresponds to a lived

movement of a human freedom constantly engaging and recognizing the experiential reality of the world and different others, and disclosing it towards future possibilities of being (see e.g. Sartre 1992a, 18–19, 46–7). As acts of a situated being, however, our judgements also can never reach a total view of the world and others, but retain a partial and open character, which at the same time foregrounds the activity of judging as an inherently intersubjective phenomenon and an appeal to the freedom of others. The recognition of the source of our judgements in human freedom, as most evidently expressed in Beauvoir's narrative judging sensibility, then also grounds at the profoundest level the fact that in order for them to be meaningful, they need to be taken up, valued and recognized by other freedoms. But they, precisely because they are free, can also fail or refuse to recognize us at all or misrepresent and misrecognize our experience and our judgements in a way that appropriates our possibilities and alienates our freedom (see Beauvoir 1948, 71; 2004a, 132–3).

These ambiguities of political judgement could also be seen as grounding the recent emergence of recognition theory or politics of recognition as a distinct approach to understanding politics. Charles Taylor, one of its main proponents, thus traces the dawn of the politics of recognition to the modern shattering of previously unquestioned historically, socially and politically ascribed identities (Taylor 1994, e.g. 48, 61). Only once human beings are expelled from the realm where recognition rested on predetermined social categories and was thus granted *a priori,* in other words, does the issue of recognition of the identity and the very humanity of oneself and that of others turn into an open, existential question, and does the need for it come to be seen as so pressing. What distinguishes the modern age from other periods, then, as Taylor notes, "is not the need for recognition but the conditions in which this can fail. And this is why the need is now *acknowledged* for the first time" (Taylor 1994, 48).

Philosophically, this realization is usually traced to Hegel's account of the emergence of self-consciousness and its intersubjective grounding. On this account, a consciousness of self as well as a sense of moral worth cannot ensue merely from the individual's efforts to engage the world of material objects, but depends crucially on recognition by other consciousnesses (see Honneth 2012, 3–18). Recent proponents of the recognition approach, most notably Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser, have, on this basis, inquired into the mainsprings and character of social conflict and change by

reference to the normative dimension contained in the relations of mutual recognition (see Honneth 1995, e.g. 92; Fraser and Honneth 2003). What grounds the distinctive character of this approach, as Patrick Hayden (2012, 575–6) has recently argued, is that it brings out the explicitly situated, and indeed political, nature of value judgements and claims for justice and rights. Or, in other words, "it poses as an open question the meaning of 'being human' as an interpersonal and political status" (Hayden 2012, 575). The recognition approach thus can be said to echo the crucial insight grounding the aesthetic judging sensibility as developed by the four existentialists: that the condition of being human is not a matter of a "self-evident" or "natural" fact guaranteed by an appeal to a transcendental realm of ideas above the world of human affairs (Hayden 2012, 576). Nor does it refer only to the problem of material conditions that could be "solved" simply by adopting "appropriate policies" of material distribution. Rather, human dignity refers to the process of "becoming" human and to the ability of *exercising* one's rights, which is predicated upon being seen and heard by others, that is, upon the dynamics of receiving and bestowing recognition within the web of human relationships that constitute the political realm (Hayden 2012, 576–7). Conversely, a failure of recognition or misrecognition, as Charles Taylor has noted, "can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (Taylor 1994, 25). A refusal to grant recognition implies a denial of human dignity and the status of a political actor, equally worthy of engaging in the recreation of the common world in the company of his or her peers (see Hayden 2012, 578).

This political dimension adds additional force to the perplexing ontological imperative that others must be recognized as equals in precisely the difference that distinguishes them from ourselves and all the rest. The difficulty of how to respond to this challenge can for instance be discerned from the two prevalent criticisms that structure recent debates about the specific ways the recognition approach could or should be used to address the perplexities of contemporary politics. First, critics have argued that, while politics of recognition – and the recently emergent field of identity politics in particular – certainly brought into clearer focus the differences in social and political situatedness and the concomitant particular visions of truth and justice, it has also tended towards a degree of epistemological and ethical relativism. It thus exposed

the question of how we are to adjudicate between different identities and perspectives that structure the social struggles of the day and that, at least in principle, seem to possess equal right to recognition. And second, if its concern with expression and affirmation of one's self has drawn attention to a dimension previously occluded from the realm of politics and thus imbued with new vigour the meaning of political action, it has also brought forth the danger of steering the focus of political judgement away from more conventional political demands for redistribution of material resources and institutional or legal reform (see Kruks 2001, 80–6).

The difficulty of recognition is here manifested in the fact that, precisely because individuals' identities are situationally and intersubjectively produced, the very attempt to imagine across difference can be seen as an act grounded in and further entrenching the political, economic and social hierarchies of power and inequality. Conversely, insistence on the particularity of individual's experience seems paradoxically to question the very idea of solidarity-based judgement and action across different groupings and divisions. By extension, too, it confronts the difficulty of simultaneously taking sufficiently into account and mustering resources to resist broader forces, processes and structures of economic and political inequality. How then are we to be able to extend recognition to others, affirm solidarity with them, without eliminating the difference in them and thus perpetuating the injustice perpetrated against them? And conversely, how are we to affirm and valorize diversity without at the same time denying the existence of any commonality to human lives that could ground understanding and dialogue across difference, and inspire wider projects of political transformation?

It is precisely this troubled horizon of the necessity and difficulty of intersubjective recognition confronting political judgement that invites the recent explorations into the ethical and political potential of the narrative form, as well as gives weight to its critics. But how can narrative form be said to embody and answer to this condition? The crucial aspect of the answer lies in what Scholes and Kellogg (1966, 240–82) call "point of view in narrative." This concept points to a double movement contained in the word *mimesis*. Imitation at work in narrative discourse, as Ricoeur (1981a, 292) observes, is not a mere "servile representation," but should be understood as a "creative retelling" (see also Kearney 2002, 133). It involves the acts of both discovery and creation, a

disclosure of "what is already there in the light of what is not yet" (Kearney 2002, 132). In other words, it points to the fact that the act of mimesis intimates the ambiguous operation of reflective judgement as revealed by the four existentialists: grounded in human freedom, it is perspectival, that is, relative to one's situation in the world, but at the same time constantly impelled out of its own perspective to confront and appeal to particular and different others and illuminate the boundaries of the common world. It is human freedom after all that introduces a gap between recounting and an action recounted, a gap which establishes the possibility of recreating life through stories and of passing from the narrated story back to life and which also contains an acknowledgement of their "unbridgeable difference" (Kearney 2002, 132; Ricoeur 1991, 32–3). Narrative embodies this ambiguity in that its "essence" lies "in the relationship between the teller and the tale, and that other relationship between the teller and the audience" (Scholes and Kellogg 1966, 240). The notion of point of view, as Prince (1988, 7) argues, furthers an understanding of narrative "not only as an object or product but also as an act or process, as a situation-bound transaction between two parties, as an exchange resulting from the desire of at least one of these parties." That is, narrative form draws attention to the points of view of the narrator, actor, and the spectator, and embodies the "interactive problematic" of a call and response, and the ways of ordering experience, politics of recognition, representation, and world-making that binds them together (Prince 1988, 4). Because narrative always encompasses a range of attitudes that the separate points of view display towards each other (Ricoeur 1981a, 279), it could be said to represent, as its very condition of possibility, the problematic of intersubjective recognition in the world without an external *telos*. Here this problematic is revealed in the inconclusiveness brought forth by the reality of the gap which also distinguishes the narrative horizon of thought from (neo)Hegelian accounts of struggles for recognition. If the latter seem to envision the eventual end point to the development of relationships of mutual recognition and reconciliation, narrative understanding of intersubjective recognition displays a lesser degree of confidence in a conciliatory end to the struggle. Essentially separate consciousnesses, we shall recall Beauvoir (2004a, 140) to have said, must find a way to "support each other like the stones in an arch, but in an arch that no pillars support."

Yet, just as it inescapably embodies this intersubjective problematic, narrative form

could also be said to possess some of the distinct structural advantages that allow it to bring particularly clearly into light and confront the promise of and risks involved in imagining outside one's own perspective and responding to the plural and unpredictable nature of the political world (Black 2010, esp. 8–9, 19–21). The notion of point of view in this respect refers to the incompleteness and open-endedness of narrative discourse, to the fact that its source in the plural and unpredictable being-in-the-world serves both as the condition of possibility of a particular narrative and as a margin that constantly interrogates and troubles any conceived or conceivable unilinearity of its conclusions. The crucial question of how this condition is assumed by the narrative form can be approached for instance through what Prince (1988) calls the "disnarrated" as the condition of possibility of the narrated. The disnarrated does not refer to "the non-narratable," to what from within a given narrative emerges as what cannot be, must not be or is not worthy of being represented (Prince 1988, 1). Neither is it synonymous with "the unnarrated, or nonnarated," what is not told in order to create a certain temporal order, rhythm, or suspense (Prince 1988, 2). Even though linked to and perhaps serving as a foundation for both of the above, the disnarrated can be understood as their opposite in that it "covers all the events that *do not* happen but, nonetheless, are referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text" (Prince 1988, 2). As such, it opens a horizon where each course of action, decision or undertaking contains within itself an alternative, a plethora of other possibilities, where "every narrative progresses by following certain directions as opposed to others: the disnarrated or choices not made, roads not taken, possibilities not actualized, goals not reached" (Prince 1988, 5). Another way of conceptualizing this peculiar characteristic of narrative form is to say with Ricoeur (1991, 31, 21–2) that narrative reconfiguration of experience proceeds by way of "a synthesis of heterogeneous elements" and involves a constant "play between concordance and discordance." We are able to observe this play in three interlinked aspects. First, it corresponds to a constant, mutually constitutive interplay between multiple particular events, and the general meaning that ensues from their being recounted in the form of a story. Second, the story is a synthesis of "components that are as heterogeneous as unintended circumstances, discoveries, those who perform actions and those who suffer them, chance or planned encounters, interactions between actors ranging from conflict to collaboration, means that are well or poorly adjusted to ends,

and finally unintended results" (Ricoeur 1991, 21). And finally, those two syntheses of the heterogeneous are transposed onto a temporal dimension where they refer to a permanent configuration of the unstable and discordant temporalities that constitute the human present (Ricoeur 1991, 31).

Both the "disnarrated" and the "play between concordance and discordance" as distinct characteristics of narrative discourse then can be said to contain valuable resources for creatively confronting the ambiguous, intersubjective condition of political judgement after the breakdown of eternal verities. For they refer to the narrative ability to envision actualities only against the background of a plethora of other possibilities, to gather and contain in one place a plurality of different, even conflicting, perspectives as they span both space and time of the narrative world. This outlook can be helpfully illuminated with the metaphor of "crowded selves" (Black 2010, esp. 19–51). Narrative, on this account, represents different selves as separate individualities, yet also always already "composed" of a crowd of other subjectivities and their perspectives on the world (Black 2010, 42, 46). In this way, narrative form is able to represent separate subjectivities as particular plays of freedom and facticity, and explore how particular actions negotiated the gap between past and future and how they arose from and in turn affected the web of intersubjective relationships. As such, too, it necessarily envisions how the others engage and affect the self, how "the borders of the self jostle against the edges of others" (Black 2010, 47), and thus also invites the exploration of the particular acts and practices of (mis)recognition.[42] To examine how this characteristic structure of narrative form can be said to intimate and help reinvigorate the activity of political judgement, I next turn to build on the existing conceptions of the relationship between literary sensitivity and real-life judgement, and, drawing on the accounts of aesthetic judgement as developed in the thought of the four existentialist thinkers, seek to enrich them by highlighting the distinctly political promise of narrative voice – its ability to account for the plurality of political life and face up to the perplexity of engaging the world in political action.

[42] An exploration into the distinct features of narrative discourse merits an acknowledgement of the important differences between various narrative forms and genres as they developed and gained prominence in particular historical periods. Due to space limitations and without aiming for a conclusive account, I have focused above on the general characteristics of narrative voice that are emphasized by the recent proponents of the ethical and political value of literary sensibility and that can be said to embody particularly clearly the existentialist insights into the ambiguous, intersubjective condition of political judgement after the breakdown of eternal absolutes.

The world of the narrative and the activity of political judgement in its worldly ambiguity

Just as the act of narration is only enabled by the existence of a gap between recounting and what is recounted, so too the readers' freedom brings into existence a gap between narrative and their own world which establishes the possibility of passing from the narrated story back to life – while acknowledging their difference. The starting point of recent proponents of the ethical and political value of narrative sensibility, such as Martha Nussbaum and Wayne Booth, accordingly is an inquiry into the experiential reality of this gap, the ways it is assumed by situated freedoms. Booth's narrative ethics in this respect is perhaps most explicitly based upon what he calls "coduction" performed by readers, an active participation in the comparative, communal discussion and evaluation of the literary work (Booth 1988, 72, 252–72). The emphasis thus shifts away from simply presupposing a connection between an engagement with literary works and the making of political judgements in real life, as well as from an inquiry into what *kind* of literary works merit reading, to, in Booth's (1988, 169, also 202–21) words, "what kind of live encounter a given reading experience is *like*." The phenomenological analysis of engagements with literary works begins with readers' acknowledgement that, as an act of creative retelling that has its source in human freedom, narrative is first and foremost an act of world-disclosure, rather than knowledge or truth strictly speaking – as Ricoeur (1981b, 201–2) says, it opens up "a world for us." As such, as we shall recall Sartre and Beauvoir to have said, it is a gift from the other, an appeal to our freedom for its value to be recognized, taken up and carried towards new possibilities of being. It is, in other words, an invitation to assume responsibility for what has been disclosed and take it up as a ground on the basis of which to engage in our own acts and processes of judgement. In the act of reading, as Nussbaum (1995, 83) has helpfully put it, we are thus "constituted" so as to assume the position of spectators and judges of the manifold affairs of humankind.[43]

[43] The existential-phenomenological orientation then is distinct for retaining attention on the narrative ability to disclose a world – thus shying away from the "epistemological" focus grounding both the traditional, historiographical view of narrative as a representation of outside reality, capable of furthering objective knowledge of the world, and the postmodern emphasis on instituting a narrative text as a place of the endless deconstruction of any and all referentiality. In line with this existential orientation, I explore in this section the way in which narrative can be said to embody the process of judging in its worldly ambiguity. On different theoretical understandings of the role and purpose of narrative discourse with regards to real life and politics see e.g. White (1987; 1984) and Bruner

In Nussbaum, however, this constitution is assumed by way of seeing literature as a tool that kindles our "knowledge of possibilities" (Nussbaum 1995, 31, 44; 2001, 86). Drawing on Aristotle, Nussbaum believes literature intimates the process of arriving at a judgement because it introduces us to a plethora of experiences and events "that might happen," reveals "their impact on human lives" and allows us to evaluate in more general terms the "possibilities for being human" (Nussbaum 1997, 92, 110; 1994, 126). This is because the reader is able to imagine to him or herself what it would feel like to be struck by the same fortunes and misfortunes as those plaguing the lives of literary characters, but is at the same time aware that it is not his or her own life that is at stake and is thus sufficiently distanced so as to be capable of reflective and critical judgement (Nussbaum 1995, 72–6). In this morally desirable position for judging, in other words, "we find [...] love without possessiveness, attention without bias, involvement without panic" (Nussbaum 1990, 162). An engagement with literature, on this account, thus occurs first and foremost in the calm and controlled solitary space of the reader's inner self. Literature, as Vasterling (2007, 84) notes, assumes the role of an "ethics lab," where we are able to train our capacities of proper understanding, judgement and adequate response without the disturbing intrusion of contingency, opaqueness, and unpredictability that often confront us in the outer world. Texts thus come close to being seen as carriers of moral examples, which the reader, in the act of self-cultivation, is able to extrapolate, and then imitate and apply to his or her own situations (see e.g. Newton 1995, 66–7). In this reading, Nussbaum's judgement threatens to not only miss out on the possibility of a "sustained interpretation of real life experience with the help of ethical lab" (Vasterling 2007, 91), but also to disregard the all-important difference between the inner and outer worlds and proceed by applying the conclusions reached in the solitary act of reading onto the often inconsistent and always plural nature of worldly experience.

An existential-phenomenological orientation, in contrast, holds that long before we are able to retreat into the security of our private space to cultivate our own self, we are constituted as "witnesses or even interlocutors" (Newton 1995, 65). In other words, we are put into an immediate relation with a myriad of differently situated perspectives on the world, and constituted as responsible to recognize in them the voices of our fellow

(1991).

actors and sufferers, and in the image of the literary world, a vision of our common world.[44] The main political promise of narrative form, in this respect, lies in its ability to inspire us to look upon the world from a variety of narrative perspectives and voices, or, as Ricoeur (1991, 33) puts it, to engage in exploration of "the imaginative variations of our own ego." The existential aesthetic sensibility, as especially clearly brought forth by Camus's and Arendt's communicative, representative judging orientation, then is specifically political because it at the outset confronts our freedom with its limits to achieve a completely transparent view of the world and others, and instead encourages it to recognize in the irreducible plurality of politics the very condition of responsible judgement (see Arendt 1994, 183–4). Inspired to engage a plurality of different viewpoints on the world, in turn, our judgement is discouraged from any too simplistic a translation of literary discourse into moral lessons that could be applied onto real life. Rather, it proceeds by a careful examination of both how worldly relationships, practices and structures have conditioned individuals' distinct ways of being in the world, their thoughts and actions, and how these conditions have been lived and assumed by human freedoms, who may have interiorized and responded to them in diverse and multiple ways (Kruks 2001, 57–61). Narrative voice thus allows us to recognize in other people the "interconstituency" of freedom and situation, and do so, in Grosz's formulation, both from "the inside out" and from "the outside in" (cited in Kruks 2001, 53). Narrative-inspired, representative judgement, that is, allows us to recognize others, to use Arendt's words, in their worldly appearance, or as Beauvoir's situated freedoms that, while retaining their distinctness, also reveal a broader meaning of their lived reality as a world that is shared in common (Beauvoir 2011a, 200–1). Engaging with and acknowledging individuals' lived experience, we are thus able to humanize previously unseen or radically different others, see in them not passive objects, but our fellows and equal members of the common world – or, as Nussbaum (1995, xvi, 5) points out, human beings worthy of respect.

Yet, this is also where the existentialist sensitivity distances itself from Nussbaum's

[44] Here emerges the question of the forms of referentiality involved in historical and fictional accounts of the past. But, as Ricoeur (1981a, 287–96) notes, it is important to recognize that both history and fiction assume the form of acts of mimesis. If taken to mean an act of "creative retelling," that is, if its human element is acknowledged, this term also implies that just as there is "*fiction in history*," so too there is reality in fiction (Ricoeur 1981a, 289). Both historical and fictional narratives, while appearing in distinct referential modes, on this account nevertheless refer to and disclose the same fundamental condition of human existence, its historicity (Ricoeur 1981a, 292–4).

use of narrative. For in Nussbaum's account the crux of desired recognition remains directed on the inner self, a certain margin of interiority that is transcendent to and separate from its worldly existence and its interaction with others (Vasterling 2007, 92). Narrative-inspired judgement proceeds by virtue of a constant interplay "between the general and the concrete," between general human needs and goals or conditions of happiness, and the particular social and political arrangements and the ways in which these can be said to either further or impede individuals' quest for happiness (Nussbaum 1995, 7–8). What is presupposed, in other words, is "a generalizable moral consciousness" (Newton 1995, 65), which is positioned in opposition to particular situatedness of individuals and then applied as a standard of judgement between different social, historical and political arrangements. In this respect, this procedure could be said to betray a remnant of the older abstract humanist proposition that under the embodied, situated and ambiguous ways of being-in-the-world there lies a constituting and self-constituting consciousness, which only needs to shed its particular situational constraints to reach its full presence to itself. Vasterling, for instance, explicitly asks whether Nussbaum's approach does not result in a judgement that recognizes only "what fits our [already established] frame of reference," to the exclusion of radically different others, rather than in one that manifests an actual enlargement and transformation of one's subjective standpoint in response to a confrontation with other, opposing perspectives (Vasterling 2007, 90). Because it focuses on a humanity in individuals thought to exist irrespective of their particular situation in the world, this perspective for instance obscures the ways in which a certain (oppressive) situation is constitutive of their very being and may fail to adequately address (and challenge) the workings and structures of social and political power and inequality.

It was this universalizing tendency of abstracting from the particular situatedness of individuals that led especially postmodern thinkers to question the narrative ability to do justice to radical difference. The main difficulty in this respect is well caught in the core ambiguity at work in the recognition approaches. For while the very foundation of the recognition approach as a distinct field of study lies in acknowledging the situated nature of subjectivity, the desired goal of mutual recognition seems contained in claims for recognition, affirmation and/or revaluation of an individual's or group's authentic

identity as if it existed or could be made to exist in the mode of the in-itself, outside or above the world of human relationships (see e.g. McNay 2008, 7–9; Markell 2003). A similar tendency can be observed in the postmodern emphasis on the unstable, decentered, and shifting nature of the self and the ways subjectivities are discursively produced. For, as Kruks (2001, 110) notes, this position at the same time seems to presuppose a transcendental subject capable of knowing and judging its multiple instantiations from the position outside of discourse, and further, strategically determining which one to adopt in which situation to best resist domination.

The more general perplexity of recognition that begins to emerge out of this brief analysis and that also plagues Nussbaum's narrative approach is that the desired goal of recognition of different subjectivities tends to be conceived in terms of a predetermined end, which is then applied as a standard according to which to judge social and political relations, processes and institutions (McNay 2008, 8–9). Political judgement thus is conceived to proceed in accordance with the Hegelian dialectical conception of intersubjective recognition, which – as Camus (1971, 130) aptly observed – is envisioned to ultimately end in a happy reconciliation of opposing sides, yet which in fact risks entrenching the division between masters and slaves and amounting to "blind combat," where final agreement ensues only at the expense of eliminating difference (see also Ricoeur 2005, 179–80). Here it is important to invoke Arendt's warning that a desire to achieve complete mutual understanding or perfect coincidence between human consciousnesses is bound to fail to sufficiently acknowledge the irreducible and irredeemable fact of human plurality and thus also diminish the sense of common worldly reality. Camus's and Arendt's insights in this respect importantly prefigure Markell's (2003, 3–5) recent inquiry into how the prevalent ways of conceptualizing the processes of subject formation and identity claims have been prone to commit a more fundamental, "ontological," form of misrecognition. In their concern with achieving proper and just recognition, mutual intelligibility, transparency and security, they have in fact put forward claims for recognition formulated in abstraction from the sphere of social and political practices, structures, and power relations, in which they are always inescapably enmeshed – claims going against the main presupposition of the recognition problematics. For if the end of recognition is conceived in terms of a self-contained substantiality, outside of the web of human relationships, this also means that ultimately

each individual's experience is so unique that it cannot be shared by, and not even communicated to, others. Any attempt to imagine different others, by extension, can only be seen as an appropriation of other's separate subjectivity. Thus, little room is left for the exercise of political judgement that would situate particular experiences and identities within the web of human relationships and social practices, critically reflect upon them and thus disclose possible grounds for solidarity across different groupings and divisions.

Further, a perspective where the goal of recognition is directed at the mode of being of the in-itself risks missing out on the very condition of possibility of seeing humans as beings capable of political action: that political action is only possible on the ground of the world and in the company of others, that is, if human beings are seen as freedoms-in-situation, both constituting and constituted beings that can never coincide with themselves. A freedom envisioned to be able to assume the form of an in-itself, on the contrary, leads to the presumption of sovereign agency, which carries with it a misunderstanding of the distinct characteristics of political action and the irreducible unpredictability and frailty of political life (see Markell 2003, 3–5). The limitations of this perspective have been lucidly exposed in Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew,* an exploration of the limited possibilities for the Jew to assume authentic existence in an anti-Semitic world. While the Jew cannot escape the lived experience of objectification by the anti-Semite by simply appealing to an abstract humanity, he can positively assume his identity and thus resist the self-objectifying internalization of the anti-Semitic gaze (see Kruks 2001, 95). Yet, while such assumption may affirm his remaining margin of existential freedom and his moral sense of self-worth, it does not really address his situation, which is structured in a way that "everything he does turns against him" (Sartre 1976, 141; see also Kruks 2001, 95). A recognition of individuals as innately free, as Sartre and Beauvoir grew increasingly to recognize, remains removed from a sustained engagement with the broader domain of social and political structures and processes that enframe and condition individuals' existence and their ability to exercise freedom. Because it envisions subjects or groups outside or above the world of human affairs, it leads into impotence at best, or into highly dangerous instrumentalism at worst.

Against this background emerges the distinctly political relevance of the

existentialist judging sensibility, its ability – as emphasized in particular in the aesthetic imagination of Camus and Arendt – to resist totalization and instead patiently hold fast to the plurality of the (narrative) world. For thus it inspires us to recognize in particular others freedoms as they appear, act and suffer, on the temporal and spatial plane of the world, that is, in the ways their identities both change and remain the same from one temporal moment to the next through their interaction with others and the world. In this way, too, it allows us to pay attention to the ways in which the dynamics of intersubjective recognition is embedded in and expressed through the broader field of social, economic, and political practices, processes and institutions. It is within this horizon that the inherent connectedness and interdependence as well as separateness and "dissymmetry" (Ricoeur 2005, 154) between the self and others comes fully to light, and that the perplexities of intersubjective recognition are given full weight. And it is also only within this horizon, as Beauvoir was well aware, that the need for recognition can come to be seen as so pressing, and the forms of misrecognition so harmful. Crucially, the focus thus shifts from an emphasis on the recognition of one's inner or essential identity to recognition of one's subjectivity in terms of its field of action (Beauvoir 2004a, 137; see also Kruks 2001, 34–5). This change of focus further involves – as Fraser has helpfully put it – a shifting of attention from *identity* to *status* or to the dynamics of "framing and representation," and the accompanying realization that an adequate understanding of social (in)justice may require a two-dimensional approach, encompassing both recognition and redistribution (Fraser 2003, 93).

Fraser for instance explores how dynamics of recognition and redistribution represent two distinct, yet deeply intertwined, dimensions of social justice, and how they may reinforce and/or contravene each other in particular situations of oppression and resistance with reference to "the normative principle of parity of participation" (Fraser 2003, 93). In this shift, a particular injustice of misrecognition and/or maldistribution is judged not in terms of its detrimental effects on the individuals' right to self-realization, but in terms of social relations and institutional arrangements that deny certain individuals and groups the status of equal members of the public realm, and thus effectively exclude them from participation in debates about social justice (Fraser 2003, 29–31). The phenomenological-existentialist loyalty to narrative depictions of separate freedoms as they appear on the ground of the common world, in

this respect, could be said to offer additional insight into how the two realms of interpersonal recognition and redistribution are interwoven, and consequently also how to approach the ambiguous process of recognizing separate others as equal members of the public realm.

An engagement with a plurality of narrative voices, for instance, allows us to observe the ways in which either the individual actions or broader impersonal social practices and institutions work to constrain the ability of certain individuals or groups to not only exert their freedom in practical action in the world but also their very ability to distance themselves from, reflect upon and judge a given situation. It helps us discern how individual refusals of recognition pass into institutionalized forms of oppression, and, in turn, how certain processes and structural factors enable or even kindle the ability of some individuals or groups to keep others in a state of subjection. So, too, we learn to recognize in the various undertakings of the oppressed, ranging from complicity to resistance, deviance to strategic opportunism, modes of lived experience in which individuals interiorize and respond to their situation in the world, and, in turn, trace the ways in which these actions resound in the world and in what form they return to their initiators. We may observe also how individual and structural forms of failed recognition condition the actions of those individuals who are in "good-faith." In Sartre's example, even those who wish to extend the realm of freedom to all, and recognize in Jews the freedoms that they are, find their friendly and supportive gaze transformed, within the oppressive situation of anti-Semitism, into another variation of an objectifying look, one of pity or commiseration. Similarly, Beauvoir describes how an individual man is unable to simply refuse to take part in the oppression of women in an instant of individual choice: while the range of possible actions may be far vaster for him than for women, he still remains deeply enmeshed in broader processes and structures, the overall situation that is not only "his to renounce" (Kruks 2001, 60; Beauvoir 2009b, 776).[45] Finally, by thus luring us out of our self-contained selves to engage a plurality of other perspectives on the world, narrative drives us to engage in forms of self-reflection in terms of our relationship to them and our broader situatedness within the web of worldly relationships, and (re)shape the sense of our identity and self-

[45] This paragraph draws on Kruks's exploration of "social mediations" through which to examine the interconnectedness between the dynamics of interpersonal recognition and the broader field of social and political processes, institutions and structures in which these dynamics are embedded (see Kruks 2001, esp. 36–8, 57–61, 92–104).

understanding, our past and future, in light of what was disclosed.

It is only after such exercises in world-travelling that we engage in what Booth calls "second-order valuings" (Booth 1988, 270–1), a reflective and representative judgement that, for instance, a certain situation represents a situation of oppression and that it should be resisted. Narrative-inspired judging ability to expand our perspective to include also distant others and previously unseen aspects of the common world, as Camus and Arendt explicitly emphasized, then is not predicated upon any pre-given identity or characteristic that may make us empathize more readily with some specific individuals or groups. Rather, the presupposition that we are able to engage reflectively with and comprehend other people's standpoints rests on our recognizing in them the same unruly and unpredictable plays of freedom and situatedness that constitute our own being-in-the-world, and beings with whom we are inextricably interconnected through the mediation of shared worldly reality. This does not, of course, exclude, in Arendt's words, "a rightful sense of indignation at the injustice of the world." It merely means, as Arendt (1968e, 6) observes in her reflections on Lessing, "that reality [should not be] measured by the force with which the passion affects the soul," but "by the amount of reality the passion transmits to it." Here also springs up the difference between primarily ethical and political uses of narrative. Recent proponents of narrative significance for ethics and politics, in this respect, could be said to focus primarily on the narrative ability to inspire empathetic identification with others' experience of suffering and injustice, and thereby cultivate in the reader appropriate emotional responses and moral sentiments. Yet, this detour via the self, as I argued above, also involves a recognition of and identification with the victims' experience of suffering or their identity based on a certain abstracting away from the plurality of the world of political affairs. As such, it easily evokes the challenge that only those who actually share the experience of oppression can understand it and issue judgements about it, and moreover, that any such attempt on the part of outsiders can only lead to further instances of an objectifying gaze that fixates the suffering in the role of passive victims. So, too, it fails to sufficiently account for the distinct characteristics of the world of political action and in fact introduces a certain hiatus between the experience of recognition and identification on the one hand and acting upon this recognition on the other, which can only be bridged by applying onto this world categories from the

outside or above.

The existentialist aesthetic loyalty to the plurality of narrative voices, on the contrary, displays an acknowledgement that it is only by exploring the immediate experience of oppression in its worldly significance – that is letting the value judgement of a action or situation as unjust or oppressive emerge out of a representative reflection on how they echoed in the common world, how they affected the human, political status of a plurality of individuals constituting it – that we are able to recognize in others not eternal victims and objects, but individuals whose humanity has been unjustly denied, and disclose grounds for solidarity with them. So, too, it is only by judging particular commissions (or omissions) of "oppressors" as they are embedded in and echo in the world, that we are able to judge them not as helpless objects of inhuman forces nor as inherently demonic villains but apportion responsibility and blame in human terms. This distinction becomes particularly relevant when trying to understand and judge those instances of oppression that cannot be traced directly to actions of specific individuals, but that only reveal themselves in the simultaneously concerted, cumulative and digressive effects of the myriad individual decisions and undertakings, and through a thorough exploration of social, historical and political conditions that make certain injustices or evils possible. By engaging a plurality of perspectives on the world, as Beauvoir (2009b, 289, 766–7) emphasizes in *The Second Sex*, we are thus able to discern a certain generality to a given situation of oppression, certain general contours to the social and political practices and institutions – even though these are individually interiorized and assumed – that place certain individuals or groups in a position of cultural, economic, and/or political inferiority, yet, at the same time recognize that it does not represent a natural or necessary fact, but is thoroughly human. What grounds the manifestly political character of such narrative judgement is the revealed sense that what is at stake in a given oppressive situation is the fate of the common world (Arendt 1968e, 7–8). The solidarity thus awakened, as Arendt (2007, 29–30) succinctly writes, is then not one based on empathetic identification with the victims *per se,* which on the other hand retains the division between those who suffer and their sympathizers, but on the realization that any denial of freedom and dignity is a concern of the suffering and non-suffering alike.

By revealing a particular situation of oppression or injustice in its human character,

that is, as it came about within the web of worldly relationships and structures, narrative-inspired representative judgement also appeals to the potentials of human freedom in the present. It, in other words, opens the past into the future or, as Ricoeur (1999b, 14) notes, allows us to uncover "the future of the past." For by returning to a plurality of moments of political action when the protagonists confronted an unknown future, we also rouse within ourselves an awareness that it is always possible to see ourselves, others and the world differently. We recognize actualities against the background of a plethora of other possibilities and are thus also able to recover the unrealized possibilities of a historical event (see Morson 2003, 61–2; Ricoeur 1999a, 9; 1999b, 14). Yet, this also means that the future too can only exist in the plural. We may for instance realize that a certain oppressive situation cannot be resisted and changed through individual efforts but only through collective action in the world, and that individual's ability to reach a fully human existence might require a change not only in interpersonal relations of intersubjective recognition but in the whole worldly field that structures these relationships. Here narrative sensitivity encourages us to acknowledge that just as the general meaning of a given situation cannot be imposed from above the world of human affairs, but must be allowed to emerge from a careful engagement with a plurality of situated perspectives on the world, so, too, a judgement on what course of resistance to undertake cannot be determined with reference to a pre-given end. A change in instances and practices of misrecognition, for instance, cannot be simply achieved by an affirmation or revaluation of the "oppressed" identity, which is likely to lead to a mere acceptance of the objectifying gaze and leave the wider situation intact. So, too, policies of redistribution are likely to obliterate the particularity of human freedoms and reduce them to mere passive beneficiaries if conducted with reference to a materialist or naturalistic end supposedly inscribed in reality. Rather, the narrative-inspired worldly judgement shifts attention to how to broaden individuals' field of action, increase their potential to engage their freedom in practical projects in the world and to have them recognized and taken up by others. As Beauvoir (1948, 142) emphasizes, it is not about making others' freedom an *a priori* end, but treating others as freedoms "so that [their] end may be freedom."

A further ambiguity is introduced when a liberation for some seems to require of us to treat others as objects or alienate their possibilities to exercise freedom. Yet, just as

representative judgement awards victims and executioners a common past, it also inscribes them into a common future. The recognition of others as situated freedoms on the ground of the shared (narrative) world in this respect resists the view of "opposing abstractions" or essentially foreign "substances" confronting each other in an eternal struggle (see Arendt 2007, 50–1, 55). Rather the relationship between opposing factions or groups is now historicized, which reveals their common ground in the fundamental human condition of being-in-the-world. As such, they are no longer seen as demonic or wholly alien to each other, but as human beings with divergent interests and responsible for their wrongdoings. So, too, they come to represent human beings who can no longer be simply dispensed with without any cost and with whom it may now seem possible to sit down at a common table to distinguish "in each camp the respective limits of force and justice" (Camus 2013, 32). The crucial point here is that any denial of freedom, even that of the oppressors and for no matter how praiseworthy a goal, retains the value of a sacrifice or an outrage and can consequently no longer be assumed lightly (see Beauvoir 1948, 107–50). This crucial point perhaps most manifestly brings out the realization that a true break with the oppressive practices of the past can only be made if claims for the reaffirmation of the dignity of the victims are formulated in terms that also involve the affirmation of the sense of dignity of each and every human being. In this way, it also demonstrates a distinctively political sensitivity that any course of action cannot be envisioned to happen in "a vacuum" (Arendt 2007, 44) but must take into account the emerging grounds of the common world and the plurality of perspectives constituting it.

Concluding thoughts: The existential judging sensibility, worldly recognition and the space for political action

Narrative judging sensibility as displayed by the existentialist thinkers, in this respect, is distinctly political in that it does not clamour to provide a final truth or a clear-cut moral imperative to be followed in political action. Its political promise instead lies in its ability to confront the plurality and ambiguity of the political world by constantly striving to recognize, reflect upon, understand and evaluate the lived

experience of others, make them part of *our* world and thereby foster the sense of shared worldly reality (see also Schaffer and Smith 2004, 2–3). The narrative ability to confront the ambiguity political judgement is here manifested in the antinomies of the gift. In the very idea of the gift, on the one hand, is implied a presumption on the part of the giver of being able to adequately recognize what the other desires, and at the same time an appeal for this act of generosity to be acknowledged in gratitude. On the other hand, the very idea of an appeal presupposes the recognition of the freedom in the other and so an acknowledgement of the possibility that "the truth" of our gift, and, by extension, of our subjectivity, might not be recognized as such nor acknowledged in a return gesture (see Ricoeur 2005, 225–30). At this point, the promise of narrative judgement again surfaces in the form of its shift of focus from a desire to reach the true essence of the other to an attempt to reclaim "the spirit of the gift" (Ricoeur 2005, 236–7). The goal, that is, is not complete coincidence or reciprocity, but the kindling of intersubjective relationships, of communicability and sociability involved in the act of giving, receiving and giving in return, and of the sense of the common world between separate, yet mutually interdependent consciousnesses.

The existentialist narrative-inspired judging sensibility thus is well-suited to face up to the ambiguity of engaging the world in action because it is bent on constantly enriching the web of human relationships, illuminating the boundaries of the world and thereby disclosing and caring for a worldly space for politics between a plurality of distinct equals (see Hayden 2015). For recognizing others as they appear in a web of human relationships, worldly judgement also contains an acknowledgement of plural individuals as part of the common world and as rightful participants in its rebuilding and preservation – thereby prying open a space for their subjectivity to appear (see e.g. Cavarero 2000). This does not mean that the possibility of misrecognition or misunderstanding is thereby eliminated; on the contrary, it must be assumed. Yet, if others are able to recognize in our judgement also a recognition of a trace of their own subjectivity, they are more likely to engage with it, correct or dispute it, and use it as a ground for their own judgements and actions. Both victims and perpetrators, for instance, might be more willing and in fact enabled to tell their own stories if they can sense that they will not be ignored or rejected out of hand. Their stories, in turn, will present us with new aspects of the common world and of our own selves, and thus place

us before an imperative of a continuous effort in mutual clarification and understanding. While questioning the possibility (and desirability) of final reconciliation, narrative judgement simultaneously challenges the conclusion that others must remain forever incomprehensible and alien, thus constantly illuminates the human face of political affairs and discloses the possibilities of political action with a view to the emerging limits of human plurality and the common world.

To illuminate the political significance of the existential narrative-inspired account of worldly judgement more concretely, the next two chapters explore how it can be made to speak to two topics that – steeped as they are in awareness of the seemingly ineliminable spectre of difficulty, tragedy and failure haunting the realm of human affairs – can be said to embody a particularly clear-sighted recognition of the complexities of political judgement as they stem from the ambiguity of individuals' communal, political existence: the problem of dirty hands and the challenge of transitional justice and reconciliation. The human and humanizing import of the existentialist aesthetic judging sensibility is further illustrated through an engagement with a number of selected literary examples as manifestations of the worldly ambiguity of political judgement.

5 Facing up to the tragedy of political action: The problem of dirty hands

The problem of dirty hands refers to the supposedly unavoidable element of wrongdoing that attends political action – conveying a classical formulation of the recognized ambiguity inherent to political involvement the roots of which reach far back into the Western tradition of political thought. In the world of politics constituted by a plurality of often conflicting values and goals, the argument goes, we are required to do wrong in order to do right and so, on the path towards some greater good, inevitably cause suffering and incur a moral cost. In this respect, the dirty hands problem can be said to represent a potent manifestation of the existentialists' insights into the anguishing experience of human engagement in the world, confronted as it is with the horizon of radical unpredictability that accompanies the "questionable gift of human freedom" (Arendt 1978b, 141). For not only does it preclude any appeal to an authoritative standard of values that would solve the dilemma of conflicting obligations, thus confronting the acting subject inescapably with the reality of his or her freedom. It also places the actors face to face with the troubling fact that whichever way they choose, they are likely to become implicated in evil and will have to bear the stain of wrongdoing. Predicated upon the awareness of the spectre of failure, conflict and evil that haunts the world of political action, the problem of dirty hands embodies the recognition of the inadequacy of absolute standards of morality and the emphasis on the need to retain the focus on the ambiguity, contingency and unpredictability structuring a particular situation in which we are called upon to judge. As a problematic of thought and action, the dirty-hands problem then can be said to importantly gesture at the existentialist shift in the understanding of the human judging capacity from the rational activity of a detached mind to a situated, practical ability of an embodied, temporal being that is also a (potentially) acting being.

If the problematic of dirty hands thus crystallizes the existentialist insight into the ambiguity of political judgement, however, it at the same time tends to envision the operation of judging as a complex technical exercise whose main aim is to rationalize, reconstruct and "solve" the intricacies at stake. In this respect remaining in the grips of the determinant conception of political judgement, intent on unveiling and ultimately resolving the riddles of life according to some or other predefined framework of rules, it

also risks missing out on the fundamental existential sources of the recognized complexity, plurality and unpredictability of the world of political affairs, and, further, rendering recognition of the tragedy of political action into a new, inevitable *end* of political judgement. In this light, the existentialists' aesthetic attentiveness to the worldly process of judging offers a valuable lens through which to illuminate the human, political significance of the challenge involved, tracing the roots of tragedy and failure to the perplexity of human engagement in the world. As such, this chapter argues, it is also distinguished for entreating the specifically human, political powers of creatively confronting and responding to the perplexities of our imperfect, all-too-human world.

The first part of the chapter starts with briefly outlining the appearance of the concept of dirty hands in the history of political thought, focusing specifically on Michael Walzer's formulation of the problem. His example was chosen because he examines the dirty hands paradox in its experiential dimension and views it as a feature inherent to political action, yet, as I argue, also succumbs to the troubling rationalist temptation to purport to be able to "resolve" the ambiguity of political judgement by reducing politics to the rule of "tragic" necessity. Teasing out the troubling political implications of Walzer's position, the second section foregrounds the distinct significance of the existential narrative judging sensibility in its ability to retain attention on the human reality of the paradox as it arises from the ambiguity of individuals' communal, political existence – which in turn allows it to preclude the conclusion about the "necessary" aspect of wrongdoing that would seem to "inevitably" accompany political action. The third section engages the lenses of Sartre and Beauvoir; it aims to discern how their insights into the situated, worldly ambiguity of political judgement reveal the political significance of the dirty hands paradox as an ever present condition of action, confronting us with our complicity in oppressive structures and relationships that cannot be changed at will but require active involvement in the political world. Against this background, the fourth section looks to Albert Camus's artistic judgement for a creative rethinking of the dirty hands problem, revealing how it points to ways of relating to the ambiguity of the world that go beyond the alternatives of vain moralism and the rule of political expediency. Building on Camus's insights, the fifth section engages Arendt's specifically political, representative judging sensibility,

seeking to unearth the way in which it displaces the temptation to submit politics to the necessary law of (lesser) evil to instead grapple with the ambiguities of the world of human affairs by constantly tending to the conditions for a properly political existence.

The dirty-hands problem in political theory

The problem of dirty hands as the central paradox at the heart of political judgement and political ethics in general is dramatically conveyed in Jean-Paul Sartre's play of the same title. In a frequently cited passage Hoederer, a pragmatic party-leader, instructs the young and idealistic revolutionary Hugo:

> "How you cling to your purity, young man! How afraid you are to soil your hands! All right, stay pure! What good will it do? Why did you join us? Purity is an idea for a yogi or a monk. You intellectuals and bourgeois anarchists use it as a pretext for doing nothing. To do nothing, to remain motionless, arms at your sides, wearing kid gloves. Well, I have dirty hands. Right up to the elbows. I've plunged them in filth and blood. But what do you hope? Do you think you can govern innocently?" (Sartre 1989, 218).[46]

Often portrayed as a conflict between ends and means or between personal morality and political expediency, this paradox of political judgement revolves around the issue of whether it is inherent to political action that it should require (or even make justifiable) the use of ignoble means and the violation of our most cherished moral values in the pursuit of desired ends. Thus construed, the dilemma was (re)introduced into the contemporary philosophical and political discourse by Michael Walzer in his 1973 article, "Political Action: The problem of dirty hands." Of late, the topic has inspired much philosophical interest and also assumed new practical relevance, in particular, for instance, with regard to the question of the legitimacy of torture "in the age of terror" (see e.g. Lauritzen 2010; Finlay 2011). The issue is hardly of recent origin, however. Its various manifestations and perplexities pervade the writings of a number of thinkers in the Western tradition of political theory. One of the most

[46] This passage evokes the title of Arthur Koestler's (1945, 9–12) essay *The Yogi and the Commissar,* which establishes the distinction between the "fundamental" opposing attitudes of the yogi's saintly rejection of violence and the commissar's wholehearted embrace of political expediency.

frequently evoked philosophical sources is Machiavelli and his insight that the political ruler, if he is to garner glory and success, must learn "how not to be good" (Machiavelli quoted in Walzer 1973, 164). By association, the dirty hands problem is commonly linked to the realist tradition of thought, as both its underlying presupposition and prime focus of study. Likewise, the dilemma is often taken up by value pluralists, as an issue of particular import to their depictions of worlds of competing, and often conflicting values (see Nussbaum 2000; Parrish 2007). Yet, the concern with the normative questions exposed by the dilemma can be traced as far back as the pre-Socratic ancient tragedians and historians and the political philosophy of Aristotle (see Wijze 2004, 454–5), which testifies, perhaps, to a more general and pervasive paradox at the heart of political judgement.

Even though the essential link between the dirty hands problem and politics has been presupposed in much scholarship on the subject, theorists have been less prone to delve into the nature of the connection and focus on a sustained examination of what exactly is it about political judgement and politics that seems to invite, so to speak by default, most radical and deeply felt moral dilemmas (see Parrish 2007, 12–13). Against this background, Walzer's intervention is particularly significant in that he sets out to approach the problem not merely, or even primarily, as a philosophical question, but as an ambiguity inherent in everyday human experience – and one that arises with particular urgency in the realm of politics (see Walzer 1973, 161). Dirty hands, in other words, becomes a problem inherent to political judgement and action. Inquiring into the reasons why this is the case, Walzer evokes segments of popular belief about the special role that politicians (are supposed to) play. On this reading, politics appears as a realm of dirty hands primarily because politicians (claim to) act for and on behalf of, not individual persons, but all of us as a collectivity, yet can at the same time also be expected to serve themselves (Walzer 1973, 162–3). This ambiguity is only intensified by the fact that politicians also have the power to rule over us and may even use violence against us, all purportedly in the collective interest (Walzer 1973, 163–4). Leaving aside the specific (and troubling) presuppositions grounding this "piece of conventional wisdom," political judgement then would seem to "systematically" invoke the dirty hands paradox because it is, at the most fundamental level, an intersubjective activity: it concerns common interests and the pursuit of collective goals (Walzer 1973,

162; Buckler 1993, 2, 11–12). For this reason, it contains an impersonal and instrumental element – an element that in essence awards only relative, rather than absolute, value to individuals (and any specific principles or goals) and, accordingly, requires of political actors to abandon their uncompromising allegiance to the universal percepts of morality in order to be able to tend to the common good (see Buckler 1993, 2, 13–20).

On this basis, Walzer constructs the dilemma as a problem that arises whenever utilitarian considerations necessitate the violation of an important moral principle. The paradox, then, is mirrored in the claim that an action "may be exactly the right thing to do in utilitarian terms and yet leave the man who does it guilty of a moral wrong" (Walzer 1973, 161). Underlying this formulation is a rejection of exercises in abstract philosophical speculation according to which we might always draw on some or other rule or calculating procedure that would enable us to judge which of the actions in a given situation is the right one and in terms of which, indeed, the issue of dirty hands can only appear as a false construction of some or other essentially flawed form of reasoning. Appeals to either a consequentialist or deontological moral ground thus presuppose that any alleged conflict of values can always be resolved either by evoking a higher moral principle or, for instance, soliciting the good of a greater number. In philosophical models, in short, an actor who does the right thing yet still feels guilty represents less a realistic account of the judging activity than a psychologically disturbed case in need of therapy (see e.g. Hare and Oberdiek in Nicholls 2004, para. 7, 10–11 and in Wijze 2009, 532–4). But the troubling consequence of these accounts is that they encourage a refusal or inability to recognize the ambiguity of political judgement in a world made up of plural and often conflicting principles, roles and relationships (see e.g. Wijze 2004, 457–8). And, succumbing to the lure of "clean hands" and easy, clear-cut and final solutions, they also are prone to blunt the sense of the (potential) ethical cost involved in the making of difficult, even impossible choices (see also e.g. Wijze 2004; Nicholls 2004, para. 7; Buckler 1993, 3).

Walzer instead resorts to a phenomenologically-informed account, drawing on literary sources in addition to conventional philosophical argument, to bring forth the problem of dirty hands as a genuine experience accompanying the exercise of political judgements. He insists that "it is by his dirty hands that we know [the moral politician].

If he were a moral man and nothing else, his hands would not be dirty; if he were a politician and nothing else, he would pretend that they were clean" (Walzer 1973, 168). For an example of political judgement proper he looks to Albert Camus's *The Just Assassins* (Walzer 1973, 178–9). The play recounts the lived experience of the nineteenth-century Russian terrorists, who, as a necessary step in their fight against injustice and after many a moral scruples, finally decide to assassinate the Duke, yet are willing to accept the penalty of death as a just penance for their moral crime. Walzer thus presents the problem of dirty hands as a very real paradox that cannot be reduced to a problem of rational deliberation, but is part of the practical, embodied reality of political agents insofar as they are involved in the dramas of collective life.

Walzer's attentiveness to the experiential dimension of the problem also grounds his argument about the appropriate response. As brought forth by the example of the just assassins, it consists of, on the one hand, a refusal to shy away from doing the "necessary" and "right" thing, which would, for instance, betray the (common) end pursued or result in a large scale harm or injustice and amount to an irresponsible flight from politics. On the other hand, however, he argues that it is necessary to retain the sense of a moral crime, of the existence of "a disvalue which is still there to be noted and regretted" (Stocker in Wijze 2004, 457). Like the just assassins, the moral politicians, for Walzer, must "acknowledge their responsibility for the violation by accepting punishment or doing penance" (Walzer 1973, 178).[47] Thus conceived, the dirty hands problem gains practical significance in Walzer's account of the just war theory and situations of "extreme (supreme) emergency" (see Walzer 2004, 33–50; see also Walzer 2006). While the violation of moral rules must remain morally impermissible for the individual, Walzer argues, it is morally required of political leaders in cases when the continued existence and most fundamental values of the community itself are at stake (Walzer 2004, 41–5). Nonetheless, this violation remains a crime, which, however, also subjects war to moral considerations and makes it a "war that it is possible to fight" (Walzer 2004, 14).

Walzer's practical formulation of the problem is of special political significance in

[47] Walzer's attentiveness to the practical experience of making difficult judgements and the attendant emphasis on the reality (as well as normative significance) of the feelings of moral guilt incurred has been taken up as a crucial characteristic of the dirty hands problem in much of the scholarship on the subject. It has been scrutinized and developed further in the works of, for instance, Wijze (2004; 2009, esp. 533–4, 538), Lauritzen (2010), Dovi (2005), and Griffin (1989).

that it establishes political judgement as an "autonomous" human activity that involves difficult choices and accordingly requires a reflective and situated attentiveness to the particularities of the specific cases and contexts of action rather than any self-evident application of traditional precepts of morality. At the same time, however, it precludes, to assert with Walzer (1973, 178–9), the ultimate surrender to "the demon of politics." For acknowledging the tragic element, it also resists the image of politics as a realm impervious to ethically-informed reflection or any (moral) considerations save the immediate concerns of prudence. Walzer's recognition of the situated and tragic nature of political judgement then is of specific political import not only because it reveals as potentially harmful the prevalent "moralistic" insensitivity to the ambiguous effects of our actions. It also is significant because it offsets the general disillusionment with politics and the unwillingness to engage in political judgement at all which seem to represent the other side of the aspirations for absolute purity and clear-cut solutions (see Brown 2007, 10–12; Buckler 1993).[48]

Even though Walzer views the dirty-hands paradox as a feature inherent to political action, however, he also shies away from a sustained exploration of the experiential dimension of judging, of the agents' confronting and responding to a difficult situation – failing to delve sufficiently into just how politics as a realm of the common would seem to lead inescapably to the element of inevitable wrongdoing, and less than thoroughly examining the human, political implications of the sense of moral cost and guilt incurred. It is at this point that springs forth the value of engaging the existentialist perspective insofar as its narrative-inspired, worldly judging sensitivity can offer a closer insight into the phenomenal, temporal – and indeed human and political – reality of the dirty hands dilemma.

The existentialist contribution to thinking the problem of dirty hands

The existentialist perspective on the dirty hands problem as an inherent characteristic of political action is perhaps most explicitly presented in Arendt's creative interpretation

[48] The problem of dirty hands in politics evokes the recent resurgence of "a sense of the tragic" dimension of political action, and human existence more generally, within international political theory (see Brown 2007; Euben 2007; Frost 2003).

of Machiavelli – the prince's philosopher, often taken to represent a classic exposition of the somewhat sinister aspect to politics and the defence of princes' immorality. In her 1955 lecture, Arendt (1955, 4) points to "the deeper reason" for Machiavelli's distrust of absolute moral standards (in his case, primarily rules of Christian morality) in politics and his claim that the prince should learn "how not to be good." It is to be found in the shifting vagaries of "fortuna," "the smiling of the world," which, however, remains unpredictable and capricious (Arendt 1955, 9). Politics as a realm of the common, in other words, represents a sphere of the dirty hands paradox because of its phenomenal nature that arises from the fundamental condition of human freedom and plurality (Arendt 1955, 12). Absolute standards of morality, on the contrary, are based on the perspective of the detached self, concerned with its own soul and personal salvation in the afterlife, and, as such, ill-suited to confront the challenges of the ambiguous nature of politics (Arendt 1955, 8, 4, 6, 10).

This "deeper reason" that locates the source of the dirty hands problem in the temporal, plural and ambiguous character of our worldly existence significantly challenges Walzer's formulation of the paradox. Walzer's recognition of the ambiguity and tragedy of political judgement, paradoxically, affirms its conventional understanding as a determinant rational activity of a solitary subject, proceeding on the basis of utilitarian, means and ends calculation. Grounding it, indeed, is a highly troubling presumption that the politician, first of all, is able to *know* the plurality of different (and incommensurable) goals and ends constituting the political world, and, second, is able to determine *the right* course of action by evaluating the conflicting values on a single scale which is essentially arbitrary – that is, his own.[49] What enables the political actor to rise above mere utilitarian calculation, however, is the sense of moral cost and guilt brought forth by the recognition that the sacrifice of a certain value exerts "a cost of a distinctive kind" (Nussbaum 2000, 1033–6) – one formulated in the language of universal standards of human rights or dignity.[50] Thus Walzer distinguishes

[49] Walzer himself, to be sure, recognizes the "speculative" and "arbitrary" element inherent in utilitarian thinking. He is attentive to the ease with which the ends of a community can become a justification for any immoral excess, and is careful to warn against any facile appeal to a condition of "emergency" and a habituation to the allegedly "necessary" crimes (Walzer 2004, 38–9, 49–50, 34–7).

[50] For a nuanced development of this position drawing on the human capabilities approach see Nussbaum (2000). Nevertheless, it seems fair to argue with Buckler (1993, 60) that if individual rights are themselves defined within the framework of utility (e.g. pursuit of happiness), then they can be pitted against other utilitarian considerations on the same scale of value and easily overruled for the sake of some other, greater good.

his position from the neoclassical tendency he finds in for instance Machiavelli to reduce political judgement to a set of technical skills required to "solve" a given ambiguous situation. At the same time, Walzer rejects the Weberian vision of the "tragic hero," who vainly wallows in inner guilt and whose conduct perversely answers to only one limit, his own "capacity for suffering" (Walzer 1973, 179). In distinction, he imagines moral guilt to lead to some form of societal, public scrutiny, which acts as a bulwark against any too easy an abnegation of moral rules. Nevertheless, it remains unclear what political weight this moral cost is allowed to carry. For just as the plurality of conflicting values is subsumed under a larger utilitarian calculus when deciding on the "right" course of action, so, too, the moral cost is not recognized in its separate, independent significance, but is determined primarily on the basis of the actor's individualistic reckoning with his or her own conscience backed by the authority of universal morality (see Dovi 2005, 131–2, 133). After this two-stage judging operation, the subject's hands become "clean again" (Walzer 1973, 178). The essentially inner moral trial and judgement, then, seems to work as a device, ennobling and toughening the politician for the next occasion when he or she would have to sacrifice his moral purity in the service of the "right" cause (Sutherland 1995, 484–5).

The existentialists' judging sensibility, in contrast, is distinct for foregrounding the dirty-hands paradox as a problem arising from actors' engaging an independent, outside world that necessarily stands beyond the sovereign control of the subject. The process of arriving at a judgement then will be thoroughly suffused by our situated being-in-the-world, our values, commitments, and the broader worldly configuration that will not lend themselves to being rendered into pure objects of rational deliberation, but that will instead shape our view of our possible courses of action in a myriad of concurrent, yet conflicting ways (see Kruks 2012, 133–6). Furthermore, our judgements will become a part of the world, be engulfed by plural others, processes and structures, with their meaning and outcomes transcending, outstripping and exceeding our intentions towards unexpected and unpredictable directions (see Kruks 2012, 137). This perspective then explodes the conventional conceptualization of the dirty hands dilemma in terms of an opposition between realism and idealism or the incommensurability of ends and the accompanying conflict between the value of the individual and the collective good. The judging subject now not only has to confront irresolvable dilemmas between a plurality

of separate, even conflicting consciousnesses, values and ends and come to terms with the unappealing proposition that taking up a position *for* certain individuals or groups almost necessarily implies a stand *against* others. Given the opaque character of the world that is bound to escape a completely transparent view of the actor, it is also strictly speaking impossible and a glaring paradox to claim to be able to "know" the conflicting values, predetermine the ends of our actions and thus to unambiguously work *for* others in the first place (see Beauvoir 2004a, 120). Similarly, it will be difficult to simply calculate and contain the burden of the moral cost. The existentialist perspective then not only renders inadequate the idealist standpoint of abstract moral purity, but also questions the presumption that it is ever possible to reach, ground or justify one's judgement unambiguously – and to the exclusion of all others – by resort to some prefabricated (instrumental) register.

In this light, Walzer's formulation of the problem is highly suspect indeed. It can in fact be seen as a new manifestation of the traditional philosophical position of detached mastery over the world and others that would seem hardly available to ordinary, finite and plural beings. For in his subject-centred focus and the concomitant tendency to reduce the dirty-hands problem to an essentially inner, rational problem-solving exercise, Walzer in effect furthers the image of a princely political ruler, whose ability to bear the ambiguity of politics and make difficult choices becomes an account of his greatness and in whose "deliberations" other people appear as mere passive objects in the calculating scheme (see Sutherland 1995, 483). This paradoxical logic is illuminated in Nussbaum's insightful reading of Henry James's *Golden Bowl.* The crucial insight of the novel in this respect can be traced to the moment when its protagonist, Maggie, after years of proclaiming and vigorously pursuing moral innocence and perfection, finally discovers that humans are "cracked and flawed" (Nussbaum 1990, 133–4). Yet, what is striking is that Maggie's realization amounts "not so much to a way of living with imperfections as to a new way of getting at perfection" (Nussbaum 1990, 134). Maggie finds a new, skewed way to moral purity by "being finely aware and richly responsible," by constantly sharpening her sensitivity to and pity for the pain she has caused and bearing, with ever increasing zeal, the tragic burden of guilt (Nussbaum 1990, 135). She becomes a somewhat perverted "sacrificial figure:" assuming the "dirty" nature of the world and reclaiming her own innocence "by sinning, and by seeing that she is sinning,

and by bearing, for love, her own imperfection" (Nussbaum 1990, 135). Her awareness of the ambiguities of judgement thus involves a further denial of recognition to others as ends in their own right – that is, as particular, separate subjectivities, not "round", but "angular," with sharp edges, always sticking out of edifying equations – resourcefully making their sacrifice part of new visions of wholeness and harmony (see Nussbaum 1990, 128–31).

Reducing the dirty-hands paradox to an essentially subjective plight of a solitary individual that is to be solved through rational calculation, Walzer thus betrays the traditional desire to arrive at a final, conclusive answer to the ambiguity of the political world. In this way abstracting from the specific, particular manifestation of the dirty-hands situation, further, he risks reifying the dirty and tragic element into an essential, eternal, inevitable aspect of political judgement as such. The human judging activity comes to resemble, as Sutherland (1995, 490) notes, "a game of chess in an empty room." The recognized necessity of dirty hands in politics, in other words, becomes a new general rule of political judgement that is no longer tied to the particular, practical case that saw to its emergence, but lends itself to be readily transported across time and space to other situations, whenever it may be deemed necessary, and used to justify, in advance, appeals to "emergency situations" and resort to violence and wrongdoing in order to achieve a given end.

The distinct political significance of the existentialist aesthetic judging orientation then can be said to lie in its ability to retain attention on the worldly source of the dirty-hands paradox. For its recognition of the ambiguity of political judgement as it stems from the plural, incalculable and unpredictable character of the world, also grounds the insight, as Arendt explicitly points out, that the judging subject cannot exist his or her dirty-hands situation in the mode of an "in-itself" or hope to be able to ultimately resolve the ambiguity of political affairs in some or other truly "authentic" way (see Arendt 1955, 12). The insights of the four existentialist thinkers, in this respect, can be traced to their attempts to respond to the political events of their time, in which the dirty hands problem was a far cry from just a fascinating philosophical conundrum, but became an aspect of their lived reality – where the world-and-human-existence-destroying political evils were systematically justified by appeals to supposedly highest intentions and most admirable goals. In their focus on the worldly, experiential

character of political judgement, they thus manifest an attuned attentiveness to the human character of any particular dirty-hands situation, radically questioning any technical, *a priori* justification of wrongdoing in the service of a given end. Instead, their worldly judging sensibility contains an appeal to the human capacities of freely responding to (and assuming responsibility for) the ambiguity of the political world – thus also refusing to forfeit the human, creative potentials of politics in a wholehearted embrace of crime.

The ambiguities of situatedness: Sartre and Beauvoir

Sartre and Beauvoir start their ruminations on the ambiguities of political judgement with the sharp criticism of the consciousness of "clean hands" underlying the standpoint of abstract humanism. According to this view, political judgement can remain shielded from the ambiguity (and potential failure and dirty hands) ruling the world of politics by remaining true to the standards of absolute ethics and proceeding by way of an application of the universal law of reason. Yet, in this it relies on the ultimately untenable presumption that it is indeed possible to hover outside of or separate from the world. We are always, as Sartre (1988a, 251–2, 279) writes with respect to the position of the writer, inside, particularly situated in time and a particular historical reality, and therefore also always-already implicated in and responsible for the given situation in the world. The detached position of moral purity in fact blinds the judging subject to the reality of *living* human beings, that is, to the particularities and differences of its own and others' situated, embodied, and indeed *political* existence. In particular, Sartre and Beauvoir point to how, thus conceived, judgement will obscure from view specific situations of oppression, ignoring, that is, the fact that the rational consciousness supposedly inhering in everyone may lack the field of the world in which to exert itself as well as the specific dynamics through which its freedom is foreclosed. More than this, in thus in essence predefining what counts as human, the standpoint of moral purity also risks in fact justifying oppression and exploitation of those who, from the viewpoint of the yardstick at hand, do not (yet!) seem sufficiently human (see Kruks 2012, 21, 27–8, 38). Underlying their rejection of abstract humanism and its

presumption of "clean hands," in short, is the claim that judging in the name of the predetermined end of humanity, an "already completed" universalism, obscures the fact that its conception of a human being actually aligns with a very particular notion of the good and the right. Thus it also is prone to neglect or even actively contribute, in no matter how subtle a way, to the exploitation or oppression of other, diverse particularities (Sartre 1983b, 230, 236–7, 253, 261; see also Sartre 1988a, 256, 259). It is the refusal to recognize the ambiguity of the political world, then, that first of all warrants the blemish of dirty hands and moral stain.[51]

Sartre and Beauvoir, for instance, show how the detached standpoint of moral universality masked the complicity of the French citizenry in the system of brutality and oppression that was the Algerian War. They point to the systematic campaign of "false ignorance" involving the French press, public officials and the public at large in which the widespread use of torture on the part of the French army was denied or (tacitly) justified as a necessary measure on the path to French victory (see Sartre 2001b, 55). Ordinary citizens were thus locked into a paradoxical bind of "irresponsible responsibility, […] guilty innocence, […] ignorance which is knowledge," and made more and more to resemble "those whom we should condemn" (Sartre 2001b, 61, 58–9). Sartre and Beauvoir, on the contrary, reveal behind the supposedly peripheral practices of torture and murder their intimate link with the broader structural reality of exploitation. Torture, as Sartre writes, is not reducible to the "acts of a handful of violent individuals" (Sartre 2001b, 70). Nor is its aim only (or not even primarily) a disclosure of information, but destruction of man, thereby at once manifesting and feeding into the overall system of colonialist and capitalist violence and oppression (Sartre 2001b, 72, 76). It is in other words an essential part of the system in which capitalist practices of economic exploitation and racism work in tandem to reinforce and justify one another, where the oppressed are kept "in a state of 'subhumanity'," made "to resemble more and more what they would need to be in order to deserve their fate" (Sartre 2001b, 50, 52). Beauvoir exposes a similar dynamics in her writings in support of Djamila Boupacha, a member of the FLN accused of terrorist activities,

[51] Beauvoir and Sartre thus echo Merleau-Ponty's (2000) critique of the tendency (which he discerns in Koestler (1973)) to approach the perplexity of dirty hands in terms of the dichotomy between the attitudes of the yogi and the commissar, the standpoints of morality and political expediency. For, while furthering a clear-cut moral denunciation of the spectre of injustice and violence ruling the political world, it also misses out on the ambiguities of political involvement and risks concealing or justifying existing forms of violence and oppression (Merleau-Ponty 2000, xiv–xvi).

imprisoned, raped and tortured by the French army. She reveals how the practice of torture required the collaboration of a number of individuals at different levels of public office and assumed the nature of a systemic force, systematically granting impunity to the perpetrators and gnawing at the very roots of the French democratic system of government (see Beauvoir 2012b, 273–79). The mass slaughter and oppression of Algerians deemed necessary to "maintain in servitude a people who are entirely resolved to die rather than to renounce their independence," and, not the least, the growing pile of debris it dumped at the very doorstep of the French republic dawned the truth: the only conceivable victory (or pacification, as the French policy was called at that time) was one that equalled "extermination" (Beauvoir 2012b, 280–1).

Their situated perspective thus reveals the illegitimacy of the end in light of which these practices were allowed to assume the banner of "clean hands" and were normalized – that is, the very continued existence of colonialism and the validity of abstract humanism in so far as it proved itself not only helpless to prevent, but also (at least) tacitly helped to justify violence and injustice. Behind its self-assured universality, in other words, they expose a particularity that refuses to acknowledge and even works actively to deny the rights and needs of the colonized population and that is thus also actively complicit with the ascending spiral of repressive means employed to pursue its ends. In this way, Sartre and Beauvoir raise in front of the French public the mirror of their own situatedness and the accompanying responsibility for the system of injustice. Beauvoir thus relates her own experience of being awakened to the reality of the Algerian War: the war was "invading my thoughts, my sleep, my moods" (Beauvoir 1965, 365). The experience ushered in the shattering of her world; it profoundly suffused and challenged her way of being, her sense of self and her very freedom (Kruks 2012, 107–9). All of the sudden, she in effect belonged to the nation of oppressors, she was complicit in the brutality and was overwhelmed by overpowering feelings of guilt. "I wanted to stop being an accomplice in this war," she writes, "but how?" (Beauvoir 1965, 369).

Exploding the consciousness of clean hands, Sartre and Beauvoir thus also challenge the conventional conceptualization of the dirty hands paradox as a problem that confronts the select few, those princely politicians who alone are believed to possess the capacity of action. Now it is a problem that confronts every human being insofar as he

or she is a situated, worldly being.[52] And it is also now that the dirty hands dilemma arises with particular force, demanding a radical reconsideration of the citizen's habitual, complacent way of being in the world. This is due to the ambiguous nature of human freedom and responsibility. On the one hand, Sartre and Beauvoir offer grounds for holding the individuals involved responsible for the varying forms and degrees of complicity. This is not to argue that all participants in an oppressive "system" – the torturers as well as, for instance, those members of the French public that failed to resist the practice – are responsible in the same way. Grounding this proposition, instead, is Sartre's insistence, as recalled by Aronson (1990, 67, 65), that even a passive accomplice made a given situation of injustice possible by adhering to the role that was assigned to him or her by the overall system, that is, contributing to it in "a specific and definite," and perhaps very limited, way – while considering that this specific and limited way also "was all that was required of him or her." The upshot is that "we may judge each individual fully for the role he or she has played" (Aronson 1990, 67). On the other hand, however, they also point to the confluence of circumstantial factors that predisposed individuals to, for instance, act in accordance with their public roles or obey orders from their superiors. With characteristic insight, Beauvoir (2009b, 776) formulates this ambiguity in the following terms: "A colonial administrator has no possibility of acting well towards the natives, nor a general toward his soldiers; the only solution is to be neither colonialist nor military chief; but a man could not prevent himself from being a man. So there he is, guilty in spite of himself and oppressed by this fault he did not himself commit." Hence, in short, arises the uncomfortable truth that our hands may be dirtied not by any specific individual action but by virtue of our participation in broader practices and structures that we did not (at least not directly) bring about and that lie beyond our individual control.

This realization, in turn, means, as Sartre and Beauvoir grew increasingly to emphasize, that oppressive structures and our own complicity with them will not be dealt away by a good-willed judgement based on a simple moral conversion, an inner distancing from unjust practices, and an appeal to the same exercise of freedom in others. They both, in fact, recognized in this response to oppression a lingering vestige of abstract moralism. This is because, first, it rests on an ultimately untenable

[52] This shift and its implications are not often addressed in the literature on the dirty hands problem. Notable exceptions are Parrish (2007) and Wijze (2002).

conception of the self that remains at any moment in control of its own thoughts, desires, values and practices and is capable of recreating itself and its worldly situation – that is, a rational, translucent to itself and self-constituting subjectivity. And second, they saw in it primarily a project directed towards one's own self, that is, undertaken primarily in order to purify one's own moral conscience rather than confront injustice in the world, and thus as constituting an insipid response given the structurally ingrained practices of oppression. What is needed instead is a worldly judgement, involved in the broader environment of the worldly processes and structures, the "filth and blood" constituting the political realm, which ground a particular situation of oppression and which may, further, significantly shape our field of possibilities on how to counter it (see Kruks 2012, 96–113). This perspective thus also brings into a particularly clear focus the challenge of whether, in seeking to uphold the value of freedom for all, we may be required to treat others as means, that is, objectify them, or even use violence against them.

Sartre's response, at least, was an unequivocal embrace of the lesser evil argument. The force of the structural factors, at any specific historical moment, he argues, pushes everyone, inevitably and without the possibility of reprieve, into the role of either "a victim or a perpetrator" (Sartre 2001b, 66). Just as the worldly structures, processes and relationships "similarly strangle" both the colonizers and the colonized, so, too, there is no question of distinguishing between "good" and "wicked" oppressors or determining the varied degrees of complicity: "There are *colons* and that is it" (Sartre 2001b, 49, 32). A moral judgement that would, for instance, enthusiastically condemn torture but also renounce the use of violence in the service of the fight against oppression, viewed objectively, in terms of not its intentions but its effects in the world, ends up actively supporting the status *quo* and proclaims itself complicit with the injustices it contains (see e.g. Sartre 2001b, 51). Responsible political judgement must first of all confront its own participation in oppressive practices and, while not being able to renounce it in a simple act of good will, also recognize in the supposedly universal moral standards a manifestation of the very specific, particular interests of those in power (see Sartre 1983b, 240–6). By implication, it must assume this "contradiction" by taking, in each of the conflicts of the day, the perspective and side of the underprivileged and the oppressed. This it must do, we shall recall Sartre to have said, in accordance with the

principle that "all means are good if efficacious, provided they do not deform the end pursued" (see Sartre 1983b, 239, 253–61, 263).

Sartre's analysis is significant in striving to emphasize the practical, situated reality of the dirty hands dilemma. For in drawing attention to the rigidity of the political realm, the weight of the world, he also illuminates the manifest inadequacy of any conception of judgement that would proceed on the basis of *a priori* moral universals. Yet, he also constructs the given situation of dirty hands in a fairly abstract way: he envisions politics in terms of the dialectical struggle between predefined, self-contained and radically incommensurable ends, where one side is (absolutely) guilty and the other (absolutely) innocent. The decision about the "right" and "necessary" although morally objectionable judgement, too, is settled from the exterior; it is defined in terms of the universalizing movement of the particular (e.g. the preconceived interests of the working class), apart from and against all other particularities inhabiting the particular situation. The recognition of the situated complicity and guilt, it would seem, grounds an aspiration towards a new finality and (moral) purity. In this conceptualization, Sartre lapses into a highly troubling reification of the "dirty" aspect of political judgement, portraying it as not only instrumental to the achievement of the desired end, but as an essential part of the oppressed subject's rise to eventual liberation and redemption. Yet in a dialectical movement, where all individuals and events gain their meaning on the basis of the envisioned totality-to-come, it is not only not clear whether there remains any space for the critical evaluation of the appropriateness (and justifiability) of the means in terms of the given end – which Sartre is adamant to retain. There also appears to be little room to question the legitimacy of the very end pursued.

The fallacy plaguing Sartre's account is well exposed in Beauvoir's *Merleau-Ponty and Pseudo-Sartreanism,* paradoxically written as a defence of Sartre's position against Merleau-Ponty's charge of "Ultra-Bolshevism." There Beauvoir appeals to the lived, practical nature of our judging ability, emphasizing that political action, for instance, revolutionary violence, cannot be judged in the abstract, with a view to the already formed conception of the future utopian society or absolute good, but as a living surpassing of the given conditions of existence that "does not wish to be integrated [into the harmonious development of the world] but rather to explode at the heart of the world and to break its continuity" (Beauvoir 2012a, 246; 1948, 84). Particular actions

should be approached, in other words, from within, in their "infinity of possibilities," uncertainty and risk that constitute any given moment of life itself (Beauvoir 2012a, 246). Likewise, a judgement positioned within the world of political affairs is no longer a matter of "choosing *for*" the oppressed from a position that considers itself detached from them, but siding with them and "willing" their liberation with them, as equals (Beauvoir 2012a, 249). This practical focus and the emphasis upon an open future can be seen as displacing or at least problematizing Sartre's presentation of acting as an accomplice to oppression or taking the stand for liberation, while "accepting many things," as the only two alternatives, where the undesirability of the first would seem to lend legitimacy to the second (see Sartre 2004a, 147).

In the case of the Algerian War, to be sure, Beauvoir deemed a moral condemnation of torture and other crimes to be an inadequate response that, in the face of the mutually reinforcing workings of the systemic elements, resembled complicity (Beauvoir 2012b, 280). A genuine recognition and responsible assumption of the ambiguity of the situation "must take the form of political action," directed against the very end that justifies the immoral practices, that is, the war along with the whole army and government apparatus that ingrains injustice (Beauvoir 2012b, 281). Like Sartre, further, she reduced the range of possible choices to two alternatives: either side with the torturers and continue to ignore the suffering of thousands of Arabs or stand for the Algerian independence, which further entails the support for the FLN as the main force of the anti-colonial struggle (Beauvoir 2012b, 281). In this respect, it may be conceded with Walzer (2002, 142) that Beauvoir, too, sees "an ideologically flattened world" and, falling prey to abstraction, grants little attention to the particular lives at stake in the conflict. Overwhelmed by guilt and desperately trying to detach herself from the nation of "murderers" (Walzer 2002, 140), Beauvoir's argument against colonialism was focused primarily on exposing the crimes and complicity of her own government, rather than the horrors of suffering for their own sake.[53] Likewise, she refused to condemn the terrorist tactics of the FLN, paying little attention to the victims among the military but also among the French (and Algerian) civilians. She also felt unauthorized to intervene in the organization's internal practices, fearing that her criticism might offer additional

[53] Fanon, for instance, severely denounced the tendency among French intellectuals to speak against the injustice and atrocities in Algeria only with a view to their detrimental consequences for the French republican tradition and their idea of national pride (Kruks 2012, 118).

ammunition to the right-wing part of the French political spectrum (Kruks 2012, 119–20).[54]

Yet, Beauvoir's theoretical perspective on judgement dispenses with the benefit of a dialectical framework that could serve as a privileged standpoint from which to justify a course of action from without. Neither a given value or principle nor any utilitarian calculation will do to attenuate the anguish of judging: "every condemnation as well as every a priori justification of violence practised with a view to a valid end" pertain to an untenable desire for "clean hands" and must be challenged (Beauvoir 1948, 148). Any judgement (on the use of violent means) can only be "legitimized concretely:" grounded in free choice, it amounts to a particular, historically specific response to the ambiguities of the practical situation in which the judging subject finds itself, and is arrived at with a view to the concrete standard of the field of action and the future that it opens or forecloses (see also Hutchings 2007, 122–3; 128–9). On the one hand, this means that we need to pay heed to the form our judgements will assume in the world, rather than bet on our intentions. On the other hand, however, it also means that the final outcome of a judgement cannot be foretold, as Sartre seems to suppose. Beauvoir's perspective thus remains more attentive to the risk involved in the making of political judgements, insisting that we need to come to terms with the fact that we can never fully predict the consequences of our actions and that we might actually do harm to those we wish to help. Further, Beauvoir's framework also enables the consideration of any justified or "necessary" moral cost in its independent value, rather than as part of an all-encompassing dialectical process: even objectification of or the use of violence against an obstinate oppressor with a view to expanding the realm of human freedom, as Beauvoir writes, remains an "outrage" that "could not be compensated for by any success" and that "could neither be overcome nor remedied" (Beauvoir 2004c, 190).

This shift in Beauvoir is important because, as noted by Kruks (2012, 40), it also implies that any grounds or justifications invoked or appealed to in our judgements can always be contested. Just as Beauvoir's situated conception of judgement confronts us, constantly and inescapably, with the paradox of dirty hands, it also offers a source for distinguishing between and evaluating different dirty-hands justifications, providing a space for criticism of the means employed in the service of a given end with regard to

[54] As Halimi relates, Beauvoir was unwilling to speak against the FLN when the organization forced Djamila to return back to Algeria against her express wishes (Kruks 2012, 119).

their implications for not only this end itself, but also the plurality of other values inhabiting the political world. Thus, it resists the view of violence as a necessity that is inscribed in a given situation and subject to a self-reinforcing dialectical movement. Nevertheless, Beauvoir ends on a somewhat tragic note. For while she conceives of "the outrage" as a constant condition of political judgement, she also runs the danger of reducing it to an "inert" category that dulls, rather than heightens, our capacities of recognizing and confronting the ever-present spectre of uncertainty and risk that is the world of politics, and that thus atrophies in a new "inevitable" companion of political action in general. At the very least, it could be argued that Beauvoir leaves begging the question of whether and how we might be able to confront this outrage which carries with itself the burden of responsibility that cannot be redeemed by any given end.[55]

A rethinking of the dirty-hands problem: Camus

Sartre's and Beauvoir's account of the challenges and ambiguity confronting political judgement point to the significance of the question that will preoccupy Albert Camus: how to resist those conditions of modern political life that seem to force us inexorably into the role of either "a victim or a perpetrator" (Sartre 2001b, 66). Camus, to be sure, is equally doubtful of the supposed good-faith behind judgements backed by the authority of absolute morality. Often he voices horror at the "devouring" injustice lurking in the wake of its abstractness and manifest refusal (or inability) to recognize the ambiguity of the human world. On the contrary, his thought reflects an ever-alert attentiveness to the ways in which the weight of the given situation imposes itself upon and permeates human consciousness, dawning the irretrievable loss of innocence in a world steeped in horror, injustice and despair. As he lyrically relates in his essay *Return to Tipasa:* "We had had to come to terms with night: the beauty of daytime was only a memory. […] Empires were crumbling, men and nations were tearing at one another's

[55] She does, however, hint in this direction in her later, recently translated and published essay *Solidarity with Israel: A Critical Support.* There Beauvoir draws attention to the detrimental effects of the judging attitude that would refuse to recognize in one's opponent an equal member of the world, thus increase among the conflicting sides the sense of "isolation" and "fear," and contribute to the climate in which the dirty hands problem tends to be reified in a way that seemingly necessitates the adoption of rigid attitudes and extreme measures – while in fact precluding efforts at an understanding of the problem at hand and the ambiguities of political action involved (see Beauvoir 2012c, 314–7).

throats; our mouths were dirtied" (Camus 1970e, 164). This situation henceforth represents the inescapable condition of political judgement, one that cannot be evaded or forgotten in any olden dream of innocence. Yet, it does not amount to responsible commitment, but to the greatest betrayal of this condition to submit to the logic of judging, which, marred by guilt, surrenders to the supposedly inexorable forces of history and itself embraces the necessity of (lesser) evil. This is because, by justifying abominable means by worthy ends, it in effect makes crime legitimate and transforms "murderers into judges" – until, finally, it betrays these ends themselves and leads to a life so impoverished of meaning that it can no longer be deemed properly human (see Camus 1971, 11; 1970e, 168).

The fallacy of the dirty hands argument Camus powerfully exposes in his novel *The Fall.* There we meet Jean-Baptiste Clamence, a man of high moral standards, an upright defender of human freedom, suddenly fallen from grace by his growing awareness of the pervasive spectre of dirt and crime ruling the world and, moreover, overwhelmed by an increasing sense of his own complicity and guilt. His is a narrative of self-scrutiny and self-condemnation, seemingly an honest attempt to come to terms with the ambiguity of political judgement and the tragedy of political affairs as it arises from under the breakdown of eternal verities. Yet, the aim of his confessional narrative, as we soon disconcertingly intuit, is not to confront the reality of the world in its incalculable particularity, plurality and unpredictability, assume responsibility for it and fight against injustice in the future. His harsh self-denunciation instead works as a device to excuse himself by accusing all others, his (imaginary) interlocutors as much as the reader, usurping the activity of judging for himself, appropriating others' perspectives only to prevail over them, and dragging the whole of humankind into the bottomless abyss of guilt (see Camus 2006c, 88–9). His rendering of guilt, evil and dirty hands into the universal condition of the world of human affairs that allows for no possibility of escape or redemption thus amounts to a new lapse into a dream of the absolute self that claims for itself the ability to mount "a summit" above others and the world, and purports to be able to find from this solitary, masterful position a "definitive solution" to the perplexities of political affairs (Camus 2006c, 83, 89). Yet, in this way again fleeing from the human, plural and ambiguous, character of worldly reality, it in fact works to underpin and foster, in his subsequent decisions, further evasions of freedom and

responsibility for the world and others, and even acts as a justification, in advance as it were, of all present and future crimes. The role of a passive, guilt-ridden bystander thus alternates with and increasingly assumes the face of an oppressor and executioner, "an enlightened supporter of slavery" (Camus 2006c, 82).

On the one hand, then, the portrait of Clamence can be said to point to Camus's recognition of the appeal to historical necessity to justify dirty hands as merely the other side of the standpoint of absolute morality, a mystification that "sums up" and "increases" the bourgeois mystification (see Camus 1971, 154). For even though seemingly representing the peak of realism and historical consciousness, judgement embracing the rule of dirty hands is just as "removed from reality" and despairing of the worldly condition of human political existence in that it equally well rests on the aspiration towards a sovereign, absolute freedom (Camus 1971, 252, 267–9). Confronted with a given situation and its ambiguity, the judging subject assumes to be able to conceive of the ends in an abstract, absolute way, outside of their historical context and in isolation from a plurality of other perspectives, and can thus justify any excess of means (see Camus 1970d, 150–1). In this sovereign presumption, in short, it consigns the authority to define and pursue justice to those in power, while seeing plural others as silent and enslaved (Camus 1971, 255). It thus engages, as Camus (1970d, 150–1) notes, in self-defeating efforts to "build [its] empire upon a desert."

At the same time, however, Clamence's monologue, filled as it is with elements of equivocation and self-reflective mockery at his perverted judging exercises in self-purification, also offers insight into the depth of the dirty hands paradox (LaCapra 1998). In LaCapra's (1998, 93) reading, Clamence's struggle with the tragic character of the world poses the challenge of how to acknowledge and try to work with and through, rather than deny or transcend, the susceptibility for excess that attends the recognition of the ambiguities of political judgement. For Camus, the ambiguity of political judgement arises from the human confrontation with a world that eludes a completely transparent grasp of the subject – which in turn implies the need to abandon the aspiration for absolute, final justice and instead commit to a ceaseless striving for relative, worldly justice, loyal to the limits of the world and those of others (Camus 1971, 258). From the relative, worldly perspective, the irreconcilable opposition between the positions of moral purity and realist expediency now no longer seems

adequate to formulate the contradictions haunting the problem of dirty hands in politics. Both positions, in fact, appear as equally impotent as they both evade the real paradox by escaping into the safe embrace of either good or evil, either "abstention" or "destruction" (Camus 1971, 252). Instead, it is only with the shift to the relative, from the self to the world – that is, with the recognition of the need to confront the world in its irreducible plurality and untameable unpredictability, without the hope for ultimate answers – that the initial contradiction and ambiguity of political action that gives rise to the problem of dirty hands is allowed to "exist and thrive" (Camus 1971, 254). Camus's worldly conception of judgement and its appeal to limits then should not be understood as, for instance, a new moralistic abstention from judgement or a quantitative leap to a "deficient" or "compromised" form of justice that, for fear of a moral taint, would refuse engagement in the tragedy of the world altogether. In contrast, it is to be seen as manifesting a heightened attentiveness to the contradictions of the world and an attempt to understand the forms of political mentality that abandon politics to the reign of dirty hands – recognizing the ways in which they act as both a constraint on our field of possibilities and a voluptuous swamp likely to transform into their opposites our deepest intentions and desires. Yet, at the same time, it also resists the tendency to simply reify the absurd contradictions and injustice of the world into a new universal rule of judgement that could be used to justify, so to speak, in advance, any supposedly "necessary" resort to violent means also in the future (see e.g. Camus 1970f, 201). Instead, Camus's creative, dialogical judgement is able to reveal behind appeals to some inhuman necessity the contours of a human world and thus also illuminate the possibilities for displacing the reign of dirty hands and opening a space for politics based on the free confrontation of differences.

Camus's artistic judging orientation towards changing "the nature of the struggle itself" is well-evident in the artist's efforts to reverse the vicious spiral of violence that characterized the conflict in Algeria (Camus 2013, 154). Employing a dialogical lens and reflecting upon the given situation from the perspectives of both sides in the conflict, his judgement is first and foremost meant to act as "a roundtable," making the opposing factions "see and hear" each other and to think about "the respective limits of force and justice" in each others' arguments (Camus 2013, 124, 32). His worldly judgement thus explodes the dirty hands reasoning of both sides by exposing its deadly

logic. He relates how the tendency on each side to conceive of itself as a minion of absolute justice, refuse to recognize the claims of the other, and justify its own crimes in terms of its adversary's assumed the nature of an ever-expanding and all-devouring spiral, bringing each day closer to reality the image of Algeria as a country "populated exclusively by murderers and victims" (Camus 2013, 141–2). Camus's dialogical judging sensibility thus provides grounds for the rejection of the lesser evil argument on both sides based not only on moral considerations, but more crucially on what Camus calls the negative solidarity of destruction and death, where "what kills one side also kills the other" (Camus 2013, 153, 116). Nevertheless, it also carries the recognition that the entrenched dialectic of hatred and distrust cannot simply be willed away in a leap of good faith (see e.g. Camus 2013, 113). Instead, it is oriented towards understanding and honestly confronting the reasons for the grievances and violent reactions on the part of each side, while aware that any judgement, once released into the world, will be changed, potentially even perverted, by a compactly tangled web of mutual accusations, bitterness and suspicion. It is necessary, Camus says, to "remain sensitive to the risk that, in criticizing the curse of rebellion, I give aid and comfort to the most insolent instigators of the Algerian tragedy, [but] I am also afraid that, by retracing the long history of French errors, I am, with no risk to myself, supplying alibis to the criminal madmen who would toss grenades into crowds of innocent people who happen to be my kin" (Camus 2013, 25).

Engaging the perspectives of multiple sides, Camus's artistic judgement thus seeks to examine each side's ends in a worldly historical perspective and in this way also disclose the ways in which they interlink with and permeate each other. Accordingly, it shows how the systematic practices of exploitation and repression on the part of the French government can explain the seeming necessity of armed rebellion among the Arabs, who, kept "in a permanent state of subjection," have "lost their faith in democracy" and in the subsequent policy of assimilation, and went in search for other means to demand justice (see Camus 2013, 101–5, 110). Yet, Camus also insists that the legitimate demand for "Algerian liberty" cannot act as a justification for the terrorist methods employed by the independence fighters (Camus 2013, 206; see also 129). In their justificatory strategy, instead, he recognizes a certain ideological element, which ensued in the tendency, prevalent also among the French intellectuals, including Sartre,

to place France "in a historic state of sin" and to frame their commitment to liberty in terms of a predefined, nationalistic end that failed to take into account the long-term and firmly embedded French settler presence in Algeria. What Camus's worldly perspective thus displaces is the abstract formulation of the dirty hands dilemma, which, conceived in terms of the opposition of absolute, preconceived ends, severed from each other, could only lead to the resignation to the struggle to see which side ultimately prevails over the other (Camus 2013, 138–9). Such unilateral calculation of means and ends would, according to Camus, in effect amount to "doctrines of total war," envisioning the future as one of either independence, which would mean the eviction of the French, or of French victory, which would entail the suppression of the Arab population (Camus 2013, 145).

Revealing the world in its particularity and plurality, rather, Camus's artistic judging sensibility first of all affirms the ambiguity of political judgement as it arises from the tragic confrontation between opposing forces, none of which can claim to possess a sole right to (absolute) justice and each of which "wears the double mask of good and evil" (Camus 1970g, 301–2; see also Zaretsky 2013b, 63). An adequate resistance to the ambiguous character of politics, for Camus, in turn, consisted of a refusal to "overstep" or "transgress" the limit that is disclosed in this confrontation between "equally legitimate, equally justified" sides (Camus 1970g, 301–2). Affirming the limits of others and the world, Camus's artistic sensibility thus displaces an end-oriented judging practice that would proceed by an estimation of the means appropriate to an (already envisioned) conception of a just society. Instead, it directs attention to the character of the means employed itself, striving for them to assume, whenever possible, the form of a dialogical appeal to the freedom of others (see Camus 1971, 256). Hence Camus's call for a civilian truce in Algeria, which, he believed, would help establish the conditions for the opposing sides to sit down at a common table as equal members of the shared reality, confront their views and engage in discussion about the possible arrangements for a common future. The focus on dialogical means, further, implies the reconsideration of the way of conceiving the ends themselves – assuming the form of a continuous striving towards the establishment of conditions under which all individuals will be able to exercise their freedom and their right to state "what is just and what is unjust" and where, accordingly, a vision of justice will only emerge out of a

consideration of a plurality of perspectives inhabiting the political world (Camus 1971, 254–5).

Camus's proposed solution, in the end, amounted to a defence of a federated structure that would be able to nourish under its wing the freedom and equality of two communities with different identities and be linked in some or other form to France (Camus 2013, 181–2). As a concern for individual liberty and difference in the face of the conditions that perpetuate hunger and poverty, it earned, particularly in the eyes of Sartre, the stamp of a meek, moralistic compromise solution that makes a mockery out of the aspiration of the oppressed to free themselves and ends up defending the neo-colonialist status *quo*. Yet, these charges arguably obscure the character of Camus's aesthetic, worldly judgement that is not to be understood as a dialectic of trial and final verdict, attributing the guilt, determining penance and declaring the winners. It instead represents an attempt to disclose the plural, human reality of the political world and appeal to all parties involved to take it into account while imagining possible solutions (see also Walzer 2002, 145). In the case of Algeria, the realistic picture was one of two different communities who "are condemned to live together" (Camus 2013, 114, 153). The solution, accordingly, had to be creative, going beyond the established political principles and arrangements of sovereign nation-states, so as to be able to recognize and respect the rights and interests of both (see Walzer 2002, 144–5, 147–8).

This does not mean that Camus's is the traditional moralistic standpoint of "absolute non-violence," which, if adopted in advance, effectively justifies the existing, systemic forms of violence, while neglecting the fact that it may not always be easy to distinguish between violence and non-violence in the first place, and also that our actions may have consequences we were not able to foresee (Camus 1971, 255). Attuned to the tragic character of politics, Camus was well aware that violence is unavoidable. Yet, oriented to disclosing the world in its plurality, his artistic sensibility also is characterized by a heightened attentiveness to "the risk" involved in acting politically, which by implication entailed a pronounced resistance to rendering violence into a *justified* practice, that is, into a rationalized, necessary course of political action (Camus 1971, 253). This ambiguity springs forth in Camus's play *The Just,* which relates the ruminations of a group of socialist revolutionaries in czarist Russia on whether, in the fight against the unjust and oppressive political and economic system, it

is justified to resort to violence and assassinate the Grand Duke Sergei. A clear-cut embrace of violence as a necessity in the face of glaring injustice and suffering – propounded by "a true revolutionary," Stepan – is contrasted with the morally troubled perspective of Ivan Kaliayev (Camus 2006b, 172). When reflecting upon the justifiability of violence for a worthy goal, Kaliayev affirms his willingness to engage in violent political action "for the sake of life," that is, of concrete people suffering in the present (Camus 2006b, 173–4). At the same time, however, he retains the gnawing awareness that, even though a representative of an unjust system, the Duke is also a human being and that the act of assassination indeed represents a crime – which can only be justified by the sacrifice of his own life (Camus 2006b, 175–8). Furthermore, Kaliayev finds himself unable to throw the bomb when he sees that two children, the Duke's niece and nephew, are travelling along in the carriage: "those two serious little faces and that hideous weight in my hand … I was going to have to throw it at them … just like that … straight at them … Oh, no! … I just couldn't do it!" (Camus 2006b, 183). For Stepan, Kaliayev's refusal to kill the children amounted to a betrayal of the revolution, which, as an eventual "cure" of "all suffering," justifies the use of "anything and everything" that might help its cause, including the sacrifice of the innocent (Camus 2006b, 186–7). Kaliayev, in turn, questions Stepan's confidence in the human ability to know the future-to-come, refusing to sacrifice the people "who are alive today," for the sake of "some unknown … distant city" (Camus 2006b, 188). Any revolution that would conform to the principle that "anything is justifiable" – as Dora voices Kaliayev's (and Camus's) recognition of limits "even" in "destruction" – would forfeit the justice of its aims and become "loathed by the entire human race" (Camus 2006b, 185–7). On another occasion, however, the Duke is travelling alone; Kaliayev performs the task and surrenders to the authorities (and the scaffold).

The perspective of the "just assassin" Kaliayev then can be said to crystallize the artistic, worldly judgement's insight into the ambiguity of violence not so much by the purported readiness for self-sacrifice, as Walzer (1973, 178–9) suggests, but by the recognized "need to entertain doubt" (Zaretsky 2013a, 175; Foley 2008, 88–92). For a judgement oriented towards the world, violence must retain, Camus says, "its provisional character of effraction" (Camus 1971, 255). By this he means that it cannot be legitimately employed "in advance," bound to any self-centred finalistic aspirations,

but only as “an extreme limit” against another form of violence, that is, for the sake of the world: to enable, for instance, that an injustice against oneself or others is made visible and instances of oppression voiced, or to establish institutions “which limit violence,” like the suppression of death penalty and arbitrary sentence (Camus 1971, 256). Moreover, Camus’s play – as articulated in Dora’s doubt as to whether Kaliayev’s willingness to die really is capable of justifying the murder of another human being of flesh and blood – reveals a strong prospective dimension contained in worldly judgement (see Camus 2006b, 176–8). Political judgement oriented by the principle of for the sake of the world, that is, amplifies the sense of a moral cost brought about by a dirty action, conceptualizing it not primarily in reference to a stained self, but in terms of the broken relationships, increasingly thin possibilities for communication and solidarity, and, by implication, for a dignified existence (see Camus 1971, 255). For it not only furthers the recognition that any decision for the use of ignoble means will have to bear the burden of the particular cost incurred in the process and confront the question of how to repair it in the future. It also orients political action by the awareness of the danger that any easy concession to the necessity of violence may make the future at all impossible.

Arendt’s political response to the problem of dirty hands: Representative judgement and the promise of politics

Camus’s creative rethinking of the dirty-hands problem receives an explicitly political formulation in Arendt’s worldly judging sensibility, appealing to the promise of properly political judgement (and politics) to recognize, accommodate and respond to the tragic character of political affairs, rather than simply submitting to the seemingly inevitable law of violence and (lesser) evil.

Arendt, to be sure, denounces the standpoint of abstract morality that envisions proper judgement as application of absolute standards arrived at by reference to one’s private conscience, that is, within the confines of one’s solitary self, untrammelled by the ambiguities and tragedies of the world of political affairs. The fallacy behind this standpoint, as Arendt observes by evoking the example of Thoreau, is that the primary

locus of attention rests on the well-being or goodness of individual conscience, rather than on the state or appearance of the world. From this perspective, indeed, the ambiguities of the political world can be avoided simply by refraining from political involvement, by distancing oneself from the plural, unpredictable and potentially dirty character of politics and thus "washing one's hands" of any evil or injustice – all the while remaining blissfully unconcerned with the world "where the wrong is committed" or with "the consequences that the wrong will have for the future course of the world" (Arendt 1972a, 60). In the desire to be "good" and seek refuge in one's "beautiful soul," Arendt thus discerns a politically troubling irresponsibility for the world, which she conveys with the Latin saying *Fiat justicia et pereat mundus* (Let justice be done even if the world perishes) (Arendt 1972a, 62). Yet, Arendt also staunchly rejects the tendency attending the breakdown of eternal absolutes in the modern age to reduce political judgement to instrumental reasoning, which conceives of political action (and politics itself) as mere means for the realization of a pre-given end and is thus able to systematically justify dirty hands as a necessary step on the path towards some greater, common good. Much like Camus, Arendt saw the argument of lesser evil as the ultimate and highly dangerous manifestation of the traditional conceptualization of political judgement – one predicated upon approaching (and mastering) the plural character of the world of human affairs with preconceived, abstract categories conceived by the solitary mind.

The inadequacy of the lesser evil argument, for Arendt, arises from the way that violence, ruled as it is by instrumental, means-end thinking, always carries with itself the danger that "the means overwhelm the end" – that is, of degrading the value contained in the ends themselves and leading to a vision of the world devoid of meaning or purpose (Arendt 1972b, 177, 106; see also Arendt 1958, 154–7). As such, the dirty hands argument assumed a politically especially troubling formulation in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century philosophies of history, where an attempt to recognize and confront the disorderly and chaotic character of human affairs led to a penchant to interpret all contradictions, antagonisms and setbacks as part of, and in fact promoting, a progressive dialectical movement towards "more and more freedom," and thus to portray evil as a necessary, justified step towards the eventual emancipation of humankind (Arendt 1994, 444; 1972b, 128, 155; Isaac 1992, 82). A particularly

pernicious development, however, Arendt saw in writers like Sartre, Sorel and Fanon, who, drawing on the tradition of life philosophies of Bergson and Nietzsche, proceeded to view violence as itself "a life-promoting force" – as itself a means, in Sartre's words, of "man recreating himself" (Arendt 1972b, 170–1, 114). For Arendt, the willing embrace of dirty hands then easily leads to an ultimate, nihilistic assertion of the absolute subject, capable of providing the final solution to the riddles of political action by reducing it to violence as a natural, inevitable course of our collective, political existence as such, impervious to the powers of human judgement (see Arendt 1972b, 172). It thus not only entails the loss of all stable yardsticks by which to orient our judgements, but also risks reducing humans to mere automata, borne thoughtlessly along the stream of larger historical or biological forces.

What "the glorifiers of violence" thus fail to pay heed to, as Arendt observes, is that the ambiguity of political judgement stems precisely from the fact that an individual "does *not* owe his existence to himself," that he or she on the contrary stands facing the outside world that remains recalcitrant to the imposition of subjective categories of thought (Arendt 1972b, 172, 115). The fallacy of the dirty hands argument, then, is exposed in the fact that violent means, always relying on the presumption of being able to order and contain the plurality and complexity of the world in accordance with a pre-given end, are bound to disregard the inherent ambiguity and unpredictability of political action (Arendt 1972b, 176–7, 150; Isaac 1992, 79). Dependent on an instrumental, calculative register, on a conception of judgement as an essentially inner process of reckoning with consequences whose results are then to be applied onto political affairs from the outside and above, violence inevitably leads to a denial of human plurality and threatens to tear apart the fabric of the common world as a meaningful context for the appearance of human words and deeds. In this respect, Arendt distinguishes violence as opposed to and in fact destructive of power (and the public, political realm itself), which only arises from and is sustained by a plurality of individuals appearing to each other and engaging in debate, deliberation and action in the company of their peers (Hayden 2014b, 17; Arendt 1972b, 143, 155). A systematic resort to violence thus risks severing individuals from others and from common worldly reality and leading to the atrophy of their judging and acting ability to relate to and assume responsibility for the world – only to ultimately abandon politics to the rule of

inhuman forces and processes.

In this way Arendt, like Camus, deconstructs the conventional conceptualization of the dirty hands problem, portraying the acceptance of lesser evil as merely the other, and politically highly dangerous, side of the standpoint of moral purity, equally well reliant on a conception of absolute self, detached from others and the world. Instead, she conceives of the dirty-hands paradox as arising from the capriciousness of "fortuna," that is, from the subject engaging the independent worldly reality, the weight of the world that lies beyond its complete grasp and that precisely cannot be (re)created at will (see Arendt 1955, 9). The ambiguity of political judgement, in other words, stems from the fact that we always need to judge while facing a circumstantial reality that was there before our arrival, that necessarily shapes our range of possible choices and that, further, is bound to transform our decisions in unpredictable and boundless ways (Arendt 1958, 190–2). Narrative-inspired, representative judgement is well-suited to confront this ambiguity because, engaging a plurality of perspectives on the world, it is able to view actions in their worldly appearance, that is, in terms of the actor's response to the challenges, possibilities and constraints of the world of political affairs (see e.g. Arendt 2006a, 151). Political judgement then cannot simply avoid the ambiguity of political engagement by appealing to good intentions, without regard to, for instance, the structurally ingrained patterns of suffering and injustice that cannot be adequately countered by mere changes in mental states, or to the ways in which the agent's original intention are likely to be significantly changed, even perverted into their opposites, by a given situation.[56] Yet, representative judgement also resists the temptation to seek to ultimately resolve the ambiguity of political action by reifying it into an essentially dirty enterprise. For seeing it as a "rising" of a freedom into the world, it displaces the tendency to conceive of political action as realization of a given end that would in turn be able to justify any means deemed necessary for its achievement. By engaging a manifold of different perspectives and thus bringing into existence a public space of appearance, it instead is bent on confronting the ambiguity of the political world by illuminating a particular dirty-hands dilemma in its intersubjective, human reality and thus inciting deliberation on the possible courses of action with a view to how they

[56] Arendt in this respect evokes the lively debates about the political relevance of "moral luck," an appreciation of the fact that any action, its meaning and implications do not lie within our powers alone but are significantly conditioned by things beyond our control (see e.g. Williams 1981; Card 1996).

would resonate in the public realm, the common world – that is, not in terms of any "in order to," but "for the sake" of the world (see Arendt 1955, 10, 13, 21, 16).

The aesthetic, representative judging sensibility thus reinterprets the dirty hands problem by displacing the seeming inevitability of the alternative between a conception of political judgement as application of universal moral ideals and one inherently predicated on the acceptance of (lesser) evil. Its ability to retain attention on the ambiguity of the political world – similarly to Camus's artistic sensibility – then should not be understood as mere moralistic insistence on the wrongfulness of violence, but is distinct for drawing attention to recognizing those worldly conditions that would seem to render dirty hands into an inevitable course of political engagement. Just as violence is destructive of the political realm, as Arendt (1972b, 184) writes, so, too, "every decrease in power is an open invitation to violence." Political judgement oriented by the principle of "for the sake of the world," in other words, is attentive to how the weakening of the sense of the common world and the increasing atrophy of the public space where individuals could appear to and engage in action and speech with each other, may make a resort to violence seem the "only" possible way left of affirming the human ability to change the world (see Arendt 1972b, 178–80). Arendt, for instance, observes how the modern reduction of politics to a realm of bureaucratic administration bent on calculating and managing the plurality of the political world in accordance with the prefabricated vision of the (common) good, led to "the disastrous shrinkage of the public realm," where "there is nobody left with whom one can argue, to whom one can present grievances, on whom the pressures of power can be exerted" (Arendt 1972b, 178). At the same time, however, worldly judgement is oriented to confronting these conditions, directing attention to the question of how to kindle and sustain a human world, a space in which the contradictions and dilemmas of our situated existence could be addressed by political means, that is, through action and speech among peers (Arendt 1972b, 179).

For by revealing a particular dirty-hands situation in its intersubjective, human significance, narrative-inspired, representative judgement is oriented to kindling the sense of the world in its particularity, plurality and unpredictability, and thus, rather than yielding to any supposed "necessity," honestly confronting the ambiguity of engaging it in action. Drawing on the example of totalitarian crimes, Arendt for instance exposes

how the argument of lesser evil – that, given the circumstances, "it was more 'responsible' to stay on the job" or that any opposition to the gradually ascending spiral of anti-Jewish measures and laws would only make matters worse – was a matter of individuals' choice that could not be justified by appeals to one's duty or some inevitable law, simply because soon "a stage was reached where nothing worse could possibly have happened" (Arendt 2003, 35–7). On the other hand, Arendt brings out the significance of those few, who, while they remained the participants in the Nazi apparatus, nevertheless resisted their specific role or line of duty. She invokes, for instance, the examples of Anton Schmidt, German army sergeant, who helped the Jewish partisans, and of those ordinary citizens who hid Jews in their homes (see Arendt 2006c, 230–1). For they were the ones who, even in the face of the oppressive conditions that limited their potentials for action, refused to yield their capacity of free judgement in front of the seemingly inevitable; they engaged the world in freedom, forged bonds of solidarity across and beyond the immediate roles assigned to them by the larger historical forces and structures and thus also made the world into a more human one. While highly attentive to the role of the given circumstantial factors that lie beyond the control of the agent, then, Arendt's representative judging sensibility also seeks to confront this ambiguity by constantly striving to disclose the contours of a shared world and thus kindle forms of political action that would take into account the existing field of actors, perspectives and relationships constituting it. Given the unpredictability of action, Arendt writes, "the means used to achieve political goals are more often than not of greater relevance to the future world than the intended goals" (Arendt 1972b, 106). An adequate response to the plural and perplexing character of the political world, that is, should whenever possible assume the form of an appeal to the freedom of others, of action in concert, and so endeavour to provide the conditions for a properly human, political existence for a plurality of standpoints inhabiting the common world (see Arendt 1972b, 179).

At the same time, however, Arendt's representative judging attentiveness to the plurality of the political world shies away from purporting to be able to ever ultimately offset the inherent unpredictability of political affairs – to, for instance, provide a set of yardsticks or laws that could remedy the ever-present potentiality of action to ensue in tragic outcomes and thus eradicate the problem of dirty hands – and this, as Arendt

(1958, 192) writes, simply because human deeds always intervene into the plurality of existing wills and intentions, which means that their "full," intersubjective meaning reveals itself only "at their end," to the "backward glance" of the judging spectator.[57] So, too, Arendt's sensitivity to the ambiguities of politics does not amount to a categorical rejection of violence. Much like Camus though, Arendt insisted that its use must be limited to the pursuit of "short-term goals," as a response to particular situations, rather than made into a systematic practice in the service of grand causes, like history or revolution (Arendt 1972b, 176). Violence, from the perspective of Arendt's aesthetic judging orientation, may in some circumstances be permissible, but it needs to be undertaken "for the sake" of the world, not "in order to" achieve any predetermined end, thus severing it from any conceived "necessity" and linking it to actor's freedom and concomitant responsibility. It can be justified, for instance, to "dramatize grievances," to bring cases of injustice into public view and thus to open the public realm to previously disregarded perspectives, to protect the innocent or in a struggle for freedom against foreign occupation (Arendt 1972b, 176; 2007, 166–7; Hayden 2014b, 17). Yet, Arendt's representative judging perspective also contains a heightened attentiveness to the political, worldly cost borne by the decision to resort to violence. While the use of violence may be justifiable in some cases, as Arendt (1972b, 151) writes, it "never will be legitimate." Much like for Camus, then, violence remains inexcusable in the sense that it can never be made into a rationally justifiable theory or doctrine, in accordance with which dirty hands would assume the aura of moral validity, even virtue, while shying away from the need to engage in the processes of assuming responsibility and assigning accountability for the cost incurred. For Arendt, the use of violence, even if it ultimately brings about the desired end that justifies it, carries a "very high" price (Arendt 1972b, 152). For the representative, worldly judging sensibility reveals how this price refers not merely to "the vanquished," that is, to those individuals or perspectives whose freedom has been denied, but to the loss of power suffered by the victors as well – to the severance of the web of human relationships and the accompanying atrophy of the human world as a fitting abode for political action and

[57] Arendt's take on the dirty-hands problem, in this respect, should be distinguished from attempts at transcending the paradox that can be discerned among, for instance, value pluralists, who argue that a confrontation with a truly tragic situation which brokers no happy solution, should not lead to mere wallowing in guilt, but should spur us to reflect upon how existing practices and institutions can be reformed so as to lead to a world of "concordant action," where conflicting values could be mediated and reconciled without a tragic remainder (Nussbaum 2000, 1013–16; see also Sutherland 1995).

speech (see Arendt 1972b, 152–3). Political judgement oriented towards the world then carries a strong prospective dimension; it conveys a prescient awareness that any "dirty" action simply cannot hope to be redeemed by the achievement of a given end, but will need to be reckoned with and its meaning broached in the future, posing the question of how, after violence and evil, it might be possible to reconstitute a common world among former enemies and thus reinvigorate a space for properly political interaction among plural equals. Oriented by the recognition that dirty hands cannot simply be justified as a seemingly inevitable aspect of political engagement, Arendt's conception of political judgement "for the sake of the world" thus also constantly kindles the sense of the possibilities and limits of political action with a view to what would amount to a severance of relationships so dire that it would preclude any further confrontation of differences and make politics impossible.

Concluding thoughts: The tragic vision of politics and its limits

The chapter inquired into the distinct contribution of the existential aesthetic judging sensibility to understanding and confronting the problem of dirty hands as a perplexity inherent to political action. It attempted to show how the existentialists' attentiveness to the process of judging in its worldly ambiguity offers a valuable lens through which to disclose the problem in its human, political significance – and thus displace the tendency to submit the human capacity of action to the law of tragic necessity. Sartre's and Beauvoir's insights into the worldly perplexity of political judgement revealed the dirty-hands problem as a challenge arising from human situatedness in (and complicity with) a world of (oppressive) relationships, structures and forces that cannot be changed by clinging to the standpoint of moral purity, but require an active involvement in the "filth and blood" of political affairs. Against this background, the chapter turned to Camus and Arendt for a creative rethinking of the challenge of dirty hands, revealing how their determination to remain loyal to the plural, unpredictable, that is, human, character of the world displaces the tendency to reduce politics to the reign of (lesser) evil and opens a worldly space within which the contradictions and dilemmas of our situated existence can be addressed through action and speech among plural equals.

Furthermore, their dialogical, representative judging orientation brought forth an amplified sense of the worldly cost exacted by a dirty action, directing attention to the need to confront the question of how to come to terms with it and assume responsibility for it in the future. Displacing the view that violence could simply be justified as an inevitable course of political action as such, the existential judging sensibility then can also be said to poignantly expose the limitations of the dirty-hands perspective, which, content to reduce politics to the law of tragic necessity, falls short of adequately confronting the implications borne by the ambiguity of human affairs and upholding, in the face of evil and injustice, the possibilities for a properly political, human existence. Inspired by the perspectives of Camus and Arendt in particular, the next chapter engages the challenge of how it might be possible to reconcile with the tragedy and fallibility of human engagement in the world and reaffirm, after wrongdoing and suffering, the dignity of political action.

As a problematic of thought and action, the challenge of transitional justice and reconciliation in societies divided by past wrongs represents a relatively recent attempt to confront the tragic nature of political action as manifested by the problem of dirty hands. Echoing the promise of "Never again!," the challenge at its most fundamental involves the question of how to judge and confront a past of conflict, injustice, brutality, and division so as to make possible a different and common future. Its guiding sensibility is a successor of the efforts at the Nuremberg trials to face up to and imagine possible ways of dealing with the painful experience of the Second World War and genocide that shook the consciousness of humankind. Since then, the need for transitional mechanisms arose following a spate of political violence, terror, mass killings, and ethnic cleansing devouring places as diverse as South Africa, Chile, Argentina, Rwanda, Bosnia and countless others. On the one hand, then, the challenge of transitional justice crystallizes awareness of the human capacity for cruelty and evil, the ever present potentiality of human beings to bring harm to and impose injustice upon each other which cannot be simply wished away through appeals to moral absolutes or faith in the progress of humanity. On the other hand, however, it contains an appeal to the need for humans to draw on their capacity to reconcile with what happened, to understand how and why, and, on this basis, make a new beginning and work to prevent such actions from happening in the future (see e.g. Lara 2007, 1–2, 22). The transitional justice problematic, in this respect, engenders the challenge of political judgement from the other side than the dirty hands problem, as it were: one of the spectators, who need to reconcile with the frailty and fallibility of human engagement in the world and in whom the burden of action meets the burden of responsibility.

This crucial concern of transitional justice and reconciliation scholarship regardless, the judging process of reconciling with and assuming responsibility for the burden of action has not been awarded sufficient attention or explored in its own right. Initially, the prevalent paradigm involved the focus on criminal justice and law, bent on prosecuting and punishing the perpetrators and thus restoring the validity of principles of a just moral and political order. Later, especially with the success of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the main concern shifted from a

conception of retributive to one of restorative justice which encompasses broader human, moral, cultural, and psychological goals and a contextual sensitivity often glossed over within the legal, universalist framework of criminal trials. Increasing weight was given to, for instance, the aims of uncovering the truth about past wrongdoing, reclaiming the dignity of the victims and restoring the common world and societal harmony (see Rotberg 2000, 10–12; Hayner 2011, 5–6; Boraine 2000, 69–70). Nevertheless, the prevalent tendency remains to imagine a framework already in place on the basis of which judgement is to proceed from a past of evil and suffering to a democratic and just future. As postmodern critics have recently been quick to point out, the challenge of transitional judgement is usually approached with a preconceived vision of consensus and agreement, of either a liberal or communitarian sort, whereby past violence and a sense of tragedy and loss can be redeemed and substituted for by a restored sense of justice and belonging (see e.g. Hirsch 2011, 1–4; Schaap 2005a). The standard of appeal may be the universal moral law of reason and principles of reasonableness in accordance with which the truth of wrongdoing can be recognized and condemned, and the values of moral decency and human dignity restored (see e.g. Minow 1998, 10–14). Others may resort to the rhetoric of a wounded social or national body that needs to be healed, which likewise predetermines the wrongfulness of the offence and envisions the restoration of community to ensue through, for instance, public acts of atonement and forgiveness (see e.g. Bartley 2009, 120; Schaap 2005a, 18–20). Yet, in this way, the activity of judging and the process of reconciliation come to resemble a "bridge" linking "two disparate entities, [the past and the future], without becoming part of either one" (Bartley 2009, 120). It becomes a determinant problem-solving exercise of a detached, rational mind: "pragmatic, temporary and neutral: a means to an end" (Bartley 2009, 120).

What is thereby missed, however, is precisely the way in which the processes of judging how to reckon with the past is grounded upon the temporal, situated ambiguity of the present, transitional moment – where the horrors of the past and the promise of a better future collide, suffusing the present and questioning the possibility of conceiving of reconciliatory judgement and politics in terms of a linear progressive motion (see e.g. Zolkos 2009). The emphasis in judgement instead is on penetrating the ultimate nature of the experience of suffering and injustice, reaching the final knowledge of their

causes, thus confining them to the past and proceeding confidently into a brighter future. As such, however, it also is bent on, as Arendt (1994, 307–11) would have it, explaining them away and even justifying them, while obscuring or short-circuiting the process of understanding the ways in which past suffering came about through human, political action in the world and how this awareness bears on the human capacities of response. At the risk of oversimplification, it may be said that this tendency betrays a Hegelian touch whereby loss, suffering and discord, and eventual redemption follow each other in a dialectical movement, and where the tragic nature of human affairs becomes reified into a necessary and justified course on the path towards the final reconciliation and triumph of reason – begging the question of the significance of human frailty and the ensuing responsibility for our judgements and actions.

It is against this background that springs forth the value of reflective, narrative-inspired judgement as conceived by the existentialist thinkers. For presupposing as its background condition the fundamental temporality and narrativity of human existence – that is, that our capacity for freedom and spontaneous action in the world is importantly predicated upon our constantly making sense of and inscribing ourselves in meaningful pasts – it is well-suited to address what Ricoeur calls "boundary situations" (Kearney 1995, 37–8), those moments of transition, of rupture or break in established ways of being in the world brought forth by violence, evil and suffering that can no longer be bridged through appeals to prefabricated frameworks of judgement, but require the whole of society to thoroughly rethink the bases of its identity, its myths, memories and relevant histories. The import of the existentialist, narrative judging sensibility thence arises from its ability to confront instances of wrongdoing and suffering in the particularity and originality of their appearance in the world, rather than subsuming them under some broader whole. As such, it embodies the process of reconciliation by revealing how past tragedies have arisen from human (in)actions and in the midst of the political world, weaving them into meaningful stories, making them part of our common worldly reality and thus also confronting us with the need to assume responsibility for them and make a new beginning in the present.

To argue the significance of this underlying existential dimension, then, is not to concur with the conclusion often implied in the postmodern rejection of harmonious and consensus based models of reconciliation, where the significance of narrative voice is

often invoked to indicate the ineffable element to human suffering, to emphasize "tragic" remainders, aporias and the forever deferred moment of final reconciliation, or to signal the endless repetition of past trauma in the present and the inevitability of new violence in the course of reckoning with the old (see e.g. Felman and Laub 1992; Hirsch 2012; Schaap 2005a; Sanders 2007; Gready 2011). If this focus renders past evil into a new generalized lesson or conclusion of political judgement, it is the distinct value of the existentialist emphasis on the importance of our reflective judging ability to be able to retain the focus on the situated nature of the process of reconciling with the tragedy of human action and of assuming responsibility for past wrongs. The purpose of the chapter, accordingly, is not to offer a new theory or a model of transitional justice mechanisms, but to bring out the existential, political import of the process of judging and reconciling with past wrongs. As such, it also aims to bring to the forefront the core challenge that, as the mirror side of the dirty-hands problem, stands at the heart of the reconciliation debates, yet risks getting obscured in the existing, predominantly abstract theorizing on the subject – how the awareness and understanding of the human capacity to bring about suffering also grounds the human ability to resist injustice in the future, that is, how to reckon with past wrongdoing without committing further injustice and evil.

The chapter begins by exploring the burden of responsibility as an attendant to the recognition of the tragedy of human affairs and the human capacity for evil – a recognition containing an urgent appeal to the community of spectators for their capacity of response. In contrast to the inner and self-centred focus characterizing the predominant emphases on either individual accountability as emphasized within the framework of criminal trials or (collective) guilt as invoked in the framework of truth commissions, the first section draws on the insights of the four existentialist thinkers to show how reflective judgement points to a distinctly worldly, yet inherently ambiguous, conception of responsibility. Reflecting the temporal ambiguity of the transitional moment, this understanding of judgement and responsibility displaces the conclusive focus plaguing both the retributive and restorative paradigms of reckoning with past wrongs and instead directs attention to the underlying existential and political need to situate ourselves in the world and engage the meaning of past events for our present lives in common. The second section, accordingly, turns to explore the significance of

the narrative-inspired, representative judging ability to stir into motion and foster, in divided and traumatized societies, the process of reconciliation with reality. Rather than seeing reconciliation in terms of an end goal of, for instance, a restoration of moral order or national unity, it attempts to show how public testimony and narrative truth can contribute to the political process of making the painful past part of the common world and of thus reinvigorating the public realm. The chapter concludes by briefly pointing to the political implications of the existentialists' judging attentiveness to the human significance and ambiguity contained in the process of reconciling with the tragic character of political affairs.

The burden of responsibility

As the previous chapter attempted to show, it is the distinct political value of the existentialist sensitivity to portray the tragic element as a feature inherent in political action. Political action, as most explicitly brought forward by Arendt, not only is grounded in spontaneity, which means that it is in its essence to interrupt any natural or historical chain of causes and effects and to appear in the world as a miracle, "an 'infinite improbability'," which could not have been foreseen or predicted – precisely because it "did not exist before" its appearance, neither as a motive nor an intended goal (Arendt 2006a, 168, 150). As an arising of freedom in the world and amongst a plurality of other wills and intentions, it also is unpredictable and boundless, capable of initiating consequences and processes that return to the agent in alien, essentially unrecognizable forms (Arendt 1958, 190–2). In political action, in short, we are bound to be "constantly falling over [our] own feet" (Arendt 1979, 305). This constitutive contingency and ambiguity of political action poses a significant challenge to political judgement, putting into question the very idea and reality of human freedom and responsibility. While we may feel free and responsible in our inner selves, in a contradiction well established by Kant, our worldly existence seems determined and at the mercy of laws of causality that rule the outer world and under the force of which our freedom (and ensuing responsibility) dissolves as soon as it enters the realm of phenomena – to the point of appearing non-existent or a mere mirage (Arendt 2006a, 142–4; see also Arendt 1958,

234). This paradox of judgement (and of responsibility) comes particularly clearly to light when political action indeed ends in failure, in situations when the world becomes a site of wrongdoing, injustice and suffering. Yet, it is also those moments that render it particularly tempting to purport to be able to avoid it, yielding to the sovereign desire to trace events to a rationally-discernible chain of causes and effects, and reach thereby the final, rational knowledge of the past and a clear-cut attribution of responsibility. Grounded as it is on the presumption of a self-contained inner self, removed from and unhindered by the broader worldly environment, however, this desire actually risks, as Arendt warned, forfeiting freedom and human capacities of response in front of inhuman, automatic and seemingly irresistible prophesies of progress – or, even more likely, of disaster and doom (Arendt 1994, 404–5; see also Arendt 2004, 617–18; 2006a, 147, 152, 167–9).

The existentialist awareness of the burden of human responsibility and the dangers contained in denying it, are, in ontological terms, most explicitly brought forth in Sartre's trenchant denunciation of all attempts to avoid responsibility for one's worldly situation as forms of bad faith. Human freedom, we shall recall him to insist, is not a pure, disembodied self-identical substance, lingering above the world of human affairs, but exists only in a situation – and therefore crucially depends on assuming responsibility for the given past as *ours*. Sartre conveys this disconcerting truth in his play *The Flies,* depicting the journey of Orestes to Argos, his home town, where, fifteen years ago, his father, king Agamemnon, was brutally murdered by Queen Clytemnestra's lover, Aegistheus, and which, as a legacy of the past crime, is still plagued by swarms of flies. While highly educated, possessing full (rational) knowledge of the multiplicity of ideas, cultures and temples long past, Orestes needs but to step foot in the place of his birth to recognize something has been missing. Even though he is "free as air," non-committed and "gloriously aloof," he also lacks his own memories, his past that would make him love and hate, endow him with hopes and fears, and enable him to exert his freedom in the world, among his fellow citizens (see Sartre 1989, 59–60, 87–8). Orestes's aloofness gains a mirror image in the perverse rituals of self-abnegation and generalized penance that the gods have thrust upon the inhabitants of Argos. Devised as a definitive reckoning with the "originary" crime of murder, these rituals keep the town subjects at the mercy of a divine fate, unable to assume

responsibility for the weight of the past as their own and own up to it as a condition of their freedom in the present and for the future – rendering them mere puppets at the mercy of the established order. To escape his ghostly existence and remind the others of the reality of their freedom – to affirm, in other words, that justice "is a matter between men" – Orestes soon recognizes, he must embed his freedom in the world and take on the burden of responsibility for the painful past (see Sartre 1989, 103, 88–92).

While broad-brushed, these initial considerations invoke the crucial political significance of the linkage that reflective judgement establishes between the event, actors and the spectators. For by retaining focus on the particular and perhaps unprecedented appearance of wrongdoing and suffering, its intersubjective, human reality, reflective judgement grounds the burden of responsibility as an appeal to all members of a particular community to recognize the tragic events as part of their world and to draw on their capacities of a meaningful response. Thus, reflective judgement brings forth the ambiguity of responsibility as the other side of the tragic nature of political action, an appearance of freedom in the midst of the world that of necessity escapes any presumption of self-mastery and that can never be completely amenable to rational explication. The tragic burden it manifests is that we are responsible by virtue of our worldly existence, our always already being part of and constituted by the web of human relationships comprising the political realm – which significantly problematizes and departs from any causality-based model of responsibility, rendering us responsible for events and occurrences that we had never wished or intended, had not (directly) brought about, or had been unable to alter, yet which we must nevertheless assume as a worldly condition of our freedom in the present (see Herzog 2014, 186; Kruks 2012, 34–5).

Reflecting the temporal ambiguity of the transitional moment, the burden of responsibility for reckoning with painful pasts manifests itself in two interrelated aspects. On the one hand, a reflective judgement that is able to acknowledge the human reality of past injustice and suffering, can be said to found the need for a response as an instance of, following Markell, "tragic recognition" (see Muldoon 2009, 6). It is able to acknowledge, in other words, how grave wrongs have the capacity to profoundly suffuse and challenge our sense of selves and of the common worldly reality, to the point of irretrievably destroying the previously unquestioned presuppositions of

judgement, and the legal and moral order that cannot be simply reasserted or erected *ex nihilo* (see e.g. Doxtader 2011, 42–51; Kruks 2012, 152). An experience of previously unimagined evil, as Hayden (2009, 15) has argued, can thus profoundly "jeopardize our ability to judge and to act," producing "an ethical paralysis, if not outright nihilism." As such, on the other hand, it also remains attuned to the ways in which responding to past wrongs, settling on forms of accountability and redress is not simply a matter of an abstract rational exercise in the rendering of justice. It is instead significantly underlain and guided by the human, worldly purpose of the reinvigoration of the sense of self and of the common world, an attempt "to render intelligible the seemingly unintelligible, to make orderly the potentially chaotic, and to reconstruct a sensible world—however precarious—from the reality fractured by the experience of evil" (Hayden 2009, 15). Disrupting our habitual ways of being in the world, then, painful pasts also contain a powerful appeal to the human capacity of making a new beginning – which, in turn, demands a willingness to confront the ambiguity of engaging the political reality of shattered ideals, betrayed hopes and divided dreams that allows for no appeal to eternal standards of right and wrong (see Fine 2001, 160–2).

This two-fold challenge of judgement and responsibility is well-evident in the attempts of Sartre, Beauvoir and Camus to come to terms with and respond to the French experience of war, occupation and collaboration. In her essay *An Eye for An Eye* – written to explain her refusal to sign a petition asking for amnesty for Robert Brasillach, a well-known writer and editor, infamous for his anti-semitic columns and editorials – Beauvoir powerfully conveys how the activity of judging and responding to past wrongs is not a matter of exercises in detached, rational deliberation, but involves instead a reflective, situated response, involving the whole of one's being in not only its cognitive, but also its affective and emotional dimensions (Beauvoir 2004e; Kruks 2012, 153). Beauvoir starts by relating how her deeply felt desire to seek justice after evil arose from a distinct form of wrongs that plagued the years of Occupation. Before the war, the notion of a criminal related to wrongdoings such as theft or murder, which, as horrible as they might have been, seemed a result of the unjust social system that forced some people into crime and did not "compromise any of the values that we were attached to" (Beauvoir 2004e, 245). During and after the war and in response to its atrocities, however, Beauvoir (2004e, 246) writes, "we have learned rage and hate."

Beauvoir resorts to reflective judgement to establish the crimes of, for instance, torture, murder, suffering, humiliation and assassination as instances of what she calls "absolute evil." It is not as if, she writes, these crimes were "abominable in themselves" – they were so abominable because of their political, intersubjective meaning, of the way they entailed a denial of victims' freedom and their very humanity and were brought forth not by some or other natural disaster, but by other human beings (Beauvoir 2004e, 248).

The deep-seated, embodied need to reckon with past crimes and seek modes of redress, for Beauvoir, can thus be said to emanate from the ways in which they profoundly challenged her modes of being in the world, the most cherished values and norms of her community, including the assumptions of basic human reciprocity, that provided meaning to her life and structured the modes of interacting with others and the world (see Kruks 2012, 153–4). This shattering of the common worldly reality brought about by the experience of wrongdoing and suffering is well conveyed in Sartre's allegory of the flies, bearing a constant reminder of the past crime, while keeping the townsfolk lonely and separate, each enshrined in his or her own guilty conscience and fear, and no longer able to rejoice in each others' company (see Sartre 1989, 53–7, 65). The aim of "transitional" judgement, in turn, cannot be reducible to a determinant exercise in the re-establishment of "a reasonable and just order," but bears a distinctively human purpose (Beauvoir 2004e, 259). Beauvoir locates it in the "metaphysical" requirement of justice contained in the demand for a restoration of "the reciprocity of interhuman relations" that has been denied by the atrocity (Beauvoir 2004e, 249). It is the "metaphysical" demand to respond to past evils as part of *our* world and to affirm thereby "our values, our reasons to live," that first of all grounds "the sentiments and attitudes designated by words vengeance, justice, pardon, charity" in "their true concreteness" and establishes the significance of judging between them as possible ways of reckoning with the past (Beauvoir 2004e, 246–7).

It is also this existential purpose that brings forth the ambiguity involved in judging how to respond to a painful past. Both Sartre and Beauvoir as well as Camus (initially) supported punishment, at times the harshest, for Nazi collaborators and rejected forgiveness as a legitimate response. In their argument they resorted to no rational justification; they referred simply to the solidarity with and memory of the victims, to the stories of killings and torture, and blamed perpetrators not for any lawfully

proscribed crime (for instance, treason), but for their refusal to recognize their victims as human beings, their unwillingness to imagine the suffering caused by their actions (see Beauvoir 2004e, 257–8; Camus 2006a, 5–6, 14–15, 20–1; Zaretsky 2013a, 138–9). As Camus writes in defence of de Gaulle's decision to execute Pierre Pucheu, an interior minister in the Vichy government, responsible for ordering the executions of resistance fighters: "Too many men have died who we loved and respected, too many splendors betrayed, too many values humiliated […]" (Camus quoted in Zaretsky 2013a, 139).

The reflective recognition of the human purpose of responding to past wrongs, however, also allowed the three thinkers to acknowledge the ambiguity of punishment, pointing to how it is bound to end in (at least a partial) failure. For punishment to answer the metaphysical demand for justice it must be based on reflective judgement, aiming "expressly at the individual who suffers it" (Beauvoir 2004e, 247). Thus, by striving to reach to the heart of his or her freedom and confronting the wrongdoer inescapably with the vulnerabilities of his or her own embodiment, it also makes him or her understand the ambiguity of the human condition and recognize the victim as a freedom whose subjectivity has been unjustly denied (Beauvoir 2004e, 248–9). Yet, punishment also seeks an inherently contradictory aim, that is, "to compel a freedom:" to claim to be able to reach the subjectivity of the wrongdoer and the intention behind the crime, and to control his or her freedom in the future (Beauvoir 2004e, 249). In Sartre's play, this ambiguity of punishment is portrayed in the person of Electra, Orestes's sister, who for years has been nurturing the dream and desire of revenge, yet who, when Orestes decides to confront the burden of responsibility for the past by killing the king and their own mother, finds the antecedent promise of an inexplicable joy unfulfilled and her heart "like a lump of ice" (Sartre 1989, 104). Looking at Aegistheus's "dead-fish eyes goggling up at nothing" and listening to her mother's screams, she is consumed with anguish at the thought that her being an accomplice to murder, far from restoring meaning to her life, has weighted her previously lighthearted existence down with a burden that she will never be able to erase and will henceforth have to suffer as an inescapable companion to her freedom (see Sartre 1989, 105–6).

Beauvoir (like Camus) was accordingly particularly steadfast in her rejection of private, extralegal forms of vengeance, which, she believed, manifested a highly

dangerous presumption of a sovereign consciousness that usurps for itself the right to judge in the name of some or other universal principle and thus risk being carried away and "transforming itself into tyranny," breeding an endless cycle of revenge and new injustice (Beauvoir 2004e, 251, 258). Yet, Beauvoir also draws attention to the element of failure haunting the legal, formal pursuit of punishment through court-based proceedings. For punishment is thus pronounced by virtue of a determinant judgement of subsuming particular cases under the universal laws of "impersonal right" or "an objectivity" of universal societal principles, which abstracts from the concrete, singular reality of the accused and his or her crime (Beauvoir 2004e, 258, 252). Thus falling short of its human purpose, of satisfying the "metaphysical" demand for justice, punishment risks casting the perpetrator in the role of "an expiatory victim" of a "symbolic" – and somewhat arbitrary – act of justice (Beauvoir 2004e, 254). Despite the difficulty of remaining loyal to the concrete reality of wrongdoing and the consequent failure haunting the aim of punishment, however, Beauvoir (like Sartre) rejects charity or forgiveness as a legitimate response to those crimes that were so dehumanizing and world-shattering that deserved a denomination of absolute evil. Despite its ultimate failure, punishment is necessary to uphold the concrete existence of values denied by the atrocities and affirm the human meaning of the distinction between good and evil (Beauvoir 2004e, 257–9).

While Camus confronted in his calls for justice a similar tension, he also was less willing to accept the inevitable element of failure involved in acts of punishment as part of the ambiguity of political judgement and action that simply needs to be assumed. Sustaining the tension between the need to pay homage to the memory of suffering and injustice and the innate "repugnance" at the thought of new death sentences carried out in the name of justice, Camus thus rejected the proposition that the difficulty of judgement lies in the absolute choice between "the way of hatred and the way of pardon" (Camus 2006a, 89–90, 168–9). The real challenge, instead, Camus discerned in seeking justice by insisting on truth (Camus 2006a, 168–9). Accordingly, Camus from the very beginning drew attention to the importance of the *way* in which justice is to be done. The judgement on how to punish the collaborators should be based on a careful consideration of the particularities of specific cases (Camus 2006a, 77). It should be based on "the notion of proportional responsibility" of the accused, distinguishing

between serious crimes, which should be "punished immediately," and what could be considered to be errors or mistakes, which should be "consigned to carefully considered oblivion" (Camus 2006a, 77–8, 90). The actual purge, on the contrary, was not proportional to the concrete instances of wrongdoing; punishments and verdicts were meted out in accordance with political motivations and interests, failing to punish "genuine criminals," while reserving undeservedly harsh sentences for people like, for instance, the pacifist columnist René Gérin (Camus 2006a, 250). As Camus (2006a, 250) writes: "the postwar purge […] is now completely discredited. [...] failure is complete."

Yet, the realization of the imperfections and failures of human justice, also led Camus to modify his earlier attitude. He came to insist more strongly on the pressing need for transitional judgement to acknowledge the complexity and human reality of violent and painful pasts, "the infinite range of compromises and denials" that may have bred unimaginable suffering, but that question the possibility of clear-cut divisions between good and evil (see Judt 1998, 106). Out of the attendant recognition of uncertainty and doubt as necessary companions to transitional moments, in other words, came his appeal to limits. This position first of all entailed a staunch rejection of the death penalty and the air of finality it carries, which was also the argument that Camus evoked when he signed the petition to pardon Brasillach. This is not to say, however, that he thereby sought a renunciation of all punishment to opt instead for a new rule in the form of a general pardon. Rather, what Camus found so disconcerting about the post-war purge was that it was conducted with a view to preconceived, absolute conceptions of ends (tethered to, for instance, ideologically defined interests and motivations of political parties), attributing responsibility according to a simplified and complacent calculus of absolute guilt and innocence, while remaining distanced from the ambiguous reality of the political world. Thus, far from fulfilling the human, political purpose of transition, the purge in fact reinstated the same forms of political mentality which it was intended, and should rightly have sought, to denounce and overcome (see Judt 1998, 111, 106). The only way to honour the memory of the victims and reconstitute a sense of justice and meaning to political life, Camus thus came to insist, was to keep constant guard against new lapses of attention in the future and refusals to imagine the effects of our judgements on real human beings of flesh and

blood. I shall return to this shift of focus later on, after first examining how the ambiguities exposed by the three existentialist thinkers resurface in a plethora of concerns guiding the recent attempts to envision the forms of reckoning with past wrongs in terms of the paradigms of retributive and restorative justice.

The weight of responsibility in the face of injustice and evil initially took the form of ensuring accountability through criminal trials. Historically, the judgement on the need to punish the perpetrators primarily involved the cases of transition from authoritarian governments or military dictatorships, dealing with state orchestrated repression and abuses (Roht-Arriaza and Mariezcurrena 2006, 326). Likewise, it characterizes the relatively recent efforts by international tribunals to hold individuals personally accountable for egregious wrongs of genocide and crimes against humanity. A legacy of Nuremberg trials, this paradigm of reckoning with past wrongs is characterized by an emphasis on individual criminal responsibility that cannot be simply wished away and evaded under the doctrine of reason of state, superior orders or some other notion of collective accountability – and thus also by its allegiance to supposedly universal (international human rights) norms that transcend the validity of any context-specific or national considerations (see e.g. Minow 1998, 40; Teitel 2000, 32–3).

Recalling the insights of Sartre, Beauvoir and Camus, scholars have emphasized that the judgement on the need for punishing those responsible for past wrongs is not, at least not primarily, utilitarian in character, but is motivated by the need for justice – the belief that "wrongdoers deserve blame and punishment in direct proportion to the harm inflicted" (Minow 1998, 12). It concerns the self-understanding and political identity of a society confronted with the reality of wrongdoing, affirming the principle of equal human dignity (and individual responsibility) and the moral worth and respect of the victims, and thus also grounding the rule of law and the new (democratic) political and moral order after terror and injustice (Minow 1998, 10–12; Teitel 2000, 28–30). In this purpose, it bears a conclusive and finalistic tone, and is often associated with the notions of "full" or perfect justice (Boraine 2000, 147). Based on meticulous procedures of examination and determination of evidence, it is based on the assumption that the responsibility for mass and often state-sponsored human rights violations can and should be clearly demarcated and assigned to "identifiable individuals" (Minow 1998, 25). Unless the perpetrators are punished and removed as bearers of criminality and

evil, the whole society and public sphere remains collectively responsible for the criminal acts, which further frustrates the capacity to judge and reconstruct the societal values and norms (Teitel 2000, 55–6).

In its conclusive focus, however, the retributive justice paradigm risks ignoring the distinct circumstances of transition grounding the difficulty of judgement after evil. It risks obscuring, in short, how the legal and moral laws and norms that are appealed to as an authoritative standard according to which to mete out (final) justice, may have themselves been implicated in, and thus shattered in their validity, by past crimes. It would indeed seem, as Teitel (2000, 28, 30) argues, that it is the very involvement of the previous regime, the implication of the valid laws and norms, in wrongdoing that most vehemently calls for clear-cut, law-based criminal sanction, that also frustrates any unambiguous appeal to law and the assumption of "full legality" to secure justice. In practice, this contradiction could be said to manifest itself in a number of dilemmas – Minow, for instance, mentions the problems of retroactivity of the law, politicization of trials that questions the presumption of impartiality, and the selectivity of the process, a certain arbitrariness about who of the perpetrators is ultimately selected for persecution and punishment (Minow 1998, 30–1; Teitel 2000, 44). These dilemmas, in turn, have often given rise to the charges of criminal trials as a form of "victor's justice" – threatening thereby to end in wholesale cynicism, despairing over the very possibility of a meaningful response to past wrongs (Teitel 2000, 46; Minow 1998, 47–51).

These tensions at stake, well brought forth already by Sartre, Beauvoir and especially Camus, can be traced precisely to the ambiguous character of worldly responsibility, in particular the difficulty of unproblematically attributing personal responsibility in instances of mass wrongs and violations that are often state-orchestrated and/or grounded in broader, systemic or structural forms of injustice and oppression. The danger of criminal trials, as Arendt explicitly points out in her essay *Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship*, is precisely to wish this difficulty away. Reflecting on the Eichmann trial, she chides the court for simply presupposing that given the enormity of his crime Eichmann must have been inherently (and indeed demonically) evil, while failing to understand how and why his actions were deserving of (the harshest) punishment and thus also removing from view the issue of how totalitarian (or authoritarian) crimes could only be made possible by and in fact depended upon the

complicity of broader segments of population (see Arendt 2003, 26). Seemingly the most obvious solution to enable the collective to move on and inhabit a new future, then, calls for punishment in fact risk explaining wrongdoing away as a problem easily containable to a few individuals, while relieving the broader community of any responsibility to understand how it came about and what might be required to prevent it in the future (see Fine 2000b, 296, 301).

These insights into the deeper ambiguities plaguing the retributive orientation can be seen as grounding the more recent turn within transitional justice and reconciliation debates towards restorative justice. Its distinctive orienting sensibility, in comparison with criminal trials, lies not primarily in the goal of identifying and punishing those responsible, but in the explicit focus on the human, political goals of uncovering the truth about the past, reclaiming the dignity of the victims and restoring the broken relationships and sense of community among former enemies (see e.g. Minow 1998, 60; Hayner 2011, 166). As such, it is often considered to be the second-best option, a "realistic" compromise solution in situations when the balance of power or simply the lack of material resources or appropriately trained staff in a given society precludes a principled response (e.g. criminal persecution), yet when there nevertheless exists a sense that something needs to be done about past injustices. At the same time, the restorative justice can be seen as a harbinger of the more recently expressed need for a more flexible approach to the questions of transitional justice – in particular in response to civil wars, ethnic cleansing and genocide, situations that involved a wholesale destruction of political and social structures and eluded a fairly clear-cut and relatively easily discernible hierarchy of command that characterized earlier cases of state repression (see Roht-Arriaza and Mariezcurrena 2006, 6, 326).

Usually reliant on the institution of truth commission, this mode of judging and attributing responsibility is oriented not by the aim of reaching knowledge as hard fact and a final verdict on specific individual cases. It strives instead towards a multivocal and multilayered narrative of the past, based on a plurality of testimonies, offering insight into "the many shades of grey," an intricate web of varying degrees of responsibility and complicity that displaces the clear lines between the victims and the perpetrators, capturing thereby the general, often systemic or structural, pattern of injustice and abuse, and thus also raising the complex question of the role of

collaborators, supporters, beneficiaries and bystanders (see e.g. Minow 1998, 87; Rotberg 2000, 17, 4; Roht-Arriaza and Mariezcurrena 2006, 6). Inspiring individuals and the whole of community to situate themselves in the larger processes and relationships of injustice (Hayner 2011, 81; Roht-Arriaza and Mariezcurrena 2006, 4; Tutu in Kiss 2000, 74), in other words, it aims to stir among the members of a community a recognition of collective responsibility for the past of suffering and wrongdoing (see Schaap 2001, 749–50; also Minow 1998, 76). The activity of judging and reckoning with the past thus proceeds by way of processes of societal acknowledgement of how and why wrongdoing and suffering came about, and is followed by practices of interpersonal and political healing, of public atonement and forgiveness (Minow 1998, 56, 60; Hayner 2011, 166).

While this approach to transitional judgement offers a welcome lens through which to envision a more weighty or robust conception of political responsibility than that provided in the retributive justice approach, it is precisely the process of assuming political responsibility and, in particular, of relating the institutional and structural level of oppression and wrongdoing to individual commissions or omissions that remains somewhat obscured. The main problem is that the restorative justice approach again resorts to determinant judgement attributing the feelings of collective guilt based not on whatever one might have done, but on a presupposed (and pre-given) identity of "the wrongdoer" arrived at by way of an identification with a certain shared characteristic of a given situation, whether national character or group belonging (see Schaap 2001, 124–5). The disconcerting nature of this proposition is well-expressed in Arendt's insights into the folly of collective or vicarious guilt. "Guilt, unlike responsibility, always singles out:" it can only apply to the individual and the actions he or she actively participated in (Arendt 2003, 147, 29). In this insight, Arendt is not only or even primarily concerned with how the discourse of collective guilt leads to a wholesale and simplistic judgement that would disregard particularities and impute blame also on the innocent individuals (Schaap 2001, 752). Her main charge is that a judgement on collective guilt works to obscure, rather than clarify the sense of individual responsibility. For it amounts to a general and abstract statement that in effect portrays wrongs as outcomes of impersonal, and thereby necessary and inevitable, forces and processes, while obfuscating the significance of particular actions (Schaap 2001, 752). It blurs the recognition that mass

wrongs could indeed only come about through a plethora of particular actions or inactions of individuals and thus again precludes the assumption of human freedom and responsibility in the present.[58] Further, it in this way also clouds the political significance of a decision to grant forgiveness, rendering it into a new determinant and indiscriminate act of judgement, while obscuring the crucial questions of in which case and why it might be an appropriate way of reckoning with the past as well as how it would contribute to the building of a just society in the future.

These difficulties plaguing the retributive and restorative justice approaches merit a return to Camus's deep-seated awareness of the ambiguous burden of assuming responsibility for past wrongs and his attendant appeal to limits – which, in turn, brings us back to the perspective of *The Just* and the troubled and morally conflicted assassin Kaliayev. When offered pardon by the authorities on the condition that he repents and proclaims the wrongfulness of his act of murder, Kaliayev refuses. In his insistence on punishment and willingness to die, he seeks to affirm that the murder of the Grand Duke was indeed a political action – that is, affirm its political significance as an act of resistance against the poverty and suffering inflicted by the unjust political and economic system, and not a mere subjective criminal act, while at the same time denouncing or refusing to justify violence, even in the service of a worthy ideal, proclaiming "man's protest against violence in the world" (see Camus 2006b, 208–10, 219–20). This ambiguity most fully emerges in the dialogue between Kaliayev and the Grand Duchess. She comes to offer forgiveness, arguing that her husband may have been wrong politically, but he was also a man of flesh and blood, who "used to love the peasants" and who, two hours before he died, "was sleeping … in an armchair, with his feet up" (Camus 2006b, 213–4). She wants to forgive Kaliayev because the assassination was a morally wrong act of murder, the responsibility for which can be assumed by repenting and doing penance in life, rather than seeking escape in death. Urging him to accept Christian charity and pray to God, she offers Kaliayev the prospect of becoming good again and thus also strives to alleviate her own loneliness and sorrow at the death of her husband (see Camus 2006b, 214).

Paradoxically, however, the Duchess' ideal of goodness rests on a certain despair,

[58] Schaap, for instance, evokes the examples of South Africa and Australia, where the appeals to widespread consciousness of guilt met with either denial or feelings of powerlessness on the part of the population (Schaap 2001, 759–60).

even resentment, against the “empty and cruel” world and the vileness of human beings (Camus 2006b, 214–15). Behind her offer of forgiveness, then, there seems to reside an attempt to evade responsibility for past wrongs and a refusal to engage meaningfully in the political world also in the future. Kaliayev, on the contrary, insists that repentance would amount to a betrayal of his comrades as well as of the solidarity and love for the oppressed and the suffering people (see Camus 2006b, 215). While he recognizes the human cost exacted by his action, the real man behind his crime, he also exposes the unjust conditions of political action that have “[forced him] into crime” and refuses to abandon the cause of the fight against injustice and his “protest against a world of blood and tears” in order to be good (Camus 2006b, 219, 215–16). Yet, with the acceptance of punishment, he also seeks to fulfil “the purity of the ideal” of his “protest against violence in the world,” and thus to find a final answer to the question of his dealing with and alleviating his guilt at having killed a man in particular and the ambiguity of political action more generally (see e.g. Camus 2006b, 216, 220–2). For it is not at all clear, as Zaretsky (2013a, 174–5) notes, that a willingness to die, no matter how noble, would justify murder in the service of fighting injustice, pointing to the tragic and ambivalent nature of Kaliayev’s reckoning with the past. On the one hand, his example represents a refusal to shy away from the ambiguity of political action and a “testimony” of the justness of the resistance struggle against tyranny, misery and injustice (Camus 2006b, 226, 221). On the other hand, however, and as especially clearly recognized by Dora, it also inspires doubt as to whether this taking upon oneself the world’s suffering and justifying murder in its name really is the proper political attitude. It might just as easily solidify into a new dogma: “perhaps others will come and justify themselves by our example and not pay with their lives!” (Camus 2006b, 222).

The play thus issues a powerful reminder of the need for political judgement to remain grounded in the ambiguous reality (and tragedy) of the past, whose continued existence in the present, as Camus recognized more clearly than either Sartre or Beauvoir, frustrates the possibility of any definitive, sovereign move into the new future. It shows, in other words, how the continued reign of determinant judgement and the attendant presumption of a linear, progressive shift from the painful past into a brighter future that characterizes both retributive and restorative paradigms of

transitional justice, in fact, obviates the human, political challenge and purpose of reinvigorating a sense of self and of the worldly reality. In contrast, Camus accordingly came to insist on the need for the judgement on how to reckon with past wrongs to be arrived at dialogically and from within the worldly situation, rather than pronounced from on high. Situated in the particularities of the given political reality, as well illuminated in *The Just*, transitional judgement thus becomes a continuous activity oriented by the process of understanding how and why the act of wrongdoing came about and, on this basis, a reflection on how to conceive of forms of worldly, political engagement in the future.

The implications and relevance of Camus's dialogical orientation for transitional justice debates come forth in Arendt's explicit attempt to draw, relying on reflective, representative judgement, the linkage between collective and personal responsibility, while insisting on their distinct nature and claims. Reflective judgement is able to draw this linkage by virtue of seeing actions as responses to the challenges, adversities and opportunities of the *fortuna* ruling the world of political affairs, disclosing the individual's relationship to the world and others revealed therein (see e.g. Arendt 2006a, 151). As such, it leads to a conception of responsibility that is highly encompassing, yet rigorously discriminating. On the one hand, it denies any possibility of renouncing moral responsibility by appeals to the supposedly legitimate need to obey or to personal goodness that, pursuing its dream of purity, refuses all political engagement – a denial grounded in the simple truth that "there is no such thing as obedience in political and moral matters," only support (see Arendt 2003, 47–8). On the other hand, it also resists judgements of collective guilt, aiming to attribute responsibility in terms of each individual's particular contribution to a regime of oppression and how it fit into, coincided with or diverged from, the broader web of complicity in injustice. Thus, however, it is attuned to the many situations and ways in which the realms of personal or moral responsibility on the one hand and of political responsibility on the other, can conflict and lead to diverse conclusions about the appropriate mode of reckoning with the past (see Arendt 2003, 150–1, 154). It may, for instance, allow for an appreciation of the structural conditions of oppression, where most, if not all, forms of participation in the political world already implied complicity with evil, and where the only way to avoid implication in injustice was to refuse all participation in the world (see Arendt

2003, 43–4). Moreover, it is able to recognize how the worldly situation might have rendered the non-violent forms of resistance impossible and how it might have legitimated a resort to violent means.

This orientation, to be sure, displaces the view of judgement on how to reckon with the tragedy of the past in terms of a technical prescription on what should be done in a given situation. Figuring reflective, worldly focus, it grounds the processes of assuming responsibility for the world circumstantially, avoiding, too, a conception of punishment and forgiveness as clear-cut either/or alternatives, the feasibility of which could be rationally calculated as a conclusive response to the perplexities of a painful past. It instead brings to the forefront the paramount importance of the process of situating ourselves in the world, the challenging and often divisive issue of the formation of (political) memory and the creation of the shared historical narrative as essential to the practices of assuming responsibility for past wrongs. In the next section, I return to the framework of the restorative justice approach, to explore the distinctly political significance of narrative truth and the process of reconciliation with reality it engenders.

Testimony, memory and reconciliation

The narrative voice, especially in the form of testimony, has assumed increasing prominence in transitional justice debates. In particular after the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, the value of narrative form became intimately tied to the transitional judgement's human, restorative goals of exposing the truth about past human rights violations and the reinvigoration of social and political memory – which, further, were believed to crucially underpin the processes of reclaiming the dignity of the victims, restoring the moral foundation of society, breaking the cycles of violence and resentment and paving the way for societal reconciliation (see Krog 1999, vi; Bartley 2009, 105, 109; Gobodo-Madikizela 2004, 103). Nonetheless, these insights into the significance of narrative truth remain far from taken for granted. Scholars have for instance wondered whether a construction of a new national identity and the goal of a common future might require not only remembering, but also forgetting, or whether it might not itself contain new erasures and new violence,

as well as, and relatedly, whether the pursuit of truth might thus be ultimately unreconcilable with and lead to the betrayal of justice (see e.g. Bartley 2009, 105, 118; Hayner 2011, 25). Yet, if these concerns often seem to lead to an impasse, they also seem in the first place to arise in such form within the moral, ends-oriented orientation to transitional judgement that can be seen as pervading the restorative justice approach and also lingering in its critics. Against this background, this section draws on the existentialist notion of narrative-inspired, representative judgement, employing in particular Arendt's insight into its capacity to encourage the process of individual and societal reconciliation with reality. Thus, it aims to bring forth the explicitly political, and necessarily ambiguous, character of collective-memory formation, foregrounding reconciliation not as a pursuit of the lost national unity or of a cathartic restoration of a moral order, but as a process of re-establishing one's relationship with and rebuilding of the common world and thus of reinvigorating the public realm. To illuminate this emphasis and its implications for transitional politics more concretely, the section employs Antije Krog's semi-fictional account of the establishment and work of the TRC, *The Country of My Skull.*

The oft-invoked insistence on the importance of giving to the victims (and the perpetrators) an opportunity to tell stories of and give voice to their experiences of suffering and wrongdoing, reflects the existentialist emphasis on the crucial political significance of remembrance, of keeping alive the memory of human words and deeds, and thereby embedding ourselves in meaningful pasts. For while not apparently political, the willingness to tell the truth (in the sense of our "common and factual reality itself"), "to say what is," to invoke Arendt, is not only instrumental to, but constitutes the very essence and meaning of "survival, the perseverance in existence" (Arendt 2006a, 225, 232, 225). The purpose of public storytelling, then, is not to report on facts or to produce an objective historical account on past events. The stories' ability to disclose the plural, intersubjective, that is, human character of the world, history and politics, allows them to reaffirm, on the ruins of the past, the contours of a shared world, re-establish human relationships and thus also kindle, after suffering and trauma, our sense of selves as political actors capable of a meaningful response to past wrongs.

In much of the literature, however, these insights into the importance of telling stories remain embedded in a psychoanalytical imaginary, where the reconstitution of

identity follows the interpersonal, therapeutic practice of individual's working through trauma, healing, and self-realization (see e.g. Felman and Laub 1992; Caruth 1996, 1–9; Minow 2000; see also Bartley 2009, 119–20). An exhortation to tell and to remember is embedded in the assumption that a past of suffering has left deep wounds at the heart of an individual's identity, which, through giving a voice to traumatic experience, can be healed and made whole again. Transported onto a collective, political level, further, the self-centred, interpersonal focus assumes the form of a moral obligation to remember, where the practices of public testimony and reconciliation are conceived in terms of imperatives of justice (see Ricoeur 2004, 86–8). Scholars have for instance directed much attention to exploring the "moral foundations" of truth commissions, subsuming the processes of public narration and political judgement under prefabricated moral principles within which public remembrance is to take place and, on this basis, also conceiving of the appropriate ends of reconciliation (see e.g. Rotberg and Thompson 2000). The activity of judging and the operation of memory is thus envisioned to proceed through compiling and organizing individual testimonies and experiences into a shared, authoritative narrative of the nation. It amounts to a collective uncovering and condemnation of past suffering and injustice, and the (re)creation of a unified and just society – resembling a narrative of a journey from division and loss to societal, national redemption and catharsis (see Bartley 2009, 109, 119–20, 107–8; Minow 2000). As such, however, it also risks forgetting or erasing certain views or the deep-seated differences of opinion under the supposedly unified vision of consensus and agreement (Bartley 2009, 109, 119–21) – thereby both hindering the processes of individual and collective remembrance and reconstitution and betraying the demands of justice.

In light of the existentialist perspective, however, these difficulties can be traced to the underlying desire to conceptualize the faculties of remembrance and judgement in finalistic, end-oriented terms, itself animated by a quest to reverse the irreversible break in the absence of foundations and reconstitute a new transcendent grounding or truth. Camus's recognition of the temporal ambiguity of the transitional moment that frustrates any easy shift towards a new future, here gains further elaboration in his inveterate awareness of the ever-present danger of excess lying in the wake of the absurd as an inevitable condition of our judgements after world-shattering suffering and trauma – which invites us to hark back to the perspective espoused in his novel *The Fall*

(see LaCapra 1998, 79). A disenchanted prophet of modern times, Clamence reflects all too faithfully Camus's recognition of how the challenge of reconciliation after evil lies not simply in coming to terms with the sheer horrendousness of the crimes. More fundamentally, it rests in trying to understand how, rationalized and justified as they were by appeals to the highest ideals of progress, humanity or freedom, they have obscured and rendered morally inexplicable the significance of individual actions and left the human consciousness abandoned amidst an alien and incomprehensible world "divested of illusions and lights" (Camus 1991, 6; 1971, 11–12).

Yet, while seemingly attempting an honest reckoning with the absurd nature of past crimes, Clamence's exercises in remembrance and judgement also betray a disconcerting undercurrent. Underlain by the desire to reclaim the lost innocence and wholeness after the fall, his narrative remains far from rebuilding a shared, meaningful world. On the contrary, it thrives on and reinforces the abyss of the absurd, drawing his interlocutors and the whole of human race into the void of universal guilt and crime, and thus further blurring the ethical and political import of individual actions. Not only does his moralistic, while equivocal, self-gratifying and manipulative confession and judgement actually bespeak a refusal to engage the meaning of his past wrongdoing and serve to justify further evasions of responsibility for others and the world in the future. His perverted memory-work and penitence, waving the banner of the redemption of humankind, also itself fosters new forms of domination and victimization. In his pseudo-dialogic ruminations on the past, Clamence refuses to recognize others as equal, yet distinct members of the common world; he discredits their views and renders them into mere instruments to be used in pursuit of his own conception of "reconciliatory" politics. His narrative thus carries a strong reminder that a path back to the world does not lie in a "facile judiciousness" that would, drawing on an already established repertoire of moral principles, presumptuously claim to be able to reconstitute the past in its full glory as it once was (see LaCapra 1998, 88; Zaretsky 2013b). Ironically exposing the nihilistic undertones hidden beneath its high moral ground, as LaCapra observes, Clamence's narrative instead points to the need to find and illuminate anew the limits to political judgement and action – not by denying the irreversible loss of meaning and the attendant penchant for excess, but by recognizing it, working through it, resisting it and thus paving the way towards a once again human world.

Camus's warning, in this respect, is manifested in narrative, representative judgement and the way it embodies a move away from the self and its finalistic aspirations towards a ceaseless activity of world-disclosing. Aware of the irreversible breakdown of traditional verities, in other words, it turns to search for meaning in the reality of a shattered world and among a plurality of conflicting, even incommensurable memories on the past. Rather than trying to fit experience into an already conceived model of what truth is supposed to consist in, it accordingly contains a willingness to think representatively, to open oneself to other perspectives on an event or a situation and let truth emerge in-between a plurality of individuals, that is, in its intersubjective appearance and meaning. Shying away from the pursuit of absolute (moral) ends, it is thus also able to retain the emphasis on the underlying human and political challenge and purpose of reconciliation with reality. That is to say, it draws attention to the ways in which the multiplicity of testimonies contain an appeal to a community of others to judge, interpret and remember, to the processes of intersubjective recognition by which past suffering is provided with a public meaning and made part of the common world, to how these processes question and revivify the boundaries of a political community and how, on this basis, the possibilities for a new beginning after suffering and wrongdoing can be conceived (see Herzog 2002, 87–9; LaCapra 2001, 95–6; Bartley 2009, 120–1).

This sensibility is powerfully brought to light in Antjie Krog's *The Country of My Skull.* From the outset, Krog disengages the Commission's attempt to delve into the reality of the human rights violations and to reclaim the dignity of the victims from the quest for truth in the service of this or that goal of justice (for instance, amnesty or compensation), or in support of the legitimacy of this or that political power or party. The meaning of creating a space in which people can tell their stories in public lies elsewhere – that is, in establishing "the widest possible compilation of people's perceptions, stories, myths, and experiences," and thus to "restore memory and foster a new humanity" (Krog 1999, 16). This, Krog (1999, 16) writes, may well be "justice in its deepest sense." In this vein, Krog shies away from portraying the creation of a space for public testimony as a realistic compromise solution and a mere reflection of the balance of powers in the South African society that would seem to preclude a principled response (e.g. criminal persecution). She instead alludes to the legislation governing the establishment and activity of the TRC as a "patchwork" born of the confrontation of the

plurality of different viewpoints of the country, yet without eliminating any of them under a higher synthesis, so to speak in advance (see Krog 1999, 10). The creation of the space where the truth about the past could be subjected to public scrutiny and judgement and become part of common memory then in the first place depended on an abandonment of preconceived ideas as to where the reconciliation process is to end and the affirmation of a new beginning by opening the public sphere to all the perspectives constituting it.

Krog's account of the workings of the TRC begins with a recounting of victims' testimonies. There pours forth a river of accounts of killings, torture, rapes, cruelty and mistreatment that bears an air of the unnameable and unshareable (Krog 1999, e.g. 27–32). They reveal the "abnormality of South African society," which comes into view precisely from a sense of how human rights violations were a part of "a finely woven net" of Apartheid and became a normal, everyday part of life for a vast majority of people (Krog 1999, 44–5). Additional insight into the brutality of Apartheid is provided by the "second narrative," that of the perpetrators (Krog 1999, 56). Listening to their accounts of extreme violence and seemingly soulless cruelty, Krog (1999, 90) seeks to find and look in the eye the "Face of Evil." Yet, with an even more disconcerting note than the committed evils themselves, ring the claims echoing in most perpetrators' testimonies that they did it "for my country." Jack Cronje, the leader of the infamous Vlakplaas unit, for instance, says, "I did it for you and for you […] you could sleep safe and sound, because I was doing my job" (Krog 1999, 92). The perpetrators' testimonies thus point also to the structure of laws, institutions and chains of command that enshrouded the killings in a cloud of moral legitimacy (see e.g. Krog 1999, 93, 72).

But the full extent of the political significance of truth, Krog (1999, 103–4) writes, emerges with the submissions from political parties, meant to "sketch the frameworks within which South Africans killed one another." De Klerk, the leader of the National Party (the party in power during the Apartheid years), assumes responsibility for the government's "emergency" repressive measures and acts, which, he submits, may have contributed to the conditions that made the large scale violations of human rights possible (Krog 1999, 105). These abuses themselves, however, he disengages from, claiming ignorance, and attributes them to individual policemen's "bad judgement, overzealousness or negligence" (Krog 1999, 126). The submission of the African

National Congress (ANC) – the leading anti-apartheid party and the main force of (armed) resistance – on the contrary, does not deny knowledge of excesses that happened in the course of the liberation struggle, but justifies them by appealing to the notion of just war (Krog 1999, 105–6). While the party admits to several "mistakes," like torture, unjust trials for their own cadres or a failure to condemn "necklace murders," it wishes to retain the notion that "these particular and exceptional acts" in no way challenge the justness of the liberation struggle itself (Krog 1999, 124–5).

These multiple narrative truths, and the way they both differ from and connect to and interlink with one another, from the outset confront judgement with its limits to reach ultimate knowledge of the causes, circumstances and effects of past violence as well as the possibility of a clear-cut decision on how to conceive of the end of reconciliation. To recognize the existence of multiple, and conflicting, truths on the troubled pasts, however, is not to be read as a postmodern suspension of adjudication, an uncritical embrace of difference or an abandonment of truth to relations of power that be – relativizing it to the point of, for instance, stating that all are victims or that all perspectives are of equal value in conceiving of the final goal of reconciliation (see Gready 2009, 159–63; Krog 1999, 78, 89, 171). From the existentialist perspective, indeed, both the claim of knowing the truth and of subjecting it to constant doubt, both the appeals of having reached a just vision of transition and those that focus on exposing its aporias and reminders, join hands in their epistemological focus that glosses over the political significance of narrative for judging past wrongs (see MacPhee 2011, 177–9; Bartley 2009, 109, 112–15). The point of setting up a framework within which public testimony can take place, as Krog (1999, 89) explicitly emphasizes, is not to strive for "the hope for a catharsis, the ideal of reconciliation." Rather, it is that the terrible history of human rights violations becomes a part of the common world, so "people can no longer indulge in their separate dynasties of denial," that "I and my child know […] what happened there" (Krog 1999, 89). While Krog points to the tendency among some people to shut their eyes, question the emerging truth about the past or attack the Commission, she also discerns how testimonies did prompt people to look upon the world from the perspective of the victims and acknowledge that the past horrors cannot be undone and will have to be reckoned with (Krog 1999, 127–31).

Yet, it is precisely this process of how testimonies make an appeal to the community

to be recognized as part of the common world, Krog's narrative intimates, that also seems strangely obscured in the TRC's vision of reconciliation. For the project of restoring the dignity of the victims through testimony was conceived mainly in moral(istic) terms, reminiscing the therapeutic, interpersonal process of working through trauma. Testifying before the truth commission, the victims were envisioned to be affirmed in their dignity by receiving from the commissioners an acknowledgement of the wrongfulness of the offences done to them. On this basis, they were encouraged to cast aside their lingering feelings of hatred and resentment and forgive the perpetrators (see e.g. Krog 1999, 31, 109). The Commission's project thus consigned the processes of remembrance and reconciliation to proceed within the terms of personal and self-centred moral sentiments of empathetic identification with and compassion for the suffering of the victims. This, in turn, ensued (especially among the sympathetic spectators) in ultimately worldless feelings of guilt, helplessness, anxiety and despair (see Krog 1999, 163, 170). It was this form of interpersonal reconciliation that Arendt denounced and warned against as an unworldly and unpolitical form of human togetherness, which, shorn of an in-between space of the world to relate and separate distinct perspectives on the common reality, all too easily leads to a level of intimacy and unity of perspectives ill-suited to and hardly representative of the plurality of the political world. Within its preconceived moral framework, Commission's vision thus conceived of the goals of mutual recognition and reconciliation at a remove from individual's worldly, political existence – thereby mirroring the broader literature on the subject. There, reconciliation may be based on the mutual recognition of the same humanity in the victims and the perpetrators, believed to be able to shine forth if only their embodied and worldly ways of being-in-the-world, together with the whole of their past, could be somehow discarded or forgotten. Alternatively, it may be based on a reclamation and conciliation of authentic identities (for instance, black and white). Yet, portraying them as self-contained substantialities outside of the web of worldly relationships within which they are enmeshed, interact and are, first of all, formed, it also remains unclear how their journey from (essential) difference to (complete) unity might be envisioned to proceed. Both approaches, as Schaap (2005a, 4–6, 9–22) has helpfully argued, presuppose a shared understanding of wrongdoing and, on this basis, a moral community between the victims, the perpetrators and the broader society that

must first of all be reconstituted through processes of public narration and judgement.

This vision of reconciliation, however, is troubling because it eludes the sustained examination of how past wrongdoing and suffering came about in the midst of human society, how was it that the perspectives and lives of the victims could be so easily forgotten or disregarded, and why the past was wrong in the first place (see Krog 1999, 96, 44, 193). While bearing a strong moral condemnation of past crimes, it thus also obscures from view the real challenge at stake in reconciliation debates, that is, the possibilities for former enemies to affirm their mutual freedom in the future, recognize each other as political actors and engage in the common project of rebuilding the public sphere. On the contrary, the unpolitical climate of the TRC, as Krog relates, helped further as its other side the persistent attempts on the part of the perpetrators and especially the political parties to appeal to abstract categories of, for instance, greater good, security or just war in terms of which human rights violations were supposedly justified, while refusing to recognize the past abominations and violence in their human, intersubjective meaning. The project of public remembrance thus came to be (mis-)used by various political parties in the service of their own interests and ends. The Afrikaner politicians, for instance, used reconciliation, in the sense of their willingness to accept a black government, to set specific demands on how the past is to be reckoned with. The ruling ANC, viewing the past in terms of the just liberation struggle against the oppressive Apartheid system, in contrast, conceived of reconciliation as the granting to the black people of the right to rule and transform the country – and risking a lapse into a new nationalism (Krog 1999, 109, 111–13). The project of reconciliation thus became primarily an exercise in the establishment of a new political order, which, conceived as it was in isolation from and opposition to other perspectives constituting the public realm, remained at a remove from common worldly reality and risked bolstering the very forms of political mentality that characterized the days of Apartheid.

In this light, the perspective of worldly, representative judgement is particularly significant for thinking reconciliation in that it views the plurality of perspectives constituting the world not as a troubling state that must somehow be overcome, but the very condition (and purpose) of political and truly human life (see Zerilli 2012). It is the public articulation of a plurality of perspectives, the acts of imaginative and representative thinking and judging, of actively reclaiming a plurality of memories on

the past then that first of all allows for "things [to] *become* public," for painful pasts to become a part of shared reality for which responsibility needs to be assumed (Zerilli 2012, 21–2, 23). This is because it is only by entertaining a plurality of perspectives, thereby revealing past actions and events in their intersubjective, worldly appearance and illuminating once again the contours of a human world, that political judgement appeals to the potentials of human freedom in the present, kindles our capacities to meaningfully respond to and "resist the reality of the world created by past wrongs" (see Schaap 2005a, 83). For furthering an understanding of how past suffering and wrongdoing came about through worldly interaction, in an entangled, and often far from unambiguous interrelationships between victims, perpetrators, supporters, bystanders and resisters, it also allows for formerly opposed individuals and groups to recognize each other as speaking and acting beings, as plural equals – that is, as situated, worldly freedoms indissolubly tied together through the mediation of the shared reality. Rather than fixating individuals in their past identities as passive victims, evil perpetrators or ignorant bystanders, representative judgement thus also discloses the worldly space for a new beginning, the possibilities (as well as limitations) of how "the grid" (LaCapra 1998, 175) can be changed, new relations of solidarity formed, and the public realm rebuilt.

The political significance of representative thinking and its ability to reveal past suffering in its worldly appearance is especially evident in Krog's analysis of the *Shepherd's Tale.* It is a testimony of a shepherd, named Lekotse, who relates how his life, his sense of self and his whole world was destroyed when his house was invaded and brutally searched by the security police. What hurts him most, what irreparably affects his life, is that the incident shatters "his ability to understand the world around him" (Krog 1999, 218). He cannot understand the policemen's actions – why after all would policemen behave like thieves? – which renders him helpless against the attack. The significance of the story, as Krog (1999, 218–20) notes, lies in the profound lack of recognition awarded him; while forcing themselves into his own space, the police refuse him access to their intentions, thus coercing him into submission to their own conception of the world, without even offering him a chance to understand it. The degradation he experiences at the hands of the police, he recounts by emphasizing how he was treated as "a *kaffer*" and "a dull donkey" (Krog 1999, 214–15). The lack of

engagement with his own perspective is further reflected by the TRC itself. The Commissioner directing the testimony, for instance, frequently interrupts his story to ask for specific facts or further clarifications that seem ill-attuned to his situation (for instance, that he is, as he himself says, "uneducated") and that seem to confound the narrator and the meaning of the tale. Yet, Lekotse remains steadfast in his effort to offer insight into the meaning of the incident. To the question of whether he ever made a case against the police, he retorts with a counter-question: "how can you report policemen to policemen" (Krog 1999, 215–16), thus indirectly exposing also the broader framework of legal perversion characterizing the Apartheid system.

It is not then that Lekotse's judgement and the way it questions the validity of the way the project of reconciliation was conceived would point to an excess of truth about the past that would have to be expunged if future reconciliation is to be possible or to forever deter the coming of justice. It instead points to how the representative judging attentiveness to worldly forms of recognition kindles the sense of the common world between former enemies and discloses a space for political action. Lekotse's perspective questions the political relevance of an abstract moral judgement – his subjectivity precisely is *not* reclaimed by testifying before the Commission and "receiving" a moral condemnation of what was done to him. His insight into how his dignity was denied *in the world,* symbolically calls upon the opposed groups to engage each other's perspectives, acknowledge how their previously separate memories on the past interlink, meet and depart from each other, on the field of the world, and thus also rethink their respective truths and justifications. This might, for instance, stir the architects and supporters of Apartheid to own up more explicitly to the links between human rights violations and the Apartheid policy, bringing to the forefront the question of whether the means employed in pursuit of the "noble" ends of the good of the country, might not challenge the legitimacy of these ends themselves – rather than simply casting the perpetrators, from the general to the foot soldier, in the role of "bad apples," of "criminals" who "ought to be punished" (Krog 1999, 98, 126). On the part of the ANC, similarly, it might lead to a sustained examination of whether particular injustices really were necessitated by the oppressive situation or whether they may have represented an excess of the unjust means in relation to the justness of the cause – a questioning that would allow for a more serious recognition of the violence of Apartheid as well as of

the human cost exacted by the conflict and the liberation struggle (see Krog 1999, 125–7).

The shepherd's story also reveals how the denial of his dignity formed a constitutive part of his everyday, situated existence. It was reflected in a degradation of his different way of life and woven in a web of constraints imposed on his field of action, from his inability to make himself listened to and understood to forms of material inequality. Thus, Lekotse's story also brings forth the role of not only the perpetrators, but also the beneficiaries of the Apartheid system, disclosing how the process of remembrance and reconciliation might require not only identification with the plight of the victims and the ensuing (abstract) feelings of guilt at the (indirect) complicity with crimes. It points to the need for a sustained reflection on the various (in)actions that may have contributed to the establishment of conditions that not only made these crimes possible but were themselves oppressive in that they hindered the possibilities for certain groups of people to act and exert their freedom in the world. It draws attention, in other words, to the everyday, ordinary and normalized violence of the Apartheid system, the systematic exclusions from public sphere that constituted a condition of possibility for other, more visible forms of violence – which were not properly exposed in the Commission's focus on the gross human rights violations, yet whose persistence would need to be taken into account and confronted in conceiving of a different future.

This brief inquiry into the world-revealing potentials inhering in worldly practices of recognition evokes again the meaning of Camus's notion of limits as a way of imagining a reconciliatory politics. For, in its worldly orientation, narrative-inspired, representative judgement displaces the Hegelian dialectics ruling the predominant accounts, where disembodied minds journey from alienation to communion, yet where the eventual mutual recognition also implies the victory of one and the death of the other (see Camus 1971, 129–30). As such, it shies away from conceiving of reconciliation as a project in restoring some lost unity or wholesome harmony between individuals – refusing, too, to reduce it to a problem-solving exercise in devising possible sustainable forms of compromise on how the political order could be re-established (see Zaretsky 2013b, 62). Oriented to disclosing the limits of the world and others, instead, representative judgement envisions the processes of mutual recognition and reconciliation to take place at the point of a creative tension – well-captured in

Camus's (1971, 130) image of "beams of light painfully searching for each other in the night and finally focusing together in a blaze of illumination." Rather than striving to reach agreement and ultimate resolution of opposites, that is, narrative-inspired, worldly judgement brings into existence a public space, a shared ground, where the plurality of perspectives and memories on the past meet in a fruitful confrontation, engage in a shared reflection on what past injustices mean for the common world, and confront the ambiguities of political action in the present – disclosing how a new beginning, too, can only be imagined within the newly emerging bounds of human plurality and of the world. Figuring the temporal ambiguity of the transitional moment, on the one hand, it remains attentive to the potentially tragic character of reconciliatory efforts, the fact that more than one side may have a legitimate claim to truth, that memories on the past might remain opposed and even the possibility that forms of reconciling with the painful past might themselves bring about further injustice. Yet, remaining bound to the perspective of worldly plurality, it also shies away from any easy and blind justifications of oppressive or violent means in terms of some or other higher (and abstract) end of reconciliation and points to the possibility that a sustained examination of past abuses and the conditions that made them possible, might also inspire the creation of different relationships and institutions in the future.

Krog, likewise, avoids pronouncements on the "success" of the Commission's work, focusing rather on how the hearings and disclosures open the space for individuals and the whole community to confront themselves and their past. She can thus also draw attention to the deeply-entrenched and continuously reinforcing differences and conflicts in the judgements and interpretations of the past and notes among the victims as well as the perpetrators the lingering distrust of the public sphere where their feelings of resentment, despair, guilt and shame could be expressed and dealt with, and where they would be given a right to participate in discussions as to what form the transition to democracy is to assume (see e.g. Krog 1999, 95, 99, 160–3, 191–4). While in some cases the Commission's moral framework did make the victims feel restored in their dignity, Krog also relates testimonies that demand for more than mere acknowledgement of victimhood or that carry strong refusals to forgive (see Krog 1999, 31, 109, 52–4). More than this, Krog points to the deep-seated hostility among groups, especially the Afrikaner, who, continuing to appeal to the honour of their people, feel

unfairly attacked by the Commission's disclosures and refuse to give up any of their economic and political privileges (see Krog 1999, e.g. 126, 129, 162–3, 196, 216, 266–7). The processes of memorialization, like the pronouncement of Reconciliation Day, as well as the reparation policy, thus coexist alongside the continued trajectory of misunderstanding, misrecognition, inequality and oppression, deeply inscribed in the very language used and facial expressions witnessed (see Krog 1999, 216, 234, 195–6; see also Gready 2011, 17).

Yet, the plurality of narratives on the past and the representative judging sensitivity also brings forth a continuous critical engagement with the question of how the political sphere can be rebuilt so as to avoid past erasures, injustice and wrongdoing in the future. It thus resists reducing the meaning of reconciliation to efforts at symbolic commemoration of past suffering or material reparations to victims, but shifts the focus to "rights-based participation," which further entails the need to address systemic inequalities, economic oppression and social discrimination that hinder individuals' freedom to engage in the world, and effect a more profound change in relationships, practices and institutions (see Gready 2011, 12–15; LaCapra 2001, 48, 56–8, 60–1). Recognizing the main source of past injustice in a widespread refusal to see in others one's equals worthy of just treatment and to look upon the world from their perspective, however, it at the same time warns against the dangers of one-sided, ideological thinking in the present – in particular how the unconditional insistence on affirming the validity of only one truth at the expense of others can work to preclude an engagement with actual (and shared) problems at stake (see Judt 1998, 10; LaCapra 2001, 60–3). It allows to acknowledge the danger, for instance, that the discourse of the Commission might itself congeal in an attitude where the greater good (the reconciliation of the whole nation) again becomes the predetermined end with regards to which the appropriate means need only to be calculated and for the realization of which the necessity of sacrifices can be unproblematically affirmed (see Krog 1999, 262–4). Krog (1999, 272–5), for instance, draws attention, evoking the example of her family, to new violence committed against Afrikaner landowners, and the once again fomenting conditions that make a part of the population feel threatened, with their "backs against the wall" (Krog 1999, 106–7). She thus points to the crucial need for judgement on how to reconstitute a political community and effect social transformation to make room for

the former oppressor-group too, encouraging the culture of dialogue that recognizes in the other an equal partner, whose memories and judgements on the past need to be acknowledged in conceiving of ways in which to transform the common world for the sake of a better future (see Krog 1999, 127, also 275).

Concluding thoughts: Coming to terms with the tragedy of political action

The challenge of transitional justice and reconciliation then crystallizes the existentialists' insights into the paramount human need to understand and come to terms with the tragedy of political action, reconcile with the world that, especially in the case of mass injustice and suffering, dons the appearance of an absurd, impenetrable and shapeless weight, devoid of human significance. It can thus be said to embody a particularly clear-sighted recognition of the perplexity left in the wake of Kant: how to affirm the reality of human freedom in the midst of an untameable world and assume responsibility for "a Being that [we] did not create and that is alien to [our] very nature" (Arendt 1994, 166; see also Zerilli 2005b, 163). The existential representative judging sensibility, this chapter has argued, is particularly well-suited to confront this challenge because it displaces the prevalent penchant within transitional justice debates to purport to be able to reach ultimate knowledge of past suffering and wrongdoing, to instead direct attention to their worldly appearance, that is, to how they came about through a plurality of human (in)actions in the world. It is thus able to trace the tragedy of the past to the very conditions ruling the world of political affairs, disclosing how it was made possible by our embeddedness in a web of worldly forces beyond our full control, by human interdependence and the ensuing vulnerability that represent the most distinct characteristics of our sharing-the-world-with-others (see also Griswold 2007, 49, 110, 133–5). Unearthing the source of perhaps previously unimaginable suffering and unprecedented wrongdoing in the ambiguity of human involvement in the broader field of worldly relationships and structures, in turn, it questions the tendency to conceive of reconciliatory politics in terms of a final, pre-determined end. What it resists, in other words, is the dangerous presumption – well illuminated in Orestes's masterful assumption of the challenge of reckoning with the past that was not (wholly) of his

making – that it might be possible to take upon our shoulders the whole brunt of responsibility for ourselves and the world, and sovereignly dispel or conclusively deal with a painful past. This temptation, ostensibly giving up on the notion of world as an often opaque and always plural given – as, too, this chapter has sought to disclose – all too easily leads to a willingness to accept further erasures and injustice as a legitimate and necessary path towards final reconciliation. Oriented by the perspective of worldly plurality, instead, narrative-inspired judging sensibility retains attention on disclosing the plural, ambiguous, that is, human, character of the world and can thus best be understood as a process of coming to terms with the worldly condition of our freedom – or, in Zerilli's words, of affirming the reality of "a non-sovereign human freedom," freedom "that begins in political community not outside it" (Zerilli 2005b, 162). The Kantian perplexity here is honestly confronted in a recognition that the outside world and separate others do not represent a hindrance, but the very condition, for good or bad, of our freedom.

As a mirror side of the dirty-hands problem, the challenge of transitional justice then aptly exposes how narrative-inspired judgement and the process of reconciliation with reality it engenders does not amount to an attempt to mend, perfect, contain or flee the imperfect and tragic nature of the world, precluding the possibility of an ultimate redemption for past crimes. Yet, in its worldly focus, it directs attention to actors' embeddedness in the world, revealing for instance how the broader field of unjust and oppressive relationships or institutions may have constrained their freedom and made their perhaps seemingly benign actions ensue in radical denials of humanity of certain individuals or groups.[59] Rather than a conclusive attribution of blame, it is thus also able to kindle our sense of responsibility for the kinds of relationships and forms of community, that is, the in-betweens of the world, between former enemies can and should be rebuilt, nurtured and sustained so as to broaden and foster, rather than restrain, the space for mutual recognition and the human ability to be free together (see Card 1996, x, 22–3). Given its attentiveness to the tragic and contingent nature of past

[59] The existentialists' narrative attentiveness to the ambiguities of human situatedness in the world can thus be said to reveal particularly clearly the conditions for the possibility of forgiveness as a much needed response given the inherent imperfections of human, political life (see e.g. Griswold 2007). In particular, it arguably raises the question of the distinctly political significance of forgiveness that remains insufficiently addressed in the predominantly moral focus orienting the existing literature on the subject (see Card 2002; Gobodo-Madikizela 2004; MacLachlan 2009, 135–9; North 1998; Veltman 2009; see also LaCaze 2014; Pettigrove 2006). For reasons of space, I leave this discussion for future research.

actions then, worldly judgement cannot be expected to yield knowledge as to how to ultimately eliminate the possibility of wrongdoing and suffering in the future. For holding on to the sovereign presumption that it might be possible to deny or control the inherent ambiguity and unpredictability of political action, any such attempt would not only render unnecessary the continued efforts to engage in and with the world and respond to its challenges, but also risk lapsing into a politically highly dangerous disregard for the human character of political affairs itself (see Hayden 2009, 10–31; Muldoon 2009, 11). While acknowledging suffering as an inevitable part of our embodied, worldly existence, instead, judgement oriented by the principle of for the sake of the world also is bent on confronting it by appealing to the promise of human solidarity, constantly striving to create the space for dialogue, further mutual understanding, and build relationships and institutions that are welcoming to human plurality and capable of revealing ever anew the human face to the world and politics. Refusing to abandon the bounds of this world for the sake of another, seemingly perfect, yet inhuman one, worldly, narrative-inspired judgement thus issues an unrelenting appeal to the human capacities of freedom and political action – keeping constant guard against the development of conditions that would forfeit the promise of politics in front of some seemingly inhuman and inevitable force or process.

Follow, poet, follow right
To the bottom of the night,
With your unconstraining voice
Still persuade us to rejoice;

With the farming of a verse
Make a vineyard of the curse,
Sing of human unsuccess
In a rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.

W. H. Auden, In Memory of W. B. Yeats

Conclusion: Reclaiming wonder at the world of political affairs

The thesis has sought to enrich current debates about the importance and perplexity of political judgement by drawing on the largely forgotten voice of twentieth-century philosophies of existence. The prescient challenge of judgement surfaced against the background of the contemporary postmetaphysical horizon of thought, where the initial recognition of the irreversible loss of reliable standards quickly yielded to archaic rationalist attempts to conceptualize the human judging capacity as a determinant function, capable of measuring, ordering and containing the particular, plural and ambiguous character of politics in accordance with pre-fabricated, supposedly absolute and universal rules – only to thereby nurture, as its dangerous other side, a stupefying spectre of disillusion and new escapes from the exigencies of the political world. In the existentialists' deep-seated awareness of the modern crisis and their vigilant assumption of the situated condition of human existence, in turn, the thesis discerned a valuable prism through which to undertake a so far neglected inquiry into the experiential reality, and the accompanying ambiguity, of judgement. Their aesthetic sensibility, in particular, foregrounded political judgement as a thoroughly human ability that cannot clamour for an otherworldly realm of perfection, but proceeds as a reflective, situated process of confronting the irreducible plurality and unpredictability of political affairs without pre-determined standards of thought. The four thinkers thus revealed the compelling

political challenge and significance of judgement by directing attention to the ways of reinvigorating our ability to recognize the ambiguities of specific situations that necessarily elude the order of final solutions, and thereby strengthening our capacity to come to terms with the perplexity of engaging the world in political action. For from their recognition of the fact that we are not "the all-knowing immortals," but "flurried humans," in Nussbaum's (1998, 142) words, also sprung an appeal to the specifically human powers of facing up to the challenges of our imperfect, all-too-human world – an entreaty to "the peculiar value and beauty of choosing humanly well."

To situate the existentialists' contribution, the thesis first inquired into the ambiguous presence of the notion of political judgement in the history of political thought, telling its story against the backdrop of the moral and political crisis in modernity. Tracing the thinkers' attempts to delve into the process of judging in its situated, perplexing character as well as their persistent failures to account for the complexity of political affairs, the first chapter revealed the manifestly political significance of the human judging ability as a capacity in which the distinctly human, free and worldly condition of our collective, political existence itself is at stake. It thus sought to signal the sense of urgency that will orient the existentialists' appeals to the pressing need for a thorough rethinking of the traditional ways of judging and relating to the world. The second chapter engaged the lenses of Sartre and Beauvoir. Based on their critique of the traditional penchant for abstract moral principles, it explored the political import of their aesthetic sensibility, disclosing how its ability to bring to light the human character of political judgement as a creative, communicative practice foregrounded our common responsibility for the world of political affairs and revealed the ambiguity of our situated freedom. In particular, it aimed to illuminate the potentials of Sartre's and Beauvoir's aesthetic imagination to confront the worldly perplexity of political judgement as it stems from human involvement in the world, the plural and opaque character of political reality that is bound to remain resistant to any individual's control, frustrate any easy assumption of freedom, and, further, place us face to face with the disconcerting spectre of risk, tragedy and failure attending the challenge of political action. Against this background, chapter three turned to the aesthetic sensibility of Camus and Arendt. In their efforts to understand the breakdown of traditional standards of thought, it unveiled a profound awareness of the dangers of excess lurking in the

absurd condition of political judgement and action in the world of the dead god – tracing how it translated into a heightened sense of the need to creatively confront, rather than simply resign to the perplexing and often tragic character of political affairs. It thus discerned the distinct contribution of their aesthetic judging orientation in its staunch refusal to yield to the traditional desire for finality and perfection, to instead face up to the ambiguity of political reality by taking into account a plurality of perspectives constituting it, thereby to constantly kindle the sense of the common, human world and strengthen our capacity of recognizing and responding to the possibilities and limitations of political action.

Chapter four further illuminated the political significance of the existential aesthetic judging sensibility by placing it in conversation with the recent narrative turn within political theory. In contrast to the predominantly moral focus of recent supporters of narrative, the existential aesthetic imagination emerged as specifically political for its ability to retain attention on the process of judgement in its worldly ambiguity and confront the strained dynamics of intersubjective recognition as it emerges from under the weakened validity of traditional verities. The chapter thereby crystallized the political relevance of Camus's and Arendt's insight that the only way to resist the absurd character of the world lies in remaining loyal to the perspective of human plurality – revealing how it fosters worldly forms of recognition, that is, inspires individuals to recognize each other not as self-contained substances, but as speaking and acting beings. The plural, representative focus of the existential aesthetic judging sensibility, I argued, is able to bring into existence a space for politics between plural equals and thus appeal to the human potentials of confronting the ambiguity of engaging the world in action – of fighting for greater freedom within the emerging limits of our common world.

This human and humanizing import of existential narrative orientation was concretely illustrated by exploring (in chapters five and six) how it can be made to speak to two problematics of thought and action that embody a particularly clear-sighted recognition of the seemingly ineliminable spectre of complexity, tragedy and failure haunting the world of political affairs. As a two-way prism, the problem of dirty hands and the challenge of transitional justice brought forth at its most fundamental the political significance of the existentialists' aesthetic attentiveness to the worldly

ambiguity of political judgement: its ability to affirm, in the face of the overwhelming and incomprehensible weight of the world, the human potentials of beginning anew. Rather than holding on to the sovereign presumption of being able to ultimately perfect, resolve or flee the imperfect nature of political affairs – as the two chapters sought to disclose – the existential worldly sensibility commits to confronting it in its particular, plural, and unpredictable, that is, human character and thus to constantly striving, without the hope of ever reaching a final solution, to create on the debris of history once again a fitting abode for human habitation. In its staunch refusal to let the reality of suffering lead to a wholesale despair and repudiation of the political realm, I argued, it issues a powerful appeal to the human capacities for judgement and action as ways of assuming our shared responsibility for the common world.

Reclaiming the perspective of the existentialist thinkers, the thesis has aimed to offer insight into the worldly ambiguity of judging that remains obscured in the prevalent rationalist theories on the subject and thus thread the path towards an account of political judgement able to address and face up to the uncertain and precarious reality of our postfoundational world. Pointing to how the existential aesthetic judging sensibility can be engaged to speak to specific examples of the perplexity of political action, it arguably discloses a worthy lens through which to engage other problems plaguing our world at the beginning of the twenty-first century that seem stubbornly to elude the grasp of established verities and frameworks of thought. In particular, it invites further explorations into the political significance of narrative-inspired, worldly forms of recognition to the dilemmas of our increasingly interconnected, yet ever-more divided existence that all too often presents us with the alternative of being either a victim or an executioner. Delving into the existentialists' "way of beauty," at the very least, the thesis hopes to have inspired a way of being in and relating to the world: one that, in the quest for justice, will not give in to laws of new crime and further hatred, but will face up to the absurd, the alien and the abominable in an attitude of unyielding love of the world and of the human condition – affirming, even in the depths of misery and despair, the human "thirst to love and the thirst to admire" (Camus 1970e, 168).

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