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Introduction

> The [modern] loss of standards [. . .] is a catastrophe in the moral world only if one assumes that people are actually incapable of judging things per se, that their faculty of judgement is inadequate for making original judgements, and that the most we can demand of it is the correct application of familiar rules derived from already established standards.
>
> Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*

How are we to reinvigorate the human capacity for political judgement as a practical activity capable of confronting the plural and ambiguous character of our postfoundational world? In the face of pervasive injustice and suffering that continuously confound our moral expectations, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and seek solace in despair. More often than not, our judgements and actions seem obliterated under the weight of larger forces and processes, to the point of making the most steadfast pursuit of moral ideals end in disaster. Even though increasingly interconnected across temporal and spatial boundaries, we hit upon walls of difference, ideological division and hatred. These quandaries foreground political judgement as a topic of fundamental existential import, pertaining to the meaning of our lives and our relationship to the world and others. While political judgement has of late assumed increasing prominence in political theory, the questions of its concrete, human reality and significance remain obscured under the preoccupation with proper standards or grounds. It is now more than fifty years since another generation of thinkers awarded these questions the status of utmost philosophical relevance. Responding to their own horizon of betrayed hopes for universal human emancipation, twentieth-century philosophies of existence approached the dilemmas of political judgement as they

are *lived*, in the ambiguity of a particular historical situation that cannot be congealed in an abstract system of rules. In our present era of uncertainty and disillusion, this book seeks to reclaim their voice, focusing in particular on the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus and Hannah Arendt.

Part of a highly variegated intellectual tradition, the four thinkers are distinguished for their particularly bold insertion into history. Sartre, 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 philosophising, 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 indeed be said to have crossed 'the frontier from the Academy into the world at large' (Barrett 1990: 9). Hannah Arendt's thought, in contrast, remains subject to contested categorisations. Nevertheless, despite her equivocal assessment of *Existenz* philosophy, her thinking manifests a deep-seated existential commitment to bringing political thinking back to the realm of lived experience (Hinchman and Hinchman 1984: 183). Indeed, it is Arendt's rethinking of the human judging ability as a reflective practice of engaging the particularity of the world that highlights political judgement as an activity in which the meaning of being human itself is at stake – bringing into view the prescient political relevance of the existentialists' perspective. This book delves into the four thinkers' awareness of the moral and political crisis in modernity and their vigilant assumption of the situated, worldly condition of political judgement and action. In their perspective it discerns a valuable prism through which to take up the contemporary impasse of political judgement devoid of metaphysical guarantees.

The Contemporary 'Postmetaphysical' Challenge of Political Judgement

Over the past decade, several thinkers have looked 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 (Brown 2010; Ferrara 2008). The recent turn to political judgement 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 tradition of political thought abounds in theories of moral and political judgement. The Kantian categorical imperative, natural law tradition, utilitarianism, or Aristotelian virtue ethics might be evoked 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'. They furnish the foundations for forming reasonable judgements, rather than delving into the ability of judging itself. This surprising omission can 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 into the role of a 'determinant' function (Kant 2007: IV, 15) that, always already in possession of a universal rule, proceeds as application of pre-given standards onto the particularities of political affairs.

The recent 'rise of the judgement model' (Ferrara 1999), accordingly, is characterised by a move away from the paradigm of universal principles, laws and norms. It approaches 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 that are concerned primarily with providing proper (either universal or community-specific) foundations for moral judgement. In our ambiguous 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'. The question becomes how to develop the appropriate capacities that will help us respond to 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 *what is*

(Ferrara 2008: 2–4). He 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). The human judging ability is understood as a situated process that bears upon and is oriented towards the cultivation of the sense of 'self-congruity' or 'authenticity' of one's identity (Ferrara 1998: 6–7; 1999: x; 2008: 8, 20–3). Much like for Brown, then, for Ferrara the validity of judgement 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 (Ferrara 2008: 6–7, 30–1; 1998: 10–12, 17).

In its attentiveness to the plural and situated character of political affairs, the recent turn to political judgement is responding to the yet unfinished narrative of the crisis of modernity (see Brown 2010: 26–7; Ferrara 1999: 2). Gaining preeminence in the course of the twentieth century, this narrative coalesced in a staunch scepticism of the modern Enlightenment project and its unlimited faith in the progress of humankind (Isaac 1992: 3–9). Instead of an autonomous, rational subject and its capacity to ground universal standards of morality, the critics of modernity have discerned an advance of domineering instrumental reason (Adorno and Horkheimer 2000). Imposing upon the world abstract and self-certain ideals, Enlightenment reason is not only oppressive of the particularity of the world, the critics say – it is also prone to reducing political judgement and politics itself to the rule of mere utilitarian, strategic means–ends calculation (Isaac 1992: 69–70; Johnson 1998: 16–18). Similar concerns continue to animate recent thinking, most notably in the postmodern deconstruction of all universal knowledge claims as repressive attempts to entrench existing relations of power within society, while marginalising the irreducible play of difference.

The recent turn to judgement arose against the background of the contemporary awareness of the lack of stable ethical and political foundations to which we could appeal when judging our political practices with any degree of past confidence (see Ferrara 1999: 2; Brown 2010: 26–7). Yet it likewise is characterised 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 Ferrara 2008: 6–7). For all its critical import, the postmodern celebration of particular, local and contingent narratives that allow for no common meaning claims remains on the level of abstract concepts. It falls short of critically responding to the exigencies of our historical reality and risks abandoning politics to 'the spectre of [continued] uncertainty and disillusion' (Isaac 1992: 3, 5–10; Kruks 2001: 11–21). The challenge taken up by recent theorising on political judgement then participates in the postmetaphysical or postfoundational horizon of contemporary thought, articulated most notably in the writings of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. There, the predicament of political judgement is tied to a larger project of reviving political theory and renewing debates about justice and democracy in the wake of the fallen metaphysics. The lack of eternal rules stirs the question of how to reinvigorate the human judging capacity in a way that is attuned to the particularity and complexity of our postfoundational world (see Ferrara 2008: 4–9; Azmanova 2012: 28–36).

In Rawls and Habermas, the attempt to rethink political judgement starts from their rejection of the traditional modern penchant for grounding absolute principles of morality upon the transcendental conception of the rational subject (Habermas 1996: xli, 449; Rawls 1996: 10, xviii, xxxviii). After the events of the twentieth century have 'taught us the horror of existing unreason', Habermas claims, political judgement cannot appeal to a 'higher' 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'. They refer to the fact that in judging we are confronted with an experientially shaped plurality of perspectives and evaluations (Rawls 1996: 55–8; Lassman 2004: 267–8). The purpose of political judgement cannot lie in the quest for a new overarching philosophical 'truth' that would seek

to adjudicate between conflicting views of the good and coerce agreement (Rawls 1996: 216–19). Instead, Rawls and Habermas foreground judgement as a dialogic, intersubjective practice of public reason (Azmanova 2012: 31–4).[1]

For Rawls, judgement of matters political must bear in mind the limits of 'reasonable' argumentation and justification (Rawls 1996: xx). This means judgement must be based on the citizens' recognition of each other as equal, free and reasonable members of a society. By implication, public reason enjoins all participants in public discourse to refrain from imposing upon others their private, comprehensive beliefs, and to 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; Azmanova 2012: 79; Hayden 2002: 75). Seeking to secure a stable political order, Rawls's solution to the burdens of pluralism removes divisive issues from the sphere of legitimate public debate (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 universal rule on how individuals '*ought to reason*' (Habermas 1995: 117–19, 128; Benhabib 1994: 36). It excludes from consideration the very plurality of political life that it had initially sought to confront, and is unable to account for the possibility of social criticism and change (Azmanova 2012: 86–8; Zerilli 2012). To avoid Rawls's 'functionalist' bias, Habermas proposes judgement to proceed by way of an ideal procedure of deliberation (Habermas 1995: 117, 122, 131; McCarthy 1994: 45). In Habermas's model, the plurality of value and truth claims does not represent a troubling condition to be bracketed for the sake of a stable consensus. It is something to be discussed, contested and defended in an open-minded, critical dialogue between plural equals (McCarthy 1994: 62–3, 51; Bohman 1995: 265–6). Much like in the case of Rawls, however, Habermas's account is tied strongly to the end of achieving agreement. The impartial outcome of the judging process is 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, remains mired in a 'monologic', determinant conception. In the guise of an 'ideally extended we-perspective', it imposes onto the situated, plural character of the world a 'singular', 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 win 'a pyrrhic victory' (Azmanova 2012: 120). In their preoccupation with absolute standards of (procedural) justice, they paradoxically reduce political judgement to instrumental reasoning, where the situated nature of politics is to be viewed and managed 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. He seeks to provide an account of basic human capacities or virtues that, while context-specific, are also universal, capable of providing a ground for judging between different social arrangements (Brown 2010: 81–2). Ferrara, similarly, focuses on unearthing 'the universal [human] capacity to sense' what constitutes the flourishing of human life that is 'independent' of a plurality of interpretative perspectives (Ferrara 2008: 34, 31–2). In this way, our situated judgements also possess 'transcontextual validity', and can point to a 'truly postfoundationalist' way of distinguishing right from wrong (Ferrara 1999: 156, 12; 2008: 7). The centre of attention rests on furnishing judgement with an adequate foundation that would allow us to accommodate and control, rather than engage with, the pluralism of contemporary political life (see Weidenfeld 2011: 234–5).

Although attuned to the loss of metaphysical foundations, the recent attentiveness to the problematics of judgement falls short of a sustained analysis of the historical roots of the modern predicament. Rather than attending to the dilemmas of our situated political coexistence, it reinstates political judgement as a determinant shelter from the ambiguities of worldly reality. Left inadequately addressed is precisely the modern 'scandal' of judgement: the risk that our normative aspirations lose their 'grip' on political realities

and end up reproducing the relationships of inequality and domination (Azmanova 2012: 3–4). As Azmanova aptly recognises, this paradox enjoins us to abandon the grounds of ideal theory and undertake a thorough examination of the activity of judging itself, including its embeddedness in intersubjective horizons of meaning and structures of injustice.[2] What the prevalent concern with the questions of validity has overshadowed, then, is the political significance of judgment as a situated practice of confronting the incalculable complexities of politics – its human reality that necessarily escapes pre-given models of rational deliberation and justification. In this ahistorical focus, the contemporary rise of the judgement paradigm not only has failed to move beyond the current 'impasse', where the loss of reliable bedrocks nurtures new escapes from the political world (Kruks 2012: 3–4; Bernstein 1983: 18–19; Weidenfeld 2011: 232–4). It has also 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 and rethink it in its worldly ambiguity.

Reviving Political Judgement: The Perspective of Twentieth-Century Philosophies of Existence

The imagination of Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus and Arendt arose in response to a series of twentieth-century political events whose overwhelming novelty and often mind-numbing horror, in their view, challenged the most cherished moral certainties of the Western philosophical tradition. Their thought horizon saw the advancements of science and technology, the emergence of centralised states and mass society, the increasing internationalisation of human life, and the waning of traditional authorities and relationships. To 'complete their education', they were provided with the scourge of two world wars, the Holocaust and the emergence of totalitarian ideologies (Camus 1946: 20; Hayden 2013a: 156). Their insight into the depth of the modern predicament of political judgement and action is dramatically expressed with the notions of 'absurd', 'anxiety', 'nausea', 'ambiguity' and 'dark times'. These

illuminate the modern crisis in terms of a fundamental predicament of human existence which, with the loss of traditional justifications, finds itself 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).

For the four thinkers, then, the modern crisis of judgement was not a mere abstract philosophical conundrum. The series of historical events was a terrifying occurrence in that it simply could not be understood within the established standards of thought. It put a profound strain on the individuals' fundamental human need to make sense of experience and ascribe themselves in meaningful worlds. As Arendt (1994: 316) notes, '[t]he very framework within which understanding and judging could arise is gone'. For the existential thinkers, the modern crisis of judgement not only denotes the irreversible breakdown of absolutes, but also tragically exposes the failure of traditional philosophical categories to 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 enquiry into the roots of the Western love of wisdom. The thinkers refrain from attributing the modern confusion to an insubordinate reality which all of a sudden burst forth with a shameless disregard for the rules that were once in place to tame it. They trace the roots of the modern malaise to a number of disconcerting elements and contradictions plaguing the Western tradition of political theory itself. These insights into the historical sources of the modern predicament lead them to a radical rethinking of the traditional ways of relating to the world of human affairs.

In Arendt's helpful definition, the existentialist approach signals a 'reformulation of the philosopher's attitude toward the political realm [. . .]' (Arendt 1994: 445). 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 detached, theoretical attitude prevalent in much of Western thought. The gist of their criticism is directed against the metaphysical desire to penetrate

to the ultimate truth of being, standing under, behind or above the realm of 'mere' appearance as its ground, cause or purpose (Warnock 1970: 136). Despairing over the 'melancholy haphazard-ness' of human affairs, the story goes, philosophers have tradition-ally sought to remove themselves from the world to contemplate the sphere of eternal ideals (Denneny 1979: 248). They conse-quently reduced the human capacity for political judgement to an act of a rational subject that can rise above its particular situation, from this position of mastery reach complete knowledge of reality, and apply it as a standard of political action. What the philoso-phers denied, however, was what Arendt (1994: 445) called 'that *thaumadzein*, that wonder at what is as it is'. What they obscured was nothing less than the realm of human worldly existence as it is lived through individuals' concrete choices and actions, in all their anguish and complexity. In their courageous dismantling of metaphysics, the selected existential thinkers proved worthy heirs of their spiritual forebears. Their concern with 'the struggles of the human situation' in the modern age also finds parallels in the reli-gious direction existentialism took in the works of, for instance, Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel (Solomon 1972: 245–6; Aho 2014: 10–14). Nonetheless, the four thinkers are distinct for their ethical and political commitment, tying their philosophical rebellion intimately to the fight for freedom and jus-tice in a world shorn of consoling certainties of the tradition.

To account for the modern predicament of political judgement, the four thinkers abolish the traditional dualism of being and appearance, and conceive of human existence as embodied, situ-ated and practical being-in-the-world. This conceptualisation fore-grounds the existential 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. They are free, which is to say they are always already oriented towards the world as a mean-ingful context of their perceptions, judgements and actions (Aho 2014: 34–47). While we are 'factical' beings, enmeshed in social contexts, practices and relationships – in Sartre's formulation – our humanity truly manifests itself in our ability to assume the given situation as our own and 'transcend' it towards non-existent ends (Sartre 2003: 223, 461). Human existence, in other words, is

inherently temporal in that every 'now' represents a point of inter-section between the dimensions of past and future (Guignon and Pereboom 1995: xx). While our present assumes meaning in light of our future projects, any projection into the future is made pos-sible only by our constantly reinterpreting the past as its resource and horizon (Guignon and Pereboom 1995: xx).

With different emphases, the selected thinkers 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 amounts to a vision of political affairs characterised by incalculable plural-ity, 'flesh-and-blood presence' and contingency, 'infinite richness', complexity and unpredictability (Beauvoir 2004d: 207). Accord-ing to the existentialists, then, it was only a matter of time before the traditional determinant conception of political judgement trag-ically failed. In its temptation to approach the world with abstract rules, it reduced human beings, too, to mere objects with certain identifiable characteristics or a given (human) nature, and signi-fied a dangerous disregard for our situated, finite and distinctly human way of being. This danger was especially pronounced with the advance of the modern age. With the modern unparalleled affirmation of human powers for rational knowledge, certainty and control of the world, political judgement came to rely on stan-dards, increasingly distanced from the particularities of human existence. Not only was it unable to recognise and offer adequate defences against the denials of human freedom plaguing the politi-cal world – it itself risked becoming oppressive, assuming that the particular character of human lived reality can be mastered and transformed in accordance with a predetermined blueprint (Isaac 1992: 69–82).

The modern predicament of judgement therefore does not refer simply to the fact that traditional standards of thought have sud-denly become obsolete (Arendt 1966). The demise of old catego-ries, rather, exposed as 'a tangible reality' and 'a fact of political relevance' the challenge of political judgement as it arises out of the situated condition of human political existence (Arendt 2006a: 13). Any attempt to erect a new set of yardsticks, on this account, cir-cumvents the crucial precept to be drawn from the experience of

the twentieth century. This precept, Arendt (1966: 113) observes, lies in the 'simple fact that there are no general standards to determine our judgements unfailingly', no rules that could subdue and stabilise '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, it has also confronted them, perhaps to an unprecedented degree, with their freedom. As the existentialists emphasise, it is now up to humans to 'snatch the world from the darkness of absurdity' and 'unaided create [their] own values' (Beauvoir 2004f: 326; Camus 1995h: 58). To confront this challenge, the four thinkers refrain from the quest for valid grounds of judgement. They delve instead into the lived experience of judging as a 'spontaneous' activity that, rather than seeking to flee, assumes and faces up to our situated existence (Arendt 2003: 27; Camus 1970f: 202).

To illuminate the experiential reality of political judgement, the existential thinkers look outside the 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 explicit attempt to rethink political judgement by way of a creative reworking of Kant's account of aesthetic judgements of taste. But 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 enquired 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. For all the four thinkers, aesthetic imagination stands at the heart of their efforts to rethink the terms of our engagement with the world.

The model of aesthetic judgement 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 particular situations could simply be subsumed. It 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 (Sartre 2007: 38; Arendt 2003: 27, 41). The notion

of political judgement as free creation is characterised by a constitutive ambiguity. While always already part of and situated in the world, it cannot reach for objective knowledge lying beyond the realm of appearance. Leaving behind the order of absolute truth, aesthetic sensibility foregrounds political judgement as an activity that is open and attentive to the world and diverse others. It proceeds 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 thereby encapsulates 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 pre-given value or end (Guignon and Pereboom 1995: xxvii; Solomon 1972: 279–87).

After this initial exposition of 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, 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 complexity of political affairs (Parvikko 2003). Its distrust of normative standards has often exposed existentialism to the charges, most notably coming from the critical tradition of thought, of harbouring individualist, elitist or even aestheticist pretensions. While perhaps well suited to a morality of personal salvation, the critics argue, 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 Jay 1986; Habermas 1977). And yet, the existentialist rebellion against traditional philosophy does not lead to the wholesale rejection of modernity's most noble aspirations. In contrast to many other 'crisis of modernity' narratives, it does not end in despair over the emancipatory potentials of politics (Katznelson 2003:

87–96; Isaac 1992: 68–71; Sharpe 2015a: 82–97). To the contrary, it is their appeal to the human judging capacity as a situated practice of facing up to whatever happens without the guidance of predetermined rules that revivifies judgement as a paramount political ability (Hayden 2014a: 170–2). Stirring political judgement to awake from the traditional dream of a self-certain and masterful self, the four thinkers reclaim the political challenge and promise of judging for the world.

Judgement and the Existential Narrative Imagination: A Preliminary Overview

Illuminating the activity of judging in its worldly ambiguity, the existentialists' narrative account directs attention to the ways of enhancing our ability to make sense of and respond to the context-specific dilemmas that cannot be contained under prefabricated answers or procedural schemas of resolution. The purpose of this book is to reclaim their insights in order to confront the challenges of our political reality that continue to frustrate the hope for ready-made yardsticks. To begin setting out this argument, this section turns to briefly explore the existential narrative approach to political thinking. I tease out how the four thinkers' narrative sensibility reframes the traditional philosophical understanding of the relationship between thought and action, and foregrounds the present political significance of their aesthetic accounts of judgement.

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 indebted to the phenomenological–existential lineage of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Following their example, the four thinkers depart from the traditional philosophical (and specifically Cartesian) subject–object opposition, and the accompanying tendency to conceive of humans as primarily cognitive, knowing beings. Traditionally, the ambition has been to attain an objective standpoint, untrammelled by worldly environment and capable of grounding certain knowledge about reality as the object-world separate

from the subject (Secada 2000: 18; Guignon and Pereboom 1995: xxiv). The existential narrative imagination rejects the quest for a mysterious Archimedean point from which it might be possible to achieve a view of reality from 'the standpoint of eternity'. Similarly, the existentialists leave in abeyance the traditional preoccupation with the questions of method. What they denounce is the underlying assumption that a theory can remain detached from its object and develop 'appropriate' tools through which to approach and control it from the outside and above (Vollrath 1977: 162–4). In the tradition of existential phenomenology, the narrative imagination of the four thinkers is characterised by a shift of focus away from reaching for pure knowledge to disclosing 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 is intricately interwoven into their attempts towards 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 highly troubling. This is because it confronted 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 realisation of a pre-given essence or end (Arendt 1958a: 222–5). What remained unaccounted for was the distinctly human capacity for action. Based in human freedom, it is in the essence of action to always bring into the world something new that could not have been known or predicted. Appearing in the midst of the intersubjective, plural world, its outcomes are also bound to remain uncertain and uncontrollable (Arendt 2006a: 150; 1958a: 188–92). The traditional disregard for political action as a human ability took on an especially disturbing tone in the modern age, in the tradition of positivist social science and the rise of teleological, historicist approaches to politics. For there, in the face of the collapsed order of metaphysical absolutes, the unabated quest for objective knowledge

was entrusted to processes of logical deduction and instrumental reasoning. As a result, the whole of human reality was demoted 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). Within this framework, the meaning of any particular action or event was reduced to the place it was assigned to assume in the overarching whole or process (Arendt 1994: 318–20). Humans themselves came to be conceived in the role of mere passive and malleable objects of inhuman forces, lying beyond the powers of human judgement or even comprehension (Arendt 1978a: 216).

The existentialists' narrative imagination, in contrast, 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 well suited to respond to the challenge of political judgement because it answers to the fundamental temporality and historicity of human existence. It accounts for 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 affirms the human judging capacity as a free, worldly activity that can endow with significance particular actions and events, weave them into a meaningful story, and help us address the concerns and intricacies of the present and the future (Arendt 1968a: 205–6; Sartre 1992a: 14, 17–18; Benhabib 1990: 170–1).

In its worldly focus, the existential aesthetic orientation reveals the political danger behind the lingering rationalist bent of contemporary approaches to political judgement. Abstracting from the particularities of political affairs in their quest for rational solutions, they sweep from under our feet the very existential ground of the world on which we depend for our capacity to respond to worldly events, and risk leaving politics at the mercy of deeper, inhuman causes or laws. Against this tendency, the four thinkers' narrative sensibility is oriented by the existential process of illuminating the particularity, plurality and contingency of the world. Its

distinct political significance lies in affirming 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 account of judgement then nonetheless carries a pronounced critical potential because it elicits the sense of our selves not as passive objects, but as free and acting beings (Luban 1983: 239; Hill 1979; Kearney 2002: 129–33).

Specifically, the book explores how the four thinkers' narrative judging sensibility can strengthen our capacity to confront the perplexity of political action. The emphasis lies on unearthing how their recognition of the ambiguity of political judgement can account for the spectre of complexity, risk and uncertainty involved in engaging the world that remains resistant to rational control of the solitary subject (Arendt 1994: 166; Zerilli 2005a: 128). Here the analysis hinges significantly on the exploration of the subtle differences between the thinkers. Sartre's and Beauvoir's aesthetic accounts of judgement are distinct for confronting individuals with their responsibility for the world and the difficult moral dilemmas involved in engaging the oppressive structures in political action. Camus's and Arendt's narrative sensibilities, in turn, offer worthy attempts to creatively face up to these difficulties and point to the possibilities of fighting for greater freedom within, rather than outside or above, the bounds of our plural political existence.

In line with the existential thinkers' orientation, this monograph adopts a narrative approach. Situated in the present horizon of the perceived challenge of political judgement, it turns to the past and finds in the existential imagination a promising source of illumination. The book undertakes textual and conceptual analysis of the selected existentialists' essays, novels, plays and short stories to reclaim their attempts to confront the challenge of judging politically. The analysis relies on tracing the thinkers' insertion in and engagement with the Western canon, as well as the practical ethical and political dilemmas of their time. It is oriented towards unearthing the specific contribution each of them can make to address the problems at stake, as well as how they can be seen to importantly speak to and build on each other's insights. The aim, however, is not

to undertake a definitive exposition of the existentialists' ideas, nor to construct a theory of political judgement that could be applied as a blueprint for political action. Instead, it is to illuminate the present political significance of the existential aesthetic imagination on concrete contemporary examples that embody the complexity of political judgement and the concomitant burden of responsibility. Throughout the book, theoretical argumentation is enriched by drawing on instances of literary works to illustrate the process of judging in its worldly ambiguity.

The Structure of the Book

The argument proceeds as follows. The first chapter briefly enquires into the presence of the concept of political judgement in the history of political thought. It traces in history increasingly sophisticated attempts to think judgement as an aesthetic, situated practice that cannot be reduced to mere rule-bound reasoning. Yet it reveals in past accounts the persistence of the rationalist penchant for escaping the distinctly political, complex character of judgement into the realm of abstract concepts. It points to how these inadequacies disregarded the free, plural and contingent world of human affairs, and coalesced in the widespread sense of the breakdown of reliable standards in modernity. The purpose of this chapter is not to determine what judgement is, nor to provide an exhaustive account of how it has been theorised in the history of political thought. It is to disclose the political import of judgement as an activity in which the human, free and situated character of our collective existence itself is at stake. Thereby, the chapter signals the paramount significance of the existential thinkers' attempts to rethink our ways of relating to the world by turning to the voice of narrative.

Chapters 2 and 3 are dedicated to unearthing the existentialists' aesthetic efforts to illuminate political judgement in its worldly ambiguity. The analysis is organised to emphasise the thinkers' different guiding sensibilities as they pertain to their confrontation with the modern predicament of political judgement and their underlying philosophical views of the human condition. Chapter 2

begins this ensemble by engaging Sartre's and Beauvoir's distinctly existentialist orientation. It draws on their critiques of the abstract notions of truth and knowledge and teases out their accounts of political judgement as creative, communicative practice of world-disclosure that confronts us with our responsibility for the world and others. The chapter also focuses on Sartre's and Beauvoir's increasing recognition of the difficulty of political judgement as it stems from our embeddedness in and complicity with the constraining web of oppressive structures that lie beyond any individual's control. In relation to this common concern, it discerns their respective insights into the murky reality of conflicting commitments, tragic choices and sacrifice attendant on resistant action.

Heeding this awareness of the difficulty of political judgement, the third chapter explores Camus's and Arendt's existential orientation that resists the conventional world-view of 'existentialism'. In their efforts to understand the breakdown of traditional standards of thought, it unveils a deeper recognition of the ambiguity of political judgement and the accompanying dangers of nihilism and excess. Their aesthetic sensibility accordingly is characterised by heightened efforts to creatively confront, rather than simply resign to, the perplexing and complex character of the political world. The chapter first engages the political significance of Camus's artistic attentiveness to the limits of the world and of different others. It demonstrates how Camus's dialogic judgement refuses the 'necessary' choice between 'victims and executioners', and strives to reveal the common ground for dialogue between a plurality of human freedoms. The chapter next brings into view Arendt's distinctly political – and often contested – existential orientation. It re-examines Arendt's account of political judgement in light of her phenomenological–existential commitment to coming to terms with ever-changing worldly reality. It shows how her reworking of Kant's account of aesthetic judgement illuminates judgement as a specifically political ability of representative thinking, oriented to disclosing the possibilities and boundaries of political action.

After reconstructing the existential insights into the worldly character of political judgement, I turn in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 to exploring how they can be engaged to speak to contemporary horizons of thought. Chapter 4 further foregrounds the political

significance of the existential aesthetic judging sensibility by bringing it into conversation with the recent theoretical turn towards narrative. Thinkers as diverse as Martha Nussbaum and Richard Rorty have praised the narrative ability to approach reality in its particularity and offer a valuable means for recognising and representing difference and otherness in an ever more plural world. However, recent discourse on narrative is also guided by an epistemological, moral concern with ensuring a proper way of grasping others' experience (of suffering and injustice), while abstracting from the plurality of the world. The existentialists' aesthetic imagination, in this respect, emerges as distinct for retaining attention on the specifically political, world-disclosing potentials of literary works. The chapter reveals how their narrative sensibility can respond to the pressing need for intersubjective recognition that follows from the weakened validity of traditional verities. In particular, it crystallises the political relevance of Camus's and Arendt's aesthetic orientation. It shows how their dialogic, plural focus can foster worldly forms of recognition and bring into existence a space where the suffering and contradictions of our situated existence can be confronted through politics between plural equals.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore how the existential thinkers' insights into the worldly character of the human judging ability can be brought to bear on two problematics of political judgement and action that have risen to prominence in recent theorising. The two thorny topics examined are the problem of dirty hands and the challenge of transitional justice and reconciliation. Both problems are steeped in awareness of the ineliminable spectre of difficulty, tragedy and failure haunting the realm of human affairs. Nevertheless, they also remain mired in the penchant for conceiving of political judgement as a determinant, problem-solving exercise bent on providing a final, rational resolution to the intricacies at stake. The significance of the existential narrative judging sensibility lies in illuminating the roots of failure in the perplexity of human engagement in the world. Revealing the fundamental existential sources of the ambiguity of political action and responsibility, it can stimulate our capacities of coming to terms with and resisting the tragedies of our world, rather than simply yielding to

them as a necessary course of political life. The engagement with the two perplexities of judgement thus unearths the distinct critical potential of existential aesthetic imagination in its resolute love of the world – its ability to respond to the absurd, the alien and the abominable by respecting the limits of our plural, unpredictable and all too human world.

Notes

1. 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*.
2. Even though Azmanova offers valuable insight into the social hermeneutics of judging as a context-specific process of formation and articulation of justice claims, her account too is ultimately concerned with providing a theory of political judgement as reasoned justification of political action, where the conflicting claims and tensions of politics can be discursively redeemed through the formation of a critical consensus (Azmanova 2012: esp. 1–20, 227–37; see also Mihai 2016b). The focus on normative validity and valid grounds of judgement is also notable in Rainer Forst's writings on justification as a situated social practice (Forst 2014).

1 Political Judgement in the History of Political Thought and the Modern Crisis

Despite the traditional focus on constructing abstract and universal standards of morality, the problematic of judgement makes persistent appearance in the history of political thought. While the enquiry into the concept has generally not been systematic, it figures in a plethora of thinkers who elevate judgement, and the corollary notions of choice, 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 prefabricated standards of thought, it is these attempts to delve into the judging ability itself, to scrutinise its proper and perhaps previously unquestioned 'grounds', that bring forward its distinct political nature. The purpose of this chapter then is not to determine what judgement *is*, but to disclose the role awarded to judgement in the political realm. It is an enquiry into the faculty of judgement as a distinctively *political*, deeply situated and relational affair, untangling a historical appreciation of how judgement crystallises the main dilemmas of individuals' communal existence.

The chapter tells the story of political judgement in the history of political thought against the background of the modern crisis. It traces in history the growing sense of the perplexity of political judgement, disclosing how varied difficulties specific to particular historical periods herald the acute awareness of the breakdown of reliable standards in modernity. Given its focus on judgement as a political ability, the chapter views these difficulties of political judgement through the lens of a broader philosophical problem inhering in the ambiguous relationship of the subject to the outside world and separate others. On the one hand, it discerns how the increasing awareness of the complexities of politics

inspired sophisticated attempts to think judgement as a situated, worldly activity that cannot be reduced to rule-bound reasoning. 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 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 tendency to escape its complex character into the realm of abstract concepts. It points to how these inadequacies disregarded the free, plural and incalculable world of human affairs, and coalesced in the crisis of judgement in modernity.

The chapter does not aim for an exhaustive account of how the notion of judgement has been theorised in the history of political thought. Nor does it aspire to a comprehensive overview of the theoretical issues that oriented the imagination of individual theorists. It relies on a select number of thinkers, who emerge as representatives of particular concerns with political judgement as manifested in history. It charts the engagement with the human judging ability in Aristotle and the Stoics, Hume and Kant, Nietzsche, Marx and the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, and Husserl and Heidegger, 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 of political judgement in a linear, progressive or necessary fashion. It hopes to make visible the ruptures, the creative new possibilities and the impasses brought forth by the critical interaction between the thinkers. In this way, it illuminates the space orienting the existentialist attempts to confront the modern breakdown of absolutes – both by exposing the inadequacies in traditional accounts and by revealing 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

The political significance of judgement is well encapsulated in Aristotle's notion of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom – for him, an essential component of a life of *eudaimonia* (the good life, also happiness).

Phronesis cannot be reduced to application of universal rules, the proper realm of theoretical wisdom *(sophia)* or scientific knowledge *(episteme)*, which deal with the necessary and the unchangeable (Steinberger 1993: 107; see also Aristotle 2000: 1140b1–4). It is 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' (Nussbaum 1986: 241–2, 290–1). As Aristotle writes, *phronesis* 'is concerned with human affairs' as 'what can be otherwise' and 'what we can deliberate about'. It engages affairs that go on between a plurality of human beings and are for this reason changeable, intricate and unpredictable (Aristotle 2000: 1141b10–17). In this realm, the philosophers' knowledge of eternal principles – as 'extraordinary, wonderful, abstruse, godlike' as it may be – is 'useless', because it is distanced from practical interests and values (Aristotle 2000: 1141b5–9). Its practical field of operation also means that *phronesis* is not 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 (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 pertains to deliberating and acting well or 'nobly', involving an adequate responsiveness to the particularities of a given situation that confronts us in the world (Aristotle 2000: 1140a25–30, 1104a11–1104b3; see also McDowell 1996: 21–2).

Thus construed, the human judging ability gains its highest significance in the political realm (Ferrara 1987: 260). For Aristotle, *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 to human freedom, the capacity to choose what action to undertake as 'something in our own power' to achieve (Korsgaard 1996: 214–16, 227). Furthermore, *phronesis* as the process of deliberating on what action is good relates to choosing what is good for *us* as human beings situated in a particular context (Nussbaum 1986: 293–4; Gadamer 2004: 310). Judgement becomes a practice guided by the concern for our

communal life, the interests, situations and problems that we, as individuals of a particular community, hold in common (Beiner 1983: 79–80; see also Aristotle 2000: 1140b9–12, 1141b).

As the ability to engage the particularity of our situated existence, *phronesis* is intimately linked to empathetic understanding (Gadamer 2004: 319–21; Nussbaum 1990). It entails 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 (Aristotle 2000: 1142a). As such, it involves an aesthetic, literary sensibility, 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: 141). The political significance of *phronesis*'s aesthetic, imaginative way of proceeding is brought out in Aristotle's account of deliberation in his *Politics*. Rather than the prerogative of a solitary expert, political judgement can only be exercised through a situated process of negotiation and persuasion between a plurality of opinions (*doxa*) (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). In the common reaching of judgements, the citizens come to a shared view of what constitutes the common good, which kindles among them the sense of political friendship and embeds them into a political community (Beiner 1983: 79–82). The political significance of *phronesis* is then located at the underlying existential level. Judgement bears the humanising purpose of endowing the world with relative coherence as a ground of individual and communal identity, rendering us better prepared to confront the challenge of political action (Kearney 2002: 3–14; Nussbaum 1986: 302–5).

Yet Aristotle approaches the operation of judgement by outlining a set of required virtues of character to be habituated in practice (Larmore 2001: 58; Aristotle 2000: 1141b18–22; McDowell 1996: 22–3; Nussbaum 1986: 306). His notion of judging presupposes that the ethical substance of the good life and a sense of community 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; Aristotle 2000: 1179b–1180a). In this respect, *phronesis* remains 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 according to a being's natural function, essence or end (Reeve 1992: 26, 97). What remains obscured, however, is precisely Aristotle's initial insight into the practical, situated and deliberative process of judging as well as its political purpose – 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). Rooted in the established customs and mores, it is doubtful whether Aristotle's judgement can respond to unforeseen situations or address the political reality of competing values (McDowell 1996: 31; Larmore 2001: 61; Herman 1996: 37). If the sense of an ethically coherent world emerges from fixating an individual actor into a predetermined function as assigned by nature, little space is left for a consideration of the ambiguities of particular *human* situations. *Phronesis* arguably cannot adequately answer to the otherwise aptly recognised complexity, risk and tragedy involved in the leading of a good life (Nussbaum 1986: 305, 310, 318–19; Annas 1996: 246–7).

Aristotle's teleological 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 of nature. As Cicero and Diogenes Laertius develop this position, the goal of living a good life is determined not only by virtue of being rooted in a human natural endowment. Nature itself is posited as 'a benevolent, reasoning agent', which reduces judgement to individuals' rational capacity to intuit and follow their 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 of achieving these 'natural' objectives in the worldly realm of human action. Any intended or required course of action, indeed, might not in the end turn out to chime with the overall plan of the universe. More than this, the 'necessary' losses or evils that nature puts in 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). Identifying judgement with individuals' rational capacity to obey nature's harmonious design of being, the Stoics paradoxically portend an escape from the vagaries of the political realm. 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 effect a meaningful change in the world (Cooper 1996: 278; Schneewind 1996: 292–5). The Stoics thereby announce the twilight of judgement as a crucial political capacity, which will persist in Neoplatonism and Christian metaphysics.

The Distinctly Modern Challenge of Political Judgement

It was this confidence in a benevolent natural order believed to attend to human concerns that was shattered with new scientific discoveries and the crumbling of established authorities characterising the advent of the modern age. The most notable proponent of modern sensitivity is Descartes, whose radical doubt consigns within the realm of human powers, rather than some natural design, the capacity to know and judge reality. Yet the Cartesian horizon also conceives of (political) judgement as an act of a transcendent subject who, through the ideas of pure reason, is capable of reaching objective knowledge of external reality and applying this knowledge as a foundation of all morality and politics (Bowie 2003: 16–17). Descartes' rationalism inspired among his successors, notably Hume and Kant, the awareness that, even though free, the judging subject remains embedded in the world, and so is incapable of knowing the whole of reality. To confront the ambiguity of judgement, they turn to the realm of aesthetics, interrogating how individuals' autonomous judgement is to relate to external reality and inspire political action in the world.

Descartes' rationalism was first seriously challenged by the tradition of the Scottish Enlightenment and its prominent representative David Hume. Reflecting the insights of British moralists like Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, Hume questions the ability of reason and its abstract ideas not only to approach and judge

external reality, but also to inspire the passions and our will to act (Hume 2000: 2.3.3.1–3, 265; 3.1.2.27, 302; Foot 2002: 78; Deutscher 2013: 122–4). He envisions individuals' interaction with the outside world as an immediate response to concrete objects of perception, finding an alternative foundation of moral and political judgement in experience (Hume 2000: 3.1.1.2, 293; Morrow 1923: 62–3; Kivy 1967: 59). Moral judgement 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 challenges the Cartesian conception of a solipsistic subject and portrays judgement as an activity of sentient, natural beings, embedded in the world and therefore 'infirm' and 'fallible' (Singer 2000: 230; Baier 1993: 452; Morrow 1923: 61–2). The freedom of judgement is situated in the world, which first of all allows the subjects to engage their experiential reality in its particularity, yet also brings to light judgement's subjective nature (Ferguson 2007: 4–5). In our judgements, we cannot 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'. It '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). Grounded in experience, judgement also is always already oriented towards others, a characteristic Hume highlights by evoking the principle of sympathy (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. It foregrounds the activity of judging as 'communication' of sentiments between a plurality of human beings (Hume 2000: 2.3.6.8, 273; 2.2.7.7, 238). In direct contact with the multiplicity of individuals' standpoints, Hume's judgement can transcend subjectivism towards

more general validity (Morrow 1923: 64). This is because sympathy as communication of pleasures and displeasures grounds a fundamental commonality of human experience (Morrow 1923: 64). It serves as something like a common human nature or 'frame' that embeds us as participants in a shared moral order and invites us to deliberate about community values and goals (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 nature. 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 [a human being]' (Hume in Baier 1993: 440–2). Yet Hume shows that it is precisely the ambiguity of judgement that establishes its political relevance. It is the lack of ultimate standards of appeal that draws attention to the ways of enhancing our capacity to respond to the plurality of the world, and inspires the search for (shared) criteria by which to distinguish right from wrong. Hume exposes the need to kindle the so-called 'delicacy of taste', to develop through practical training our capacity for sympathetic seeing and making comparisons and distinctions (Hume 1998: 141–6). He also emphasises the importance of keeping one's mind free from prejudice. Akin to Adam Smith's notion of impartial spectator, he praises the ability to distance oneself from 'my peculiar circumstances' and consider any feeling of pleasure or displeasure from the standpoint of 'myself as a [human] in general' (Hume 1998: 145–6; 2000: 3.1.2.4, 303).

Outlining the qualities of a good judge, however, Hume puts forth a determinate set of virtues – such as courage and benevolence, cleanliness and wit – that are deemed useful for the common life of a society (Foot 2002: 74–5; Baier 1993: 447–8). In an Aristotelian vein, Hume finds a new ground of judgement in an already presupposed societal unity, its shared customs and norms. The principle of sympathy in this framework becomes less a faculty of communicating sentiments by virtue of which a community is to be brought into being, than a natural given or endowment

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that posits, rather than explains, human beings' rootedness into a shared moral order (Morrow 1923: 62, 65–7). Hume 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 agreeable to themselves, broader society and/or the whole of humankind (Foot 2002: 75–6; Morrow 1923: 67–8). Basing judgement in (societal) utility, he reduces the human judging ability, along with the sphere of political affairs, to the objective and rationally discernible set of causal laws (Morrow 1923: 67–8). He risks betraying not only his initial insight into the experiential reality of judging, but also judgement's distinctly political significance as a capacity for responding to the particularity of the political world and plural others.

Nevertheless, it was Hume's distrust of abstract reason that prefigured Kant's turn to the model of aesthetics to illuminate judgement as an autonomous human faculty that is not rule-governed but consists of 'a special talent that cannot be taught but only practiced' (Larmore 2001: 48; Kant 1998: A133/B172, 268). If Hume ultimately subsumed judgement under the rule of causality, Kant is determined to preserve the space for human freedom amidst the phenomenal world of cause and effect (Deutscher 2013: 130–2). Kant's turn to aesthetic judgement, indeed, is 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 left intact the traditional division between subject and object as well as the attendant quest for what 'truly is'. Kant, on the contrary, sets out to examine the relationship between subject and object itself (Jaspers 1962: 17). Rather than tackling the 'traditional' question of how to reach correspondence with reality, he enquires into the necessary or *a priori* conditions of the *possibility* of knowledge for *us*, as rational and embodied beings (Solomon 1972: 19–20). Kant's turn to judgement of taste then emerges as a response to his recognition of the 'worldly' limits of human reason. To be sure, 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 be made into a universal law. Because the universal

is always given and the particular is to be merely subsumed under it, moral judgement is what Kant calls 'determinant' (Kant 2007: IV, 15). Nevertheless, Kant insists that practical judgement confronts 'special difficulties', because the supersensible moral law must be applied 'to an action *in concreto*', to particular events in the phenomenal world (Kant 1909: 159–60). Aesthetic judgement forms a mediating link between the individuals' (universal) moral law of reason and the disorderly world of political affairs that cannot be adequately tackled by simple allegiance to universal moral principles.

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, yet, as parts of the world, also unable to ever transcend it completely. 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). Developing the implications of our situated existence, Kant shows how our sensibility is rooted in subjective forms of intuition, space and time, and our understanding dependent on subjective categories of thought. Accordingly, he limits valid knowledge to the phenomenal world as the only one that we can perceive and know – leaving in abeyance as unintelligible the question of *noumena*, 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. Freedom, if it is to be indeed free, cannot depend 'on anything empirical', 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 here 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 realised in practice. As Jaspers (1962: 98) writes, it consists in a more radical challenge of how to judge in pursuit of the moral law, while conditioned by the contingent political reality that is bound to frustrate any clear-cut realisation of our aspirations.

Aesthetic judgement can face up to this challenge because of its reflective character. In opposition to determinant judgement, as Kant writes in *The Critique of Judgement*, 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 in advance (Kant 2007: IV, 15). 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 dependent on an already defined interest, 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 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. Judgements of taste rely 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 or displeasure at 'appearance *qua* appearance' (Kleist 2000: 9). The feeling of aesthetic pleasure contains an awareness of one's free subjectivity – what Kant calls the 'free play' of our cognitive powers – which at the same time recognises the limits that arise from its situated character. In line with this recognition, it commits to an unpremeditated openness to the givenness of the appearing world, 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, 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, judgements of taste cannot 'compel' agreement (Kant 2007: §8, 47). Still, 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). In this sense, 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*. *Sensus communis* refers to '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. It corresponds to a faculty '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 [human]kind' (Kant 2007: §40, 123). As such, aesthetic judgements of taste are not determined by the rational principle of self-consistency, but rely on the capacity for enlarged thought. Enlarged thought foregrounds 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, Kant explicitly emphasises 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. 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 led many commentators to view Kant's account of aesthetic judgement as 'strictly formalistic', removed from practical ethico-political concerns of communal life (Steinberger 1993: 141; Beiner 1983: 43–50; Gadamer 2004: 37–70). Yet Kant's *a priori* principle of communicability is meant to ward off the danger of finding in the substantive ends of a community a new, this time empirical, attempt to reify the whole of the world into a knowable object and eliminate human freedom (Jaspers 1962: 45–6). On this account, it is the disinterested distancing from any objective, moral or empirical interest that grounds the *political* significance of aesthetic judgements of taste. The principle of communicability, as Ricoeur (2000: 103–4) notes, recognises the constitutive plurality of political life as 'life in common', and is oriented to responding to the ambiguities of the world by respecting its unpredictable nature.

Judgement's appeal to common sense is inherently political because it contains an *a priori* principle of purposiveness (of nature) (Kant 2007: VII, 25). Kant recognises the 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 realist tendency, which insists on the need to acknowledge 'men as they are', not as 'they ought to be' – and 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: 86–9; 1991d: 119). The political import of aesthetic judgement is revealed in Kant's enthusiasm about the French Revolution. Unconcerned 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' (Kant 1991e: 182). This attitude 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). Kant's aesthetic judgement assumes a public or '*exemplary* validity', disclosing in a singular phenomenon belonging to the world of sense the broader moral purpose of humanity (Kant 2007: §22, 70; Ricoeur 2000: 104; Kleist 2000: 40–1, 34, 38). While refraining from prescribing the purpose of nature in terms of a determinant concept, the publicity of aesthetic judgement allows us to posit as a regulative idea 'a harmony between human and human and between human and world' (Kleist 2000: 41). It offers a 'comforting prospect' of seeing history *as if* it were ordered so as to favour the realisation of the rational ends of human subjectivity (Kant 1991a: 52, 41, 52–3; Kleist 2000: 40–1, 34, 38).

Kant's aesthetic judgement then cannot be reduced to evaluating actions on the basis of whether or not they conform to the moral law. Revealing the prospect of a favourable history, it instead kindles the sense of the human potentials to struggle 'with ourselves and the world' (Jaspers 1962: 98) towards the realisation of universal human freedom. In this purpose, however, it encounters a contradiction in that the fight for freedom for everyone must 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). Kant assumes this ambiguity in his 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 public criticism of any existing law or measure (Kant 1991b: 55; 1991c: 84–5; 1991b: 55–7, 59). Taste's communicability thereby strives to affirm the human capacity for political action – not in the sense of 'producing' freedom, but of furthering the conditions under which individuals 'gradually become increasingly able to *act freely*' (Kant 1991b: 59; Kleist 2000: 124–5).

Nonetheless, Kant's wariness of pre-given substantive principles of communicability paradoxically leads him to a 'naturalised' conception of common sense, based on a vision of a universally shared 'cognitive apparatus' (Ferrara 2008: 25–8). As such, judgement assumes that any differences of opinion can only arise out of mistake or ignorance. It eliminates any genuine conflict or moral dilemmas under the presumption that, if only able to exercise their freedom, human consciousnesses will finally meet in the harmony of ends (Kant 1991b: 84). Moreover, the appeal to an *a priori* principle of purposiveness reintroduces the transcendent notion of human subjectivity, capable of *knowing* the higher purpose of history according to which the particularity of politics is to be ordered. While Kant warns against '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)' (Kant 1991d: 117, 112–13). Appealing to human 'self-seeking inclinations' as a force that compels them to create a civil state, taste posits a form of providence that helps produce, so to speak behind our backs, the ends of morality and reason. This temptation risks forfeiting the significance of human judgement 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 of the Hegelian bent to portray history itself as amenable to the subject's powers of moral determination (Kleist 2000: 130–3).

Historical Consciousness and the Breakdown of Eternal Standards

In contrast to the abstractness of Kant's philosophy, Hegel conceived of human subjectivity and judgement as historical datums, concretely situated in particular contexts and oriented to realising their ends in the course of a historical process. Absorbing all particular events into the all-embracing dialectical movement of the World Spirit, however, Hegel's cunning of (practical) reason also came to signify the end of history. Even so, the increasing awareness of the historicity of human existence brought forth the ultimate demise of all transcendental, ahistorical standards of judgement that continued to animate the imagination of both Hume and Kant. As perhaps most clearly evident in Nietzsche and Marx, judgement becomes an inherently political affair, inevitably posing the challenge of how to face up to the particularity of the world and the reality of plural others without external points of support. The ambiguity of judgement, in other words, appears as an explicitly *practical* quandary, concerning the human capacity for engaging the world in action, its involvement in relations of power and the structural forces of inequality. Yet the growing complexities of judgement also exposed all the more clearly the lingering philosophical ineptitude to adequately tackle them, beaconing a sense of the full-fledged crisis in modernity.

Nietzsche's insight into the ambiguity of political judgement stems from his awareness of the profound crisis of modern consciousness – what he calls the present reality of nihilism. For Nietzsche, the crisis of judgement manifests itself in the irreversible loss of 'absolutes' that used to provide individuals with a sense of value and meaning (Roodt 2001: 326). His pronouncement of 'the death of God' not only denotes the demise of transcendent values; it 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). Nietzsche traces the modern crisis to the philosophers' contempt for the changing and contingent worldly reality and the consequent penchant for placing faith in a higher world as its cause or purpose. With the collapse of the supersensuous world the loss of

meaning came to haunt also the sensual, appearing world (Bowie 2003: 291–2). Nietzsche (2005: 171) writes with typical 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!*'

Nietzsche's critique of the determinant conception of political judgement runs parallel to his engagement with Kant's critical project. On the one hand, he praises Kant for setting limits to human reason, rendering judgement a matter that is concerned with the world of appearances. On the other hand, he also blames Kant for leaving his critical project unfinished, establishing judgement as judgement of phenomena only to ultimately ground it in an 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, and recognise the appearing world as 'the only world there is' (Guignon and Pereboom 1995: 108–9).

To this end, Nietzsche reinterprets the human judging ability as perspectival knowledge. Like Kant before him, he resorts to the model of aesthetics, but turns from Kant's emphasis on disinterestedness towards a focus on free creation (Zangwill 2013). Perspectivism contains an acknowledgement that any judgement is only meaningful as an *interpretation* – revealing a particular aspect of an object as it appears from a particular point of view that we occupy in the world (Nietzsche 2006a: III, §12, 86–7; Fairfield 2011: 10–12). Here, the impossibility of reaching ultimate truth also grounds the possibility of assuming our freedom to create value on the ground of a world shorn of inherent meaning. Nietzsche 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 do not approximate to a teleological exercise with an already known result. They reflect a creative, transcending movement of a human subjectivity, oriented and conditioned by our sensual and embodied, interested and practical engagement in the world (Doyle 2008: 202–4; Nietzsche 1997: 76–7).

The recognition of judgement's subjective, situated character does not amount to an embrace of arbitrariness or relativism. As Nietzsche (2006a: III, §12, 86–7) elaborates, '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). Perspectival judgement reveals that all natural and inevitable systems of morality themselves are results of contingent histories, within which there lurk subtle attempts at domination and well-hidden hierarchies of power (Nietzsche 2002: I, §187–8, 77–9). Exposing the arbitrary origins and oppressive effects of conventional moralities, Nietzsche's aesthetic judgement liberates the space for the appearance of different and resistant values previously dismissed or pronounced as dangerous (Ferguson 2007: 13–14).

Nietzsche further elaborates on the situated and ambiguous character of judgement in his efforts to reclaim the pre-Socratic insights into the political significance of tragedy (Nietzsche 1999). His tragic aesthetic sensibility discards the traditional notion of a 'free' subject that would pre-exist the process of forming a judgement (Ferguson 2007: 12–13, 16; Nietzsche 1968: III, §485, 268–9; Roodt 2001: 329). Portraying the subject as split, multiple and plural, it furthers a performative view of identity. It envisions the human judging ability as an incessant poetic activity of self-invention, of courageously facing up to the chaos, heterogeneity and complexity of reality, while aware of the tragic nature of our aspirations (Eagleton 1990: 250–2). Unable to provide any ultimate answers to the riddles of human existence, our judgements 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* conception of communicability or universal agreement (Ferguson 2007: 12–13). In the search for communal standards, Nietzsche discerns a desire to escape the vagaries of human existence into the haven of one's inner self – a refusal to entertain the difference of political life and recognise in oneself the 'validity of another's judgement' (Eagleton 1990: 237; Roodt 2001: 329; Strong 1988a: 163). Severed from others and the world, this solipsistic penchant represents

'the actuality of nihilism', prone to yield to 'a naked admiration for success' and 'an idolatry of the factual' (Strong 1988a: 163; Nietzsche 1997: 105). Nietzsche's aesthetic judgement, instead, is inherently intersubjective in that it always already 'takes us outside ourselves' (Ferguson 2007, 14, 12; see also Strong 1988a: 162; Owen 2008: 121–3). It brings to light the relationship between the deed, actor and spectators, inviting a plurality of different selves to participate in the process of creation, communication and contestation of meaning, and binding them together in the production of new worlds. Eschewing the possibility of final reconciliation, it assumes the uniqueness and tragedy of human action that always reaches beyond any given form of human commonality, into the unforeseen and the extraordinary (Roodt 2001: 342–3).

The political significance of Nietzsche's worldly judgement, however, is stymied by his interpretation of perspectivism 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 is reduced to the human life-enhancing capacity, the pursuit of power as an end in itself (Fairfield 2011: 16–17; Eagleton 1990: 247–8, 255–7). Heidegger, notably, found in Nietzsche's will to power a new metaphysical principle that submits the whole world to the subject's sovereign powers of instrumental control and domination. In agonistic readings, in contrast, will to power characterises the relationality and incessant power play between diverse perspectives, which remains resistant to an overarching synthesis (see Schrift 1996: 330, 339–44). Despite conflicting interpretations, perspectival judgement oriented by the principle of will to power retains a strong focus on individuals' potentials of fashioning the 'material' of the world, while 'underplaying' its untameable character and the way it may limit the determining aspirations of the subject (Strong 1988b: 234–5; Fairfield 2011: 21–3). This lingering trace of subjectivism is especially evident in Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence. The problem of the tragedy of human action is here resolved by an affirmation of everything that happens with the pronouncement of 'thus I willed it' (Nietzsche 2006b: 110). As Nietzsche argues, aesthetic, perspectival judgement becomes a means 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). The doctrine of eternal recurrence then signals an attempt to provide an ultimate answer to the ambiguity of human existence by submitting it to the higher, necessary law of Being. What gets obscured is precisely the intersubjective and unpredictable character of politics – along with the political significance of making judgements, sharing them with others and confronting moral dilemmas (Strong 1988b: 267, 281).

Nietzsche's insights into the worldly ambiguity of political judgement as it stems from human embodied existence, as well as the eventual impasse he lands in, are echoed in Marx's contribution to the topic. Like Nietzsche, Marx conceives of the perplexity of political judgement not as an epistemological quandary, but as a problem of human *praxis*, our practical engagement in the world (Dupré 1980: 93–4; Habermas 1972: 35–6). In the (in)famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, he exclaims: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it' (Marx 2000a: 173). In Marx's reinterpretation of Hegelian dialectics, the operation of judgement is conceived as a situated activity, both suffused by the material, structural forces and power relations ruling our worldly environment, and capable of going beyond the given situation and changing it (Dupré 1980: 93).

Like Nietzsche, 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 principle of abstract equality, they obscure the structurally entrenched sources of oppression, and work to keep the majority of the world's population under the yoke of necessities of material survival, incapable of realising their full human potentials (Booth 1993: 252). True emancipatory judgement must start from human beings' 'sensuous, individual, immediate existence' (Marx 2000b: 64). Its aim should be to liberate individuals not as abstract citizens, but as real human beings, in their empirical existence, their day-to-day lives, work

and relationships (Eagleton 1990: 209–10). If Nietzsche's recognition of the ambiguity of political judgement appealed 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. It introduces the additional challenge of how to establish collective forms of resistance and work to refashion the material conditions of human life (Eagleton 1990: 202–3).

In Marx the goal of political judgement and action mirrors the 'aesthetic' concern with the realisation of human capacities as an end in itself, but it is also an end tethered to an instrumental conception of human *praxis* (Eagleton 1990: 201–3, 206–8). Certainly there is considerable disagreement on the role that the Marxist dialectics assigns to morality and thought itself – in particular whether they, as superstructural factors, should be seen as merely reflective of the forms of economic activity (Dupré 1980; Nielsen 1987). Nevertheless, emancipatory judgement remains rooted in the needs of the working body and the process of material production, themselves developing in accordance with the natural laws of history. The human judging capacity is reduced to instrumental reasoning, fastened to a new universal law, which is no longer a regulative idea guiding action as in Kant, but assumes the form of an inevitable historical process, embodying the progressive realisation of humankind (Dupré 1980: 115–16; Eagleton 1990: 205–6, 212–13, 226–7). Marx's awareness of the situated character of political judgement and the collective nature of human action, paradoxically, reintroduces the traditional philosophical conception of the self-sufficient subject. This variation of the 'absolute ego', as Habermas (1972: 44) observes, appears in 'the more tangible productive activity of the species'. What is thereby again collapsed is the space for critical reflection, obviating the need for intersubjective communication to evaluate not only how human potentials can best be realised, but also the proposed conception of the end of self-realisation itself (Eagleton 1990: 224–5). Marx's perspectival judgement, 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. Thus conceived, judgement ultimately betrays Marx's affirmation of the human capacity for action, the ends of which cannot be known or determined in advance if it is to remain a living, creative practice of transcending the given (Dupré 1980: 107).

Marx's and Nietzsche's attempts to confront the modern lack of standards of judgement then neglect Kant's recognition of the interdependent relationship between thought and the outside world, as well as the limits that this 'antinomy' imposes upon human reason. Ultimately affirming the freedom of judgement outside the intersubjective realm of political affairs, they end in an impasse, eliminating the human capacities of action under inevitable forces or laws of movement. This predicament of the withering of the space for critical judgement was explicitly recognised 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, they argue, that in the end developed into an instrument of repression and domination (see e.g. Horkheimer 2002; Roberts 2004; Kaufman 2000).

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, the leading forerunners of twentieth-century existentialism. Their distinct insight is to think the modern crisis of judgement explicitly as symptomatic of the crisis of human existence – an urgent question of thought's meaningfulness as at once a concern in which our existence itself is at stake (Reynolds 2006: 20–1; Murungi 2006: 443–4; Dodd 2004: 46–8). Husserl and Heidegger 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. They trace the crisis in modernity to the traditional philosophy's inability to come to terms with the ambiguous interrelationship between human consciousness and world. In their efforts to respond to the ambiguity of political judgement, they call for a radical rethinking of traditional ways of relating to the world.

For Husserl, the modern crisis is not a predicament limited to a specific field of scientific enquiry nor to any definite sphere of human activity. It represents a crisis of philosophy or thought in general, which endangers the distinctively human character of our existence. As Husserl has it, it is a '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' (Husserl 1970b: 273). Under attack is a species of rationalism imported from natural science (inclusive of the historicist approaches), envisioning judgement as an act of a detached mind that reduces the whole world, and human subjectivity itself, to a set of logical, natural and inevitable causal laws (Moran 2008: 403–8). This 'naturalist' rationalism glosses over the primordial purpose of thinking as a human ability to make sense of experience and endow the world with (a human) meaning (Husserl in Dodd 2004: 29–30). Drawing a picture of the never more rational(ised), yet also increasingly 'objective', reality, judgement leads to a situation of exile, where the world has become 'incomprehensible' and 'uninhabitable' from the human standpoint (Dodd 2004: 37–9).

To reinvigorate the human judging capacity, Husserl rejects the absolute subject of traditional metaphysics, and views human consciousness as 'consciousness of the world', or 'world-consciousness' (Husserl 1970a: §28, 109, 103). This means that consciousness is always intentional or *of something*, that it always intends an object in the world. In response to the crisis, Husserl thus institutes a phenomenological approach to theorising, which makes the relationship between human consciousness and the world, and the fundamental structures that underpin this relationship, into

an explicit focus of study (Solomon 1980: 1–4). Echoing the contours of Kant's critical project, however, Husserl rejects his dualist metaphysics and his lingering penchant for objective knowledge. *Meaning*, for phenomenology, emerges only from consciousness's direct encounter with the world, seeking to describe appearances or 'things themselves' without previously formed theoretical standards or presuppositions (Solomon 1980: 24–5).

Husserl's phenomenology aptly acknowledges the ambiguity of (political) judgement. Distancing itself from the scientific desire for certainty, it recognises consciousness as always already enmeshed in a given 'lifeworld', which as a historically constituted, intersubjective horizon of meaning shapes all experience, judgement and action (Husserl 1970a: §9, 50–2; 1973: §6–9, 27–40). Evoking the ancient conception of *doxa* or opinion as opposed to knowledge, Husserl envisions judgement as an activity that starts from our pre-reflective belief in the givenness of the world (Husserl 1970a: §5, 12–13; §44, 155–7). As a horizon of our understanding, the givenness of the world does not possess the clarity of an object of knowledge in-itself, but is ambiguous. It presents itself 'in the form of a question to be both formulated and addressed', motivating and orienting the human quest for a meaningful world (Dodd 2004: 155, 150–3). To assume this ambiguity, Husserl resorts to the procedure called reduction or *epoché*. Reduction refers to the process of bracketing 'the natural standpoint', 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 pre-given theoretical or practical interests, judgement contains a reflective movement of capturing the previously concealed meaningfulness of the world as '*a phenomenon*' (Husserl 1970a: §41, 152; Dodd 2004: 175–9, 188–91). Just as our situatedness in a lifeworld constitutes the precondition of all judgement, it is then also only a subjective movement of consciousness that makes possible the seeing of things as things in and of this world (Dodd 2004: 34–7). It is not as if the subjective element to our judgements would be a hindrance that would need to be controlled, but is itself constitutive of a meaningful, worldly realm of human, lived experience (Dodd 2004: 150–3, 155, 175).

Disclosing the interdependent relationship between consciousness and the world, Husserl points to the political significance of conceiving judgement as a reflective practice. For as an activity that is not exhausted in the search for correct knowledge, judgement contains the movement of a life and illuminates the way of a distinctively human existence. In its awareness that meaning must be constantly created, Husserl's reflective judgement shapes the sense of the relevant histories and pasts *as ours* and discloses a field of future possibilities. Perpetually questioning the merely obvious or the established, and subjecting its results to careful scrutiny, it kindles 'a sense of and for the meaningful to provide a context of thought and action in which it can unfold' (Dodd 2004: 31). It poses ever anew the question of who we are, a concern most relevant precisely in moments of crisis, when established ways of judging and understanding are put in question (Dodd 2004: 18–23, 31–2).

Nevertheless, it is precisely this humanising import that is obviated in Husserl's primarily epistemological focus. Ultimately, the goal of Husserl's method of reduction is knowledge, 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 contains the echoes of the traditional rational subject. In the form of a 'transcendental Ego', it purports 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, Husserl misses the point that the situated character of judgement also means, as Merleau-Ponty (2002/1962: xv) has argued, that it can never embrace the totality of itself and world. Despite its ground in the lifeworld, the judging subject's quest for essences ultimately removes it from the realm of human plurality and of intersubjective, shared experience. The public, objective world, for instance, is posited to emerge from an *a priori* harmony between human consciousnesses. It is not based on the negotiation of a plurality of perspectives on the world, but on a presupposition of a singular, common structure of human experience (Husserl 1970a: §57, 202; Mohanty 1995: 71–4; Moran

2008: 222–8; Keller 1999: 45–58). Abstracting from the mutu-
ally constitutive interrelationship of subject and world, Husserl
also ends up obscuring the possibilities for individuals' practical,
transcending engagement in the political realm.

This rationalist bias leads Heidegger to discern in Husserl's phe-
nomenological approach vestiges of the fundamental flaw plagu-
ing 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 tra-
ditional metaphysical tendency within philosophy itself (Guignon
1993: 5). Going as far back as Plato, this tendency manifests itself
in the predominance of the theoretical attitude, finding an indubi-
table ontological foundation in the primacy of mind, *cogito*, or the
subject that thinks and knows. Within this framework, judgement
proceeds by imposing upon concrete, singularly existing things a
set of determinant concepts and substances – while missing a more
fundamental question of what it means for them to exist in the
first place (Elliott 2005: 69, 75–8; Dahlstrom 2010: 403–4). For
Heidegger, this flaw is of no small importance because it overlooks
the way of being that is properly human.

In contrast to the traditional quest for essences, Heidegger
draws on the Greek notion of truth as disclosure, 'uncoveredness'
or 'unconcealment' of being (Heidegger 2001: §44, 256–63; Hei-
degger 1993b: 117–19, 125). Reaching for an alternative way of
philosophical enquiry, he envisions thinking as a quest for mean-
ing. The purpose of judgement should be the disclosure and (self-)
understanding of one's concrete, worldly existence, which corre-
sponds to one's being-in-the-world or *Dasein*, a primordial struc-
tural unity of human and world (Heidegger 2001: §39, 225; Badia
2006: 223–4). Heidegger here expands on Husserl's recognition of
the indissoluble relationship between human and world, offering
an attenuated grasp of the ambiguity of (political) judgement. Hei-
degger's unity of being-in-the-world allows for an understanding
of the human judging ability as grounded in our practical engage-
ment 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', preceding the ratio-
nalist attempt to make the world present as a transparent object

of a cognitive gaze (Heidegger 2001: §15, 98–102; Dahlstrom 2010: 403–4). In this practical comportment towards the world, judgement is underlain by a pre-reflective understanding of our worldly existence as temporal and historical. As Heidegger (2001: §32, 188, 192) writes, all judgement, interpretation and evaluation is 'grounded existentially in understanding' as a field of socially and historically shaped presuppositions, meanings and relationships. This forestructure of understanding comprises our particular worldly situation, which can never be made fully transparent and constantly appeals to our capacities to take it up as ours, render it explicit, judge, evaluate or clarify it (Reynolds 2006: 35; Dahlstrom 2010: 404–8).

Following the path charted by Husserl, Heidegger portrays the situated character of our judging ability as the condition of seeing judgement as a 'task' of making the world and the past our own, and assuming the distinctively human, or 'authentic' way of being (Dahlstrom 2010: 408–9). In our everyday being-in-the-world, this sense of judgement gets 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 endow *Dasein* with a sense of security, yet also alienate its possibility of turning its being into an issue (Badia 2006: 224–5). The dismantling of traditional metaphysical categories, in this respect, opens the space for *Dasein* to recognise that its being does not correspond to the manner of being of a (pre-determined and eternal) substance or a thing, but is *free* (Hinchman and Hinchman 1984: 190). This recognition, for Heidegger, is brought forth in the existential experience of anxiety (Badia 2006: 226). In anxiety, *Dasein* is confronted with its 'thrownness' into the world, which, now robbed of the coherence bestowed upon it by the established standards, 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). Yet anxiety also confronts *Dasein* with 'the nothing', the finitude and contingency at the heart of its being, which allows it to assume itself as a potentiality of existing differently in the future (Heidegger 1993a: 103–6; Badia 2006: 229). It is its very worldliness, its 'thrownness' into a world that eludes its complete

mastery, then, that enables *Dasein* to assume its freedom and creatively engage and endow with meaning the particularity of the world. Judgement as creative disclosure means that the subject's 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 further foregrounds the political import of human reflective judging capacity in that the ambiguity of judgement is no longer conceived as a problem of knowledge, but explicitly recognised as a '(proto-)ethical' issue of human choice, action and responsibility (Solomon 1980: 30; Elliot 2005: 102). Evoking Aristotle, Heidegger distinguishes practical judgement from *techne*, the 'productivist' model of knowledge that, grounded in the metaphysics of substance, conceives of (human) action as realisation of a pre-given end or *telos* (Tchir 2011: 59–61). Heidegger's practical judgement, in contrast, enables the disclosure of an individual, unique 'who', affirming the potential of a distinctively human existence (Tchir 2011: 60–1; Badia 2006: 229).

Yet Heidegger ultimately envisions authentic judgement and existence to proceed by a distancing from the public realm of the many. The (authentic) activity of judging is based on a solitary 'resoluteness' of *Dasein* 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). 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 intersubjectively shared, public world (Tchir 2011: 64–5). The main concern is an essentially metaphysical quest for an ultimate ontology, a (self-)transparent view of the modes and possibilities of being. Abstracting from the particularity and plurality of (human) reality that *Dasein* depends on for a meaningful existence, Heidegger's judgement ends up forfeiting human freedom in front of a new homogenising given (Eagleton 1990: 310).

This troubling tendency is especially evident in Heidegger's later turn towards *Gelassenheit*, or the attitude of 'letting beings be'. Tracing the crisis of judgement to the modern triumph of instrumental reason, Heidegger envisions an 'authentic' alternative in the disposition of refraining from engagement in the things of this world so as to guard 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 subjectivise being, Heidegger rejects his earlier insight into the political character of judgement as a creative projection into the future. The aesthetic judging sensibility metamorphoses into an attitude where *Dasein* becomes a passive medium through which the history of being can reveal itself (Heidegger 1993c: 227, 240–1; 1993b: 124–7; Eagleton 1990: 299, 301, 310–11; Guignon 1993: 15; Elliott 2005: 119, 122). Yet, in this way, the pervasive alienation from the world in modernity is countered by an ultimate renunciation of the human capacities of judgement and action. The Truth of Being increasingly assumes the form of a divine destiny, unfolding independently of human control or understanding (Heidegger 1993c: 222–3; Eagleton 1990: 299–301, 306; Guignon 1993: 21).

Husserl's and Heidegger's insight into the modern crisis of judgement as a profound predicament endangering the distinctly human way of being leads them to confront the ambiguity of political judgement as it arises from our situated existence itself. They draw attention to the political significance of conceiving judgement as a reflective, worldly activity. Even if they ultimately fail to relate their judgement to the vagaries of the political world, their thought contains the theoretical prerequisites for rethinking political judgement as an activity responsive to our plural and contingent political reality.

Concluding Thoughts

The chapter traced how the increasing recognition of the complexities of politics inspired efforts to rethink political judgement on the model of aesthetic practice. With different emphases, aesthetic sensibility illuminated the ambiguity of political judgement

as a situated activity of confronting the particularity of the world and different others without prefabricated standards of thought. Yet the recognised 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 inter-subjectively shared political realm. The chapter pointed to how this obstinate penchant neglected the interdependent relationship between human consciousness and world – and obliterated the significance of the human capacities for judgement and action under necessary, given laws. The examination of both the promises and inadequacies contained in the historical engagement with the topic revealed the political import of judgement as an activity in which the distinctively human, free and situated character of our political existence itself is at stake. Thus it signals the paramount political significance of the existential thinkers' aesthetic attempts to rei-magine political judgement as an activity capable of responding to the 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 unearthing the political import of the existential aesthetic judging sensibility by engaging Sartre's and Beauvoir's existentialist visions of the situated condition of human political existence. The analysis of each thinker opens with a brief biographical preface, focusing on their practical ethical and political engagements. Tracing their insights into the roots of modern crisis, the chapter next draws on their critiques of the abstract notions of truth and knowledge and examines their attendant turn to the mode of aesthetic judgement. It discloses how their aesthetic sensibility illuminates political judgement as a creative, communicative practice of world-disclosure that confronts us with our responsibility for the world, and appeals to our capacities of engaging it in action. Building on this initial exposition, the chapter delves into Sartre's and Beauvoir's increasing recognition of the worldly perplexity of political judgement arising from the weight of oppressive structures and forces that frustrate any easy assumption of freedom. It discerns how their narrative judging sensibility becomes oriented towards grasping the complexity of a given political reality and confronting the uncertainty and tragedy of 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, and earned his *agrégation* in 1929.

Shortly after, he started work on what was to become one of the most prolific philosophic and literary careers of the twentieth century (Thody 1971: 25–6). It was also around that year that he met Simone de Beauvoir, who became his personal 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. His radical ideas 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, which led 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 political realities 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. He also attempted to establish a non-communist left-wing alliance, Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire (RDR), which would bring together the struggle for freedom and social equality (Aronson 2004: 103; Howells 1988: 98). The movement's failure, as Beauvoir (1965: 6) notes, 'gave Sartre a lesson in realism'. Later Sartre placed greater emphasis on the actual possibilities for change within constraining historical circumstances, which 'forced him to choose' the communist side of the Cold War divide (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 embodied 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 (Ungar 1988: 8, 15–16). As Sartre writes in his autobiographical novel *Words*, however, the process of leaving behind a realm of ideas is 'a cruel, long-term business' (Sartre 2000b: 157). Despite his efforts to sink into the real world, his perspective betrays

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). His engagement with the contradictions of political affairs both discloses the human significance of rethinking political judgement as a worldly ability, and uncovers the difficulties involved in such an enterprise.

The Modern Failure of Absolutes and the Experience of Absurdity

Sartre characterises the modern crisis of judgement as the pervasive spread of meaninglessness brought forth by the demise of traditional absolutes. In his first novel, *Nausea*, he conveys this experience with a vision of 'metaphysical doubt' that overwhelms its hero, Roquentin. The 'metaphysical' experience of meaninglessness comes from the realisation that things exist and just that, without meaning or purpose, in their superfluity and arbitrariness, that '*behind them* . . . there is nothing' (Sartre 2000a: 176–85, 140). What breaks down are all forms of knowledge and morality that seek to endow appearances with a necessary and justified being, a 'given' purpose or function. In a world shorn of meaning, Roquentin realises that his existence, too, lacks an ultimate justification, that he exists for Nothing and Nobody, facing a freedom that is so absolute that it resembles death (Sartre 2000a: 241, 223). For Sartre, Roquentin personifies the nauseating experience of the fundamental absurdity of human existence: the contingency of human life that is no longer provided with 'a given that it is *for*' (Sartre 2000a: 185; Barnes 1992: 23). While the breakdown of traditional poles of judging certitude may seem to make possible a freedom to 'do anything', this freedom remains empty as it can furnish no reason to prefer one course of action over another. As Roquentin comments: 'I go out. Why? Well, because I have no reason for not going out either' (Sartre 2000a: 146). The significance of human judgement and action is lost.

Sartre traces the modern crisis of judgement to the advance of the abstract or what he calls 'analytic' reason, associated with the tradition of rationalism and (bourgeois) humanism (Sartre 1988a: 263). The mark of analytic reason is to imprison human beings within their pure intellect, at a remove from the world of political affairs

(Anderson 1993: 5). From this position, it claims for itself the ability to reach a realm of abstract, universal categories and essences, standing above the reality of human affairs. Political judgement, accordingly, is conceived as a determinant exercise in 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). In this way, however, the human judging ability gets caught in the lures of what Sartre (1992a: 57–8), in *Truth and Existence*, calls an 'idealist' or abstract type of truth. Idealist truth resembles a self-enclosed and self-referential 'totality of all knowledge', while shedding its basis in and actual engagement with reality (Sartre 1992a: 57–8). As Sartre (1992a: 57–8) says, it refuses to '*see*', and is only capable of producing 'statements about Being without contact with Being'. Aiming for absolute knowledge, idealist political judgement grew increasingly distant and in the end completely detached from real problems of human situated existence (Sartre 1992a: 58).

Universal moral standards provided assurance that 'nothing important will ever happen anymore', not least the twentieth century, and that humanity was 'advancing gently towards perfection' (Sartre 2001a: 111–12; 2000b: 111). Yet idealist political judgement found itself helpless and without any adequate tools to confront reality when the completely unforeseen events at once abruptly situated it in the flux of history. For Sartre, it was unable not 'only to solve but even to formulate the problems [it] intuited obscurely' (Sartre 1988a: 263). Hiding behind the illusory idealism of universal human rights, the 'best minds' were perplexed at the continued existence of poverty and injustice, and observed with awe the emergence of class struggle (Sartre 1988a: 263). Abstract morality conceived of human beings as rational, autonomous and isolated subjects, in possession of freedom as a 'metaphysical endowment of "human nature"' – while obscuring their situated existence in the world and the concrete dynamics of oppression (Sartre 1988a: 262, 264; 2000a: 131–2; see also Howells 1992: 324). But what for Sartre ultimately discredited idealist judgement was not only this somewhat benevolent ineptitude to relate to the real. It was 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 the 1848 French Revolution, in the bloody suppression of the workers' revolt. Then, the idealist conception of political judgement renounced the privilege 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 abyss of meaninglessness, Sartre insists, we need to salvage political judgement from the clutches of the, at best, ineffectual and at worst harmful universalism of bourgeois morality. An adequate conception of political judgement must aim to liberate humans not as abstract substances, but in the concrete 'totality' of their worldly being (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 political action (Anderson 1993: 51).

Judgement as a Creative Practice of World-Disclosure

To rethink political judgement, Sartre rejects the traditional subject–object dichotomy and the accompanying penchant for conceiving of human beings as primarily knowing beings. Instead, he affirms the fundamental ontological condition of human existence in Heidegger's being-in-the-world. In his appropriation of Heidegger's notion, however, Sartre emphasises 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). To illustrate this relationship, he draws upon Husserl's idea of intentionality, his claim that 'all consciousness is consciousness of something'. In Sartre's hands, this insight indicates that consciousness, in itself, is Nothing, and so alone able to relate to and judge the world as something which it is not (Anderson 1993: 5; see also Sartre 2010).

This structural gap within human consciousness grounds Sartre's understanding of freedom as an inescapable fact of the human condition, as well as his conceptualisation of judgement as free creation (Sartre 2003: 62–3, 239, 241; 2007: 38).

In contrast to the object-like existence of things – what Sartre calls an in-itself way of being – the nothingness at the heart of human consciousness informs the awareness that human beings are free. As Sartre says, they exist in the mode of for-itself, of constantly engaging the world as it is given and transcending it towards non-existent ends. While we are deeply enmeshed in our facticity, 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 vision of the human condition repudiates any attempt to ground our judgements on values 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 lies in human freedom. On this basis, Sartre envisions 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).

This means judgement becomes a reflective act of world-disclosure, rather than knowledge strictly speaking. It is a creative practice of a human consciousness that, in its transcending movement, '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 existence because it affects 'the temporalisation of Being' (Sartre 1992a: 5). As Sartre notes, judgement makes the 'rich and undifferentiated raw material' of reality appear as a meaningful past, and in this way reveals the world as a field of future possibilities (Sartre 1992a: 18–19). The model of aesthetics foregrounds the human character of political judgement that is not reducible to detached contemplation or technical calculation. It corresponds to 'consciousness' *means* of existing', embodying and offering support to human lived engagement in the world (Sartre 1992a: 46–7).

Thus construed, 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 the judging subject is conditioned by the worldly environment and so can only unveil being from its particular perspective on the world and in light of its free projections into the future (Sartre 2003: 503–27). As a practice of a finite, situated being, creative judgement can never achieve a completely transparent view of the world nor fully predict the outcomes of its judgements (Sartre 1992a: 65, 72–3, 9). Any desire to flee this ambiguity amounts to a form of 'bad faith', a temptation to deny either of the two constitutive elements of our existence in order to become a self-identical, substantial, absolute being. For Sartre, bad faith amounts to attempts to endow our judgements and actions with a determined foundation, while relieving ourselves of the anguish of choice (Sartre 2003: 70–94, 640–3; Cox 2006: 8–9, 39–40, 91, 116; Anderson 1993: 16). The model of aesthetic judgement, in contrast, is well suited to confront the ambiguity of situated freedom because it is based on an attitude of what Sartre calls 'pure reflection'. This is an attitude where we abandon the desire for personal salvation, to becoming our 'own self-cause', and instead commit our freedom to the salvation of the world – to a ceaseless creation of meaning and value on the ground of the undifferentiated in-itself (Sartre 2003: 640, 647; 1992b: 515; Anderson 1993: 54–6; Howells 1988: 37). Aesthetic judgement, for Sartre, then contains a willingness to engage and disclose the particularity of the world with courageous lucidity, yet accept the fact that its creations are 'human, not divine' (Sartre 1976: 90; Anderson 1993: 58).

This should not be taken to mean that our creative judgements amount to a lapse into mere subjectivism (Sartre 1992a: 7, 67). 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 recognised as such (Sartre 1992a: 67; 1960: 172; 2001a: 39, 35). As Sartre writes, the revealed truth must not 'remain the property of the unique absolute-subject'. It is a specifically 'interdividual phenomenon' and is only meaningful if it is given and recovered by another (Sartre 1992a: 9, 7, 75). Judgement as aesthetic practice embodies the realisation that in the world devoid of absolute standards, it is others alone who can endow our particular disclosures with value and make meaningful

our freedom (Sartre 1992a: 7; 2001a: 35). The practice of judging 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. They need to create what is disclosed *for themselves*, assume responsibility for it and decide on the course of action with respect to it (Sartre 2001a: 46, 28–38; 1992a: 42).

Yet, because they are free, human consciousnesses are ontologically separated or, in other words, plural. Once I give my truth to other freedoms, 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. 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. I can only reach their 'being-as-object' and their 'probable existence in the midst of the world', degrading them from their existence as subjects (Sartre 2003: 326, 281). While my totalising grasp of the situation alienates what used to be their possibilities in the world, the others can always reapprehend themselves as free subjects and objectify me in turn (Sartre 2003: 286–9, 310–13). Informed by the attitude of pure reflection, aesthetic judgement assumes this ambiguity arising from human plurality. Rather than clamouring for a final unveiling, a 'dead' truth, it wills the truth to live in its being a 'commitment for the other' (Sartre 1992a: 12, 67). Predicated on recognising others as freedoms, it commits to the constant sharing and communication of its truths to others (Sartre 2001a: 39, 35).

Sartre's creative sensibility 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 a 'moral imperative' for everyone (Sprintzen 2004: 22). It is a matter of an ethical choice between actively facing reality and assuming the related responsibilities or fleeing reality and the responsibility that it implies.

Responsibility for the World and Judgement as Praxis

During and especially after the Second World War, Sartre became increasingly preoccupied with the concrete worldly constraints imposed upon the realisation of human freedom as envisaged by his ideal of pure reflection (Sprintzen 2004: 21). In this period, his insights into the political significance of judgement as creative disclosure receive an embodiment in his call for committed writing. This appeal entails 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. It represents Sartre's attempt to reclaim the moral, human import of political engagement and carve out a possibility for a 'third force' between capitalism and communism (Sartre 2001a: 172, 176, 184).

In *What Is Literature?*, Sartre argues that literary works, in particular prose, are of utmost political importance because they have the capacity to reveal the concreteness and particularity of our lived experience (Goldthorpe 1992: 147). The writer is always situated in time and in a particular historical reality, and therefore always already implicated in and responsible for the given situation in the world (Sartre 1988a: 251–2, 279). If this holds for every human being, it is especially true of the writer. This is because writers use words not as objects that please or displease in themselves, as in poetry, but primarily as designations for worldly things, actions or events (Sartre 2001a: 5–8). For this reason, as Sartre (1988a: 252) says, 'every word [they] utter has reverberations. As does [their] silence.' The writers' mission is to engage their freedom to disclose the things of this world, and so move events or situations 'on to the plane of reflection' and into the intersubjective, human world (Sartre 1960: 169–70). Their judgement 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 literary commitment 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

prefigures the irresponsibility of art for art's sake. For Sartre, it 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. Sartre's understanding of the political significance of aesthetic judgement is not based on the literary ability to describe, narrate or explain, which implies 'acceptance' and 'excuses everything' (Sartre 2001a: 224). The proper purpose of literature is 'praxis' (Sartre 2001a: 224). Disclosing the world in its particularity, it opens the possibilities of changing it and should kindle in its readers their concrete powers of political action (Sartre 2001a: 224).

The humanising import of creative judgement reveals the dangerous political implications of confronting the world with abstract moral standards. Adopting the perspective above history, idealist judgement represents a bad-faith attempt to diminish its relationship with the world, and, by extension, deny its freedom and responsibility to engage it in action (Sartre 1992a: 28, 33, 38–41). Similarly, Sartre rejects the historicist or realist tendency to define a given end of political action and 'blindly accept' the means necessary to realise it (Sartre 1960: 180–2). What he resists is a temptation to read history as an objective law of movement, which likewise presupposes a capacity to assume a standpoint outside and above historical struggles. The problem is that this temptation renders political action into an instrumental practice and reduces human beings themselves to mere means to be used in order to achieve an already determined end. Instead, Sartre (1992a: 80) argues, 'we must make ourselves historical against a mystifying history'. The proper purpose of political judgement is to define 'our "end of history" within a larger history', to engage *our* particular and human world. This orientation, however, implies a recognition of our limited view of the future and a willingness to assume the risk that, in the midst of the world and plural others, our actions might produce 'infinite' consequences – to the point of destroying the very end pursued (Sartre 1992a: 10, 73–4).

Writers' creative judgement confronts this complexity by appealing to the readers' freedom to judge the present and its injustices from the 'viewpoint of the City of Ends' (Sartre 2001a: 225–6; 1960: 172). The writers should do this by detaching

themselves from their personal concerns in a movement of self-reflection and transforming their emotions into free, generous or 'selfless' emotions (Sartre 2001a: 41). These correspond to 'Kantian good will': they take as their aim to always treat plural others as free equals, as ends and not as means (Sartre 2001a: 208–9). In this way, aesthetic judgement aims to inspire the readers to convert the 'imaginary' freedom and community that they experience in the act of reading into a demand for concrete freedom and social justice. They are to strive for 'an objective modification of the historical situation' and work towards the establishment of a socialist democracy as a realm of universal human freedom (Sartre 2001a: 123, 209–11; 1960: 175).

While Sartre's aesthetic sensibility acknowledges the ambiguity of the political world, it fails to sufficiently explore the problems that this ambiguity poses for the exercise of political judgement (Goldthorpe 1992: 143). Sartre recognises the situated character of free judgement, emphasising 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' (Howells 1988: 23). Yet he also strongly emphasises 'the transparency of consciousness', its capacity for detachment from its embodied, practical situation and its ability to reach a transparent view of the world (Howells 1992: 336; Sartre 2001a: 205; Anderson 1993: 7, 20–2). As Goldthorpe (1992: 143) notes, his aesthetic judgement 'seems to lead to a confrontation of thesis and antithesis, in which the opacity of the situation is recognised on the one hand, and its intelligibility is simply asserted, against all the odds, on the other'.

Sartre's aesthetic attempt at rethinking political judgement then retains a presupposition of the rational subject. It is concerned less with confronting the complexity of our plural political existence than with resisting the 'evil' 'unintelligibility of our finite condition' and reaching a comprehensive grasp of 'the broken totality' (Murdoch 1980: 50–1, 55). Sartre, for instance, recognises the importance of acknowledging a plurality of diverse standpoints and approaching through them the 'multi-dimensionality' of situations or events (Sartre 2001a: 239–40). Nevertheless, he posits the reconciliation between different perspectives to occur based

on the universal human capacity for freedom, regardless of the particular situational factors that may shape and alienate it. Further, his 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 (Kruks 1995: 86). It is thus incapable of moving beyond the vision of a plurality of separate absolute subjects. It falls short of an account of intersubjectivity and of the general situation, capable of providing a 'concrete factual basis' for collective political action and objective transformation of repressive political structures (Beauvoir 1965: 45; Kruks 2001: 42; 1995: 86; Pilardi 1999: 34–5).

Indeed, Sartre himself soon came to see this aesthetic vision of politically committed judgement as overly idealistic, failing to pay sufficient attention to the pervasive situational restrictions placed upon the exercise of human freedom. For the later Sartre, the political significance of aesthetic judgement lies not so much in its ability to communicate clear ideas, teach and change the world. Recognising that the writer is as conditioned by the social world as the readers, Sartre leaves behind his earlier faith in the free emotions' ability to realise a happy 'symbiosis' between them (Sartre 1983b: 278, 273–5). Rather, the importance of aesthetic sensibility rests in its unique capacity to approach the lived experience of another person, at once characterised by the irreducible singularity and revelatory of the broader historical context (Goldthorpe 1992: 164; Howells 1988: 144). The work of art is a manifestation of the totality of human being-in-the-world, in all its richness and opacity, that cannot be approached through concepts 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 of the approach of comprehension, through which he aims at an account of political judgement capable of engaging the concrete reality of repressive political structures.

Confronting 'the Vanity of Morality with the Efficacy of Praxis'[1]

Later Sartre shifts the focus of attention to objective, material, human-made structures – the so-called practico-inert – that both

constrain and enable human action and represent 'the necessity of freedom' (Sartre 2004b: 489). He draws on the framework of Marxism as the only philosophy of today that 'takes [human beings] in [their] totality – that is, in terms of the materiality of [their] condition' as its point of departure (Sartre 1968: 175). To confront the field of alien and alienating historical, political forces, Sartre writes, human beings must reach consciousness of history as a realm of common human *praxis* (Sartre 1968: 88–90). To this end, political judgement must assume the form of dialectical reason, and interpret the plurality of meanings and actions in history in light of 'a future totalisation' – the end of universal human liberation (Sartre 1968: 90). Yet it must be careful not to succumb to Marxist historicism, the tendency to make of the movement of history 'the object of an absolute Knowledge', while again missing the ambiguity of political action (Sartre 1968: 175). The challenge of judging should be taken up through the existential, situated, aesthetic sensibility called understanding or 'comprehension' (Sartre 1968: 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 totalisation. It accordingly refrains from eliminating particular perspectives and actions too quickly by subsuming them under *a priori* frameworks and ideas. Rather, it involves a dialectical movement, 'an enriching cross-reference', between the singularity of individual experience and the broader processes that situate the individual within a class, a society and a history (Sartre 1968: 148–54). Sartre's understanding in this way allows a grasp of plural others as subjects – not abstract freedoms, but embodied, situated and acting beings. Disclosing both how their actions were conditioned by the objective situation and the way they assumed and responded to the given, it approaches them in their 'lived surpassing' (Sartre 1968: 153–4; see also Kruks 2001: 120). As Sartre notes, understanding reveals others 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 it does not entail simply adopting the others' goals, it thus also discloses an

'inner bond linking our singularities' (Sartre 1983a: 167–8; see also Sartre 1992b: 276–96). While affirming the others' difference, it enables us to recognise them as our equals and points to the possibility of transcending conflict towards mutual reciprocity and engagement in each other's projects (Sartre 1968: 167–72; 1983a: 167–9; Goldthorpe 1992: 154–5). Nevertheless, judgement's ability to grasp the general situation and disclose the possibilities for political action is based on the perspective of future totalisation, delineated in line with the overarching framework of the historical dialectic. As Sartre (1968: 30–1) observes, '[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 totalisation in process'. Aesthetic attentiveness to the plurality of the world then remains subordinate to the emphasis on identifying the general structures of oppression, and the ends of emancipatory political *praxis* (Aronson 2004: 172).

Sartre's conception of political judgement as dialectical reason offers insight into the structural violence of the capitalist and colonialist systems, showing how they keep certain groups of people in the state of subhumanity. It indicates how oppressive structures maintain themselves by transferring responsibility from individuals to seemingly objective 'demands' imposed upon them by the system (Aronson 2004: 205; Sartre 2001b: 55–61). Thereby, it not only reveals how such systemic factors can blind us to our complicity in the perpetuation of injustice, creating 'prefabricated crimes that are only waiting for their criminals' (Sartre in Aronson 2004: 205). It also draws attention to the ways in which repressive political forces can significantly limit the range of possible choices for resistance. Indeed, Sartre's account is particularly alert to the fact that the remaining scope of freedom can become 'the most terrible burden, for it carries with itself a concomitant responsibility' (Howells 1988: 91; see also Sartre 2001b: 66).

Responsible politically committed judgement requires of us to assume responsibility for the oppressive relations, engage ourselves 'in every one of the conflicts of our time', and each time take the side of the oppressed (Sartre 1983b: 254). Sartre repudiates the claims of 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). Because they assume the standpoint of a 'ready-made' or 'completed' universality, Sartre (1983b: 249, 261) says, false intellectuals thwart 'the effort of various particularities towards universalisation'. Forgetting that the universal moral values are in fact a product of particular class interests, they in effect hinder the attempts of the oppressed to liberate themselves, and make themselves an accomplice of the established order (Sartre 1983b: 253, 260–1). For Sartre, the humanist moral condemnation of suffering and oppression is futile because it falls short of questioning and transforming '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). As such, it cannot reject violence *a priori*. On the contrary, the means employed in action should be judged from the perspective of the desired end. 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). It should be noted that 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 (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 specified conditions (Anderson 1993: 127–8; Aronson 2004: 280). The rule of judgement contained *within* the end of liberation – what Sartre calls 'the morality of praxis' – here refers to his attempt at controlling revolutionary action so as to avoid its degenerating into dynamics of systemic oppression (Bowman and Stone 1992: 167–8).

Sartre's 'political realism' should 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

humanising purpose of political action. It must 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. The purpose is to preserve the space for critical reflection and continually evaluate concrete actions in light of the end pursued (Anderson 1993: 127). Nonetheless, recognition of the irreducible plurality of political affairs does not lead to moderation that is characteristic of the ancient tragic confrontation between the protagonist and the forces beyond his control. Sartre's judgement instead is predicated upon the acceptance of 'contradictions' and aims for a conclusive transcendence of the conflict as 'a unitary supersession of opposites' – which, in accordance with the dialectical movement, is 'creative of further contradictions' (Sartre 1983b: 263–4; Howells 1988: 81). It is in this sense that political judgement must come to terms with the fact that constraining political realities will often confront our freedom with the necessity of making a clear-cut choice between being either a victim or a perpetrator (Sartre 2001b: 66).

Sartre's dialectical notion of political judgement represents a worthy attempt to confront the deeply ingrained structures of violence and oppression that cannot be dismantled by individual effort. Yet his embrace of the intelligible framework of the dialectic also presupposes that it is possible to internalise all of the contradictions and ambiguities of a given situation and reach a totalising response (McBride 2004: 245). His efforts to 'unify theory and practice' through committed judgement rest on 'deeply essentialist conceptions of agency and history' that again risk reducing the human reality of political action to technical realisation of a pre-given end (McBride 2004: 245; Isaac 2004: 257). On this point, Sartre was harshly criticised 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, 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 (Merleau-Ponty 2000: xxxvi–xxxix, 187–8; 1974: 186–94). Sartre's 'law of a "transcendental *praxis*"'

(Merleau-Ponty 2000: xxxi) reduces the plurality and complexity of human existence to the struggle between antagonistic dualities. Endowing one side with the mission to free the world and destining the other to oblivion, it precludes the possibility of a mutually enriching engagement and communication between different standpoints. In Sartre's own words, it can all too easily justify 'many things, if one tries to change a few of them' (Sartre 2004a: 147; see also Merleau-Ponty 2000: xxv; 1974: 185–6).

Sartre's aesthetic efforts to liberate political judgement from the confines of abstract moral absolutes then betray a remnant of the rationalist disregard for the complexity and ambiguity of the political world. 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 generally recognised as the founder of modern feminism, was born in Paris in 1908 (Tidd 2009: 11). She studied philosophy at the Sorbonne, becoming one of the pioneering women to enter a predominantly male profession, earned her *agrégation*, and later taught at various *lycées* for girls (Tidd 2009: 32–3).

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). Only recently has she gained increasing recognition for making an original contribution to existentialist thought and political theory more widely. Already in Beauvoir's student diary we can discern a pronounced sensitivity to the fundamental ambiguity of the human condition. Her thought is distinct for its awareness of the essential interdependence between human freedoms and a highly original literary approach to human reality (Beauvoir 2006: 66, 162–5, 256–8, 279). Both elements crystallise in an account of political judgement that provides us with a compelling alternative to the inadequacies of Sartre's model.

Beauvoir was largely apolitical before the war, but the experience of collective suffering immersed her in history. Developing the political implications of her view of the human condition, she grounded the exigency of solidarity with others on the need for 'mutual *recognition* of consciousnesses' (Beauvoir 2009a: 43, 319–20; 1973: 470). The post-war years 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; 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 (Tidd 2009: 120–3; Shelby 2006: 101–6; Caputi 2006: 109–26). Later she lent her support to a number of initiatives of radical feminists and also engaged in the thorough study of society's oppressive attitude towards its elderly population (Tidd 2009: 140–50; Beauvoir 1996). Until her death in 1986, Beauvoir honoured the role of a committed intellectual, determined to publicly denounce the cases of injustice that plagued her world.

Traditional Disregard for the Human Condition of Ambiguity

Ambiguity is the core notion of Beauvoir's ethical and political thought, and represents the foundation of her attempt to rethink political judgement as a worldly practice. As in Sartre, it 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 (Beauvoir 1948: 7). Beauvoir traces the modern breakdown of absolute standards to the traditional philosophical penchant for trying 'to mask' this fundamental truth of the human condition (Beauvoir 1948: 7).

Like Sartre, Beauvoir attacks the rule of abstract idealism and its tendency to conceive of political judgement as application of universal moral principles. Predicated on the assumption of being able to rise above its concrete worldly existence, the idealist

conception of judgement encloses humans within 'pure subjectivity' (Beauvoir 2004c: 177). It enjoins them to obey a set of preordained duties that are seen as a matter of 'inner necessity', irrespective of the concrete circumstances of political action – and signifies an escape from worldly concerns into the haven of one's 'virtuous soul' (Beauvoir 2004c: 177). Unable to account for the complexities of political affairs, it places the necessarily risky and impure character of political affairs 'forthwith outside of ethics'. As such, idealist judgement effectively furthers a realist understanding of politics as the pursuit of ends inscribed in reality, while eliminating the freedom of judgement under the 'objective' 'necessity of things' (Beauvoir 2004c: 177). The fateful move, however, occurs in modern times when political judgement becomes conscious of the fact that '[humans] themselves are their own end' and finds in this claim the 'objective justification' for political action (Beauvoir 2004c: 181). Once the end is determined and depicted as an absolute, 'all means [are] relative to the end' (Beauvoir 2004c: 181). Political judgement is reduced to a technical matter of calculating the means necessary for the achievement of a pre-given goal, implying a willingness to sacrifice everything, even humans themselves, to the realisation of that end (Beauvoir 2004c: 181–2; 1948: 48–9).

Beauvoir then delves deeper into the modern malaise than Sartre, disclosing how abstract moral standards became perverted in the rise of the teleological understanding of political judgement and action. Seeking to realise in politics the reign of absolute ends, teleological political judgement ultimately exposed the fallacy of approaching the plural world with abstract constructions conceived in the mind of an individual thinker (Moynagh 2006: 14; Holveck 1995: 70–1). The unprecedented assertion of human powers in modernity brought to light to an unprecedented degree the fundamental ambiguity of political judgement. This ambiguity refers to the experience of an increasingly tragic discrepancy between the human capacities of 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. (Beauvoir 1948: 8–9)

To face up to the ambiguity of politics, Beauvoir, like Sartre, rejects all 'reasonable metaphysics' and 'consoling ethics' of traditional philosophy (Beauvoir 1948: 8, 13–14). She dispenses with the traditional conception of political judgement as an abstract, rational exercise that, itself untrammelled by worldly reality, would seek to subdue the particularity of the world under gratifying theoretical constructions (Kruks 2012: 124). Like Sartre, she 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, totalising power of consciousness, Beauvoir's orientation is distinct for its sustained attention to the judging subject's situatedness in the world and its entanglement in relationships with others (Beauvoir 2004b: 160–3). Her heightened regard for the situated character of human existence translates into a greater attentiveness to the lived experience of arriving at a judgement that escapes philosophical elucidation (Kruks 2012: 130). She seeks to reinvigorate the human judging ability as a literary, narrative practice of recognising and responding to the complexity of our lived reality and the particularity of diverse others (Beauvoir 2004d: 275).

Confronting the Ambiguity of Political Judgement as Free Creation

To assume the ambiguity of the human condition, Beauvoir's judging subject must adopt the attitude of so-called 'conversion'. Following the example of Husserlian reduction, conversion involves a suspension of all metaphysical claims about the ultimate truth of the outside world, along with the underlying desire to reach self-coincidence or a necessary, god-like way of

being (Beauvoir 1948: 12–14; Holveck 1995: 73). Liberated from the quest for complete knowledge, judgement is conceived as a situated, practical activity in which the subject transcends itself towards as yet non-existent goals, and in this upsurge endows with meaning the phenomenal reality of the political world. As 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. It 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 assume our responsibility for the world and others (Beauvoir 2004c: 180–1, 188, 176).

In detaching itself from the world, however, human freedom is never 'a pure for-itself', a nothingness opposed to the givenness of the in-itself, as for Sartre (Beauvoir 2004b: 163). It resembles 'a hollow' or 'a fold', mirroring 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). Shying away from the 'Cartesian ghost' lingering in Sartre (Butler in Simons 1995: 258), Beauvoir offers a subtler understanding of the constitutive ambiguity of political judgement. She is mindful of how our reflective judgements are 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). A situated activity, political judgement can never reach a complete, lucid grasp of the situation as an object in-itself. It discloses a world that is at once familiar and mysterious, 'at one moment translucent, at another utterly opaque', encompassing multiple aspects that can never be fully mastered by the rational mind (Beauvoir 1965: 276; see also Pilardi 1999: 118–19; Zakin 2006: 32). While in judging we get a hold of (particular aspects of) the world and 'root' ourselves in it, as Beauvoir (2004b: 162–3) writes, 'the same movement' also distances the world from us, pushes it away 'to the always inaccessible horizon of [our] experience'.

Beauvoir's insight into the incompleteness of our judgements draws her 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 recognise our disclosures and thereby affirm our freedom. As Beauvoir (2004a: 140) writes, human consciousnesses 'support each other like the stones in an arch, but in an arch that no pillars support'. While our judgements always transcend the given towards new possibilities, it is also only on the ground of the world already endowed with a plurality of human significations that our disclosures gain meaning. And while other freedoms present different perspectives and take 'the world away from me', it is also only others who can take up our judgements and in this way hold the future open for us (Beauvoir 1948: 71; see also Bergoffen 1995: 183–4). Inversely, an individual's refusal to engage with the perspectives of others and consider their judgements constitutes an attempt to deny or alienate their freedom. By reducing another to the way of being of a mere object, that individual is excluded from the human world, destining him or herself to the existence of 'a thing among things' (Beauvoir 2004a: 132–3).

The intersubjective character of our judging ability provides our political actions with both 'limits' and 'content': they must seek to recognise 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). Political judgement must respond to the ambiguous dynamics of intersubjective recognition that eschews the possibility of a conclusive, universal agreement. For Beauvoir, judgement becomes a practice of constantly communicating our perspectives, truths and values to others and appealing to their freedom. Judgement as appeal to others, in turn, implies a willingness to put ourselves in danger before them, and to consider their judgements in turn (Beauvoir 2004a: 129, 133, 136). This insight into the inherently communicative character of political judgement is of utmost political significance because it foregrounds the human import and ambiguity of politics as a sphere of freedom, plurality and action.

Beauvoir's insight into the interdependent relationship between human freedoms exposes the troubling political consequences of both idealist and teleological types of political judgement. Relying on universal moral principles, idealist judgement may well be able to recognise others as freedoms and absolute ends of political action, yet can only do so in abstraction from their concrete, situated existence. Thus, it cannot but miss the worldly constraints imposed upon their freedom and is incapable of conceiving of concrete goals of liberation. Worse still, as Beauvoir writes, evoking the example of conservative bourgeoisie, it easily lapses into mere 'realist' utilitarianism. For based on guarding given universal values, it excludes differently situated perspectives from the realm of the legitimate exercise of freedom and reduces them to the manner of mere material, thing-like being (Beauvoir 2004c: 182). The workers' struggle for justice, for instance, is interpreted as an expression of natural needs to be met by charity or aid, while denying the element of human freedom contained in their demand for bread (Beauvoir 2004c: 182–3). But the struggle against oppression cannot be reduced to mere 'instinctual movement'. It embodies a human value; it expresses an idea that workers have of themselves and contains a demand 'for all others' (Beauvoir 2004c: 183–4). As Beauvoir observes, politics '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).

The teleological, historicist type of judgement recognises 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' (Beauvoir 2004c: 183; 2004a: 136). In this self-contained movement, it risks reducing differently situated others to mere means, again excluding them from the realm of political action and betraying the very value of solidarity it had sought to affirm. What it veils is the ambiguity of political action, which, if it is to remain free, is 'by definition' a transcendence towards

as yet non-existent ends and must engage the world and separate others without 'ready-made answers' (Beauvoir 2004c: 179, 181, 187). For Beauvoir, in contrast, the challenge of political judgement lies in recognising others in the ambiguity of their situated existence, as both free and also deeply embedded in the intersubjective world. The purpose is not to take the others' freedom as 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, we should not be guided by the desire 'to fulfil the other', to make our judgement 'the foundation of his [or her] being' (Beauvoir 2004a: 121). Our judgements should aim to disclose the world in a way that opens 'possibilities' for the free engagements of others and reveals grounds for solidarity and collective action (Beauvoir 2004a: 121–4).

Beauvoir confronted this challenge of intersubjective recognition through a novelistic, literary approach to political thinking. It is the distinct feature of narrative sensibility to bring to light and communicate the complexity 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). Literary imagination is of political import because it appeals to the readers to engage 'with a movement of [their] entire being' in the same 'work of creation' (Beauvoir 2011b: 294; 2004d: 270). They are invited to participate in the same process of reflecting, doubting, choosing and taking sides, which characterises the lived reality of literary characters (Beauvoir 2011b: 294; 2004d: 270). Beauvoir, however, warned against the temptation to turn a story into a vehicle for expounding a prefabricated idea, a doctrine or lesson, questioning the persistent rationalist bent of Sartre's committed writing. If the novelists assert their subjectivity in too sovereign a way and force their conclusions upon the reader, she held, they impoverish the very world and its ambiguity that they were supposed to disclose and betray the literary purpose of 'genuine communication' (Beauvoir 2004d: 270–2).

For Beauvoir, the writer's ability to communicate 'the density of the world' could be greatly enriched by employing multiple viewpoints. As she writes in her reflections upon her own writing

practice, the promise of literature lies in 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' (Beauvoir 2011a: 198–9; 2011b: 284–7). By this she means that narrative engagement with individuals' lived experience in its particularity and plurality at the same time points to a more general meaning of our worldly existence. It enables humans to recognise 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). For Beauvoir, literary judging sensibility thus acts as 'the privileged place of intersubjectivity', supporting a vision of politics based on the mutual recognition of human freedoms as plural equals (see Beauvoir 2011a: 199–201). This is because, by mediating between ourselves and the world and diverse others, it allows us to venture out of our standpoint and entertain the perspectives and situations of others without eliminating their difference (Beauvoir 2011a: 201; 2011b: 287–8, 296). It discloses a common ground on the basis of which plural individuals can communicate 'in what separates [them]', and affirm solidarity across diverse perspectives (Beauvoir 2011a: 199–200).

It was this narrative focus 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 men's and society's absolute Other (Beauvoir 2009: 12, 5–6). While man is put in the position of the free subject, the values and structures of patriarchal society have reduced women to mere immanence, to a given body or their function as a mother or a wife. Beauvoir does not confront this oppressive situation with a realm of universal moral standards.

Abstracting from the particularity of individuals' embodied, situated existence – in denying that women exist as a distinct group – such a perspective would amount to a 'flight' from reality and thwart the possibilities for emancipatory political action (Beauvoir 2009b: 4; 1973: 165–6). Instead, Beauvoir's narrative judging sensibility undertakes a systematic exploration of the multiple and varied examples of women's lived experience. This allows for an understanding of women's general situation in the world, evincing how it constrains the possibilities for women to affirm their freedom, without 'enslaving them to a timeless and deterministic pattern' (Beauvoir 1973: 166; see also Beauvoir 2009b: 289, 766–7). On the one hand, Beauvoir's narrative engagement exposes that women's immanent existence does not constitute a natural fact, but corresponds to an instance of oppression established by what human society has made out of female embodiment (Beauvoir 1973: 367; 2009b: 6–13, 16–17).[2] On the other hand, it reveals their situation as a source of powerful constraint that is not caused simply by individual bad faith. Individual practices of misrecognition, on the part of both men and women, are conditioned by a broader field of social values and practices which cannot be changed by any individual effort, but require collective political action (Beauvoir 2009b: 776; Kruks 2001: 43–5).

Illuminating individual experience in their broader meaning, Beauvoir's narrative judging sensibility also discloses the possibilities for change. In contrast to Sartre, however, it refuses to 'view the truth behind "reality" in terms of a synthesis', and tie the promise of emancipatory political action to a totalising teleological law of *praxis* (Kruks 1995: 88–9; Beauvoir 1973: 488; Simons 1995: 248–51; Vintges 1995: 49; Moynagh 2006: 26). Beauvoir, for instance, refused to subsume women's struggle for emancipation under the general framework of class struggle and was less than convinced that the realisation of the socialist society could by itself bring about gender equality (Beauvoir 2009b: 776–7). By revealing to women commonalities in their situation, Beauvoir's judgement discloses the contours of a new, potentially revolutionary 'we' and appeals to their capacity to transform the oppressive conditions, both individually and collectively (Shelby 2006: 98; Moynagh 2006: 21–3, 12). This solidarity is not based on

the given or 'essential' oppressed identity, which traditionally has been used to justify injustice. It emerges from a dialogue between varied perspectives; rather than eliminating different voices under an assumed collective, it opens the possibility of collective action across gender, class, ethnic or racial divisions (Marso 2014: 253–4). Importantly, Beauvoir's plurivocal focus resists attempts to reduce the world to the struggle between two opposing poles, displacing the pattern of the unfruitful polemic between feminists and 'masculine arrogance' (Beauvoir 2009b: 15, 770–1). It invites both men and women to assume the ambiguity of their situation with 'lucid modesty' and acknowledge that, while different, they also are essentially interconnected and interdependent through their common worldly reality (Beauvoir 2009b: 774, 779–80).

Political Judgements of Probability, Risk and Sacrifice

Nonetheless, Beauvoir's attentiveness to the contradiction, plurality and complexity of the world led her to refrain from regarding the mutual recognition of human freedoms as a panacea for the world's evils (Zakin 2006: 33–41). Her insight into the ambiguity of 'freedom within constraint' incites awareness of the outrageous fact that some situations might compel us to use violence to further the cause of liberation. As she states: 'Whenever persuasion fails, only violence remains to defend oneself' (Beauvoir 2004a: 138).

Shorn of the security of Sartre's dialectic, Beauvoir's judgement 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 views political action as 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. It affirms the interdependency of means and ends as inseparable moments of human action (Beauvoir 2004c: 186). This insight coalesces 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; 1948: 153). Inversely, 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: 185). Parallel to her emphasis on the mutual recognition between human freedoms, Beauvoir maintains that political action proceeds 'only on the basis of givens, of corporeal presences', which means that the pursuit of freedom will require treating others as instruments or even obstacles (Beauvoir 2004c: 189–90). For a politics to be valid, she claims, 'it must first and foremost be successful', foregrounding the need for judgement to be attentive to issues of 'opportunity and efficiency' (Beauvoir 2004c: 180; 1948: 89).

Beauvoir confronted this ambiguity of political action with the advent of the Algerian war. She was firm in her denunciation of colonial injustice and supported the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*, National Liberation Front), an organisation fighting for an independent Algeria. Determined to intervene in public debates, Beauvoir agreed to commit herself to the cause of Djamila Boupacha's defence. In her essay written in support of Djamila, she engages sympathetically with the young woman's lived experience of torture and rape by the French army. She reveals in the singular instance a broader system of oppression that the French state instituted beyond its 'democratic' borders, and appeals to the French public to assume responsibility for the injustice committed in their name (Beauvoir 2012b; 1965: 500–4). Structural violence of colonialism, for Beauvoir, cannot be adequately confronted by mere moral condemnation of torture and violence. It 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 she writes, there exists a single, clear-cut choice: either you align with the victims or 'take sides with the torturers' (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 conditions of oppression. This judgement, in turn, 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 (Beauvoir 1948: 96–155; 1965: 340–1; Langer 2003: 100).

In this respect, Beauvoir's narrative judging sensibility comes 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. In contrast to Sartre, however, Beauvoir affirms the necessarily partial, probable and uncertain character of our judgements. Her 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 (Beauvoir 2004c: 190). By implication, Beauvoir's narrative judgement upholds the 'unique and irreducible value' of each particular event or individual, affirming the reality of sacrifice involved in judging politically (Beauvoir 1948: 107). A decision to 'kill only one [human being] in order to save millions', she writes, brings into the world 'an absolute outrage'. It cannot be relegated to the status of a stage or a contradiction in an overarching teleology, cannot 'be compensated for by any success', 'be overcome or remedied' (Beauvoir 2004c: 190). This means that 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' (Beauvoir 1948: 133, 150). At the same time, political judgement must reconcile itself to risk and the possibility of 'failure', 'defilement' and 'horror' that attends the reality of worldly engagement (Beauvoir 2004c: 190).

Dispensing with Sartre's faith in the ultimate reconciliation between humans and world, it is the distinct contribution of Beauvoir's narrative sensibility to assume the ambiguity of political judgement. As she insisted, 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 engage the realm of political affairs, rather than fleeing it in the traditional dream of moral purity – 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 exposes the distinctly human import of political judgement, bringing us face to face with the situational complexities of political action and responsibility.

In particular, this chapter examined the potentials of their narrative judgement to tackle the plurality and opaqueness of political reality that necessarily stands beyond the completely transparent grasp and determining powers of the subject. It showed how Sartre's efforts to confront the perplexity of judging politically ultimately ended in an embrace of historical necessity, yielding the human capacities of action in front of the inevitable force of the given. Sartre's solution, in turn, was contrasted with Beauvoir's greater attentiveness to the intersubjective, plural and uncertain character of political judgement. The analysis of her narrative judging sensibility revealed both the possibilities of confronting the ambiguity of politics through mutual recognition between a plurality of human freedoms as well as the unavoidable spectre of tragedy and sacrifice involved in judging politically. Sartre's and Beauvoir's accounts of political judgement thus invite a sustained analysis of how to kindle the human capacities of coming to terms with and resisting the unavoidable failures of politics.

Notes

1. Beauvoir (1965: 242).
2. Beauvoir's distinct contribution 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 (Kruks 2001: 47–51).

3 Camus and Arendt: Confronting the Ambiguity of Political Judgement and Illuminating the Limits of the World

Responding to the recognised tragedies of the world of political affairs, this chapter turns to Camus's and Arendt's existential orientation which nevertheless resists the conventional world-view of 'existentialism'. In their efforts to understand the breakdown of traditional standards of thought, it unveils a deeper recognition of the dangers of nihilism and excess that accompany the situated ambiguity of political judgement. In turn, it discerns in their aesthetic sensibility a heightened sense of the need to creatively confront the plurality and complexity of the world, rather than resign to the logic of inevitability and failure. The chapter first engages Camus's 'artistic' sensibility, beginning with a brief biographical overview of his ethical and political 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. Camus's artistic judgement, it is argued, faces up to the conflicts and injustices by refusing the 'necessary' choice between 'victims and executioners', and striving to reveal the common ground for dialogue between a plurality of human freedoms. The chapter next brings into view Arendt's distinctly political existential orientation. Critically surveying the existing interpretations of her 'existentialism', it re-examines Arendt's account of political judgement in light of her phenomenological–existential commitment to coming to terms with ever-changing worldly reality. It reveals how her reworking of Kant's account of aesthetic judgement further illuminates the

humanising import of Camus's dialogic sensibility, foregrounding judgement as a specifically political ability of representative thinking, offering support to a vibrant public sphere.

Albert Camus

The thought of Albert Camus is characterised by a thoroughgoing rebellion against traditional philosophy's taste for abstract reasoning and system-building. In this rebellion, Camus rejected the label of philosopher altogether, and counter-posed to the ways of thinking, prevalent in the Western tradition of political thought, the sensibility of an artist (see Camus 1995g: 239; Camus in Todd 1997: 408). It was his profound 'distrust of ideas' that led Camus to distance himself not only from traditional philosophy but from existentialism as well. This intellectual current, 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 both the tragedy *and* beauty of human existence in the world of the dead god 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 this voice got somewhat obscured. While acclaimed for his artistic talent, Camus was largely disregarded as a political thinker worthy of the philosophical canon (Novello 2010: 3). Recently, however, Camus has been praised for providing a peculiar ethical and political orientation that – while defying 'conventional theoretical labels and methods' – is of continued significance to the dilemmas of contemporary political life (Hayden 2013b; Isaac 1992: 15; 2004: 267; Zaretsky 2010; Srigley 2011; Sharpe 2015a).

Camus was born in Algeria in 1913, into a 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; Sprintzen 2004: 37). From the beginning, then, and even though he became friends with Sartre, Beauvoir and a wider group of

Parisian intellectuals, Camus was an outsider to the idealist tradition of French philosophy as well as to the atmosphere of Parisian intellectual life (Sprintzen 2004: 32–6). Political engagement, on the other hand, came to him 'much more naturally', seeing no need for prior philosophical elucidation (Aronson 2004: 25). At the age of twenty-two, he joined the Communist Party and became 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 communism. After the Communist Party renounced support for the cause of Arab rights in order to create the widest possible coalition against fascism, Camus refused to follow suit and got expelled in 1937 (Aronson 2004: 25). This refusal to place strategic 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. A year later he became editor-in-chief of the clandestine newspaper *Combat*, which embodied 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) challenged both ideologies that dominated the political sphere after the war and led to a hostile public confrontation with Sartre, whose support for the communist movement at that time reached its peak (Sprintzen 2004: 19–27). Until his tragic death in a car accident in 1960, Camus persisted in his struggle to carve out a space beyond the politics of ideological denunciation, silence and contempt that he saw devouring the human world.

Humanity in 'the Prison of its Crimes'[1]

Like Sartre and Beauvoir, Camus conceives of the modern crisis of judgement in terms of 'a human crisis' or 'a crisis in human consciousness' (Camus 1946: 21–2). He exposes its core in the experience of absurdity confronting an individual abandoned amidst a universe 'divested of illusions and lights' that used to provide reasons for judging and acting (Camus 1991: 6). In Camus, however, this metaphysical account is more firmly grounded in the historical account of the unprecedented horrors of the twentieth century.

At the roots of his explorations into the modern predicament lies a simple question: how could it be that 'the death or torture of a human being' could 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 1946: 22)?

The answer springs forth in the first pages of *The Rebel*:

> 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. (Camus 1971: 11–12)

What is most troubling is not so much the sheer horrendousness of the crimes but the fact that they were made '*reasonable*', justified by some or other doctrine of humanity that they were believed to help further (Camus 1971: 11–12). Such a 'perversion of values' cannot be adequately dealt with by attributing the modern excesses to a number of 'criminal souls' and envisaging, after their downfall, a happy convalescence (Camus 1946: 22; 2004: 205). Like Sartre and Beauvoir, Camus traces the modern breakdown of traditional absolutes to the contradictions plaguing the humanist tradition of political thought. 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 the spirit of history that permeates twentieth-century Marxism (Isaac 1992: 68).

Camus illuminates this tradition and its failures by enquiring into the problem of rebellion. Rebellion is a specifically modern problem that arises when individuals repudiate the authority of the divine order and decide to take their destiny in their own hands (Camus 1971: 26). For Camus, the modern crisis of judgement stems from the fact that moderns have not been able to adequately address Nietzsche's challenge of nihilism.

Having 'killed' traditional deities, 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). Modern humanist thought remained within the Platonic–Aristotelian metaphysical tradition, grounded upon the subject–object dualism and 'will to truth'. Its conception of political judgement was predicated upon the unlimited confidence in the powers of human reason to reach the underlying essence or telos of things (Isaac 1992: 69, 73; Novello 2010: 7). It thereby yielded to a nihilist tendency to reduce human existence to mere inert material to be transformed in accordance with an abstract finality – posited either in heaven or at the end of history (Camus 1971: 61). For Camus, this tendency was politically troubling because it could not but fail to account for the particularity, plurality and uncertainty of human worldly being. Rather than enlarging the scope of human freedom, it ended up 'incarcerating' humanity in new 'reasonable' deities (Camus 1971: 74).

Camus 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. Political judgement was to proceed as application of the principles of formal virtue, formulated in accordance with the universal laws of (human) nature and supposedly embodying the general will of the people (Camus 1971: 84–93). The attempt to realise within the human world the reign of absolute virtue transformed any form of dissent into vice that could only be cured by extermination (Camus 1971: 93–4). As demonstrated by the French revolutionary Reign of Terror, it led 'with implacable logic, to the republic of the guillotine' (Camus 1971: 94). Camus was even more horrified by the teleological conception of judgement permeating the rise to prominence of philosophies of history. Rejecting the abstractness of Enlightenment reason and morality, this conception purports to know the course of history and envisions truth and justice to reach their essence only at its end. In this way, however, these values '[cease] to be guides in order to become goals', which also means that there is no standard that could help us judge the means required to attain these goals (Camus 1971: 103–4). Denouncing

the hypocrisy of abstract bourgeois morality, teleological judgement falls into the opposite extreme. It implies the willing acceptance of errors and 'painful stages', and amounts to a justification of impurity (Camus 1971: 105, 107).

The modern crisis of judgement then refers to the atrophy of the human capacity for judgement under the weight of what Camus calls the 'cult of efficiency and abstraction' (Camus 1946: 22–4). Proceeding as application of absolute, pre-determined ends, political judgement becomes 'no more than a calculation' based on the criterion of success rather than human dignity (Camus 1971: 104; 1946: 22–5). The humanity in human beings is submerged under an official function or doctrine, which transforms individuals into mere 'cogs in the machine' or, alternatively, into inert waste material to be disposed of at will (Camus 1946: 22–4; 1971: 152). To dispense with this 'murderous' way of political reasoning and confront the modern crisis, Camus invites us to look upon the world from the point of view of the artist.

Sensibility of the Artist is Born: The Absurd

Camus formulates the ambiguous condition of political judgement after the breakdown of traditional verities as the awareness of the absurd. As he compellingly argues in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the absurd sensibility springs from the 'confrontation' of the human cry for meaning, the need to understand and unify the world in accordance with human purpose, and the irredeemable silence of the world that is bound to remain forever unreasonable (Camus 1991: 17, 28, 49). The absurd is 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 therefore is characterised by an indissoluble bond between humans and the world that both binds and separates them at the same time. On the one hand, the bond conveys the realisation that human life cannot be endowed with a higher purpose and a sense of strangeness brought forth by the break in familiar ways of being in the world. On the other hand, it denotes our embeddedness in the world as an indispensable horizon of experience that we cannot shed or do without.

The absurd condition of human existence depicts the ambiguity of political judgement in terms of the awareness of the limits of human reason – the inability of thought to ever penetrate to the ultimate truth of reality. A situated activity, judgement must abandon the traditional philosophical 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). Dispensing with all metaphysical absolutes, theoretical constructions and systems of morality, the awareness of the absurd opens the possibility of reimagining political judgement on the model of artistic sensibility (Camus 1991: 21, 43). In line with the 'phenomenological' challenge to the foundationalism of traditional philosophy, Camus's artistic judgement entails a commitment to engaging the world in its particularity and plurality, while aware that its meanings are human and therefore provisional (Camus 1991: 89; see also Hayden 2013b: 198–9). As Camus (1991: 51) writes: 'What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms.' Yet Camus's attentiveness to the limits of human reason also disputes the underlying mode of thinking grounding the traditional quest for essences that neither Sartre nor Beauvoir seriously questioned. He remains wary of the instrumental logic, enslaving human freedom to a concern with measuring, ordering and utilising the world in accordance with future ends (Camus 1991: 57–8; Novello 2010: 93). In response, his artistic sensibility is grounded upon taking pleasure in the independent existence of the world, in its untameable richness and ambiguity, 'in all its splendour and diversity' (Camus 1991: 65). It revels 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).

Camus portrays the absurd condition of political judgement in *The Stranger*. We meet Meursault, an office clerk, who lives his life satisfying the physical needs of the present moment, indifferent to the norms and ambitions of society. When he learns of his mother's death, he shows little sadness or grief. Returning from her funeral, he reflects that 'after all, nothing had changed' (Camus 2000: 28). When his lover, Marie, asks him if he loves her, he replies that 'it

didn't mean anything, but that I don't think so' (Camus 2000: 38). As Camus (2000: 118) writes in the *Afterword* to the novel, Meursault refuses to 'play the game', renouncing any standard or principle of judgement that would make him say 'more than is true' or 'more than [he] feels'. At the same time, he displays a self-less attentiveness to and kindness towards people's feelings and concerns, even if these acts show no discernment between different standpoints or values (Camus 2000: 36–8). This inarticulate impression of the absurdity of human existence assumes the level of conscious understanding in the second half of the novel, after Meursault, without any apparent reason or premeditation, kills an unknown Arab at the beach.

When the judge asks him to specify his motives for the crime, he replies 'it was because of the sun' (Camus 2000: 99). Meursault is condemned to death, not only or even primarily for the crime he committed, but for showing no remorse and so for ignoring the 'fundamental rules' of social order (Camus 2000: 99). Facing execution, the tragic hero continues to repudiate the perspective of divine grace, relinquishing the consolations of future immortality. He affirms that, given that all human beings are condemned to death, 'nothing mattered': 'I'd lived in a certain way and I could just as well have lived in a different way' (Camus 2000: 115–16). Yet, as Meursault awaits the decision on his appeal, he also feels 'delirious with joy' at the thought of having another twenty-four hours to live and affirms the value of his finite existence (Camus 2000: 110, 117). Meursault's senseless killing of the Arab metaphorically conveys the double injunction of the absurd. On the one hand, it emphasises the oppressive perplexity and impenetrability of the world – mirroring the colonial erasure of and indifference towards the Other – that confounds judgement. On the other hand, it interrupts Meursault's comfortable mooring in the world and leads him to a lucid awareness of his limited condition, finding precisely in his sense of strangeness the potential of living and creating anew (Hayden 2016a: 39–40).

While Camus's absurd mirrors Sartre's insights into the absurdity of human existence, it also imbues his existentialist vision of the threatening opacity of the world with the Hellenic recognition of the 'equilibrium' or balance between humans and world

(Camus 1971: 158; see also Zaretsky 2013; Sharpe 2015a: 1–58; 2012: 404–10, 417–22). As Camus (1970f: 201) writes in his review of Sartre's *Nausea*, it is wrong to conclude that 'life is tragic because it is wretched'. The sense of life's tragedy stems from the world's overwhelming, yet perishing beauty, the sensuous allure of 'the sea, the sun, [people's] faces' (Camus 2005: 8). *The Stranger* embodies this shift of emphasis, conveying Camus's insistence that the individual's struggle against the absurd at the same time bears testimony of a 'hopeless love' for the world and the human condition (Camus 1970b: 101, 104). As Hayden (2016a: 38) has argued, the awareness of the absurd also affirms this flawed, finite and human world as preferable to any other (see also Hayden 2016b: 80–1).

The artistic judging sensibility is kindled by the recognition that a refusal to deny the absurd also carries a refusal to submit to it. While the absurd represents the existential condition of responsible political judgement in the world of the dead god, Camus avers, it cannot be taken as an end (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, but only aim to discern 'the consequences and rules for action that can be drawn from it' (Camus 1995a: 28; 1971: 13; 1970f: 202). The ethical and political significance of the awareness of the absurd is that it institutes a decisive shift from the traditional image of an absolute, self-sufficient and masterful self, capable of unifying a given reality as a knowable object of thought. It instead foregrounds the incomprehensibility of the world as the very condition of possibility that renders meaningful human freedom to engage the world and endow it with human value and purpose. Simultaneously, however, it also contains a refusal to simply accept the contradictions of the political world. The challenge of artistic judgement is to stimulate the human capacities of creatively responding to the tragedies and suffering of the political world, providing grounds for a meaningful human existence in a world shorn of absolute guarantees.

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

of human existence in the world shorn of all 'aboves', 'beyonds' or 'later-ons' (Camus 1991: 55). Rebellion modelled on artistic sensibility says 'no' and 'yes' simultaneously. As Camus (1971: 219) writes, the artist's rebellion 'is a demand for unity and a rejection of the world. But it rejects the world on account of what it lacks and in the name of what it sometimes is.' Rebellion arises in response to particular instances of oppression, and not to realise an external principle. In its rejection of injustice, it affirms the existence of a limit beyond which oppression will no longer be tolerated and thus also of 'a standard of values' that should be upheld 'at all costs' (Camus 1971: 19–20). Importantly, rebellious judgement embodies a recognition that the value affirmed in revolt 'does not belong to [the rebel] alone', but articulates a universal demand for respect of common human dignity (Camus 1971: 22, 224, 241–2). As testimony of the dignity of human worldly existence, rebellion against the absurd implies the understanding that life is 'the single necessary good' for all human beings (Camus 1971: 14). The human community affirmed in rebellion is not predicated upon a transcendent moral principle, such as universal human nature. It stems from the realisation that the absurd condition of human existence is not merely an individual perplexity, but a common human fate (Camus 1971: 28). Artistic judgement's appeal to the humanity of others is grounded in recognition of individuals' 'pre-metaphysical existence' as creatures endowed with a capacity to rebel against anything that would crush their worldly freedom (Sharpe 2011: 88). Developing the consequences of Camus's insights into the limits of human reason, this appeal brings into existence an experiential limit or measure by which to judge political actions and events. Just as it represents the justification of rebellion against injustice, it imposes a boundary that it must not transgress (Camus 1971: 27–8).

Camus elaborates on these observations in his insistence on the 'free essence' of creative judgement, which recognises no external rule, but 'lives only on the constraints it imposes on itself' (Camus 1995b: 269, 268). Artistic judgement aims to create unity on the ground of the 'chaos' of reality, yet resists the temptation towards a denial of the absurd contradiction in a rational 'leap of faith' – a danger Camus associated with Sartre's vision

of 'engaged' writing. In Sartre's desire to respond to the exigencies of a historical situation with a synthesising vision, Camus discerned a tendency to enslave the artist's rebellion to an end that is 'alien' to it and reduce human freedom to mere production of a prefabricated result (Camus 1995b: 268, 261–2; see also Sprintzen 2004: 51; Aronson 2004: 56–60). Artistic rebellious judgement does not aspire to final answers; its aim is not 'to legislate or to reign supreme, but to understand first of all' (Camus 1995b: 266). It is grounded upon an imaginative ability to describe others 'faithfully' and 'with consideration', to engage their perspectives on the world with empathy (Zaretsky 2010: 86–7; 155–7; Camus 1995b: 267, 269). The artistic attentiveness to the particularity of human worldly existence here translates into a commitment to kindling the human condition of plurality. Rather than subordinating the particularity and embodied presence of others to a pre-given idea, it always strives to see them as concrete freedoms, as living individuals. The political significance of artistic judging sensibility, for Camus, lies in discerning 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 responsible political judgement receives illumination in *The Plague*. The novel recounts the sufferings and struggles of the inhabitants of Oran, a small coastal town suddenly struck by the plague. Rieux, a doctor and the story's narrator, becomes the leader of the town's organised resistance, embodying the artistic judgement's affirmation of human solidarity in the face of injustice. The ascent of the plague engenders among the populace experiences of profound isolation and exile. As Camus (2002: 59–60) writes, 'no one could hope for help from his neighbour and everyone remained alone with [their] anxieties', with onlookers meeting 'the most authentic sufferings' with either silence or 'banal clichés'. Rieux's rebellious judgement does not congeal in an attempt to gain complete knowledge of the causes of the injustice and provide clear-cut 'instructions' on the goals of rebellious action. His solidarity for the suffering is affirmed in an effort towards impartiality, truthfulness and understanding, by collecting and entertaining the perspectives of multiple characters (Zaretsky 2010: 86–90; Camus 2002: 237, 8, 232, 105, 138–9). The fight

against the plague here is metaphorically conveyed as a ceaseless imaginative watchfulness against the danger of allowing humanity to collapse under the weight of an abstraction (Camus 2002: 49, 95, 192–6). By describing individual experiences of suffering in their concreteness and plurality, Rieux's narrative account reveals them as situations shared by all and thereby opens the possibility for collective rebellious action (Camus 2002: 237, 232; Gatta 2015: 338–41, 346–50). Rambert, a visiting journalist, initially insists he does not belong within the city's walls and desperately tries to escape. Increasingly acknowledging his destiny as interlinked with those of others, however, he changes his mind: '[N]ow that I have seen what I have seen, I know that I come from here, whether I like it or not. This business concerns all of us' (Camus 2002: 162). Tarrou, another visitor to Oran, approaches Rieux with a proposal to constitute 'voluntary groups', going beyond official channels and made of 'friends in many walks of life' (Camus 2002: 95–6). The emerging community of action is not based on mobilising people to an already defined cause, tallying with existing power structures within society. It emerges from the rebellious impulse of different actors, who, divided in their motivations and hopes, nevertheless join in the common fight against suffering (Gatta 2015: 349–50; LeBlanc and Jones 2003: 227–8).

Camus's artistic sensibility shies away from resorting to any pre-conceived conception of human solidarity, for instance one based on psychological identification or a community of interest. It discloses the political potential of alternative communities (of judgement and action), articulating the sense that, while situations are lived through individually, they are also shared, and so that 'on the foundation of his [or her] sufferings and joys', each human being 'builds for all' (Camus 1995b: 272). In its striving for unity, artistic political judgement displaces the (Hegelian) dialectical conception of intersubjective recognition lingering in Sartre. For Camus, this conception may claim to lead to the eventual reconciliation of the contradictions of the political world, but ultimately amounts to the domineering elimination of difference in a final synthesis (Camus 1971: 130). The artistic confrontation with the plurality of the human world, to the contrary, ensues in the recognition of the need for moderation.

Here we come to the core of Camus's conception of political judgement: its determination to recognise in everyone, including the oppressors, the human value affirmed in its rebellion (Camus 1971: 217, 22, 29). As he argues, artistic judgement is characterised by 'the affirmation of the contradiction' and a refusal to ever venture 'beyond the frontier where opposites balance each other' (Camus 2004: 213). This means that it does not press others into agreement with its own perspective on the world and aim for universal agreement. It is inherently dialogical in orientation, always striving to create conditions for and insistent on taking its bearings from 'real dialogue', where we 'grant that our opponent may be right' and agree to consider his or her arguments (Camus 1995c: 70; 1995d: 63; 2006a: 287; see also Sharpe 2015b: 21–2). Camus's artistic judging sensibility is grounded in an awareness that the possibilities of reconstituting a meaningful world only lie in community with plural others recognised as equals. It commits to providing a platform, where different perspectives can be revealed and negotiated through their mutual interaction and where common humanity can shine through by embracing the differences that compose it. In Camus's words, it constantly discloses 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 polarisation, its reception was, unsurprisingly, less than welcoming. Since then, too, critics have pointed to Camus's inability to address the deep-seated, structurally grounded antagonisms between different groups within and between societies (Sprintzen 2004: 18; Aronson 2004: 91, 122). Camus was hardly ignorant of the structures of power and oppression or of the 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 confine political imagination to the alternative of being 'either a victim or an executioner' (Camus 1995d: 112; 2006a: 257–76). While aware of the tragic character

of political affairs, his artistic judgement sought to affirm the possibility of human action against the supposed 'necessity' of history (Camus 2006a: 266).

Artistic judgement's appeal to limits articulated Camus's rejection of the historicist tendency to wed political judgement to a predetermined law of movement, embodying the progressive emancipation of 'an essential subject' as representative of a 'unitary' humankind (Isaac 1992: 82; 2004: 256–9). The troubling implication is that crime becomes 'logical', a necessary step on the path towards the future, and abstract, ends of perfect justice (Camus 1971: 11). In a total narrative with an already set outcome, the plurality of political affairs is arranged into the categories of good and evil – the world of masters and slaves (Camus 1970d: 149). What ensues is an 'infernal dialectic', allowing each side in a conflict to justify its crimes in light of the excesses of the other, and plunging the world into an ever-widening spiral of violence (Camus 2013: 153, 25–8, 31–2; 1995e: 92–3). Among the left-wing intellectuals associated with *Les Temps Modernes*, Camus's critique of revolutionary violence was denounced as insufferably idealistic and moralistic. Sartre and Jeanson attached to Camus the label of a 'beautiful soul' that believes it can remain above the fray of historical events to judge them from on high. His refusal to assume the tragic exigencies of resistant action, they argued, ended up thwarting the possibilities for the emancipatory transformation of society and affirming complicity with the existing situation of injustice (Jeanson 2004: 99, 179–83, 195; Sartre 2004a: 156).

In Camus's view, however, it was Sartre's submission to historical necessity that was out-of-worldly and moralistic. For him, it embodied the danger of nihilism and excess in the face of the absurd world. Starting from the recognition of the particularity, plurality and contradictions of political affairs, it defined the ends of rebellious action in an absolute way, from the position of mastery above the world and others. Failing to acknowledge the human, free and ambiguous character of the political world, it risked betraying the particular reality of those suffering in the present. Camus's artistic loyalty to the limits of the world and the beauty of people's faces, instead, remains attentive to the ambiguity and risk inherent in worldly freedom. It commits to resisting injustice by respecting

the irreducible plurality and complexity of political life, and entails constant reflection on the possibilities and limitations of political action in specific circumstances (Camus 1970d: 152–3; 1970e: 168–71). Artistic judgement oriented by love of the world, in this respect, brings us back to Rieux's modest attitude. When Tarrou asks the doctor about the motivations for his rebellion against the plague, Rieux rejects the perspective of (divine) grace and final redemption, which at the same time justifies present injustice. His rebellion is grounded simply in his acceptance of the situation 'as it is' and a refusal to resign himself to it, while aware that any 'victories will always be temporary' (Camus 2002: 67, 98). In response to Tarrou's desire to become a saint, he replies: 'I feel more solidarity with the defeated than with saints [. . .] What interests me is to be a [human being]' (Camus 2002: 196–7). Aware of the impossibility of eradicating suffering once and for all, Camus's artistic judgement foregrounds an inspiration to 'continuous rebellions suited to the injustices of every present without finality' (Hayden 2013b: 201–2).

Camus's commitment to disclosing the limits of political action, then, is not to be understood as an exercise in measuring different elements and devising sustainable forms of compromise that leaves unchallenged existing structures of oppression. It leads to a renegotiation of the terms of political community, grounded in a refusal to be either a victim or an executioner. The political significance of artistic rebellious judgement lies in displacing the 'the conflict-based form' of political relationships and opening the space where the tragedy and suffering of the political world could be addressed through politics between plural equals (Hayden 2016a: 74; LeBlanc and Jones 2003: 210–16).

In this spirit, Camus sought to reverse the 'infernal dialectic' of torture and terror ravaging his native Algeria. Denouncing the injustice of colonialism, he was equally dismayed by the terrorist means employed by the FLN. He drew attention to how the fight for freedom and justice degenerated into a 'blind' contest for political power that could end only with an ultimate annihilation of one side by the other (Camus 2013: 151–5). The spiral of mutual denunciations and violence led to a negative solidarity of death, where 'what kills one side also kills the other', and removed

every day further from view the possibility of a meaningful future (Camus 2013: 153, 141–2). Camus's 'Appeal for a Civilian Truce in Algeria' meant to act as 'a roundtable', making the opposing factions 'see and hear' each other (Camus 2013: 124). If either side was willing to engage the perspective of its opponent, he believed, it might be possible to distinguish 'the respective limits of force and justice in each camp', to disentangle from under the violent excesses what is legitimate in their claims (Camus 2013: 32). While Camus's perspective has been interpreted as an act of complicity with colonial status quo, it revealed how the ideological justifications of violence on both sides of the struggle in fact blurred the actual concerns of social justice and political liberty. Resisting the fatalistic resignation to the dialectic of violence, it appealed to the human creative potentials to imagine a solution attentive to the reality of two different communities that 'are condemned to live together' (Camus 2013: 114, 153).

Resisting the victim–executioner binary, Camus's artistic judgement strove to bring into being 'a living society' of people 'without a kingdom', willing to interact beyond the ideological divides enforced by structural injustice (Camus 2006a: 272, 259). This aspiration, for instance, is manifest in his contention 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 rejection of the Marxist dialectic of means and ends therefore does not amount to an embrace of bourgeois freedom, which has been historically used 'to justify a very real oppression' (Camus 2006a: 264–6; 1995b: 254). It implies a willingness to self-critically consider one's decisions in relation to a plurality of perspectives and judge political actions contextually, in light of 'their repercussions on living people' (Isaac 2004: 263–4; Camus 1995b: 266). This freedom of judgement entails a commitment to always take 'the side of the victims' and denounce all instances of oppression regardless of the noble ends pursued by the perpetrators (Camus 2002: 196; 1995b: 266–7). It also dedicates itself to the pursuit of 'relative' values, where a judgement on 'what is just and what is unjust' is

shaped through a consideration of a plurality of other perspectives (Camus 1971: 254–5).

Camus's artistic judgement lacks the finality of a clear-cut rule that would determine 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 engagement. Camus's failed intervention in the Algerian conflict, for instance, exposed how the weight of oppressive political conditions may pervert most determined efforts to uphold the limits of political action – offering 'a painful lesson in the stubbornness of the absurd' (Hayden 2016a: 83). Nevertheless, the artist's worldly orientation inspires a way of acting in line 'with most genuine realism', one attuned to the imperfections of political life (Camus 2006a: 273). For while characterised by anguish and disquiet, it should not be reduced to moral(istic) despair over and escape from the world of political affairs. It is of utmost political import in revealing behind 'realist' appeals to necessity forms of 'anachronistic political thinking' that gloss over the complexities of a given situation and misconstrue the challenges of political action (Camus 2006a: 270). Far from encouraging 'the feeling of powerlessness, distaste for politics, pessimism turning into indifference' (Jeanson 2004: 199), then, Camus's vision of political judgement importantly develops Sartre's and Beauvoir's attempts to confront the tragic character of political affairs. Free of 'any nostalgia for an earthly paradise' (Camus 2006a: 261), it discloses in our finite human condition the ground of human solidarity, and commits to 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 account of political judgement continues to manifest a stubborn resilience against attempts at an easy categorisation 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 into sharp relief her general lack of interest in philosophical and epistemological debates. It instead is guided by 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' (Arendt 2006a: 14; see also Hinchman and Hinchman 1984: 183). While several interpreters have found in this focus a stimulating resource for reflection upon contemporary concerns (see 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 recognised Arendt's philosophical origins in the tradition of *Existenz* philosophy, specifically in the phenomenology and existential ontology of Husserl, Heidegger and Jaspers (Hinchman and Hinchman 1984; 1991; Parekh 1981: 66–83, 173–85; Young-Bruehl 2004: 217–20; Vollrath 1977: 160–82; Yeatman, Hansen, Zolkos and Barbour 2011). So, too, critics have pointed to the significant departure Arendt makes from her philosophical influences to make room for and resuscitate the 'lost treasure' of political action. Accordingly, they have referred to her political theory as 'political existentialism' (Jay 1986) or 'existentialism politicised' (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 can be traced to the interpretation furthered by Martin Jay, who explicitly pointed to *Existenzphilosophie* as the appropriate background against which Arendt's work should properly be read. 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' became reduced to a desperate attempt to salvage the distinct nature of politics, only to lapse into aestheticised decisionism that refuses to be tamed by socioeconomic concerns or any other instrumental considerations (Jay 1986: 241–2). Similarly, Arendt's appropriation of Kant's aesthetic judgement

of taste has been chided for its lack of solid normative foundations to serve as a yardstick by which to distinguish good from evil (see Garsten 2007: 1072; Kateb 2001: 135–7). On this reading, it is only after this existentialist sensibility has been 'tamed' that it can speak meaningfully to the problems of modern politics (Benhabib 1996: 198). Only recently have Arendt's interpreters warned that the foundationalism/anti-foundationalism nexus and its epistemological grounding might not provide the most fruitful interpretive lens. They have argued that this focus might in fact destine Arendt's 'existentialist' element to a reductionist reading and obscure the continuing promise of her response to the perplexities of modern times (see Buckler 2011: 9–11; Biskowski 1995: 59; Zerilli 2005a; 2005b).

This section re-examines Arendt's account of political judgement in light of her phenomenological–existential commitment to making sense of the political world. To this end, it 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 without prefabricated standards of thought. Second, it reads her recourse to Kant's aesthetics as a response to the breakdown of the Western tradition of political theory, 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 joining 'the ranks' of existential philosophy as the only mode of thinking that has honestly confronted the ambiguous condition of thought and action after the demise of metaphysical foundations (Arendt 1978a: 212). Her reimagining of Kant's aesthetic sensibility as a specifically political ability of representative thinking, further, reveals the worldly character of her existential orientation. Her aesthetic sensibility dethrones political judgement from the position 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. It foregrounds the human judging capacity in a Camusean spirit as a worldly ability oriented towards disclosing a public space of appearance, and recognising the possibilities and limitations of political action.

Facing Up to the Weight of Our Century

Even though Arendt turned to explicitly address the 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 judged within established categories of thought and understanding (Arendt 1994: 318). The pervasive crisis of judgement in modernity revealed by totalitarianism, for Arendt, referred to the growing atrophy of the fundamental human capacity to make sense of living experience (Hinchman and Hinchman 1984: 185; Biskowski 1993: 65). From Arendt's recognition of the depth of modern crisis follows an awareness that she shares with the broader tradition of *Existenz* philosophy. In their novelty, modern events exposed the inadequacy of traditional philosophical categories and moral standards to meaningfully address the experiential realities of human worldly existence. Bringing to light the ruin of established yardsticks, they confronted political theory with the urgent need to rethink its own attitude towards the political realm (Arendt 1994: 430–1, 444).

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 metaphysical desire to reach the ultimate truth of Being (Arendt 1978a: 15). Driven by the will to truth, philosophers have sought to uplift themselves onto a solitary, supposedly objective position detached from the disorderly realm of political affairs so as to be able to access 'what is forever invisible [. . .] and truly everlasting' (Arendt 1978a: 131). Yet they have succumbed to a troubling belief that the rational knowledge conceived in the mind of a solitary thinker also possessed universal validity in the political realm of the many. Political judgement was to proceed as determinant application of prefabricated standards onto the particularities of the political world from the outside and above. The philosophers

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 ability to determine standards of right and wrong, was identified with rulership, while relegating the human capacity of action to mere execution of a pre-given idea (Arendt 1958a: 225). In this way, however, they have in fact opened an ever-widening 'abyss' between thought and action (Arendt 2005: 6). For Arendt, this abyss gained a terrifying concreteness in the course of the twentieth century, when 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).

The traditional conception of political judgement harbours the seeds of the modern crisis because it fails 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 reality of the public realm, she persistently points out, 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 1958a: 55–7). The determinant conception of political judgement – as manifested in traditional 'two-world' metaphysical fallacies – in contrast attempts to construe the realm of 'mere' appearance in terms of deeper and truer realities as its supposed cause or purpose (Arendt 1978a: 10–12, 216). As a practice of subsuming particular actions and events under preconceived frameworks of thought, Arendt writes, determinant judgement allows for nothing new to happen 'under the sun' (Arendt 1994: 309). It is bound to grow less and less informed by particular events 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 politically 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. What thought's prolonged severance from experience puts into question is what Arendt calls the 'preliminary understanding', the 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 was clearly expressed in the modern age. The crucial shift occurred when, unhinged from the realm of eternal standards, humans turned inward to reclaim the lost certainty and security of absolute foundations within their own selves (Arendt 1958a: 254, 283–4). The activity of judging came to resemble instrumental reasoning or logicality, whose main characteristic is that it carries a claim of compulsory validity regardless of others and the world, that is, regardless of our situated existence (Arendt 1994: 318). Like Camus, Arendt saw in this development the culmination of the traditional faith in the powers of human reason to contain the plurality and unpredictability of the world from the position of 'solitary mastery' (Arendt 1958a: 220). The reinterpretation of political judgement as instrumental reasoning purported not only to know the whole of the world as a totally transparent object of thought, but also to 'produce', order and transform it at will (Isaac 1992: 78–9; Arendt 1958a: 252, 228). The disturbing political implications came to light with the ascent of the teleological conception of political judgement, most notable in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophies of history. These philosophies claimed to have found a decisive answer to the ambiguity of political action by seeking salvation in history, reading it as a story of unlimited 'Progress' of humankind. Yet they could thereby 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). Teleological judgement reduced the meaning of each particular event to the place it was awarded in an all-encompassing process, subordinating reality itself to the essentially arbitrary movement of some inevitable 'higher law' (Arendt 1978a: 26–7, 53–5; 1958a: 296–7, 304; 2006a: 57). In this way, it

in effect demoted humans to mere objects of inhuman forces and processes, and 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 recreations of reality.

For Arendt, the modern crisis of judgement harbours the paramount *political* danger 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 (Arendt 1994: 316–17; Hinchman and Hinchman 1984: 185, 202; Isaac 1992: 68; Fine 2000a). The pressing need to reinvigorate the human capacity of political judgement, in turn, contains the challenge of 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. To confront this challenge, Arendt insisted, political judgement must be reimagined as a practice of wondering at the human world of political affairs in its plurality and particularity, in all 'its grandeur and misery', its 'stubborn thereness' and contingency (Arendt 2005: 38; 2006a: 253).

Arendt's Existential Appropriation of Kant's Aesthetic Judgements of Taste

Arendt discerns the possibility of reclaiming the human capacity of judgement as a paramount political ability 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 cognitive beings of traditional metaphysics, but as a plurality of concrete, worldly beings, 'as they really are and live in societies' (Arendt 1989: 13). 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, 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, contains a manifestly political

sensibility because it dispenses with the rule of determinant standards. It envisions political judgement as a reflective, worldly process of recognising 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 shattered the metaphysical pretensions of the tradition and liberated humans from their previously predetermined place in the (rational) chain or circle of Being (Arendt 1994: 169–70). Affirming individuals as free and autonomous subjects, however, Kant also placed them face to face with an incomprehensible world whose workings they could no longer know, that they 'did not create and that is alien to [their] very nature' (Arendt 1994: 171, 166). Kant's critical philosophy thus illuminates the perplexing condition of political judgement, as taken up by the three existentialists. As worldly beings, humans are free to engage, question and transcend the given in their quest for meaning, yet can also never assume an Archimedean position from which to reach a completely transparent view of political affairs. Kant's critique of taste assumes this condition because it corresponds to the ability of reflective judgement. As in the case of a beautiful object that we cannot simply subsume under the pre-given universal concept of Beauty, for reflective judgement 'only the particular is given for which the general has to be found' (Arendt 1989: 76, 13). Rather than fleeing, it faces up to the incomprehensible weight of the world by calling upon us to 'meet the phenomena, so to speak, head-on, without any preconceived system' (Arendt 1973: 9).

Eschewing the reliance on abstract principles, aesthetic judgement answers to the temporal condition of human existence. Arendt conveys this condition with an image of the gap between past and future that, after the break in the thread of tradition, must be constantly negotiated without the security of established standards (Arendt 2006a: 13). Taste can cope with the gap between past and future because it is determined neither by 'the life interests of the individual nor the moral interests of the self', but parallels a 'disinterested' pleasure at the sight of 'the world in its appearance and in its worldliness' (Arendt 2006a: 219). By

this Arendt means that taste is liberated from the quest for deeper causes and realities, purposes and ends, and distanced from immediate interests in the world. It affirms human freedom to look upon the past anew, salvage individual actions and events from their predetermined place in a larger whole and endow them with (a general) meaning that is capable of offering a meaningful bridge to the future. As she writes, taste involves an immediate sensation of 'it-pleases-or-displeases-me' that is 'unmediated by any thought or reflection' (Arendt 1989: 66). In its subjective character, it is highly discriminating, affirming at the same time the independent, particular existence of the appearing world (Arendt 1989: 66). For Arendt, taste bespeaks a phenomenological–existential 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 is of utmost political import because it encapsulates its ability to 'reclaim our human dignity' (Arendt 1978a: 216). In its attentiveness to 'the particular qua particular', taste is able to affirm human freedom as a source of worldly events (Arendt 1989: 66; Hill 1979: 298). Arendt develops this insight in her reflection on the political significance of stories. The stories' proximity to the particularity of human experience, Arendt says, has the unique capacity of revealing the 'who' rather than the 'what' of the protagonists' identity (Arendt 1958a: 186). It enables us to affirm the human 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 1958a: 182). In this vein, 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 is not to unearth a previously concealed essence or origin of a phenomenon, explain it (away) in terms of its 'causes' (Arendt 1994: 319, 403–5, 407). This would not only deny the reality of the new 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). The purpose is to 'redeem' those 'corals' and 'pearls' of past experience, liberated from under the segmented layers of traditional categories, and illuminate them as a living reality in our world (Arendt 1968a: 205–6; 1971: 51). It is to gauge what they mean for *us*, and to make them speak with new vigour and unexpected significance to the concerns and intricacies of the present (Arendt 1968a: 205–6; 1971: 51; Benhabib 1990: 171–3). Arendt's embrace of aesthetic, narrative sensibility rests on the claim that because it by its very form imitates the structure of human acting and suffering, it can establish the human significance of politics and kindle the sense of ourselves as political agents, capable of responsible action in the world. This emphasis is crucial because human freedom and the status of an acting being 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). It is predicated upon our recognising each other as equal members of the public realm and can be denied or even completely obliterated if intersubjective recognition is refused.

This political concern guiding Arendt's appropriation of aesthetic taste opened her account of political judgement to charges of subordinating all moral and practical considerations 'to the aesthetic potentiality of politics' (Kateb 2001: 122; see also Kateb 1983; 1977: 163–8). Critics have claimed that her slide into 'an unwarranted aestheticisation of politics' is prone to assume implications, reminiscent of the very impulses she had most wanted to resist (Beiner 1989: 138; Kateb 2002: 351–6). Yet Arendt persistently warned against the danger of an aestheticist reversal lurking in the breakdown of absolutes in modernity. She insisted on a fundamental distinction that needs to be kept in envisioning political judgement on the model of aesthetic taste. Aesthetic sensibility contains a distinctly political attitude in endowing with meaning the particularity of the world. As she emphasises in her reflections on Isak Dinesen, however, it is a highly dangerous error to view political action as if it were 'a work of art', and try to make a

preconceived (aesthetic) ideal come true in politics (Arendt 1968b: 105, 109).

Arendt elaborated on this peril in her reflections on the troubling political implications of Heidegger's philosophy. Based as it is on a reflective distancing from prefabricated theoretical perspectives on the world, the danger of an aestheticist reversal is present in the method of drilling itself. Nevertheless, the reversal occurs only when aesthetic judgement forgets to return to the common phenomenal reality and turns inward towards itself (Arendt 1971). In its desire to liberate past experiences from larger wholes, it easily ends up affirming what is supposedly purely original or authentic, too genuine, in short, to reveal any broader meaning that would be communicable to others (Arendt 1994: 180–1; 1968a: 198–9). In this quest, it 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 (Hinchman and Hinchman 1984: 206). Rather than revelling in the independent existence of outside reality, it lapses into the cultivation of a unique, isolated Self.

For Arendt, indeed, Heidegger's attempt to resolve the ambiguity of political judgement in an embrace of 'absolute Self-ness' betrays a disregard for Kant's recognition of the limits of human reason (Arendt 1994: 181). For far removed from common intersubjective reality, it can only lead to action by an 'absolutising of individual categories of being', furthering the view of the world and others as mere material to be moulded at will (Arendt 1994: 185, 176–82; Fine 2008: 161–3). It was also these perceived vestiges of subjectivism that made Arendt shy away from an unequivocal embrace of *Existenz* philosophy. While she praised it for articulating the most promising 'prerequisites' for the first this-worldly form of thinking, she also reproached the existentialists for failing to come to terms with the ambiguity of political judgement revealed by Kant. His destruction of metaphysics brought home the fact that human freedom and political action are only possible on the grounds of a recalcitrant worldly reality that can no longer be 'resolved into thought without losing its character as reality' (Arendt 1994: 183). Akin to the implications drawn by Camus, Arendt 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 wards off the danger of aestheticism because, 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. Imagination allows it to distance itself from 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 (Arendt 1989: 67–9). As such, representative thinking corresponds to the actual 'operation of reflection', leading to the approval or disapproval of taste's initial subjective choice between it-pleases or it-displeases (Arendt 1989: 68–9). Aesthetic judgement as enlarged thought 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, 'in communication' (Arendt 1968c: 85). Standing face to face with its 'failure' to grasp reality as a 'pure object of thought', Jaspers's thought recognises that the possibilities of reconstituting a meaningful world can only lie in community with others, and assumes the form of 'a perpetual appeal' to the freedom of others (Arendt 1994: 182–4). Representative thinking embodies the same spirit in acknowledging the very condition of its exercise in the presence of a plurality of perspectives who take it to account and constantly reinvigorate its conclusions (Arendt 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. She explicitly emphasises that representative thinking is not a matter of trying to understand 'one another as individual persons', 'to be or to feel like somebody else' (Arendt 1989: 43). The aim is not 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. Representative thinking is oriented towards 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 2006a: 51). Guided by this concern, Arendt remained critical of Jaspers's imagining of communication on the model of an 'I–thou' model of a personal encounter between myself and a friend. She believed that such 'intimacy of dialogue' harbours in important respects the transcending aspirations present in the solitary, 'I-and-myself' dialogue of thought (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 (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 also illuminates what is at stake in her distrust of rational or moral truths. Her account of political judgement has often been criticised for lacking a cognitive foundation that could subject a plurality of opinions to rational processes of validation and provide a normative basis for an informed public agreement (see Habermas 1977: 22–3; Benhabib 1996: 193–4; 2001: 200–2; Wellmer 2001: 169; Beiner 1989: 137). Arendt's concern, however, is not to deny argumentation a necessary part in the process of judging. It is to warn against deducing our judgements from our acceptance of certain initial premises in accordance with the logic of rational self-consistency, irrespective of the opinions of plural others and '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 bringing into existence a shared world (Zerilli 2012: 21–2, 23).

Here Arendt echoes Camus's distrust of attempts to envision the communicative practice of judging in terms of a synthesising movement that would eliminate the others' difference in its quest for a universal agreement (see also Young 2001: 211–25; Nedelsky 2001: 106–18). The purpose of representative thinking is the cultivation of what Arendt, following Kant, calls *sensus communis*.

By this Arendt understands a 'specifically human sense' of what we share in common that enables us to orient ourselves in the public realm and respond to the complexities of politics (Arendt 1989: 70, 74; 2006a: 218). By articulating a plurality of perspectives on the world, 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 their worldly, intersubjective existence (Arendt 1968d: 79–80; 1968c: 85; 1994: 186). In disclosing actions and events in their worldly appearance, Arendt (1989: 77) says, aesthetic judgements possess 'exemplary validity'. In a particular occurrence they are able to reveal a general meaning that manifests and appeals to a community of others, without eliminating its uniqueness under a universal rule (Arendt 1989: 77, 67). This emphasis is crucial because it grounds the political promise of judgement: its ability to unveil the political world as a human world, and appeal to previously concealed potentials of human freedom in the present. For in revealing humans in the way they appear in the web of human relationships constituting the public realm, it furthers their recognition as acting and speaking beings, rather than passive instantiations of inhuman forces – as distinct and equal members of the public realm.

Representative Thinking and Reconciling with the Ambiguity of Political Action

The existential underpinnings of Arendt's engagement with Kant bring out the political significance of aesthetic judging sensibility in its ability to shift the focus from the self and its absolute standards of morality to an attitude Arendt called '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'. It is driven by a concern with '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' (Arendt 2006a: 219; see also Hayden 2014a: 178–9). This worldly focus importantly speaks to critics, reproaching Arendt's account of political judgement for offering a

weak normative framework through which to resist injustice in the contemporary world (see Bay in Arendt 1979: 303–11). It reveals the resistant potential contained in displacing the rational, moral quest for completeness and finality to be able to retain attention on judgement's proper aim – what Arendt called 'reconciliation with reality' (Arendt 2006a: 257). In this sense, political judgement becomes a continuous process of weaving the multiplicity of actions and events into the fabric of the common world, of reinvigorating our sense of worldly reality and facing up to the ambiguity of political action (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 an objective, 'god's eye view' from nowhere, she also renounced an 'engaged' form of judging from the standpoint of the victims (Arendt 1994: 402; see also Disch 1993: 667, 672). Based on an attempt to identify with others' experience of suffering, engaged judgement seeks to inspire appropriate (emotional) responses and forms of political action. From Arendt's perspective, however, this focus risks reducing the meaning of a given oppressive situation to a moral lesson or idea, while abstracting from its phenomenal manifestation in the world. Short-circuiting the worldly process of considering and negotiating a plurality of different perspectives, it amounts to a 'worldless' form of human togetherness that remains 'invisible', shorn of a political status in the political realm (Arendt 1968e: 16). It not only congeals the experience of suffering to an essential, seemingly eternal trait of the victims' identity. It also threatens to in effect justify their victimhood and obscure the possibilities for the oppressed to affirm their freedom in the future (Arendt 1994: 402). Left without a solid ground of the common world, further, such judgement can lead to a willingness to sacrifice human freedom and plurality to abstract principles or causes of liberation (Arendt 2006b: 80). Arendt exposed this danger in her writings on the French revolutionary terror. For her, this example showed how easily an attempt to make the identification with others' suffering into a basis for political action can be distorted into a 'boundless' emotion.

What in this case inspires political engagement is an abstraction that drowns the sensibility '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, predetermined law (Arendt 2006b: 80).

Representative thinking instead aims towards judging 'for the world's sake' or a perspective of worldly impartiality, which Arendt praises in the great ancient historiographers (Arendt 1968e: 7–8; 2006a: 51). The hallmark of such judgement is resistance to any prefabricated 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 worldly reality (Fine 2008: 169–70). Representative judgement lets the meaning of actions (as unjust or oppressive) surface tentatively, out of a consideration of how they echoed in the common world, how they bore upon the political status of a plurality of individuals constituting it. Importantly, the solidarity with the victims here is not based on an identification with their suffering. It rests 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 (Marso 2012: 20). Judging for the sake of the world thus reveals past occurrences in their human character, 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). On the one hand, it invites us to acknowledge the past as something which is part of our own world and for which responsibility needs to be assumed. On the other hand, it kindles the awareness that it could have been otherwise and discloses the possibilities for acting anew and differently in the future.

By the same token, worldly judgement furthers the political insight that a new beginning cannot be conceived in terms of a predetermined end transcending the realm of human affairs. Forms of resistant action can only be meaningful if they take into account the newly emerging bounds of human plurality and of the shared world. For disclosing past suffering in its intersubjective significance, representative thinking reveals the world as 'a new political arena', as something both the victims and the oppressors 'share in common' (Arendt 2005: 178). It 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 (Arendt 2007: 50–1, 55). Rather than fixating individuals in their past identities as passive victims or evil perpetrators, it links them indissolubly together through the mediation of the shared reality. It opens a space for former enemies to recognise each other as acting beings, differently situated, yet also responsible for rebuilding and preserving for each other a properly human world (Schaap 2005a: 83).

Arendt's worldly judgement shies away from offering a remedy for the perplexities of political action in the sense of providing 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). This involves 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 actions and events can appear in their plural, human character, representative thinking reveals 'the conditions of [our] freedom' and also 'what [we] can and cannot do' (Arendt 1994: 186). Worldly judgement thereby becomes 'the other side of action' (Arendt 1994: 321), helping us to recognise 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 traced how Camus's and Arendt's aesthetic attentiveness to the worldly ambiguity of political judgement opens a way of creatively confronting the plurality and unpredictability of political affairs. Camus and Arendt share an apt recognition that the recalcitrant, plural and untameable character of the world represents the very condition of human freedom and creative judgement. Their distinct contribution, it was argued, accordingly lies in a staunch

refusal to yield to the traditional desire for finality and perfection to retain the focus on kindling the sense of the common world between a plurality of human freedoms. In contrast to the main criticisms of their thought as politically impotent, their dialogic, representative judging orientation importantly enriches Sartre's and Beauvoir's emphasis on confronting individuals with their responsibility for the world. For in reclaiming wonder at the world in its plurality and complexity, they reveal the political promise contained in a free confrontation of differences and disclose the possibilities of fighting for greater freedom within the bounds of our worldly existence.

Note

1. See Camus (1971: 74).

4 Political Judgement and Narrativity

Drawing on the perspectives of the four selected existential thinkers, the preceding two chapters brought out the paramount political import of reinvigorating the human judging ability as a worldly, ambiguous practice. Their attempts to confront the realities of their time led them to question the barriers between the realms of ethics and politics on the one hand and the realm of aesthetics on the other, and to rethink political judgement on the model of aesthetic sensibility. In this reconsideration they prefigure the recent turn within political theory towards narrative as a promising prism through which to confront the ethical and political perplexities of contemporary times. Thinkers as diverse as 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. Literary imagination is praised for its ability to displace the traditional understanding of the human judging ability as an abstract exercise in the application of universal standards. It foregrounds political judgement as a reflective activity of recognising others and worldly events in their particularity, and of stimulating our capacity for an adequate response. This narrative about narrative, however, has not remained uncontested. Critics warn against awarding narrative too presumptuous a role. Questioning the very ability of narrative that is praised among its supporters, they point to the troubling political implications of narrative empathy. 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.

This chapter explores how the existentialists' narrative sensibility maps onto this broader space of the vigilant, yet contested turn towards narrative as a way of facilitating political judgement. In this examination, it refrains from assuming the ethically and politically beneficial effects of narrative voice. It draws on the four thinkers' aesthetic accounts of the situated process of judging to foreground the political relevance of narrative at the deepest existential level. It understands narrative not as a conveyor of any specific truth content or way of reasoning, but a mode of interaction and understanding aimed at making sense of human worldly experience. In line with the existential horizon of thought, it delves into the experiential reality of our engagement with literary works and highlights the political relevance of narrative in its world-disclosing potential.

First, the chapter briefly outlines the main arguments for the ethical and political promise of narrative form in recent thought, and confronts them with several main criticisms. What emerges from this examination is the contested issue of narrative (in)ability to approach the plural and unpredictable character of the political world and the reality of (radically) different others. Second, it engages the existentialist lens to unearth the epistemological and ontological premises that underlie the contemporary narrative turn. It teases out 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. On this basis, it points out how narrative form can cultivate the process of judging by responding to the strained dynamics of intersubjective recognition that follows from the weakened validity of traditional verities. Third, the chapter undertakes a phenomenological exploration of our engagement with literary works, contrasting the contemporary probings into the value of narrative voice with the existential thinkers' aesthetic reimaginings of political judgement. Within the recent discourse on narrative, it discerns a predominance of the moral concern with ensuring a proper way of grasping others' experience (of suffering and injustice), which again risks abstracting from the plurality of the world. 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. The chapter brings together the respective contributions of the four existential thinkers. Its main focus, however, lies in crystallising the political relevance of Camus's and Arendt's plural, representative aesthetic sensibility.

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 sympathetic understanding believed to be essential to political judgement. Akin to the four selected existential thinkers, they all more or less explicitly challenge Kant's separation of the spheres of morality and aesthetics and the ensuing relegation of literature to a marginal position within the field of ethics. As Rorty (1989: 82, 94) argues, it is now the attentive description of the particular, private and idiosyncratic that is awarded the primary role in public deliberation about shared values and goals. This challenge implies a reconsideration of the judging activity and ethics as such. The ability to judge and ethics in the broadest sense are no longer understood merely or even primarily as knowledge of universal rules and their application onto particular cases. They mirror a novelistic sensibility, an ability of compassionate and just attentiveness and perception, of 'getting the tone right', of being able to recognise and respond to specific situations and uncertainties in which we are called upon to judge (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. We may trace to Aristotle the first philosophically formulated statement on the ethical and political relevance of stories. Recent proponents of narrative find a welcome starting point in his insight in the *Poetics* that 'poetry is more philosophical [. . .] than history' (Aristotle 1996: 16; see also

Ricoeur 1981a: 296; Nussbaum 1997: 93). For Aristotle, stories are inherently ethical because they imitate the structure of human action and can reveal universal aspects of human existence – as opposed to history, which remains on the plane of particular and contingent facts (Aristotle 1996: 11–12, 38; Ricoeur 1991: 22, 28). This ability, further, rests on stories' capacity to inspire in the spectators the sense of cathartic release, what Aristotle defined as purification 'through pity and fear' (Aristotle 1996: 10; Kearney 2002: 137). Stories are believed to embody 'both empathy and detachment': they are to inspire empathetic identification with the suffering of others, and at the same time afford sufficient distance so that the spectators will not become overwhelmed and will still be able to see the whole (Kearney 2002: 137–9). On this account, narrative understanding is closely linked to *phronesis*, practical wisdom of ethical and political judgement. In contrast to theoretical wisdom, it better attunes us to recognising the particularities of specific situations and helps us discover in human responses to these situations general ethical values (Ricoeur 1991: 22–3).

Defence of the positive ethical value of narrative voice regained intensity in eighteenth-century philosophy, with Adam Smith and David Hume. Questioning the traditional division between reason and emotions, they anchored the ethical significance of narrative in what they believed to be the socially beneficial effects of exercises in vicarious imagination and empathetic identification. Thence emerged Smith's model of a judicious spectator, where the cultivation of emotions represented an essential part of public rationality (see Nussbaum 1995: xvi; Keen 2007: 42–4). This view was also powerfully expressed in Romantic and Victorian theories of literature and ethics. In Shelley, for instance, we read that human beings, 'to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; [they] must put [themselves] in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of [their] species must become [their] own' (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' (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 empathise with distant others.

In recent explorations into the ethical and political value of narrative these arguments reappear with an increased sense of urgency. They examine how the emotionally engaged narrative understanding could provide a corrective to the abstractness of the Enlightenment reason and point towards a humanism better able to acknowledge the ambiguity of our ever more complex world (Nussbaum in Kearney 1995: 121–2; Nussbaum 1995: 44–52). Narrative sensibility can do this because it breaks with the Enlightenment philosophy's emphasis on the autonomous self that is able to know and retain mastery over the whole of reality, to dissolve its plural and unpredictable character into a prefabricated thought-frame. As Murdoch (1970: 23) argues, our ability to appraise beauty is linked with an ethical stance that involves a distancing from the self and its 'self-aggrandising' motives. Freedom becomes 'a function of a progressive attempt to see a particular object clearly', to perceive and recognise it as valuable on its own terms, irrespective of the needs or desires of one's self (Murdoch 1970: 23).

More attentive seeing translates into the improved ability of judgement and morally beneficial action. Novelistic sensibility, as 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 (Nussbaum 1997: 87). Literary imagination teaches us to see others not as abstract entities, but as human beings endowed with dignity. It involves recognising others as both different from us, constantly challenging our capacity of sympathetic identification, and bound to us by our 'common vulnerability', 'similar weaknesses and needs, as well as similar capacities for achievement' (Nussbaum 1997: 91–2). Moral understanding contained in literary works 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 recognising them as 'fellow sufferers'. In a similar spirit, Lynn Hunt writes that novels inspired people to see in alien others human beings that 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 prompts us to view others in their difference that it allows us to recognise them as our equals, as human beings worthy of loving and just treatment.

In this way, it is possible to give voice to silenced members of society, yet bear in mind that they are agents in their own right, and not passive objects of our benevolent gaze (Nussbaum 1997: 96–7). At the same time, this position avoids the temptation of renouncing the very possibility of extending our empathy beyond the frontiers of existing group identities (Nussbaum 1997: 109). Such a view, according to Nussbaum (1997: 110), goes so far in denying our common humanity as to lapse into a non-reflective celebration of difference that reduces politics to a power play of opposing interest groups. Against this view, Nussbaum affirms the promise of literature to make others 'comprehensible or at least more nearly comprehensible' (Nussbaum 1997: 111). By imagining others' motives in the context of their situational complexity, it makes us less prone to treat them as wholly alien or evil, but recognise them as rightful participants in deliberation about common goals (Nussbaum 1997: 97–8). As Rorty (1989: 192) elaborates, novelistic sensibility inspires us to work towards social and political arrangements based on the values of dialogue and mutual understanding. Narrative engagement then embodies a commitment to a fight for greater freedom and justice that is based on a careful consideration of the plural and ambiguous nature of the political world. While it enables us to denounce particular practices as unjust, it resists simple utopian and abstract solutions that would obliterate difference in the other (Nussbaum 1995: 34). It 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).

Yet it is precisely the narrative ability to account for the plurality and complexity of political life that remains highly contested. A particularly powerful critical strain emerged with postmodern, postcolonial and feminist theory in the late twentieth century. Prominent in this respect is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978),

which exposes behind supposedly well-intentioned Western depictions of the 'Orient' an imperialist desire to control the Other. In the writings of Foucault and Derrida, similarly, the narrative claims of being able to faithfully represent historically shaped differences of perspective and transcend otherness towards forms of commonality remain in the clutches of an overly confident Enlightenment reason. The selfless and other-directed beautifying gaze ends up imposing on other people and cultures the allegedly universal values and emotions of those in power, appropriates the subjectivity of the oppressed and denies their capacity for political action. Far from its emancipatory aspirations, it is bent on justifying unjust practices and reproducing hierarchies of social power (Black 2010: 2–3, 23–4; Keen 2007: 143–8, 159–60).

In this powerful counter-narrative merge two 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 benumb readers' ability to judge (Scarry 2006: 61). Literary sensibility was prone to assume the form of self-indulgent and self-complacent empathising with an image of the destitute other, while removing readers further away from real-life problems and dulling their sense of responsibility to people in reality (Keen 2007: xx, 46–7). On the other hand, critics reproved beauty's 'apparent directional quality', and warned that its acts of attention and representation might 'actively' do harm to or destroy its object (Scarry 2006: 58–9). Critics and writers like William Godwin, Wyndham Lewis and Laura Riding, for instance, distrusted a certain spontaneous, automatic and non-reflective element at the heart of sympathetic feeling, able to obliterate under its sway any and all individuality (Keen 2007: 47; Black 2009: 788). The presumptuousness of universal emotion, they argued, displayed a disregard for the particularities of human experience and betrayed the goal of just recognition (Keen 2007: 57).

In the twentieth-century critics, however, the narrative ability of adequately recognising difference is deeply implicated in the social, economic and political structures of oppression. With this linkage, the ethics and politics of narrative became entrenched in the broader crisis of intersubjective representation, where the

unbridgeable difference between the subject and object of narration mirrors 'troubling [. . .] hierarchies of power' (Black 2010: 2). This broader counter-narrative is a direct legacy of twentieth-century evils, which 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 ever be represented in a way that does justice to the victims' suffering. Many critics have since asked whether the very idea of aesthetic representation in light of such atrocity does not border on 'dehumanising pornography' that mocks 'the very idea of human solidarity' (Black 2009: 789). The postmodern criticism and its embrace of only particular narratives thus not only challenged the possibility of just representation outside of one's own 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).

To be sure, thinkers have since discerned behind the postmodern critique the risk of a new 'epistemologically limiting and politically dangerous' perspective that is alienated from practical struggles against oppression (Stone-Mediatore 2003: 1). Nevertheless, the challenge posed by the end-of-the-century crisis of representation remains profound. For at issue now is not only how to constantly scrutinise the adequacy of our acts of recognition and representation with a view to unmasking their potential injustice. What so radically impugns the positive effects of literary sensibility is the concern that this moral framework has become profoundly inadequate to relate to our historical experience and serve as a meaningful bridge to reality (Dean 2004: 7). What merits careful consideration, therefore, is the question of how precisely can narrative sensibility 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 upon others and more welcoming to difference? To address this question, the next section refrains from presupposing a connection between an engagement with literary works and the making of political judgements in real life. It heeds

the recent calls for a sustained exploration of the specific features of narrative and the process of narrative interaction that underpin its potential political relevance (Schiff 2013: 101, 110–12; 2014: 141–63; Mihai 2018a; 2018b; Thiele and Young 2017). It engages existentialists' lenses to enquire into the epistemological and ontological presuppositions grounding the explorations into the ethical and political promise of narrative form. It finds its political promise in its ability to respond to the vexed issue of intersubjective recognition and its discontents.

Existential Underpinnings of Narrative Imagination and the Troubled Horizon of Intersubjectivity

Ontologically, the arguments for the ethical and political promise of narrative form rest on stories' ability to answer to the 'proto-existential' account of human experience (Kearney 2002: 130). By this is meant that stories respond to the horizon where human beings have been unhinged from the realm of eternal ideas, and where the points of support can be looked for only among others, in our finite, intersubjective existence itself (Murdoch 1970: 86; Rorty 1989: 45). This horizon envisions human beings as 'split, decentred, fallible' subjectivities, both free to interpret and engage the world, but also deeply immersed in a given historical situation and 'traversed by meanings other than [their] own' (Ricoeur in Kearney 1984: 15, 32). The way of human freedom 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 value of narrative within this horizon resides in a recognition that a presumption of an autonomous, self-constituting subject of traditional philosophy all too easily loses its ground in reality and obscures our ability to view it clearly (Murdoch 1970: 1, 7, 47). Beauty, in contrast, acknowledges the worldly character of the self, and is determined to endow with meaning the plural and unpredictable nature of the world (Murdoch 1970: 79, 86).

Hence emerges, at its most fundamental, existential–phenomenological level, the political relevance of narrative voice. Because

narrative approaches human lived experience in its worldliness and its contingency, it can imitate the structure of human action and suffering in the world (Ricoeur 1991: 28; Kearney 2002: 131–2). To recall Arendt's (1958a: 186) insight, the political relevance of stories lies in their ability to reveal the 'who' rather than the 'what' of the actors' identity, to foster the view of human beings as actors and sufferers rather than passive objects. Ontologically, this understanding corresponds to 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. On the one hand, our lives are always already storied, caught in the temporal dramas of the appearing world. On the other hand, human life constitutes 'an activity and a passion in search of a narrative' that would organise the flux of events into a meaningful life-story (Ricoeur 1991: 28–9; Kearney 2002: 129–32; see also Ricoeur 1981c). Their loyalty to the structure of human action allows narratives to humanise 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). Or in Arendt's (1958a: 184) words, while our condition as worldly beings engaging the world in action and speech grounds the very possibility of stories, it is stories that can reveal the distinctly human character of action. Narratives endow past occurrences with a tangible form and enrich our sense of the common world – which simultaneously involves a reconsideration of the possibilities of human action in the present and the future (Kearney 2002: 132–3). Narratives, in short, are crucial in strengthening our sense of ourselves as 'political-ethical subject[s]', capable of responsible action in the world (Kearney 2002: 151–2).

These existential insights into the political relevance of stories reveal the utmost importance of the vexed question of recognition of the particularity of others 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 gains 'full autonomy' only once it is liberated from the theory of knowledge, with the granting of philosophical significance to the

vicissitudes of human being-in-the-world (Ricoeur 2005: 36, 27). Only once the contingent nature of human experience is acknowledged – and the concomitant uncertainty and the possibility of misrecognition given full weight – can the process of recognition be approached in its inherent urgency as well as difficulty (Ricoeur 2005: 36, 63–8). This awareness grounds the recent emergence of politics of recognition as a distinct approach to understanding politics. Charles Taylor, one of its main proponents, traces the dawn of the politics of recognition to the modern shattering of previously unquestioned historically, socially and politically ascribed identities (Taylor 1994: 48, 61). Once human beings can no longer rely on predetermined social categories, the issue of recognition of the identity and the very humanity of oneself and that of others turns into an open, existential question. What distinguishes the modern age from other periods, 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 realisation 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 (Honneth 2012: 3–18). Recent proponents of the recognition approach, notably Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser, have on this basis enquired into the mainsprings of social conflict and change by reference to the normative dimension contained in relations of mutual recognition (Honneth 1995: 92; Fraser and Honneth 2003). The recognition approach, in this respect, echoes the crucial insight arising from the existentialist account of the human condition. As Arendt has underscored, human dignity is not a matter of a self-evident fact. It refers to the process of 'becoming' human and to the ability of *exercising* one's rights, which is predicated 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 '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 the status of political actor, equally worthy of engaging in the recreation of the common world in the company of his or her peers (Hayden 2012: 578).

The importance of intersubjective recognition brings out the situated, and indeed political, nature of the activity of judging, of affirming bonds of solidarity with the oppressed and resisting injustice (Hayden 2012: 575–6). Yet it also reveals the fundamental ambiguity involved in recognising others as equals in precisely the difference that distinguishes them from ourselves and all the rest. This ambiguity refers to the difficulty of recognising ourselves and different others as acting and responsible beings, beings who can no longer rely on an ontological whole of Being where individual actions could be granted a necessary place and thereby also redeemed (Ricoeur 2005: 69–70, 96). With the shattering of this whole in modern philosophy, the acknowledgement of individuals' political status requires the recognition of their autonomy as agents, yet an autonomy that constantly engages the outside world and confronts the reality of other freedoms (Ricoeur 2005: 96, 90–96, 101–3). The ambiguity of recognition emerges in two interlinked aspects. Political judgement must 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 answer to the dialectic between the self and others, or 'the dialectic of identity confronted by otherness' (Ricoeur 2005: 103).

The difficulty of recognition manifests itself in the fact that, precisely because individuals' identities are intersubjectively produced, the very attempt to imagine across difference can be seen as an act grounded in and further entrenching the social and political hierarchies of power. The political implications of this difficulty can be discerned from two prevalent criticisms of the recognition approach to politics. An insistence on the particularity of individuals' experience tends towards a degree of epistemological and ethical relativism, questioning the idea of solidarity-based judgement and action across different groupings and divisions. So too, it risks failing to sufficiently account for and muster resources to resist broader processes and structures of economic and political

inequality (Kruks 2001: 80–6). How then are we to extend recognition to others and affirm solidarity with them, without eliminating their difference and perpetuating existing injustice? And conversely, how are we to value diversity without at the same time denying the existence of any commonality to human lives that could ground understanding across difference, and inspire wider projects of political transformation?

It is 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 giving weight to its critics. But how can narrative form be said to embody this condition? The answer can be gleaned from the existential thinkers' aesthetic insights into the ambiguity of political judgement. Unable to rely on any pregiven and self-evident standard of values, aesthetic judgement is grounded in human freedom. To evoke Sartre, it corresponds to a lived practice of confronting the world in its experiential reality and disclosing it towards future possibilities of being (Sartre 1992a: 18–19, 46–7). Yet, as acts of a situated being, our judgements can never reach a total view of a given situation, but retain a partial and open character. Among recent proponents of narrative, this ambiguity is expressed in the notion of 'point of view' (Scholes and Kellogg 1966: 240–82). The notion foregrounds that *mimesis* or imitation at work in narrative discourse has its source in human freedom, which introduces a gap between recounting and an action recounted (Kearney 2002: 132). The human reality of the gap, in turn, points to a double movement contained in the word *mimesis*. Narrative imitation, as Ricoeur (1981a: 292) observes, is not a mere 'servile representation', but should be understood as a 'creative retelling'. 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). As the condition of recreating life through stories, however, the gap also contains an acknowledgement of their 'unbridgeable difference', questioning the possibility of a conclusive narrative account (Ricoeur 1991: 32–3).

The perspectival quality of narrative at the same time highlights the activity of judging as an inherently intersubjective phenomenon and an appeal to the freedom of others. The source of our

judgements in our situated existence, as most evidently expressed in Beauvoir's narrative judging sensibility, grounds the fact that in order for them to be meaningful, they need to be taken up, valued and recognised by other freedoms. But they, precisely because they are free, can also fail or refuse to recognise us at all or misrecognise our judgements in a way that appropriates our possibilities and alienates our freedom (Beauvoir 1948: 71; 2004a: 132–3). Narrative manifests this ambiguity of judgement and recognition 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'. Narrative form embodies the 'interactive problematic' of a call and response between the narrator, actor and spectator, and the 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 represents the problematic of intersubjective recognition in the world without an external *telos*. The inconclusiveness and open-endedness of narrative discourse brought forth by the reality of the gap, however, distinguish the narrative horizon of thought from (neo)Hegelian accounts of struggles for recognition. If the latter 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'.

Just as it embodies this intersubjective problematic, narrative form also possesses some distinct structural advantages that allow it to confront the promise and risks involved in imagining outside one's own perspective and responding to the plural world (Black 2010: 8–9, 19–21). The intersubjective condition of political judgement 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 nonnarrated', what is not told in order to create a certain temporal order, rhythm or suspense (Prince 1988: 2). Even though linked to 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). The unfolding of a particular narrative, in other words, also reveals 'choices not made, roads not taken, possibilities not actualized, goals not reached' (Prince 1988: 5). The disnarrated responds to the contingency of human affairs by offering a portrait where each course of action, decision or undertaking contains within itself an alternative, a plethora of other possibilities.

Another way of conceptualising this peculiar characteristic of narrative form is to say with Ricoeur (1991: 31, 21–2) that narrative reconfiguration of experience involves a constant 'play between concordance and discordance' and proceeds by way of 'a synthesis of heterogeneous elements'. Narrative 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. This means that it is a synthesis of 'components that are as heterogeneous' as unforeseen circumstances, interactions between 'those who perform actions and those who suffer them', interrelationships 'ranging from conflict to collaboration' and 'unintended results' (Ricoeur 1991: 21). As such, it is well suited to account for the complexity of political affairs because it gathers in one place a plurality of different perspectives as they span both space and time of the narrative world. A similar outlook is conveyed with Black's (2010: 19–51) metaphor of 'crowded selves'. On this account, narrative 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, it can illuminate how particular actions negotiated the gap between past and future and how they arose from and affected the web of

intersubjective relationships. It envisions how the others engage and affect the self, how 'the borders of the self jostle against the edges of others' (Black 2010: 47), inviting us to reflect on the particular acts and practices of (mis)recognition.[1]

To articulate how these insights into the worldly character of narrative can help reinvigorate the activity of political judgement, the next section undertakes a phenomenological exploration of our engagement with literary works. It builds on the existing accounts of the relationship between literary imagination and real-life judgement, and seeks to enrich them by drawing on the existential aesthetic judging sensibility. It contrasts the recent predominance of the epistemological, moral concern with ensuring a proper way of responding to others' suffering, with the existential thinkers' aesthetic emphasis on fostering worldly forms of recognition and kindling of a space for political action.

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, 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, is an enquiry into the experiential reality of this gap, into the ways it is assumed by situated freedoms. On this account, narrative ethics is based on what Booth calls 'coduction' performed by readers, an active participation in the communal discussion and evaluation of the literary work (Booth 1988: 72, 252–72). The emphasis shifts from an enquiry into what *kind* of literary works merit reading, to 'what kind of live encounter a given reading experience is *like*' (Booth 1988: 169, 202–21). The phenomenological analysis of engagements with literary works begins with readers' acknowledgement that, as an act of creative retelling, narrative is an act of world-disclosure, rather than knowledge or truth. As Ricoeur

(1981b: 201–2) says, it opens up 'a world for us'. The existential–phenomenological orientation shies away from the 'epistemological' focus of both the traditional, historiographical view of narrative as (objective) representation of outside reality, and the postmodern emphasis on instituting a narrative text as a place of the endless deconstruction of all referentiality (see White 1987; 1984; Brunner 1991). As Sartre and Beauvoir insisted, narrative is an appeal to assume responsibility for what has been disclosed and take it up as a ground for our own acts of judgement. In the act of reading, as Nussbaum (1995: 83) has put it, we are 'constituted' so as to assume the position of spectators and judges of the manifold affairs of humankind.[2]

In Nussbaum, however, this appeal is envisioned to proceed by way of stimulating our 'knowledge of possibilities' (Nussbaum 1995: 31, 44; 1997: 86). Drawing on Aristotle, Nussbaum believes literature intimates the process of judging because it introduces us to a plethora of events 'that might happen', reveals 'their impact on human lives' and allows us to evaluate in general terms the 'possibilities for being human' (Nussbaum 1997: 92, 110; 1995: 126). This is because the reader is able to imagine what it would feel like to be struck by the same misfortunes as those plaguing the lives of literary characters, but is sufficiently distanced so as to be capable of critical judgement (Nussbaum 1995: 72–6). In this morally desirable position for judging, 'we find [. . .] love without possessiveness, attention without bias, involvement without panic' (Nussbaum 1990: 162). An engagement with literature occurs in the calm and controlled space of the reader's inner self. Literature, as Vasterling (2007: 84) notes, assumes the role of an 'ethics lab', where we can train our capacities of proper understanding and adequate response without the disturbing intrusion of contingency that confronts us in the outer world. The experience of reading is seen primarily as an act of self-cultivation or a fostering of one's character. Texts are engaged as carriers of moral examples or 'paradigms', which the readers are supposed to extrapolate and apply to their own situations (Nussbaum 1990: 166; Newton 1995: 66–7). This focus not only threatens to miss out on the possibility of a 'sustained interpretation of real life experience with the help of ethical lab' (Vasterling 2007: 91). It also risks disregarding the

all-important difference between the inner and outer worlds, proceeding by applying the conclusions reached in the solitary act of reading onto the often inconsistent and always plural nature of worldly experience.

The existential aesthetic orientation, to the contrary, holds that long before we are able to retreat into the security of our private space to cultivate our own self, we are engaged as 'witnesses' to or 'interlocutors' with a myriad of differently situated perspectives on the world (Newton 1995: 65). The main political promise of narrative form lies in its ability to inspire us to explore 'the imaginative variations of our own ego' (Ricoeur 1991: 33). Implicating us in the plurality of narrative discourse, narrative prompts us to recognise in the varied perspectives the voices of our fellow actors and sufferers, and in the image of the literary world, a vision of our common world.[3] As brought forth by Camus's and Arendt's representative judging orientation, narrative at the outset confronts our freedom with its limits to achieve a completely transparent view of the world (Arendt 1994: 183–4). Recognising in the plurality of politics the very condition of responsible judgement, 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. It proceeds by a careful examination of both how worldly relationships, practices and structures have conditioned individuals' thoughts and actions, and how these conditions have been assumed in diverse ways by human freedoms (Kruks 2001: 53, 57–61). Narrative-inspired judgement thus incites us to recognise others, to use Arendt's words, in their worldly appearance, or as Beauvoir's situated freedoms: in their very distinctness, it is able to reveal a world that is shared in common (Beauvoir 2011a: 200–1). Acknowledging individuals' lived experience, we are able to humanise previously unseen or radically different others, see in them not passive objects, but equal members of the common world.

This worldly focus importantly speaks to the problematic of intersubjective recognition, which remains inadequately addressed in Nussbaum's literary imagination. The process of responding to others' perspectives proceeds by virtue of a constant interplay 'between the general and the concrete', between general human

needs and conditions of happiness, and ways these are furthered or impeded by particular social and political arrangements (Nussbaum 1995: 7–8). Here the crux of desired recognition remains directed on the inner self, a margin of interiority that is transcendent to its worldly existence and its interaction with others (Vasterling 2007: 92). What is presupposed is 'a generalizable moral consciousness' (Newton 1995: 65), which is applied as a standard of judgement between different historical arrangements. In this respect, Nussbaum's ethics of reading betrays the abstract humanist proposition of a self-constituting consciousness, which only needs to shed its particular situational constraints to reach its full presence to itself. It remains disputable whether such narrative-inspired judgement does not recognise only 'what fits our [already established] frame of reference', to the exclusion of other perspectives (Vasterling 2007: 90). Rather, Nussbaum's account seems to presuppose a shared conception of humanity that must first be brought into existence through a consideration of a plurality of equally valuable 'imagining and thinking and feeling' acts of the different members of the reading community (Nussbaum 1990: 48). Because it focuses on individuals' humanity as an inner quality, this perspective for instance obscures the ways in which a certain (oppressive) situation is constitutive of their very being and may fail to challenge the structures of social and political inequality.

It is this universalising tendency of abstracting from the particular situatedness of individuals that led postmodern thinkers to question the narrative ability to do justice to radical difference. The main difficulty is well captured in the core problem at work in the recognition approaches. While the foundation of politics of recognition lies in acknowledging the situated nature of subjectivity, the desired goal of proper revaluation of an individual's or group's authentic identity is conceived in the mode of the in-itself, outside the world of human relationships (see McNay 2008: 7–9; Markell 2003). The more general perplexity of recognition that plagues Nussbaum's narrative approach is that it remains underpinned by the concern with achieving proper and just recognition, mutual intelligibility, transparency and security. To argue with Markell (2003: 3–5), Nussbaum's inward-directed ethics of

narrative commits a more fundamental, 'ontological' form of mis-recognition. Admitting that individual perspectives are socially shaped, it envisions the goal of mutual recognition between different subjectivities in terms of a self-contained substantiality or a predetermined end, lying outside of political relationships and structures in which they are inescapably enmeshed.

This problem echoes Camus's and Arendt's wariness of attempts to penetrate to the innermost kernel of the others' subjectivity and achieve perfect coincidence between human consciousnesses. While envisioned to end in a happy reconciliation of opposing sides, as Camus observed, these attempts risk entrenching the division between masters and slaves. They amount to 'blind combat', where final agreement ensues only at the expense of eliminating difference (Camus 1971: 130). It was this desire to achieve complete mutual understanding between persons that Arendt warned against as an unworldly and unpolitical form of human togetherness. Shorn of an in-between space of the world, she held, this tendency leads to a unity of perspectives that cannot sufficiently heed the fact of human plurality and diminishes the sense of common worldly reality (Arendt 1994: 443; 1978b: 200; see also Hinchman and Hinchman 1991: 445–50). What Nussbaum's ethics of narrative lacks, then, is an account of how narrative can incite the judging process of situating particular experiences within the web of human relationships and practices, and disclosing grounds for solidarity across different groupings. If the end of recognition is thought to exist outside of the web of human relationships, this 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 can only be seen as an appropriation of their separate subjectivity. Further, this mode of mutual recognition risks obscuring the very condition of possibility of seeing humans as beings capable of political action, which is only possible on the ground of the world and in the company of others. A freedom envisioned to be able to assume the form of an in-itself leads to the presumption of sovereign agency, misunderstanding the intersubjective character of political action and the attendant unpredictability and frailty of political life (Markell 2003: 3–5).

The limitations of this perspective have been lucidly exposed in Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew*. There Sartre explores 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 resist the self-objectifying internalisation of the anti-Semitic gaze. While such assumption may affirm his remaining margin of existential freedom and his moral sense of self-worth, however, 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 recognise, remains removed from a sustained engagement with the broader domain of social and political structures and processes that condition individuals' ability to exercise freedom.

Rather than aiming for identification with others' perspectives, the existential plural orientation explores the experience of suffering in its worldly significance. Importantly, the narrative-inspired judging ability is not predicated upon any pre-given quality that may make us empathise more readily with certain individuals or groups. The presupposition that we are able to comprehend other people's standpoints rests on our recognising in them the same unpredictable plays of freedom and world that constitute our own existence. In other words, we can consider particular others as they act and suffer on the temporal and spatial plane of the world, 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. Acknowledging individuals in their worldly existence, the existential aesthetic sensibility draws attention to how the dynamics of intersubjective recognition is embedded in the broader field of social and political practices and institutions. It is within this horizon that the interdependence as well as 'dissymmetry' (Ricoeur 2005: 154) between the self and others comes fully to light, and that the perplexities of intersubjective recognition are given full weight. Crucially, the focus thereby 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; Kruks 2001: 34–5).

The accompanying realisation, as Fraser (2003: 93) has helpfully put it, is that an adequate understanding of social (in)justice may require a two-dimensional approach, encompassing both recognition and redistribution. For Fraser, the dynamics of recognition and redistribution represent two distinct, yet deeply intertwined, dimensions of social justice. She foregrounds how they may reinforce 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-realisation. It is judged by taking into account the field of social relations and institutional arrangements that deny certain individuals and groups the status of equal members of the public realm, and exclude them from participation in debates about social justice (Fraser 2003: 29–31). The existential aesthetic loyalty to individuals' worldly appearance offers insight into how the two realms of interpersonal recognition and redistribution are interwoven – and how to envision the ambiguous process of recognising 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 individual actions or social practices work to constrain not only the capacity of certain individuals or groups to engage in political action, but also their very ability to reflect upon a given situation. We learn to recognise in the various undertakings of the oppressed, ranging from complicity to resistance, deviance to strategic opportunism, modes of lived experience in which individuals interiorise and respond to their situation in the world. We discern how individual refusals of recognition pass into institutionalised forms of oppression, and how structural factors may enable some individuals or groups to keep others in a state of subjection. We may also observe how individual and structural forms of failed recognition condition the actions of those individuals who are in 'good faith'. In Sartre's example of the oppressive situation of antisemitism, even those humanists

who recognise in Jews the freedoms that they are, find their compassionate gaze transformed into another variation of an objectifying look, one of pity or commiseration (Sartre 1976: 76–7). As he writes, the democrat saves the Jew as the abstract subject of human rights, but 'annihilates him as Jew' (Sartre 1976: 56–7). 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 remains enmeshed in the overall situation that is not only 'his to renounce' (Kruks 2001: 60; Beauvoir 2009b: 776). Finally, by luring us out of our self-contained selves, narrative drives us to reflect on our own situatedness within the web of worldly relationships and structures of injustice.

It is only after such exercises in world-travelling that we engage in what Booth (1988: 270–1) calls 'second-order valuings', a judgement on how the freedom of certain individuals or groups has been denied and what is required to reclaim their political status. Such narrative-inspired judgement, however, does not constitute a wholesome moral community or agreement on an appropriate response. To evoke Beausoleil (2015: 16, 18), it does not signify 'the mastery of knowledge', but can better be envisioned as 'the experience of meeting' – acknowledging the deeply situated nature of the encounter as well as the limits of understanding the concrete other. Hence also springs the distinction between the political import of the existential aesthetic sensibility, and the predominantly moral focus of the recent enquiries into the value of narrative. In Nussbaum, the main concern is reaching an adequate grasp of others' experience of suffering and injustice, and thereby cultivating in the reader appropriate emotional responses and moral sentiments (see also Rorty 1993). Unmediated by the perspective of worldly plurality, to evoke Arendt, this detour via the self is bound to overlook how a particular instance of oppression arose amidst our common, human world, and obscure the sense of worldly reality. It introduces a hiatus between the experience of identification on the one hand and acting upon this recognition on the other, a failure which can only be 'remedied' by applying onto this world categories from the outside or above. Short-cutting the process of reconciling with the ambiguity of political action, it

leads into impotence at best or into highly dangerous instrumentalism at worst.

This existential critique certainly does not exclude '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 an evaluation of a certain action or situation should not be based on 'the force with which the passion affects the soul', but on 'the amount of reality the passion transmits to it'. The crucial political significance of the existential narrative-inspired judgement then lies in its resistance to accounts of completeness and finality, to instead retain the space for ongoing reflection on what particular injustices mean for our common world. In this light, the operation of the existential aesthetic sensibility can be read as an attempt to reclaim 'the spirit of the gift' (Ricoeur 2005: 236–7). In the idea of the gift, on the one hand, is implied a presumption on the part of the giver of being able to adequately recognise what the other desires, and 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 will not be affirmed in a return gesture (Ricoeur 2005: 225–30). Narrative judgement does not eliminate the 'dissymmetry' or the possibility of misrecognition between human consciousnesses (Ricoeur 2005: 154). Rather than complete reciprocity, its goal consists in the kindling of communicability and sociability involved in the act of giving, receiving and giving in return. Constantly enriching the web of human relationships, it illuminates the boundaries of the common world and can disclose a worldly space for a new beginning.

The political significance of this shift of focus is manifested in Arendt's *The Jewish Writings*. Her analysis of the position of Jews in Western nation-states importantly enriches Sartre's individualistic approach, which attributes the situation of antisemitism to the inauthentic exercise of freedom on the part of the anti-Semite, the Jew and the democrat (Sartre 1976: 11–17, 90–3; Pilardi 1999: 34–5). Arendt adopts a plural perspective, allowing her to trace the twentieth-century horrors to the specific historically and politically situated dynamics of the Jewish–Gentile relationships.

In *Antisemitism*, she similarly challenges the Enlightenment formulation of the Jewish question, which conceived of liberation as the struggle for affirmation of the Jews' abstract humanity, while missing out on their 'concrete noxiousness' as it was perceived in the world (Arendt 2007: 62). The Enlightenment politics of assimilation was based on a vision of perfect coincidence between the Jews and their host nation, which in fact eliminated the Jewish difference. Arendt reveals how this abstract understanding was turned 'on its head' by modern antisemitism, transforming Jews as living, differently situated individuals into a principle of what is universally 'evil' (Arendt 2007: 64). Yet she is equally critical of the Zionists' depiction of the Jew–Gentile relationship, which conceived of Jewish existence in terms of an eternal 'substance', forever opposed to the 'equally eternal substance' of the hosts (Arendt 2007: 51). This tendency again abstracted the Jewish question from historical relationships and processes through which it emerged, and blurred the insights into antisemitism as a human, political phenomenon (Arendt 2007: 66–7, 43). In *Zionism Reconsidered*, for instance, Arendt describes how the Zionist claims of 'eternal' antisemitism cut off Jews further from the world, absolving them of any responsibility for the state of affairs and assuming Jew-hatred to be a 'natural reaction' of 'every gentile living with Jews' (Arendt 2007: 358).

For Arendt, it is only by exploring the experience of oppression in its intersubjective meaning that we are able to recognise in the suffering not eternal victims, but individuals whose humanity has been unjustly denied, and disclose grounds for solidarity with them. Similarly, it is only by considering particular commissions (or omissions) of 'oppressors' as they 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 in human terms. This distinction is particularly relevant when trying to judge those instances of oppression that cannot be traced directly to actions of specific individuals. Most oppressive situations, indeed, only reveal themselves in the simultaneously cumulative and digressive effects of the myriad individual undertakings, and through an exploration of social and political conditions that make them possible. Furthering an understanding of how suffering arose through

worldly interaction between different individuals, narrative judgement also stirs the recognition that it does not represent a necessary fact, but is thoroughly human and appeals to the potentials of human freedom in the present.

By returning us to moments of political action when the protagonists confronted an unknown future, it inspires us to recover the unrealised possibilities of a historical event (Morson 2003: 61–2; Ricoeur 1999a: 9; 1999b: 14). Or, as Ricoeur (1999b: 14) notes, it encourages us to uncover 'the future of the past'. Revealing others as situated freedoms on the ground of the shared (narrative) world, narrative-inspired judgement allows us to see in them speaking and acting beings. Here the political appeal of narrative lies not in its ability to provoke empathetic identification with the victims *per se*, which, as Arendt (2007: 29–30) succinctly observed, retains the division between those who suffer and their sympathisers. It consists of a sense that what is at stake in a given oppressive situation is the fate of the common world and that any denial of freedom is a concern of the suffering and the non-suffering alike (Arendt 1968e: 7–8). In the same vein, narrative judgement resists the view of different groups as 'opposing abstractions' or essentially foreign 'substances' confronting each other in an eternal struggle (Arendt 2007: 50–1, 55; Camus 2013: 32). The relationship between them is now historicised, tying them indissolubly together as members of the shared world and rousing within them an awareness that it is always possible to see each other and the world differently.

The narrative-inspired appeal to human freedom first of all means that the future too can only exist in the plural. Just as it holds that the meaning of a given situation cannot be imposed from above the human affairs, it also bears a recognition that an assessment of resistance cannot be determined with reference to a pre-given end. A change in practices of misrecognition cannot be achieved by revaluation of the inner 'oppressed' identity, which keeps in place the relation of the objectifying gaze and leaves the wider situation intact. The narratives' plural perspective drives us to acknowledge that the conditions for a fully human existence require a change not only in interpersonal relations of intersubjective recognition but also in the worldly field that structures these relationships. Yet policies of redistribution, too, are likely

to reduce the particularity of human freedoms to passive benefi-
ciaries if conducted with reference to a materialist end inscribed
in reality. Instead, the narrative emphasis on worldly recognition
stimulates our capacity to resist oppression through collective
action in the world.

To return to the example of the Jewish question, Arendt
observed that liberation lies neither in an escape from the world
into one's inner self nor in an acceptance of charity. In her *Aufbau*
articles on *The Jewish War That Isn't Happening*, she insisted that
Jews defend themselves as Jews, as they were attacked (Arendt
2007: 137). This entailed coming to terms with reality as it is,
and turning their pariah status into a politically significant act
of resistance (Arendt 2007: 141, 150, 296). Arendt (2007: 137)
for instance called to the Jewish people to join the fight against
Hitler 'in Jewish battle formations under a Jewish flag'. In this
way, the Jews could not only show they do not see freedom as a
'prize for suffering endured', but something that has to be won
(Arendt 2007: 137). This decision would also effect a change in
the nature of their relationship to their allies, awakening in them
a recognition that their 'taking the side of the condemned Jew' is
not a matter of condescending benevolence, but is indistinguish-
able from Europe's common struggle for freedom and equality
(Arendt 2007: 136, 141–2). As Arendt (2007: 142) quotes Hillel,
a Jewish sage, 'If I am not for me – who is for me?' and 'If I am
only for me – who am I?' Apart from her call to arms, Arendt
(2007: 144–5) appealed to an establishment of a (Jewish) politi-
cal community that would endow their fight with a meaning. She
invited individual Jews to forego tribal politics and bring into
being a body politic based on 'the work of their own hands' and
the free confrontation of differences between various groupings
and divisions, within Palestine and worldwide (Arendt 2007:
143–4, 333, 171, 175).

The narrative appeal to concerted action also confronts the
ambiguity that liberation for some may require of us to treat oth-
ers as objects or alienate their possibilities to exercise freedom. Yet,
just as representative narrative-inspired judgement awards victims
and executioners a common past, it also inscribes them into a com-
mon future. Given the narrative ability to further recognition of

others as worldly freedoms inextricably linked through the mediation of shared reality, they are no longer seen as demonic or wholly alien to each other. They come to represent human beings who can no longer be simply dispensed with without any cost. It now seems possible to sit down at a common table to discuss their divergent interests and responsibilities, to distinguish, in Camus's words, 'in each camp the respective limits of force and justice' (Camus 2013: 32). The crucial point 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 no longer be assumed lightly (Beauvoir 1948: 107–50).

In this spirit, Arendt outlined the fallacy of Jewish politics in Palestine. Based on (Theodor Herzl's) Zionist assumption of the (eternal) hostility of the gentile world, the Zionist leaders harboured 'the dangerous illusion of the possibility of *autonomous Jewish politics*' (Arendt 2007: 57, 335–6). They sought to redeem a Jewish substance through the establishment of an autonomous national state that remained isolated from the surrounding Arab world and reliant on the protection of great powers (Arendt 2007: 336). Arendt's entreaty to human solidarity against the doctrines of racial superiority translated into a plea for Jews and Arabs to recognise each other as 'concrete human being[s]' and find a ground for an exchange of perspectives in the common problems that both relate and separate them (Arendt 2007: 430). She denounced an ideological element in the reasoning of both sides, which, 'in order to escape reality and truth, looks for ulterior motives and secret plots everywhere' and pits one's own side 'against a whole world of enemies' (Arendt 2007: 413, 416). The solution, for Arendt, had to go beyond the existing arrangements of sovereign nation states. Against the necessity of war, she proposed a confederate structure of Jewish–Arab councils that would acknowledge 'the simple fact that Palestine is being inhabited by two different peoples' (Arendt 2007: 412). In broader terms, she called for a change in ways of relating to others that would dispense with the tendency 'to play the oppressor as soon as one is liberated' (Arendt 2007: 170, 427). The existential worldly judgement, in this respect, recognises that a true break with the oppressive practices of the past can only be made if claims for liberation are formulated in terms

that uphold the dignity of all human beings. It is distinctly political in affirming 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

The existential narrative judging sensibility is of utmost political importance 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 lies in retaining attention on recognising, understanding and evaluating the lived experience of others, making them part of *our* world and fostering the sense of shared worldly reality (see Schaffer and Smith 2004: 2–3). The existential emphasis on worldly recognition can achieve this because, refusing to see others as substances that can be fully known, it dispenses with a view of them as objects '*for*' whom one should act (Ricoeur 2005: 230). This temptation, as noted above, can just as easily reduce others to mere means to be used in pursuit of pre-given moral ends. Narrative-inspired, representative judgement shifts the focus to how to broaden the individuals' field of action, increase their potential to engage their freedom in practical projects in the world and have them taken up by others. For, by acknowledging different perspectives as rightful participants in the rebuilding and preservation of the common world, representative narrative engagement can pry open a space for their subjectivity to appear (Cavarero 2000). If others can recognise a trace of their own subjectivity in our judgement, they are more likely to engage with it, correct or dispute it. Both victims and perpetrators, for instance, might be enabled to tell their own stories if they can sense that they will not be ignored or rejected out of hand. Others' stories, in turn, will present us with new aspects of the common world, and incite us to a continuous effort in mutual understanding.

While questioning the possibility (and desirability) of final reconciliation, existential narrative engagement returns us to

Camus's notion of limits as a way of facing up to the ambiguity of political action. Constantly enriching the web of human relationships, narrative-inspired judgement illuminates the human character of political affairs and discloses a worldly space where the murkiness can be tackled through politics between distinct equals. Rather than seeking to ultimately tame the plurality and unpredictability of political affairs, it faces up to them by kindling the sense of the possibilities and limitations of political action as they inhere within the emerging bounds 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 contemporary complexities of political judgement and action. Steeped in the awareness of the spectre of difficulty, tragedy and failure haunting political affairs, these are the problem of dirty hands and the challenge of transitional justice and reconciliation. The human and humanising import of the existential aesthetic judging sensibility is illustrated through an engagement with a number of selected literary examples as manifestations of the worldly ambiguity of political judgement.

Notes

1. The exploration of the distinct features of narrative discourse merits an acknowledgement of the important differences between various narrative forms and genres as they developed in particular historical periods. Without aiming for a conclusive account, I have focused on the general characteristics of narrative voice that embody the ambiguities of intersubjective recognition, which may be manifested in varied ways through different forms and genres. The central concern, however, is not to engage in literary criticism of how a particular narrative is constructed as text, but how an engagement with narratives can kindle our capacity for political judgement. Following recent proponents of narrative, my account focuses specifically on works of literature, but does not exclude non-literary aesthetic mediums.
2. Among the contemporary supporters of narrative voice, I focus in this section primarily on Nussbaum's ethics of reading because

she offers, in my view, the most sustained attempt to examine our engagement with literary works in its lived reality.

3. 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 recognise that both history and fiction assume the form of acts of *mimesis* or creative retelling. The acknowledgement of this human element 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 disclose the same fundamental condition of human existence, its historicity (Ricoeur 1981a: 292–4).

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 recognised 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 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 represents a potent manifestation of the existentialists' insights into the anguishing experience of human engagement in the world. For not only does it preclude any appeal to an authoritative standard of values that would solve the dilemma of conflicting obligations, confronting the acting subject inescapably with the 'questionable gift of human freedom' (Arendt 1978b: 141); 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 political action, the problem of dirty hands embodies the recognition of the inadequacy of absolute standards of morality. It importantly gestures at the relevance of the existential understanding of the human judging ability as a situated, ambiguous practice of facing up to the plurality and unpredictability of the world.

If the problematic of dirty hands crystallises the existential thinkers' insights into the ambiguity of political judgement, however, it at the same time envisions the operation of judging

as a complex technical exercise whose main aim is to rationalise and 'solve' the intricacies at stake. Thus remaining in the grips of the determinant conception of political judgement, it also risks overlooking the fundamental existential sources of the recognised complexity of political affairs. The upshot is that it renders recognition of the tragedy of political action into a new, inevitable *end* of political judgement. The existential aesthetic attentiveness to the worldly process of judging offers a valuable lens through which to retain attention on the human reality of the paradox as it arises from the ambiguity of human engagement in the world. As such, this chapter argues, it is also distinguished for entreating the human powers of creatively responding to the tragedies of our political reality, refusing to submit politics to any 'necessary' law of wrongdoing.

The chapter begins by briefly outlining the appearance of the concept of dirty hands in the history of political thought, focusing primarily 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, he also succumbs to the troubling rationalist propensity towards 'resolving' the ambiguity of political judgement by reducing it to the rule of 'tragic' necessity. Since his formulation presents the problem in such dramatic and stark terms, it aptly brings out certain of its general dimensions that I wish to probe. Engaging several (critical) contributors to the dirty hands problem, the second section of the chapter teases out the troubling political implications of Walzer's position and foregrounds the distinct political significance of the existential narrative judging sensibility. The third section draws on the lenses of Sartre and Beauvoir. It discerns how their insights into the situated ambiguity of political judgement reveal the dirty hands paradox as an ever-present condition of action, confronting us with our complicity in oppressive structures that can only be changed through involvement in the exigencies of the political world. Against this background, the fourth section looks to Albert Camus's artistic judgement for a rethinking of the dirty hands problem. It invokes his tragic sensibility, revealing how it discloses 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 representative judging sensibility, showing how it grapples with the contradictions of our worldly existence by appealing to the promise of politics.

The Dirty Hands Problem in Political Theory

The problem of dirty hands as the paradox at the heart of political ethics 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 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. [. . .] 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)[1]

Often portrayed as a conflict between ends and means or between personal morality and political expediency, this paradox of political judgement asks whether it is inherent to political action that it should require (or even make justifiable) the violation of our most cherished moral values in the pursuit of desired ends. 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 with regard to the question of the legitimacy of torture 'in the age of terror' (see Lauritzen 2010; Finlay 2011). The issue is hardly of recent origin, however. Its various perplexities pervade the writings of a number of thinkers in the Western tradition of political theory. One of the most 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 paradox can be traced as far back as the pre-Socratic tragedians and historians and the political philosophy of Aristotle (Wijze 2004: 454–5).

While 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 thoroughly examine what exactly it is about political judgement that invites most radical moral dilemmas (Parrish 2007: 12–13). In this light, Walzer's intervention is particularly significant in that he sets out to approach the problem not primarily as a philosophical question, but as an ambiguity inherent to political judgement and action (Walzer 1973: 161). Enquiring into the reasons why this is the case, Walzer elicits segments of popular belief about the special role that politicians (are supposed to) play. Politics appears as a realm of dirty hands because politicians (claim to) act for and on behalf of all of us as a collectivity, but 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 'systematically' invokes the dirty hands paradox because it is, at the most fundamental level, an intersubjective activity (Walzer 1973: 162; Buckler 1993: 2, 11–12). Since it concerns the pursuit of collective goals, it contains an impersonal and instrumental element that awards only relative, rather than absolute, value to individuals (and any specific principles or goals). Accordingly, it requires of political actors to abandon their uncompromising allegiance to the universal percepts of morality to be able to tend to the common good (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. As he writes, 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 – of either a consequentialist or deontological kind – where we can always draw on some rule or calculating procedure that enables us to judge which of the actions in a given situation is the right one. In these philosophical models, indeed, the issue of dirty hands can only appear as a false construction of an essentially flawed form of reasoning (Hare and Oberdiek in Nicholls 2004: para. 7, 10–11). Walzer resorts to a phenomenologically informed account, to bring forth the experiential, practical reality of the dilemma. 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 play *The Just*, which recounts the lived experience of the nineteenth-century Russian terrorists (Walzer 1973: 178–9). As a necessary step in their fight against injustice and after many a moral scruple, the rebels decide to assassinate the Grand Duke Sergei, yet are willing to accept the penalty of death as a just penance for their moral crime.

Walzer's attentiveness to the practical dimension of the dirty hands problem grounds his argument about the appropriate response. As brought forth by the example of the just assassins, it consists of 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. However, Walzer 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 must 'acknowledge their responsibility for the violation by accepting punishment or doing penance' (Walzer 1973: 178). Thus construed, the dirty hands problem gains practical significance in Walzer's account of the just war theory and situations of 'extreme (supreme) emergency' (Walzer 2004: 33–50; see also Walzer 2006; Thaler 2014b). 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 are at stake (Walzer 2004: 41–5). Nonetheless, this violation remains a crime, which subjects war to moral considerations and makes it a 'war that it is possible to fight' (Walzer 2004: 14). Walzer's emphasis on the normative significance of the feelings of moral guilt has been taken up as a crucial characteristic of the dirty hands problem (Wijze 2004; 2009: 533–4, 538; Lauritzen 2010; Dovi 2005; Griffin 1989). Similarly to Walzer, Bernard Williams (1978: 65) emphasises that it is the sense of moral cost that enables the political actor to rise above mere utilitarian calculation, seeing that the sacrifice of a certain value exacts 'a cost of a distinctive kind' (see also Nussbaum 2000: 1033–6). He foregrounds the importance of moral character, arguing that a reluctance to doing the necessary, yet morally disagreeable thing is 'an essential obstacle against the happy acceptance of the intolerable' (Williams 1978: 64).

Walzer's practical formulation of the problem is of special political significance because it establishes political judgement as an 'autonomous' human activity that involves difficult choices and requires a situated attentiveness to specific contexts of action. It not only reveals as potentially harmful the 'moralistic' insensitivity to the ambiguous effects of our actions (see also Wijze 2004; Nicholls 2004: para. 7; Buckler 1993: 3). It also precludes the ultimate surrender to 'the demon of politics' (Walzer 1973: 178–9). For acknowledging the ethical cost involved in the making of difficult, even impossible choices, it 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 tragic nature of political judgement is meant to offset the disillusioned unwillingness to engage in political action at all, which represents the other side of the aspirations for absolute purity and clear-cut solutions (Brown 2007: 10–12; Buckler 1993).

Even though Walzer views the dirty hands paradox as a feature inherent to political action, however, he does not linger on the situated process of the agents' confronting and responding to a

difficult situation. His formulation fails to enquire into just how politics as a realm of the common leads inescapably to wrongdoing, and less than thoroughly examines the political implications of the sense of moral cost. At this point springs forth the value of engaging the existential perspective insofar as its narrative-inspired judging sensibility offers a closer insight into the phenomenal reality of the dirty hands dilemma.

The Existential Contribution to Thinking the Problem of Dirty Hands

The existential perspective on the dirty hands problem as an inherent characteristic of political action is most explicitly presented in Arendt's creative interpretation of the prince's philosopher, Machiavelli. 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 capricious (Arendt 1955: 9). Politics as a realm of the common 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 are based on the perspective of the detached self, concerned with personal salvation in the afterlife, and, as such, are ill-suited to confronting the ambiguous and unpredictable nature of politics (Arendt 1955: 8, 4, 6, 10).

This 'deeper reason' for the dirty hands problem significantly challenges Walzer's formulation of the paradox. Walzer's recognition of the tragedy of political judgement, paradoxically, affirms its conventional understanding as a rational activity of a solitary subject, based on utilitarian, means and ends calculation. Grounding it is a troubling presumption that the politician, first of all, can *know* the plurality of goals 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. To be sure, Walzer imagines the sense of the moral cost to lead to a form of public scrutiny, which acts as a bulwark against any too easy an abnegation of moral rules (see also Walzer 2004: 38–9, 49–50, 34–7). He rejects the Weberian vision of the 'tragic hero', who wallows in inner guilt and whose conduct perversely answers to only one limit, his own 'capacity for suffering' (Walzer 1973: 179). Nevertheless, it remains unclear what political weight this moral cost is allowed to carry. It is not recognised in its independent significance, but arises from the actor's individualistic reckoning with his or her own conscience backed by the authority of universal morality (Dovi 2005: 131–3; Shugarman 2000: 244). After this two-stage judging operation, the subject's hands become 'clean again' (Walzer 1973: 178). The moral trial posed by the dirty hands, then, works as a device, ennobling and toughening the politician for the next occasion when he or she will have to sacrifice moral purity in the service of the 'right' cause (Sutherland 1995: 484–5). Against any facile appeal to conditions of 'emergency', Williams (1978: 66–70) turns to examine the features of the political system, which are likely to encourage a disposition to moral limits and ensure that dirty hands remain a calculated and temporary aberration (see also Osborne 2014: 152–3). He also distances the problem from Walzer's dramatic emphasis on extreme situations, focusing instead on the 'morally disagreeable' commonplace issues like lying or cunning (Williams 1978: 56; Osborne 2014: 144–5). Yet Williams's emphasis on the cultivation of 'honourable' politicians does not lead to a change in the way of justifying dirty hands. It thus hardly offers a reliable defence against habituation to the 'necessary' moral cost, especially in cases that do not just constitute 'morally disagreeable' acts, but indeed 'crimes' such as torture and murder (Williams 1978: 71–3).

In this respect, the standard conceptualisations of the dirty hands scenario rely on a position of detached mastery over the world and others that would seem unattainable for ordinary, finite and plural beings. Walzer's tendency to reduce the ambiguity of political judgement to a rational problem-solving exercise not only furthers the image of a princely political ruler, whose

ability to make difficult choices testifies to his greatness and in whose 'deliberations' other people appear as passive, expendable objects (Sutherland 1995: 483; 2000: 208–11; Shugarman 2000: 230–35, 239–43). It also abstracts from the particular manifestation of the dirty hands situation, and risks reifying the tragic element into an essential, inevitable aspect of political judgement as such. The recognised necessity of dirty hands in politics, in other words, becomes a new general rule of political judgement that can be readily used to justify appeals to 'emergency situations' and a resort to violence and wrongdoing in order to achieve a given end.

The existentialists' judging sensibility, in contrast, foregrounds the dirty hands paradox as a problem arising from actors' engaging an independent outside world that necessarily stands beyond the transparent grasp and sovereign control of the subject. The process of arriving at a judgement will be thoroughly suffused by our situated being-in-the-world, with our values, commitments, and the broader worldly configuration shaping our view of the possible courses of action in a myriad of concurrent, yet conflicting ways. Further, our judgements will be engulfed by plural others, processes and structures, with their meaning and outcomes transcending and outstripping our intentions in unexpected directions (see Kruks 2012: 133–7). The existential situated perspective explodes the conventional conceptualisation of the dirty hands dilemma in terms of an opposition between realism and idealism or the conflict between the value of the individual and the collective good. The judging subject now not only has to confront irresolvable dilemmas between conflicting values and come to terms with the unappealing proposition that taking up a position *for* certain individuals or groups necessarily implies a stand *against* others. Given the opaque character of the world, it is also strictly speaking impossible to 'know' the conflicting values, predetermine the ends of our actions and unambiguously work '*for*' others in the first place (Beauvoir 2004a: 120). Similarly, it will be difficult to calculate, contain and assuage the burden of the moral cost. The recognition of the worldly source of the dirty hands paradox, however, also means that we cannot exist a given dirty hands situation in the mode of an 'in-itself' or hope to ultimately

resolve the ambiguity of political affairs in a truly 'authentic' way (Arendt 1955: 12). The existential thinkers' insights into the experiential reality of judging retain attention on the human character of particular dirty hands situations, radically questioning any technical, *a priori* justification of wrongdoing. Instead, their worldly judging sensibility appeals to the human capacities of freely responding to (and assuming responsibility for) the ambiguity of the political world – refusing to forfeit the 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 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 absolute standards of ethics. Yet in this it relies on the ultimately untenable presumption that it is possible to hover separate from the world and obscures our implication in and complicity with a given political situation (Sartre 1988a: 251–2, 279). As Sartre and Beauvoir emphasised, the detached position of moral purity blinds the judging subject to the reality of *living* human beings, to the particularities and differences of its own and others' situated, embodied, and indeed *political* existence. Moral judgement not only hides from view specific situations of oppression, the varied ways through which individuals' freedom may be foreclosed. In predefining what counts as human, it also risks in fact justifying the 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). It is the refusal to recognise the ambiguity of the political world that first of all warrants the blemish of dirty hands and moral stain.

Sartre and Beauvoir show how the detached standpoint of moral universality masked the complicity of the French citizenry in the system of brutality 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 (Sartre 2001b: 55). Ordinary citizens were locked into a paradoxical bind of 'irresponsible responsibility' and 'guilty innocence', increasingly resembling 'those whom we should condemn' (Sartre 2001b: 61, 58–9). Sartre and Beauvoir 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 even primarily) a disclosure of information. Its purpose is the destruction of humanity in human beings, feeding into the overall system of colonialist and capitalist oppression (Sartre 2001b: 72, 76).

For Sartre, moral universalism faces a lived contradiction, with its abstract principles of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' actively contributing to the violence against differently situated individuals or groups (Stone and Bowman 1986: 205). To avoid this contradiction, colonialists' morality 'must' exclude the colonised from the ranks of humanity, atrophying into racism as the troubling other side of abstract humanism. Through racism, the coloniser 'freely assumes' and commits to perpetuating the colonial system of exploitation, 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' (Stone and Bowman 1986: 205–6; Sartre 2001b: 50, 52). Beauvoir exposes a similar pattern in her writings in support of Djamila Boupacha. Recounting the young woman's experience of imprisonment, beating and rape, she unearths how the practice of torture required the collaboration of a number of individuals at different levels of public office. Far from an isolated occurrence, it assumed the nature of a systemic force, systematically granting impunity to the perpetrators and gnawing at the roots of the French democratic system of government (Beauvoir 2012b: 273–9). The mass slaughter and oppression of Algerians, for Beauvoir, revealed the illegitimacy of the end in light of which these practices were allowed to assume the banner of

'clean hands' – the continued existence of colonialism along with the validity of abstract humanism (Beauvoir 2012b: 280–1).

Exploding the consciousness of clean hands, 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. In this way, they also challenge the conventional conceptualisation of the dirty hands paradox as a problem that concerns the select few, those princely politicians who alone are believed to possess the capacity for action. Now it is a perplexity that confronts every human being insofar as he or she is a situated, worldly being, demanding a radical reconsideration of the citizen's habitual, complacent ways of being in the world.[2] As Beauvoir 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 challenged her way of being and her sense of self (Kruks 2012: 107–9). All of a sudden, she belonged to the nation of oppressors 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).

The challenge and complexity of complicity arises from 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 those members of the French public that failed to resist the practice – are responsible in the same way. Grounding individual responsibility is Sartre's insistence, as recalled by Aronson, 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. An individual may have contributed to oppression in 'a specific and definite', and perhaps very limited, way, but this specific and limited way also 'was all that was required of him or her' (Aronson 1990: 65, 67). 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, Sartre and Beauvoir 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 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 realisation means that our complicity with oppressive structures will not be dealt away by a good-willed judgement based on moral conversion, an inner distancing from unjust practices, and an appeal to the same exercise of freedom in others. Both Sartre and Beauvoir recognised in this response a vestige of abstract moralism. This is because it represents primarily a project directed towards one's own self, undertaken to purify one's own moral conscience rather than confront injustice in the world. Relying on an ultimately untenable conception of the self that is capable at any moment of recreating itself and its worldly situation, it constitutes an insipid response given the structurally ingrained practices of oppression. What is needed is a worldly judgement, involved in the 'filth and blood' constituting the political realm, which may significantly shape our possibilities for political action (Kruks 2012: 96–113). Beauvoir and Sartre thereby refuse 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. Denouncing the spectre of violence ruling the political world, as Merleau-Ponty (2000: xiv–xvi) argued, this dichotomy distorts the ambiguities of political involvement and risks concealing existing forms of oppression. Rather, their situated perspective brings into focus the challenge of whether, in seeking to uphold the value of freedom for all, we may be required to treat others as means and use violence against them.

Sartre, for his part, embraced the lesser evil argument. The force of structural factors, at any specific historical moment, inevitably pushes everyone into the roles of either the oppressors or the oppressed, executioners or victims. Just as the worldly structures 'similarly strangle' both the colonisers and the colonised, Sartre argues, 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). In this context, we shall recall, a renunciation of violence in the fight against oppression, viewed objectively, in terms of not its intentions but its effects in the world, actively supports the status quo and affirms its complicity with existing injustice (Sartre 2001b: 51). One's complicity can be annulled only by taking part in revolutionary praxis aiming at the overthrow of the oppressive system – along with the inevitable emergence of what Sartre calls 'alienated' or 'limited' moralities (Bowman and Stone 1992: 177–8). Alienated moralities refer to revolutionary practices that end up reproducing the conditions of systemic oppression and so divert from their goal of universal human liberation. While for Sartre these emerge as useful and necessary means of change at specific stages of the struggle, he also is attentive to how they may distort it and how they can be 'corrected' in light of the end of revolutionary praxis itself (Bowman and Stone 1992: 178). In this framework, a resort to terror and lying is only permissible provided it does not become a system (Bowman and Stone 1992: 183–5). Revolutionary violence cannot be systematic in the sense of arbitrarily destining for death pre-given categories or groups of people and so reinstating the oppressive conditions of structural violence. It can only be employed in the service of human liberation, which means it must remain 'provisional', cannot be justified ideologically, 'beyond its necessity', and must originate in the masses (Bowman and Stone 1992: 184–5). Along those lines, Sartre for instance distinguishes between insurrectional defensive violence (such as against the Nazi occupation or the French repression in Algeria) and the institutionalised terror of the Soviet state (Bowman and Stone 1992: 186). The ambiguity of political judgement here is to be confronted by constant vigilance and practice of criticism within the revolutionary group, which embodies the norms of mutual reciprocity and

solidarity against the existing structures of inequality (Bowman and Stone 1992: 182, 188).

While offering an apt insight into the tragic nature of politics, Sartre also construes the given situation of dirty hands in a fairly abstract way. His dialectical framework retains the conception of human action as rational ordering or 'totalisation' of means in light of the desired end, which is hardly suited to account for the plurality and unpredictability of political affairs. He envisions resistance as the struggle between predefined, self-contained and radically incommensurable ends, where one side is (objectively) guilty and the other embodies the progressive realisation of humankind. The judgement about the 'necessary' although morally objectionable judgement, by the same token, is determined in line with the universalising movement of the particular (the preconceived interests of the oppressed), apart from and against all other particularities inhabiting a particular situation. Sartre, to be sure, insists that the moral limits of violence are contained within praxis itself. Revolutionary violence is not in itself humanising or morally justified, strictly speaking. It is an 'excusable' means given what Sartre calls the situation of 'impossibility' – a situation of being reduced to a subhuman status that makes life impossible (Sze 2010: 111–14; Aronson, Santoni, Stone and Anderson 2003: 16–17; Stone and Bowman 1986: 210). The moral limits, accordingly, refer to means that do not preclude the possibility of creating humanity and a human morality (Sze 2010: 115–23, 148–54). But how are we to decide when the ignoble means are employed in the service of humanity and when they 'deform' the end that they are supposed to help us attain? What of the unintended consequences of human action? (Bowman and Stone 1992: 198). In a dialectical movement, where all events gain their meaning based on the envisioned totality-to-come, indeed, there remains little space for the critical evaluation of the appropriateness (and justifiability) of the means *as well as of the end pursued*. To argue with Aronson, at what point would the 'random terror' employed by the FLN be judged to 'denature' their struggle for a democratic Algeria? (Aronson, Santoni, Stone and Anderson 2003: 21–2). Sartre, in this respect, lapses into a troubling reification of the 'dirty' aspect of political judgement. Alienated moralities appear as an essential part of the

oppressed subject's rise to eventual liberation, until such time in the future when the realm of universal human freedom – and the possibility of genuine morality unhindered by alienating systemic factors – is finally established.

The fallacy plaguing Sartre's account is exposed in Beauvoir's *Merleau-Ponty and Pseudo-Sartreanism*, paradoxically written in defence of Sartre's position against Merleau-Ponty's charge of 'Ultra-Bolshevism'. There Beauvoir expands on her earlier claim that revolutionary violence cannot be judged with a view to an already formed conception of the future utopian society, problematising Sartre's temptation towards a privileged standpoint from which to justify a course of action from without. As she says: 'Every condemnation as well as every *a priori* justification of violence practised with a view to a valid end' pertains to an untenable desire for 'clean hands' and must be challenged (Beauvoir 1948: 148). The goal of any action is not 'fixed once and for all', but emerges through our living surpassing of the given conditions of existence, in its 'infinity of possibilities', uncertainty and risk that constitute any given moment of life (Beauvoir 1948: 153; 2012a: 246). Similarly, practical judgement is not 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). Beauvoir's emphasis on an open future carries an insistence that any judgement on the use of violent means can only be 'legitimised concretely', paying attention to the specific and ambiguous interrelationship of means and ends in particular situations (Beauvoir 1948: 148). It is arrived at with a view to the concrete standard of the field of action and the future that it opens or forecloses, which also enables us to consider whether the evil inflicted is 'lesser than that which is being forestalled' (Beauvoir 1948: 150; see also Hutchings 2007: 122–3, 128–9).

In the case of the Algerian war, for Beauvoir, a rejection of complicity with oppressive practices required a stand for Algerian independence, which further entailed support for the FLN – along with its terrorist tactics – as the main force of the anti-colonial struggle (Beauvoir 2012b: 281). In this either-or formulation of the problem, we can concede that Beauvoir, too, painted a picture

of 'an ideologically flattened world' that granted little attention to the particular (not only military but also civilian) lives at stake in the conflict (Walzer 2002: 142). More specifically, Beauvoir's defence of Boupacha and her argument against colonialism was focused primarily on exposing the crimes of her own government, rather than the horrors of suffering for their own sake. Frantz Fanon (1964: 71), 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. While Beauvoir was certainly at pains to shed her complicity in injustice, however, it seems that her appropriation of Boupacha (and Algerians) for patriotic ends was a deliberate strategy employed to mobilise public opinion (Kruks 2012: 118). Beauvoir was also unwilling to speak against the FLN when the organisation forced Djamila to return back to Algeria against her express wishes (Kruks 2012: 119). She felt unauthorised to intervene in the organisation's internal practices, despite the oppressive gender relations within the movement, fearing that her criticism might offer additional ammunition to the right-wing part of the French political spectrum (Kruks 2012: 119–20). Both examples manifest Beauvoir's awareness of the ambiguities involved in acting on behalf of the oppressed and a refusal to let this awareness lead to political disengagement (Caputi 2006: 123–5). In both those instances, she judged that the exigencies of politics required alignment with the broader end of liberation over and above the concern with particular individuals (Kruks 2012: 118–20), even if this decision risked sustaining unjust relationships and practices in the present. Beauvoir later harshly denounced the repression of women in independent Algeria. Far from the revolution leading to their emancipation, she stated, 'they have been crushed' (Moorehead 1974).

Nevertheless, just as Beauvoir's situated insight into the ambiguity of political judgement inescapably raises the paradox of dirty hands, it also resists the view of violence as a necessity subject to a self-reinforcing dialectical movement. Her recognition of the uncertainty and failure inherent in political action bears an acknowledgement that we can never fully predict the consequences

of our actions and that we might actually do harm to those we wish to help. It also considers any 'necessary' moral cost in its independent value, as an 'outrage' that cannot be 'integrated into the totality of action' (Beauvoir 2004c: 190). This shift in Beauvoir is important because it offers a space for distinguishing between and evaluating different dirty hands justifications, implying that any grounds appealed to in our judgements can always be contested (Kruks 2012: 40). It not only provides room for criticism of the means employed in the service of a given end with regard to their implications for not only this end itself, but also the plurality of other values inhabiting the political world. It also calls for constant contestation of the validity of the end in light of the means supposedly necessary for its realisation (Beauvoir 1948: 153–5). Still, Beauvoir ends on a somewhat tragic note. While she resists any assertion of 'objective' necessity for violence, she retains a dialectic where a movement 'from freedom to freedom' can only pass 'through dictatorship and oppression' (Beauvoir 1948: 155). Conceiving of 'the outrage' as a constant condition of political judgement, she runs the danger of reducing it to an 'inert' category that dulls, rather than heightens, our capacities of facing up to the ambiguity of politics. The dirty aspect thus risks atrophying into 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 that cannot be redeemed by any given end.

She does, however, hint in this direction in her later, recently published essay *Solidarity with Israel: A Critical Support*. There she draws attention to the pervasiveness of a climate in which the dirty hands problem tends to be reified in a way that necessitates the adoption of extreme measures. While aware of the plight of the Palestinian people and their right to a national life, she warns against a judging attitude that would refuse to recognise in Israel an equal member of the world and increase among the conflicting sides the sense of 'isolation' and 'fear' (Beauvoir 2012c: 316–17). She elaborates on how the sense of isolation led Israel to a 'tightening [of] positions', which precludes understanding of the disagreement at hand and where a concern with security is given priority over social problems, such as the blatant inequality of women and

Arabs within the country (Beauvoir 2012: 317–19). In this attentiveness to changing the situational factors that justify a resort to dirty hands, Beauvoir prefigures a concern that will preoccupy Camus and Arendt.

A Rethinking of the Dirty Hands Problem: Camus

Camus's contribution to the problem of dirty hands is oriented by the question of how to resist those conditions of political life that force us into the role of either 'a victim or a perpetrator' (Sartre 2001b: 66). Camus, to be sure, is equally doubtful of the 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 to recognise the ambiguity of the human world. His thought is highly responsive to the ways in which the weight of the given situation imposes itself upon 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 throats; our mouths were dirtied' (Camus 1970e: 164). Yet, for Camus, it does not amount to responsible commitment, but to the greatest betrayal of the human condition to surrender to the inexorable forces of history and embrace the necessity of (lesser) evil. As he wrote in his journal, 'we can despair of the meaning of life in general, but not of the particular forms that it takes; we can despair of existence, for we have no power over it, but not of history, where the individual can do everything' (Camus 2010: 151–2). The recognition of the absurd, to recapitulate, also renders meaningful the human capacity for rebelling against the contradictions and the suffering of the political world.

Camus powerfully exposes the fallacy of the dirty hands argument 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 the growing awareness of his complicity with the spectre of crime ruling the political world.

His is a narrative of self-scrutiny and self-condemnation, seemingly an honest attempt to come to terms with the tragedies of political judgement after the breakdown of eternal verities. Yet, as we soon disconcertingly intuit, the aim of his confession is not to confront the reality of the world, assume responsibility for it and fight against injustice in the future. His harsh self-denunciation 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, Clamence engages others' perspectives only to prevail over them, and drags the whole of humankind into the bottomless abyss of guilt (Camus 2006c: 88–9). His rendering of dirty hands into the universal state of political affairs amounts to a new attempt to mount 'a summit' above others and the world, and find from this masterful position a 'definitive solution' to the perplexities of political affairs (Camus 2006c: 83, 89). What this attempt gives up on, however, is the plural and complex character of the world as a human world. Clamence's flight from common worldly reality in effect fosters further evasions of freedom and responsibility for the world and others, and acts as a justification, in advance as it were, of all present and future crimes. The role of a passive, guilt-ridden bystander assumes the face of an executioner, 'an enlightened supporter of slavery' (Camus 2006c: 82).

On the one hand, Camus's portrait of Clamence depicts appeals 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 (Camus 1971: 154). For while claiming to represent the peak of realism, judgement embracing the rule of dirty hands is just as 'removed from reality' and despairing of the worldly condition of human political existence (Camus 1971: 252). This is because it likewise rests on the aspiration towards a sovereign freedom (Camus 1971: 252, 267–9). Confronted with the ambiguities of the world, the judging subject conceives of the ends in an abstract, absolute way, outside of their historical context and in isolation from a plurality of other perspectives (Camus 1970d: 150–1). In this sovereign presumption, it consigns the authority to define and pursue justice to those in power, while seeing plural others as silent and enslaved, and can justify any excess of means (Camus 1971: 255). Rendering

violence into a 'reasonable' course of affairs, it transforms 'murderers into judges' and erects the injustice of the world into a systematic practice, a new 'rule' of political judgement (Camus 1971: 11; 1970d: 150–1).

On the other hand, however, Clamence's monologue, filled as it is with elements of self-reflective mockery at his narrative exercises in self-purification, also offers insight into the depth of the dirty hands paradox. In LaCapra's (1998: 93) reading, Clamence's struggle with the tragic character of the world poses the challenge of how to acknowledge and work through, rather than deny or transcend, the susceptibility to 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. This realisation implies the need to abandon the dream of final redemption and commit to the pursuit of 'relative' justice, loyal to the limits of the world and those of different others (Camus 1971: 258). From this worldly perspective, the opposition between the positions of moral purity and realist expediency no longer appears to adequately formulate the contradiction haunting the problem of dirty hands (Sharpe 2011: 92; Shugarman 2000: 236–8). Both positions, in fact, are 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). It is only with a shift from the self to the world – with the injunction to resist injustice by respecting the plurality and complexity of political reality – that the contradiction of political action is allowed to 'exist and thrive' (Camus 1971: 254). Camus's artistic judgement frames this contradiction in terms of 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 response, in turn, consists 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). This appeal to limits should not be understood as a 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 tragedies of the world altogether. To the contrary, it encapsulates the ambiguity of a fight for 'liberty' that is situated within the 'pressures of history' and subject to its 'necessity' (Camus 1970g: 306–7). Camus's plural judging sensibility manifests heightened efforts to understand the forms of political mentality that abandon politics to the reign of dirty hands, recognising the constraints that oppressive worldly structures make upon our field of possibilities. As such, it is also oriented towards changing the conditions that justify appeals to dirty actions and illuminating the possibilities for alternative forms of interaction.

Camus's artistic appeals towards changing 'the nature of the struggle itself' are evident in his interventions into the conflict in Algeria (Camus 2013: 154). Reflecting upon the given situation from a plurality of perspectives, his dialogical judgement 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 other's arguments (Camus 2013: 124, 32). Camus explodes the dirty hands reasoning of both sides by exposing its deadly logic. He relates how the tendency on each side to formulate its claims to justice in terms of absolute ends, refuse to recognise the claims of the other, and justify its own crimes in terms of its adversary's assumed the nature of an all-devouring spiral of violence (Camus 2013: 141–2). The web of mutual denunciations came close to entrenching the image of Algeria as a country 'populated exclusively by murderers and victims' (Camus 2013: 141). Camus's rejection of the lesser evil argument is based not only on moral considerations, but more crucially on the negative solidarity of destruction and death, where 'what kills one side also kills the other' (Camus 2013: 153, 116). Nevertheless, his dialogical sensibility recognises that the ingrained dialectic of hatred and distrust cannot simply be willed away in a leap of good faith (Camus 2013: 113). It is oriented towards understanding the grievances on both sides, while aware that any judgement, once released into the world, will be changed, even perverted, by a web of mutual accusations, bitterness and suspicion. As Camus writes, it is necessary to acknowledge 'the risk that, in criticising 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).

To confront this challenge, Camus's artistic judgement examines both sides' actions in a worldly, historical perspective and in this way discloses the ways in which they interlink with and permeate each other. It reveals how the systematic practices of exploitation and repression on the part of the French government led to the advent of armed rebellion. Kept 'in a permanent state of subjection', the Arabs have 'lost their faith in democracy' and in the subsequent policy of assimilation, and gone in search of other means of demanding justice (Camus 2013: 101–5, 110). Similarly to Sartre and Beauvoir, Camus exposes how the French use of terror betrayed the justice of their cause, and proclaims the end of the 'era of colonialism' (Camus 2013: 26, 31). Torture and reprisals against the civilians, he writes, have rendered the whole public responsible for the 'actions of a few' and helped 'justify the very crimes we want to fight' (Camus 2013: 26–7). However, 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, 129). What he warns against is a certain ideological element in the rebels' reasoning, which placed France 'in a historic state of sin' and portended a nationalist rhetoric that failed to account for the firmly embedded French settler presence in Algeria. Such unilateral calculations of means and ends, for Camus, amounted to 'doctrines of total war', envisioning the future as one of either independence, which would mean the eviction of the French, or French victory, which would entail the suppression of the Arab population (Camus 2013: 145).

Camus's rejection of dirty hands, then, is underlain by a more fundamental distrust of the means–ends reasoning, where judgement would reflect on the means appropriate to an (already formed) conception of a just society. His awareness of the risk inherent in worldly judgement sharpened his sensitivity to how easily ignoble means can pervert the meaning of a given end (Camus 1970e: 168). As he writes: 'Does the end justify the means? That is possible. But what will justify the end? [. . .] [T]he means' (Camus 1971: 256).

Camus's reinterpretation of the dirty hands dilemma directs attention to the character of the means employed, striving for them to assume, whenever possible, the form of a dialogical appeal to the freedom of others (Camus 1971: 256). The focus on dialogical means, further, implies a reconsideration of the way of conceiving of the ends themselves. It reorients the struggle 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' (Camus 1971: 255).

Camus's proposal for Algeria amounted to a defence of a federated structure that would be able to nourish under its wing the freedom and equality of the two communities with different identities and be linked in some form or other to France (Camus 2013: 181–2). As a concern for individual liberty in the face of grinding poverty, it earned, particularly in the eyes of Sartre, the stamp of a meek, moralistic compromise solution that ends up defending the neo-colonialist status quo. These charges arguably obscure the character of Camus's plural perspective, which is not to be understood as a dialectic of trial and final verdict, attributing the guilt, determining penance and declaring the winners. Revealing opposing sides as equal members of the shared reality, it instead attempts to bring forth a common ground for dialogue beyond the 'simplifications of hatred and prejudice' (Camus 2013: 32). The purpose is to open a space where each side can 'find the courage to denounce its own errors' and so 'preserve its opportunity to become more just', while also refusing to give weight to the fanaticisms of the other side (Camus 2013: 31, 25). Thus, Camus's dialogical orientation sought to provide a basis for shared discussion about how to imagine a common future. For Camus, any realistic solution had to be creative, going beyond the established political principles and arrangements of sovereign nation-states, so as to recognise and respect the rights and interests of both sides in the conflict (see also Walzer 2002: 144–5, 147–8).

This does not mean that Camus's is the traditional moralistic standpoint of 'non-violence', which, if adopted as an absolute principle, effectively justifies the existing, systemic forms of violence (Camus 1971: 255). Attuned to the tragic character of politics and our at least indirect complicity with unjust structures, Camus was

well aware that violence is unavoidable. However, he also sought to affirm a limit to violence, to prevent it from becoming a systematic practice lying beyond the purview of human judgement. As he writes: 'I think we should set a limit to violence, restrict it to certain quarters when it is inevitable, dampen its terrifying effects by preventing it from going to the limit of its fury. I loathe comfortable violence' (Camus in Hayden 2016a: 72). This artistic affirmation of limits even in 'destruction' is embodied in the perspective of the just assassin Ivan Kaliayev from Camus's play, *The Just* (Camus 2006b: 187). Kaliayev is determined to throw the bomb at the Grand Duke's carriage 'for the sake of life', out of his solidarity with concrete people suffering under the yoke of the unjust political and economic system (Camus 2006b: 173–4). Yet he also questions the vision of a 'true revolutionary', Stepan, who argues that the triumph of the revolution as an eventual 'cure' of all suffering justifies doing 'anything and everything', including the sacrifice of the innocent (Camus 2006b: 172, 186–7). Kaliayev aborts his assassination attempt 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 just couldn't do it!' (Camus 2006b: 183). Further, he retains the awareness that as well as being a representative of an unjust system, the Duke is a human being of flesh and blood (Camus 2006b: 175–8). The act of assassination, he believes, breaches the value of human solidarity affirmed in rebellion and can only be justified by the sacrifice of his own life (Sharpe 2011: 92–3).

For Kaliayev, Stepan's blind faith in an ultimate vision of future justice betrays a nihilist undercurrent, sacrificing the people 'who are alive today', for the sake of 'some unknown . . . distant city' (Camus 2006b: 188). It shows that the practice of justifying ignoble means by worthy ends is bound to atrophy into a pursuit of power and risk a lapse into 'another kind of tyranny' (Camus 2006b: 187). This is because it can only evaluate any particular means in light of the desired end, regardless of a plurality of other perspectives, which leaves no space for judging between acceptable and unacceptable acts (see also Shugarman 2000: 238). Kaliayev's loyalty to human solidarity as the ground and orienting principle of violent rebellion, in contrast, ensures that violence retains

the 'provisional character of effraction' (Camus 1971: 255). This shift reflects Camus's claim that violence can only be legitimately employed for the sake of human plurality and the common world, and not 'in the service of a doctrine or of a reason of State' (Camus 1971: 256). Violence loyal to the limits of the world will, for instance, be used to voice instances of oppression or to establish institutions 'which limit violence', like the suppression of the death penalty and arbitrary sentence (Camus 1971: 256).

The figure of Kaliayev then crystallises Camus's insights into the limits of violence not so much by his readiness for self-sacrifice, as Walzer (1973: 178–9) suggests (see also Zaretsky 2013a: 175; Foley 2008: 88–92). Rather, it points to a way of evaluating different 'dirty' acts in terms of their intersubjective meaning, keeping in mind their effects on the plurality of perspectives constituting the world and their potential to open the space for a free confrontation of differences. In contrast to Sartre's account, it offers a worldly perspective from which to judge when violent means turn against the cause of human solidarity that they were meant to defend. As Camus (1971: 256) writes, a resort to violent means in the struggle for common human dignity may have to accept the hazard of sacrificing oneself, but will be less willing 'to sacrifice others'. Moreover, Camus's plural perspective reveals a strong prospective dimension to the problem of dirty hands. The ruminations of the just assassins convey a heightened sense of the human cost exacted by a decision to resort to violence. Awaiting the news of Kaliayev's execution, Dora, his lover, wonders whether Kaliayev's willingness to die really can justify the murder of another living creature. As she states: 'We lose sight of childhood at the first murder [. . .] We've gone too fast . . . we're no longer [human beings]' (Camus 2006b: 221). Camus's plural perspective insists that the moral cost brought forth by a dirty action cannot be understood primarily with reference to a morally stained self that could repent and be redeemed. It extends to the broken relationships, increasingly thin possibilities for communication and the fractured fabric of the world – the circumstances that condition the necessity of further violence. Camus's worldly judgement not only furthers the recognition that any decision for the use of ignoble means will have to bear the burden of the human cost incurred, and confront

the question of how to assume responsibility for it and repair it in the future (Hayden 2016a: 78). It also furthers the awareness of the danger that any easy concession to the necessity of violence may make the future impossible.

Beyond the Double Bind of Moralism and Political Expediency: Waiting for the Barbarians

The shift to a worldly perspective on the problem of dirty hands receives expression in J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which illustrates the crucial distinction between a creative facing up to the tragedies of politics and the double bind of abstract moralism and political expediency. The novel recounts the story of a magistrate of an unnamed town at the far boundary of the 'Empire' who finds himself complicit in the crime of torture. His 'fall' begins when the authorities, in response to an allegedly imminent attack from the neighbouring 'barbarian' tribes, declare a state of emergency. He opens the town's gates to Colonel Joll, who is authorised to hunt down 'the rebels' and interrogate them, using whatever means necessary, about their war activities and plans (Coetzee 2004: 9–10).

The Magistrate abandons himself to outbursts of abstract moral indignation at the actions of the Empire. He exclaims, 'I wish that these barbarians would rise up and teach us a lesson, so that we would learn to respect them', while also doubting whether the solution to the problem really lies in the 'the triumph of the barbarian way' (Coetzee 2004: 55). At other moments, he dreams of 'a new start', which would begin with the erasure of all memory of past injustice. It would be best, he says, if the tortured, 'ugly people' were 'obliterated from the face of the earth' and 'we swore [. . .] to run an Empire in which there would be no more injustice, no more pain' (Coetzee 2004: 26). It does not take him long to realise that his way of reasoning represents a mere reverse side of the one put into practice by the executioners of the Empire – grounded as it is in a refusal to understand and assume responsibility for the complexities of the given situation.

After the Colonel's departure, the Magistrate's attention fixates upon a 'barbarian' girl who remains in town, crippled and partly blinded by torture. He takes her into his house and nurses her, oils and rubs the marks and scars on her body. His desire to understand the girl, to fathom the mystery of torture, however, yields 'no reciprocal gaze', but only 'my doubled image cast back at me', which reflects his complicity with Colonel Joll and his crimes (Coetzee 2004: 47, 48). It soon dawns upon him that his 'generosity' towards the girl comes not from his concern for her as a different, yet equal member of the common world, who has been wronged and needs to be restored in her dignity. His efforts to penetrate the girl's subjectivity and her suffering, to restore and mend her, attest a desire to redeem himself, shed his complicity with the crimes and rehabilitate his 'bleating [conscience]' (Coetzee 2004: 29, 60–1, 69–70). Here, he again mirrors the pretentions of the torturers and the logic of past violence: 'how natural a mistake to believe that you can burn or enter or hack your way into the secret body of the other!' (Coetzee 2004: 46).

Finally, the Magistrate decides to take the girl back to her people. When he comes back from this expedition into the barbarian land, he is declared an enemy of the Empire and charged with the crime of 'treasonously consorting with the enemy' (Coetzee 2004: 85). After being subjected to prolonged confinement, humiliation and torture, he is released and left to wander around freely, scavenging for scraps of food (Coetzee 2004: 128, 136–7). Far from being perceived as a threat to the Empire, he becomes superfluous to the whole world and is denied even the possibility of martyrdom. His complete powerlessness is manifest in his last explicit gesture against the Empire and its barbarian practices. When Colonel Joll returns to town with a new band of prisoners and arranges a public spectacle of torture, the Magistrate plods his way onto the scene and begins to shout: 'We are the great miracle of creation! [. . .] Look at these men! [. . .] Men!' (Coetzee 2004: 117).

This experience ultimately leads him to question not only the moral rightness of his actions, but also his way of relating to the world. He intuits that the source of his folly – what made his high moral ground a peaceful other side of the Empire's rule of political expediency – was that he wished to 'live outside history', reserving

for its sudden irruption only 'a look of hurt and guilty surprise' (Coetzee 2004: 169, 156–7). It is true, his rebellions were rendered ineffectual and perverted by the systemic forces that eclipsed the significance of individual judgement. Yet what made his public denunciation of torture into the outburst of a 'clown' or a 'madman' rather than the rebellion of the 'One Just Man' was that he, just like the jackals of the Empire, remained engulfed in 'dreams of ends' (Coetzee 2004: 124–5, 146). The Magistrate set himself on living his life in accordance with a preconceived pattern, concerned with securing for himself peaceful last days in the office (Coetzee 2004: 55–6). He was upholding the existing laws even when they were no longer adequate to the changing reality, and in fact authorised injustice. Aware of his dirty hands, he nevertheless 'temporised', consoling himself that the legal order represented the lesser of evils and that he was merely a cog in the machine (see Coetzee 2004: 149, 152–3).

From this self-centred perspective, indeed, political engagement can only appear as a crushing burden, leading to despair over individuals' ability to intervene meaningfully into the exigencies of the political. The Magistrate is overwhelmed by a course of events that his abstract moral perspective cannot even comprehend, let alone contain, and is bewildered at the thought that a person as innocent as him could become so guilty (Coetzee 2004: 103). His sense of joy after his only tangible rebellion against the Empire derives from his quest for personal 'salvation', from the fact that he is no longer in 'alliance' with the torturers, rather than a concern for the state of the world (Coetzee 2004: 85). While full of moral exasperation, he fails to examine suffering in its intersubjective meaning, explore the conditions that enabled civility to be so easily perverted into barbarism, and share his judgements with others. Such engagement would amount to stirring a public discussion on the legitimacy of the laws that banished the barbarians from their land further into the wilderness, and on the possibility of creating alternative arrangements for the future (Coetzee 2004: 118). It would represent a new beginning, the outcomes of which it is impossible to predict: 'for where can that argument lead but to laying down our arms and opening the gates of the town to the people whose land we have raped?' (Coetzee 2004: 118, 42–3).

Only then would there emerge an opening for conceiving of the possible ways to face up to the contradictions of political action, rather than obscuring them in traditional 'dreams of ends'.

Representative Judgement and the Promise of Politics: Arendt

Camus's creative rethinking of the dirty hands problem receives an explicitly political formulation in Arendt. Beyond the alternatives of abstract morality and political expediency, her worldly judging sensibility seeks to recognise and respond to the tragic character of political action by constantly kindling the conditions for politics between plural equals.

For Arendt, the fallacy behind the standpoint of moral purity is that the focus lies on the well-being or goodness of individual conscience, and not on the state or appearance of the world. On this account, as she observes with reference to the example of Thoreau, the ambiguities of the political world can be avoided simply by refraining from political involvement, 'washing [one's] hands' of any evil or injustice (Arendt 1972a: 60). The moral standpoint wishes to avoid personal implication in wrongdoing, 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). The desire to be 'good' manifests a troubling irresponsibility for the world, well conveyed by 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 argument of lesser evil. Much like Camus, she sees it as the other side of abstract moralism, an ultimate and highly dangerous manifestation of the traditional desire to resolve the dilemmas of politics from the position of solitary mastery, above others and the world.

The inadequacy of the lesser evil argument in political affairs stems from its reliance on instrumental reasoning, an essentially inner process of reckoning with consequences, which purports to order and master the plurality and complexity of the world in accordance with a pre-given end (Arendt 1972b: 150, 176–7). As

such, it always carries with itself the danger that 'the means over-whelm the end' (Arendt 1972b: 177). Disregarding the unpredict-ability of political action, an aspiration to 'produce' results risks degrading the value contained in the ends themselves and leading to a vision of the world devoid of meaning or purpose (Arendt 1972b: 106; 1958a: 154–7; see also Isaac 1992: 79). The prob-lem is that the depiction of politics as a realm of dirty hands is underlain by a conception of power as rule over others (Arendt 1972b: 134–9, 151). If political power is understood as command or domination (as in Max Weber), 'then there is no greater power than that which grows out of the barrel of a gun' (Arendt 1972b: 136). But what this conception neglects is the alternative notion of power as 'living power' – power that 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 (Arendt 1972b: 139–40, 143). Since violence denies human plural-ity, it is ultimately opposed to power and the public realm itself. As Arendt (1972b: 155) says, violence 'can destroy power', but 'it is utterly incapable of creating it'. A systematic resort to violence sev-ers individuals from others and worldly reality, and tears apart the fabric of the common world as a meaningful context of our judge-ments and actions. This danger is clearly evident in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophies of history, which portrayed all antagonisms and setbacks as necessary steps towards 'more and more freedom', while destroying in the way all stable yardsticks by which to orient our judgements (Arendt 1972b: 128, 155). The utmost nihilist assertion of the absolute subject, however, Arendt discerned in writers like Sartre, Sorel and Fanon, where violence itself became 'a life-promoting force', a means of 'man recreat-ing himself' (Arendt 1972b: 170–1, 114). Here the equation of political action with violence ultimately reduced humans to mere automata, borne thoughtlessly along the stream of larger historical or biological forces.

Both abstract moralism and the lesser evil argument miss that the ambiguity of political judgement follows precisely from the fact that an individual 'does *not* owe his existence to himself' (Arendt 1972b: 115). The dirty hands dilemma arises from the capricious-ness of 'fortuna', from the subject engaging the independent worldly

reality that cannot be (re)created at will and that shapes our choices in unpredictable ways (Arendt 1955: 9; 1958a: 190–2). Arendt in this respect evokes debates about the political relevance of 'moral luck', the recognition that the meaning of any action does not lie within our powers alone but is significantly conditioned by things beyond our control (see Williams 1981). Representative judgement can confront this ambiguity because it discloses actions in their worldly appearance, as actors' responses to the challenges, possibilities and constraints of the political world (see Arendt 2006a: 151). Engaging a plurality of perspectives, it reveals a particular dirty hands dilemma in its intersubjective meaning and can evaluate possible courses of action with a view to how they resonate in the common world, rather than in terms of any 'in order to' (Arendt 1955: 10, 13, 16, 21).

Political judgement, then, cannot simply appeal to good intentions, regardless of the systemic factors and structurally ingrained patters of injustice that are likely to pervert them in unexpected ways. Evoking the extreme example of totalitarianism, Arendt shows how appeals to good intentions may in fact harbour a submission to the 'necessity' of the situation and betray a refusal to face up to the reality of what is actually happening. The argument that given the circumstances 'it was more "responsible" to stay on the job', or that any opposition to anti-Jewish laws would only make matters worse, for instance, was absurd simply because soon 'a stage was reached where nothing worse could possibly have happened' (Arendt 2003: 35–7; see also Leebaw 2015: 18). Arendt's awareness of the ambiguities of politics also led her to recognise that in some cases a resort to violence 'is the only way to set the scales of justice right again' (Arendt 1972b: 161). Yet, similarly to Camus, she was highly attentive to the limits of violence (Bernstein 2013: 320). What she was especially wary of was the view that violence by itself could 'realise' public freedom or constitute a political community. While violence may open a space for politics, it is a dangerous mistake to employ it in the service of grand causes, such as classless society, revolution or history (Arendt 1972b: 176; see also Arendt 2017: 59–60). In the latter case, violence assumes the form of a systematic practice, imposing upon a plurality of perspectives the validity of a single truth, eliminating dissent and

threatening a lapse into terror (Arendt 1972b: 153–5). Arendt also warned against the hope that 'the strong fraternal sentiments' engendered by collective violence will provide a source of a new form of political relationship (Arendt 1972b: 166). Because the fraternity of violence comes into being in circumstances of 'immediate danger to life and limb', it is too 'transitory' to translate into the foundation of a body politic (Arendt 1972b: 166). Moreover, Arendt feared justifications of violence based on 'organic metaphors' for community, such as white or black skin (Arendt 1972b: 172–3). Violence employed in interracial struggle, she cautioned, may prove to be especially 'murderous', because it would proceed in line with the unyielding, 'rational' logic of 'an explicit ideological system' (Arendt 1972b: 173). For worldly judgement, in contrast, violence can only be undertaken 'for the sake of the world'. It can be justified, for instance, to 'dramatise grievances' and so 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; Frazer and Hutchings 2008: 100–2). In this way, violence remains a response to particular situations, limited to the pursuit of 'short-term' goals (Arendt 1972b: 176). What Arendt's representative judging sensibility seeks to ensure is that a decision to resort to violence is grounded in human freedom and concomitant responsibility, rather than any conceived 'necessity' (Arendt 1972b: 179). Disclosing particular dirty hands dilemmas in their worldly significance, it opens the space where the use of violent means can become a matter of public deliberation between different standpoints (Bernstein 2013: 194). As Arendt wrote, the justification of violence is a human, political affair, because 'this justification constitutes its political limitation', while preventing 'a glorification or justification of violence as such' (Arendt 2006b: 9).

Yet Arendt's representative judging perspective also contains a heightened attentiveness to the political cost of violence. While the use of violence may be justifiable in some cases, as Arendt (1972b: 151) writes, it 'never will be legitimate'. This is because violence, even if it ultimately brings about the desired end that justifies it, carries a 'very high' price (Arendt 1972b: 152). This price relates not merely to 'the vanquished', to those individuals or perspectives

whose freedom has been denied, but to the loss of power suffered by the victors as well (Arendt 1972b: 152–3). For the change effected by a violent act will most probably be 'to a more violent world', risking new cycles of violence and 'the introduction of the practice of violence into the whole body politic' (Arendt 1972b: 177). The political cost of violence concerns the atrophy of the political world as a common, human world, where individuals can engage in action and speech in the company of their peers. Much like in Camus, then, Arendt's representative judgement carries a strong prospective dimension. It conveys a prescient awareness that any 'dirty' action will have to be reckoned with in the future, directing attention to the processes of assuming responsibility and the question of how to reinvigorate a space for properly political interaction among former enemies.

Attentive to the political cost of violence, Arendt's representative judgement draws attention to the importance of confronting those worldly conditions that render dirty hands into an inevitable course of political engagement. Just as violence is destructive of the political realm, Arendt (1972b: 184) writes, so too, 'every decrease in power is an open invitation to violence'. Worldly judgement unearths how the increasing atrophy of the public space where individuals could appear to each other easily makes a resort to violence seem the 'only' possible way left of affirming the human ability to change the world (Arendt 1972b: 178–80). Arendt, for instance, observes that the modern reduction of politics to a realm of bureaucratic administration led to 'the disastrous shrinkage of the public realm' (Arendt 1972b: 178). As she elaborates, '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). The equation of political engagement with violence, however, distorts the human potentials for action-in-concert, and obscures the possibility for bringing into being (non-violent) political power (Arendt 1972b: 179; Bernstein 2013: 189–90, 198).

Accordingly, representative judgement focuses on how to arouse and sustain the sense of a human world, where the contradictions of our situated existence can be addressed through action and speech among peers. Given the plurality and unpredictability of

human affairs, 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). For this reason, representative judgement strives to assume the form of an appeal to the freedom of others, and reveal events as matters of shared concern around which different perspectives could interact and give shape to a new community. In this spirit, Arendt was resolute to bring out the significance of those who, even in the face of extreme repression, refused to yield their capacity for free judgement in front of the seemingly inevitable and resisted their specific line of duty. Against the backdrop of general societal complicity with Nazi crimes, she for instance invokes the examples of Anton Schmidt, a German army sergeant, who helped the Jewish partisans, and of those ordinary citizens who hid Jews in their homes (Arendt 2006c: 230–1; see also Leebaw 2013: 252–3). For they were the ones who engaged the world in freedom, forged bonds of solidarity beyond the immediate roles assigned to them by the larger historical forces and made the world into a more human one. Similarly, Arendt celebrated the immense political import of spontaneous councils, where, however briefly, public freedom has become a tangible, worldly reality. As she wrote in her reflections on the Hungarian revolution of 1956, people coming together 'without a government (or a party program) imposed from above' was a testament of the democratic potential of non-violent political power against systemic violence of the state (Arendt 1958b: 28, 33; Bernstein 2013: 196–8).

At the same time, Arendt's worldly orientation shies away from the presumption that it might be possible to ultimately offset the inherent unpredictability of human affairs. For Arendt, it would be unseemly to search for a set of yardsticks or laws that could eradicate the problem of dirty hands. Arendt's take on the dirty hands dilemma should be distinguished from attempts at transcending the paradox that can be discerned among value pluralists. For these thinkers, a confrontation with a tragic situation that brokers no happy solution should not lead to mere wallowing in guilt. It should spur a reflection on 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 (see Nussbaum 2000: 1013–16; Sutherland 1995). Arendt touched on the ever-present potentiality of action to ensue in tragic outcomes in her reflections on civil disobedience. While she praised it as a potent manifestation of action-in-concert and the best 'remedy' for the 'failure of institutions', she also observed that freedom of assembly is one of the 'most dangerous' rights, breeding the 'danger of violence, inherent in the disaffection of a whole generation' (Arendt 1972a: 94–5, 101–2; 1968f: 24). This danger cannot be averted by eliminating the right to civil disobedience, but by keeping it loyal to its inspiring principle, the mutual interaction of citizens around worldly matters of shared concern rather than ideological commitments (Arendt 1972a: 97–8). To this effect, representative judgement is especially significant for trying to elicit forms of political action that would respect the boundaries of the shared world and endeavour to provide the conditions for a properly human existence for a plurality of standpoints inhabiting it. Aware of the uncertainty of the future, it also constantly summons the sense of 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

This chapter has drawn on the existential insights into the ambiguity of political judgement to disclose the problem of dirty hands in its human, political significance. Sartre and Beauvoir revealed the dirty hands problem as a challenge arising from our complicity with a world of (oppressive) relationships and structures that cannot be changed by clinging to the standpoint of moral purity. Yet their invitation to assume the 'tragedies' of resistant action also fell short of a sustained examination of what we might be able to do about the supposedly inevitable element of 'failure' haunting the world of human affairs. In turn, the chapter looked to Camus and Arendt for a rethinking of the dirty hands problem. Going beyond the double bind of moralism and political expediency, their worldly judgement reoriented the focus towards tending to the conditions

where the contradictions of our situated existence can be addressed through politics among plural equals. Their dialogical judging sensibility also brought forth an amplified sense of the worldly cost exacted by a dirty action, directing attention to the question of how to assume responsibility for it in the future. Displacing any inevitable equation of politics with the law of tragic necessity, then, the existential judging sensibility poignantly exposed the limitations of the dirty hands perspective. In response, it appealed to the human powers to confront the implications borne by the ambiguity of human affairs and uphold, in the face of evil and injustice, the possibilities for a properly political existence.

Notes

1. This passage alludes to 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 embrace of political expediency.
2. This shift and its implications are not often addressed in the literature on the dirty hands problem. Notable exceptions are Parrish (2007), Wijze (2002) and Beiner (2000).

6 Times of Transition: Reconciling with the Tragic Nature of Political Affairs

Echoing the promise of 'Never again!', the challenge of transitional justice and reconciliation represents a relatively recent attempt to confront the complexities of judging pasts of political violence, brutality and division so as to make possible a different and common future. Its guiding sensibility is a successor to the efforts at the Nuremberg trials to 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 terror, mass killings and ethnic cleansing devouring places as diverse as South Africa, Chile, Argentina, Rwanda, Bosnia and countless others. On the one hand, the challenge of transitional justice crystallises awareness of the human capacity for cruelty and evil, which cannot simply be wished away through appeals to moral absolutes or faith in the progress of humanity. On the other hand, it contains an appeal to the need for humans to draw on their capacity to come to terms with what happened, to understand how and why, and make a new beginning in the future. The transitional justice problematic, in this respect, engenders the challenge of political judgement from another angle than the dirty hands problem: that of the spectators, who need to reconcile with the fallibility of human engagement in the world and in whom the tragedy of action meets the burden of responsibility.

This crucial concern of transitional justice and reconciliation scholarship notwithstanding, the judging process of assuming responsibility for the tragedy of political action has not been awarded sufficient attention or explored in its own right. The

prevalent tendency remains to imagine a framework of judgement already in place on the basis of which to conclusively deal with a painful past and move confidently into a brighter future. As postmodern critics have been quick to point out, the challenge of transitional judgement is approached with a preconceived vision of agreement – of either a liberal or communitarian sort – whereby past violence can be redeemed and substituted for by a restored sense of justice and belonging (Hirsch 2011: 1–4; Schaap 2005a). The activity of judging comes 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 gets missed is the way in which the processes of reckoning with the past are grounded upon the temporal, situated ambiguity of the transitional moment. In the present the horrors of the past and the promise of a better future collide, suffusing the capacity of judgement and questioning the possibility of conceiving of reconciliatory politics in terms of a linear progressive motion (Zolkos 2009). Not only does the prevalent determinant orientation aim to reach the ultimate knowledge of past suffering, while obscuring the process of understanding how it came about through the complexity of human action in the world – it also envisions the goal of transition in terms of the eventual advent of final reconciliation, failing to sufficiently acknowledge the significance of human frailty and the difficulty of assuming responsibility for our judgements and actions.

In this light, the political import of the existential, narrative judging sensibility arises from its ability to confront instances of wrongdoing and suffering in the particularity of their worldly appearance. It reorients the focus to re-establishing the contours of a meaningful, human world that can help face up to the ambiguity of political action in the future. To argue the significance of this underlying existential dimension, then, is not to concur with the conclusion often implied in the postmodern rejection of consensus-based models of reconciliation. There the significance of narrative voice is invoked to indicate the ineffable element to

human suffering, to emphasise '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 Felman and Laub 1992; Hirsch 2012; Schaap 2005a; Sanders 2007). The distinct value of the existential narrative-inspired perspective, instead, is to retain attention on the situated nature of the process of reconciling with the tragedy of political action. This sensibility allows us to bring out the core challenge that stands at the heart of the reconciliation debates, yet tends to get concealed in the existing abstract theorising on the subject – how to reckon with past wrongdoing without committing further injustice and evil.

The chapter starts by exploring the burden of responsibility accompanying the recognition of the tragedy of political action, showing how narrative-inspired judgement points to a distinctly worldly, yet inherently ambiguous conception of responsibility. I examine Sartre's, Beauvoir's and Camus's insights into the complexities of punishment, revenge and forgiveness to expose the imperfections involved in reckoning with violent pasts, and the attendant need for limits. These insights are complemented with Arendt's explicit attempt to draw the linkage between collective and personal responsibility, while insisting on their distinct and sometimes conflicting nature and claims. Reflecting the temporal ambiguity of the transitional moment, the existential understanding of judgement and responsibility displaces the conclusive focus plaguing both the retributive and restorative paradigms of reckoning with past wrongs. It directs attention to the underlying existential, political need to situate ourselves in the world and engage the meaning of past events for our present lives in common. The second section turns to explore the significance of the narrative-inspired, representative judging ability to foster the process of reconciliation with reality. Rather than seeing reconciliation in terms of an end goal of a restoration of moral order or national unity, it probes how narrative truth can make the painful past part of the common world and reinvigorate the public realm. The chapter concludes by teasing out the political implications of the existential understanding of reconciliation as a process of coming to terms with the worldly condition of our freedom. I highlight

the importance of linking the discourses of reconciliation to the assumption of responsibility for the common world, as well as the need to recognise the limits of reconciliatory politics.

The Burden of Responsibility

As the previous chapter has shown, it is the distinct political value of the existential sensibility to portray the tragedy of political actions as arising from the ambiguity of human engagement in the world. Political action 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. As Arendt (2006a: 168, 150) says, it appears in the world as a miracle, 'an "infinite improbability"', which could not have been foreseen or predicted simply because it 'did not exist before' its appearance, neither as a motive nor an intended goal. As an appearance of freedom in the world and amongst a plurality of other wills and intentions, political action is also unpredictable and boundless, capable of initiating consequences that return to the agent in alien, essentially unrecognisable forms (Arendt 1958a: 190–2). In political action, in short, we are bound to be 'constantly falling over [our] own feet' (Arendt 1979: 305). This constitutive contingency of political action poses a significant challenge to political judgement, putting into question the very 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 freedom 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). This paradox of judgement is especially evident when political action indeed ends in failure, in situations when the world becomes a site of wrongdoing, injustice and suffering. Yet it is also in those moments that we are most tempted to avoid it, yielding to the sovereign desire to trace events to a rationally discernible chain of causes and effects and reach a clear-cut attribution of responsibility. Grounded as it is on the presumption of a self-contained inner self, this desire risks forfeiting the human capacities of response in front of inhuman and 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 burdens of responsibility and the dangers of denying it are in ontological terms explicitly engaged in Sartre's 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 disembodied substance, but depends crucially 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 earlier, his father, King Agamemnon, was brutally murdered by Queen Clytemnestra's lover, Aegistheus. While highly educated, possessing full (rational) knowledge of ideas, cultures and traditions long past, Orestes needs but to step foot in the place of his birth to recognise something has been missing. Even though he is 'free as air', non-committed and 'gloriously aloof', he 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 (Sartre 1989: 59–60, 87–8). His aloofness gains a mirror image in the perverse rituals of self-abnegation and generalised 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 the established order, unable to own up to the weight of the past as a condition of their freedom in the present. 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 recognises that he must take on the burden of responsibility for the town's painful past (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. Revealing instances of wrongdoing and suffering in their particular appearance and human reality, reflective judgement appeals to all members of a community to recognise the tragic events as part of their world and to draw on their capacity for a meaningful response (see Lara 2007: 1–22; Mihai 2014: 448–51; Thaler 2014a: 368–72; 2018b: 72–87).

It 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 escapes complete 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, which significantly problematises any causality-based model of responsibility (Docherty 2016: 3–4). It renders us responsible for events 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 (Herzog 2014: 186; Kruks 2012: 34–5).

Indicating the temporal ambiguity of the transitional moment, this burden of responsibility surfaces in two interrelated aspects. On the one hand, a reflective engagement with the human reality of past injustice founds the need for a response as an instance of, following Markell, 'tragic recognition' (in Muldoon 2009: 6). It can acknowledge how grave wrongs may profoundly challenge our sense of selves and of the common worldly reality, irretrievably destroying the previously unquestioned presuppositions of judgement, and the legal and moral order (Hayden 2009: 15; Doxtader 2011: 42–51; Kruks 2012: 152). On the other hand, a reflective judging sensibility also remains attuned to the ways in which settling on forms of accountability and redress is not simply a matter of an abstract rational exercise in the rendering of justice. It is significantly underlain and guided by the human purpose of reinvigorating the sense of self and of the common world. As Hayden (2009: 15) argues, it contains 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'. Disrupting our habitual ways of being in the world, then, painful pasts demand a willingness to engage the political reality of betrayed hopes and divided dreams that allows for no appeal to eternal standards of right and wrong (see Fine 2001: 160–2).

This twofold challenge of judgement and responsibility is evident in the attempts of Sartre, Beauvoir and Camus to come to terms with the French experience of war, occupation and

collaboration. In her essay 'An Eye for An Eye', Beauvoir explains 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. She powerfully conveys how the process of responding to past wrongs involves 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 marred the years of Occupation. She 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' (Beauvoir 2004e: 248). 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 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'. The crimes of absolute evil were 'abominable' because of their political, intersubjective meaning – the way they denied the victims' freedom and were brought forth not by some natural disaster, but by other human beings (Beauvoir 2004e: 248). The embodied need to seek modes of redress, for Beauvoir, emanated from how they questioned her modes of being in the world, the most cherished values and norms of her community, including the assumptions of basic human reciprocity (Kruks 2012: 153–4). 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' demand for a restoration of 'the reciprocity of interhuman relations' that has been denied by the atrocity (Beauvoir 2004e: 249). It is the 'metaphysical' requirement to affirm 'our values, our reasons to live', that grounds the attitudes of '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 foregrounds 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. In their argument, they resorted to no rational justification, but referred simply to the solidarity with the victims. Recounting particular stories of killings and torture, they blamed perpetrators not for any lawfully proscribed crime (for instance, treason), but for their refusal to recognise their victims as human beings, their unwillingness to imagine the suffering caused by their actions (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 killings of resistance fighters: 'Too many [human beings] have died who we loved and respected, too many splendors betrayed, too many values humiliated [. . .]' (Camus quoted in Zaretsky 2013a: 139). To be sure, Beauvoir (2004e: 255–6) acknowledges how the actions of Nazi collaborators were conditioned by the criminal political and moral order that destined certain groups of people for extermination. This, however, does not absolve them of responsibility for the (particular) role they played within the system. In a situation where being a Jew carried the very real danger of persecution and killing, Brasillach's anti-Semitic 'words' were 'as murderous as gas chambers' (Beauvoir 1965: 22; see also Marso 2017: 51–8).

This reflective engagement with past crimes 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 aimed 'expressly at the individual who suffers it' (Beauvoir 2004e: 247). Confronting the wrongdoers inescapably with the vulnerabilities of their own embodiment, it should make them understand the ambiguity of the human condition and recognise the victim as a freedom whose subjectivity has been unjustly denied (Beauvoir 2004e: 248–9). Yet punishment also seeks an inherently contradictory aim: 'to compel a freedom' (Beauvoir 2004e: 249). Based on the desire to reach the subjectivity of the wrongdoers and the intention behind the crime, and to control their freedom

in the future, it is bound to fail to re-establish mutual reciprocity between human consciousnesses (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 of revenge. Yet when Orestes decides to kill the king and their own mother, she 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. She recognises 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 (Sartre 1989: 105–6).

Beauvoir (like Camus) was particularly steadfast in her rejection of private, extralegal forms of vengeance. These, she believed, manifested a dangerous presumption of a sovereign consciousness that usurps for itself the right to judge in the name of some universal principle and risks 'transforming itself into tyranny' (Beauvoir 2004e: 251, 258). But Beauvoir also exposes the element of failure haunting the formal pursuit of punishment through court-based proceedings. Such punishment subsumes particular cases under the universal laws of 'impersonal right' or 'an objectivity' of societal principles (Beauvoir 2004e: 258). Abstracting from the singular reality of the accused and his or her crime, it is likely to cast the perpetrator in the role of 'an expiatory victim' of a 'symbolic' – and somewhat arbitrary – act of justice (Beauvoir 2004e: 254). In the case of Brasillach, Beauvoir was critical of the French court's attempts to use the trial for nation-building purposes, promoting the narrative of a resistant French nation. The punishment of (a few) 'traitors' in effect veiled the murky sphere of inter-war collaboration and allowed certain prominent Vichy officials and businessmen to walk free (Beauvoir 1965: 21–2; Marso 2017: 49). Despite the difficulty of remaining loyal to concrete instances and complexity of wrongdoing, however, Beauvoir (like Sartre) rejects forgiveness as a legitimate response to those crimes that deserved a denomination of absolute evil. Even though it ends in 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 was less willing to accept the inevitable element of failure involved in acts of punishment as a necessary outcome of the ambiguity of political judgement. Sustaining the tension between the need to pay homage to the memory of suffering and the innate 'repugnance' at the thought of new death sentences carried out in the name of justice, he rejected the absolute choice between 'the way of hatred and the way of pardon' (Camus 2006a: 89–90, 168–9). The real challenge he discerned in seeking justice by insisting on truth (Camus 2006a: 168–9). From the very beginning, Camus drew attention to the importance of the *way* in which justice is to be done. Judgement on how to punish the collaborators should be based on a careful consideration of the particularities of specific cases, respecting 'the notion of proportional responsibility' of the accused (Camus 2006a: 77). As Camus (2006a: 90) writes, it would do well to distinguish between serious crimes to be 'punished immediately', and errors or mistakes, which should be 'consigned to carefully considered oblivion'. The actual purge, on the contrary, was not proportional to the concrete instances of wrongdoing. It failed to punish 'genuine criminals', while reserving undeservedly harsh sentences for people like, for instance, the pacifist columnist René Gérin (Camus 2006a: 250). Camus's (2006a: 250) verdict was clear: 'the postwar purge [. . .] is now completely discredited. [. . .] failure is complete'.

The realisation of the imperfections of human justice led Camus to modify his earlier attitude, appealing to the importance of reviving the limits of human action. He insisted more strongly on the pressing need for transitional judgement to acknowledge the complexities of political violence, '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 (Judt 1998: 106). His appeal to limits 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 that he renounced all punishment to opt instead for a new rule in the form

of a general pardon. What Camus found so disconcerting about the post-war purge was that it was conducted with a view to pre-conceived, absolute conceptions of ends, tethered to, for instance, ideologically defined interests and motivations of political parties. It attributed responsibility according to a complacent calculus of absolute guilt and innocence, while remaining distanced from the ambiguous reality of the political world. Far from fulfilling the human purpose of transition, it reinstated the same forms of political mentality which it was intended, and should rightly have sought, to denounce and overcome (Judt 1998: 111, 106). The only way to honour the memory of the victims, Camus averred in response, was to keep constant guard against new lapses of attention and refusals to imagine the effects of our judgements on real human beings of flesh and blood (Camus 2002: 237, 195). I shall return to this shift of focus later on, after first examining how the concerns and ambiguities exposed by the three existentialist thinkers resurface in transitional justice scholarship.

The assumption of responsibility in the face of injustice and evil initially took the form of retributive justice, ensuring accountability through criminal trials. Historically, the judgement on the need to punish the perpetrators involved the cases of transition from authoritarian governments or military dictatorships, and dealt with state-orchestrated repression and abuses (Roht-Arriaza and Mariezcurrena 2006: 326). Likewise, it characterises 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 characterised by an emphasis on individual criminal responsibility that cannot be evaded under the doctrine of reason of state, superior orders or some other notion of collective accountability (Minow 1998: 40; Teitel 2000: 32–3). Recalling the insights of Sartre, Beauvoir and Camus, scholars have emphasised that the need for punishing those responsible does not arise primarily out of utilitarian considerations. It is motivated by the desire for justice, the belief that 'wrongdoers deserve blame and punishment in direct proportion to the harm inflicted' (Minow 1998: 12). The purpose of punishment is to affirm the principle of equal human dignity (and individual responsibility) and the moral

worth of the victims, restoring the rule of law and the validity of the (new) political and moral order after terror and injustice (Minow 1998: 10–12; Teitel 2000: 28–30). Relying on a universal framework of (international human rights) norms, the retributive paradigm assumes that responsibility for gross human rights violations can and should be clearly demarcated and assigned to 'identifiable individuals' (Minow 1998: 25, 40). Unless the perpetrators are punished and removed as bearers of criminality, the societal values and the whole public sphere remain tainted by past evils (Teitel 2000: 55–6).

In its conclusive focus, however, the retributive justice paradigm ignores the ambiguity of transitional judgement as revealed by the three existential thinkers. It risks obscuring how the legal and moral laws that are appealed to as an authoritative standard according to which to mete out (final) justice, may have themselves been implicated in, and shattered in their validity, by past crimes.[1] In particular, the appeal to legality to secure justice neglects the difficulty of unproblematically attributing personal responsibility in instances of mass wrongs that are grounded in broader structures of injustice and oppression. The underlying problem is that the retributive paradigm rests on the rational conception of moral agency, understood as the ability to follow pre-given normative ideals, regardless of the agents' embeddedness in a larger field of relationships and processes beyond their immediate control. It subscribes to a comforting view of past violence as deviation from the established moral norms, while failing to account for the so-called 'grey zone' – the complexities of complicity in systemic violence that elude the grasp of clear-cut categories of good and evil (Baines 2015: 317; Bouris 2007; Danchev 2016: 4–5, 20; Leebaw 2011: 1–5; McEvoy and McConnachie 2013).

Arendt engages with this danger of criminal trials in her essay 'Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship'. 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 his actions came about and why they were deserving of the (harshest) punishment. What was missed was how Eichmann's actions were conditioned by the complete reversal of the moral and

legal order in Nazi Germany that endowed any particular criminal act with an aura of legality and moral legitimacy. As Arendt writes, Eichmann acted 'under conditions in which every moral act was illegal and every legal act was a crime' (Arendt 2003: 41). His evil, she argues, arose not from his perverted or wicked motives, but was banal. It lay 'merely' in that he was incapable of independent thinking and judgement; he was unquestioningly following the dictates of the law of the land, without consideration for the effects on others and the world. Failing to consider the particular nature of Eichmann's evil, the court also removed from view the issue that totalitarian (or authoritarian) crimes depended upon the complicity of broader segments of population (Arendt 2003: 26; see also Fine 2000b: 296, 301). For Arendt, the real challenge to established standards of right and wrong came not from 'the bestial behaviour of the storm troopers in the concentration camps and the torture cellars of the secret police'. It emerged only with the curious phenomenon of 'coordination', of a great majority of people changing their moral standards overnight and lending support to the Nazi regime, without any ideological motivation or strong political conviction (Arendt 2003: 24). Calls for punishment then risk explaining wrongdoing away as a problem easily containable to a few individuals, while obfuscating the socio-political circumstances that made mass human rights violations possible and what might be required to prevent them in the future.

These ambiguities plaguing the retributive orientation ground the more recent turn within transitional justice debates towards restorative justice. Its aim, in comparison with criminal trials, lies not primarily in reaching a final verdict on specific individual cases, on identifying and punishing those responsible. It is oriented by 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 (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 and appropriately trained staff in a given society precludes a principled response. Usually reliant on the institution of truth commission, the restorative judgement paradigm strives

towards a multivocal and multilayered narrative of the past, based on a plurality of testimonies. The purpose is to illuminate '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 and captures the general, often systemic or structural, pattern of abuse (Minow 1998: 87; Rotberg 2000: 17, 4; Roht-Arriaza and Mariezcurrena 2006: 6). Raising the complex question of the role of collaborators, supporters, beneficiaries and bystanders, restorative judgement inspires individuals and the whole of the community to situate themselves in larger processes of injustice (Hayner 2011: 81; Roht-Arriaza and Mariezcurrena 2006: 4). The societal recognition of collective responsibility for the past of suffering is to be followed by practices of interpersonal healing, of public atonement and forgiveness (Schaap 2001: 749–50; see also Minow 1998: 56–76; Hayner 2011: 166).

The restorative approach to transitional judgement certainly envisions a more weighty conception of political responsibility than that provided in the retributive justice paradigm. Yet it is precisely the process of assuming political responsibility and of relating the institutional and structural level of oppression 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 on a presupposed (and pre-given) identity of 'the wrongdoer'. The assignment of collective guilt rests not on whatever one might have done, but is arrived at by way of an identification with a certain shared characteristic of a given situation, whether national character or group belonging (Schaap 2001: 124–5). The disconcerting nature of this proposition is encapsulated 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). Here 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 the particularities of specific cases and impute blame also to the innocent individuals (Schaap 2001: 752). Her main charge is that a judgement on collective guilt works to eclipse rather than

clarify the sense of individual responsibility. It amounts to a general and abstract statement that portrays wrongs as outcomes of impersonal and inevitable forces and processes, and obfuscates the significance of particular actions (Schaap 2001: 752). It blurs the recognition that mass wrongs could indeed only come about through a plethora of individual actions or inactions, precluding the assumption of human freedom and responsibility in the present. This omission clouds the political significance of a decision to grant forgiveness, rendering it into a new indiscriminate act of judgement, while obscuring the crucial question of 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 appeal to limits. As the other side of the tragedy of political action revealed in *The Just*, the meaning of limits here is conveyed through Kaliayev's ambiguous reckoning with his violent act of resistance. 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, he seeks to affirm the political significance of the Grand Duke's assassination 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. At the same time, his willingness to die proclaims his 'protest against violence in the world', refusing to justify violence, even in the service of a worthy ideal (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 that 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 (Camus 2006b: 214). Paradoxically, however, the Duchess's ideal of goodness rests on despair over, even resentment against,

the 'empty and cruel' world and the vileness of human beings (Camus 2006b: 214–15). Behind her offer of forgiveness, we discern an attempt to evade responsibility for past wrongs and a refusal to engage meaningfully in the political world in the future. Kaliayev, on the contrary, refuses to abandon the cause of the fight against injustice in order to be good, insisting that repentance would amount to a betrayal of his comrades as well as of the solidarity for the oppressed people (Camus 2006b: 215–16). While he recognises 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' (Camus 2006b: 215).

Yet Kaliayev's acceptance of punishment also claims to fulfil 'the purity of the ideal', aiming to ultimately alleviate his guilt at having killed a human being and resolve the ambiguity of political action more generally (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. The example of the just assassins certainly 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). Nonetheless, 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. As recognised by Dora, their rebellion 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 importance for political judgement to remain grounded in the ambiguous reality of the past, whose continued existence in the present frustrates the possibility of a definitive, sovereign reckoning. Its conversations between different perspectives show how any linear, progressive shift from the painful past into a brighter future obviates the human, political purpose of reinvigorating a sense of self and of the worldly reality. They demonstrate Camus's insistence that the ways of attributing responsibility need to be arrived at dialogically and from within the worldly situation, rather than pronounced

from on high. Transitional judgement becomes a continuous activity oriented by the process of understanding how the act of wrongdoing came about and, on this basis, a reflection on how to conceive of forms of political engagement in the future.

The implications of Camus's dialogical orientation emerge in Arendt's explicit attempt to draw, relying on representative judgement, the linkage between collective and personal responsibility, while insisting on their distinct nature and claims. Personal or moral responsibility refers to the individual and what he or she has done, while collective or political responsibility is vicarious and arises from one's membership in a political community (Arendt 2003: 148–9). Representative judgement can draw the linkage between the two realms by virtue of seeing actions as responses to the adversities and opportunities of the *fortuna* ruling the world of political affairs, disclosing the individual's relationship to the world and others revealed therein (Arendt 2006a: 151). It leads to a conception of responsibility that is highly encompassing, yet rigorously discriminating. On the one hand, it rejects the possibility of renouncing moral responsibility by appeals to the need to obey or to personal goodness that, pursuing its dream of purity, refuses all political engagement. For Arendt, this rejection is grounded in the simple truth that 'there is no such thing as obedience in political and moral matters', only support (Arendt 2003: 47–8). On the other hand, it resists judgements of collective guilt, attributing personal responsibility in terms of each individual's particular contribution to a regime of oppression and how it coincided with or diverged from the broader web of complicity in injustice. In its worldly focus, however, representative judgement is attuned to the many situations and ways in which the realms of moral and political responsibility conflict and lead to diverse conclusions about the appropriate mode of reckoning with the past (Arendt 2003: 150–1, 153–4). Worldly judgement may acknowledge that resistance to evil governments is more likely to come from those who participated in their criminal activity. Yet it also allows for an appreciation of structural conditions of oppression, where most, if not all, forms of involvement in the political world implied complicity with radical evil, and where the only way to avoid implication was to refuse participation altogether (Arendt 2003: 43–4,

154–6). Moreover, it can recognise how the worldly situation has rendered non-violent forms of resistance impossible and explore whether and how it justified 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. The next section accordingly turns to explore the distinctly political significance of narrative truth and the process of reconciliation with reality it engenders.

Testimony, Memory and Reconciliation

Narrative voice, in particular in the form of testimony, has assumed increasing prominence in transitional justice debates. Especially after the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, the value of narrative form became intimately tied to the goals of restorative justice. The narrative ability to expose the truth about past human rights violations is believed to crucially underpin the processes of reclaiming the dignity of the victims, breaking the cycles of violence, and paving the way for societal reconciliation (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 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. Relatedly, critics have asked whether the pursuit of truth might not ultimately

lead to the betrayal of justice (see Bartley 2009: 105, 118; Hayner 2011: 25). Against this background, this section draws on the existential notion of narrative-inspired, representative judgement, employing Arendt's insight into its capacity to encourage the process of individual and societal reconciliation with reality. It brings forth the explicitly political, and necessarily ambiguous, character of collective-memory formation. It foregrounds 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 the common world and of reinvigorating the public realm. The political significance of narrative sensibility, it is argued, lies in its ability to constantly illuminate the possibilities and limits of reconciliatory politics. To exemplify this emphasis and its implications for transitional politics more concretely, the section engages Antjie Krog's semi-fictional account of the establishment and work of the TRC, *The Country of My Skull*.

The insistence on the importance of giving to the victims (and the perpetrators) an opportunity to voice their experiences of suffering and wrongdoing reflects the existentialist emphasis on the crucial political significance of remembrance. The practice of keeping alive the memory of human words and deeds and embedding ourselves in meaningful pasts represents a fundamental human need, grounding the possibility of all thought and action. While not apparently political, the willingness to tell the truth in the sense of saying '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). As such, the significance of narrative is especially evident in what Ricoeur calls 'boundary situations' (Kearney 1995: 37–8) – those moments of rupture in established ways of being in the world brought forth by violence that require the whole of society to thoroughly rethink the bases of its identity, its myths and relevant histories. The purpose of public storytelling, then, is not to report on facts or to produce an objective historical account of past events (Herzog 2002). The stories' ability to disclose occurrences in their plural, intersubjective meaning allows them to reaffirm, after suffering and trauma, the contours of a shared human world, and kindle 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. The reconstitution of identity follows the interpersonal, therapeutic practice of the individual's working through trauma, healing and self-realisation (Felman and Laub 1992; Caruth 1996: 1–9; Minow 2000). An exhortation to tell and to remember rests on 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, this 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 directed much attention to exploring the 'moral foundations' of truth commissions, envisioning public remembrance to take place within the framework of prefabricated moral principles and, on this basis, conceiving of the appropriate ends of reconciliation (see Rotberg and Thompson 2000). The activity of judging and memory-formation mirrors a process of compiling and organising individual testimonies and experiences into a shared, authoritative narrative of the nation. It amounts to a collective uncovering and condemnation of past suffering, and the (re)creation of a unified and just society, resembling a journey from division and loss to societal, national redemption and catharsis (Bartley 2009: 119–20, 107–9; Minow 2000). As such, it risks forgetting or erasing the deep-seated differences of opinion under its vision of consensus – thereby both hindering the processes of individual and collective reconstitution and betraying the demands of justice.

In this penchant for conceptualising the processes of remembrance in finalistic, end-oriented terms, we can discern an underlying desire to reverse the loss of established standards and set up a new transcendent grounding or truth. Aware of the irreversible breakdown of traditional verities, the existential narrative-inspired judgement embodies a move away from the self and its finalistic aspirations. As a ceaseless activity of world-disclosing, it looks for meaning in the reality of a shattered world and among a plurality of conflicting, even incommensurable memories of the

past. Rather than trying to fit experience into an already conceived model of what truth is supposed to consist in, it 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. Thus, existential narrative sensibility can retain the focus on the political challenge and purpose of reconciliation with reality. It draws attention to the ways in which different testimonies contain an appeal to a community of others to judge, interpret and remember. It points to the processes of intersubjective recognition by which past suffering is provided with a public meaning and made part of the common world. And it illuminates how these processes question and revivify the boundaries of a political community.

This shift of focus importantly frames Antjie Krog's *The Country of My Skull*. The Commission's attempt to unearth the truth of past human rights violations is not depicted as serving this or that goal of justice (for instance, amnesty or compensation), or the legitimacy of this or that political power or party. The meaning of creating a space in which different perspectives can tell their stories in public lies in establishing 'the widest possible compilation of people's perceptions, stories, myths, and experiences', restoring memory and fostering 'a new humanity' (Krog 1999: 16). This, Krog (1999: 16) adds, may well be 'justice in its deepest sense'. In this vein, Krog shies away from portraying the Commission's project as a realistic compromise solution and a mere reflection of the balance of powers in the South African society. She 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, without eliminating any of them under a higher synthesis (Krog 1999: 10). The creation of the space for public testimony depended on an abandonment of preconceived goals of reconciliation, reflecting an affirmation of a new beginning that has no end.

Krog's narrative of the workings of the TRC begins with a recounting of victims' testimonies. There pours forth a river of accounts of killing, torture, rape, cruelty and mistreatment that bears an air of the unnameable and unshareable (Krog 1999: 27–32). They reveal the 'abnormality of South African society',

where 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 past brutalities is provided by the 'second narrative', that of the perpetrators (Krog 1999: 56). Listening to their stories of extreme violence and soulless cruelty, Krog (1999: 90) searches for the 'Face of Evil'. Yet what she finds most disconcerting are 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 thereby also reveal the structure of laws, institutions and chains of command that enshrouded the killings in a cloud of moral legitimacy.

The political significance of truth further emerges with the submissions from political parties, meant to 'sketch the frameworks within which South Africans killed one another' (Krog 1999: 103–4). 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 large-scale violations of human rights possible (Krog 1999: 105). But he distances himself from the abuses themselves, attributing them to individual policemen's 'bad judgement, overzealousness or negligence' (Krog 1999: 126). The African National Congress (ANC, the leading anti-apartheid resistance movement) does not deny knowledge of excesses that happened in the course of the armed 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 remains steadfast that 'these particular and exceptional acts' in no way challenge the justness of the resistance struggle (Krog 1999: 124–5).

These multiple narrative truths, and the way they both differ from 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, and conclusively determine the ends of reconciliation. The recognition of the

existence of conflicting truths on the troubled pasts, however, is not to be read as a postmodern suspension of adjudication. An uncritical embrace of difference may well abandon truth to relations of power that be, relativising 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 (Gready 2009: 159–63; Krog 1999: 78, 89, 171). From the existentialist perspective, indeed, the claims of both knowing the truth and exposing its 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; Norval 1998: 254, 259–61). The point of setting up a framework within which public testimony can take place, as Krog (1999: 89) emphasises, is not to strive for 'the hope for a catharsis, the ideal of reconciliation'. It is that the terrible history of human rights violations becomes a part of the common world, so that '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 notes the tendency among some people to shut their eyes, question the emerging truth or attack the Commission, she also discerns among the broader society a growing recognition that the past horrors cannot be undone and will have to be reckoned with (Krog 1999: 127–31).

Still, it is precisely this process of how testimonies make an appeal to the community to be recognised as part of the common world that remains strangely obscured in the TRC's vision of reconciliation. As Krog's narrative intimates, the project of restoring the victims' dignity was conceived in moral(istic) terms, reminiscent of the self-centred, therapeutic process of working through trauma. Testifying before the truth commission, the victims were supposed to have their dignity affirmed by receiving from the commissioners an acknowledgement of the wrongfulness of the offences done to them. Societal reconciliation was to proceed by inspiring within the broader community interpersonal moral sentiments of empathetic identification with and compassion for the suffering of the victims. On this basis, the victims were encouraged to cast aside their lingering feelings of hatred and resentment and forgive the perpetrators (Krog 1999: 31, 109). The Commission's

moral vision of reconciliation, in this respect, echoes the broader literature on the subject, where the goals of mutual recognition stand at a remove from individuals' worldly, political existence. Reconciliation may be seen to result from the mutual recognition of the same humanity in the victims and the perpetrators, believed to be able to shine forth if only their past experiences 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 worldly relationships within which they are enmeshed and formed, it also remains unclear how this leap from (essential) difference to (complete) unity is to occur. Both approaches, as Schaap (2005a: 4–6, 9–22) has helpfully argued, presuppose a shared understanding of wrongdoing and 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 eludes the sustained examination of how past wrongdoing and suffering came about in the midst of human society. While bearing a strong moral condemnation of past crimes, it circumvents the question of how it was 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 (Krog 1999: 96, 44, 193). The troubling political implications of this failure emerge in Thomas Brudholm's (2008; 2006: 8–9) recent warnings of the dangers of reconciliatory discourses based on an uncritical endorsement of the therapeutic and moral value of forgiveness. Evoking the example of the TRC, he shows how the Commission's pressures on victims to forgive were premised on a commitment to national unity, itself imagined in terms of an apolitical vision of 'frictionless social harmony' (Brudholm 2006: 48). In response, Brudholm delves into Jean Améry's attempt to rehabilitate the moral value of resentment, tracing how it is connected to an alternative notion of reconciliation.[2] As a Holocaust survivor, Améry's resentment is directed at what he calls a 'hollow, thoughtless, and utterly false conciliatoriness', mirrored in the (German) state's and society's failure to face the truth of the past and assume responsibility for what happened

(Brudholm 2006: 15; 2008: 99, 120). The reason he continuously loses his 'trust in the world' is the persistence of indifference, self-deception or outright contempt against the surviving Jews (Brudholm 2006: 15; Brudholm and Rosoux 2009: 39–41). If we 'let bygones be bygones', he warns, 'the past could rise from the ashes and become a new present' (Brudholm 2008: 78).

The problem Améry exposes can be demonstrated through Arendt's and Jaspers's insights into how to mobilise the sense of political responsibility among the perpetrating community. Both Arendt and Jaspers envision a conception of political responsibility predicated upon membership in a political community and not on the attribution of moral blame (Jaspers 2000: 33–4, 55; Arendt 2003: 147–58). For both, too, the assumption of responsibility importantly entails the process of understanding what happened and a change in the forms of political mentality. Jaspers (2000: 17, 22) imagines this understanding to come about through intimate, truthful communication between ordinary Germans, ensuing in a spreading consciousness of moral and metaphysical guilt. While moral guilt can be incurred by indifference, tacit support or a failure to resist, metaphysical guilt refers to 'the lack of absolute solidarity' with fellow human beings, the guilt of surviving when others were led away and killed (Jaspers 2000: 57–66). Moral and metaphysical guilt, for Jaspers, lie beyond the sphere of public judgement, and are to be settled 'from within', in conversation with one's individual conscience (Jaspers 2000: 33, 42). Nevertheless, he supposes the personal sense of co-responsibility for past wrongs will eventually lead to a change in 'collective morality' and 'a people's way of life' (Jaspers 2000: 72, 70). From Arendt's perspective, however, this presupposition conflates the moral and political realms of responsibility and ensues in a troubling displacement of the collective reckoning with the past to the private sphere. The ultimately self-directed realisation of moral guilt, as she feared, obliterates the worldly significance of others' suffering, precludes the process of making the past part of *our* world, and fails to consider how the burdens of collective responsibility could be confronted through political action in concert (Arendt 2006b: 79–80; 2003: 153; Schaap 2001: 754–6). In her response to Jaspers, Arendt called for an affirmation of *political* solidarity,

whereby, for instance, any Jew would be welcomed to become a citizen of the new political community 'solely on the basis of his [or her] Jewish nationality and without ceasing to be a Jew' (Arendt and Jaspers 1992: 52–3, 62–3, 113). The moral discourse of reconciliation then seems helpless to heed Améry's warning. While the bystanders may be appealed to as spectators and expected to be appropriately 'horrified' at the sight of the truth, the discourse of moral guilt does not stir them to acknowledge their specific part in past wrongs or nurture their responsiveness to the claims of the world in the future (Fletcher 2007: 47, 51). It may well contribute to the temptation to forget and move on, while refusing to 'come to terms with what really happened' (Arendt 1994: 249; Schaap 2001: 754; Brudholm 2008: 127; Thaler 2018a).

In a similar vein, Krog relates how the unpolitical climate of the TRC helped further as its other side the persistent attempts to evade responsibility for human rights abuses. The appeals to widespread consciousness of guilt ensued, even among sympathetic spectators, in ultimately worldless feelings of helplessness, anxiety and despair (Krog 1999: 163, 170). The perpetrators and especially the political parties continued to justify past violence in terms of abstract categories of greater good, security or just war, while refusing to entertain its human, intersubjective meaning. These practices of justification fed into the parties' efforts to employ the project of public remembrance and reconciliation in the service of their own interests and ends. The Afrikaner politicians, for instance, used their willingness to accept a black government to set specific demands on how the past is to be reckoned with. The ruling ANC, in contrast, conceived of reconciliation as the granting to black people of the right to rule and transform the country – threatening a lapse into a new nationalism (Krog 1999: 109, 111–13). The project of reconciliation became primarily an exercise in the establishment of a new political order, which stymied the broader societal reflection on how to address the legacy of past crimes and risked bolstering the forms of political mentality that characterised the days of apartheid. It was also this frustration at the lack of worldly change that underpinned staunch refusals to forgive on the part of several victims (Krog 1999: 31, 109, 52–4). As declared in the testimony of Mrs Kondile: 'It is easy

for Mandela and Tutu to forgive . . . they lead vindicated lives. In my life nothing, not a single thing, has changed since my son was burnt by barbarians . . . nothing. Therefore I cannot forgive' (Krog 1999: 109).[3]

Contrary to the TRC's moral discourse, the perspective of representative judgement views the plurality of perspectives constituting the world not as a troubling state that must be overcome, but the very condition (and purpose) of political reconciliation (Zerilli 2012). It is the public articulation of different perspectives, the processes of actively reclaiming a plurality of memories of the past, that allows 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 by revealing past actions and events in their intersubjective appearance that political judgement appeals to our capacity to meaningfully respond to and 'resist the reality of the world created by past wrongs' (Schaap 2005a: 83). Promoting an understanding of how past suffering and wrongdoing came about through worldly interaction between victims, perpetrators, supporters, bystanders and resisters, it invites formerly opposed individuals and groups to engage in the common project of rebuilding the public sphere. For rather than fixating individuals in their (inner) identities as passive victims, evil perpetrators or ignorant bystanders, representative judgement illuminates them as acting beings – as worldly freedoms indissolubly tied together through the mediation of the shared reality. It 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 and new relations of solidarity formed.

This political import of representative thinking is evident in Krog's analysis of the *Shepherd's Tale*. It is the testimony of a shepherd named Lekotse, who relates how his life, his sense of self and his whole world were 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 comprehend the policemen's actions – why after all would policemen behave like thieves? – which renders him helpless against the attack. Desperately trying to transport himself into

their position, he thinks they may be hungry and even offers them food and drink (Krog 1999: 213). Forcing themselves into his own space, the police refuse him access to their intentions and coerce him into submission to their own conception of the world, without offering him a chance to understand it (Krog 1999: 218–20). Recounting the degradation and profound lack of recognition he endured at the hands of the police, he emphasises that he was treated as 'a *kaffer*' and 'a dull donkey' (Krog 1999: 214–15). Paradoxically, this failure of recognition is mirrored by the TRC itself. The Commissioner directing the testimony frequently interrupts his story to ask for clarifications that are ill-attuned to his situation (the fact that he is, as he says, 'uneducated') and that confound the meaning of the tale (Krog 1999: 215). Yet Lekotse keeps struggling to make himself understood. 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) – indirectly exposing the broader framework of legal perversion characterising the apartheid system. To obtain sufficient factual data, the leader of testimony also encourages Lekotse to talk about the specific injuries to his shoulder and ribs that he sustained during the attack. The shepherd, however, is primarily interested in conveying the lasting impact of the symbolic death he experienced. As he finishes the testimony: 'That is why I said to them, "Kill us all so that there is no trouble thereafter." [. . .] If one of these policemen is around here, I'll be happy if one of them comes to the stage and kills me immediately . . .' (Krog 1999: 220, 216).

It is not then that Lekotse's story 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. His testimony 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. What he asks for is an engagement with his *perspective*, an understanding of how and why his dignity was denied *in the world*. Shepherd's story symbolically calls upon the opposed groups to consider each other's viewpoints, acknowledge how their memories on the past interconnect and 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. Rather than casting the perpetrators in the role of 'bad apples' that 'ought to be punished' (Krog 1999: 98, 126), it would expose how the means employed in the service of 'the good of the country' challenged the legitimacy of this 'noble' end itself. The ANC, similarly, might be driven to critically evaluate its resort to violent means, considering whether and how specific human rights abuses were necessitated by the context of violent conflict, carefully exploring the chains of command and assigning responsibility for excesses (Krog 1999: 125–7). Such questioning would allow for a more serious recognition of the systemic violence of apartheid as well as of the human cost exacted by the conflict and the liberation struggle (Leebaw 2011: 158–164).

Further, Lekotse's story 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. His testimony thereby also brings forth the role of the bystanders and the beneficiaries of the apartheid system. On this account, the processes of remembrance and reconciliation require more than identification with the plight of the victims and the ensuing (abstract) feelings of guilt at the (indirect) complicity with crimes. They call for a sustained reflection on the various (in)actions that contributed to the establishment of conditions that not only made gross human rights violations possible but were themselves oppressive in that they hindered the potentials of certain groups of people to exert their freedom in the world. In other words, the shepherd's story draws attention to the ordinary and normalised violence of the apartheid system, and the persistence of systematic exclusions from public sphere, which were not properly addressed in the Commission's focus on direct human rights violations (Mamdani 2002: 38).

This enquiry into the political potential inhering in worldly practices of recognition evokes again the meaning of Camus's limits as a way of imagining a reconciliatory politics. The appeal to limits

displaces the Hegelian dialectics ruling the predominant accounts, where disembodied minds journey from alienation to communion. In Camus's view, as argued, such understanding of mutual recognition also implies the victory of one side and the death of the other (Camus 1971: 129–30). In its worldly orientation, representative judgement shies away from conceiving reconciliation as restoration of wholesome harmony between individuals. It also refuses to reduce reconciliatory politics to a problem-solving exercise in devising sustainable forms of compromise on how the political order could be re-established (Zaretsky 2013b: 62). Instead, it invokes the importance of displacing past patterns of political interaction towards alternative forms of community. This focus is 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'. Oriented to disclosing the limits of the world and others, worldly judgement brings into existence a shared ground, where the plurality of perspectives and memories meet in a fruitful confrontation. Dialogue between different standpoints on the political significance of past wrongs here translates into a consideration of the ambiguities of political action in the present. Aware of the penchant for excess accompanying the loss of communal standards, representative judgement remains attentive to the potentially tragic character of reconciliatory efforts. It attends to the fact that more than one side may have a legitimate claim to truth, that memories of the past might remain opposed and even that forms of reconciling with the painful past might themselves bring about further injustice. Yet, bound to the perspective of worldly plurality, it rejects blind justifications of oppressive or violent means in terms of some higher (and abstract) end of reconciliation. Its enquiry into the human meaning of past abuses and the conditions that made them possible unearths the possibilities of rebuilding relationships, practices and institutions based on the mutual affirmation of human freedoms.

Krog, likewise, avoids pronouncements on the 'success' of the Commission's work, focusing on how the hearings opened the space for individuals and the whole community to confront themselves and their shared reality. She draws attention to the entrenched differences and conflicts in the interpretations of the

past. Her narrative notes among both victims and perpetrators the lingering distrust of the public sphere, where their feelings of resentment, despair and shame could be expressed, and where they could participate in discussions about the form of transition to democracy (Krog 1999: 95, 99, 160–3, 191–4). More than this, Krog points to the deep-seated hostility among groups, especially the Afrikaner, who feel unfairly attacked by the Commission's disclosures and refuse to give up any of their economic and political privileges (Krog 1999: 126, 129, 162–3, 196, 216, 266–7). The processes of memorialisation and the reparation policy coexist alongside the continued trajectory of misunderstanding and inequality, inscribed in the very language used and facial expressions witnessed (Krog 1999: 216, 234, 195–6; see also Gready 2011: 17).

Yet the plurality of narratives of the past also inspires a continuous critical engagement with the question of how the political sphere can be rebuilt to avoid past erasures, oppression and wrongdoing in the future. Representative judgement refrains from reducing the meaning of reconciliation to efforts at symbolic commemoration of past suffering or material reparations to victims. It shifts the focus to 'rights-based participation', entailing the need to address systemic inequalities and social discrimination that hinder individuals' freedom to engage in the world, and effect a more profound change in existing practices and institutions (Gready 2011: 12–15; LaCapra 2001: 48, 56–8, 60–1). Recognising the main source of past injustice in a widespread refusal to see in others one's equals worthy of just treatment, furthermore, worldly judgement warns against the dangers of one-sided, ideological thinking in the present. It acknowledges the risk of the TRC's reconciliatory discourse congealing into an attitude where the greater good of the nation would come to justify the necessity of new sacrifices (Krog 1999: 262–4). Krog (1999: 272–5, 106–7, 127), for instance, draws attention to 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'. Her plurivocal narrative insists on the need for judgement on how to reconstitute a political community to make room for the former oppressor group too (Krog 1999: 275, 279). It encourages the culture of dialogue

that recognises in the other an equal partner, whose memories need to be acknowledged in conceiving of ways in which to transform the common world for the sake of a better future.

Concluding Thoughts: Coming to Terms with the Tragedy of Political Action

The challenge of transitional justice crystallises the existentialists' insights into the paramount human need to reconcile with the world that, especially in the case of mass injustice and suffering, dons the appearance of an absurd weight, devoid of human significance. It embodies the perplexity left in the wake of Kant: how to affirm the reality of human freedom 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 is well suited to confront this challenge because it displaces the predominant desire to reach ultimate knowledge of past suffering and wrongdoing. It retains attention on their worldly appearance, tracing the tragedy of the past to the ambiguity of human involvement in the world. It discloses how gross human rights violations were made possible by our embeddedness in a web of worldly forces beyond our full control, by human interdependence and the ensuing vulnerability. In turn, worldly judgement questions the tendency to conceive of reconciliatory politics in terms of a final, predetermined end. What it resists is the dangerous presumption – illuminated in Orestes's sovereign act of reckoning with injustice – that it might be possible to take upon our shoulders the whole brunt of responsibility for ourselves and the world, and conclusively deal with a painful past. This temptation gives up on the notion of world as an often opaque and always plural given, and all too easily leads to a willingness to accept further erasures and injustice as a legitimate and necessary path towards final reconciliation and redemption. Oriented by the perspective of worldly plurality, narrative-inspired judging sensibility commits to disclosing, on the rubble of the past, the contours of a once again human, plural and unpredictable, world. As such, it can best be understood as a process of coming to terms with the

worldly condition of our freedom, 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 is honestly confronted with 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.

Recognising the source of past tragedies in our enmeshment within a web of relationships and structures, existential worldly judgement shows that the burden of political responsibility can only be undertaken as a shared endeavour. In this focus, it prefigures recent emphases on the notion of shared responsibility as a way of confronting the subtle and indirect forms of complicity in political violence. Yet in these accounts shared responsibility remains *moral* in character, tied to a broadened understanding of individuals' participation in wrongdoing and based on the assumption that different forms of complicity can be easily isolated and ascertained (see May 1992; Striblen 2007; Kutz 2000: 7–11). Holding onto the view of responsibility as an attribute of a rational subject, who is to a significant extent in control of his or her intentions or attitudes, this interpretation fails to sufficiently acknowledge the ambiguities of worldly responsibility (Mihai 2019). Existential narrative sensibility, in contrast, keeps the focus on how actors' complicity was conditioned by oppressive structures, making their seemingly benign actions ensue in radical denials of the humanity of certain individuals or groups. It is especially apt to explore the discrepancy between individuals' moral opposition to others' suffering, and their inability to manifest this opposition through active involvement in the world. Thus, it also remains wary of seeking solutions at the level of individual character cultivation, aware that this may ensue in attempts to look to the world to provide an environment for the realisation of our moral aspirations, and then turn away from it in disappointment when it does not chime with our expectations (Arendt 1968e: 8). Rather than a pursuit of moral goodness, narrative-inspired worldly judgement reorients the focus towards kindling our sense of responsibility for the in-betweens of the world that ground the possibility of action-in-concert. It asks what kinds of relationship and community 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 (Card 1996: x, 22–3).

Existential worldly judgement, then, does not attempt to perfect, contain or flee the tragic nature of the world, viewing as untenable the desire to ultimately eliminate the possibility of suffering and injustice in the future. Any such desire would not only render unnecessary the continued efforts to engage in and with the world and respond to its challenges. It would also risk lapsing into a politically highly dangerous disregard for the human character of political affairs itself (Hayden 2009: 10–31; Muldoon 2009: 11). Refusing to abandon the bounds of this world for the sake of another, seemingly perfect, yet inhuman one, it issues an unrelenting appeal to human freedom – keeping constant guard against the development of conditions that would forfeit the promise of politics in front of an inevitable force or process.

Notes

1. In practice, this contradiction manifests itself in a number of dilemmas. Minow, for instance, mentions the problems of retroactivity of the law, politicisation 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 (Minow 1998: 30–1; Teitel 2000: 44). These dilemmas have often given rise to the charges of criminal trials as a form of 'victor's justice', leading to a wholesale cynicism about the possibility of a meaningful response to past wrongs (Teitel 2000: 46; Minow 1998: 47–51).
2. For worthy accounts of the moral and political value of negative emotions in transitional justice processes see Mihai (2016a), Brudholm (2008) and Chakravarti (2014).
3. This discussion raises the question of the 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). For valuable discussions of the dangers of conflating the personal and political discourses on

forgiveness, the challenge of forgiving the unforgivable and the need to link forgiveness to the processes of assuming responsibility for the world, see Brudholm (2008, esp. 51–62); Griswold (2007); LaCaze (2014); Pettigrove (2006); Carse and Tirrell (2010); Mihai (2013); Mihai and Thaler (2014); Schaap (2005b; 2003); Mrovlje (2016).

Conclusion: Reclaiming Wonder at the World of Political Affairs

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'

This book has sought to enrich current debates about the importance and perplexity of political judgement by evoking the voice of twentieth-century philosophies of existence. Drawing on their aesthetic sensibility, it has undertaken a so far neglected enquiry into the experiential reality, and the accompanying ambiguity, of judgement. Departing from the rationalist quest for valid standards and rules, the four thinkers revealed the significance of judgement as a paramount political ability. For it is by delving into the situated process of judging that their narrative orientation pointed to the ways of enhancing our ability to recognise and respond to the context-specific uncertainties that elude the order of final solutions. From their recognition that we are not 'all-knowing immortals'

but 'flurried humans', 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' (Nussbaum 1998: 142).

Reclaiming the challenge and promise of judging for the world, the four thinkers address a problem of pressing relevance for political thought. The manifest inadequacy of abstract rules to capture the perplexities of our plural world, as Linda Zerilli (2016: 1) has recently argued, foregrounds the human capacity for reflective judgement as 'a central feature of modern democratic citizenship'. Yet the current awareness of the irreversible loss of reliable standards is also tainted by a persistent suspicion that, in the absence of universal rules, we may not be able to judge at all. If current attempts to revivify political judgement as a practice of public reason are plagued by a residual rationalism, their critics tend to view political judgement as expression of the preconscious, somatically and socially shaped workings of affect (Zerilli 2016: 2–6). What both strands share is a distrust of our judging capacity as a situated ability of engaging the particularity of the world, rooted as it is in the necessarily subjective, partial character of our *human* perspective (Zerilli 2016: 4). Relativism, Zerilli (2016: 36–7) discerningly observes, in this respect represents the mere 'flip side' of objectivism, retaining the untenable sovereign presumption that 'what is objective must be free of any admixture of human subjectivity'.

Zerilli's way out of this impasse echoes the guiding orientation of the four existential thinkers. It is only once we depart from the entrenched picture of judgement as the problem of adjudicating competing validity claims that we may look into the intricate interplay between the subject and world underwriting the process of judging – and ask what it means to judge politically, for the world (Zerilli 2016: 281, 268, 7–9, 16). Heeding this recognition, it is the distinct contribution of the existential narrative judging sensibility to think the ambiguity of political judgement as stemming from our situated human condition, and bring into view the complexity, murkiness and difficult moral dilemmas involved in judging a world lying beyond our transparent grasp. Sartre and Beauvoir theorised how, as a situated activity, judgement corresponds to a creative, communicative process of world-disclosure.

Their aesthetic sensibility revealed the human import of political judgement as a practice that is not within the prerogative of the wise few, but contains an appeal to each and every one of us to assume our responsibility for the world and face up to the intricacies of political action. The two thinkers also aptly exposed the fallacy of judging based on the ideal of moral conversion, whereby cultivation of individuals' universal, inner capacity for freedom would eventually reconcile differences of perspective and translate into an objective transformation of their historical situation. They discerned in this attitude remnants of self-centred moralism that fails to adequately account for the oppressive worldly constraints upon our ability to exercise freedom, and refuses to bear the tragedies of resistant action. Their determination to expunge all traces of abstract morality, however, threatened to lapse into a troubling reification of the tragedies of worldly affairs into a necessary aspect of political action as such. Enriching Sartre's and Beauvoir's insights into the situational complexity of political engagement, Camus and Arendt offered a more nuanced recognition of the implications arising from the ambiguous condition of political judgement. A resignation to the inevitability of failure, for them, represented a mirror side of abstract morality in that it was underpinned by the traditional philosophical desire for finality and perfection. Seeking to provide an ultimate solution to the difficulties of political action, it too gave up on the plural and unpredictable character of the world. Camus's and Arendt's aesthetic sensibility, instead, insisted that the only way to resist the absurd character of the world lies in remaining loyal to a plurality of perspectives constituting it and illuminating the boundaries of the common world. In this focus, they moved the debate beyond the stale opposition between vain moralism and an embrace of political expediency. Eschewing the traditional aspiration to unify thought and action, their representative judging orientation committed to disclosing a space where the ambiguities of political affairs could be confronted by respecting the limits of our worldly co-existence.

To concretely illustrate the prescient relevance of the existential judging sensibility, the book engaged two problematics of thought and action that embody the 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 demonstrated the critical potential of existential aesthetic imagination in its resolute love of the world. Explicitly manifest in Camus's and Arendt's plural orientation, worldly judgement can affirm, in the face of the overwhelming and incomprehensible weight of the world, the human potentials of beginning anew. Rather than trying to ultimately perfect, resolve or flee the imperfect nature of political affairs, it commits to revealing it in its particular, plural and unpredictable – that is, human – character. Refusing to let the reality of suffering lead to a wholesale repudiation of the political realm, it constantly strives to reclaim the limits of political action and create on the debris of history once again a fitting abode for human habitation.

To further elaborate on the contemporary significance and critical potential of judging for the world, I bring the existential insights into conversation with two recent arguments that likewise have at their core the importance of a worldly ethical orientation. Building on Arendt, Ella Myers's *Worldly Ethics: Democratic Politics and Care for the World* theorises care for the world as a specific attitude, believed essential in support of collaborative forms of democratic action. On this account, care is not directed at 'another person or even persons', but at the world or, more specifically, at 'particular worldly things' that become 'objects of shared attention and concern' (Myers 2013: 86). Establishing the 'normative valence' of world, Myers (2013: 112) exposes the limitations of dyadic models, which focus on either the cultivation of one's self (as in Foucault) or the cultivation of our infinite responsibility towards a singular Other (as in Levinas). While valuable for crafting a dispositional ethics in the absence of universal moral codes, she argues, these dyadic models are insufficiently oriented towards affecting a change in worldly conditions of individuals' lives (Myers 2013: 23–4, 39, 47–52, 82–3). A proper perspective by which to distinguish between competing collaborative projects, rather, is provided by the commonness of the world as both a shared home for human beings and an in-between space for politics (Myers 2013: 111–38).

Akin to the existential aesthetic sensibility, Myers is attentive to how the self–other dialectics may reinforce a hierarchical relation

between different subjects, further an insensitivity to the plurality of the public realm, and ensue in a turn away from the messy world of action-in-concert (Myers 2013: 27–8, 43–9, 54–7, 62–75). Myers also provides a worthy insight into the normative aspirations entailed by worldly care, imbuing it with specific substantive and procedural aims. The associative projects she propounds must foster the world's commonality, by trying to make the world a better home for human beings, and creating the opportunities for citizens to exchange a plurality of perspectives on objects of shared concern (Myers 2013: 126). Nevertheless, Myers's account stops short of examining the specific (judging) practices by which care for the world could be cultivated. The existential narrative orientation here provides an important addition in delving into the situated process of bringing into view the world's commonness against conditions of its profound loss. It shows how the attempts to penetrate the inner subjectivity of others and conceive of the ends of intersubjective recognition in terms of a preconceived moral community fail to entertain how suffering arose amidst our common world and misconstrue the complexities of political action. Wary of these tendencies, the existential perspective of worldly plurality reveals how a given situation of oppression arose through the ambiguity of human engagement in the world and illuminates it in its shared, intersubjective meaning. Thereby, it also opens a space for a consideration of the possibilities and limits of political action in the present. By inspiring worldly forms of recognition, it invites formerly opposed individuals or groups to see each other as speaking and acting beings, equal members of the common world, who share a responsibility for its rebuilding and preservation. It is in this sense that worldly judgement embraces Arendt's awareness that the human character of politics comes to the fore only 'where people are *with* others', and neither 'for' nor 'against' them (Arendt 1958a: 180). For it reveals that acting 'for others' may easily reduce these others to mere means and conceive of projects of liberation in terms of pre-given (moral) ends imposed upon the plurality and unpredictability of the world from the outside and above. Narrative-inspired attentiveness to human plurality, rather, judges political engagements with a view to how they affect individuals' concrete possibilities for political

action, to whether they either broaden or delimit the space for the movement of human freedom. To be sure, worldly judgement shies away from providing a theoretical procedure by which to unambiguously determine the 'right' course of action, aware of the reality of conflicting commitments and unpredictable outcomes. Nevertheless, it offers a way of distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable undertakings by reference to the emerging, ever fragile and tentative 'criterion' of the shared world.

The existential aesthetic judgement as a practice of disclosing the boundaries of the common world echoes Jade Schiff's exploration into how narrative can incite the process of acknowledging our implication in others' suffering in conditions of pervasive structural oppression. In *Burdens of Political Responsibility: Narrative and the Cultivation of Responsiveness*, Schiff (2014: 27–49) argues that our assumption of political responsibility entails an, as it were, prior cultivation of responsiveness – our *experiencing* ourselves as entangled in (an unjust) world and willing to shoulder the burdens such entanglement makes upon us. Resorting to the existential imaginary, Schiff approaches our various disavowals of responsibility for the world as instances of refusing to face or actively concealing the plurality, freedom and contingency of our human condition (Schiff 2014: 34, 37–9). Mirroring the existential narrative-inspired judgement, too, she places faith in narratives' creative potential. As acts of creative retelling, narratives can redescribe our world in a way that not only exposes the injustice of existing arrangements, but also reveals the given situation as contingent and so open to change (Schiff 2014: 141–51; 2008: 113–14).

All the same, the political potential of narratives, for Schiff, depends on whether the 'moral image' they build up makes visible our implication in injustice, and whether we adequately transpose such 'models' to our own situation (Schiff 2014: 144, 154–63). This ethics of reading remains focused on individual self-cultivation, while insufficiently exploring how our awareness of injustice – or even our acknowledgement of our complicity with it – can translate into meaningful *political* engagement. From the existential worldly perspective, it fails to delve sufficiently into how our relationship to the suffering of others is mediated by broader structures of oppression, introducing a

lacuna between our 'adequate' grasp of our implication and our concrete capacities of political action. In response, Schiff (2014: 185–9, 194) suggests a public exchange of narratives, which would invite us to recognise our interdependency and shared vulnerability, and inspire a 'collective transformation' towards responsiveness. Existential aesthetic imagination in this regard importantly develops the potential of narratives in the public sphere by retaining attention on their ability to reconcile us with the worldly condition of our political existence. Holding fast to the plurality of narrative discourse, it shows how different perspectives interact on the ground of the shared world. In this way, it offers insight into the situated nature of the encounter, while appealing to the potentials of mutual understanding and concerted action based on the free confrontation of differences. The existential vision of narrative engagement then is not exhausted by adding to the discourse a competing perspective that would vie for victory with the existing ones. Nor does it aim for rational agreement that would help transcend subjective distortions and yield a more correct or complete understanding of a given situation (see also Schiff 2014: 192–4). The purpose, rather, is the kindling of communicability, a reinvigoration of the sense of what we share in common, so as to evoke the possibility of alternative forms of relationships and community.

As Schiff (2014: 192, 194) acknowledges, moments of crisis may well radically expose our shared vulnerabilities, but they can also inspire vigorous disavowals of responsibility for our world and lead to 'anguished' flights from the human condition into new illusions of 'mastery'. This is especially evident when moments of loss, tragedy and grief become brewing sites of ever-widening spirals of violence and oppression. Judgement oriented by love of the world responds to these temptations not by denying, but confronting the dangers of excess through the promise of human solidarity. Its attentiveness to how different perspectives interact on the grounds of the shared world reveals common ground for dialogue beyond the ideological divides enforced by structural injustice. Refusing the 'necessary' choice between victims and executioners, worldly judgement discloses the world as an object of shared responsibility, where differently

positioned individuals can engage in reflection on how to uphold for each other the possibilities for a dignified existence. It manifests the broader contours of a critical, resistant politics that, in the quest for justice, will not give in to laws of new crime and further hatred, but will affirm, 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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