



Judgment and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Arendt's Thought

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I. JUDGMENT AND THE MORAL
FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICS
IN ARENDT'S THOUGHT

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JUDGMENT AND MORAL CONSIDERATIONS

Hannah Arendt's incomplete reflections on judgment, intended to be the third volume of her work, *The Life of the Mind*, are puzzling. The perplexing quality of these reflections derives less from the burden on contemporary students of her thought to seek to understand and imaginatively complete what an author might have intended to but was unable to say in her lifetime. Rather this hermeneutic puzzle arises from three different kinds of claims that Arendt makes about judgment and that stand in tension to each other.

First, in the introduction to the first volume of *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt clarifies that her preoccupation with the mental activities of thinking, willing, and judging had two different origins.¹ The immediate impulse came from her attending the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem; the secondary, but equally important, prompting was provided by her desire to explore the counterpart of the *Vita Activa* (which in English translation misleadingly appeared as *The Human Condition*) in the *Vita*

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Contemplativa. In coining the phrase “the banality of evil” and in not explaining the moral quality of Eichmann’s deeds in terms of the monstrous or demonic nature of the doer, Arendt became aware of going counter to the tradition of Western thought that saw evil in metaphysical terms as ultimate depravity, corruption, or sinfulness. The most striking quality of Eichmann, she claimed, was not stupidity or wickedness or depravity but one she described as “thoughtlessness.” This in turn led her to the question: “Might the problem of good and evil, our faculty for telling right from wrong, be connected with our faculty of thought? . . . Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or attract attention, regardless of results and specific contents, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evildoing or even actually ‘condition’ them against it?”²

Arendt pursued this question in a lecture on “Thinking and Moral Considerations” published in *Social Research* in 1971, about the same time that she was composing the volume on *Thinking*. Again she asked: “Is our ability to judge, to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly, dependent upon our faculty of thought? Do the inability to think and a disastrous failure of what we commonly call conscience coincide?”³

As these passages indicate, in approaching the problem of judgment, Arendt was primarily interested in the interrelationships between thinking and judging as moral faculties. She was concerned with judgment as the faculty of “telling right from wrong.”

In the second place, and in contrast to her interest in judgment as a moral faculty, Arendt also focused on judgment as the retrospective faculty of culling meaning from the past, as a faculty essential to the art of storytelling. In the Postscriptum to the volume on *Thinking*, she briefly outlines how she proposes to handle the problem of judgment in volume three. She still intends to discuss judgment as it is related to “the problem of theory and practice and to all attempts to arrive at a halfway plausible theory of ethics.”⁴ But her last paragraph to the Postscriptum turns from ethics to the problem of history. She intends to deny history’s right of being the ultimate judge, “Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht” (Hegel), without denying history’s importance. As Richard Bernstein and Ronald Beiner have observed, in these subsequent reflections, Arendt’s interest appears to have shifted from the standpoint of the actor, judging in order to act, to that of the spectator, judging in order to cull meaning from the past.⁵

Third, Arendt's reflections on judgment do not only vacillate between judgment as a moral faculty, guiding action, versus judgment as a retrospective faculty, guiding the spectator or the storyteller. There is an even deeper philosophical perplexity about the status of judgment in her work. This concerns her attempt to bring together the Aristotelian conception of judgment as an aspect of *phronesis* with the Kantian understanding of judgment as the faculty of "enlarged thought" or "representative thinking." As Christopher Lasch has observed: "On the one hand, Arendt's defense of judgment as the quintessential political virtue seems to lead to an Aristotelian conception of politics as a branch of practical reason. On the other hand, her appeal to Kant as the source of her ideas about judgment appeals to a very different conception of politics, in which political action has to be grounded, not in the practical arts, but in universal moral principles. . . . Arendt's discussion of judgment, instead of clarifying the difference between ancient and modern conceptions of morality and politics, seems to confuse the two."⁶

In this essay I propose to examine some of these hermeneutical puzzles by focusing on one aspect of Arendt's reflections on judgment in particular. I intend to discuss judgment as a moral faculty. Arendt herself never made good on the "attempt to arrive at a halfway plausible theory of ethics" and instead called judgment "the most political" of all our cognitive faculties. By contrast, I intend to argue that first, her characterization of action through the categories of plurality, natality, and narrativity provides us with an illuminating framework for analyzing judgment as a moral faculty, but that second, although she left us with an intriguing beginning point for thinking about the interrelationship of morality and politics, Arendt herself was misled in these matters by a quasi-intuitionist concept of moral conscience on the one hand, and an unusually narrow concept of morality on the other.

My purpose is to think with Arendt against Arendt. I will follow her inconclusive reflections on judgment to develop a phenomenological analysis of judgment as a moral faculty, but at the same time, I will criticize her own problematic separation of morality from politics. However, I will also place her ruminations on this matter in the context of some contemporary debates in practical philosophy between neo-Aristotelians and neo-Kantians. This line of analysis will allow me to address the difficulty raised by Christopher Lasch. It may be that Arendt's attempt to bring together the Aristotelian concern with

particulars in practical matters with a principled, universalist moral standpoint is not simply confusing but contains an insight very much worth developing. Arendt's incomplete doctrine of judgment, by weakening the opposition between contextual judgment and a universalist morality, could help us see through some false fronts in contemporary moral and political theory.

JUDGMENT AND ACTION

I want to begin by recalling the most salient features of action as Arendt introduces them in *The Human Condition*.⁷ These are natality, plurality, and the immersion of action in a web of interpretations that I shall call "narrativity." Natality is like a "second birth," according to Arendt. It is that quality through which we insert ourselves into the world, this time not through the mere fact of being born, but through the initiation of words and deeds. This initiation of words and deeds, which Arendt names "the principle of beginning,"⁸ can no more be avoided than the fact of birth itself. The child becomes a member of a human community in that it learns to initiate speech and action. Although an unavoidable aspect of human acculturation, the condition of natality implies no determinism. In fact, just as every speaker of a language has a capacity to generate an infinite number of grammatically well-formed sentences, the doer of deeds has a capacity to initiate always the unexpected and the improbable, which nonetheless belongs to the possible repertoire of human action and conduct.

Whereas action corresponds to the fact of birth, "speech corresponds to the fact of distinctness and is the actualization of the human condition of plurality, that is, of living as a distinct and unique being among equals."⁹ Plurality, which is revealed in speech, is rooted in the fact of human equality, which in this context does not mean moral and political equality but rather a generic equality of the human constitution that allows humans to understand each other.¹⁰ Whereas in the case of other species, this generic equality defines the individuality of each member of a species, in the case of humans, the distinctness of individuals from one another is revealed through speech. We can say that the human capacity to use speech leads to a differentiation of the repertoire of activities beyond those which are species-specific as well as allowing the emergence of a differentiated subjectivity in the inner life of the self. Speech

differentiates action from mere behavior; the one who speaks is also the one who thinks, feels, and experiences in a certain way. The individuation of the human self is simultaneously the process whereby this self becomes capable of action, that is, of expressing the subjectivity of the doer.

Speech and action are fundamentally related, and “many, and even most acts,” observes Arendt, “are performed in the manner of speech.”¹¹ Speech and action have a revelatory quality: they reveal the “whoness” of the doer. This revelation of the whoness of the actor is always revealing to somebody who is like oneself. Only if somebody else is able to understand the meaning of our words as well as the “whatness” of our deeds, can the identity of the self emerge. Action and speech, therefore, are essentially interaction. They take place between humans.

Narrativity, or the immersion of action in a web of human relationships, is the mode through which the self is individuated and acts are identified. Both the whatness of the act and the whoness of the self are disclosed to agents capable of communicative understanding. Actions are identified narratively. Somebody has always done so at some point in time. To identify an action is to tell the story of its initiation, of its unfolding, and of its immersion in a web of relations constituted through the actions and narratives of others. Likewise, the whoness of the self is constituted by the story of a life—a coherent narrative of which we are always the protagonist but not always the author or the producer. Narrativity is the mode through which actions are individuated and the identity of the self constituted.

These claims concerning the role of narrative in the individuation of actions and the constitution of self-identity are not uncontested. The tendency in the philosophical tradition has been to view these phenomena along the models of substance and accidents or a thing and its properties. The self becomes the “I know not what” underlying or suspending its actions. These, in turn, are not viewed as meaningful deeds that reveal something to someone but rather as properties of bodies. The self whom Hume stumbles upon while ruminating in his consciousness or the Kantian “I” that accompanies all my representations is not the self in the human community, the acting or interacting self, but the self qua thinker, qua subject of consciousness withdrawn from the world.

There is a fundamental connection between the tradition’s ignoring of the question of judgment in moral life and the neglect of the specificity of action as speech and action or communicative interaction. Once we

see moral action as interaction, performed toward others and in the company of others, the role of judgment emerges in at least three relevant areas of moral interaction.¹² These are the assessment of one's duties, the assessment of one's actions as fulfilling these duties, and the assessment of one's maxims as embodied, expressed, or revealed in actions.

TOWARD A PHENOMENOLOGY OF MORAL JUDGMENT

Although the clash of moral duties is a frequently acknowledged topic in moral philosophy, the exercise of judgment concerned with the assessment of one's duties in particular situations arises even when there is no such clash. Consider a moral duty like generosity. How does an agent recognize this particular situation as being one that calls for the duty of generosity? Suppose through some circumstances, the details of which are not exactly clear, a friend in the publishing business manages to squander the family fortune and is heavily in debt. We must first determine whether these particular circumstances are ones in which such a duty of generosity has a claim on what we are to do. But how do we determine the claims of the circumstances upon us? Note that this question does not concern the moral duty an agent acknowledges to be generous. It concerns the interpretation of the duty of generosity in this particular case. Is an individual who squanders the family fortune through her own deeds one who deserves my generosity? If I know from the previous history of the person her tendency to be reckless with money, would or should this influence my deliberations in the matter? The general rule of generosity to help those in need does not aid here, for the issue is whether this particular situation is one in which this rule leads to a moral claim upon me. My first thesis is this: The exercise of moral judgment that is concerned with the epistemic identification of human situations and circumstances as *morally relevant* does not proceed according to the model of the subsumption of a particular under a universal. By "morally relevant," I mean a situation or a circumstance so defined that it would lead to the formulation of a *prima facie* moral duty among those involved.

What about the assessment of one's action then? Suppose I resolve

the above situation by deciding in favor of helping my friend. How should this act of generosity be exercised? Whereas in the first instance we were asking, Is this situation morally relevant for me because it imposes upon me the duty of generosity? now we are asking, What is it that I must do to fulfill this duty? Suppose, after deciding to help this friend, I go up to her in the midst of a crowded cocktail party and say that I know she is broke, and here is a certain amount of money that I hope she will use better next time. Have I acted generously? Have I humiliated this individual? Have I simply exhibited my egotistic desire for praise from others? In other words, what I do, which course of action I decide upon, involves some interpretive ability to see my act not only as it relates to me but as it will be perceived and understood by others. I must have enough moral imagination to know the possible act descriptions or narratives that my action can be subsumed under. My second thesis is this: The identity of a moral action is not one that can be construed in light of a general rule governing particular instances but entails the exercise of *moral imagination* that activates our capacity for thinking of possible narratives and act descriptions in light of which our actions can be understood by others.

Finally, let me turn to the assessment of one's maxim. It might appear that this area of moral considerations at least should be immune to the interpretive indeterminacy of moral judgment and imagination. I know what I want to do, it might be said, what my intentions are, even though my capacity to understand and to foresee what others think or might think, how they might construe my actions, may be limited or simply of no great interest to me. Indeed, there is often a clash between the whatness of a deed in the eyes of others and the whoness of the agent performing it. Actors are also sufferers; they not only act but become the object of the tale of others. Despite this oft-noted and unavoidable cleavage between intention and action, once they become a part of the world, actions reveal our intentions, and sometimes we do not know what our intentions are or may have been until our actions have become a part of the world. In formulating intentions we project ourselves, our narrative history, into the world, and we want to be recognized as the doer of such and such. We identify our intentions in terms of a narrative of which we ourselves are the author. This narrative entails both knowledge of our past and self-projection—desires for our future. It also anticipates the meaning that this past and future may have and will have in the eyes of others. The self is not only an *I* but a *me*, one that is

perceived by others, interpreted and judged by others. The perspectives of the *I* and the *me* must somehow be integrated to succeed in making our intentions communicable. My third thesis is this: The assessment of the maxim of one's intentions, as these embody moral principles, requires understanding the *narrative history* of the self who is the actor; this understanding discloses both self-knowledge and knowledge of oneself as viewed by others.

What I have described so far may be considered a phenomenology of moral judgment. I have argued that if one proceeds from the model of moral action as communicative interaction, as speech and deed, moral judgment is relevant in three domains: in the assessment of morally relevant situations, in the identification of morally correct actions, and in the interpretation of the intentions and maxims of the moral agent. The assessment of morally relevant situations cannot be explained in light of the subsumptive model of judgment; the identification of morally correct actions requires moral imagination concerning possible act descriptions and narratives; and the interpretation of one's intentions and maxims entails comprehension of narrative histories, both one's own and those of others.

JUDGMENT IN KANT'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Arendt's characterization of human action in terms of natality, plurality, and narrativity provides us with an excellent beginning point for developing a phenomenology of moral judgment. I now would like to turn briefly to the status of judgment in Kant's moral philosophy. For as Richard Bernstein has also noted, one of the most perplexing aspects of Arendt's discussion of judgment consists of the following: "Arendt well knew that, even though she invokes the name of Kant, she was radically departing from Kant. There is no question in Kant that the 'ability to tell right from wrong' is a matter of practical reason and not the faculty of reflective judgment that ascends from particulars to generals or universals."¹³ The question I would like to discuss in this context is whether, in fact, the rather perfunctory role that moral judgment plays in Kant's practical philosophy is not related to his two-world metaphysics and to the denigration of action that follows from it. In explaining Arendt's relation to Kant on these matters, one must first consider Kant's theory of action.

Kant, in fact, did not completely ignore the role of judgment in practical philosophy. Judgment, “as the faculty of thinking the particular under the universal,” is determinant when the universal is given and the particular is merely to be subsumed under it.¹⁴ It is reflective if only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it. According to Kant, because the moral law, as the universal guiding moral action, is in all circumstances given, moral judgment is determinant rather than reflective. Let me ask whether, even according to Kant’s own reasoning, moral judgments can be merely determinant, that is, whether they merely entail the subsumption of the particular under the universal law of morality.

In the section “Of the Topic of Pure Practical Reason” in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant writes: “To decide whether an action which is possible for us in the sensuous world is or is not a case under the rule requires practical judgment, which applies what is asserted universally in the rule (in abstracto) to an action in concreto.”¹⁵ This problem presents special difficulties. Because an action determined by the law of practical reason must contain no other ground for its occurrence than the conception of the moral law, and because “all instances of possible action,” according to Kant, “are only empirical and can belong only to experience and nature,” it is absurd to wish to find an instance in the world of sense that allows the application of the law of freedom to it.¹⁶ Kant sums up the difficulty as follows: “The morally good, on the contrary, is something, which, by its object, is supersensuous; nothing corresponding to it can be found in sensuous intuition; consequently, judgment under laws of pure practical reason seems to be subject to special difficulties, which result from the fact that a law of freedom is to be applied to actions which are events occurring in the world of sense and thus, to this extent, belonging to nature.”¹⁷

In this discussion Kant assumes that every action is an event in the world falling under natural laws. Yet for freedom to be possible, he also has to admit that although all actions, once performed, become events in the world, some actions must be caused by the idea of the moral law alone. What distinguishes a moral from a nonmoral action is the ground of its determination, that is, the nature of the principles governing one’s maxims alone. Furthermore, only such actions can be morally good.

As is often the case, in his considerations on this matter Kant conflates two issues. First is a question we may name the epistemology of human actions. How can they be identified and individuated? Kant’s metaphysics of two worlds, the *noumenal* and the *phenomenal*, leads

him to the view that all actions, once they become deeds in the world, are events. But the problem is not whether actions are not also events, but whether the language of natural events is epistemologically adequate to describe human actions. Even as events in the world, human actions can only be understood with reference to reasons, that is, with reference to the meaningful grounds or principles that act as their causes. Reasons are of such a kind that they require to be understood; they can only be described from the participants' or actors' own perspectives. I am not suggesting that an objectivating science of human action is not possible, but only that understanding—*Verstehen*—is an essential component of any such science of human action as well.¹⁸ Under the spell of the exaggerated promises of Newtonian science, Kant disregards all distinction between natural, human, and the social sciences, and simply takes it for granted that a natural, Newtonian science of human action is possible.

The second question that guides Kant is the distinction between the morally right and the morally good. Actions that are morally right are in conformity with the moral law; but only those that have the duty to conform to the moral law as their sole ground, or motivational purpose, are morally good. The distinction between the morally right and the morally good is not counterintuitive, for it is possible to do the right thing for the wrong reasons. The intentions of the doer are obviously an essential, though by no means the sole, component of the moral quality or virtue of an action. Where Kant seems to go wrong though is in his insistence that we can never know if an action was morally virtuous in this sense at all, as the morally good defies embodiment in the phenomenal world. We might say with Hegel that “the purity of heart” becomes a chimera in Kant’s moral philosophy.¹⁹ As soon as it is embodied in action and becomes a part of the world, it becomes impure; yet to embody the good will in action is the only mark of freedom and moral dignity. Thus we seem to be free only when we act, yet become unfree as soon as we act. The way out of this quandary, I want to suggest, is not to deny the distinction between the morally good and the morally right but to reject the two-world metaphysics of Kantian theory in favor of a social epistemology that can do justice to the description and explanation of human action and interaction.²⁰ Thus, although Kant does not ignore the role of judgment in practical philosophy, his reflections on this matter get mired in the problem of his two-world metaphysics and preclude a closer examination of what may be involved in the exercise of moral judgment.

Are we now in a position to answer the question with which we began this section, namely why Arendt, who repeatedly emphasized that judgment was a faculty of “telling right from wrong,” and not just the beautiful from the ugly, continued to appeal to Kant’s doctrine of reflective judgment as a model for judgment in general?²¹ Clearly, Arendt had no use for Kant’s two-world metaphysics and for the denigration of human action that resulted from it. In this respect, Kant only shared the contempt for the *vita activa* characteristic of the philosophical tradition as a whole. What Arendt saw in Kant’s doctrine of aesthetic judgment was something else: In Kant’s conception of reflective judgment, restricted by Kant himself—erroneously in Arendt’s eyes—to the aesthetic realm alone, Arendt discovered a procedure for ascertaining intersubjective validity in the public realm. This kind of intersubjective validity clearly transcended the expression of simple preference though falling short of the a priori and certain validity demanded by Kantian reason. Let us recall Kant’s description of “reflective judgment”:²²

By the name *sensus communis* is to be understood the idea of a public sense, that is, a critical 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 judgment with the collective reason of mankind, and thereby avoid the illusion arising from subjective and personal conditions which could readily be taken for objective. . . . This is accomplished by weighing the judgment, not so much with actual, as rather with the merely possible, judgments of others, and by putting ourselves in the position of every one else.

In her early essay on “The Crisis in Culture,” Arendt provides an illuminating gloss on this passage. She writes:

The power of judgment rests on a potential agreement with others, and the thinking process which is active in judging something is not, like the thought process of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement. From this potential agreement judgment derives its specific validity. This means, on the one hand, that such judgment must liberate itself from the “subjective private conditions,” that is, from the idiosyncrasies which naturally determine the outlook of each individual in his privacy and are legitimate as long as they are only privately held opinions but which are not fit to enter the market place, and lack all validity in the public realm. And this enlarged way of thinking, which as judgment knows how to transcend its individual limitations, cannot function in strict isolation or solitude; it needs the presence of others “in whose place” it must think, whose

perspectives it must take into consideration, and without whom it never has the opportunity to operate at all.²³

The answer, then, to the question as to why Arendt did not explore her departure from Kant in these matters is primarily that in Kant's discovery of the "enlarged mentality," Arendt saw the model for the kind of intersubjective validity we could hope to attain in the public realm. Why she saw such an "enlarged mentality" as a specifically political rather than moral faculty, however, has to do with her own rather narrow conception of the moral domain.

NEO-KANTIAN AND NEO-ARISTOTELIAN PERSPECTIVES ON JUDGMENT

Prior to exploring the relationship between the moral and the political in Arendt's thought, we must consider the following objection to what has been said so far: Is it in fact possible to combine a phenomenology of moral judgment, based upon an Arendtian conception of action, with a Kantian model of intersubjective validity? Although the first line of thinking is more characteristic of the Aristotelian tradition with its emphasis on context- and narrative-bound particulars, the Kantian model of reflective judgment makes no such reference to contextuality and enjoins us abstractly "to think from the standpoint of everyone else." Whereas in the Aristotelian model it is the exemplary quality of the judgment of the *phronimos* that grants it validity, in the Kantian model the ground of the validity of our (aesthetic) judgments is their universal communicability with the hope of winning the assent of all.

Clearly to suggest that Arendt or anybody could simply combine or integrate these modes of thought into a frictionless unity would be equivalent to wanting to square the circle. There are fundamental metaphysical assumptions dividing Aristotle and Kant and that underlie their theories of ethics and politics. Yet in contemporary debates among Kantians and Aristotelians, these metaphysical assumptions play hardly a role. Neo-Aristotelians like Gadamer, Taylor, and MacIntyre base their practical philosophies neither upon an Aristotelian metaphysical teleology nor upon an Aristotelian theory of form and matter. Equally, neo-Kantians like Rawls, Gewirth, Apel, and Habermas reject Kant's

two-world metaphysics as well as his Newtonian theory of action. A central issue in the current debate is whether a universalist moral standpoint must be formalistic, a prioristic and context insensitive or whether moral universalism can be reconciled with contextual sensitivity. It is at this juncture that Arendt's *prima facie* implausible synthesis of Aristotelian and Kantian elements proves fruitful. Here I can only suggest what an Arendtian contribution to this debate might be. Arendt intimated that intrinsic to Kant's model of "reflective judgment" may be a conception of rationality and intersubjective validity that would allow us to retain a principled universalist moral standpoint while acknowledging the role of contextual moral judgment in human affairs. Let me expand. Consider first a Kantian objection to the phenomenology of moral judgment presented above. What you have described, a Kantian might object, is an art of cleverness in human matters, "eine Geschicklichkeit auf Menschen und ihren Willen Einfluss zu haben"—a certain skill in influencing others and their will.²⁴ Certainly, the objection continues, the hermeneutic and interpretive abilities you describe are relevant in human company and for human sociability, but what lends them their moral quality is that they are guided by moral principles. In the absence of such moral principles, these hermeneutic-interpretive skills can be utilized to manipulate people, or to produce the semblance of virtue without its existence. As Kant pointedly writes: "Ebenso gibt es Sitten (Conduite) ohne Tugend, Höflichkeit ohne Wohlwollen, Anständigkeit ohne Ehrbarkeit usw."²⁵

This Kantian objection applies to all variants of neo-Aristotelian theories in which the relationship of moral judgment to moral principles, and the grounds of the validity of the latter, are left unclear. As the debate over the narrow or wider meaning of Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* shows, there are some crucial ambiguities in this concept.²⁶ At times *phronesis* is interpreted in the narrow sense as entailing the choice of means to a given end whose validity itself is not further investigated. Others, like Gadamer, interpret *phronesis* more widely as entailing not only knowledge of means but also of ends that constitute our life as a whole.²⁷ Yet compare the following statement from *Truth and Method* in which Gadamer himself reverts to the Aristotelian language of "seeing" and "the archer hitting the mark"²⁸ in describing the activities of the *phronimos*:

From this it follows that ultimately all moral actions require taste—not as if this most individual balancing of decision is the only thing that governs them, but it is

an indispensable element. It is truly an act of undemonstrable tact to hit the target and give the application of the universal, the moral law (Kant), a discipline that reason itself cannot. Thus taste is not the ground, but the supreme perfection of the moral judgment.²⁹

Gadamer does not altogether collapse the distinction between taste and morality, as he admits that taste is not the ground of the validity of moral judgment. But he does not tell us what the ground of the validity of moral judgment is either. Moral principles are viewed as embodied in the horizon of our traditions that constitute our ethical community. Of course, Gadamer does not have in mind a mechanical application of these principles or blind obedience to habits. All application involves interpretation, and all interpretation involves understanding. In continuing a tradition we do not merely apply it, but we cointerpret it, codefine it, and reinterpret it. However, there must be some principles, the Kantian would insist, for distinguishing between traditions worth preserving and those that are not, ethical practices worth sharing in and those we must reject even when they are our very own. We can concede to Gadamer that such criteria themselves are going to be embodied in some or another tradition or in some or another practice, that they may be handed down from the past, or that they may be inspired by utopian hopes for the future.

From a Kantian standpoint, the crucial issue is whether the exercise of judgment is guided by moral principles, which themselves reflect a universalistic morality, or whether such exercise takes no bearings from moral principles and is instead governed by a situational casuistic. In other words, a contemporary Kantian may admit that Kant's claims about moral judgments being merely subsumptive as well as Kant's theory of action are inadequate and must be rejected. Yet such a Kantian could also insist that a distinction needs to be made between moral judgment and moral principle, and that the latter must be guided by a universalist morality considering all humans as ends in themselves. Along these lines, Barbara Hermann has argued in a recent article that Kantian moral theory lacks indeed "rules of moral salience," enabling agents to identify morally relevant situations, maxims, and act descriptions.³⁰ She contends, however, that such rules of moral salience could well be formulated from within a Kantian framework, insisting that moral judgment needs to be guided by universalistic moral principles.

This Kantian distinction between moral judgment and moral principle helps us see how room might be made in Kantian theory for the exercise of moral judgment. This distinction alone does not suffice to convince,

however, that contextual judgment and a universalist standpoint are compatible. If, as is usually assumed to be the case, the moral law enjoins us to abstract from situational detail and to think of what could be valid for all rational beings *simpliciter*, then indeed no such compatibility is possible. For the Kantian principle would enjoin exactly the opposite of what moral judgment would require.

It is in this context that Kant's formula for reflective judgment, the only ground of whose validity is its universal communicability with the hope of winning the assent of all, and Arendt's reading of this as a procedure of "enlarged thought" become relevant. "Act in such a way that the maxim of your actions can always be a universal law of nature" can be reformulated as "Act in such a way that the maxim of your actions takes into account the perspective of everyone else in such a way that you would be in a position to 'woo their consent.'" Such a procedure of enlarged thought and contextual moral judgment are not at all incompatible. The moral principle of enlarged thought enjoins us to view each person as one to whom I owe the moral respect to consider their standpoint. This is the universalist-egalitarian kernel of Kantian morality. Yet "to think from the standpoint of everyone else" requires precisely the exercise of contextual moral judgment.

I had isolated above three respects in which the exercise of moral judgment was crucial: first, the recognition of morally relevant situations; second, the exercise of the moral imagination in the articulation of possible act descriptions through which our deeds would be construed; third, the interpretation of one's action and maxims in light of the narrative history of the self and others. Each of these aspects of moral judgment requires for its successful exercise the ability to take the standpoint of the other. The more human perspectives we can bring to bear upon our understanding of a situation, all the more likely are we to recognize its moral relevance or salience. The more perspectives we are able to make present to ourselves, all the more are we likely to appreciate the possible act descriptions through which others will identify our deeds; finally the more we are able to think from the perspective of others, all the more can we make vivid to ourselves the narrative histories of others involved. Moral judgment, whatever other cognitive abilities it may entail, certainly must involve the ability for "enlarged thought," or the ability to make up my mind "in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement" (Arendt). Such capacity for judgment is not empathy, as Arendt also observes,³¹ for it does not mean assuming or accepting

the point of view of the other. It means merely making present to oneself what the perspective of others involves or could be, and whether I could “woo their consent” in acting the way I do. If such thinking from the standpoint of everyone else is to be distinguished from empathy, then how else are we to understand it? For Kant this was not an issue, as he assumed that thinking for one, a pure rational being could think for all. If we reject Kantian a priorism and his assumption that as moral selves we are all somehow identical, if, in other words, we distinguish a universalist morality of principles from Kant’s doctrine of a priori rationality, then I want to suggest we must think of such enlarged thought as a condition of actual or simulated dialogue. To “think from the perspective of everyone else” is to know “how to listen” to what the other is saying, or when the voices of others are absent, to imagine to oneself a conversation with the other as my dialogue partner. “Enlarged thought” is best realized through a dialogic or discursive ethic.³²

THE MORAL FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICS IN ARENDT’S WORK

Is there any reason to assume that this procedural model of enlarged thought, which enjoins us actually to engage in or simulate in thought a moral dialogue with all concerned, helps us recover that thread among thinking, judgment, and moral considerations that Hannah Arendt had sought for? It is again one of the perplexities of Arendtian thinking on these matters that though she readily acknowledged the relevance of “enlarged thought” as a principle in the public-political realm, in her considerations on morality, she reverted to the Platonic model of the unity of the soul with itself. In her 1971 essay on “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” following Socrates in the *Gorgias*, she described conscience as the harmony or oneness of the soul with itself.³³ Although I would not want to deny the relevance of this experience for moral considerations, I think Arendt was too quick in assuming that out of the self’s desire for unity and consistency, a principled moral standpoint could emerge. Let me simply remind you of Walt Whitman’s famous lines: “Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes.”³⁴

Arendt emphasized harmony as the morally relevant experience, but she regarded plurality as the political principle par excellence. Through

this emphasis on unity or harmony she presented a quasi-intuitionist conception of moral judgment. For if the basis of the validity of our moral judgments is that they allow us “to be at home with ourselves,” are we not in fact making validity a matter of the idiosyncrasies of the individual psyche? Was not one of the most perplexing characteristics of Eichmann, in Arendt’s eyes, precisely the fact that he was “at home” with himself? Arendt fails to convince us that an attitude of moral reflection and probing, such as enjoined by the procedure of enlarged thought, and the Platonic emphasis on unity or harmony of the soul with itself, can be reconciled. In fact, the capacity for enlarged thought may well lead to moral conflict and alienation, but in a world in disarray, an attitude of moral alienation may be more at home in the world than an attitude of simple harmony with oneself.

There is an irony in these reflections. The kinds of historical situations that led Arendt to her ruminations on thinking and moral considerations, most notably National Socialism and Stalinism in our century, are precisely instances when the intersubjectivity constitutive of the social world has been so dirempted and damaged that the motivation as well as the capacity to engage in enlarged thought disappears. In other words, one possible Arendtian objection to the model of actual or simulated dialogue I have presented may be that it reveals the utopianism of moral thought in the extreme. For these kinds of moral attitudes seem to disappear precisely when we most need them, that is, in those situations of moral and political upheaval when the fabric of moral interactions that constitute everyday life are so destroyed that the moral obligation to think of the other as one whose perspective I must weigh equally alongside my own disappears from the conscience of individuals.

I think we have to admit that there is indeed a cleavage here and that the question of when a principled moral standpoint of enlarged thought can become or fails to become the moral culture of a society cannot be answered by philosophical arguments concerning its validity and desirability. However, this admission is not equivalent to the acceptance of impotence in the face of history that the old Hegel, at least, always viewed as the price Kantian ethics had to pay for formalism. We can name this issue the problem of the mediation of moral principles and moral culture. It is at this point when we are precisely concerned with mediating a principled moral standpoint with actual historical and social practices that the issue of a political ethic arises. A political ethic concerns the creation of institutions, the formation of practices, and the

sustaining of civic values that cultivate the ability of enlarged thought and the universalist-egalitarian commitment that inspires them. Here I must depart from Arendt.

Arendt herself radically separated moral considerations from political action. Although her own political theory of the public space, community, power, and participation seem to me to be inconceivable without an implicit political ethic of enlarged thought, in her book *On Revolution* she proceeded from a remarkably narrow conception of morality. As is known, one of her major criticisms of the French revolutionaries was that in attempting to establish a republic of virtue they only succeeded in establishing one of terror.³⁵ "Purity of heart," in her view, has no room in politics. Arendt here did not distinguish between the morally good and the morally right. The moral good, virtue, concerns indeed those dispositions, traits of character, emotions, and intentions that lead to virtuous conduct. The morally right concerns our public actions and interactions that affect, influence, and reflect upon the moral dignity and worth of the other as a public being. Thus one possible answer to Arendt's separation of morality and politics is to argue with Kant and modern liberal political theory that there is a moral foundation to politics insofar as any political system embodies principles of justice. In Kantian theory this domain covers the *Rechtslehre*, namely those human rights and public principles of legislation that embody respect for the moral worth and dignity of another. This is what John Rawls reformulates in his theory of justice as the fundamental principles of justice that are to govern the basic institutions of societies. Between a "republic of terror" and a "republic of virtue," we might say, lies the conception of a "well-ordered and just society," embodying basic moral principles in its macro-political and economic institutions.³⁶

It is possible to go one step further in exploring the topic of a political ethic without altogether collapsing the distinction between the right and the good. This additional step would involve the encouragement and cultivation of a public ethos of democratic participation. Between the basic institutions of a polity embodying principles of the morally right and the domain of moral interactions in the life world, in which virtue often comes to the fore, lie the civic practices and associations of a society in which individuals face each other neither as pure legal subjects nor as moral agents standing under ties of ethical obligations to each other, but as public agents in a political space. The gap between the demands of justice, as it articulates the morally right, and the demands of virtue, as it defines the quality of our relations to others in the

everyday lifeworld, can be bridged by cultivating qualities of civic friendship and solidarity. These moral attitudes of civic friendship and solidarity involve the extension of the sympathy and affection we naturally feel toward those closest to us onto larger human groups and thus personalize justice. Whereas the traditional liberal model from Kant to Rawls sees a rupture here between the public virtue of impersonal justice and the private virtue of goodness, it is possible to envisage, not their identity, but their mediation.

The discourse model of ethics, which enjoins enlarged thought by making the perspective of all involved in a dialogue situation the *sine qua non* of the moral standpoint, allows us to think of this continuity and mediation. For the articulation of the perspectives of all involved requires, in fact, a civic and public life in which the right to opinion and action is guaranteed.³⁷ The articulation of differences through civic and political associations is essential for us to comprehend and to come to appreciate the perspective of others. The feelings of friendship and solidarity result precisely through the extension of our moral and political imagination, not in vacuo or via a Rawlsian thought experiment, but through the actual confrontation in public life with the point of view of those who are otherwise strangers to us, but who become known to us through their public presence as voices and perspectives we have to take into account.

There is thus a fundamental link between a civic culture of public participation and the moral quality of enlarged thought. Enlarged thought, which morally obligates us to think from the standpoint of everyone else, politically requires the creation of institutions and practices whereby the voice and the perspective of others, often unknown to us, can become expressed in their own right. A major mistake of Kantian moral theory is to assume that the principles of enlarged thought can be realized via the isolated thought experiments of a thinker. These solitary thought experiments often substitute the standpoint of one privileged part for that of the whole. Indeed, it can hardly be otherwise. For “to think from the standpoint of everyone else” in Kantian moral philosophy is equivalent to thinking from the standpoint of one who is like all others in virtue of being a pure rational and autonomous agent. Once we reject the two-world metaphysics of Kantian theory as well as the definition of our moral identities in purely rational terms, and we proceed to the perspectives of natality, plurality, and the narrativity of action, we have to see that “to think from the standpoint of everyone else” entails sharing a public culture such that

everyone else can articulate indeed what they think and what their perspectives are. The cultivation of one's moral imagination flourishes in such a culture in which the self-centered perspective of the individual is constantly challenged by the multiplicity and diversity of perspectives that constitute public life.

In this sense, Arendt was right in maintaining that judgment is the most political of all human faculties, for it leads to the recovery of the perspectival quality of the public world in which action unfolds. Where I depart from Arendt though is in her attempt to restrict this quality of mind to the political realm alone, thereby ignoring judgment as a moral faculty. The consequences of her position are, on the one hand, a reduction of principled moral reasoning to the standpoint of conscience, which is identified with the perspective of the unitary self, and on the other hand, a radical disjunction between morality and politics, which ignores precisely the normative principles that seem to me to be required by the fundamental concepts of her own political theory like public space, power, and political community. I have attempted to show that her own theory of action can be made fruitful for the exploration of moral judgment and that, furthermore, this theory of action leads to a reformulation of the essence of Kantian moral theory in terms of a dialogic procedure of enlarged thought. My final reflections have attempted to mediate between this perspective of enlarged thought and its political embodiment in a public culture of democratic ethos.

NOTES

1. Hannah Arendt, *Thinking*, vol. 1 of *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 3.

2. Arendt, *Thinking*, 5.

3. Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture," *Social Research*, 5th Anniversary Issue (Spring/Summer 1984), 8.

4. Arendt, *Thinking*, 216.

5. Ronald Beiner, "Hannah Arendt on Judging," in *Hannah Arendt: Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 117ff; R.J. Bernstein, "Judging—the Actor and the Spectator," in *Philosophical Profiles* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 221-238; Cf. also Arendt's discussion of Kant's distinction between the standpoint of the actor and that of the spectator in these lectures, 44ff; 54ff.

6. Christopher Lasch, "Introduction," in *Salmagundi*, Special H. Arendt issue, ed. Christopher Lasch, No. 60 (1983), xi.

7. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 8th printing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

8. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 177.

9. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 178.

10. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 175.

11. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 178.

12. For an illuminating discussion of moral judgment, see Charles Larmore, "Moral Judgment," *Review of Metaphysics* 35 (December 1981), 275-296.

13. Bernstein, "Judging—the Actor and the Spectator," 232-233.

14. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. and with analytical index by J. C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 10. I have also consulted "Kritik der Urteilskraft," in *Kants Werke, Akademie-Textausgabe*, Bd. V (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968).

15. Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Practical Reason," in *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings in Moral Philosophy*, trans. and with intro. by L. W. Beck (New York: Garland, 1976), 176.

16. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 176.

17. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 177.

18. From the extensive literature on this topic, I will mention only Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," *Review of Metaphysics* 25 (1971), 3-51; R.J. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978); and A. Giddens, *Studies in Social and Political Theory* (London: Hutchinson, 1977), 135-165, 165-179.

19. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phaenomenologie des Geistes*, 6th ed., ed. J. Hoffmeister in Philosophische Bibliothek, Bd. 114 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952), 301-313; trans. A. V. Miller, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

20. Kant returns to the question of moral judgment in the *Metaphysik der Sitten*, this time in the context of distinguishing perfect from imperfect duties. *Perfect* duties like telling the truth and keeping promises are ones where the action itself is directly determined by the moral law; *imperfect* duties, like generosity and benevolence, are ones whose maxims alone are determined by the moral law (230ff, 250ff). This distinction between perfect and imperfect duties corresponds to that between the morally right and the morally good; whereas the first are subsumed under the *Rechtslehre*, the second are subsumed under the *Tugendlehre*. Kant admits that in virtue of the latitude allowed to imperfect duties—strive for your own perfection and the well-being of others—these require the exercise of the faculty of judgment. This faculty ought to determine how a "maxim is to be applied in specific cases"; this in turn requires another subsidiary maxim of application, and we thus land in a "moral casuistic" (p. 256). On Kant's view, the broader the domain of an imperfect duty, the broader the scope for the exercise of the faculty of judgment. Kant ends these deliberations rather promptly with the observation that ethics is not concerned so much with judgment as with reason (p. 256). See Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysik der Sitten*, 4th ed., ed. K. Vorländer, Philosophische Bibliothek, Bd. 42 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1966).

21. Cf. Arendt, "Introduction," *Thinking*, 5; Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," 8. We also know from the notes of her students who attended her course on Kant's *Critique of Judgment* at the University of Chicago in 1971 that "although Kant withheld questions of right and wrong from the sphere of reflective (aesthetic) judgment . . .

Arendt herself was convinced that in doing so he had made a major mistake," Michael Denny, "The Privilege of Ourselves: Hannah Arendt on Judgment," in *Hannah Arendt. The Recovery of the Public World* (New York: St. Martin's, 1979), 266.

22. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 151; Cf. Arendt's discussion of this passage in her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 71ff.

23. Arendt, "Crisis in Culture," in *Between Past and Future. Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Meridian, 1961), 220-221.

24. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 9.

25. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 50.

26. See R. Sorabji, "Aristotle on the Role of Intellect and Virtue"; and David Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," both in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. A. O. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 201-221, 221-241, respectively.

27. H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. G. Barden and J. Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1975), 287.

28. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *Basic Works of Aristotle*, 10th printing, ed. and intro. by R. McKeon (New York: Random House, 1966), 1114b5ff, 1142a25ff.

29. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 37-38.

30. Barbara Herman, "The Practice of Moral Judgment," *Journal of Philosophy* (August 1985), 414-436.

31. Arendt, "Crisis in Culture," 221.

32. I have dealt with the program of communicative ethics, in "Toward a Communicative Ethics," *Critique, Norm and Utopia. A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 279ff.

33. Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," 30; The passage discussed by Arendt is the following: "It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than that I, *being one*, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict *me*." Translation and emphasis by Arendt. Cf. *Gorgias*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 7th printing, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series LXXI (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 265.

34. Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Leaves of Grass and Selected Prose*, ed. and intro. by John Kouwenhoven (New York: Modern Library, 1950), Stanza 51, 74.

35. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, 7th printing (New York: Viking, 1969), 68ff, 81ff. For a similar concern with the relationship of morality to politics in Hannah Arendt's thought, cf. J. Habermas, "Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power," in *Social Research*, vol. 44 (1977), 3-25. I am in agreement with George Kateb on this issue, who writes: "My fear is that judging is too frail a support for the hope of keeping an only slightly altered Greek conception of political action while reducing the dangers of its countenancing immorality. . . All that the faculty of judging can guarantee is that those one recognizes as one's equals will be taken into account. The demand that all be recognized as one's equals, that one not equate humanity with one's group, does not necessarily follow from the activity of judging." In *Hannah Arendt. Politics, Conscience, Evil* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), 38-39. Precisely for this reason, it is important to distinguish between moral judgment and moral principle as well as making explicit the moral foundations of one's concept of the political.

36. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 51ff.

37. On the rights of opinion and action, which Arendt describes as “the right to have rights” as such, see, Arendt, *Imperialism*, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Part Two (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 176-77. For a provocative essay that explores and argues against the antidemocratic strain in Arendt’s thought, cf. Sheldon Wolin, “Hannah Arendt: Democracy and the Political,” in *Salmagundi*, Special H. Arendt issue, ed. Christopher Lasch, No. 60 (1983), 3-19. The alternative conception of the political that Wolin outlines in this essay is oddly enough much indebted to Arendt’s views in *The Human Condition*; cf. Wolin, 17-19.

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