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## Judging Between History and Politics

I would like to begin by taking as a pretext an essay by Jean-François Lyotard in which he charges Hannah Arendt of having unduly interpreted Kant's *Kritik der Urteilkraft* in "a realistic and sociological" fashion. He reproaches her for having sacrificed the transcendental trait of the judgement of taste and of the *sensus communis* in order to transform these concepts into the categories that bear out a radical political project: that of a community which coincides with the "self-government of being-together" (Lyotard 1991, 86).

Lyotard does not contest the content or the validity of the proposal, which he considers as being the theoretical transposition of the experience of democratic councils. But he believes that, in itself, the projection of a form for a political community is the sign of a thought which is still "too conciliatory"; of a thought which is trying to leave behind dialectical logic but cannot remain in the contradiction, and therefore ends up relinquishing the critical weapon of reflection and resigns itself to the

reconciliation between the subject and political objectivity.

For Lyotard, in short, the Arendtian philosophy gets caught in the trap – which is always waiting – of the Hegelian synthesis: a synthesis that takes away from philosophy the possibility of being a “place of resistance”.

I do not believe that things stand this way. Indeed, I am convinced that all the ambiguities and paradoxes of the Arendtian writings are due precisely to the extreme vigilance of the author who, on the one hand, would like to retrieve for us the originary meaning of the concept of citizenship; but, on the other hand, is aware of the fact that any attempt to reconnect theory and praxis always risks becoming reinscribed in the dialectical reconciliation.

In order to show why Hannah Arendt thinks that the faculty of judgement *is* a weapon for resisting the existent, and therefore not an instrument to overcome *in extremis* the divergence between thought and action, I will rapidly expose the content of Arendt's *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Arendt 1982) emphasizing above all the anti-Hegelian *pathos* that runs through them. I will then refer to some appropriations of Arendt's reflections on judgement, including that of Lyotard, and I will draw some conclusions about what I take to be the most adequate way of reading the *Lectures on Kant*.

## The Perspective Opened by Kant

Arendt's work as a whole tries to rethink in a radical way the traditional relation between theory and praxis; a relation that tends to privilege the first dimension over the second. In less generic terms, one can say that her entire reflection – from *The Human Condition* (Arendt 1958) to *The Life of the Mind* (Arendt 1978) – puts into question

the consequences that the approach of “first philosophy” has for the comprehension of the practical sphere (Forti 1996). In particular, she is after the reasons that have allowed metaphysics to compromise an authentic consideration of human affairs. What betrayed free and plural action into the asymmetrical relation between rulers and ruled, what reduced praxis to the order imposed by *theoria*, was the refusal by philosophy to accept the constitutive instability of “human affairs”. To synthesize rather brutally, one may say that for Arendt the basic trait of Western Philosophy, from Parmenides to Husserl, consists in the persistent attempt to negate contingency and plurality, in order to find immutability, permanence and identity in the unshakeable sphere of the “I think”.

Kant plays a fundamental role in the work of deconstructing this basic tendency of metaphysics – a work that Arendt carries out most efficiently in *The Life of the Mind*. There is no time for a detailed treatment of Arendt’s interpretation in the *Lectures*, but it is enough to remind oneself that – through a very selective and projective reading of Kantian texts – Arendt calls upon all those passages which, in her opinion, testify to Kant’s eccentricity with respect to the Western philosophical tradition. As if she wanted to retrieve an image of Kantian philosophy emendated of every metaphysical and universalistic aspect.

One could say that Arendt presents *not a pre-Hegelian Kant, still ignorant of the “power of the negative”, but a post-Hegelian, or even post-metaphysical, Kant*. This Kant seems to have passed through the philosophy of existence and turns back to reflect on the *finitude of our being-there* and on the untranscendable co-belonging of man and world.

Arendt, though, cannot avoid certain convergences between Kant and Hegel. For example, Kant seems to embrace, like Hegel, a conception of history that posits an idea of progress and that postulates as its subject the

human species, an entity which is no less abstract than the Hegelian *Geist*.

But if one follows carefully the argument that illustrates the analogies between the two thinkers, one gets the impression that Arendt admits and enumerates the points of contact between the two philosophers only in order to render rhetorically more effective the denial of any real affinity between them. According to Arendt, if Kant did indeed give in to a progressive and providential conception of history, he nevertheless did not hypostasize an Absolute Spirit that reveals itself in history. History, understood in Kantian fashion, does not realize its *telos*: the ideas of freedom and of peace between States are not realized in the course of history like the Hegelian *Geist*, but are simply guiding threads that permit an ordering of the chaos of the events into a narrative plot.

It is essential for her to emphasize the distance that separates Hegel from Kant and to minimize the influence that certain aspects of Kantian criticism have had on idealism. This is because, for Arendt, Kant and Hegel assume the value of *two alternative theoretical paradigms*: either one sides with Kant, in order to save the meaning and the autonomy of what appears; or one sides with Hegel, in order that everything may become reconciled again in the monistic logic of the idea and of historical necessity, from which one demands the meaning of each singularity.

This opposition is asserted with such insistence that one is tempted to think that Arendt's main worry is not so much that of providing an original reconstruction of Kantian thought, as that of sketching a profile on Kant which reveals his radical extraneousness to Hegel's project.

From this perspective, Arendt considers as decisive those passages of the text "Is the Human Race Constantly progressing?" that, apart from allowing her to locate in Kant the separation of politics and morality, also allow

her, once for all, to absolve Kant from any responsibility with respect to Hegelianism.

Undoubtedly, Hegel's belief that Universal History makes sense only if "from the actions of men there results something else, apart from what they intended and attain, know and want immediately", can also be applied to Kant himself, when he writes about the French Revolution. For Kant, in fact, the greatness of the revolutionary events is not due to the actions and the intentions of the actors that took place in those events: what makes him decide for the importance of what has happened, lies in "the mode of thinking of the spectators which reveals itself publicly in this game of great revolutions, and manifests such a universal, yet disinterested, sympathy for the players on one side against those on the other". That is in the fact that the revolution manages to impress "in the hearts of all spectators (who are not engaged in this game themselves) a wishful participation that borders closely on enthusiasm".

Kant and Hegel are therefore united in their belief that it is not through action, but through contemplation that one discovers the meaning of the whole. Kant, like Hegel, seems to remain inside that traditional relation between *theoria* and *praxis* that privileges the first over the second, that gives dignity to contemplation but not to action.

But in the different considerations attributed by the two philosophers to the figure of the spectator, Arendt believes to have found a decisive difference.

If for Hegel the spectator "exists strictly in the singular", and is the philosopher himself, as "organ" of the absolute spirit which homologates reality to itself in the process of reflection, – for Kant, instead, the *Weltbetrachter*, the spectator, who is potentially in every man and not only in the philosopher, exists only in the dimension of plurality.

It is the plural dynamic of *this* spectator – radically different from the “organ” of the Hegelian *Geist* – that Arendt interprets through the categories of the Kantian *Urteilstkraft*.

This investigation tries to bring forward a different way of relating that *bios theoretikos*, which has traditionally cut off its ties to this world, to the *Lebenswelt*. In other words, the conclusions implicit in the trilogy of the last Arendtian work seem to suggest that only if one individuates *within the life of the mind itself* a way of thinking reflectively that maintains firmly its own relation to the world, can one redeem the world of human affairs from the ontological disrepute in which metaphysics has placed it.

This is what Arendt asks of the *Kritik der Urteilstkraft*, a work that she believes to be less compromised than others by the homologizing and unifying power of the concept. The Analytic of the Beautiful lends itself to the enterprise of the “ontological rehabilitation of the singular”; it delineates the competences of a subjective faculty that manages to catch the phenomena directly, thereby eluding the grasp of conceptual determinations. A faculty that escapes the narcissistic delirium of modern subjectivity which brings back all reality to the hegemonic principle of the Self, to the principle of self-identity.

The key passages of the *Kritik der Urteilstkraft* that Arendt uses, to indicate the paradoxical art of “thinking the singular”, are well known. She refers to the discriminating capacity of “taste”, then to the *Erweiterte Denkungsart*, “enlarged mentality”, which in turn refers to the concepts of imagination and *sensus communis*.

As opposed to the “eye of the mind” of metaphysics, which can perceive the truth of being only in isolation, the Kantian concept of the imagination places us in a virtual communication with others in the very moment in which we compare “our judgement with the possible, rather

than actual, judgement of others". (*Kritik*, § 40)

To guarantee the possibility of such a comparison, Kant calls upon the category of *sensus communis*. A category which is presented by Arendt, rather elusively, as a supplementary spiritual endowment that allows human beings to participate in a community. *But it is not a concrete community*, as Lyotard thinks. The *sensus communis* of which Arendt speaks can be made to coincide with a kind of "factual apriori", if one can use this oxymoron, which does not define human nature but has the function of circumscribing a specific difference: "It is the capability by which men are distinguished from animals and from gods". (Arendt 1982, 70)

*The sensus communis does not coincide with an ontological principle that grounds the natural sociability of man*, from which derives the necessity of a good political community. *It is rather a fact*, which is given phenomenologically, that is at the same time the condition of possibility of language, of communicability, and of sharing in general.

The *sensus communis* cannot even claim to designate the modalities and procedures through which one can attain a "self-government of being-together", a collective consensus and unanimous political decisions.

It is rather the last, but non-foundational, instance to which Arendt appeals in order to reinforce the argument in favour of the sole and humble truth offered to mortals: that "not Man, but men inhabit the earth" and that "plurality is the authentic essence of men to the degree that they belong to this world".

It is certainly not surprising that this reading of Kant has provoked numerous criticisms. Of these, the most frequent one, and also the most obvious one, is that Arendt would have deliberately misunderstood the intentions of Kant, in so far as the latter is never supposed to have "displaced" his political philosophy into his aesthetic theory, and even less would he have been disposed to

separate politics from morals – as Arendt's interpretation presupposes. But also those who consider that it is legitimate to seek the politics of Kant in those texts which are not expressly dedicated to politics, express a note of caution against the excessive facility of Arendt's interpretation. More precisely, they note that in order to bend the aesthetic judgement to her own purposes, Arendt has to weaken, to the point of irrelevancy, the transcendental problematic, just as she evades the teleological problematic.

There is not much to say about this type of objection. From the point of view of philological accuracy and as a textual analysis, the *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* are hardly defensible. In fact, it is from a different perspective that one must evaluate their relevance: as a "pioneering" text that has opened the way to a wide philosophical and political debate, as well as a renewed interest for Kantian aesthetics, and lastly as a precious indication to understand the whole significance of Arendt's reflection.

## Contentions About the Arendtian Inheritance

Perhaps the most efficient way to bring out the possible implications of the *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* in the recent philosophical debate around political Judgement, is to follow the "reception" of this text in four different authors, each more or less influenced by the Arendtian reflections on the Kantian *Urteilkraft*.

To indicate the lines along which Arendt's theory of judgement has been pursued, I have employed *thinkers who are in some way "representative" of different philosophical tendencies*.

Ernst Vollrath has been called upon to testify about the sort of reception reserved for the Arendtian-Kantian judgement within a philosophical context which can be



considered to have important affinities with the philosophical horizon of the German *Rehabilitierung der praktischen Philosophie*. Ronald Beiner, instead, is charged with presenting the relation between Arendt's reflections on Judging and American Communitarianism and Neo-Aristotelianism. From Seyla Benhabib one asks the delineation of the way in which the universalism of Habermasian "discourse ethics" could integrate the perspective opened by the *Lectures*. Lastly, I will consider some reflections of Lyotard, in search of affinities between the interpretation and the use of Kantian reflective judgement made by Arendt and the "anxieties" of a philosophical context, such as that of the French "philosophy of difference", engaged in confronting itself with the inheritance of Nietzsche and Heidegger.

The work of Ernst Vollrath, *Die Rekonstruktion der politischen Urteilskraft* (1977) and *Die Grundlegung einer philosophischen Theorie des Politischen* (1987) move from Arendtian premisses, even though it intends to go beyond Hannah Arendt by extrapolating from her unfinished work a *systematic theory of political judgement*. Especially in *Die Grundlegung einer philosophischen Theorie des Politischen*, Vollrath attempts to delineate a "new philosophical theory of the political" and thereby respond to the serious crisis in which traditional political theory finds itself.

The project of *Die Grundlegung* is very ambitious and it has among its merits the fact that it problematizes some aspects of the so-called "*Rehabilitierung*" of practical philosophy, even though its horizon is not foreign to Vollrath. According to him, the philosophical project of the *Rehabilitierung*, which repropose the Aristotelian separation between *sophia* and *phronesis*, is untenable for at least two reasons. Although the Aristotelian doctrine of *phronesis* responds to the essential requisite of a non-metaphysical theory of politics, because it perceives and accepts the "optional" and not necessary character of the

world of human affairs, still in Aristotle everything that is contingent remains ontologically subordinated to the primacy of what is necessary. In the second place, the Aristotelian wisdom remains tied to the historical presupposition of the Greek *polis*, whose *ethos* has been irredeemably lost. Vollrath's *Neue Klugheit*, the new wisdom on which the philosophy of the political must rest, cannot simply be a new version of the ancients: it must entail a paradigm change.

This is where the *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* become the indispensable theoretical instrument to effect such a change. It will take place only if one puts the rationality of reflective judgement, with its openness to plurality, in the place of metaphysical reason. This type of judgement is called upon to mediate rationality and empiricism, universality and particularity. It is a form of knowledge that emerges directly from the political phenomenon and which is therefore capable of grasping it in its purity, without imposing extraneous criteria. Accordingly, Vollrath delineates the formal criteria which constitute the political: it is not identified in a concrete content, but represents a modality of being-together ruled by the dynamic which is implicit in the Arendtian-Kantian aesthetic judgement. The subjects who judge according to interpersonal universality, and who put themselves, thanks to the imagination, in the place of every other, represent the authentically political modality of association. By judging from a common point of view, they manage to constitute a community. For Vollrath, without this "participation in judgement" there would be no authentic politics, but merely organization.

Ronald Beiner, one of the first proponents of a theory of political judgement, is equally motivated by the desire to put to work the Arendtian inheritance. He is primarily interested in the significance that political judgement may have for a *strong theory of citizenship* (Beiner 1983). Beiner is

situated within a philosophical position – that of the communitarians – which places the problem of inter-subjective agreement and consensus not on the theoretical and transcendental plane, but inserts it in the concrete tissue of a community, in the “living” web of a shared *ethos*, from within which emerge and develop the beliefs and convictions of human beings. From this perspective, to investigate the nature of judgement means to investigate a human faculty that, in the absence of objective methods and certain rules, is able to orient itself in the context of particular situations and to open a space of deliberations, of active participation in public life.

But Beiner believes that the Arendtian reconstruction of Kant’s judgement of taste, although fundamental to understand the subjective dynamic of judgement, is incapable of giving a concrete principle on which to support the dynamic of the community, because of the transcendental background in which it moves and because of the universality to which it appeals. This principle is to be looked for in the so-called “Aristotelian theory of judgement”.

In the end, Aristotle remains the necessary complement of Kantian formalism; the Aristotelian political judgement gives what Kant cannot offer: the substantial and concrete co-ordinates of a peculiar modality of human interaction, of which a non-secondary aspect resides in deliberating and deciding together “about the ways of life is desirable to pursue inside a determinate context of possibility”.

Quite different, at first sight, is the perspective from which Seyla Benhabib employs the Arendtian-Kantian judgement. Benhabib turns to the Arendtian *Judging* in order to find a model for “moral action” – understood as communicative action – that can be posited as foundation for democratic politics (Benhabib 1988 and 1996). The author is aware, though, that the Arendtian *Urteilskraft* is

hardly compatible with the still universalist and rationalist perspective of Habermas's universal pragmatics. But precisely on the terrain of the *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Benhabib individuates the place for a possible dialogue between communitarianism and theory of communicative action. For her, Arendt's peculiar interpretation of Kant – which has rid him of certain excessively formal garbs and dressed him up with those of Aristotelian *phronesis* – indicates the way for a possible mediation between the particularistic attitude toward context and the universalist point of view of morality. In brief, for Benhabib the merit of the hermeneutical operation that conjugates Aristotle and Kant is that of having made thinkable a fruitful reconciliation between the transcendental aspect of the “enlarged mentality” and the contextual moral judgement to which communitarians appeal. The latter, if appropriately understood, could mitigate the formalism and abstractness of universalist morality.

We must admit that Habermas in some respects followed the path indicated by Benhabib (Habermas 1976 and 1980). He took into consideration the criticism moved by communitarian thinkers. With reference to the latest Habermas, we may in fact speak of a “contextual and particularistic turn”. That is to say: the assumption of a more critical attitude towards a pure universalistic paradigm and the attention for a more particularistic one; a turn which is connected, in a not merely secondary way, to these Arendtian reflections on Kant.

Nevertheless I do not think it is possible to consider this Habermasian move as a paradigm change, as someone has suggested. Habermas is still tied to a philosophical framework which states a universalistic claim, even if in a milder way. A claim which prevents him, in principle, from a radical recognition of differences as well as an authentic acceptance of the radical “singularistic” point of view adopted by Arendt.

The “philosophy of judgement” of Jean-François Lyotard has very little in common with the so-called theories of political judgement. The French philosopher does not appeal directly to the *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*. One can say, though, that he thinks side by side with Arendt, through an interpretation of Kant which shows much more than a simple formal affinity with her (Lyotard 1983). Lyotard’s hermeneutical operation also consists in amplifying the antimetaphysical charge of certain Kantian notions, as if to contrast the weight of universalistic elements contained above all in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*. The French philosopher emphasizes the Kantian discovery of the heterogeneity of subjective faculties and interprets them in a radical manner, drawing from it the extreme consequence of an unreconcilable discord. From here derives the insistence of the irreducible difference between Wittgensteinian “family of phrases” – aesthetic, theoretical, ethical, political – and the accusation of violence brought against any attempt to subsume them under a unique epistemic discourse. The aesthetic, reflective judgement, according to Lyotard, would thus be the faculty which is capable of putting into communication radically different types of discourse without thereby doing an injustice to their singularity. And critical philosophy – the philosophy in charge of “judging” – becomes the legitimate pretender to the “impartial tribunal”; a tribunal which has no prescriptive authority and which limits itself to regulate and establish the borders between different language games (Lyotard 1986).

Behind the ironical and eclectic style that would seem to place the author of *The Postmodern Condition* in a strand of thought which is wholly “relativist”, there lies in fact the same exigency that Arendt espoused. That is: *the need to define a place of resistance against the hegemony that determinant judgement exerts on the sphere of human affairs*. The same *pathos* for a space-time that escapes the logic of the process; a

logic that in our times takes the guise of the calculus, of efficiency and functionality at all costs. To refuse this logic is possible for both thinkers by virtue of the faculty to judge reflectively: because only the reflective judgement allows for different types of discourse not to be dominated by that logic.

Just like Arendt, Lyotard believes that it is illusory and misleading to put to work the determinant judgement before an event: to anticipate the meaning of what is happening by a pre-understanding that inserts it in the reassuring chain of the relation of cause and effect. These thinkers have also in common the belief that *nothing can exempt us from the "responsibility" of having, time and again, to give an answer to the cases: to judge the case without the help of established criteria.*

But if Arendt appeals to the Analytic of the Beautiful, and to its possible extension to the sphere of politics, Lyotard appeals to the Sublime, and to that feeling of pleasure and displeasure that one experiences not just before nature, but also before historical events. In his opinion, the aesthetic judgement tied to the beautiful still carries with it the hope of an "harmonic integration", in which the particular reconciles itself with the universal. The sublime, on the contrary, by evoking excess and incommensurability, remains faithful to non-reconciliation, to the fundamental task – of which Lyotard is the bearer – that the plurality of voices may be preserved and not recomposed inside of a discourse that is unitary and hegemonic.

Also in this case one can say that Kant – with his *Kritik der Urteilkraft* and above all with his treatment of the Sublime – is called upon to contrast Hegel: as the Arendtian *Lectures*, also the writings of Lyotard give us back a "post-Hegelian" image of Kant, intended to disrupt the dialectical system, in all of its more or less mystifying variations. And in a more radical manner than with Arendt, here the accent is placed on the impossibility of

an acquiescent synthesis, on the impossibility of re-composing the contradictions (Lyotard 1986).

In conclusion, we can say that in spite of the divergent appeals to the Sublime (Lyotard) and the Beautiful (Arendt), the two readings of Kant appear undoubtedly close, as is testified above all by those pages of *L'enthousiasme*, in which Lyotard appeals to the "gift" of judgement and thereby seems to restate the same alternative proposed by Arendt: either one appeals to a subjective faculty which can discriminate, think critically, and decide; or the Hegelian *Weltgericht* will have the upperhand, and, by demanding to world history the emission of the final verdict, will exempt everyone from the responsibility of judging.

## Judgement and the "Activity of Thinking"

A new type of practical rationality; a modality for deliberating on the principles on which to base a political community; a fundamental category of communicative action; a form of understanding that allows us to grasp the sense of events, without predetermining them.

These, in synthesis, are the directions of a possible continuation of Arendt's interrupted discourse and also the diverse tasks assigned in turn to judgement. These tasks are assigned from philosophical perspectives which are also in contrast with one another. But if in spite of this, these perspectives share – directly or indirectly – the reference to Arendt's *Judging*, then one will have to admit that Arendt's political philosophy in general, just as her reflections on judgement, is traversed by different vectors which are not easily reconcilable within a reassuring theoretical framework.

Perhaps it is also for this reason that interpreters have given much space to the *opus postumum* of the author: *as if*

*in it there were kept the secret of her last words, that, one they were deciphered, would shine light over her entire work.*

In short, if communitarians see in the usage of a Kantian transcendental perspective the reason for the abstractness of the Arendtian judgement, the Habermasians reproach her precisely of not following through the implications of the “critical and intersubjective rationalism” of Kant. If on one side the supporters of “discourse ethics” approve Arendt’s insight for avoiding the identification of *sensus communis* with a real and determined political community – an insight that gives to this concept the value of a regulative idea for a discursive practice as enlarged as possible – the communitarians, on the other hand, regret precisely this point. They are willing to follow Arendt’s discourse on judgement only up to the point in which it nears Aristotelian *phronesis* and abandon it when the appeal to Kant – a falling back into modernity, in their opinion – becomes determinant, and accounts for the fact that the concept of *sensus communis* cannot offer a support for the functioning of a community that expresses itself and renews itself on the basis of a shared *ethos*.

As I had anticipated, we find ourselves before divergent decodings of the “last word” of Hannah Arendt. These are so different one from the other that we may be led to think that she offers, in reality, many theories of judgement – perhaps complementary ones: political judgement, moral judgement, historical judgement. In reality, she never formalized these distinctions; if anything, she has emphasized the unitary and autonomous character of the faculty of judgement. Especially in the last writings, when it is modelled upon the reflective judgement, the faculty of judgement becomes – this is certainly true – more and more the prerogative of an impartial observer. Impartial, but not indifferent to the events of the world.

If we pay attention to the way in which Arendt individuates the temporal modalities which are supposed



by the faculties of the life of the mind, perhaps the physiognomy of judgement stands out more clearly.

To thinking, in fact, corresponds the eternal present and willing turns out to be related to the future; the past, lastly, is the proper temporal dimension of the faculty of judgement. The reflections on *Judging*, thus, have little in common with the “judgement” implied in the practical deliberation of the Aristotelian *phronimos*, or in the intersubjective dynamic of “communicative ethics”, whose temporal direction is undoubtedly oriented towards the future.

The last word of Hannah Arendt, thus, returns to the concept of history, and therefore represents a progressive shift toward the external borders of the political. But not in the sense that one can read *Judging* as the result of a thought which through clearly distinguished stages returns to the place from which it had wanted to leave behind originally. As if this thought were trapped by that very escape from the world of human affairs which it had originally put into question.

The work of Hannah Arendt begins with a critique of the separation of thought from action. It tries constantly to subvert the hierarchical order in which theory and praxis present themselves within traditional political philosophy. It is also true that this work ends without suggesting an answer to how both terms can connect themselves. It does not give us a “new political science” that would allow us to make projects and to put order in the world of human affairs in a non-traditional way.

But I think that this lack should not be seen as an unkept promise or a deviation from the original intentions; *rather it must be considered as a result that was inscribed in the premises of this critical, radical, and anti-systematic thought, a thought, nevertheless, which was much more coherent than what the author herself liked to admit.*

It is true that in works preceding *Thinking and Moral Considerations* (Arendt 1971), Arendt looks into the Aristo-

telian perspective of *phronesis* in order to find the possible overcoming of the fracture between theory and practice, in accordance to a modality different from both rationalistic constructivism and the Hegelian dialectical rationalism. And it is undeniable that judgement – in those writings – is considered also under the register of the actor who acts in concert and who deliberates on matters of common interest.

But if one examines carefully those references to *doxa* and to *phronesis* one realizes that they do not resolve the relation between thinking and action, they *do not reconcile theory and praxis through the mediation of the political judgement. The tension between the two moments persists: a separation that becomes more radical in her last works and which the author intentionally does not want to overcome.*

Even if it were through the modality of reflection rather than determination, on the basis of a phronetic rather than epistemic knowledge, that respects and recognizes the contingency and singularity proper to the world of human affairs, a theory of political judgement that would serve to orient action by giving it an intention that begin from an idea, binding again both terms, would travel along those same rails that Arendt wanted to abandon. If action would actualize a theoretical project through judgement, then it would again make of action an “applied consequence”, the mere execution of a knowledge, no matter of which kind it may be.

In other words, such a theory of judgement would repropose the derivative character of a praxis which obeys to the command of *theoria*; it would present once again, under a different guise, that same logic of means-ends in opposition to which Arendtian thought gains its significance. In this case one could really say that the author has returned to a place which she wanted to leave. Instead, it is as if Arendt throughout her work, but with more tenac-

ity in the final part of it, forces herself *to resist the temptation of the synthesis, of the reconciliation and of mediation.*

The only acceptable reconciliation is that which connects thinking and reality – once the former has shed the curial habits of metaphysics – in the reflective judgement of the person who, not interested in adequating the meaning of what happens to her own philosophical conviction or to her own theoretical project, tries to grasp the sense of the events. Just as she tries to free herself from the ungrounded subjective self-sufficiency by educating the imagination to “visit” the point of view of others; especially of those who are the outcasts, the pariahs whose voices cannot be heard from by the dominant chorus.

In spite of the fact that this judgement *does not mediate between thought and action within a political community, it does not lend itself to be the basis of a systematic political theory, it does not draw out the presuppositions of a discourse ethics, it maintains the claim to be at once ethical and political, as historical.*

As I have pointed out already, far from being brought back to the *bios theoretikos* which had turned its back on the world, this judgement becomes, in the hands of her author, the weapon to combat what Hegelian *Geist* represents in Arendtian eyes: not the least of which is an acquiescent attitude toward the process of becoming which justifies everything that happens.

In contrasting this conception of history, which subordinates the contingent to the necessary and the event to the process, the Kantian *Urteilkraft* recovers, according to the intentions of her interpreter, the Greek meaning of *historein*. That is, this faculty assists to the events of the world and then decides what is worthy of being remembered and of being “saved” from disappearing in time.

But this faculty, which would appear to be a mere category of historical understanding, reveals at the same time its *ethical potential* (Bernstein 1996 and Parvikko 1996).

Without appealing to universal criteria and moral rules, it implies *the responsibility to give or withdraw one's assent to reality, to discriminate what is right from what is wrong in everything that happens.*

But in so snatching the final verdict “from the pseudo-divinity of the modern age named History”, judgement gives expression to thinking, and becomes the *place of resistance with respect of the existent*. And this judgement, in “times of political emergency” can become *immediately* action.

Toward the end of *Thinking* Arendt wrote: “When everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join in is conspicuous and thereby *becomes a kind of action*. In such emergencies, it turns out that the purging component of thinking (Socrates’ midwifery, which brings out the implications of unexamined opinions and thereby destroys them – values, doctrines, theories, and even convictions) is political by implication. For this destruction has a liberating effect on another faculty, the faculty of judgement, which one may call with some reasons the most political of man’s mental abilities. ... The faculty of judging particulars (as brought to light by Kant)...realizes thinking, makes it manifest in the world of appearances, where I am never alone and always too busy to be able to think. The manifestation of the wind of thought is not knowledge; it is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly. And this, at the rare moments when the stakes are on the table, may indeed prevent catastrophes, at least for the self.” (Arendt 1978, 193)

Arendt did not elaborate further her vision of this mysterious faculty. And perhaps it was not accidental. As if it were only possible for her to conclude her path by reminding us that thinking critically and judging reflectively are, as Lyotard says, the sole true freedom that we

are left with, amidst the ruins of ethics and the progressive retreat of the public space: “the freedom to say yes or no to abjection”.

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