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**Breaking the silence of women in the conversation of 'mankind':
The political theory of Hannah Arendt**

Disch, Lisa Jane, Ph.D.

Rutgers The State University of New Jersey - New Brunswick, 1988

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BREAKING THE SILENCE OF WOMEN IN THE
CONVERSATION OF 'MANKIND:' THE POLITICAL THEORY
OF HANNAH ARENDT

By LISA J. DISCH

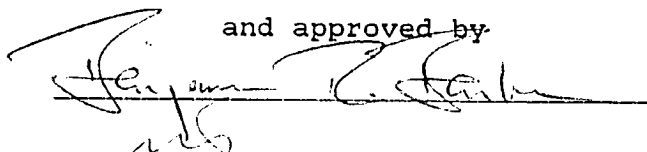
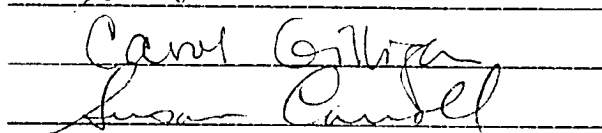
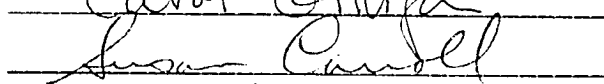
A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Political Science

Written under the direction of

Professor Benjamin R. Barber

and approved by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Breaking the Silence of Women in the
Conversation of 'Mankind': The Political Theory
of Hannah Arendt

by Lisa J. Disch, Ph.D.

Dissertation Director: Professor Benjamin R. Barber

Women are outsiders to the conversation that is the tradition of Western political thought. Their absence is due to the fact that women's perspective on such fundamental political concepts as power and freedom differs radically from that of the tradition. Women's silence signifies neither consent nor disinterest but is rather evidence of the invisible barriers to entering a conversation in dissent from its dominant vocabulary. I use textual analysis of Hannah Arendt's work to explore the problem of entrance and to unfold a new vocabulary for political thought. Arendt's studies of totalitarianism and of the human condition bear out the hypothesis that women's political vocabulary is different from that which dominates the tradition. Arendt illustrates the problem of entrance with her writing on judgment which she gives profoundly original treatment in her early work and then falls back to a more conventional Kantian argument at the end of her life.

The focus on difference in women's political perspective contests the universality of the fundamental concepts of Western morality. It also calls into question the objectivity

of Western standards of judgment. Hannah Arendt's writing on judgment, in addition to illustrating the phenomenon of entrance, moves beyond the contest between objectivity and relativism. Arendt creates the foundations for a new understanding of judgment with her concept storytelling. Storytelling is not for her an abandonment of principle and refusal to judge, but an acknowledgment of the fact of history and the necessity of perspective. She pits an ethic of friendship and community in opposition to the dominant morality of rights. Adding her voice to the conversation, Arendt initiates a vital dialogue between contemporary feminist and democratic theory.

Hannah Arendt once said that "all beginning, as every one of you knows who ever wrote a paper, has an element of utter arbitrariness."¹ This is a profound insight into the creative process. Arendt's way of thinking about beginnings is a useful way to conceptualize the way dissertations happen. They typically begin to percolate long before we recognize it and sometimes end before we discover what we really meant to say. The arbitrariness of beginning explains our inability to write a preface until the end and our temptation to construct it not as a straightforward argument but rather as a story.

I chose the metaphor of civilization as conversation from Michael Oakeshott's essay, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind,"² as the starting place for my dissertation proposal in 1986. I argued that the Western political tradition was a conversation and that women were outsiders to it. The metaphors of conversation and outsidership not only described women's relationship to the "canon," but also characterized most departments of Political Science. It struck a chord in me because the idea of being an outsider and its companion question of entrance captured my sense of what it was like to be a graduate student just beyond

¹Hannah Arendt, Unpublished transcript of remarks to the American Society of Christian Ethics, 1973, Arendt Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., p. 7. Hereafter the collection in Washington, D.C. will be abbreviated Library of Congress.

²Michael Oakeshott, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," in Rationalism in Politics (New York: Methuen, 1962), pp. 197-247. Hereafter cited as "Voice."

exams: writing a dissertation is earning a place in the conversation and I wanted to accomplish this task by naming the problem of entrance and writing about it.

With a deference characteristic of graduate students, I appropriated Oakeshott's definition of conversation and his account of the dynamics of entrance somewhat uncritically. Oakeshott argues that we enter a conversation by learning the manners appropriate to speaking partners and "pursuing the intimations" of the talk in progress. For me, this meant that in order to enter my profession it would be necessary to demonstrate expertise with its classic texts. To bring women into the tradition, it seemed I should focus my dissertation on the great books of the tradition, re-interpreting the great theorists of democracy and education for use as a foundation for feminist theory; if political theory is the art of creative mis-interpretation, then feminist scholars needed to take a bolder stance toward the tradition, appropriating its themes for their projects as dissenters have always done.

As I had conceived it, the project was full of self-contradictions. In defining the Western political tradition as the conversation of "mankind," I accorded it a privileged position and suggested that feminist theory needed the recognition and sanction of the "canon" before it would be legitimate. The idea that these texts could provide a foundation for feminist thought was in tension with my sense that women are outsiders to the tradition. If they are outside

it, then presumably its great texts do not speak for them. If feminist theory could grow out of these texts, then perhaps women's outsider status was irrelevant as they would have nothing to say that had not already been said. My deference to Oakeshott's definition of the conversation and account of the mechanics of entrance blunted the force of my initial argument about women's outsidership.

It became clear that my dissertation, rather than "solving" the problem of women's entrance into the conversation needed to test the proposition that women are, in fact, outsiders. If women were outsiders, then entrance would be a problem that could be identified and explored in the work of a woman political theorist who is at the outskirts of the tradition herself. Hannah Arendt did not immediately present herself as the subject of my dissertation, though she had been on my mind since I read The Human Condition during the summer following my first year in graduate school. At that time, I was not questioning how to enter the tradition of Western political philosophy, but whether it would even be worth it to continue in graduate school. I discovered the outsider's perspective in Arendt: she spoke the language of the tradition at the same time as she challenged its foundations. Arendt's work defined the problem I posed two years later in my initial dissertation proposal, though I did not see that I was writing about her until Carol Gilligan pointed it out to me.

I thought Arendt was an obvious choice for a dissertation

about women's position outside the various conversations of "mankind" even though most political theorists would argue that she is neither an outsider nor a distinctively "womanist" writer. It is the mark of an insider to be mentioned by anyone who writes in your area of expertise, and the mark of an outsider to be dismissed by your colleagues. Hannah Arendt is both frequently mentioned and frequently dismissed by students of authoritarian regimes, theorists of democracy, and by theorists of judgment. She is unquestionably part of the conversation of political theory, but the standard "line" on her work is that it is unsystematic, individualist, and aesthetic rather than political. I think she is an outsider to the tradition because while many scholars believe her work merits refutation and commentary, much of the secondary literature on Arendt only skims the surface of her thought: we students of political theory have yet to engage her in a conversation that brings out the richness of everything she has to teach us.

Maybe the problem with this literature is that it judges Arendt's work against standards she means to call into question. If we train our ears to listen for the ways in which Arendt, a woman theorist in a conversation that has excluded women departs from the tradition she enters, some of these standard criticisms fall away and the subtleties of Arendt's work leap from the page. Ironically, however, Arendt receives her harshest criticism at the hands of scholars who have

listened for her to speak distinctively as a woman.³ While she is cited by most contemporary theorists of liberalism and democracy, she is been dismissed by many women scholars. In terms of the outsider theme, Arendt is more of an outsider to the conversation of women than to that of the western political tradition in general.

While I disagree with those who dismiss Arendt out of hand as an anti-feminist, I recognize the validity of aspects of this kind of argument. Arendt places herself doubly outside the conversation of feminist theory because she uses categories that feminists reject and denies the validity of assumptions that are central to feminist analysis. For example, she separates public and private, and differentiates between questions of politics and questions of social justice in a seemingly conventionally conservative manner. While it is true that Arendt's definition of politics excludes much that we consider political, I do not think her understanding of the relationship between the social and the political is simply conservative.⁴

More significant than the categories Arendt uses is the one she rejects: gender. Arendt sees the Western Political Tradition anew, but makes no claim to speak as a woman. Of

³See Hanna Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public," Political Theory 9 (August 1981), pp. 327-352. Hereafter cited as "Justice."

⁴See Nancy Hartsock, Money, Sex and Power (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984), esp. Chapter Nine.

course, every woman writer need not present herself as a representative of women. But Arendt's political theory begins with the idea of natality and introduces a language of birth and new beginnings to create a vocabulary for political action. That she uses this language but muffles its reverberations in women's experience seems artificial; the unexplored connection between women's experience and this redefinition of political action in terms of speech rather than war leaves her work unfinished.⁵

Unlike her use of the categories public, private, and social, I cannot dispose of Arendt's non-use or silence on the question of gender by the magic of a sympathetic textual re-reading. Instead, Arendt's refusal to think about gender can be seen anew in light of the outsider theme. Arendt wrote at a time when it was not yet considered interesting or scholarly to explore women's differences; difference was more likely to call forth images of privacy and sexual allure--the "feminine mystique"--than generate lively intellectual exchange as it does today. I read Hannah Arendt's silence at points where her language taps into women's experience as evidence of the problem of entrance.

Regardless how she would answer, the richness of Arendt's

⁵Both Jean Bethke Elshtain, Meditations on Modern Political Thought (New York: Praeger, 1986), esp. Chapter Eight, and Nancy Hartsock call attention to Arendt's redefinition of power which they argue is an attempt to create an alternative discourse that challenges the equation of politics with war. They explore the extent to which she participates in a woman's discourse on politics.

work unfolds when we engage her in conversation about outsiders and difference--and with the fact that she is a woman--in the front of our minds. Her work is of interest to feminist scholars precisely because although she is not a feminist her work is an explicit challenge to the founding assumptions of a male-dominated tradition. Further, she is a thinker whose work has been misunderstood and who has perhaps censored herself at critical points by virtue of the fact that she is an outsider.

One thing that is troubling about the secondary literature is that there is so little consensus about who Arendt was. Interpretations range from the argument that she takes a harsh stance toward human affairs and defines politics in terms of war, to the charge that her work is not political at all but rather aesthetic. It is not inappropriate to wonder whether the controversy that followed the Eichmann book, unusual both for its volume and personal tone, and the aestheticized readings of The Human Condition are shaped by the fact that Arendt is a woman. Critics responded with hostility to Eichmann because they believed Arendt distanced herself from her subject matter in a way that betrayed Jews. The impassioned rhetoric of this debate can be explained in part by the fact that the book deals with a subject matter that is highly emotionally charged. Yet the accusation that Arendt was harsh and cold in her treatment of the Jewish Councils implies that critics expected greater partisanship from her as a Jew

and greater compassion from her as a woman.

The response to Eichmann stands in ironic contrast to the commentary on Human Condition. Where the former judges Arendt to be too harsh, the latter argues that she is too poetic. Critics argue that Arendt's categories are purely aesthetic, meaning that they correspond to no real human experience. This critique is doubly ironic in light of my sense that Arendt's vocabulary has a particular resonance in women's experience. If it is the case that the words plurality and natality describe women's experience of the human condition, the "aesthetic theorist" critique merely confirms the fact of women's outsidership!

If we look not only at her work but at the secondary literature as well with a consciousness of the fact that she is a woman, it may be possible to tell a more coherent story about Hannah Arendt. We need not look to resolve all the tensions in her work, however. There is an undeniable tension between her writings on action and the late work on judgment. The attentive reader of The Human Condition and the unfinished lectures on Kant comes away with a sense of double vision, as if she were looking through an improperly focused stereopticon. Once again, this dissonance may be an effect of the phenomenon of entrance, a consequence of the fact that the vocabulary and problems of the conversation that Arendt wants to enter are not

quite suited to the things she wants to say.⁶

This story of an outsider should be of interest not just to students of Hannah Arendt but to contemporary democratic theorists and to people who find themselves at the margins of conversations. Outsidership and entrance make useful tools for mining Arendt's thought; in turn, the ambiguities in her corpus demonstrate that these are not just concepts but phenomena that can be empirically observed. Democratic theorists like John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas, and Benjamin Barber, to name a few, have already embraced the task of defining the conditions for a more broadly inclusive social contract. To the extent that these thinkers assume they have addressed all aspects of the problem of outsidership, their work would be enriched by greater attention to Arendt. Further, scholars in women's studies need to be more explicit about the meaning of the concepts outsidership, voice, and entrance: this is not metaphor but rather the language of contemporary women's experience of injustice.

If women are quintessentially outsiders, we must not only recapture lost words but also reconstitute the conversation of modernity so that it will include us from now on. Outsidership suggests that women speak in a "different voice," and that we

⁶This isn't peculiar to Arendt, but characteristic of most truly original thinkers. Hobbes and Kant, for example, had to re-invent the vocabulary of philosophy before they could say what they wanted to. Nietzsche, too, recreates the language of philosophy as he writes. What is unique about Arendt is that she is the first woman to do so and that the new vocabulary resonates with the experience of women.

need to fine-tune our listening skills to pick up new frequencies. I hear a different voice in the works of Hannah Arendt; each of her books challenges certain taken-for-granted beliefs in political science and political theory. I do not argue that Arendt is a feminist, or even that she would have been sympathetic to the enterprise of women's studies; nonetheless, her work opens up when we listen for difference and look through the lens of outsidership.

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Dedication

To Benjamin R. Barber

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Introduction

Chapter One: Conversation

As civilized human beings, we are the inheritors, neither of an inquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on both in public and within each of ourselves....It is the ability to participate in this conversation, and not the ability to reason cogently, to make discoveries about the world, or to contrive a better world, which distinguishes the human being from the animal and the civilized man from the barbarian.¹

If Michael Oakeshott is correct to say that conversation is the distinguishing human capability, then he must be wrong to argue that civilization is or has ever been a conversation. What we really hear in the traditions of science, philosophy, religion, politics, and literature is not the playful chorus of many voices that Oakeshott's metaphor calls to mind, but rather a lecture spoken with gravity and seriousness by a succession of great men. There is silence in the conversation where the voices of the many whom "the civilized" did not consider human ought to be. Women are among the silenced at many points of this conversation, in particular in the tradition of Western Political Thought.

Hannah Arendt breaks the silence of women in the conversation of mankind. She is not, by any means, the first woman political philosopher, but she is the first to gain partial entrance into the tradition because--unlike Mary Wollstonecraft or Charlotte Perkins Gilman--she participates in

¹Oakeshott, "Voice," p. 199.

its so-called great debates. I say she gains only partial entrance because despite her reputation, Arendt is nonetheless a kind of pariah. Political theorists and political scientists are uncertain as to how to categorize or make systematic sense of her work. Arendt is interesting to women scholars precisely because she is not a feminist and she never speaks explicitly as a woman. Her work is an excellent case study in the dynamics of conversation and the phenomenon of outsidership. Before turning to Arendt, it is appropriate to speak more generally about conversations and outsidership.

Conversation is a subject of interest not just to students of the history of Western political thought but for political scientists as well because Oakeshott's conversation metaphor is not just a literary device but a brilliant description of the character of social institutions. All institutions are maintained by means of structures both formal and informal. Structural information maintains the integrity of an institution by defining its purpose, designating its powers, and determining qualifications for membership. By "structure" I do not mean to suggest the existence of an immutable form, but rather a complex of rules and relationships that organizes but does not determine human activity. The United States Constitution is an obvious example of a formal political structure; it defines the purpose of the state, designates the powers of its various branches, and establishes membership qualifications. Though it has established a relatively

permanent form for this state, the Constitution, by means of the amendment process and by virtue of the generality of the terms in which it is written explicitly acknowledges the mutability of the government. The conversation metaphor is useful for describing institutions in that it designates the interpretive aspect of a structure: to interpret the Constitution is to engage it in conversation.

In one sense, then, conversation denotes the mutable aspect of an institution. The conversational element of a structure is sometimes prescribed by rules, as in the case of the Constitution, but more often consists of the informal social relationships that shape the day-to-day workings of an institution. Equal opportunity provisions like the liberalization of voting qualifications, de-segregation laws, and even physical alterations like ramps and curb cuts for handicapped accessibility are prescriptive changes to the most literal structures of an institution. Yet these changes to the more tangible aspects of our institutions may be necessary but are not sufficient conditions for real social change because they do not reach the conversational level of an institution. It is at this more subtle level that we find the real barriers to entrance.

It is in addressing the problem of entrance that Oakeshott's metaphor makes its most profound contribution to understanding institutions. Conversation denotes the informal social relationships that are part of every institution. This

is the aspect of an institution that cannot be reached by prescriptive changes in its rules, but only by altering the worldviews of those who inhabit the institution. Affirmative action plans, which stretch the notion of equal opportunity to its outer limits, are actually a recognition of the conversational dimension of institutions and an admission that conversations cannot be reached by rule changes but only by the introduction of new participants. The affirmative action plan is one attempt to confront the problem of entrance which, though it is not exclusive to conversation, is the most significant barrier to changing definitions of insidership and outsidership.

We can better understand the problem of entrance if we speak in greater detail about conversation itself. For Aristotle, conversation is the political activity par excellence. It is the expression of philia or political friendship which is a relationship not of intimacy but of mutual respect that is ours for the reason that we are political by nature. Conversation is an exchange of ideas and values among friends who, as Aristotle knew, are not necessarily intimates or, as for Oakeshott, possibly not even contemporaries. It can be the exchange of ideas among the members of a certain existing circle, or a dialogue between the participants in a metaphorical circle, an intellectual tradition. Conversation designates a particular manner of speaking in a context of shared values about questions of

agreed upon importance.

Compared to technical discourse which addresses a limited range of problems by means of procedures defined by an external body of knowledge, conversation in the Aristotelian and Oakeshottian sense is relatively informal for those engaged in it. Reserved for those who can afford leisure time, it is an activity whose destination is uncertain, in which no one voice can claim precedence over the others by virtue of strength, efficiency, or prowess. The act of conversing neither relies upon nor creates intractable structures for itself. Within the limitations of language and grammar, participants set the rules of a conversation by the particular idioms through which they choose to express themselves.

Conversation is a practice which means that it is both rule-bound and invented. Oakeshott defines a practice as converse among free agents that takes place within the context of a tradition but nonetheless permits the participants to express their creativity. The integrity of a practice is maintained more by the understood relationships of those engaged in it than by its rules. Oakeshott writes, "[e]ducation, properly speaking, is an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation."² Conversation is both a

²Ibid.

skill and a partnership; we learn to participate in it by studying its rules and, more importantly, by engaging in it.

A practice is inherently conservative. Innovations cannot be introduced by a mere change of rules, but must infiltrate the habits and manners of the participants. The speakers in Oakeshott's conversation cannot understand new voices that do not follow its grammar and either use unfamiliar vocabularies or make unconventional use of familiar terms.

The arrangements which constitute a society capable of political activity...compose a pattern and at the same time they intimate a sympathy for what does not fully appear. Political activity is the exploration of that sympathy; and consequently relevant political reasoning will be the convincing exposure of a sympathy, present but not yet followed up, and the convincing demonstration that now is the appropriate moment for recognizing it.³

A conversation changes when newcomers bring to light its hidden radical intimations and convince others to pursue them. Finding these intimations and bringing them to the surface is the task of the outsider.

The fact that conversations change slowly is evidenced by many factors that indicate that women are still outsiders to most centers of power. In 1985, over half of all children who lived with single mothers were living below the poverty level. Of these households, three-quarters were headed by black

³Oakeshott, "Political Education," in Rationalism in Politics, p. 124.

mothers.⁴ Although more women are working now in law and computer-related fields than there were ten years ago, they continue to far outnumber men in service and child-related fields and in assistant positions. While ninety per cent of dentists are male, ninety-nine per cent of dental assistants are female. Similarly, eighty per cent of physicians are male while ninety-five per cent of nurses are female.⁵

This change is slow not because women are slow to acquire the skills they need to enter the conversation, but because entering a practice is not simply a question of skill. Where a skill can be acquired by anyone who will follow the rules and exercise themselves in its techniques, learning a practice is not just acquiring skills but entering into a complex of relationships. As we noted earlier, one characteristic of a practice is its relative freedom for those who are engaged in it; this freedom results not from the fact that practices are without rules but that we learn a practice by means of a long apprenticeship that enables us to internalize its discipline. This period of apprenticeship not only enables the insider to feel free within the discourse of the practice, but also diffuses the insider's memory of the problem of entrance.

The initiate into a practice first learns the discipline of the craft and second establishes a relationship with its

⁴The American Woman 1987-88: A Report in Depth, ed. Sara E. Rix (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987), p. 284. Hereafter cited as Woman.

⁵Id., p. 310.

master craftsmen and craftswomen.⁶ In the first phase a craft is not much different from a skill; it is during the second phase, however, that it becomes an art and the initiate, first by emulating and then by challenging the master, learns the inventiveness that distinguishes a craft from a skill. The success of this second phase is almost wholly dependent upon the relationship between teacher and apprentice. It is the teacher's job to give the initiate confidence as an artist, to communicate the difference between deference to the boundaries of the discipline and subservient imitation that characterizes technician rather than inventor.

The long initiation period that makes possible the taken-for-grantedness of the structure of a practice means that the phenomenon of outsidership disappears to those who are insiders. It is almost impossible to challenge a barrier when

⁶The fact that it sounds awkward and is actually paradoxical to speak of a "master" craftswoman is indicative of how deeply the notion of practice is embedded in male power. Historically, most masters have been craftsmen, as those who have longer had access to a craft will be its masters. Another problem with the idea of a craftswoman is that many activities that women have done are not accorded the same status as those traditional to men. The handcrafted chair, for example, became a collector's item long before the quilt which was taken for granted as a simple household item. The concept of practice and idea of the mastercraftsman is particularly appropriate to academia where men scholars not only outnumber women, but are accorded greater deference by apprentices. Because I believe with Oakeshott that there is an important relationship between the concept of practice and human agency, I do not want to suggest that the ideas of practice and craft are inherently biased against women, only that they are historically so. It is a legitimate and appropriate question whether, given the way practices are perpetuated, this historical reality could ever be reshaped. My dissertation explores this question which I call the problem of entrance.

those who erected it do not acknowledge its existence. Insiders take the openness of the conversation for granted and blame the problem of silence on the character or talents of the outsider, rather than on the process of entrance.

In a wonderful scene from Catcher in the Rye, J. D. Salinger captures the problem of entrance with an account of the unreasonable and arbitrary quality of initiation rites. Holden Caulfield describes Oral Expression class:

The boys that got the best marks in Oral Expression were the ones that stuck to the point all the time--I admit it. But there was this one boy, Richard Kinsella. He didn't stick to the point too much and they were always yelling 'Digression!' at him. It was terrible, because in the first place he was a very nervous guy--and his lips were always shaking whenever it was his time to make a speech, and you could hardly hear him if you were sitting way in the back of the room. When his lips sort of quit shaking a little bit, though, I liked his speeches better than anybody else's.⁷

Salinger's ironic account of a class in which students "learn" to express themselves orally by speaking extemporaneously to a chorus of "Digressions!" whenever they seem to deviate from their topic reminds us that one aspect of insidership is the power to define the boundaries of the conversation and punish deviations from it. This is the power to silence the outsider.

More important to the problem of entrance than the illusion of openness is the fact that apprenticeship is a personal relationship between a master and a student. Masters accept apprentices only if they perceive them to have the

⁷J.D. Salinger, Catcher in the Rye (New York: Bantam, 1964), p. 183.

capacity for the "intellectual and moral habits" necessary to the practice. The master must feel kinship with the apprentice. For the person who has been shut out of the cultural and intellectual milieu in which a conversation takes place, it will be difficult if not impossible to establish this kinship. Further, the capacity to nominate oneself as a candidate is often out of the control of the apprentice. The potential accomplishments of the outsider are often obscured to the vision of the master who looks at the candidate through layers of sediment from a life on the outside.

It may be objected that we are all outsiders to or insiders in conversations by virtue of what we know and do not know. Attentive silence is often appropriate when we are learning new subject matter. We are outsiders by choice to those fields we choose never to explore. So outsidership is not oppressive and silence is not abnormal: there are conversations in which we will always be silent, and conversations in which we will participate as soon as we feel ready to do so.

We are also outsiders when we first enter a new situation. Silence is often an indication that we are acclimating ourselves to a new place, learning a new routine. Outsidership is, then, a necessary accompaniment to change, growth, and challenge. It becomes destructive only when we misguidedly try to fit into a domain that does not suit our talents or temperament. Our silence may indicate only that we are sizing

up a situation and deciding whether to reject or accept it.

It is true that the phenomenon of entrance is basic to the human condition. It names the initial stage of the many education processes that are necessary to perpetuating a species that is so little defined by instinct. Entrance is part of the task of self-definition that is perverted from a condition of human existence to a problem when insiders impose their own prejudices on the outsider. If what is at stake in the evaluation of a newcomer is simply her competence as a particular individual, then entrance is not a problem. For outsiders who have a history of oppression, women or Afro-Americans for example, it is rarely the case that they will be seen as particular, self-defining individuals, however. Women are outsiders to some conversations not by knowledge or lack of knowledge but by their "nature" as it is defined by the insiders to the conversations they want to enter.

According to Susan Okin, women have been defined outside politics by the great thinkers of the Western political tradition. She finds that a "functionalist attitude to women pervades the history of political thought," by which she means that while theorists define men in terms of their creative faculties, they define women by the ways in which they can be useful to men. "Philosophers who, in laying the foundation for their political theories have asked 'What are men like?' 'What is man's potential?' have frequently, in turning to the female

sex, asked 'What are women for?'"⁸ Thus, gaining access to the conversations of politics and political theory is not in women's control. To earn the prerogative to speak women must not only educate themselves but re-educate the participants in the conversation to view them as creative, autonomous people not functional objects.

This need to re-educate the insiders cuts to the heart of the problem of entrance. The outsider wants to find a way to pursue the intimations of a conversation without losing her voice. But this voice was defined, in part, by a society that denied her agency and identity. She wants neither to mimic the insiders, nor to recreate the role she played as an outsider on the inside. She wants to hold onto the differences that make her distinctive without the oppressive roles that they used to entail. The difficulty of this task is evident in the fact that the problem of entrance manifests itself to the outsider as a choice between silence and authenticity.

We have identified three principal characteristics of conversation. It is a leisure time activity, defined by questions of agreed upon importance to a particular community, and sustained by a discipline that is invisible to those within it but opaque for the outsider. Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own, which is a masterpiece on the subject of conversations and outsidership, elucidates the problem of

⁸Susan Okin, Women in Western Political Thought (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 10. Hereafter cited as Okin.

women's entrance into the literary tradition in a way that parallels the three parts of our definition of conversation. Woolf argues that a woman needs a room of her own and five hundred pounds if she is to be a writer. The room is literally a place that provides a woman with the leisure time she needs to write by letting her escape the demands of the household.⁹ It also represents symbolic protection for women--who had at that time lived most of their lives in kitchens, nurseries, and drawing rooms--from the scorn, real or imagined, of a critical community that had not shared her experiences and so could not share her values. Not only do men critics not appreciate women writers, but men's writing does not easily spawn women writers because "the weight, the pace, the stride of a man's mind are too unlike her own for her to lift anything substantial from him successfully."¹⁰ Thus, the room also represents a tradition of women writers to whom the woman initiate can be apprenticed.

Woolf argues that women's absence from the literary tradition is an effect of oppression. She concurs with Okin

⁹If I am correct to say that this is a book explicitly about the problems of women writers, I think marxists' objections to the five hundred pounds are off the mark. It is true that many great works have come out of oppression, and that many of these are written by men. The woman who lacks an independent income must depend on her husband to provide for her. At the time Woolf wrote, when women did not have control over their own reproductive capacity, marriage meant certain childbearing and possible death.

¹⁰Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957), p. 79. Hereafter cited as Room.

that insiders define women not in terms of their potentialities but in terms of their function. As if in response to the question 'What are women for?' Woolf writes:

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size....Whatever may be their use in civilized societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action. That is why Napoleon and Mussolini both insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge.¹¹

Women are outsiders by virtue of the fact that men define them as caretakers, and because men's self-perceptions depend on women's mirroring. Men need women to distort reality in this way for "if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished."¹² Men block the entrance of women into the conversation because it would require not just that they re-vision their image of women, but also their understandings of themselves and their power.

Like Okin and Woolf, Ralph Ellison sees the outsider's struggle for entry as not simply a question of evaluating the competency of a particular individual, but rather a "...contest over the nature of reality."¹³ Ellison's character Invisible Man gives voice to what it is like to be defined by a force

¹¹Ibid., p. 35.

¹² Ibid., p. 36.

¹³Ralph Ellison, "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," in Shadow and Act (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 26.

beyond your control:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids--and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me....That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come into contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality.¹⁴

Visibility and autonomy would require that Invisible Man change this disposition of the inner eyes of whites, but this is well beyond his reach. Overcoming outsidership is not just a question of self education, but of redefining the reality of constructed social roles.

For the outsider who is self-defined, silence may well be part of a normal process of acclimation. But for the outsider excluded by 'nature,' entrance is not a process of growth but of distortion and alienation as one changes oneself to suit the standards of a world that not only does not share one's values but denigrates one's culture. Ellison demonstrates this in an early scene where Invisible Man wins the right to speak at the cost of having to say something other than what he wanted to say: where he wants to call for social equality his white audience forces him to amend his plea to social responsibility. The outsider who is heteronomously defined develops a bifurcated consciousness; the struggle for entry is a conflict

¹⁴Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (New York: Vintage, 1972), p. 3.

between voice and authenticity.

For the outsider whose "nature" is taken to justify exclusion, the result is not just double consciousness but also double vision. When one's own culture is denigrated by a dominant power, one sees double. This double seeing is given eloquent expression by W.E. Burghardt Du Bois:

...the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,--a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in an amused contempt and pity. Once ever feels his twoness,--an American a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.¹⁵

The problems of silence and double vision are mutually reinforcing. There is little energy left for speech when one must struggle to maintain wholeness in the face of "warring ideals." Further, we cannot give voice to a double vision; it leaves us tongue tied.

Woolf argues that women, too, have a bifurcated consciousness of civilization. She writes, "...if one is a woman one is often surprised by a sudden splitting off of consciousness, say in walking down Whitehall, when from being the natural inheritor of that civilization, she becomes on the

¹⁵W.E.B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk (New York: Penguin, 1969), p. 45.

contrary, outside of it, alien and critical."¹⁶ A woman sees civilization with double vision because while she is taught to value it as proof of the evolved sensibility of the human species, she cannot deny the backwardness of its refusal to acknowledge her common humanity.

While we have thus far used works of literature and philosophy to establish a connection between silence and oppression, even the Mellon Foundation found evidence of this phenomenon in a recent study of higher education. Even though women earned fifty-one percent of all bachelors' degrees awarded in 1980, and fifty percent of all master's degrees awarded in 1980 and 1982,¹⁷ they are still "overshadowed" in the classroom by men who talk more than they do and whose opinions carry "more weight" than those of their female colleagues.¹⁸ The study observed that women tend to speak less in class than men.

Even the brightest women students often remain silent. They may submit excellent written work and will frequently wait until after class to approach a teacher privately about issues raised in the discussion. But it is the men who seem most often to be recognized and talk most in class. Not only do men talk more, but what they say often carries more weight.¹⁹

¹⁶Woolf, Room, p. 35.

¹⁷Rix, Woman, pp. 241-42.

¹⁸New York Times, "Excerpts from Carnegie Foundation Report on Education at U.S. Colleges," Sect. 1, p. 38. Nov. 2, 1986, emphasis added.

¹⁹Ibid.

The Mellon study suggests that women's silence is a result of a systematic tendency to value men's words over those of women. If the fact that men are more often recognized as speakers than women contributes to women's silence, then the problem of entrance is deeply rooted in our conversations. Though an insider in terms of the formal right of free speech, women are censored and eventually learn to censor themselves by non-verbal signals that tell them their contributions are trivial.

I have explained women's silence in terms of the problem of entrance, which I argue is deeply embedded in the conversational element of our social and political institutions. The dynamic of women's outsidership is created by men who define women in terms of the functions of reproducing and maintaining life. Conversation perpetuates this image in ways that are so subtle as to be invisible to those on the inside and even, sometimes, to those on the outside.²⁰ This invisibility means that the woman who calls attention to the barriers to her participation will be disbelieved if she is too insistent in her protest. She may even be unable to mount a coherent critique of the tradition because the problem of entrance results in a bifurcation of consciousness that leaves her disoriented and speechless.

²⁰Contemporary songwriter Suzanne Vega raises this same problem of invisibility in a song about the idealization of women called "Marlene on the Wall." The signals that constrain women are ubiquitous and invisible. Vega writes: "I'm fighting things I cannot see/I think it's called my destiny that I am changing." *Waifersongs*, Ltd., 1985.

The problem of entrance is, to use Woolf's terminology, a struggle to define a room of one's own. This is not just a matter of the outsider projecting herself into a conversation but of inventing a way of speaking that corresponds to her way of seeing. I have relied on literature to construct a theory of outsidership because I think that storytelling is this way of speaking. By storytelling, I mean a way of speaking that persuades by describing the world in a way that is truthful but not necessarily factual, rational but not necessarily logical. Where the logician compels us to follow a train of thought on the basis of premises organized like steps leading inevitably to the top of a staircase, the storyteller is more painter than architect. Where logic presumes a world that can be described in an orderly fashion and fact assumes the tangibility of all relevant phenomena, stories can give expression to paradox, make visible the invisible, and capture the meaning of silence.

The problem of entrance is invisible to social science because conventional research methods cannot record silence or count absence. But to study women's outsidership means studying the silence of women within particular conversations and their absence from public spaces. The study of outsidership entails challenging accepted definitions of relevance and accepted ideas of who is qualified to speak and requires a willingness to make distinctions between authentic and inauthentic speech. Social science, a descriptive enterprise that takes for granted the appropriateness of

conventional standards, can see the outsider only as a deviant or failure. My use of literature to document the problem of outsidership is not only an expression of personal taste--though it is that--but a necessary response to the inadequacies of the discipline: only in literature can we hear the voices of outsiders.

The power of a story, like that of an argument, depends on the speaker's capacity to be articulate about the world. When we articulate our thoughts and experiences we take them out of our idiosyncratic minds and expose them to public evaluation. The capacity to be articulate is political: it leads not to the discovery of truth and untruth but to the forging of agreement and disagreement. While for the logician, being articulate means constructing sound steps in an order that leads directly and incrementally to a conclusion, the articulate storyteller proceeds not by building insights into steps but by weaving them into the fabric of a larger tapestry.

The different metaphors of building and weaving suggest that there are structural differences between the way logicians and storytellers present insights. Logic is a formula that speakers and listeners use to identify premises and conclusions. A skilled logician leaves no doubts as to what she wants to say, but no clue as to whether what she has said is useful. A story, on the other hand, is a device for capturing the interest and imagination of the reader which, when it is successful, engages the reader in helping to create

the story. When the tale is told, the storyteller can never be certain what "points" she has communicated; likewise, the audience does not know how much of themselves they have "read into" the work. The logician is more likely than the storyteller to regard variant interpretations as interference with the message.

The history of Western political thought can be read as a conversation between logicians and storytellers, or even a quarrel between philosophy and poetry.²¹ The idea that storytelling is political speech will sound odd to contemporary ears because we have placed storytelling far outside the conversation of politics. Oakeshott comments, "the conversation, both in public and within ourselves, has become boring because it has been engrossed by two voices, the voice of practical activity and the voice of 'science': to know and to contrive are our pre-eminent occupations."²² It has not always been this way, however. In ancient Athens, for example, the festival of Dionysus was both a political and a dramatic event. Storytelling, which in Athens meant dramatic poetry, was integral to establishing and maintaining political community.

²¹Martha Nussbaum's The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), is the most insightful recent treatment of this quarrel.

²²Oakeshott, "Voice," p. 202. Incidentally, this comment fits beautifully with the argument Arendt makes in Human Condition that "man the fabricator" has taken over the public realm.

So far I have defined storytelling as a distinctive method of political speech. I have identified it as one of two principal voices in the Western political tradition. I have suggested that storytelling fits the outsider's vision of the world because it is uniquely suited to express the paradoxical, subversive aspects of human existence. This second point, the idea that there is a connection between storytelling as a method and the outsider's standpoint, will be most troublesome to contemporary thinkers. Storytelling is the language of some of the more radical theorists of the Western political tradition--Rousseau, Burke, and Nietzsche, for example--but with the exception of Rousseau, their radicalism is profoundly anti-democratic and anti-feminist.²³ In the centuries since the Enlightenment, logic has been the weapon of egalitarianism and storytelling the language of conservatives who oppose social change. If storytelling is only the language of tradition, then the women who speak it will be those who see themselves as outsiders not to the spaces traditionally reserved for men, but to the new social and political order envisioned by feminism.

It may be that storytelling is the language of tradition and habit, but it is also the language of imagination and creativity. Storytelling conceived in terms of imagining utopias or anti-utopias can offer a way out of tradition and an

²³I exempt Rousseau because he is a democrat. I do not think he is a feminist, but neither is he as toxic on the subject of women as Nietzsche and Burke.

equally powerful tool for exposing the inconsistencies of historical practice.²⁴ Consciousness raising is also a kind of storytelling. Women in the sixties and seventies discovered that sharing the stories of their lives enabled them to discover that the things they thought were personal problems were, in fact, organized and perpetuated by social and political structures.²⁵ It is true that storytelling has been connected to politics in ages when politics was about the cultivation of virtue and the pursuit of human excellence, dramas that were played out in the control and subjection of women. But storytelling also has tradition-breaking uses which we will explore briefly in the work of Hannah Arendt, Virginia Woolf, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

The political theory of Hannah Arendt fits beautifully into the theoretical constructs of outsidership and storytelling. The outsider is a character in her earliest works: she draws a contrast between the pariah Jew and the Jewish parvenu that elaborates what I have called the problem of entrance. Further, Arendt saw herself as an outsider to the tradition of philosophy. In the introduction to The Life of

²⁴Some powerful examples of feminist utopian and anti-utopian thinking include Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Herland; Marge Piercy, Woman on the Edge of Time; and Margaret Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale.

²⁵Catharine MacKinnon argues that consciousness raising is the feminist method in "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory," in Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology, eds. Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara C. Gelpi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). For more discussion of MacKinnon, see Chapter Two.

the Mind, she writes: "I have neither claim nor ambition to be a 'philosopher' or be numbered among what Kant, not without irony, called professional thinkers."²⁶ She claims the name "outsider" in response to a letter from Margaret Canovan who wrote her to ask for help in choosing subjects for a book about "the modern political thinkers who stand...outside the schools of political science or analytical philosophy."²⁷ She praised the United States as a country in which an outsider could have a voice at no cost to authenticity, where "one could have the freedom of becoming a citizen without having to pay the price of assimilation."²⁸ More important, Arendt recognized that the problem of outsidership is invisible to the discipline of political science and that to voice the outsider's perspective she would have to invent a new way of doing theory.

Hannah Arendt introduces the voices of women to the tradition of storytelling that is an intimation in the conversation of Western political philosophy. Arendt argues that political phenomena originate in "[s]ocial factors, unaccounted for in political or economic history, hidden under the surface of events, never perceived by the historian and recorded only by the more penetrating and passionate force of

²⁶Arendt, The Life of the Mind, vol. 1, "Thinking" (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 3.

²⁷Canovan to Arendt, 12 July 1973, Library of Congress.

²⁸Hannah Arendt, Unpublished Address for Sonning Prize, 1975, Library of Congress.

poets or novelists...."²⁹ She uses the works of poets and storytellers like Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, Heinrich Heine, Isak Dinesen, and William Faulkner in her political theory. In addition, as many of her students have argued, she was herself a storyteller.³⁰ Arendt's storytelling fits her into the framework of outsidership at the same time as it enhances our understanding of what it means to be an outsider. Arendt herself gives us little help in identifying storytelling as the outsider's method, however.

Arendt never explicitly addressed the question of method in her published works. Ernst Vollrath, who argues that storytelling is her rebellion against behaviorist trends in the social sciences, acknowledges Arendt's silence on this question. He explains that Arendt declined to discuss method for both political and epistemological reasons. Politically speaking, she believed that "excessive concentration on methodological problems had become a mania leading to the neglect of substantive issues."³¹ But Vollrath also observes that the concept of method in general is also at odds with Arendt's way of thinking about political theory and political

²⁹Arendt, Anti-Semitism (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), p. 87.

³⁰See Social Research 44 (Spring 1977), essays by Elisabeth Young-Breuhl, "Hannah Arendt's Storytelling," pp. 183-90; Ernst Vollrath, "Hannah Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking," pp. 160-182. See also, Paul Ricoeur, "Action, Story, and History: On Re-reading The Human Condition," Salmagundi 60 (Spring-Summer 1983) pp. 60-72.

³¹Vollrath, "Method," p. 162.

phenomena because it "presumes a theory remaining itself detached from the object under consideration....Hannah Arendt's political thinking does not posit itself a priori outside the political field; rather, it grows from within that field."³² While Arendt practices the craft of the storyteller and we can infer its relationship to her epistemology, her work does not help us to make an explicit connection between storytelling and outsidership.

In order to substantiate the argument that storytelling is the voice of the outsider, it is necessary to return to Virginia Woolf. It may seem farfetched to draw a connection between Virginia Woolf and Hannah Arendt. In fact, these women--who are separated not simply by the arbitrary boundaries of academic disciplines but by very real political differences--are engaged together in a conversation about the limits of the social sciences. They are also united by a common struggle to identify the almost invisible obstacles to entry into a dominant conversation. Storytelling has the twofold purpose of challenging the assumption that it is possible to speak objectively of facts in matters of human relationships, and of unmasking the illusion of openness that surrounds conversation.

Woolf's work is useful for an inquiry into Arendt because she is more self-conscious about the fact that she is engaged in an attempt at entrance and that what she is entering into is a conversation. Compared to the density of Arendt's writing,

³²Ibid., p. 163.

the style of Woolf's book--though often mystical and obscure--is chatty. She begins her text in mid-sentence: "[b]ut, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction--what has that got to do with a room of one's own?"³³ Her opening statement is a violation of conversational discipline: it announces that she is going to digress. She regrets that she cannot give us a "nugget of pure truth" about the true nature of women and the true nature of fiction, but to make amends she will display for us the train of thought that led to her insight about the room and the salary. Here she substitutes the method of storytelling for that of conventional argument.

Woolf violates the conventions of conversation even further by announcing that the account she intends to give is not factual. In fact, she tells us she is lying and conceals herself behind the persona of "Mary" whose last name can be anything we please, perhaps because here it is not the teller but the tale that is important, or because Woolf wants to call our attention to the fundamental anonymity of all women in patriarchal society, or because Woolf wants to be anonymous herself. On one level, we can read the opening as an example of the self-deprecation that is to be expected from the outsider: Woolf affects the timidity and apologetic tone of the woman writer who expects critical censorship. But this self-deprecation is ironic.

In fact, Woolf is criticizing all those who presume to

³³Woolf, Room, p. 3.

tell "the truth" about questions of gender. The apologetic tone of the opening conceals a biting critique of the pretension to objectivity in the social sciences. Woolf argues that no one can tell "the truth" about a subject that so closely touches our interests:

...when a subject is highly controversial--and any question about sex is that--one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker. Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact. Therefore I propose, making use of all the liberties and licenses of a novelist, to tell you the story of the two days that preceded my coming here....³⁴

It is not that Woolf claims greater authenticity for her views because she presents them as a story; on the contrary she denies that the 'I' in the text is herself. Rather she states that "in a question like this truth is only to be had by laying together many varieties of error."³⁵ Everything we say about gender is error because we can never remove ourselves far enough from the 'what' to give an account that is not deeply embedded in 'who.'

If all we can hope to have on questions of gender is a perspective, we are not entitled to construct arguments that present our opinions as absolute truths. Rather we must tell stories that locate our beliefs in the context of where we

³⁴Ibid., p. 4.

³⁵Ibid., p. 109.

stand. Woolf rejects the idea that she should presume to evaluate the relative merits of women's fiction because

...I do not believe that gifts, whether of mind or character, can be weighed like sugar and butter, not even in Cambridge, where they are so adept at putting people into classes and fixing caps on their heads and letters after their names....No, delightful as the pastime of measuring may be, it is the most futile of all occupations, and to submit to the decrees of the measurers the most servile of attitudes.³⁶

Woolf's storytelling is a challenge to the objectivist pretense of the conversation to which she is an outsider. At the same time, her insistence on speaking "more truth than fact" will activate the invisible barriers to her participation in this conversation.

If it is true that the problem of outsidership disappears to insiders, Woolf can only make it visible by having us share her experience. She must tell us a story so that we will believe women's silence is in fact evidence of oppression. She must use the story as a platform from which to speak about the unacknowledged. Woolf begins Room with a story about her trip to the library that is meant to bring these forces to light.

...I found myself walking with extreme rapidity across a grass plot. Instantly a man's figure rose to intercept me. Nor did I at first understand that the gesticulations of a curious-looking object, in a cut-away coat and evening shirt, were aimed at me. His face expressed horror and indignation. Instinct rather than reason came to my help; he was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and scholars are allowed

³⁶Ibid., pp. 109-110.

here; the gravel is the place for me.³⁷

Woolf's message is that women learn from concealed messages that vigorous intellectual activity is a departure from the path reserved for their text. In the beadle anecdote Woolf magnifies the kind of signal that, because it is usually transmitted in the conversational dimension of institutions, is difficult to identify and resist. We laugh at the image of the usher who, full of self-importance, defends his turf against the invasion of this woman, and thereby question his authority. In reality, however, the arrogant male does not usually provoke laughter but rather respect and the suggestions that maintain women's outsider status are so subtle as to evade detection and critique.

There is an interesting parallel to Woolf's distinction between fact and truth in Rousseau's Discourse on the Origins of Inequality (Second Discourse). The Second Discourse is Rousseau's critique of the human nature assumptions that ground the political theories of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Rousseau begins by saying that he plans to tell a new story about man in the state of nature because he cannot say what he wants to say within the framework that Hobbes and Locke establish. He writes:

Let us therefore begin by setting all the facts aside, for they do not affect the question. The researches which can be undertaken concerning this subject must not be taken for historical truths, but only for hypothetical and conditional reasonings

³⁷Ibid., p. 6.

better suited to clarify the nature of things than to show their true origin...³⁸

In the tale that follows Rousseau challenges Hobbes' picture of humans as amoral creatures in nature who are violent and competitive, and Locke's picture of the state of nature as a state of morality, industry, and law. Instead, Rousseau makes a paradoxical argument that men and women in nature are amoral but exemplary creatures--non-violent, self-sufficient. These creatures, however, are not fully human because they are almost entirely solitary. Nature is a kind of model for civilization, but one that we come to appreciate only when we have begun to be depraved and would in fact never want fully to recreate because it would deny us "the sweetest sentiments known to men: conjugal love and paternal love."³⁹

Rousseau helps us draw some more inferences about storytelling as a method. The Second Discourse suggests that storytelling gives us a way to challenge prejudices about things like human nature that are deeply embedded in the assumptions we make about the world. This kind of enterprise, literally the substitution of considered thought for the pre-judgments or prejudices that give us short-cuts through our daily lives, inevitably opens the complex and paradoxical aspects of the human condition. Rousseau writes, "Common

³⁸Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men," in The First and Second Discourses, ed. Roger Masters, trans. Judith Masters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), p. 103.

³⁹Ibid., p. 147.

readers, forgive me my paradoxes but I cannot think without them. And whatever you say, I would rather be a paradoxical man than a prejudiced one."⁴⁰ Like Arendt and Woolf, Rousseau looks to storytelling to challenge the invisible biases of traditional thinking about human nature and politics.

These thoughts about storytelling shed light on the difficult task of locating Hannah Arendt in the Western political tradition. Arendt, like Rousseau, is an outsider to the conversation of analytic philosophy that is one aspect of the tradition. But she is doubly an outsider to even the most radical intimations of the tradition because she is a woman. Arendt breaks the silence of women in the Western political tradition by introducing hers to the voices of its storytellers. Though there are storytellers in the Western political tradition, no one writes more eloquently about the problems of women outsiders than Virginia Woolf.

I have argued that Woolf and Arendt have much to say to each other on the question of outsidership, and Woolf identifies the tasks of entrance and its connection storytelling more explicitly than Arendt. Both Woolf and Arendt write silence-breaking works. If it is the case that such works not only theorize the problem of entrance but suffer from it, then the writings of both Woolf and Arendt should display its characteristics. The problem of entrance is

⁴⁰Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Oeuvres Completes (Paris: Pleiade Edition, Gallimard, 1969), IV, 323.

evidenced in the works of both women by their double vision and, as with the outsider theme in general, easier to identify in Woolf than Arendt.

Woolf's concept androgyny exemplifies the bifurcated consciousness of the outsider. On the one hand she writes a text to encourage women writers to break their silence, but conceptualizes the relationship between sexuality and creativity in way that may deny women the possibility of artistic endeavor. The dissonance in Woolf's text strikes us the moment we read her title page. Though she denies that it is possible to speak neutrally about problems of sex, she titles this book "a room of one's own." The use of a gender neutral pronoun in the title is at odds with the stories she tells, which are exclusively about women writers, and with the theme as she states it in the beginning: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction...."⁴¹ Woolf's ambivalence about women's sexuality pervades the fundamental thesis of the book which is the claim that great art is the product of the androgynous mind.

While the surface argument of this work concerns the room of one's own, the deeper argument constructs androgyny as a re-visioning of the traditional mind/body and male/female dualisms. Woolf wants to challenge the religious and philosophic vision of the artist as ascetic and put in its place a more humanist understanding of the unified soul. Woolf

⁴¹Woolf, Room, p. 4, emphasis added.

introduces these themes through a contrast between the lavish luncheon she receives at Oxbridge and her dinner at Fernham, its sister school.

Woolf begins the account by calling explicit attention to the conventional hierarchy of mind over body, announcing that she intends to defy the novelists convention and begin not with what was said at this luncheon, but what was served. The contrast between the sole, partridge, dessert, and rich conversation that followed the luncheon, and the dinner of homely beef, stingy prunes, and dry biscuits prompts Woolf to observe that:

The human frame being what it is, heart, body and brain all mixed together, and not contained in separate compartments as they will be no doubt in another million years, a good dinner is of great importance to good talk. One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, is one has not dined well. The lamp in the spine does not light on beef and prunes.⁴²

Woolf uses this contrast not only to highlight the relative poverty of the female sex, but to challenge overly spiritualized images of the artist as a mind without a body.

Woolf describes the effect of the luncheon in a sexually charged metaphor complete with cigarette: "thus by degrees was lit, halfway down the spine, which is the seat of the soul, not that hard little electric light which we call brilliance, as it pops in and out upon our lips, but the more profound, subtle and subterranean glow, which is the rich yellow flame of

⁴²Ibid., p. 18.

rational intercourse."⁴³ As she moves to tap the ash, she notices an "abrupt and truncated animal" crossing the lawn: it is a Manx cat. The tailless cat is a metaphor for the effect of war on the human species. It can be read literally as a premonition of England's coming involvement in the second World War⁴⁴ and figuratively as an ironic commentary on the castrating effect of the "war between the sexes" on the male of the species. Just as the cat without a tail is a beast cut short, so is the fiction and poetry of men who write with a conscious need to assert their masculinity abbreviated in that it cannot speak to women.

Woolf argues that the human mind is bisexual and that the best writing comes from authors in whom "the two [sexes of the mind] live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating....It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilised and uses all its faculties."⁴⁵ The work of

⁴³Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁴The political argument is a subtle strand in Woolf's text as, for example, here where she cites self-conscious virility as the cause of the death of both poetry and politics: "...I began to envisage an age to come of pure, or self-assertive virility, such as the letters of professors (take Sir Walter Raleigh's letters, for instance) seem to forbode, and the rulers of Italy have already brought into being. For one can hardly fail to be impressed in Rome by the sense of unmitigated masculinity; ad whatever the value of unmitigated masculinity upon the state, one may question the effect of it upon the art of poetry." Room, p. 106.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 102.

androgynous authors⁴⁶ impregnates the mind of the reader, "explodes and gives birth to all kinds of other ideas," but sex conscious writing cannot grow in the mind of others but "falls plump to the ground--dead."⁴⁷ The self-consciously virile writer reduces his women characters to ciphers as "shapeless as mist" and makes outsiders of his women readers.⁴⁸

...some of the finest works of our greatest living writers fall upon deaf ears. Do what she will a woman cannot find in them that fountain of perpetual life which the critics assure her is there. It is not only that they celebrate male virtues, enforce male values and describe the world of men; it is that the emotion with which these books are permeated is to a woman incomprehensible....The fact is that neither Mr. Galsworthy nor Mr. Kipling has a spark of the woman in him. Thus all their qualities seem to a woman, if one may generalise, crude and immature.⁴⁹

Although the imagery Woolf uses to describe the 'androgynous mind' suggests an egalitarian partnership of mind/body, male/female within the author, crosscurrents in the book suggests that this kind of partnership is not possible for the artist who has a woman's body.

⁴⁶Reviewing literary greats of the past, Woolf names Shakespeare, Keats, Sterne, Cowper, Lamb and Coleridge. Shelley she says is sexless; Milton, Ben Jonson, Wordsworth and Tolstoi are too male. Interestingly, she singles out Proust as the wholly androgynous author of her time. Arendt calls Proust the "greatest writer of twentieth-century France" whose introspective writings capture the truth of an age in which "society had emancipated itself completely from public concerns, and when politics itself was becoming a part of social life." Anti-Semitism, p. 80.

⁴⁷Woolf, Room, p. 105.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 104.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 106.

Androgyny is an answer to sex-conscious writing in both sexes. Woolf gives us the closest thing to a definitive statement in this text when she announces that if sitting in front of a typewriter with a blank page entitled "Women and Faction" she would write:

It is fatal for any one who writes to think of their sex. It is fatal to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-manly or man-womanly....Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated....The writer, I thought, once his experience is over, must lie back and let his mind celebrate its nuptials in darkness.⁵⁰

Here she shows us what it is like inside the room of the title. Like the luncheon, the imagery is sexually charged but this time the writer is 'he.' The fact that Woolf resolves her definition of androgyny with a masculine pronoun is evidence of double vision.

Is androgyny an argument for conversations in which both men and women are a vital presence, or is it an acknowledgement that a woman's body is an irrevocable impediment to all great achievement--in art as in politics? Woolf's text offers no conclusive answer. In her most extended treatment of a woman artist, Woolf invents the character Judith Shakespeare, the talented sister of William who travels to London to be an actress and ends up pregnant, unwed, and dead by her own hand. Judith's story suggests that woman artist cannot have a unified soul because a woman's body is a death sentence for the artist's mind. On the other hand, Woolf addresses this book

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 108.

explicitly to women writers because she is bored with reading histories of wars, biographies of great heroes, and the sterile poetry of Manx-men.⁵¹ Woolf is unable to resolve, either in her mind or in her text, the question whether androgyny is pluralist and bisexual or whether it symbolizes the assimilation of women's bodies to men: is it silencing or silence-breaking for the voices of women?

For a work whose focus is Hannah Arendt, I have taken what may seem to be unreasonable care in discussing Woolf's text. Woolf does not aspire to enter the tradition of Western political philosophy and is thus much freer to criticize it than Arendt. Despite their differences, they work well in conversation because both are essayists. Because they are ultimately part of different traditions, it would become awkward to sustain this comparison over a long project. But A Room of One's Own makes an elegant frame for an exploration of outsidership and storytelling in Arendt.

Woolf is useful to constructing a theory of outsidership for several reasons. Her work is an explicit critique that helps us see what Oakeshott's conversation looks like from the outsider's perspective. In addition to teaching us about the dynamics that exclude women from conversations, Woolf's work exemplifies the particular strengths and weaknesses of outsiders' writing. Like Du Bois and "black American," Woolf divides in two over the idea of "woman author." Her desire to

⁵¹Ibid., p. 112.

write to women and to claim that there is such a thing as a woman's perspective, combined with her unwillingness to identify herself as the author of this text, creates dissonance in her work.

Both the strength and the weakness of outsidership come from the idea of double vision. Dualistic thinking is part of the dynamic of exclusion because insiders require outsiders as a force against which to define themselves. The outsider's weakness consists in permitting dualistic thinking, which is the insider's way of defining reality, to infiltrate her consciousness and define her vision of herself. But the outsider who can self-consciously attack dualistic thinking can turn double vision to her own advantage.

The outsider, by virtue of her perspective on the conversation, has the special ability to think beyond dichotomous categories. The tendency to think in polarities in which one term is posited active and the other passive is characteristic of many traditional conversations. An outsider is someone who re-visions conversations by disturbing the neat dualisms that customarily order rational discourse. It is for this reason that Sandra Harding introduces "dissonance" into the vocabulary of feminist analysis. She writes, "[w]e need to be able to cherish certain kinds of intellectual, political, and psychic discomforts, to see as inappropriate and even self-defeating certain kinds of clear solutions to the problems we

have been posing."⁵²

We can construct an example of dualistic thinking and its revisioning if we put Woolf's androgyny in conversation with G.W.F. Hegel's thought on gender. In The Philosophy of Right, Hegel gives a concise statement of the "separate spheres" argument which pervades the Western tradition:

The difference in the physical characteristics of the two sexes has a rational basis and consequently acquires an intellectual significance....It follows that man has his actual substantive life in the state, in learning, and so forth, as well as in labour and struggle with the external world and with himself....Woman, on the other hand, has her substantive destiny in the family, and to be imbued with family piety is her ethical frame of mind.⁵³

Hegel argues that the biological differences between the sexes determine them to separate social spheres and that the marriage bond is a "concrete unity consequent upon this difference."⁵⁴ The essential complementarity he posits in the natures of man and woman leads Hegel to conclude that the hierarchal marriage is a natural necessity.⁵⁵

⁵²Sandra Harding, "The Instability of the Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory," in Sandra Harding and Jean F. O'Barr, eds., Sex and Scientific Inquiry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 288.

⁵³G.W.F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, trans. T.M. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), sec. 165-66.

⁵⁴Ibid., sec. 165.

⁵⁵Similar arguments can be found in Jean Jacques Rousseau's Emile and Letter to D'Alembert and Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America. As Zillah Eisenstein observes in Feminism and Sexual Equality (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), this position is enjoying a resurgence in the writings of conservatives like Jerry Falwell and George Gilder.

A case can be made for the idea that arguments such as these contain intimations that are empowering to women insofar as the idea that woman is active and powerful in her own realm breaks down the stereotyped construction of women's passivity and submissiveness. But the idea that the sexes are mutually complementary and that both their union and the gendered division of labor are necessary to human development is fundamentally opposed to the project of women's liberation. This construction of gender difference permits a man to enjoy economic and political power as well as power in the household. A woman's power is contingent on being a wife and her dependence on the man for identity and survival is absolute. The task of feminist theory, the new voice in this long conversation about sex, is to redefine the concept difference to give women latitude for choice on par with men's.

Benjamin Barber argues that there is an egalitarian line of argument in Hegel with regard to women.⁵⁶ In addition to the constricting paradigm of woman as mother that identifies women with the family and realm of feeling, Barber sees egalitarianism in woman as lover, sister, and daughter. Hegel begins by positing the essential equality of spirit in each of these roles which, in violation of his philosophic method, he truncates by ultimately burying women within the family. Barber fits this dissonance on women into the larger conflict

⁵⁶Benjamin R. Barber, "Spirit's Phoenix and History's Owl or The Incoherence of Dialectics in Hegel's Account of Women," Political Theory 16 (February 1988), pp. 5-28.

engendered by Hegel's claim to stand at the end of history. Like the picture of spirit fully realized in a static world, the truncation of women's spirit by her imprisonment in the family sabotages Hegel's dialectic, introducing into it the paradox of an historical being who drops prior to being liberated. Barber's ear for dissonance in Hegel is further evidence of the ways in which conversation and its hidden assumptions shape the formation of ideas.

Woolf challenges Hegel's construction of difference with her concept 'androgyny.' With androgyny, Woolf attempts to preserve the idea that men and women are distinctive but to discard the dualistic notion that difference implies male sovereignty and female dependency. As we saw from the conflicting statements she makes about androgyny, the attempt to challenge dichotomous thinking does engender what Harding calls "psychic discomfort." It produces dissonance in an outsider's work that makes it seem as if the outsider speaks nonsense. The best works of outsidership are those, like Woolf's or Rousseau's or Nietzsche's, that display a high threshold of tolerance for this discomfort, holding tenaciously to paradox and double vision even in the face of demands for consistency. Arendt, too, undertakes to challenge a hierarchical polarity that is deeply rooted in the conversation of political philosophy. She argues that in the Western political tradition since Plato "the term vita activa receives its meaning from the vita contemplativa; its very restricted

dignity is bestowed upon it because it serves the needs and wants of contemplation in a living body."⁵⁷ Arendt does not dispute the fact that the life of the mind is different from political life, but rather that politics should be subordinated to philosophy. She argues that the subordination of action to thought greatly oversimplifies the vita activa, which consists of three distinctive modes of being--labor, work, and action--and as a consequence obscures the relationship between these two aspects of the human condition. The life of the mind meets the world in politics, the distinctively human aspect of the vita activa. While for Plato the separation of mind and world justified the rule of the Philosopher-Kings, to the theorist who lives in an age of democracy, this separation has catastrophic consequences for politics because it denies the possibility of political judgment. Arendt's work on judgment, like her work on the history of political thought, attempts to move beyond dualist thinking to a reconciliation of ethics and action.

If Arendt is an outsider, we would not only expect her to disorganize the traditional conversation but also that this effort would create dissonance within her work. As with Woolf's "androgyny," I see evidence of dissonance throughout Arendt's corpus. The problem of entrance is particularly acute in Human Condition. Like Woolf, Arendt is an outsider

⁵⁷Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 16. Hereafter cited as Condition.

making a critique of the tradition both through what she says and the way she says it. Though Arendt does not begin her book, as Woolf does, with a statement of her intent to digress perhaps she should have--"But, you may say, what do natality, plurality, and worldliness Marx; furthermore, what does the human "condition" have to do with public life...?"--for this question plagues us throughout. It is almost as if she has written two books, one where she uses a traditional categorical mode of thinking to criticize Marx and another where she invents a new vocabulary for political philosophy; that she submerges the more radical text in the mundane discussion of Marx is evidence of the problem of entrance. Similarly, in her writings on judgment, she distorts her own voice by filtering it through Kantian categories. In order to gain entrance into the conversation, Arendt frames each of her works in a way that to some extent betrays its content.

I think Arendt's corpus comes together as a unified whole when we view it as a scholarly treatment of similar themes in political theory that Woolf identifies in literature. Where Woolf finds unmitigated masculinity in the literary tradition, Arendt finds this same spirit in the Western political tradition. Both women observe that the conversations in which they would like to participate assert the superiority of the spiritual and ideal over the real and define freedom in terms of domination. Woolf and Arendt both challenge the dichotomous thinking of the tradition. The works of both women are

characterized by what we have identified as the strengths of the outsider's perspective.

Both Woolf and Arendt also display the weaknesses of outsiders. There is dissonance in both their works at points where they challenge dualisms that are fundamental to traditional conversation. Interestingly, both are reticent when it comes to making an explicit claim to speak from a woman's perspective. We have seen how carefully Woolf masks herself in "Room." Similarly when Arendt gave the Christian Gauss lectures at Princeton and later was invited to join the faculty as a full Professor, she insistently refused to be identified as the First Woman to achieve either of these distinctions. According to her biographer Elisabeth Young-Breuhl,

What Arendt wanted to avoid, as a woman, was a situation in which she was distinguished from 'ordinary' women by virtue of her education, thought 'strange and exciting,' entertainingly different, a unique personality. What she wanted for women and from women was attention paid to questions about political and legal discrimination, attention broad enough to relate women's political and legal problems to those of all groups denied equality. She became uneasy whenever she saw the 'woman problem' generate either a political movement separated from others or a concentration on psychological problems.⁵⁸

If Young-Breuhl is correct, Arendt's views on discrimination against women parallel the analysis she makes of 'privileged Jews' in nineteenth century Europe: it is fatal to accept as a reward for being exceptional that which you are owed simply

⁵⁸Elisabeth Young-Breuhl, Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 273.

because you are human.

We have carried the parallels between Woolf and Arendt as far as they can go for the purposes of this argument, however. While Woolf is a novelist, Arendt is a political theorist who appreciates storytelling, not a storyteller. She is at her best in a work like Human Condition that uses the evocative language of the storyteller to define new words in philosophy, and in the essays she writes to commemorate people who were important to her. She is at her worst when she tries her hand at real storytelling, as in the "biography" of Rahel Varnhagen. While Woolf is a feminist theorist, Arendt is a political theorist whose work has something to offer feminist theory but who does not use gender as a category of analysis.

In this chapter, we have identified women as outsiders to the Western political tradition and argued that an outsider's work is shaped by the problem of entrance. Entrance is a problem for individuals who are identified with a group that has a history of oppression when insiders deny their capacity for self-definition. This problem manifests itself in the work of an outsider as double vision, a conflict between the world as it is defined by the insider and the new order that the outsider wants to bring into being. Storytelling is a particularly effective tool of entrance for the outsider because it is uniquely suited to transmit the dissonance that is released when we look beneath the surface of the generalities that define some aspects of the insider's world.

This theory of outsidership defines a new way of looking at Hannah Arendt whose work is important to feminist theory because she theorizes outsidership and invisibility. Arendt lets us hear a different voice, even though she does not identify it as a woman's voice. Even though she does not claim to speak for women, she can help us explore what becomes audible when a woman enters a male-dominated conversation and what becomes visible when a woman looks at a tradition from the outside.

Chapter Two

Silence: Outsidership in John Rawls and Hannah Arendt

Outsidership is a many dimensioned concept in the Western political tradition. Political philosophy in general is an outsider's vocation, written by men who considered themselves pariahs and believed that this gave them a privileged position from which to criticize the social order. Within the tradition itself there is a conversation of outsiders, among those theorists who write more as storytellers than as analytic philosophers. With few exceptions, the partners in this conversation have made outsiders of women by defining them as creatures of body rather than mind and speech.

Hannah Arendt explores outsidership in her biography of Rahel Varnhagen. She is drawn to Varnhagen out of kinship. Varnhagen is, as a Jewish woman, an outsider to high society in nineteenth century bourgeois Germany. Arendt is doubly an outsider: once to the world by her vocation and once again to that vocation by the fact that she is a woman. The outsider theme is refracted in the Varnhagen biography. Arendt both treats outsidership as a facet of Varnhagen's life and questions the standpoint of outsidership even as she, the biographer, occupies it. She asks whether it is legitimate to tell Rahel's life story in ways she would not have told it herself. By questioning the understood vantage point of the theorist, Arendt writes exactly as we would expect from someone who is an outsider to an outsider's profession.

It is customary to accord the outsider a privileged objectivity. Images of the outsider in the Western political

tradition include Plato's philosopher who escapes the cave, Nietzsche's ubermensch who lives beyond the horizon, and Rousseau's noble savage who criticizes bourgeois corruption from the vantage point of primitive authenticity. To stand inside means to be trapped within a narrow field of vision and to be caught up in competition for a share in conventionally defined goods so that we cannot contest either the rules of the game or its ends. Inside the system, where status is measured by success, dissent is interpreted as evidence of weakness or disability and discredited. "Outside" implies a capacity to see the whole, to identify human suffering as a systemic rather than a personal phenomenon, and to reject certain goods not because we can not have them but because we will not.

If women are outsiders to the public sphere, then it is possible that they possess a special gift for political theory. But is it not self-contradictory to claim that outsidership is a privilege and women enjoy it? In the first chapter we argued that outsidership is an aspect of women's oppression and that the task of entrance is to challenge objectivist concepts and abstract argument by means of storytelling. If we accept the notion that outsidership implies objectivity, then the image of woman as outsider conflicts with the idea of storytelling as a paradigm for feminist theory. If is the case that feminism is essentially a critique of the invisible power embedded in the claim to objectivity and the method of abstract philosophy, what does it mean to identify women as outsiders? Does

feminism occupy a privileged position with respect to the competitive, individualist ethos of a male-defined social order? Or does feminist theory reject the notion of a privileged standpoint altogether?

In claiming the outsider's perspective in order to use it as a vantage point for a critique of objectivity, we find ourselves like Orpheus, turning back to lose the very thing we hoped to save by our journey. Yet, if the disharmonies of outsidership are aspects of women's lives, the outsider's paradox may be indispensable to writing by and about women. Sandra Harding identifies the outsider's paradox in feminist theory with two dissonant strains of argument that she calls "feminist standpoint epistemology" and "postmodern" feminism.¹ The first accepts objectivity as a concept but seeks to define a feminist standpoint as a corrective to the fallacies of philosophies that pretend impartiality and universality even as they speak from a patriarchal perspective.² The second argues

¹Sandra Harding, "The Instability of the Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory," in Sandra Harding and Jean F. O'Barr, eds, Sex and Scientific Inquiry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 283-302. Hereafter cited as "Instability."

²For treatment of the patriarchal biases of philosophy, see Susan Bordo, "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought," in Sex and Scientific Inquiry; Jane Flax, "Political Philosophy and the Patriarchal Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Epistemology and Metaphysics," in Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science, eds. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co, 1983); Allison Jaggar, Feminist Politics and Human Nature (Totowa: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983); Susan Okin, Women in Western Political Thought.

that epistemology is fundamentally suspect "for it assumes separations between the knower and the known, subject and object, and the possibility of some powerful transcendental, Archimedean standpoint from which nature and social life fall into what we think is their proper perspective."³ The thing that makes the outsider's paradox truly paradoxical is the fact that both strains frequently can be heard together in a single work.

Catherine MacKinnon's work exemplifies the outsider's paradox. MacKinnon claims for women the status of outsiders to the realm that is conventionally defined as "the political," and argues that "feminist epistemology" properly understood is a contradiction in terms. MacKinnon argues that "sexual objectification is the primary process of the subjection of women,"⁴ and that this process is fortified by the concepts of objectivity in science and pretense of neutrality in the law. If the project of feminism is to articulate a critique of objectification, MacKinnon argues, feminism must reject epistemology which is inherently objectifying in that it assumes the separation of subject from object. Just as feminist politics argues that the definition of woman as "wife" is a construct of patriarchy, feminist theory argues that the

³Harding, "Instability," p. 285.

⁴Catharine MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory," in Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology, eds. Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara C. Gelpi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 27. Hereafter cited as "Agenda."

distinction between epistemology and ontology is similarly atavistic. While it may be true that feminist standpoint epistemologies recreate habits of thought that have been used to imprison women, the wholesale rejection of standpoint denies the existence of a feminist perspective and leaves feminist politics without grounds for judgment and action.

The outsider's paradox emerges in the fact that even as she calls epistemology an instrument of patriarchy, MacKinnon acknowledges the need for a critical vantage point. She argues that the concept that the personal is political identifies women's standpoint: "[I]t means that women's distinctive experience as women occurs within that sphere that has been socially lived as the personal--private, emotional, interiorized, particular, individuated, intimate--so that what it is know the politics of woman's situation is to know women's personal lives."⁵ Consciousness raising is the method by which we gain access to this knowledge and formulate principles of political action: "[P]roceeding connotatively and analytically at the same time, consciousness raising is at once common sense expression and critical articulation of concepts."⁶ If consciousness raising does establish a critical standpoint that is embedded in the world, MacKinnon has identified a way to think beyond the outsider's paradox.

There is an interesting point of connection between

⁵MacKinnon, "Agenda," p. 21.

⁶Ibid., 22.

MacKinnon and Harding on this question of a feminist standpoint that, in effect, brings Archimedes down to earth.⁷ MacKinnon names a research methodology that Harding would argue is genuinely objective, rather than 'objectivist.'⁸ Objectivism, according to Harding, is the use of abstract terms like "person" and "individual" to conceal the patriarchal biases of traditional thought:

We need to avoid the "objectivist" stance that attempts to make the researcher's cultural beliefs and practices invisible while simultaneously skewering the research objects beliefs and practices to the display board....the beliefs and behaviors of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the results of research....Introducing this "subjective" element into the analysis in fact increases the objectivity of the research and decreases the "objectivism" which hides this kind of evidence from the public.⁹

The distinction between objectivity and objectivism marks different ways of thinking about impartiality. If all knowledge is contextual, the traditional conception of objectivity is disguised attempt to privilege the perspective

⁷See Myra Jehlen, "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism," in Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology.

⁸It may be objected that MacKinnon's piece is utterly incompatible with Harding's because where Harding leans more toward feminist standpoint epistemology, MacKinnon is a postmodernist. I think MacKinnon might accept Harding's distinction between objectivity and objectivism and concur that she wants to overthrow what Harding calls objectivism, but for political purposes does not want to rule out the possibility of defining a women's standpoint.

⁹Sandra Harding, "Is There a Feminist Method?" in Feminism and Methodology (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 9.

of the researcher. Genuine impartiality requires the acknowledgment of partiality.

We can hear this same dissonance between outsidership and the problem of impartiality in Hannah Arendt's biography of Rahel Varnhagen. Arendt employs storytelling as a method in this work because it permits her to capture the problem of entrance in a way that conventional social science can not, and to question whether she, as a political theorist, occupies a privileged position with respect to her subject. The Varnhagen biography is a double-edged critique of privilege. It not only challenges the legitimacy of social privilege in nineteenth century bourgeois society and criticizes parvenu Jews who aspired to membership in that society, but also questions the privileged perspective of the theorist.

Storytelling gives Arendt a perspective on Varnhagen that is critical but not objective and sensitive without being identified with her to the point of losing the capacity for analysis. She explains that she set out "to narrate the story of Rahel's life as she might have told it."¹⁰ She rejects the idea that she, as storyteller, should look at Rahel from a superior standpoint achieved by "psychological standards and categories that the author introduces from the outside,"¹¹ but attempts to tell the story from the vantage point of Rahel's

¹⁰Hannah Arendt, Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. xv.

¹¹Ibid.

diaries and letters, letting Rahel speak for herself. Arendt cautions, "[I]t is, of course, only of my intentions that I speak; I may not always carry them out successfully and at such times may appear to be passing judgment upon Rahel from some higher vantage point."¹² This qualifying remark raises the outsider's paradox. No story can be told without some critical distance from a subject, and imposition by the storyteller; the art of storytelling involves knowing the difference between a stance that permits critical observation and one that facilitates the imposition of prejudice.

This distinction between good storytelling and bad raises once again the problem of objectivity and objectivism. A good story is informed by a sense of its own significance which comes from seeing the discrete events as part of some kind of whole. It requires the perspective and judgment of an outsider whose retrospective glance invests with meaning the seemingly insignificant happenings in which the story began. One story is never the truth of an event, but merely the reflection of those aspects that one particular storyteller found comprehensible and important. If telling a story is an exercise in judgment, we should be wary of stories that conceal the teller.

Feminist critics of liberalism argue that it is an objectivist political theory, a story without a storyteller. It perpetuates outsidership in a particularly insidious manner,

¹²Ibid., p. xvii.

hiding the demand for conformity behind the illusion that its language and standards are universal. The belief in the impartiality of laws and standards based on a particular conception of human nature effects the permanent exclusion of those who do not fit the model of the individualist who defines ethics in terms of abstract principle.¹³ The outsider's critique of liberalism centers on its objectivist conception of impartiality and its belief in the Archimedean point, as such, it is paradoxical in that the aspects of liberalism most disturbing to the outsider are those which are traditionally thought to define outsidership itself.

The dispute between Harding's feminist standpoint and postmodern feminist thinkers that I have called the outsider's paradox taps into a long tradition of conversation between liberalism and its critics. We will explore this paradox by invoking this conversation by means of a comparison between the works of John Rawls, a liberal political philosopher, and Hannah Arendt, a critic of liberalism. John Rawls is exceptional among contemporary liberal political theorists because he is at once a critic and a proponent of universalist thinking. In A Theory of Justice, Rawls defines the original position as an Archimedean point for the definition of genuinely consensual principles of justice. These principles

¹³For two excellent feminist critiques of liberal epistemology see Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) and Allison Jaggar, Feminist Politics and Human Nature (Totowa: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983) esp. Chapter 3.

are to be applied to society by means of "relevant social positions" which, in my terminology, are the standpoints of outsiders. Thus Rawls, though he holds fast to the ideal of universalism, resists what Harding calls objectivism by drawing the outsider into the ongoing critique of the principles of justice.

Rawls' theory makes an argument for feminist standpoint epistemologies: it is an attempt to redefine the Archimedean Point to include those who are traditionally outsiders. Hannah Arendt, on the other hand, is less comfortable with the attempt to make objectivity compatible with outsidership. She argues that reason alone cannot overcome the problem of entrance because the forces of outsidership are deeply embedded in history.

Reason can liberate from the prejudices of the past and it can guide the future. Unfortunately, however, it appears that it can free isolated individuals only, can direct the future only of Crusoes. The individual who has been liberated by reason is always running head-on into a world, a society, whose past in the shape of "prejudices" has a great deal of power; he is forced to learn that past reality is also a reality.¹⁴

Arendt would see the original position as a realm of Crusoes who, once beyond the veil of ignorance, will find themselves plagued by historical realities. She defines the task of entrance as a problem of political community that involves recognizing the fact that all standards, even those that purport universality, are products of history. In her

¹⁴Arendt, Varnhagen, p. 10.

recognition of the limitations of reason against the power of history, Arendt leans toward the postmodernist camp though she, like MacKinnon, defines the task of entrance as a problem of judgment. A conversation between Hannah Arendt and John Rawls would explore the harmonies and disharmonies of the outsider's paradox.

Arendt's conception of outsidership is richer than Rawls in that she characterizes the outsider's dilemma as a choice between rebellion and assimilation, using the terms "pariah" and "parvenu" to distinguish the rebels from the conformists. Rawls defines the outsider as someone who is socially disadvantaged. The category encompasses those who, by birth or natural attributes, lack those things that society values most. Because it presupposes the fairness of the standards and questions the abilities of the individual, this is more a sociological definition than a political analysis of outsiders. Arendt would say it is the way the outsider who has become a parvenu would describe the outsider who chooses conscious pariahdom.

Hannah Arendt defines the outsider not in terms of social advantage but in terms of political principles; the outsider struggles not for success but rather to choose between rebellion and conformity. The parvenu values material success over all else, and denies historical and cultural identity in order to achieve social status. The pariah refuses to assimilate and instead demands political recognition. Where

the goal of the parvenu is social visibility at the cost of political silence, the pariah wants to be both seen and heard as a critic. The parvenu's life is inauthentic because everything achieved through acquiescence is determined by the values and expectations of others. The parvenu maintains these accomplishments at the cost of self-respect which is diminished by conformity to an alien cultural and historical identity. By failing to see that the escape from oppression lies not in standing apart from others like you but rather in challenging the norms of the dominant society, the parvenu is perpetually oppressed. Only conscious pariahs, who question the legitimacy of exclusive social standards, free themselves. Where Rawls tries to make liberal democracy serve the interests of the outsider, Arendt argues that the outsider is not just socially disadvantaged but politically oppressed and consequently can not use but must rebel against the existing system.

For Arendt, the concept "outsider" can not be defined except in relationship to a critical understanding of the concept "community." Communities are defined by shared interests, standards, and values that spur the members to achievement--sometimes by their desire to outdo each other and sometimes by their desire to share insights about a common question. These principles and standards do not emerge into history fully determined, but evolve over time. The outsider is someone who was excluded from the public realm during much of the history of a particular culture and so is confronted

upon emancipation with an alien set of principles. Rawls' treatment of political community leaves out its historical aspect and thus omits the problem of entrance.

Often, the terms pariah or outsider connote a solitary figure. The great artist or philosopher often, by virtue of a keen sensibility, is a stranger everywhere in the world. As perpetual stranger, this outsider is not simply in exile but entirely homeless. Homelessness is a condition that confronts us all in the fact of our birth.¹⁵ Each of us is a contingency, a unique stranger who has never existed before, will never exist again, and whose purpose is to find a place in the rest of the world. The seemingly universal insight of many artists and philosophers might be that they never escape this fundamental homelessness. In terms of political community, the outsider is not a perpetual stranger but rather an exile.

To the outsider who is not yet self-conscious exile may feel like homelessness, but there is a difference between exiles and strangers. Great artists and philosophers, because they can never be fully understood, will always be alone. Newly emancipated outsiders are alone only as long as their histories and traditions are devalued and unrecognized by a dominant culture. The sense of homelessness in exile is created by the dominant culture's capacity to render subcultures invisible.

¹⁵See, Arendt, "What is Existenz Philosophy?," The Partisan Review, 12 (Winter 1946), pp. 34-56. See also, Peter Berger, The Homeless Mind.

Parvenus are outsiders who render themselves invisible as a strategy for entrance, assimilating the insider's disdain for their own history to make themselves acceptable to the insider. This strategy makes the parvenu "a character without a stage-set."¹⁶ Arendt herself once abandoned her history and culture, though not by choice--the case of the parvenu--but by necessity--the case of the persecuted. In an account of what it meant to her to be a refugee she makes a connection between silence and invisibility.

We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings.¹⁷

Outsiders who abandon their homeland--whether by choice or by necessity--become invisible. Without occupation they lose self-esteem; without language they lose the possibility of easy self-expression. Thus they have neither the confidence nor the capacity for voice.

The problem of the outsider, as Arendt defines it, is primarily a problem of shame. The dominant culture robs the newly emancipated of their histories. As social beings, initially all outsiders want to be considered normal, but as newcomers, they are inclined to define "normal" in terms of

¹⁶Arendt, Varnhagen, p. 217.

¹⁷Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees," in The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age, ed. Ron H. Feldman, (New York: Grove, 1978), pp. 55-56 (originally published January, 1943). Hereafter cited as Pariah.

what already exists. Accepting that the dominant culture is normal and theirs is not only different but abnormal, outsiders learn to be ashamed of their history. They think that the way out of exile is to deny their connection to the community of shame and don an ill-fitting mask of superiority.

When the existence of a community is taken as proof of the great discipline and superior virtue of its members, a false value is attached to joining it. Outsiders who accept the denigration of their own culture by a dominant community mistake status for virtue. They don't realize that insiders don't have to live up to social standards--they merely live them. What the parvenu learns is that inside or out, "he remains subject to the same adverse law that he revolted against when he was a pariah: having to acquiesce in everything."¹⁸ Once community is defined as a creature of history and the outsider as someone on a different course of development, it becomes clear that conformity furthers invisibility by confirming shame. The task for the outsider is not to escape but to reconstruct the invisible community of shame as a visible political community of dissent.

Arendt's biography of Rahel Varnhagen tells the story of one woman's choice between pariah and parvenu. Rahel Varnhagen was the daughter of Marcus Levin, a wealthy dealer in precious stones who lived in Berlin. She came of age around the turn of the century, the hostess of an influential Berlin salon. Until

¹⁸Arendt, Varnhagen, p. 209.

the late nineteenth century, Jews had been confined to ghettos and denied political and civil rights. On the heels of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, the denial of the "rights of man" to Jews was blatantly hypocritical. In 1792, European nation-states beginning with France began to emancipate their Jewish populations. The tradition of "Jewish Privilege," which had permitted the Moses Mendelssohns and Baron Rothschilds to escape from the ghetto by virtue of exceptional talent or wealth, cast a shadow over the emancipation effort. Jews were not accepted into society as Jews, but only on the condition that they assimilate to the moeurs of the gentile middle class. What should have been a public recognition of Jews' humanity became a demand that they prove themselves worthy of human respect.

Rahel's life was a struggle to come to terms with the fact that she was a Jew in an era when Jews were no longer clearly barred from society, but not fully welcome either. Arendt opens her biography with the words Rahel is reputed to have spoken on her deathbed: "[T]he thing which all my life seemed to me the greatest shame, which was the misery and misfortune of my life--having been born a Jewess--this I should on no account now wish to have missed."¹⁹ Arendt charts Rahel's passage from shame to pride in her heritage by means of an analysis of outsidership that appears in a later article on pariahs.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 3.

Arendt identifies four ways in which outsiders establish themselves as conscious pariahs. The first is by a lifestyle based on the romantic notion of the equality of humanity in nature. She takes this from the poet Heinrich Heine, is that it is absurd to compete for status in an artificial social hierarchy when in nature "the bare fact that the sun shines on all alike affords...daily proof that all men are essentially equal."²⁰ Heine argues for a withdrawal from politics to the more authentic life of the artist in nature.

Bernard Lazare makes outsidership a political concept. Lazare, a Jewish publicist who wrote pamphlets on behalf of Alfred Dreyfus, originates the term "conscious pariah" which Arendt uses to tell Rahel's story. Lazare argues that pariahs belong to a community of the oppressed. As opposed to Heine, who turns his back on politics, Lazare argues that anyone who does not self-consciously oppose oppression perpetuates it and that it is the job of the conscious pariah to champion the cause of the oppressed.

The movies of Charlie Chaplin and the novels of Franz Kafka further develop the idea that the pariah is a victim of oppression. Chaplin's tramp, "the perpetually harassed little man," characterizes the outsider as someone constantly suspect in the eyes of the state. The conscious pariah deflects the feelings of culpability that fill the parvenu with shame,

²⁰Arendt, "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition," in Pariah, p. 71 (originally published April, 1944). Hereafter cited as "Pariah."

knowing that "for the man who is in any case suspect there is no relation between the offense he commits and the price he pays."²¹ Kafka's works suggest that every human being is an outsider to the bureaucratic state. His heroes are those who petition for no more than simple human rights and grow old waiting for them because in a bureaucracy, even basic respect is a privilege reserved for the exceptional.

Arendt tells Rahel's story as that of a woman who struggles against both assimilation and homelessness before coming to know herself as a conscious pariah. Arendt calls it a study of "the manner in which assimilation to the intellectual and social life of the environment" shapes the life of an individual.²² In presenting Rahel's story, Arendt explores the connections between assimilation and invisibility, community and visibility.

Rahel lived in an age of "romantic pessimism" that was deeply conservative. Disillusioned by the French Revolution, thinkers of the time "despaired of the political capacities of Man as a law-maker and became resigned to considering him as capable only of obeying laws, whose ultimate legitimation was no longer in God but in history and tradition...."²³ Even though the aristocracy was rendered politically marginal by the

²¹Ibid., p. 80.

²²Arendt, Varnhagen, p. xvii.

²³Hannah Arendt, "Jewish History, Revised," in Pariah, p. 97 (originally published March, 1948).

Revolution and by industrialization, its history and traditions were still taken to be the standards of human progress; consequently, the quest of the middle class was to assimilate to nobility and the quest of the Jews was to find a role in the structure of the bourgeois state comparable to the financial role they had played in the courts of the past. Rahel Levin was both a romantic and an optimist, out of step with her time because she believed in human creativity, hoped for the actualization of the Enlightenment vision of egalitarian human rights, and yearned to be accepted in society without assimilating to it.

Jews of the time believed that they were as the bourgeoisie said: "members of an oppressed, uncultured, backward people who must be brought into the fold of humanity."²⁴ For the individual Jew, the escape from Jewishness required separating from other Jews, by marriage for women and by wealth and occupation for men. The escape from Jewishness was an escape from history, which meant casting off the frame that makes it possible for a person to appear in the world: "a necessary attribute of a personality, of rank and quality, [is] a world in which certain things [are] recognized as constituting rank and quality."²⁵ The disappearance of this frame meant Jews would no longer be identified by religious doctrine or shared history but rather by a negative stereotype

²⁴Arendt, Varnhagen, p. 8.

²⁵Ibid., p. 168.

against which each individual Jew had to prove an exception to gain social acceptance.

Outside the historical frame, the person becomes invisible. In the absence of a sense of the history of one's people, "it is hard to decide whether being different is a blemish or a distinction."²⁶ At age twenty-one Rahel writes to a friend of the pain it cost to live as an unconscious pariah:

...do what I will, I shall be ill, out of gene, as long as I live; I live against my inclinations. I dissemble, I am courteous...but I am too small to stand it, too small....My eternal dissembling, my being reasonable, my yielding which I myself no longer notice, swallowing my own insights--I can no longer stand it; and nothing, no one, can help me.²⁷

Rahel's feeling of smallness should recall Ellison's "invisibility."²⁸ Rahel resembles Ellison's character in that both are isolated from the support of a community that knows and respects them. Like Rahel, the story of the invisible man is his coming to know that invisibility is a condition of his blackness in a white world, and that rebellion against that world is the only way to visibility. Like Invisible Man, Rahel does not at first see Jewishness as an historical and cultural identity, but as a dimension of her personality that could be hidden if necessary.

Rahel begins to discover her cultural identity as a source of strength in her salon. Jewish salons were popular during a

²⁶Ibid., p. 218.

²⁷Ibid., p. 13.

²⁸See Chapter One's discussion of invisibility.

brief period in the nineteenth century when the salons of aristocrats were no longer fashionable and the bourgeoisie had yet to develop salons of their own. The Jewish salons provided a cultural neutral zone without which the German intelligentsia would have been "socially homeless."²⁹ The Jews, the bourgeoisie, and aristocrats of Rahel's Goethe cult were all refugees in a time of social change when history was no longer a guide to status. The members of her circle turned inward, preoccupying themselves "only with the development of their personality and their 'education sentimentale.'"³⁰ For the time of her salon, which dissolved in 1806 when new salons formed around bourgeoisie of rank, Rahel lives the paradox that as an outsider she has a role in society; it is her first taste of being a conscious pariah.

The conflict between conscious pariah and parvenu surfaces for Rahel when her unconventional life in the salon interferes with her conventional attempts to become a parvenu through marriage. Rahel's first love affairs end because she is reluctant to give up her salon--where being Jewish does not have to mean being small--for an uncertain life as a parvenu. At twenty-four Rahel becomes engaged to Count Karl von Finckenstein, but instead of giving up her identity to be known as Countess von Finckenstein, Rahel draws her fiance into the

²⁹Hannah Arendt, "Privileged Jews," Jewish Social Studies, VIII/I (January 1946), p. 16.

³⁰Ibid. p. 20.

salon where he cannot survive because he, unlike Rahel's other friends, wanted to remain an aristocrat. To an aristocrat, the "individual represents merely one moment as against the memory of the family stock and the need for its continuance into the future."³¹ In the salons, it was the job of the individual to display her unique personality, not to stand as a symbol to the past.

The salons were the meeting places of those who had learned how to represent themselves through conversation. The actor can always be the "seeming" of himself; the bourgeois as an individual had learned to show himself--not something beyond himself, but nothing but himself.³²

In the salon, Finckenstein's status as a count no longer matters, but he has no idea how to re-present himself as a person beyond his family history. Rather than be reduced to nothing by the moeurs of the salon, Finckenstein withdraws from Rahel, provoking her to break the engagement. Though she did not yet understand the significance of the event, in preferring the salon over marriage to Finckenstein, Rahel reveals that she is not parvenu but pariah.

Rahel's second affair, with the secretary of the Spanish legation Don Raphael d'Urquijo, also ends over the question of gender. Rahel, her salon, and her friends violate Don Raphael's every expectation of what a woman should be. In turn, the intensity of Rahel's need to be visible repulses him.

³¹Arendt, Varnhagen, p. 36.

³²Ibid., p. 38.

Rahel must have seemed a kind of witch to him, a "monster"...; he assumed that in all probability she had to be treated this way, since Finckenstein had done the same. Much sooner than she, he saw the parallel; his insights flowed from a natural male solidarity against monstres of all sorts.³³

Rahel might have overcome this problem had she been willing to become a woman 'in general'; she could not do this, however, because she had spent too many years of her life trying to escape her Jewishness by learning to be exceptional to give up her identity to a husband. In fact when she finally did marry, "Rahel found it intolerable that 'now I have to behave toward people as if I were nothing more than my husband; in the past I was nothing, and that is a great deal.'"34

The ends of the two affairs are critical periods in Rahel's move toward being a conscious pariah. After the affair with Finckenstein, Rahel discovers that the salon is not the only place she can live as an outsider without suffering isolation. After their break-up, Rahel goes abroad because she believes she can be free there of her past: "Man is himself only abroad; at home he must represent his past, and in the present that becomes a mask, heavy to carry and obscuring the face."³⁵ In Paris she has a two month affair with a German businessman, Wilhelm Bokelmann, who shows her what it is like to live in solidarity with another outsider. Rahel learns that

³³Ibid., p. 95.

³⁴Ibid., p. 210.

³⁵Ibid., p. 219.

she

...who was already born outside the world, could stand together against the world with those who remained outside it from a sense of freedom; with such people she could discover the reasons for rejecting a bad world and desiring a better one.³⁶

Like Invisible Man, Rahel discovers that outside can be a position of liberation for pariahs who turn their anger outward as social criticism rather than inward as shame.

When Rahel meets and marries August Varnhagen she finds a relationship that connects her to the world. With Varnhagen, "Rahel's life became more human because it now had a pedagogical effect upon another human being, because for the first time the other person and his otherness did not constitute a doom for her, an immovable obstacle whose only relevance to her was that it showed her something different from what she was in herself."³⁷ Varnhagen, an undistinguished writer and unsuccessful medical student, falls passionately in love with Rahel because he sees in her the personality and intellectual sensibility that he lacks in himself. Marriage to him could not establish Rahel in a position of status but could restore her to a community of scholars.

One of the people Rahel meets through Varnhagen is Alexander von der Marwitz, a young scholar of the classics. Marwitz is, like Bokelmann, an outsider critical of society. He is a man of discrimination, a conservative, convinced of

³⁶Ibid., p. 75, emphasis added.

³⁷Ibid., p. 154.

tradition's inescapable power in the lives of individuals. Except for their common exile, Marwitz is an odd companion for Rahel whose wishful blindness to the significance of tradition and heritage makes her almost indiscriminate in her choice of friends. From the combined forces of the discriminating tastes of Marwitz and Varnhagen's admiration for her sensibility, Rahel discovers another dimension of herself as a pariah.

She begins to recognize in herself the special insight and sensitivity of the artist and philosopher that is in part compensation for and in part the cause of being a pariah. Marwitz taught her

to see her own unrelatedness and alienation objectively, to fit them into the vacuity and emptiness of a city which was, so to speak, too poor and too empty of content to have the strength to absorb, to assimilate her. Her despair was no longer her own private affair; rather, it was merely the reflection of a doomed world.³⁸

When Rahel understands that her alienation from the world is neither proof of her inferiority nor simply a result of being Jewish but an effect of her sensitivity and passion, she is a conscious pariah.

The Varnhagen biography tells the story of entrance as Rahel's learning to think of equality not in social but in political terms. Rahel is a woman who learns to see herself not as member of a community of shame but as a participant in a community of dissent against the values and standards of bourgeois society in nineteenth century Europe. Throughout the

³⁸Ibid., p. 167.

biography, Arendt makes it clear that what Rahel and other assimilationist Jews lacked was a critical standard against which to measure the world in which they lived because they thought in terms of social rather than political equality. When a community permits itself to be defined heteronomously, by the standards and judgments of others, it becomes invisible. Only the self-conscious pariahs who are defined not simply heteronomously as outsiders by a dominant value system but also autonomously in a community that knows itself to be in dissent are genuinely capable of political action.

The conflict between pariah and parvenu is a conflict between competing definitions of equality. The parvenu confuses social equality with political equality, accepting the legitimacy of the standards constructed by the dominant forces in society and permitting equality to be defined as 'normalcy.' Political equality, on the other hand, means equal respect before the law, and exists not because we are alike but because we choose to recognize our common humanity. Thus, the conflict between objectivism and objectivity, which influences the way Arendt tells Varnhagen's story, also shapes her analysis of the social and political forces that make Varnhagen an outsider. Just as the storyteller is not entitled to adopt a "higher vantage point," neither is the insider entitled to define the conditions of entrance for the outsider.

The story of Rahel Varnhagen suggests that there is a relationship between objectivism and equality defined as a

social condition. The Archimedean point is the prototypical heteronomous standard: the fulcrum of a lever that could move the world must by definition exist outside the Earth. Social equality, the goal of the parvenu, confers a false objectivity on the culture of the dominant social power. Assimilation is tacit recognition that one culture is a standard for human civilization.

If Rawls and Arendt were to have their conversation about outsidership, objectivity and social equality would be their principal points of disagreement. Where Hannah Arendt explores the position of the outsider from the inside by means of storytelling, John Rawls stands apart, defining the outsider by an "index of disadvantage." In the early part of A Theory of Justice, Rawls focuses on what Arendt would call social equality. In the end, however, he makes a political account of equality that raises the problem of self-esteem and connects it to the existence of an autonomous community. When he switches focus from society to community, Rawls' account of equality and its requisites becomes much more textured than his description of the original position. Where the opening section of the work defines the outsider in terms of social disadvantage, later sections place greater emphasis on the need for community.

Rawls conceives the problem of justice as a problem of outsidership. He argues that it would be possible to reach an interpersonal consensus on principles of justice if everyone

looked at the social order from the same point of view. He constructs this point of view, which he calls the original position, to replicate and generalize the condition of outsidership. The original position is one in which everyone sees as an outsider because a "veil of ignorance" prevents them from knowing their particular social position, natural attributes, character, or age. Rawls argues that a community of outsiders would act conservatively to guarantee to the least advantaged the best possible minimum share of primary social goods rather than choosing a principle of justice that would benefit those at the top of society. Rawls argues that an interpersonal consensus will take shape around the classic liberal proposition of equal liberty for all, and around a second proposition which he calls the difference principle. The principle stipulates that "social and economic inequalities" must be arranged "to the benefit of the least advantaged," and "attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity."³⁹ The principle of equal liberty together with the "difference principle" constitute Rawls' theory of justice as fairness.

Once the veil of ignorance is lifted, inequality in the distribution of primary social goods and natural talents fragments the original position into "relevant social positions." To the citizen in the abstract, each of these

³⁹John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), sec. 15.

positions is the same because the law grants every person equal recognition regardless of particular characteristics. To the historical person, however, the positions correspond to different levels of well-being set not only by the acquisition of wealth but also by fixed natural characteristics like sex, race, and culture. The difference principle is intended to guarantee that society will continue to work in the best interests of the outsiders even after the distinctions between rich and poor, powerful and powerless become clear.

Rawls uses the difference principle as a corrective to the individualist ethos of liberalism. Where liberalism posits the abstract individual as the primary component of the social order, the difference principle introduces a minimal value of community into political discourse. According to Rawls, the difference principle corresponds "to a natural meaning of fraternity: namely, to the idea of not wanting to have greater advantages unless this is to the benefit of others who are less well off."⁴⁰ Where the insider prefers to define liberalism in terms of equality, the outsider will do so as Rawls does, in terms of fraternity. The outsider's need and appreciation for community may be more acute than the insider's simply by the fact of exclusion: the benefits of community are always more obvious to those who stand outside than to those who live carelessly within.

Liberalism is not solely responsible for the disappearance

⁴⁰Ibid., sec. 17.

of fraternity from modern society. The capitalist economy and the inventions of technology greatly extend the powers of any individual person, displacing some of the functions of human community onto machines and service bureaucracies. If it were not for capitalism and technology, which delude us that we are self-sufficient, our political theories would probably not have lost sight of the fact of human interdependency and, consequently, of the importance of fraternity. Rawls attempts to replicate the original human condition of helplessness in nature so that people who no longer recognize the reality of their dependency on others by virtue of money and technology can return to a more communal frame of reference. Without the mediation of contracts, commodities, and machines, there is a natural connection between fraternity and justice.

Rawls difference principle injects the spirit of fraternity into a condition where true community is impossible because the veil of ignorance prevents the participants in the original position from knowing anything about their particular attributes, without which communities cannot be defined. Rawls argues that the veil is necessary to the original position because without it there could be no consensus on the principles of justice as fairness. Rawls intends the principles of justice as fairness to constitute an "Archimedean Point" against which to determine whether a society has actualized the principles of liberty and equality. Once beyond the original position, we assess the fairness of society from what Rawls

calls the "relevant social positions." Rawls' discussion of the relevant social positions reveals that his is an heteronomous definition of the outsider.

We have noted that the relevant social positions correspond to outsiders' perspectives. Rawls identifies these positions by means of an index of disadvantage that measures individuals' shares of primary social goods, the "things which it is supposed a rational man wants whatever else he wants."⁴¹ While Rawls acknowledges that primary social goods include "rights and liberties, opportunities and powers, income and wealth" and self worth,⁴² for practical purposes he calibrates the index only to the conventional liberal values of rights and property. Because all citizens are granted equal rights by law, the relevant social positions turn out to be defined solely in terms of wealth, and justice becomes a question of levelling economic disparity. Thus, Rawls' theory bears out the hypothesis that objectivist arguments tend to define equality as a social condition.

As we have seen, Arendt argues that to define equality solely in economic terms is to reduce it from a political principle to a term that is purely descriptive of social conditions; where the former can inspire action, the latter reduces human motivation to an instrumental calculus. In response to this position, many critics charge that Arendt is

⁴¹Ibid., sec. 15.

⁴²Ibid.

insensitive to the connection between economic disadvantage and political equality.⁴³ Although it is clear that Arendt rejects "social justice" in its simplest form--the attempt to ensure everyone an equal share in social wealth--her concept of justice has both a political and a social face. Politically, justice means equal respect before the law:

...the public sphere is as consistently based on the law of equality as the private sphere is based on the law of universal difference and differentiation. Equality, in contrast to all that is involved in mere existence, is not given us, but is the result of human organization insofar as it is guided by the principle of justice. We are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights.⁴⁴

In her analysis of outsidership in the Varnhagen biography and the writings on Anti-Semitism, Arendt defines social justice as autonomy. A just community is a pluralist one in which differences of gender, religion, class and ethnicity are not permitted to interfere with participation but rather to define communities of dissenters.

Arendt rejects social equality out of a reluctance to think in a way that denies or negates human plurality. As we saw in Rawls, wealth is a convenient way to construct a seemingly objective measure of injustice. Arendt argues that this yearning after the Archimedean point prompts us to define

⁴³See Sheldon Wolin, "Hannah Arendt: Democracy and the Political," Salmagundi 60 (Spring-Summer 1983), pp. 3-19.

⁴⁴Arendt, Imperialism (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), p. 181.

equality in social terms and to study action as if it were behavior.

...the paradox of the development of modern science seems to be that while it enhanced enormously the power of man, it resulted at the same time in a no less decisive diminishment of man's self-respect....when he now looked down from this point upon what was going on on earth and upon the various activities of men, including his own, these activities could not but appear to him as though they were no more than what the behaviorists call "overt behavior," which can be studied with the same methods used to study the behavior of rats and apes.⁴⁵

When we look upon the social world from an Archimedean Point we do not gain the capacity to move the earth but rather lose our appreciation for plurality.

It would be unfair to give Arendt the last word on this question of the relationship between social equality and objectivism. Rawls' difference principle, together with the relevant social positions and index of disadvantage that implement his theory of justice, are intended as a corrective to the false impartiality of theories, including Arendt's, that define justice as equal respect before the law. Rawls argues that in a social order that does not give full credence to all three democratic principles--liberty, equality, and fraternity--the ideas of equal respect and equal opportunity are empty fictions. He addresses the connection between politics and economics with a distinction between liberty and the "worth" of liberty. Rawls argues that while all people are equally free

⁴⁵Hannah Arendt, "The Archimedean Point," University of Michigan, College of Engineers, 1968, Library of Congress, pp. 8-9.

as citizens, "The worth of liberty to persons and groups is proportional to their capacity to advance their ends within the framework the system defines."⁴⁶ The goal of justice as fairness is not to eradicate the disparities in the worth of liberty across a social system; rather, when the difference principle is satisfied the lesser worth of liberty is presumed compensated because any other arrangement of goods would diminish rather than increase the capacity of the less fortunate members of society to achieve their aims.

Rawls identifies the relevant social positions which ensure impartial adherence to the principles of justice beyond the original position for the purpose of diminishing the disparity between liberty and its actual worth. It is too simple to argue that Rawls defines equality as a social condition because the aim of justice as fairness is not to equalize wealth but to constitute a social order for the greater liberty of outsiders. Rawls will not eliminate outsiders altogether because he could not create perfect equality without too great a cost to liberty; if everyone judged from the standpoint of outsiders, however, then 'outsider' would cease to be politically significant because policies would always reflect the best interests of the least advantaged.

The question is whether the conception of justice as fairness is too "thin" a theory of politics to inspire

⁴⁶Rawls, Theory, sec. 32.

political action by outsiders. If outsiders become politically active only when they come to know themselves as members of a community of dissent, a theory that collapses the varied goods of the human experience into the traditional rights-property dyad may mitigate against participation. In the later sections of A Theory of Justice, Rawls introduces the "Aristotelian Principle," and a theory of justice as goodness that describes human action not in terms of rights and property but in terms of community and excellence. This more textured argument is somewhat at odds with the "thin" theory of politics that informs the original position. Rawls offers two theories in an attempt to separate the principles of justice as fairness, which he believes to be universal, from his account of justice as goodness, which he believes to be particularistic and unlikely to elicit universal consensus.

Rawls' two theories of justice put forth slightly different definitions of equality. In the thin theory, Rawls argues that fraternity is essential to a fair society because equality--conceived as equality of condition--is impossible without it. He states explicitly that "to provide genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into the less favorable social positions."⁴⁷ As Arendt argues, the urge to locate an Archimedean Point results in a tendency to reduce the human condition to instrumental terms and define equality in

⁴⁷Ibid., sec. 17.

terms of social condition. When Rawls gives up the Archimedean Point for the account of goodness he gives in the final third of the book, he argues that fraternity is the condition not just of fairness but of action. Equality is not simply a measure of wealth, but the animating principle of political community.

The discussion of justice as goodness assumes a strong theory of politics in which political life is the condition without which it is impossible to pursue human excellence. Excellence comes from activities that move us to extend our capabilities. Rawls explains, via the "Aristotelian Principle," the psychology that moves us to prefer the challenging to the mundane.⁴⁸ Complex activities are stimulating because they confront us with new experiences that engage our interests. Every time we meet a new challenge, we have an opportunity for ingenuity and invention. To invent something new is to create a space for ourselves in history; it is an expression of distinctiveness that can win us esteem in the eyes of others.

The Aristotelian principle suggests that the will to achievement is only in part self-generated; it also depends on the presence of others who are interested in our projects and value our accomplishments. Action is possible only when there

⁴⁸Note: I take Rawls' distinction between the challenging and the routine as an expression of the difference between action and behavior; the pursuit of excellence can simply be termed action.

is for "each person at least one community of shared interest to which he belongs and where he finds his endeavors confirmed by his associates."⁴⁹ Communities of shared interest come into being among equals who respect each other's diverse perspectives and talents and who are secure enough about their own uniqueness and indispensability to recognize and appreciate excellence in others. Rawls states that such communities are more likely to exist among people "when their several excellences have an agreed place in a form of life the aims of which all accept."⁵⁰ In other words, community, as opposed to a cult, must be meaningfully connected to the larger social order.

Rawls' Aristotelian principle advocates a conception of equality that Hannah Arendt would consider political, rather than social. It defines equality in terms of equal respect, and defines achievement in terms of excellence rather than wealth. Like Arendt, Rawls acknowledges the importance of community to all political action, and describes the problem of outsidership as a problem of shame.⁵¹

The Aristotelian principle argues that self-esteem is crucial to action and achievement, and that shame destroys the impulse to act. Rawls identifies two kinds of shame, one that

⁴⁹Rawls, Theory, sec. 67.

⁵⁰Ibid., sec. 79.

⁵¹Critics like Hannah Pitkin would disagree with my belief that Arendt's is not an individualist conception of action. I address this argument in Chapter IV.

results from social condition and the other from feelings of personal inadequacy. The problem with the concept of equality in Rawls' "thin" theory of politics is that it perpetuates shame. The outsider is defined as someone in a social position of disadvantage for whom self-esteem--which comes from the conviction that what we are doing is worthwhile, within the range of our capacities, and of interest to our peers--may be impossible. The focus on equality of condition, even though it is intended to mitigate the conditions that work against achievement, may paradoxically magnify shame.

Rawls' theory overlooks the problems of the newly emancipated. In Rawls' original position, every person is a citizen. In history, however, equal citizenship was extended gradually throughout the population. For the members of a group or class previously denied fundamental rights and liberties--women or blacks for example--the period after emancipation raises a number of questions about the terms of entry into a new dimension of social life. They have not had access to the sources of self-esteem which those who have lived their lives in public take for granted.

Rawls and Arendt focus on different aspects of outsidership. The problem of entrance is of secondary or even marginal importance in Rawls' work because he defines emancipation out of the original position and relegates the discussion of self-esteem to the last section of A Theory of Justice. Entrance is the focus of the Varnhagen biography,

whose action takes place in a time of transition and emancipation. Where Rawls defines the problem of shame in terms of success, Arendt explores the connection between shame and dissent. Visibility entails self-conscious participation in a community that defines itself in opposition to a dominant culture.

I have argued that feminist theory embodies two contradictory premises: the claim to the outsider's perspective and an attack on objectivist definitions of impartiality. This contradiction is the outsider's paradox. We can see both sides of the outsidership debate explored in the writings of Hannah Arendt and John Rawls. Rawls claims to define justice from a vantage point outside society while Arendt speaks from inside in that she explores injustice by its effects on a particular individual. Rawls defines the outsider as a socially disadvantaged person and calibrates his index of disadvantage to rights and property for an objective measure of injustice. The attempt to speak objectively places him squarely inside the framework of liberalism and obscures some aspects of outsidership.

Arendt includes in her theory of outsidership a distinction that Rawls does not make, between the pariah and the parvenu. Where the parvenu conceives outsidership in terms of social disadvantage, the pariah knows it to be a question of rebellion against the standards and principles of the dominant powers in society. The problem of outsidership is not one to

be settled by equalizing the distribution of wealth. Instead, it requires outsiders to come together in a community of dissent.

Where Rawls' objectivist vision defines the outsider as a hardship case, Arendt, because she questions the standards by which Rawls measures outsidership, can see the outsider as a political rebel. Rawls can not distinguish between pariah and parvenu and so defines equality in terms of conformity. For Arendt, equality means participation. Her insight into the problems of outsidership, which parallels Rawls' discussion of excellence, is that participation is contingent on self-confidence which derives from membership in a self-defining community. Outsidership is a problem in a pluralist culture where one group monopolizes the power of naming the rest. Silence is indicative not of consent to this larger power, but of the deep shame that results when we lose the capacity to name ourselves.

The problem of self-definition is particularly acute in times of transition and emancipation. To a newly-enfranchised group, the way to participation and equality seems to lie in casting off the garb of outsidership. But to reject our own culture is to deny ourselves a standpoint from which to identify and change those aspects of the insider's world that continue to exclude us. We have argued the storytelling is the outsider's way of writing because it exposes the continuing forces of exclusion that are deeply rooted in history. The

comparison between Rawls and Arendt bears out this hypothesis. The language of analytic philosophy permits Rawls to make a coherent argument without addressing the problem of emancipation. Arendt's storytelling involves a level of detail that permits her to detect the subtle problem of entrance.

Both Hannah Arendt and John Rawls exhibit signs of the outsider's paradox, however. Rawls constructs an objectivist theory of justice with the original position which he undermines later with the account of the Aristotelian principle. Where the original position reduces participation to a matter of self-interest, the Aristotelian principle defines it as a question of voice, a problem of locating ourselves within a community of shared interest that permits us to esteem ourselves and our work. The Aristotelian principle raises the challenge of history to the abstract reason of the original position.

The outsider's paradox--the struggle between Arendt the storyteller and Arendt the philosopher--shapes the treatment of gender in the Varnhagen biography. The philosopher erases gender from the story. Arendt notes in the preface that the "Woman Problem" which she defines as "the discrepancy between what men expected of women 'in general' and what women could give or wanted in their turn," was well established by Rahel's time, but says it will not figure in the story because it was not part of Rahel's self-understanding.⁵² But the storyteller

⁵²Arendt, Varnhagen, p. xviii.

shows us that womanhood was integral to Rahel's being and that she struggled to both use it as a way to escape Jewishness through marriage to a gentile, yet feared losing her autonomy to being a wife. Rahel seems more sensitive to the "Woman Problem" than Arendt is, with the effect that as she documents Rahel's growth into self-conscious rebellion against bourgeois society, it remains unasked whether in women's struggle to enter the public realm there might be a problem of assimilation comparable to that of Jews' in their entrance into gentile society. I wonder whether it is really Rahel or whether it is Hannah Arendt who could not make womanhood part of her analysis of outsidership.

Rawls uses the language of analytic philosophy to conceal his own presence within the text; Arendt accomplishes the same thing in attempting to tell Rahel's story as Rahel herself might have told it. It seems that Arendt uses Varnhagen's life as a mask to write about her own experiences. As a result, Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman is not a particularly well-crafted story. Its plot is obscured by long introspective passages that are neither integrated into the tale nor clearly identified as Arendt's reflections. We are left in the end with too fine a portrait of Rahel. It is a detailed account of the psychology of the outsider and only a marginal description of the political forces that produced her, though Arendt makes it clear that the problem of outsidership is political rather than psychological. Ironically, Arendt

brings together the weaknesses of philosophy and storytelling in this tale: she loses the plot in the storyteller's intimacy with her subject and loses herself in the disembodied character of her reflections.

This conversation between Rawls and Arendt illustrates some of the ways in which storytelling can be useful to the outsider. Storytelling permits Arendt to explore the historical forces that exclude Rahel and to make emancipation a project for communities not individuals. It also illustrates that the outsider's paradox may be an integral part of women's writing. Arendt both wants to tell the story of a particular Jewish woman and to censor those aspects of the story that really have to do with gender. Because gender is not a political category for Arendt, she chooses not to focus on gender issues in Rahel's life. In this way, storytelling can fall prey to problems of objectivism like those that plague more conventional research techniques. On this aspect of the story, Arendt reveals more about herself than she reveals about Rahel.

Chapter Three

Entrance: The Origins of Totalitarianism

Every science is necessarily based upon a few inarticulate, elementary and axiomatic assumptions which are exposed and exploded only when confronted with altogether unexpected phenomena which can no longer be understood within the framework of its categories. The social sciences and the techniques which they have developed during the past hundred years are no exception to this rule.¹

Hannah Arendt makes her formal entrance into the conversation of political theory with Origins of Totalitarianism. This book is at the same time her entrance into the tradition and her break with that tradition: as such it is an excellent forum for discussing the questions of outsidership, entrance, and storytelling that are the focus of our inquiry. Origins is a perfect opportunity to study outsidership because it exemplifies the problems of entrance in the methodological problems Arendt addresses to create this work, in her silence on the ways in which her answers to questions of methodology present a challenge to the tradition, and in the criticism it generated. Origins bears out the contention that when a woman's voice is new to a tradition she will reshape its customary modes of discourse, and that, for the social sciences, the new voice will be that of a storyteller.

Origins was a difficult book for Arendt to write because the idea of a break with tradition is both the explicit theme of her analysis of totalitarianism and the underlying

¹Arendt, "Social Science Techniques and the Study of Concentration Camps," Jewish Social Studies, 12 (1950), p. 49. Hereafter cited as "Techniques."

methodological problem that plagued her in writing the book. Totalitarianism is an unprecedented phenomenon "that has brought to light the ruin of our categories of thought and standards of judgment."² If totalitarianism ruptures the categories and standards of the tradition, then the analyst is left without a frame for making sense of it: "there are, to be sure, few guides left through the labyrinth of inarticulate facts if opinions are discarded and tradition is no longer accepted as unquestionable."³ Traditional concepts of things like good and evil, justice and injustice, no longer fit our experience of these phenomena. "This does not mean that we do not think in these concepts, but that our thoughts with well-worn coins is [stet] becoming increasingly meaningless."⁴ In Origins, Arendt undertakes to invent a method that could explain the phenomenon of totalitarianism and recover judgment in an age without meaning, a task that is public and political not private and spiritual.

Arendt believed that the information that would explain totalitarianism lay beyond the vision of the political historian.

Social factors, unaccounted for in political or economic history, hidden under the surface of events, never perceived by the historian and recorded only by

²Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," Partisan Review 20 (July-August 1953), p. 388.

³Hannah Arendt, Antisemitism, p. 9.

⁴Arendt, "Summary," unpublished notes for manuscript of The Origins of Totalitarianism, Library of Congress.

the more penetrating and passionate force of poets or novelists changed the course that mere political antisemitism would have taken if left to itself, and which might have resulted in anti-Jewish legislation and even mass expulsion but hardly in wholesale extermination.⁵

She chooses storytelling as this method because it is uniquely suited to make visible a phenomenon that was invisible to the science that should have been able to study it.

While she makes her methodological departures clear in outlines and research memos for Origins and in articles she wrote alongside the book, none of these issues surface in the book itself. She is unwilling to call attention to her different voice until forced to defend the book against Eric Voegelin when she admits, "...I failed to explain the particular method which I came to use, and to account for a rather unusual approach...to the whole field of political and historical sciences as such. One of the difficulties of the book is that it does not belong to any school and hardly uses any of the officially recognized or officially controversial instruments."⁶ Ernst Vollrath would attribute Arendt's silence on these questions to her personal modesty, and to her unwillingness to permit fundamental moral issues to be lost in disputes over methodology. I see this as evidence of the problem of entrance. Arendt is unaware of how greatly her way

⁵Arendt, Antisemitism, p. 87.

⁶Hannah Arendt, "A Reply," Review of Politics (Jan 1953), p. 77. Voegelin's critique, "The Origins of Totalitarianism," immediately precedes Arendt's response in this issue.

of thinking differs from conventional social science, surprised by what she is asked to explain, and in any event unwilling to engage in a confrontation with the tradition unless she has to.

Those who attempt to identify what is unique about the way Arendt constructs political stories must re-live many of the problems she confronted in writing them. Ernst Vollrath notes that Arendt wrote very little about her methodology, which is perhaps the most unique aspect of her thought. He argues that Arendt's storytelling is both the act of a rebel against the methods of social science and categories of political theory, and a necessary epistemological choice based on what she perceived to be the nature of political phenomena.⁷ Eric Voegelin, on the other hand, argues that Origins is inconclusive and untheoretical.⁸ Arendt comes closest to giving an account of her methodology and identifying it as storytelling in her response to Voegelin's review where she makes public some of the thoughts she included in the outlines and research memoranda that were part of her working process. This chapter uses Origins and the articles Arendt wrote at the time to attempt, as Vollrath does, to articulate Arendt's "method of political thinking," with due respect to the uncertainty and speculation such an enterprise involves.

This focus on the question of method and storytelling

⁷Ernst Vollrath, "Hannah Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking," Social Research 44 (Spring 1977).

⁸Eric Voegelin, "The Origins of Totalitarianism," Review of Politics, 15 (Jan 1953). Hereafter cited as "Origins."

self-consciously overlooks other controversial aspects of Origins that have received extensive treatment in secondary literature. Some scholars have questioned the accuracy of the facts on which she bases her analysis. Benjamin Barber questions the legitimacy of the concept "totalitarianism" in itself, arguing that it is an instrument of cold war ideology lacking any useful social science meaning.⁹ While these criticisms are important in other conversations, they need no answer here. My interest in this work is not for what it has to contribute to the study of totalitarian regimes, although I do think it makes a contribution to this field. Rather, I am interested in what this work tells us about Arendt's storytelling, its connection to her political theory, and its relationship to the questions about judgment she will confront at the end of her career.

I will first examine briefly why Arendt thought totalitarianism "exploded" the foundations of the social sciences. Next I will look at the controversy she raised with this argument. I will then argue that her critique of the social sciences and her redefinition of politics is connected to an epistemology of storytelling. I will conclude with a brief textual exploration of her version of the Dreyfus story which demonstrates what it means to invent a political theory

⁹Benjamin R. Barber, "Conceptual Foundations of Totalitarianism," in Totalitarianism in Perspective, ed. C.J. Friedrich, M. Curtis, and B.R. Barber (New York: Praeger, 1969), pp. 3-52.

of storytelling.

Totalitarianism shatters the foundations of political science and political philosophy because it is an "outrage to common sense."¹⁰ It is a kind of government that violates the utilitarian premises of our political theory, and confounds the ways in which we differentiate regime types. It is a phenomenon that defies our usual definitions of crime and punishment. Most important, it is unprecedented in the history of anti-Semitism because it is not simply an attack on Jews but a full-scale war against humanity itself for which the Jewish people provided the first battleground.

Mainstream political science and political theory conceives of a political regime as a contract among rationally self-interested that exists to consolidate and maintain or increase power. Totalitarianism does not "respond to our commonly accepted research techniques and scientific concepts" because it is a politics from which this human person and social contract have disappeared.¹¹ The totalitarian regime is a mass political organization whose strength comes not from the capacity to represent interests, but from the sheer force of numbers.¹² It demands the "total, unrestricted, unconditional loyalty of the individual member" which it secures by means of

¹⁰Arendt, Antisemitism, p. 3.

¹¹Arendt, "Techniques," p. 51.

¹²Arendt, Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), p. 6.

a combination of ideology and terror.¹³ Totalitarian ideology claims to know and embody the laws of history which is conceived not as the story of humanity but as a process that exists independently of and in opposition to human action. While the legitimacy of a democratic government consists in its respect for the rights of its citizens, that of a totalitarian regime depends on its capacity to realize the laws of history in the present. Thus, no totalitarian government can exist without terror and the concentration camp. The former is the means by which human spontaneity is discouraged and human interference with the laws of history made impossible; the latter is the place in which terror is institutionalized.

The unprecedented character of totalitarianism lies in its conception of law. Governments claim legitimacy on the grounds that they have crafted positive laws in accordance with the immutable principles ordained by God or nature. They admit the impossibility of complete knowledge of these laws, or their perfect realization in human history. In the totalitarian state, the supreme law is the "will of the Fuhrer."¹⁴ His will, however, is not like that of the tyrant, a purely personal, arbitrary will. Instead, the Fuhrer claims to be the personification of the Law of Nature, the instrument of the logic of "race" realizing itself in history. Ruled by the will of the Fuhrer, the embodiment of the law of history, the

¹³Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 63.

totalitarian regime proclaims itself to be the realization of perfect justice on earth, government directly by the laws of History or Law of Nature.

Totalitarian ideology rests on a philosophy of history as process, which is a perversion of the work of Marx and Darwin. Both conceive of history in evolutionary terms, Marx speaks of the perfection of democracy in a classless society and Darwin of the perfection of the species through natural selection. While Marx and Darwin both argue that man participates in history's unfolding, totalitarian ideology posits the laws of history and nature as absolutes and human action as interference with their perfect realization. "Terror and concentration camps psychologically are the calculated means by which men are reduced to bundles of reactions which can be replaced at any time by other bundles of reactions which will behave in exactly the same, predictable way."¹⁵ The attempt to make way for the free play of History, conceived as a force outside of human action, is "the most radical denial of human freedom."¹⁶

The decisive difference between democracy and totalitarianism is that in the former humanity is active within

¹⁵Arendt, unpublished "Memo: Research Project on Concentration Camps," 10 December 1948, Library of Congress, p. 2.

¹⁶Arendt, "On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding," p. 1, unpublished early draft of "Understanding and Politics," Partisan Review 20 (July-August 1953). Hereafter cited as "Essay."

boundaries established by the rule of law; in the latter, however, it is terror that rules over a submissive humanity in order "to make it possible for the force of nature or of history to race freely through mankind; unhindered by any spontaneous human action."¹⁷ Law in a democratic regime is the guarantor of human freedom. It corresponds to what Arendt will later call "natality"--the potential that each of us carries at birth to create a new beginning.

The laws hedge in each new beginning and at the same time assure its freedom of movement, the potentiality of something entirely new and unpredictable; the boundaries of positive laws are for the political existence of man what memory is for his historical existence: they guarantee the pre-existence of a common world, the reality of some continuity which transcends the individual life span of each generation, absorbs all new origins and is nourished by them.¹⁸

Where firmly constituted laws clear a space for the free movement of individuals, laws in motion make action impossible. This has the effect of destroying the human condition of natality.

The totalitarian conception of law defies the customary distinction between legitimate and illegitimate government. Arendt writes, "[I]nstead of saying that totalitarian government is unprecedented, we could also say that it has exploded the very alternative on which all definitions of the essence of governments have been based in political philosophy,

¹⁷Arendt, Totalitarianism, p. 163.

¹⁸Ibid.

this is the alternative between lawful and lawless government, between arbitrary and legitimate power."¹⁹ The distinction between arbitrary power and lawful rule turns on the question of law; while the tyrant recognizes no limit to his will, legitimate governments are constrained by the framework of the constitution. "Totalitarian rule is 'lawless' insofar as it defies all positive laws; but it is not arbitrary insofar as it obeys in strict logic and executes in precise compulsion those laws of History or of Nature from which all positive laws are supposed to spring."²⁰ The claim of the totalitarian regime to embody the laws of history or nature is hubristic: it places the government and its administrators beyond the reach of human judgment.²¹

The significance of the totalitarian philosophy of history is that it, unlike any other regime, renders humanity superfluous. Where even the tyrant exercises judgment, though it is solely in response to personal will, the concept of history as a process subordinates all levels of government to the "will" of history. Totalitarianism works by creating a fictional reality around the central reassuring fiction "that all happenings are scientifically predictable according to the laws of nature or economics."²² Political judgment is neither

¹⁹Ibid., p. 159.

²⁰Arendt, "Essay," p. 30.

²¹Arendt, Totalitarianism, p. 160.

²²Ibid., p. 81.

possible nor necessary for the inhabitants of this fabricated world because they are not agents who act on their own inclination, but executors of a law they perceive to be greater than themselves and humanity. The annihilation of political judgment not only renders meaningless our traditional notions of crime and punishment but also further guarantees the superfluity of human beings.

Arendt cites Socrates' teaching that it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong as the foundation of law and order in the Western system of beliefs.²³ Socrates' precept rests on the assumption that the soul--the principle of human individuation--is immortal and therefore impervious to physical attack, but the immortality of the soul was guaranteed by remembrance in the world. In the conclusion to Origins, Arendt argues that the substantive evil of the concentration camp is that it robs the victims of the possibility of remembrance after death by taking entire communities out of the world at once and killing them without witnesses.²⁴ The inmates were not so much murdered as erased, taken from the world where they existed as individuals to a place where they are made superfluous by systematic execution in the gas chambers. In the face of crimes against humanity--which is to say human

²³Hannah Arendt, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship," unpublished long draft of lecture in Boston, 1964, Library of Congress, p. 3. Hereafter cited as "Responsibility."

²⁴Arendt, Totalitarianism, p. 156.

individuality--it is no longer possible to agree with Socrates that it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong. For the victim who dies in anonymity, the question becomes absurd because no memory lives on to be judged.

One tradition-breaking aspect of totalitarianism is its substitution of the rule of law with the rule of terror. Terror is the engine of history conceived as a process that works its way in the world independently of human action. Total ideology renders human beings superfluous by its radical denial of human freedom and human judgment. Superfluity, the antithesis of individuality, destroys all grounds in the Western political tradition for obedience to law.

Totalitarianism is also an unprecedented event in the history of anti-Semitism. Arendt argues that Jews were not the focus of the Nazi policy, but were rather "used by Nazism as the amalgamator" of racial hatred.²⁵ They were intended as the first, but not the only victims in the campaign for race purity. While the choice of the Jews as a starting-point is not insignificant, it is unlike anything else in the history of anti-Semitism because it occurs in the context of the wish to eradicate not only Jews in particular but human freedom in general: "the physical extermination of the Jewish people, was a crime against humanity, perpetrated upon the body of the Jewish people,...only the choice of victims not the nature of

²⁵Arendt, unpublished outline for Origins, "The Elements of shame," 1946, Library of Congress, p. 1. Hereafter cited as "Shame."

the crime, could be derived from the long history of Jew-hatred and anti-Semitism."²⁶ The first volume of Origins attempts to explain how this unprecedented crime against humanity crystallized around the Jews.

The ultimate horror of totalitarianism, and its ultimate distinguishing characteristic is that it is nothing less than an "attempt at robbing man of his very nature."²⁷ Here is an example of a place where Arendt, the outsider, makes use of a vocabulary that distorts her fundamental message. The centerpiece of her argument against totalitarianism is the idea that if there is no immutable human nature, anything that threatens human action is a particularly virulent enemy.

The concentration camps are the laboratories in the experiment of total domination, for human nature, being what it is, this goal can be achieved only under the extreme circumstances of a human-made hell. Total domination is achieved when the human person, who somehow is always a specific mixture of spontaneity and being conditioned, has been transformed into a completely conditioned being whose reactions can be calculated even when he is led to certain death.²⁸

When Arendt argues that totalitarianism aims to change the nature of man, what she means is that by a combination of ideology--history as a process--and terror--the concentration camp--it radically alters the human condition and destroys the capacity for free action and speech.

²⁶Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem (New York: viking, 1983), p. 261.

²⁷Arendt, "Essay," p. 4.

²⁸Arendt, "Techniques," p. 60.

Natality, the human potential for a new beginning, and plurality, the web of relationships that is constitutive of reality, are the important conditions of political life. We have already seen that the arbitrariness of law in a totalitarian regime counters natality by making action almost impossible. Arendt identifies the basic experience in human life that finds distinctive expression in totalitarianism as loneliness. While all tyrannies prey on isolation which is the inability to combine for political action, "totalitarian domination as a form of government is new in that it is not content with this isolation and destroys private life as well. It bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man."²⁹ This experience of radical disorientation, "not belonging to the world at all," is the destruction of the human condition of plurality without which we can not think sensibly.

Arendt's idea that plurality is a fundamental human condition means that we are social beings who need public life, life in the company of equals who listen to us and receive what we create, to convince ourselves that we are real. Our confidence in the reality of everything but the most basic physical sensations depends on "common sense which regulates and controls all other senses and without which each of us would be enclosed in his own particularity of sense data which

²⁹Arendt, Totalitarianism, p. 173.

in themselves are unreliable and treacherous."³⁰ Arendt is not, like a relativist, denying the existence of a shared world or shared reality. Rather, she calls our attention to the extent to which our confidence in reality depends on exchanging perceptions with others. This is certainly the case in politics, where events can be subject to multiple interpretations depending on one's ideological perspective, but will ring true also if we think about relationships with friends or lovers whose reality depends on the confidences we share together.

The real horror of totalitarianism is the "denaturing" of the human being by the twofold destruction of the conditions of natality and plurality. The structure of the totalitarian regime is a fictional world in which authentic speech--the sole basis of fact--is destroyed. The totalitarian regime is like an onion with the leader in the center surrounded by the elite, the party members, and a front of sympathizers.³¹ The front is composed of the masses who are alienated, isolated, and incapable of organization on the grounds of "determined, limited, obtainable goals."³² The movement provides 'mass man' with a mission that invests him not with simple human dignity but with historical significance. Because "the ultimate test

³⁰Ibid., pp. 173-74.

³¹Arendt, "What is Authority?" in Between Past and Future (New York: Penguin, 1983), p. 103.

³² Arendt, Totalitarianism, p. 9.

of what he does has been removed beyond the experience of his contemporaries," the words of the leader can never be challenged by the mass and they are deprived of the opportunity for political judgment.

The inner layer of the movement is populated by the party members who are cynical about the leader's words which they know to be a facade for the outside world, and contemptuous of the masses that believe them. At the center of the movement is the Leader and the elite who have contempt for history and contempt for fact, "for in their opinion fact depends entirely on the power of man who can fabricate it."³³ The layers of this onion function to destroy fact and political judgment, which is impossible without it. The confidence of the front organization makes the movement seem honest and genuine to the outside world, while the cynicism of the party members and the elite insulates what the leader does from what he says. The gradation of cynicism and arrogance within the organization protects the leader from accountability.

This regime would be most threatened by the encroachment of factual reality. It is a potentially devastating weapon, but one against which totalitarian regimes take care to secure themselves.

The point is that the impact of factual reality, like all other human experiences, needs speech if it is to survive the moment of experience, needs talk and communication with others to remain sure of itself. Total domination succeeds to the extent that it

³³Ibid., p. 48.

succeeds in interrupting all channels of communication, those from person to person inside the four walls of privacy no less than the public ones which are safeguarded in democracies by freedom of speech and opinion.³⁴

The stories that first emerged from concentration camp survivors after the war were so atrocious that the public dismissed them as post-war propaganda.³⁵ In fact, the Nazis anticipated that survivors' accounts of what went on in the darkness of the extermination camps would be disbelieved in the light of the public realm, and counted on it to protect them.³⁶ What struck Arendt, and what even the Nazis did not foresee, constitutes the essential unprecedented horror of the extermination camp: that the survivors themselves were never sure if what they were experiencing was real or a nightmare.

The journey to the camps and life in them was designed to sever the inmates from the web of relationships that constitutes reality. Taken from society at random by an arbitrary arrest, separated from the social world in which moral standards can exist, and subjected to routine torture, the prisoners lost the capacity to conceive or to execute meaningful action. No longer living under human social conditions, they could no longer be said to be human. Missing

³⁴Hannah Arendt, "Totalitarian Imperialism: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution," Journal of Politics 20 (1958), p. 25.

³⁵Arendt, "Approaches to the 'German Problem,'" Partisan Review 12 (Winter 1945), p. 94.

³⁶Arendt, "Techniques," p. 54.

from their neighborhoods and thrown into a world emptied of everything that makes everyday life plausible, the inmates became invisible even to themselves.

The brunt of Arendt's argument regarding the unprecedentedness of totalitarianism rests on this idea of a radical change in "human nature" that renders human beings superfluous. The fact that the traditions of Western philosophy and politics are ill-equipped to conceive of such a crime is evidenced by the difficulties Arendt has in expressing it. Though she relies on the standard language of "human nature," the radical evil of totalitarianism is that there is no immutable human form. Total domination occurs when "the human person, who somehow is always a specific mixture of spontaneity and being conditioned," is placed inside a world from which the conditions of human action--natality and plurality--have been removed. Eric Voegelin's review of the book is further evidence of the tradition-breaking character of Arendt's argument.

Eric Voegelin's review of Origins exemplifies the insider's response to an outsider's work. His critique of Arendt's interpretation of totalitarianism as an unprecedented phenomenon is actually a reassertion of traditional ways of seeing. He argues that totalitarianism is not unprecedented at all but can be understood in terms of the breakdown of western civilization that dates back to the gradual secularization of the spirit that begins with the end of the Middle ages.

Further, he charges that her contention that totalitarianism changes human nature misunderstands the concept of nature.

Voegelin argues that it is a misunderstanding of the concept "nature" to claim that nature is susceptible to transformation.

'Nature' is a philosophical concept; it denotes that which identifies a thing as a thing of this kind and not of another one. A 'nature' cannot be changed or transformed; a 'change of nature' is a contradiction of terms; tampering with the 'nature' of a thing means destroying the thing. To conceive the idea of 'changing the nature' of man (or anything) is a symptom of the intellectual breakdown of Western civilization.³⁷

The idea that Arendt has "misused" the concept of human nature typifies the kinds of misinterpretations that happen to someone who challenges the tradition in which she writes. Arendt's thesis is that traditional philosophic concepts--human nature among them--are no longer relevant to public life. Arendt later identifies the fundamental source of the dispute between Voegelin and herself as the insider-outsider problem. At the New School in 1969 she remarked to students in her "Philosophy and Politics" class that, "[S]o far as political philosophy still exists, it is being taught by the traditionalists--Voegelin, a Platonist, Strauss, and Aristotelian, Kojeve, a Hegelian. Each of them believes that the tradition is valid and that the main problems are being solved."³⁸ To Arendt, the

³⁷Voegelin, "Origins," p. 74.

³⁸Arendt, unpublished lecture from a course at the New School for Social Research, New York, on "Philosophy and Politics," 1969, Library of Congress.

task of political philosophy is not to preserve the tradition but to move outside it to find ideas that are more useful to tasks of moral judgment in the modern world.

In her reply to Voegelin's review, Arendt re-states her thesis that totalitarianism is an unprecedented form of government as it is "a much more radical liquidation of freedom as a political and as a human reality than anything we have ever witnessed before."³⁹ That six million human beings could be slaughtered was historical evidence for Arendt that human spontaneity could be neutralized. She writes:

Under these conditions, it will hardly be consoling to cling to an unchangeable nature of man and conclude that either man himself is being destroyed or that freedom does not belong to man's essential capabilities. Historically we know of man's nature only insofar as it has existence, and no realm of eternal essences will ever console us if man loses his essential capabilities.⁴⁰

The disciplines of religion and philosophy conceive of our humanity as something that is guaranteed by forces beyond the human world, such as a divine Being or realm of intrinsic values. Arendt rejects this reassuring conception of humanity for the idea that we are real only when human activity appears--is seen and heard--in the world.

Voegelin's criticism of the book, as Arendt notes in her response, is self-contradictory. At first, he agrees with the argument Arendt herself makes with respect to the fact that the

³⁹Arendt, "A Reply," p. 83.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 83-84.

trend toward behaviorism in the social sciences leaves the political theorist without tools to understand totalitarianism. Voegelin departs from Arendt, arguing that she draws the scope of her inquiry too narrowly, confining it to the institutional breakdown of the nation state which she fails to see as a symptom of a "spiritual disease" in the process of evolution from the "rise of immanentist sectarianism since the Middle Ages."⁴¹ Voegelin argues that the totalitarian ideal of a perfect society to be realized genetically by purifying the human race is just another display of the fact that the "Christian faith in transcendental perfection through the grace of God has been converted--and perverted--into the idea of immanent perfection through an act of man."⁴²

Voegelin first argues that it is the fact that spiritual disease is invisible to positivist social science that misleads Arendt about the nature of totalitarianism. "The catastrophic manifestation of the revolution, the massacre and misery of millions of human beings, impress the spectator so strongly as unprecedented in comparison with the immediately preceding more peaceful age that the phenomenal difference will obscure the essential sameness."⁴³ He then reverses himself, charging that the "organization of the book is somewhat less strict than it could be, if the author had availed herself more readily of the

⁴¹Voegelin, "Origins," p. 74.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., p. 69.

theoretical instruments which the present state of science puts at her disposition."⁴⁴

Voegelin goes on to make a more serious charge, based on this same theme. With the argument that totalitarianism does in fact effect a change in human nature, Voegelin claims shows Arendt reveals her participation in the breakdown of Western civilization because she "adopts the immanentist ideology."⁴⁵ He is careful to qualify this statement, saying that Arendt is clearly not an advocate of "National Socialist and Communist atrocities," but that her "typically liberal, progressive, pragmatist attitude toward philosophical problems" leaves her without ethical grounds to condemn totalitarian movements.⁴⁶ Arendt is a nihilist, Voegelin argues, because she misconstrues the concept "human nature."

What is significant here is that Voegelin does not recognize that Arendt is trying to invent tools that will make a phenomenon like totalitarianism visible to the social sciences. We have examined Arendt's argument that the crime of totalitarian domination is incomprehensible in terms of Western political theory and philosophy. An equally powerful, though less explicit, aspect of Origins is Arendt's argument that the phenomenon of totalitarianism is invisible to and, to a degree, perpetuated by the methodology of the social sciences.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 72.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 75.

⁴⁶Ibid.

One great methodological obstacle to the writing of Origins is the problem of critical historiography. Arendt wrote of the holocaust that "human history has known no story more difficult to tell."⁴⁷ She argued that in the absence of a viable moral tradition it was difficult if not impossible to tell a story that does not preserve but criticizes an event. She argues that chronological historical writing "is by its very nature a justification and even a glorification; the retracing of historical events in [a] formal continuous form can't but have as supreme aim the conservation of the temporal and its handing into the memory of mankind."⁴⁸ The problem of writing a history that is critical of the event is solved by polemic or satire, but this approach is permitted only when the author "stands--even without knowing it--on the firm basis of traditional values on which judgments are formed and against which events are measured."⁴⁹ Arendt believed that she wrote in an age when no such firm ground existed and that her task as political theorist was not simply to tell the story of totalitarianism, but to invent a new way of explaining political phenomena; Origins is consequently not written chronologically but fit together like "a jigsaw-puzzle."

⁴⁷Arendt, "The Image of Hell," Commentary 2 (Sept 1946), p. 292.

⁴⁸Hannah Arendt, "Imperialism," book outline to Mary Underwood at Houghton Mifflin, August 16, 1946, Arendt papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁹Ibid.

Voegelin criticizes Arendt's method of organization which he argues is "emotionally determined."⁵⁰ Once again his criticism is self-contradictory. On one hand he claims that "[T]he delimitation of subject matter through the emotions aroused by the fate of human beings is the strength of Dr. Arendt's book."⁵¹ But on the other hand, he argues that her emotional response to totalitarianism clouds her judgment and leads her to conclude mistakenly that it is an unprecedented phenomenon. Just as his attack on the idea that totalitarianism changes human nature touched the most radical aspect of Arendt's departure from traditional concepts, Voegelin's challenge to the organization of Origins attacks her at the most radical point of her departure from traditional methods.

As we have seen, Arendt deliberated over the structure of Origins because of the problem of critical historiography in the absence of an unambiguous moral tradition. She fits Origins together as she does to fulfill what she saw as the moral imperative of the political theorist--the recovery of meaning in the modern age. For Arendt, this enterprise begins not with the construction of ethical systems in the abstract but with the excavation of the historical watersheds of the modern age to uncover the elements that enabled them to happen, and spur the present generation to come to terms with its past.

⁵⁰Voegelin, "Origins," p. 70.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 71.

A story is a better answer to this task because it is open to interpretation in a way that the first hand account, the "objective" statistical report, or dispassionate analysis cannot be and, as a consequence, sparks conversation where the others silence it. Arendt integrates her own moral responses into the language she uses to describe totalitarianism in Origins in a deliberate attempt to be controversial. This is a radical approach to social science because, depending on whether one is an outsider or an insider, it either violates or re-defines scientific objectivity.

Arendt intends her method to challenge the notion of objectivity, although she does not reveal this until Voegelin challenges her. In response to his criticism of her emotional account, she contests the traditional understanding of objectivity.

Let us suppose--to take one among many possible examples--that the historian is confronted with excessive poverty in a society of great wealth, such as the poverty of the British working classes during the early stages of the industrial revolution. The natural human reaction to such conditions is one of anger and indignation because these conditions are against the dignity of man. If I describe these conditions without permitting my indignation to interfere, I have lifted this particular phenomenon out of its context in human society and have thereby robbed it of part of its nature, deprived it of one of its important inherent qualities....I therefore cannot agree with Professor Voegelin that the "morally abhorrent and the emotionally existing will overshadow the essential," because I believe them to form an integral part of it.⁵²

Her "description of the camps as hell on earth is more

⁵²Arendt, "A Reply," p. 78.

'objective,' that is, more adequate to their essence than statements of a purely sociological or psychological nature," because it does not abstract the camps from the context of our moral response to them.⁵³

Throughout the writing of Origins, Arendt is concerned to construct the story she tells in a way that respects the fragility of reality. "Reality needs us to safeguard it," she writes to David Reisman.⁵⁴ This fragility imposes on the historian the obvious responsibility not to lie, but also to tell the story in a way that does not misrepresent the conditions of human action. If Arendt argues that the radical evil of totalitarianism consists in reconstructing the human condition so as to render human beings superfluous to the unfolding of history, she must be careful to set this story in a conceptual framework that does not itself deny human freedom.

In articles and essays published at the same time she was writing Origins, Arendt criticizes the conceptual framework of the social sciences which, at the time she wrote, were in the throes of the behavioral revolution that was sparked by the emergence of survey research. Early on, the instrument of the survey and technique of statistical analysis seemed to offer the possibility that the "soft sciences" could model themselves

⁵³Ibid., p. 79.

⁵⁴Hannah Arendt, "Letter to David Reisman re: his memos on Origins," 13 June 1949, Library of Congress.

after the natural sciences.⁵⁵ Arendt argues that the human condition of natality, whereby each of us inserts ourselves unpredictably into history, is in tension with the concepts of cause and effect and predictability that political scientists appropriated from Newton's universe. This trend in the social sciences parallels that aspect of totalitarianism which seeks to destroy the condition of human action in that "[B]elief in causality, in other words, is the historian's way of denying human freedom which, in terms of the political and historical sciences, is the human capacity of making a new beginning."⁵⁶ Arendt rejects statistical methods because they cannot measure action. She writes, "the justification of statistics is that deeds and events are rare occurrences in everyday life and in history."⁵⁷ The behaviorist assumes the existence of a world without spontaneity in which everything humans do can be predicted and characterizes action not as the quintessential human activity but as a departure from the norm. Ironically, statistical social science is best suited not for the realm of politics--which is a realm of action--but for something like the concentration camp in which the conditions for spontaneous

⁵⁵One irony of this whole period is that the social sciences, in assimilating the categories of "hard science," construed concepts of objectivity, causality, and predictability in the manner of classical physics. Modern physics is much more modest in its epistemological claims. Arendt notes this irony in her essay "The Concept of History," in Between Past and Future, p. 49.

⁵⁶Arendt, "Essay," p. 7.

⁵⁷Arendt, Condition, p. 42.

action are systematically destroyed.

Implicit in the process of writing Origins is Arendt's search for an alternative to the vocabulary of cause and effect which she finds, somewhat paradoxically, in the language of physics. In an early precis of the book, Arendt writes, "[F]ull-fledged imperialism in its totalitarian form is an amalgam of certain elements which are present in all political conditions and problems of our time."⁵⁸ The idea of an amalgamation of elements is Arendt's initial formulation of a non-causal metaphor. This formulation is reflected in the titles she planned for the book at this time, either "The Elements of Shame: Antisemitism - Imperialism - Racism" or "The Three Pillars of Hell...." She finally settles on the concept "origins of totalitarianism," which she describes as "an historical account of the elements which crystallized into totalitarianism...."⁵⁹ She draws a distinction between crystallization and causality: "[E]lements by themselves never cause anything; they become origins of events if and when they suddenly crystallize into fixed and definite forms."⁶⁰ Arendt's use of the crystallization metaphor rejects the language of necessity for that of contingency.

Arendt identifies an alternative to statistical techniques in a proposal for a research project on the concentration camps

⁵⁸Arendt, "Outline," emphasis added.

⁵⁹Arendt, "A Reply," p. 78.

⁶⁰Arendt, "Essay," p. 7.

she submitted to Jewish Social Studies. She proposes to study the camps by reading primary source documents and conducting interviews with Jewish and non-Jewish inmates of Nazi and Soviet camps.⁶¹ It was urgent that these interviews take place "as soon as possible because misrepresentations will become more frequent."⁶² Arendt argues that only by drawing comparisons between data from a variety of primary sources--the documents and interviews--could historians reconstruct a truthful picture of conditions in the camps.

Great accumulation of material will necessarily bring many repetitions yet without such accumulation no truthful results can be expected. The reports from the world of the dead are written for the world of the living, written by people who want to escape certain memories (therefore the need for interviews), to prove that their personality did not disintegrate, to demonstrate that they are not the scum of the earth, to adjust constantly to expectations, real or alleged, to conform to normal standards. Only comparisons can bring out the truth and only a great wealth of material can secure scientific checks and control.⁶³

The interview is a methodology for social science research that moves beyond the limitations of both statistical studies and first hand accounts, neither of which could depict the reality of the concentration camp as an experiment that changed human nature. Statistics on numbers of deaths or even on

⁶¹Arendt, unpublished "Memo: Research Project on Concentration Camps," for Jewish Social Studies, 10 December 1948, Library of Congress, p. 4.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

suicide rates cannot explain the ways in which the process of deportation and conditions in the camps gradually wore down the inmates' resistance. The survivors, who have first hand knowledge of that gradual loss of human spontaneity, deny it because their ability to go on living depends on believing that they did not disintegrate morally and intellectually under the conditions of the camp. The interviewer is a sympathetic listener who can interpret the data because "...these experiences are not only blind and horrifying happenings but who, through their insight into the working and ideals of democracy, possess the yardstick with which to measure this horror."⁶⁴

Arendt's proposal sheds additional light on her understanding of storytelling and the role of the storyteller. As in the Varnhagen book, Arendt claims neither empathic unity with nor objective distance from her subject which is the concentration camp victim. If the story is to be told well, the storyteller must have sympathy with the subject and stand outside their experience by coming after it in time.

Storytellers, by virtue of the fact that they come on the scene when the experience is over, have access to themes that were present but invisible beforehand. Validity in a story is not a question of objectivity but comprehensiveness, incorporating a variety of themes. No story is ever an all-inclusive account of an event because the storyteller must

⁶⁴Ibid.

select themes in order to organize the tale. The selection of themes not only determines the shape of the story, but declares the identity of the storyteller. Hannah Arendt reveals herself when she announces that totalitarianism is a story about the destruction of human freedom to be measured by the yardstick of democracy, and when she says that she will not tell Rahel Varnhagen's life in terms of the "woman question."

The essays and research proposals for Origins make an argument for storytelling on the grounds of the conditions of politics in general, as a response to the particular phenomenon of totalitarianism, and as an answer to the moral imperative of political theory in the modern age. Storytelling is a consequence of the fact that Arendt defines politics in terms of action and identifies natality and plurality as conditions of action. The study of human freedom demands a method that can distinguish action from behavior. This means it must be able to record speech--the principle of individuation in public--without picking up raw feeling and emotion which are purely subjective and private until subject to the mediation of exchange and discussion.

Storytelling is also a response to the particular characteristics of the phenomenon of totalitarianism. Arendt uses the language of elements to suggest that totalitarianism originates in social factors that are hidden underneath the surface of politics. She writes that the elements of totalitarianism belong "to those subterranean streams of

Western history which have but recently come into the open."⁶⁵ Discerning hidden origins is not the job of the scientist but of the storyteller because they "are not open to inspection and analysis, but can be reached only by the uncertain way of interpretation and speculation."⁶⁶

The skills of the novelist are better suited to the task of explaining the phenomenon of totalitarianism because the novelist is an observer and recorder of society and totalitarianism became possible in an age when the social and public realms had merged. The engulfing of politics by society meant the replacement of the citizen "who was concerned with public affairs as the affairs of all," with the bourgeois "who judged and used all public institutions by the yardstick of his private interests."⁶⁷ This distinction between the public realm as a realm of common interest and the social realm as that of economics is fundamental to the critique of modernity that Arendt will develop in The Human Condition. We must relegate difference to the social and private realms in order that the public realm, which exists only by virtue of the fact that diverse individuals choose to give themselves equal rights before the law, can survive. When these two spheres cross, society absorbs law and the state and social prejudice dictates

⁶⁵Arendt, "Shame," p. 1.

⁶⁶Hannah Arendt, "Home to Roost," The New York Review of Books (26 June 1975), p. 4

⁶⁷Arendt, Totalitarianism, p. 34.

the rules of politics which, in the case of the Holocaust, resulted in a public policy of exterminating Jews. Thus, the novelist becomes a political theorist when we lose the capacity to distinguish the social from the political and difference becomes relevant to politics.

Arendt attributes the emergence of totalitarianism to the growth of "bourgeois politics" and the rise of imperialism which is the paradigmatic expression of bourgeois political values. Where the republican ideal of politics conceives of domestic community in terms of equality and human rights and international community in terms of the balance of power, imperialism is the product of the infusion of commercial goals and commercial values into politics. Imperialist community is based not on abstract principles of right but on humans' ability to labor, need to consume, and desire to develop new work forces and new markets. Arendt argues that imperialism made politics efficient for businessmen who had previously been too busy accumulating capital to have any interest in government. They had been private persons, concerned with moneymaking and socialized to a sub-society ruled by the laws of competitive advantage. When their capacity for production outgrew the investments possible within the bounds of the nation-state these businessmen began to seek political power, carrying with them their ideals of expansion and expediency, and their belief that competition and chance are the ultimate arbiters of events.

The explication of imperialism comes from Thomas Hobbes whom Arendt calls "the true, though never fully recognized, philosopher of the bourgeoisie because he realized that acquisition of wealth conceived as a never-ending process can be guaranteed only by the seizure of political power, for the accumulating process must sooner or later force open all existing territorial limits."⁶⁸ Arendt reads Leviathan as a kind of "bourgeois manifesto" which contains a complete picture of a bureaucratized world in which all things political are social centuries before it came into being.⁶⁹ The basis and ultimate end of Hobbes' state is the accumulation of power. It is constituted not according to divine law, natural law, or a social contract, but out of an amalgamation of its individual members' private interest in self-preservation which moves them out of their natural condition into a mutual compact that grants absolute power to a sovereign in the hope of securing protection against each other. This pact leaves self-interested man essentially unchanged: his primary responsibility is still to preserve himself. He owes his country no loyalty if it is defeated at war and can no longer guarantee his safety, or if the state itself threatens his safety because he has broken the law. There is no 'right' in this state, only power; consequently, law is not grounded in a standard of justice but proven in success.

⁶⁸Arendt, Imperialism, p. 26.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 19.

In Arendt's terms, the Hobbesian Commonwealth is a polity without a public space. The sovereign, like the bureaucrat, rules by decree, in accordance with his personal sense of justice rather than by public standards. A Commonwealth without public standards deprives its citizens of the chance to develop political judgment and of the need to contemplate and discuss questions of the common good.

People ruled by decree never know what rules them because of the impossibility of understanding decrees in themselves and the carefully organized ignorance of the circumstances and their practical significance in which all administrators keep their subjects.⁷⁰

The subjects of bureaucratic rule have no opportunity for communal action and nothing against which to measure themselves but each other.⁷¹ Generosity is impossible in this society because public relationships are based on competition, and amour propre or vanity erodes people's capacity for friendship because they try so hard to find something worthy of loving in themselves that they cannot appreciate value in others.

Arendt's "bourgeois politics" theory breaks with tradition on the question of the relationship between anti-Semitism and the politics of the nation state. Conventional attempts to explain the Holocaust in terms of nationalism argued that Jews provided the universal enemy needed for a reawakening of nationalistic unity. In Arendt's judgment, the Jews were not destroyed by the nation state but rather with it.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 124.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 21.

As a group, Western Jewry disintegrated together with the nation-state during the decades preceding the outbreak of the first World War. The rapid decline of Europe after the war found them already deprived of their former power, atomized into a herd of wealthy individuals. In an imperialist age, Jewish wealth had become insignificant; to a Europe with no sense of balance of power between its nations and of inter-European solidarity, the non-national, inter-European Jewish element became an object of universal hatred because of its useless wealth, and of contempt because of its lack of power.⁷²

Arendt's analysis suggests that we view the Jews as a kind of litmus test for the nation state. If the emancipation of the Jews is emblematic of the heyday of republican values, then their liquidation bears witness to the failure of the principles of equality and universal human rights.

There is a sense of irony or tragedy in Arendt as she describes the destruction of the nation-state by the emergence of bourgeois politics. The story of the rise of imperialism is a story of political change. It is not the kind of change that we are accustomed to talk about and that can be easily identified as a change of majority party, or change in "who rules?" Rather it is a more subtle and more profound change that occurs behind the scenes of things that appear in the political world. It is a "process of revaluation"⁷³ of the ruling principles of politics, namely by the infusion of social concerns into the political realm.

In addition to imperialism, internal contradictions in the

⁷²Arendt, Antisemitism, p. 15.

⁷³Arendt, Imperialism, p. 18.

principles of the nation-state played a role in contributing both to its decline and to the liquidation of the Jews.

The nation-state is grounded in the idea that there were "human rights" which were the inalienable possession of all men.

With the French Revolution, which combined the "rights of man" with the principle of national sovereignty, the nation-state came into contradiction with itself.

The same essential rights were at once claimed as the inalienable heritage of all human beings and as the specific heritage of specific nations, the same nation was at once declared to be subject to laws, which supposedly would flow from the Rights of Man, and sovereign, that is, bound by no universal law and acknowledging nothing superior to itself.⁷⁴

Arendt argues that this ambiguity in the nation-state's concept of authority opened the door for Hitler. Though in theory they are attributed to humanity in general, in practice, human rights were made contingent on nationality which meant that anyone who was not a citizen could be excluded from the protection of human rights. Hitler's first step in preparation for the gas chambers was to deprive Jews of their citizenship. The internal contradiction of the nation-state with respect to authority lends itself to the creation of a class of outsiders.

When Arendt argues that "social factors" directed the course of political anti-Semitism to its end in the Final Solution, she means that Jews' position as outsiders to the economic, religious, and social life of Europe in the late nineteenth century made it possible for anti-Semitism to be

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 110.

used as "amalgamator" for the politics of the Third Reich. Arendt blames the death camps on Jewish exceptionalism which she sees as a consequence of factors both external and internal to the Jewish community. Exceptionalism as a public policy draws the rhetoric of difference--the language of society--into the public realm. Nazi terror crystallized around the Jews because they were outsiders to the realm of republican virtue created by the nation-state.

Arendt analyzes Jewish exceptionalism in terms of its economic, religious, and social aspects. Economic exceptionalism resulted from the need of the emerging nation state to free itself from the aristocracy, establishing a power base in a class that was outside the social structure of feudalism. Jewish financiers provided the disinterested capital the nation state needed to establish itself as a representative of the "common good."⁷⁵ It is the fact that the Jews were granted emancipation--political freedom--but did not achieve assimilation--social freedom--that created the shadow myths which would become real arguments for persecution in the daylight of the Nazi regime.

Granting Jews political emancipation while giving them a special financial tie to the state preserved Jewish exceptionalism even as it attempted to give them the benefits of an impartial law. The very fact that Jewish emancipation was not a taken for granted result of the breakdown of the

⁷⁵Arendt, Antisemitism, p. 11.

feudal order, as it was for serfs, or a matter of course from the religious freedoms of any citizen is indicative of Jews' separation from class society. It was in the state's interest to prevent Jewish assimilation into society because of its need for financial support, which only the Jewish outsiders would grant, and because establishing itself as a body above all classes required that its financiers also be separate from particular class interests.

The phenomenon of exceptionalism was perpetuated by wealthy Jews whose power depended on their being distinguished from the masses of Jewish peasants. They resisted the political emancipation of the masses for fear that it would erode their own status.⁷⁶ The attitude of wealthy Jews toward the Jewish peasants revealed that they viewed emancipation not as true political equality but as an extension of the "privileges and special liberties" that Jews had always received for services rendered at court to the larger group of Jews required to finance the affairs of the nation.⁷⁷ By accepting rights as if they were privileges, Jews permitted themselves to be placed outside the full protection of the law.

The secularization of Judaism also perpetuated the myth of Jewish difference. Secularization had the effect of turning the traditional tenets of Judaism into racist ideology. It separated the concept of chosenness from the hope that the

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 33.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 18.

Messiah would come and found a Jewish nation, which made Jewish segregation from all other peoples a permanent condition. It also created the paradox by which the secularization of Judaism engenders Jewish chauvinism: the belief in the specialness of Jews persists but is no longer connected to a mission to benefit humanity.⁷⁸ Arendt argues that to the degree that they departed from the political teachings of Judaism, conceiving of the difference between themselves and other nations not as one of doctrine, but of "inner nature," Jews themselves prepared the ground for their own annihilation.⁷⁹ The subtle changes in the principles of secularized Judaism shaped the relationship of Jews to society: "Jewish origin, without religious and political connotation, became everywhere a psychological quality, was changed into 'Jewishness' and from then on could be considered only in the categories of virtue or vice."⁸⁰ It is from society's perversion of Jewishness into a quality, either virtuous or vicious, that Arendt traces the notion that Jews were a vermin which, in the perverse logic of totalitarian thinking, called for extermination.

As far as the Jews were concerned, the transformation of the 'crime' of Judaism into the fashionable 'vice' of Jewishness was dangerous in the extreme. Jews had been able to escape from Judaism into conversion; from Jewishness there was no escape. A crime, moreover, is met with punishment; a vice can only be exterminated. The interpretation given by society to

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 74.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. viii.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 83.

the fact of Jewish birth and the role played by Jews in the framework of social life are intimately connected with the catastrophic thoroughness with which antisemitic devices could be put to work. The Nazi brand of antisemitism had its roots in these social conditions as well as in political circumstances.⁸¹

The Nazis' antisemitism is located here, at the crossroads of the social and the political. The Nazis outlawed not the practice of Judaism but having Jewish blood. They punished this "crime" as if it were a vice, by exterminating all those who were "racially predestined" to develop the characteristics of Jewishness.

The social factor that enabled totalitarianism to crystallize around anti-Semitism is outsidership, perpetuated by the relationship between Jewish financiers and the nation state, the de-politicization of Judaism, and the status of Jews as "curiosities" in the Salons. The novelist with the best eye for these factors, according to Arendt, is Marcel Proust. Proust's Remembrance of Things Past, captures both the substance and the spirit of the salon of late nineteenth century France. Proust depicts the role of Jews in the salons of the French middle class and their fascination with the "vice" of Jewishness, which is so subtle and yet so crucial to Arendt's analysis of racist ideology and the phenomenon of exceptionalism. Because Proust's introspective style transforms all worldly events into inner experience,

[T]here is no better witness, indeed, of this period

⁸¹Ibid., p. 87.

when society had emancipated itself completely from public concerns, and when politics itself was becoming a part of social life. The victory of bourgeois values over the citizen's sense of responsibility meant the decomposition of political issues into their dazzling, fascinating reflections in society.⁸²

If Hobbes is the theorist of bourgeois values, then Proust is the storyteller of bourgeois politics because his work both documents and demonstrates the inversion of politics into society.

We have attempted to articulate Arendt's theory of storytelling by establishing its relationship to her conception of the human condition, to the enterprise of political theory, and to the particular phenomenon of totalitarianism. We have argued that she is predisposed to storytelling because she defines politics in terms of the conditions plurality and natality: only a story can explain an event without resorting to the language of cause and effect. Storytelling enables the political theorist to capture the meaning of an event by presenting it in the context of moral response, even in an age that is lacking in moral consensus. Finally, we have argued that stories, which penetrate to the level of social forces, are particularly appropriate to political theory in an age where the boundaries of politics and society are blurred. We are now ready to look at the most interesting story Arendt tells in Origins: the Dreyfus Affair.

Social antisemitism, which on its own would not have been

⁸²Ibid., p. 80.

fatal to the Jews, established the Jewish community as a target for the political antisemitism that destroyed it. Jews are not the focus of the story as Arendt tells it; rather, they are part of a larger theme of the decline of the nation state and republicanism in the face of the rise of the bourgeoisie. Political anti-Semitism appeared for the first time in 1870 when the first anti-Semitic political parties were formed as part of the imperialist program to destroy the nation-state and substitute the notions of conquest and power for the antiquated republican ideal of community based on equality and human rights. It also signified the end of the age of diplomacy: the ideology of "total war" destroyed the ideal of balance of power and nations stopped believing in the possibility of European solidarity.⁸³

Hannah Arendt said that the Dreyfus Affair was "a kind of dress rehearsal for the performance of our own time."⁸⁴ It offers the opportunity "of seeing, in a brief historical moment, the otherwise hidden potentialities of antisemitism as a major political weapon within the framework of nineteenth-century politics and its relatively well-balanced sanity."⁸⁵ Nineteenth century France gives her a context in which to observe the connections between political antisemitism and imperialism in a way that is not possible amid the widespread

⁸³Ibid., p. 22.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 10.

⁸⁵Ibid.

havoc of Nazism. This story contains all the themes that determine her analysis of totalitarianism as a whole. It exemplifies the problem of outsidership in that it showed the world "that in every Jewish nobleman and multimillionaire there still remained something of the old-time pariah, who has no country, for whom human rights do not exist, and whom society would gladly exclude from its privileges."⁸⁶ It also reveals the dynamic of bourgeois politics whereby the social and political merge, and the consequences of this dynamic for European Jews.

Arendt's treatment of the Dreyfus Affair demonstrates her thesis that the underlying causes of totalitarianism could be found in social factors. She shows us the political theorist in action as a storyteller. The choices she makes in telling the story--where she locates its beginning, whom she casts as its heroes and villains--are determined by her theoretical understanding of bourgeois politics. She casts the Dreyfus Affair, as she did the Holocaust, not purely in the context of anti-Semitism but as an attack on humanity in general.

Arendt feared that retrospective accounts that explained totalitarianism exclusively as an attack on Jews would enable it to be marginalized as a purely "Jewish Problem." This concerned her because she thought that if totalitarianism were not recognized as a watershed event of the twentieth century "world political developments may well again crystallize around

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 117.

hostility toward the Jews,"⁸⁷ leading to another attempt at global domination. Jewish intellectuals bore the responsibility to avert such a catastrophe by preventing the "Jewish problem" from being marginalized in retrospective discussions of totalitarianism.

Arendt wanted Commentary magazine to serve as a forum for Jewish intellectuals to analyze the forces that drove Jews "into the storm center of events." In a memo to Elliot Cohen, editor in chief, Arendt gives what might be seen as her vision of Oakeshott's conversation:

We lack an intelligentsia which has been grounded in history and educated through a long political tradition. We do not have a recognized intellectual atmosphere which forms a living bond between the scholar over the cultural writer, the political publicists, the editors, journalists, reporters down to the outright politicians. Such invisible bonds, among other peoples, serve as active ingredients of public opinion.⁸⁸

Arendt attempted to create this atmosphere by participating in each of the separate media. It is clear that she perceived her responsibility as a political theorist not to render final judgment on the Holocaust, but to create the conditions for public discussion of the event.

The Dreyfus Affair took place when the tradition of republicanism created an intellectual atmosphere in which political theory, through the medium of the partisan press,

⁸⁷Hannah Arendt to Elliot Cohen, "Memo on Research," undated, Library of Congress, p. 1.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 2.

could participate in the lived experience of politics. Arendt writes that in this time the "doctrine of equality before the law was still so firmly implanted in the conscience of the civilized world that a single miscarriage of justice could provoke public indignation from Moscow to New York."⁸⁹ French laws passed in 1881 that redefined the concept of libel and abolished censorship liberated the partisan press to participate actively in defining political realities by shaping public opinion about political events. In the case of Dreyfus, the press was to some extent the instigator not only of Dreyfus' reinstatement but of his very downfall. Edouard Drumont used first the Panama Scandal and later Dreyfus' arrest to boost his anti-Semitic paper Libre Parole (free speech) "from a small and politically insignificant sheet into one of the most influential papers in the country, with 300,000 circulation."⁹⁰ The war among the competing dailies is the model for the definition of conversation in Arendt's memo to Elliott Cohen.

The Dreyfus affair features many of the characters that would reappear forty years later--with a different cast--in the Nazi regime. In the supporting roles there is first the profiteer de Lesseps whose shady dealings with the French middle class over the construction of the Panama Canal summon up the antisemitism that, six years later, would circle Dreyfus

⁸⁹Arendt, Antisemitism, p. 91.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 96.

like the Furies. Racist logic makes its appearance in the Jesuit clergy, whose statutes requiring novices to prove their families pure of Jewish blood back to the fourth generation presage nazism.⁹¹ The Jesuits, who were trying to recapture for the church its old political power, opposed the integration of Jews into the army chain of command because Jewish officers would have been "immune to the influence of the confessional."⁹²

The main characters include Dreyfus himself and his family, who made themselves vulnerable to antisemitism by trying to move into high society through the military. They are classic parvenus whose preference for social success over political rights exemplifies the eclipse of public principles by social values. There is the hero of the piece, the publisher Georges Clemenceau, and the bohemian writers and scholars, pariahs all, who defended the parvenu. Finally, there is the mob for whom then, as in the twentieth century, the Jews are a favorite victim. To its simplistic vision, Jews hold a dual position of privilege in both the society and the state from which the mob has been excluded.

The Prologue takes place six years prior to the arrest of Dreyfus with the scandal of the Panama Company which went bankrupt in 1888. The company, charged with the responsibility for constructing the Panama Canal, financed its operations by

⁹¹Ibid, p. 102.

⁹²Ibid., p. 103.

securing loans from the French middle class with the aid of Parliamentary backing. Investigations conducted after the bankruptcy revealed that the company had not been solvent for several years, and that it had survived by bribing members of the Parliament, the Press, and public employees. Although there were no Jews among the bribed members of Parliament or on the company's board, Jewish middlemen--at high rates of commission--had distributed the payoffs.

The Panama scandal revealed that the Third Republic was a polity in decay: its Parliament was a commercial organization and its political representatives and civil servants had become businessmen who regarded politics as "the professional representation of vested interests."⁹³ It can hardly be expected that the French middle class, who did not object to the transformation of politics into business so long as their interests were protected, would attribute the scandal to the inherent decadence of a commercial polity. They chose instead to see the Jews, who were really only parasites on a body politic already corrupted by its use of political authority for commercial ends, as the source of pollution. The Panama scandal stands as a Prologue to the Dreyfus affair because from it French society learned to account for all the country's political and social ills with the simple diagnosis: "Jewish Problem."

It is Edouard Drumont, with his Libre Parole, who defined

⁹³Ibid., p. 116.

this political reality for the French. Drumont entered the spotlight when he received, from Jacques Reinach, the liaison between the Panama Company and Parliament, a list of corrupt politicians and the Jewish businessmen who had helped bribe them. Drumont published the list in installments, putting his paper at the center of the attention of both politicians and the French public.

The Panama scandal, which, in Drumont's phrase, rendered the invisible visible, brought with it two revelations. First it disclosed that the members of Parliament and civil servants had become businessmen. Secondly, it showed that the intermediaries between private enterprise (in this case the company) and the machinery of the state were almost exclusively Jews.⁹⁴

Drumont's anti-Semitic propaganda helped focus the anger of the French middle class on the Jews who were a safe target because they were outside the machinery of the state.

Georges Clemenceau, editor and publisher of L'Aurore, is the hero of the piece because he defends both Dreyfus and the republican principle of equality before the law against Drumont and the wave of political anti-Semitism. In French, "dawn," L'Aurore was a publication in the spirit of Enlightenment.

There was only one basis on which Dreyfus could or should have been saved. The intrigues of a corrupt Parliament, the dry rot of a collapsing society, and the clergy's lust for power should have been met squarely with the stern Jacobin concept of the nation based upon human rights--that republican view of communal life which asserts that (in the words of Clemenceau) by infringing on the rights of one you

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 96.

infringe on the rights of all.⁹⁵

Clemenceau is the hero of the story that Arendt tells because he saw in the attack on Dreyfus, as she did, the death of universal human rights and political freedom.

Clemenceau saw the defense of Dreyfus as a defense of the impartiality of the nation-state against the angry French middle class who wanted vengeance for the Panama fiasco. He stands in contrast to the family of Dreyfus who, because they believed more in the power of money to buy innocence than in the likelihood that innocence would be discovered by an impartial law, distributed cash as if they acted on behalf of a guilty man. The efforts of the family were futile not only because the Catholic bourgeoisie could match it dollar for dollar, but also because members of Parliament, who had seized the Dreyfus affair as a way to wash their hands of the Panama scandal, was impervious to appeal through the channels of its usual corruption.

The drama opens with the arrest of Dreyfus, his trial behind closed doors, and sentencing to lifelong deportation at Devil's Island. This incident and the series of trials petitioning for his reinstatement created an international spectacle. It was followed closely as a test of "the century's greatest achievement, the complete impartiality of the law."⁹⁶ Three years after the arrest, dissenting forces crystallized

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 106.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 91.

around the figure of Georges Clemenceau who knew himself not simply as the defender of one particular innocent man, but as the spokesman for "one of the oppressed peoples of Europe,"⁹⁷ and a champion of the republican ideals of "justice, liberty, and civic virtue" against the decadence of the French salons. Unlike the clergy, aristocracy, and the military, who felt no need to mask their prejudice against Dreyfus, Clemenceau and the Dreyfusards knew that the presence of an international audience meant that the honor of the French republic was at stake.

The climax of the drama finds Clemenceau and his forces assailing the courts and Parliament, armed with quill pens and the universal principles "justice," "fairness," and "republican pride." Opposing them was the rock-throwing mob that vandalized Jewish shops and violated Jews on the street. Society hostesses made small talk out of devising tortures for Dreyfus, and pamphleteers suggested various medieval punishments for Jews. Just as the language of bureaucracy would make murder into a routine for those who followed the Nazis, high society prattle and the standing of those who spoke it "made real, passionate violence look like harmless child's play."⁹⁸

The eventual victory of the Dreyfusards was not a triumph of republican principles, but rather a demonstration of the

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 118.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 107.

dynamics of mass politics. Arendt argues that the mob plays a critical role both in Nazism and in the Dreyfus Affair. "Mob" is the label she gives to political masses that are created by the destruction of the class structure because they share no identifiable political interests and so are incapable of organization except by means of propaganda that appeals to emotion and passion. The Dreyfus Affair reaches its denouement as the Dreyfusards gradually win the mob over to their side. Arendt makes a point of observing that they couldn't be roused by the pure rhetoric of justice, liberty, and the honor of the French republic, but would only take to the streets when convinced that there was danger to "their own class 'interests'."⁹⁹ The great drama ends with the revision of Dreyfus' sentence to ten years' imprisonment, and a Presidential pardon that relieves him from serving it. Dreyfus' pardon is a result of the intervention of a "deus ex machina" in the form of the Paris Exposition of 1900. The shift in Parliamentary feeling toward Dreyfus occurred because they feared the effects of a boycott on the exposition. An anticlimax, the pardon represents a victory not for liberty and justice but rather for commerce.

Arendt's treatment of the Dreyfus Affair in particular and totalitarianism as a whole enriches our theories of outsidership and storytelling. Outsidership is both a category of explanation in Origins and a method. She argues that Jewish

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 113.

outsidership is responsible for the fact that totalitarianism crystallized around anti-Semitism. But outsidership is a position of privilege as well as a position of risk. In the way she constructs the text, Arendt demonstrates that storytelling is the outsider's method of thinking about politics.

One of the weak points of the book, illustrated by the exchange with Voegelin, is the fact that Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism is informed by a conceptual framework that she has not yet articulated. In order to make sense of the work, it is necessary to both construct a methodology that Arendt never makes public and to look ahead to the analytical framework she sets forth in The Human Condition. It is now appropriate to look in greater depth at The Human Condition, where Arendt spells out the challenge to the Western political tradition that is merely implicit in the early text.

Chapter Four

A Different Voice: The Human Condition

...the mind of man has begun to wander in obscurity...where the categories of the past are no longer sufficient for our understanding....We cannot even understand properly our present situation, neither in philosophical terms nor in terms of the rules and prescriptions of common sense. The breakdown of common sense in the present world signalizes that politics by itself is no longer capable of even understanding the realm of human affairs. And that means that the problem of philosophy and politics, or the necessity for a new political philosophy from which could come a new science of politics is once more on the agenda.¹

Hannah Arendt writes the lexicon for this new political philosophy in The Human Condition, her most radical work. At its center is the claim that action is the distinguishing characteristic of political life and the distinctive capacity of human beings. She argues that neither political science nor political theory can understand political life because it was written "by men who were devoted to the contemplative way of life and who looked upon all kinds of being alive from that perspective."² She rebuilds the vocabulary of political philosophy to center it around action and establish storytelling as a methodology for political theory. Though she does not intend it, with The Human Condition Hannah Arendt initiates a discourse of women in the history of political thought.

The Human Condition foreshadows many feminist critiques of

¹Arendt, unpublished essay, "Philosophy and Politics: the Problem of Action and Thought after the French Revolution," 1954, Library of Congress, p. 54. Hereafter cited as "Philosophy and Politics."

²Arendt, Thinking, p. 6.

political philosophy. Her attack on the Platonism of Western political philosophy parallels feminists' critique of mind-body dualism. Her new political vocabulary comprehends the tension between individuality and interdependency and her political philosophy acknowledges that political action under the twofold condition of mutual dependence and diversity will always contain an element of tragedy. Because she defines politics in terms of action she must deny that political judgment requires that we remove ourselves from the world, but she will not deny that judgment is possible altogether: she presents storytelling as an alternative to rationalism.

The Human Condition is a new lexicon for political thinking that is oriented not toward philosophy but toward action. Arendt begins to articulate her new vision with the title, which challenges the traditional concept "human nature." As we saw in Origins, Arendt considers human nature a comforting fiction that she rejects for the idea that the human species exists only when human activity appears--is seen and heard in the world. The concept "human condition" expresses her sense of the fragility of human existence. The definitive human characteristics are mutable in the sense that they are not guaranteed by the essential properties of human nature but rather conditioned by the world.

It is important not to confuse Arendt's idea that we are conditioned beings with the notion that human beings are wholly determined by their environments. Arendt's concept human

condition means that life, worldliness, and plurality are requisite to our existence. In addition to these conditions under which life is given to us as a species, we participate in creating artificial conditions--the things of the world--that become as indispensable to human life as those which come from nature. Our existence is impossible without these things, but they, in turn, depend on us because they would "be a heap of unrelated articles, a non-world, if they were not the conditioners of human existence."³ Thus, while the world is the condition of the existence of human beings, our existence is in turn the condition of a meaningful world.

This concept of the human condition is evidence of Arendt's pragmatism. Human nature functions in the tradition as a ground for universal principles of law and morality. The Natural Law tradition posits "nature" as something that is universal to us all and can therefore ground abstract, general principles of law and morality. In rejecting human nature, she also rejects an epistemology based on abstract universal categories.

Under the conditions of a common world, reality is not guaranteed primarily by the "common nature" of all men who constitute it, but rather by the fact that, differences of position and the resulting variety of perspectives notwithstanding, everybody is always concerned with the same object.⁴

The Natural Law tradition is both idealistic in its yearning

³Arendt, Condition, p. 9.

⁴Ibid., p. 57.

for universal moral standards and pessimistic in that it resorts to a mythic "human nature" to guarantee the possibility of public ethical life. Arendt replaces the idea of universal morality grounded in nature with the more limited notion of public standards grounded in the world. Hers is at the same time a less idealistic and more optimistic view of ethics in that it asserts that limited consensus is possible if we give up the myth of the metaphysical unity of humanity for an appreciation of the world we share in common.

Now that we have considered the significance of the concept "human condition" in the abstract, we can look at the conditions Arendt identifies in her new political lexicon. Plurality is the most important word in Arendt's lexicon. She introduces it as "the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live."⁵ At its most basic level, plurality names human diversity, that "not Man but men inhabit this planet."⁶ Conceptually, it expresses the complementarity of individual liberty and equality, terms that the democratic tradition holds in a delicate balance. We tend to conceive liberty engaged in a struggle against both great equality and great inequality.

Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech, has the twofold character of equality and distinction. If men were not equal, they could

⁵Ibid., p. 8.

⁶Arendt, Thinking, p. 19.

neither understand each other and those who came before them, nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. Signs and sounds to communicate immediate, identical needs and wants would be enough.⁷

Politics is something we engage in voluntarily to display our unique excellence, and something we do out of necessity. This necessity is twofold. It is both a function of the conditions we share with present and future generations and of the fact that action and speech, the faculties through which we disclose ourselves, mean nothing if no one sees them.

The definitive characteristic of a political world conditioned on plurality is publicity. Publicity is so critical to Arendt's conception of politics, it is almost surprising that she did not name it as a distinct dimension of the human condition. She highlights the public aspect of plurality when she notes that "the realm of human affairs, strictly speaking, consists of the web of human relationships which exists wherever men live together."⁸ This web represents interdependency which results both from the fact that we are physical beings and from the fact that we are historical beings. She weaves the qualities of plurality and publicity together in the following passage:

...the reality of the public realm relies on the

⁷Arendt, Condition, pp. 175-76.

⁸Ibid., p. 183.

simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common denominator can ever be devised. For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects.⁹

Plurality means that there is no possibility of an Archimedean Point in public life. Public spaces exist only when there are differences in opinion and perspective among a group that gathers to discuss a question of common interest.

The uniqueness of Arendt's political theory is the tension that she maintains between individual and community. Plurality is the condition of distinctiveness and dependency. Each person is a unique actor whose individuality only manifests itself in concert with others. The public exists as a space for the celebration of individuality, yet we cannot reach it without supporters who understand our enterprise and care whether or not we succeed.

Speech is both the faculty of community and the vehicle of distinction and individuality. In fact, Arendt defines speech and action in terms of each other. She bases this understanding on Homer's Greece where she claims

...speech and action were considered to be coeval and coequal, of the same rank and the same kind; and this originally meant not only that most political action, in so far as it remains outside the sphere of violence, is indeed transacted in words, but more fundamentally that finding the right words at the right moment, quite apart from the information or

⁹Ibid., p. 57.

communication they may convey, is action.¹⁰

Disconnected from speech, action becomes a means to an end, and politics is synonymous with the pursuit of self-interest or organization of the forces of self-defense. Likewise, separated from action, speech communicates only fact and never promise, "as such it could be replaced by sign language which...[is] even more useful and expedient to convey certain meanings, as in mathematics and other scientific disciplines or in certain forms of teamwork."¹¹ Speech gives political action its capacity to remake the values of the present, and action ensures that speech will be more than rhetoric.

Next to plurality, the most important word in Arendt's lexicon is natality, the principle of new beginnings that is the impetus to action. Natality refers to the fact that each of us is a distinct individual with the capacity to begin something new on our own initiative. "With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance."¹² It is through "word and deed" that we disclose who we are; thus, action is inescapably public because the activity of self disclosure, unlike that of labor or

¹⁰Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹Ibid., p. 179.

¹²Ibid., pp. 176-177.

fabrication, requires an audience.

Acting is fulfilling promises that we make to the world. We cannot act without an audience because only the presence of others who hear what we promise can make us true to our words. Who we are depends on the interplay of promise and action.

Without being bound to the fulfillment of promises, we would never be able to keep our identities; we would be condemned to wander helplessly and without direction in the darkness of each man's lonely heart, caught in its contradictions and equivocalities--a darkness which only the light shed over the public realm through the presence of others, who confirm the identity between the one who promises and the one who fulfills, can dispel...forgiving and promising enacted in solitude or isolation remain without reality and can signify no more than a role played before one's self.¹³

This passage, one of Arendt's most beautiful, might be taken as a meditation on friendship and politics. It captures how profoundly related we are to one another in our psychic lives.¹⁴

Arendt argues that action is conditioned on natality to reveal that philosophy is fundamentally morbid. Philosophy is concerned with an eternal realm of timeless, immutable, and universal truths. Experience of the eternal corresponds to no human activity because it comes through contemplation which is something we do in utter solitude. The quiet of philosophy takes us out of our social lives; it is as Socrates regarded

¹³Ibid., p. 237.

¹⁴It rings true for me that no great action would ever be undertaken without commitment. But I wonder if this doesn't contradict her teaching about work being solitary, because the same is surely true about many creative projects.

it, preparation for a good death. Arendt sees in philosophy's concern for eternity a preoccupation with mortality.

Action, on the other hand, is concerned not with eternity but with earthly immortality, which we win through deeds whose fame persists when we are gone. The distinction she makes between eternity, the concern of philosophy, and immortality, the concern of action, enables Arendt to challenge Freud's belief that human activity is an expression of our fear of death. Arendt argues that the wish for immortality is not evidence that we fear mortality, but an expression of the human condition of natality:

...action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of action. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought.¹⁵

Natality, the capacity to begin something new that will last beyond a lifetime, is the driving force of the human desire for immortality.

The view that life is preparation for death comes from a worldview that holds philosophy to be the highest of human activities. Such a worldview mitigates against action, for action comes out of our attachment to life and hopes for the future. We think often about our mortality, to the point where

¹⁵Arendt, Condition, p. 9.

we forget that we are also natal beings--creatures who burst into the world with the "startling unexpectedness" that is characteristic of all beginnings.¹⁶ Natality, "the ever-present reminder that men, though they must die are not born in order to die but in order to begin," shifts the orientation of our reflections to action.¹⁷

By shifting its center from contemplation to action, Arendt initiates a revolution in Western political philosophy. The critical words in her lexicon are, as we have seen, natality and plurality. Where the philosophic perspective on human activity denies freedom by explaining human action as the expression of a neurotic obsession with death, Arendt restores the meaning of freedom by redefining action as a celebration of life. While natality makes a significant effort at reorienting political philosophy, plurality effects even more profound changes in the concepts of the Western political tradition.

The philosophic worldview is fundamentally opposed to the condition of plurality. As we have seen, plurality means that political reality is constituted out of a multitude of perspectives. Confronted with diversity, the metaphysician looks for a common denominator to define the many in terms of the one that underlies them. If, as Arendt argues, the public realm "relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives," the philosophic hostility to diversity threatens

¹⁶Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 246.

the existence of public space. This hostility to publicity is an expression of the "[S]olipsism, open or veiled, with or without qualifications, [that] has been the most persistent and, perhaps, the most pernicious fallacy of philosophy even before it attained in Descartes the high rank of theoretical and existential consistency."¹⁸ If philosophers were to abandon this hostility they would shift their gaze from heaven to earth, find cause to wonder at the spectacle of human plurality and "accept in something more than resignation about human weakness the fact that it is not good for man to be alone."¹⁹

Plurality challenges the idea that the solitary philosopher knows anything that is relevant to politics, and even that the "truths" we discover in solitude mean anything at all. The public aspect of plurality means that "...our sense of unequivocal reality is so bound up with the presence of others that we can never be sure of anything that only we ourselves know and no one else."²⁰ We depend on each other for reassurance that our perceptions are real and our beliefs justifiable. If our thoughts are not real unless we can make public sense of them, we cannot make decisions about right and wrong alone, but only in conversation with others.

Plato's parable of the Cave is the prototype for the

¹⁸Arendt, Thinking, p. 46.

¹⁹Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," p. 55.

²⁰Arendt, On Revolution (New York: Penguin, 1984), p. 96.

epistemology that Arendt contests. Plato tells the story of the solitary philosopher who leave the cave--the world of appearance--for the realm of the sun. He apprehends the truth of being intuitively, and returns to the cave unable to communicate with its inhabitants. The philosopher's knowledge entitles him to rule the cave, but ensures that he must be an authoritarian ruler. His inability to relate the experience of the sun to the cave-dwellers except in the form of myths means that he indoctrinates them rather than teaching self-government.

Plurality makes a joke of Plato's cave parable. Arendt interprets the fact that the philosopher returns from the realm of the sun unable to speak to mean that he "has lost the common sense with which to orient himself in a world which is common to all."²¹ If he cannot speak to the inhabitants of the cave, he is not entitled to rule them. As a consequence of plurality, "whatever men do or know or experience can make sense only to the extent that it can be spoken about."²² This means that the philosopher has no wisdom to direct the activities of the cave; on the contrary, he is a psychotic whose reign would likely prove horrifying.

When Arendt looks at our traditional understandings of freedom and power through the frame of plurality, the results are startling. Arendt finds that the traditional ways of

²¹Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," p. 21.

²²Arendt, Condition, p. 4.

formulating these concepts are anti-political to the extent that we cannot even understand freedom if we look for guidance in the tradition: "[O]ur political tradition is almost unanimous in holding that freedom begins where men have left the realm of public life inhabited by the many, and that it is not experienced in association with others but in intercourse with one's self....."²³ Western non-political philosophy conflates freedom with sovereignty and power with strength.

This error results, once again, from the philosophic hostility to human interdependency. Philosophy defines freedom as sovereignty because it construes plurality as a weakness to be overcome rather than a permanent aspect of the human condition. This construct makes no sense to Arendt who notes that, "[U]nder human conditions, which are determined by the fact that not man but men live on the earth, freedom and sovereignty are so little identical that they cannot exist simultaneously."²⁴ The philosophers who invented the Western political tradition were never able to reconcile their capacity to imagine utopias with the constraints of our physical and psychic interdependency. They "resolved" this tension between the boundlessness of the philosophic imagination and the condition of plurality by equating freedom and mastery.

We need politics precisely because we depend on others

²³Arendt, "What is Freedom," in Between Past and Future, p. 157. Hereafter cited as "Freedom."

²⁴Ibid., p. 164.

whose desires and interests frequently conflict with our own. If we do not define freedom in a way that is compatible with the constraints of physical and psychic interdependency we render the concept of human autonomy meaningless. Sovereignty, philosophy's attempt to rescue freedom from the inconveniences of the human condition, accomplishes precisely that: "[I]f it were true that sovereignty and freedom are the same, then indeed no man could be free, because sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality."²⁵

The philosophic wish to escape plurality also contaminates our understanding of power. As with freedom, the tradition confuses power with strength because it assumes the superiority of solitude over companionship.

The popular belief in a 'strong man' who, isolated against others, owes his strength to his being alone is either sheer superstition based on the delusion that we can 'make' something in the realm of human affairs--'make' institutions or laws, for instance, as we make tables and chairs, or make men 'better' or 'worse'--or it is conscious despair of all action, political and non-political, coupled with the utopia hope that it may be possible to treat men as one treats other 'material.'²⁶

Philosophers' separatist conceptions of power and freedom are appropriate to craftsmanship or work with things, but not to work with people. The idea that there is power in isolation, like the idea that there is freedom in sovereignty, would bring

²⁵Arendt, Condition, p. 234.

²⁶Ibid., p. 188.

silence and stillness to the public realm.

Plurality weaves together two aspects of humanity, autonomy and interdependency, that political philosophers and political scientists have treated as incompatible with freedom and power. If all human beings are interconnected, one act sets in motion a chain of consequences that are irreversible. Because each one of us is a free and unique person, the responses that we make to the things that happen around us are unpredictable. Thus, we cannot "make" history as we fabricate objects. The identification of freedom with sovereignty is evidence of the wish to control politics as we control fabrication. "If we look upon freedom with the eyes of the tradition, identifying freedom with sovereignty, the simultaneous presence of freedom and non-sovereignty, of being able to begin something new and of not being able to control or even foretell its consequences, seems almost to force us to the conclusion that human existence is absurd."²⁷

Plurality is Arendt's word for the dissonance that surrounds human freedom. It is a paradoxical concept in that the "calamities of action all arise from the human condition of plurality, which is the condition sine qua non for that space of appearance which is the public realm."²⁸ Plurality is both the condition of action and the condition for its frustration because it makes us unable to foretell the outcome of any new

²⁷Ibid., p. 235.

²⁸Ibid., p. 220.

beginning. The possibility that we will be held responsible for events we did not intend or foresee is the price we pay for being able to act at all. The tradition responds to this dissonance with great hostility toward freedom and by withdrawing from action:

It is in accordance with the great tradition of Western thought to think along these lines: to accuse freedom of luring man into necessity, to condemn action, the spontaneous beginning of something new, because its results fall into a predetermined net of relationships, invariable dragging the agent with them, who seems to forfeit his freedom from the very moment he makes use of it. The only salvation from this kind of freedom seems to lie in non-acting, in abstention from the whole realm of human affairs as the only means to safeguard one's sovereignty and integrity as a person.²⁹

The preference for self over the world reasserts the philosopher's hostility toward plurality.

The philosophic approach, in casting off plurality, leaves itself no way out of the seeming paradox of freedom. No one can release themselves from the guilt of a failed enterprise. Nor can anyone, from inside the continual flux of his or her self-consciousness, find relief from the unpredictability of perfect subjectivity. When we acknowledge our connectedness to others, however, we gain the faculties of forgiveness and promise-making which release us from the irreversibility of action and the unpredictability of freedom.

Both faculties, therefore, depend on plurality, on the presence and acting of others, for no one can forgive himself and no one can feel bound by a promise made only to himself; forgiving and promising

²⁹Ibid., p. 234.

enacted in solitude or isolation remain without reality and can signify no more than a role played before one's self.³⁰

The premise of plurality reverses the philosophic equation of solitude with freedom and politics with constraint: freedom is contingent upon our connections with others which free us from the burdens we impose on ourselves.

Philosophy creates the ideal of self-sufficiency in a misguided attempt to salvage human freedom and human pride. This attempt is misguided in that self-sufficiency is a myth that assaults our pride even as it salvages it. In return for protection from the pain of loss, self-sufficiency forces us constantly to mock ourselves for the urge for companionship that is an intrinsic dimension of the human condition. Arendt's answer to philosophy's conclusion that human life is absurd because freedom is impossible is that "[W]here human pride is still intact, it is tragedy rather than absurdity which is taken to be the hallmark of human existence."³¹

Arendt sees the tradition as a story of men's futile attempts to maintain the fiction of sovereignty in spite of the plurality and uncertainty of the human condition.

We can maintain the fiction of self-sufficiency only if we deny either the autonomy or interdependency that are aspects of plurality. Arendt's view of the tradition is substantiated by political theories of contract and community. Liberal theory

³⁰Ibid., p. 237.

³¹Ibid., p. 235.

preserves the fiction of sovereignty by denying that aspect of plurality which corresponds to human interdependency. Theories of community, which accept interdependency, ensure sovereignty by the denial or containment of difference. The drawback to both traditions is that they simplify political relationships. Where the liberal concept of "contract" relegates interdependence to the private realm, democratic theories are premised on small public spaces that minimize difference which alleviates the need for compromise and bargaining. Arendt takes a step beyond both liberalism and classic democratic theory with a vision of political freedom and power that does not rely on either the denial of community or the eradication of difference.

The words plurality, natality, and human condition initiate a new discourse in the Western political tradition. Plurality offers a way of talking about human interdependence without compromising individuality and uniqueness. Natality looks at human action and accomplishment as a celebration of life. The human condition redefines public life as a showcase for the distinctively human activities speech and action. Arendt writes this new vocabulary to carve out a privileged place for public life and to remind us to cherish what is distinctively human.

Most scholars concur that Arendt initiates a new discourse in the conversation of modern political theory. Sheldon Wolin writes that The Human Condition "brought something new into the

world. It introduced a distinctive language and with it a new political sensibility which invested politics with a high seriousness and dignity that transcended the dreary and trivial categories of academic political science."³² Gerard P. Heather and Matthew Stolz write:

...The Human Condition should remind us of the Leviathan, for both are great exercises in the arts of political naming. Like Hobbes, although with clear substantive differences, Arendt insists that in order to act successfully in politics, perhaps to know that we are acting politically at all, we require to be possessed by a political language that simultaneously affirms the worthiness of political activity as a human endeavor, and orients us appropriately to it. In the end, Arendt would have us understand that the language of politics cannot be reduced to the language of philosophy and history, and certainly not to the language of economics.³³

While it is not controversial to say that Arendt invents a new vocabulary for political action, it is controversial to claim that this is a women's discourse, and that it is a democratic one. Many scholars not only question whether Arendt is a democrat, but whether her thought is even political at all but rather aesthetic and individualist. While some political theorists have begun to hear intimations of women in Arendt's work, most see her not simply as silent on the question of women but hostile to feminist issues.

Feminists who criticize the Western political tradition single out for attack its pervasive mind-body dichotomy and

³²Sheldon Wolin, "Hannah Arendt and the Ordinance of Time," Social Research 44, p. 92.

³³Gerard P. Heather and Matthew Stolz, "Hannah Arendt and Critical Theory," The Journal of Politics 41 (1979), p. 18.

definition of women in terms of the body, the abstract individualism of modern social contract theory, and the rationalist conception of political judgment that informs many of its classic texts.³⁴ As we have seen, the two most radical words in Arendt's vocabulary--natality and plurality--have important connections to women's experience and the perspective of feminist philosophy. Though she does not discuss its connection to motherhood and women's experience, Arendt makes birth the foundation of political action. Plurality gives her a way to bring together human interdependency and human individuality in a sophisticated challenge to the abstract individualism of liberal political theory.

Gender is not part of Hannah Arendt's analytic vocabulary, however, and for all that her work resonates with contemporary feminist theory, it is thought to contain much that poses problems for the feminist enterprise. Once again, we discover the dissonance that is characteristic of the work of outsiders. We know that this is the work of an outsider because Arendt calls our attention to her radical reconstruction of the vocabulary and methods of political theory. Outsidership is more than a theme of The Human Condition, it is also an unspoken problem in her work. As we have argued, we expect the

³⁴See Allison Jaggar, Feminist Politics and Human Nature, Susan Okin, Women in Western Political Thought, Susan Bordo, "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought," Jane Flax, "Political Philosophy and the Patriarchal Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Epistemology and Metaphysics," Sandra Harding, "The Instability of the Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory,".

outsider to speak in a different voice but we also expect that voice to be distorted by the problem of entrance.

The problem of entrance is both internal to The Human Condition in the constraints Arendt imposes on herself, and external to it in the way it is viewed by critics. The most prominent aspects of the problem of entrance in Arendt's work are the problems she had framing the project and in speaking non-categorically about the dimensions of the human condition. These problems in the way it is framed and in the way she labels her ideas have caused great disagreement in the secondary literature with respect to the question whether Arendt is a participatory democrat or a reactionary who wants to return to the parochial elitism and agonal spirit of the Greek polis. Though no amount of re-reading will change the fact that Arendt does not write as a feminist and does not phrase her analysis in terms of gender, interpreting The Human Condition through the lens of outsidership, with a sensitivity to the problem of entrance, reveals much that is of great value to contemporary feminist thought.

Arendt's outsidership is evidenced in her critique of the Western political tradition. Arendt argues that neither political science nor political theory can understand action because both are organized by concepts borrowed from disciplines that confuse acting with making--natural science and philosophy. Natural science concepts of causality and predictability assume that all behavior is determined by

purposive patterns that are readily identified. Arendt criticizes behavioral social science because "the justification of statistics is that deeds and events are rare occurrences in everyday life and in history."³⁵ Action, which is for her the distinguishing characteristic of the human condition, is outside the reach of statistical analysis; consequently a political science modeled after the natural sciences cannot understand politics.

This critique parallels feminist arguments about Western political philosophy when Arendt argues that the conversation of political theory is grounded in Plato's hierarchal dichotomies of ideal and real, being and appearance, thought and action. She argues that these dichotomies put Western political theory in fundamental opposition to politics. The tradition was born in paradox: political theory began once political thinking had ended. Fifth century Athens is unique in human history because it saw the union of men of thought and men of action in the sophists, in Socrates, and in Pericles. The Western political tradition "far from comprehending and conceptualizing all the political experiences of Western mankind, grew out of a specific historical constellation: the trial of Socrates and the conflict between the philosopher and the polis. The death of Socrates convinced Plato that this conflict was irreconcilable and fatal to the philosopher; consequently, he articulated a political theory with "no aim

³⁵Arendt, Condition, p. 42.

other than to make possible the philosopher's way of life."³⁶

The deep source of the antagonism between philosophy and politics lies in the Platonic dichotomy of being and appearance which Arendt calls a "metaphysical fallacy." Platonic philosophy originates in wonder at the underlying mystical oneness of the universe. Arendt argues that this wonder is misplaced:

Nothing perhaps is more surprising in this world of ours than the almost infinite diversity of its appearances, the sheer entertainment value of its views, sounds, and smells, something that is hardly ever mentioned by the thinkers and philosophers.³⁷

It is not the oneness of being but the infinite variety of appearances in the world that is the source of wonder. The metaphysician is in conflict with the political actor because the truths of philosophy conflict with common sense: where common sense tells us that we live in a world of particularity and variety, philosophy wants to argue that conflict and difference are mere appearance and that true being is singularity.

The rivalry of philosophy and politics is actually a conflict between competing ways of knowing. The philosopher is a truth-seeker whose knowledge of the forms stands in opposition to political knowledge. Where the philosopher possesses certain knowledge of truth by intuition, political knowledge comes out of persuasive speech and trial and error.

³⁶Ibid., p. 14.

³⁷Arendt, Thinking, p. 20.

Philosophic knowledge is endangered when it enters the public realm where it loses its status as truth and becomes only one opinion among many. Plato turns away from politics because Socrates' inability "to persuade his judges of his innocence and merits, which were so obvious to the better and younger part of Athens' citizenship, made him doubt the validity of persuasion."³⁸ The experience of Socrates' death made Plato "wish to substitute making for acting in order to bestow upon the realm of human affairs the solidity inherent in work and fabrication...."³⁹ He constructs the philosopher-king as a sculptor who, inspired by the idea of good, uses myth and education to shape human nature--the material of the polis--to approximate the ideal form.⁴⁰

The philosopher-king is the epitome of the Platonic worldview. It expresses the belief that knowledge is power, that truth lies outside the common realm of sense experience, and that consequently, it is accessible only to those who can separate themselves from all that attaches them to that world. The imperative to separate from the world meant both mastery of bodily impulse and separation from the necessities of life which, for the Greeks, translated into slavery.

If the philosopher attains rulership over the city, he will do no more to its inhabitants as [sic] he has done already to his body....All our current sayings

³⁸Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," p. 32.

³⁹Arendt, Condition, p. 225.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 227.

that only those who know how to obey are entitled to command, or that only those who know how to rule themselves are legitimate to rule over others have their roots in this relationship between body and soul, seen as a metaphor for the relationship between politics and philosophy.⁴¹

Plato's equation of knowledge with truth, authority with mastery, and participation with obedience, assimilates acting to making. Thus, the Western political tradition, which takes its bearings from Plato, is wholly unsuited for the study of politics.

Although she does not make it in the language of gender, Arendt's critique of the Western political tradition foreshadows much current work in feminist epistemology and philosophy. One focus of feminist scholarship has been to challenge the mind-body and theory-practice dichotomies and to define a way of knowing that breaks away from them. As we have seen, Sandra Harding identifies two approaches to this project, one that tries to correct traditional epistemology and locate a standpoint from which to construct a genuinely objective world-view, and another embraces post-modernist pessimism about the possibility of constructing objective truth.⁴² Harding argues that neither approach can stand on its own because while it may be the case that objectivity is a fundamentally oppressive concept, the idea that there is no standpoint for judgment denies the possibility of formulating a political program and

⁴¹Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," p. 46.

⁴²See my chapter 2.

thus preserves an oppressive status quo.

The Human Condition exemplifies the kind of thinking that Harding might welcome because it transcends particularity but does not claim objectivity. Arendt identifies the separation of mind from body and theory from practice as oppressive constructs and argues that both originate in Plato's mistaken belief that truth lies not in appearances but beyond the world in a realm that is accessible only to the philosopher. Thus she identifies traditional epistemology with domination. She proposes to re-evaluate the human condition "in manifest contradiction to the tradition,"⁴³ from the premise that the distinctive human activity is not philosophy but action. Action names a standpoint that can define principle but is neither objective and external to the world nor particularist and confined to one particular group. Her work holds out the promise of the kind of synthesis that Harding is looking for.

We have noted that outsidership is both a theme of Arendt's work in her explicit critique of political theory, and an unspoken problem for her thought. One way in which this problem manifests itself is that Arendt's work, as is to be expected from a work by an outsider, is awkwardly framed. Any outsider who enters a tradition confronts the question how to enter a conversation in dissent from its fundamental assumptions. We have speculated that the need to frame a work so that it fits the conversation might distort some of its

⁴³Arendt, Condition, p. 17.

themes.⁴⁴ The Human Condition is perfect example of this problem of framing.

This problem is most dramatically revealed in the conflict over the title of the work. Arendt originally titled the book "The Vita Activa." In the Introduction to "Thinking" she explains:

I had been concerned with the problem of Action, the oldest concern of political theory, and what had always troubled me about it was that the very term I adopted for my reflections on the matter, namely, vita activa, was coined by men who were devoted to the contemplative way of life and who looked upon all kinds of being alive from that perspective.⁴⁵

Where philosophers, who have no passion for public life, looked upon the vita activa as a necessary burden, Arendt wants to redefine it as a life of freedom. The title that she chose named her project exactly, but would have been daunting to an American audience because it was in Latin. Arendt's publisher decided on "human condition," which may be a good title but it is a bad name because it neither identifies her subject nor refers to any of the explicit themes of the book.

While the book begins with an elaborate study and redefinition of the phrase "vita activa," Arendt never really tells us what "human condition" stands for. Vita activa is the medieval translation of Aristotle's bios politikos, which meant public life.⁴⁶ It is one of the three ways of life that

⁴⁴See chapter one.

⁴⁵Arendt, Condition, p. 6.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 13-15.

Aristotle says are freely-chosen because they are concerned neither with the necessary or the useful but with the beautiful: the life of pure pleasure, the life of the citizenship, and the life of philosophy. With the disappearance of the polis and the beginning of christianity, citizenship was no longer a life devoted to performing beautiful deeds and pleasure became sinful rather than pure, which left contemplation as the only free way of life. "vita activa" became a catch-phrase for all that is non-contemplative and, therefore, not free, losing both its connotation of glory and the exclusively political meaning of the Aristotelian phrase. The project of The Human Condition is to recapture the idea that the vita activa is a free and exclusively political way of life.

Entrance and the problem of framing manifest themselves in the difficulty Arendt had in conceptualizing the project. Arendt researched the book under the assumption that it was to be a book on the connection between Marxism and Stalinism. Though she gave up this project, she still believes her discussions of labor and work and the distinction she makes between public and social address Marx. The Marx frame is evident in Arendt's argument about the distinctions between labor-work-action and public-private-social. Arendt seems to use these triads as categories, which, if true, would be at odds with her criticism of categorical thinking in the tradition. Arendt is careless in her use of this form of

organization. It is implicit in The Human Condition and clear from later interviews and writings that these concepts are not categorically distinct from each other, yet nowhere in Human Condition does she state this explicitly.

The unique characteristic of Arendt's philosophic method is that she tries to articulate distinctions between aspects of human life without imposing absolute categories. She defines labor as an activity that cannot be productive in the sense of contributing to the world because it exists for the sake of consumption. "Labor's products do not stay in the world long enough to become part of it, and the laboring activity itself, concentrated exclusively on life and its maintenance, is oblivious of the world to the point of worldlessness."⁴⁷ A life of unrelieved labor is antagonistic to politics, but work supplies the tools and objects that mitigate our relationship to necessity and define a durable space for public life.

The conditions of work, its process and values make it alien, but not antagonistic to politics. Where politics is conditioned on human plurality, work is intrinsically solitary. The work process, because it is constrained by means-end rationality, is unlike politics because it is not wholly self-defining. Finally, there are inescapable elements of destruction and mastery in the process of fabrication. Arendt does not reject work, but cautions against the results when its values insinuate themselves into our modes of political

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 118.

thinking; when "usefulness and utility are established as the ultimate standards for life and the world of men" it becomes impossible to have a politics that gives adequate respect to human dignity.⁴⁸

The fact that Arendt makes a distinction between activities that are political and those that are non-political does not mean that she dismisses or denigrates the latter. In fact, Arendt celebrates labor as a source of human vitality. Her description of the pleasure that comes from abandoning ourselves to the life force should strike a chord in anyone who has experienced the difference between reaching the end of a project involving intellectual energies and running a race, dancing, eating a piece of fresh-baked bread, or engaging in any activity at the promptings of physical appetite or energy.

The blessing of life as a whole, inherent in labor, can never be found in work and should not be mistaken for the inevitably brief spell of relief and joy which follows accomplishment and attends achievement. The blessing of labor is that effort and gratification follow each other as closely as producing and consuming the means of subsistence, so that happiness is a concomitant of the functioning of a healthy body.⁴⁹

Arendt is not insensitive to the fact of exploitation, however. She acknowledges that the social organization of labor and often throws this cycle out of balance. For the poor, the exhaustion of laboring is followed by wretchedness instead of regeneration; the rich for whom "boredom takes the place of

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 157.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 107-108.

exhaustion," lose their vitality because they make others responsible for the needs of their bodies. In the case of poor and rich alike what is lost is that fundamental connection of mind and body, man and nature that Rousseau named the "sentiment of existence."

Though it is clear that Arendt views labor and work as existing for the sake of politics, it is incorrect to suggest that she thinks they are less than human. They are aspects of the human condition without which politics would be impossible. In addition, they are intertwined within the lives of every individual. Arendt disputes the distinction between manual and intellectual work, noting that "[w]henver the intellectual worker wishes to manifest his thoughts, he must use his hands and acquire manual skills just like any other worker."⁵⁰ Thus, though she does not explicitly say so, it appears that labor-work-action are not separate categories, but aspects of the human condition that are interrelated in complex ways.

The triad public-private-social also names terms that are interrelated rather than categorically distinct. This triad follows Aristotle's distinction between politics and the household. Like Aristotle, Arendt argues that the public is the realm of speech and persuasion while society is the realm of economics. She gives juries and town meetings as examples of politics because they confront questions that are "really debatable...there are different viewpoints...from which you

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 90.

could look at the issue."⁵¹ Where public issues are open to interpretation, the social realm is a realm of necessity which, for Arendt, rules out argument by definition. In her comments on the early labor movement Arendt makes it clear that she does not mean to exclude economic problems from politics, but that they must be presented as demands for real change. She notes that the labor movement in its early stages "not only defended its economic interests but fought a full-fledged political battle."⁵² As workers won economic and social power, they no longer phrased their arguments in terms of freedom or equality but rather in terms of wage increases. Arendt laments this shift precisely because it robs the labor movement of the capacity to effect radical political change which puts her not in the company of aristocrats, but in the marxist tradition that opposes trade unionism.

Later comments on the subject further indicate that she does not mean these terms to be interpreted as categories. Arendt gives an example of the interrelationship between the social and political:

Let's take the housing problem. The social problem is certainly adequate housing. But the question of whether this adequate housing means integration or not is certainly a political question. With every one of these questions there is a double face. And one of these faces should not be subject to debate. There shouldn't be any debate about the question that

⁵¹Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt," in Melvyn Hill ed., Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), p. 317. Hereafter cited as "Hill."

⁵²Arendt, Condition, pp. 218-19.

everybody should have decent housing.⁵³

Especially in light of today's homeless problem, there is something naive in Arendt's assertion that adequate housing is, as a matter of course, a social responsibility. This naivete is evidenced further when she asserts, "[T]hat they should then be subject to debate seems to me phony and a plague."⁵⁴

Some conservative readings of Arendt may come from the fact that she takes for granted the existence of a liberal consensus on questions of social justice.

We have seen that the problem of entrance distorts Arendt's work, in that she uses what seem to be categories to identify terms that she does not use categorically. The triads labor-work-action and public-private-social identify phenomena that are both interrelated and historically determined. One of the most interesting aspects of The Human Condition, which can also be attributed to the problem of entrance, is the fact that it is actually two books. One is the so-called critique of Karl Marx, which is neither particularly original nor particularly accurate. The second, identifiable by the triad life-worldliness-plurality, is a radical challenge to the Western Political Tradition.

The Human Condition weaves the fabric of a revised tradition, built on the world--i.e. the human condition--rather than the soul or "human nature." Arendt develops her

⁵³Arendt, "Hill," p. 318.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 317.

conception of the human condition by an account of its activities which she claims "are within the range of every human being."⁵⁵ These activities--labor, work, and action--correspond to life, worldliness, and plurality: the fundamental conditions of human existence on Earth. These conditions of living on Earth are bracketed by the conditions of entrance and exit--natality and mortality.

Ethical works begin with an account of how it is that we, in contrast to gods and beasts, are moral beings. Arendt's distinction between nature and history is crucial to establishing this contrast. The human species is distinguished by action, which "is the exclusive prerogative of men; neither a beast nor a god is capable of it, and only action is entirely dependent upon the constant presence of others."⁵⁶ Action, the expression of human freedom, is inconceivable without history which provides a space of appearance. Where nature is a pure realm of being, marked by the cyclical occurrence and recurrence of things that are indistinguishable from one another, history is a realm of meaning in which the presence of others permits the individuation of members of the human species. "The birth and death of human beings are not simple natural occurrences, but are related to a world into which single individuals, unique, unexchangeable, and unrepeatable

⁵⁵Arendt, Condition, p. 5.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 21.

entities, appear and from which they depart."⁵⁷

Human existence is historical because each of us is an unexpected event whose arrival and departure changes the shape of our world, however narrow its boundaries. Narrative marks the distinction between nature and history. While nature assimilates every living thing to its eternal process, every life in history is a unique story from birth to death that was never told before and can never be repeated.

Though we are distinct from nature, we are also rooted in it by life, the first word in Arendt's political lexicon. Life corresponds to labor, the mode of engagement in the vita activa that is conditioned by physical need. Laboring, considered apart from its social organization, is the most natural of the human activities. It is proof that we, too, are moved by the cyclical processes that carry all natural things from birth to decay.

Work is the antithesis of labor in that we engage in it not to satisfy needs that we share with animals but to mitigate our alienation from the natural world. By virtue of its recurring sameness, the natural world is endowed with a permanence or species immortality that the human world, because it is composed of individual beings, does not have. We engage in work to create an artificial space for ourselves in the natural world, to relieve the burdens of natural necessity, and to establish a civilization capable of transcending the finite

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 96.

life-spans of the members of a particular epoch. The space that we create by work gives rise to the human condition of worldliness that is the necessary condition of historical narrative.

The discussion of worldliness establishes the distinction between appearance and disappearance, which is the mode of human existence, and occurrence and recurrence, which is the mode of natural existence. When we preserve artifacts and carry on traditions, culture gives us material proof that we have existed on earth over time. History creates space for our birth that we fill with words and deeds while we are alive and leave empty when we die. The natural ecosystem permits everything in the untouched environment to come and go unannounced and unmissed. The beauty of this rhythm is that it wastes nothing; the sadness is that neither does it provide occasion for remembrance.⁵⁸

If work builds a space for us to "appear" in time, then action and speech make that space meaningful by filling it with history. The capacity to be something is basic to all forms of life, but to mean something is distinctively human. Meaning emanates from acting and speaking, the activities by which "men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal

⁵⁸Domesticated animals represent a crossing of the realms of nature and history. The life of a pet has meaning, that is, historical significance, because it participates in our life story. Because it does not speak, a pet is never as strikingly absent as a person; its personality in life, as its memory in death, is a construct of human imagination

identities and thus make their appearance in the human world...."⁵⁹ The activity of self-disclosure is peculiar to human beings. It corresponds to appearance and comes out of action and speech, which are distinctive in that they establish not just that we are but who we are.

Like work, action is the exclusive prerogative of human beings; unlike work, which by definition leaves its mark in time by the creation of a world, action leaves no trace in history unless it is witnessed and recorded. Its "reality depends entirely upon human plurality, upon the constant presence of others who can see and hear and therefore testify to their existence."⁶⁰ Ironically, without the presence of storytellers who will tell what we have done, action can not appear but simply occurs like the plant or animal that is indistinguishable from the folds of nature.

Arendt's view of the human condition is tragically optimistic. Humanity exists only as long as we have a stage on which to appear and the courage to make the entrance. There is no underlying immutable being or nature guarantee our survival should we choose not to exercise our responsibility to act. The importance Arendt attaches to appearance denies that the mind-body split is relevant to thinking about politics. The idea that we are actors who need audiences reveals that the

⁵⁹Arendt, Condition, p. 179.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 95.

belief that we are naturally solitary is a "metaphysical fallacy" drawn from the experience of the vita contemplativa and imposed on the vita activa by men who feared and abhorred the loss of control inherent in all action. Philosophers privilege being over appearance, mind over body, and solitary thought over cooperative action in an attempt to shield themselves from the tragic potential of real involvement in the human condition.

Arendt shares this perception of philosophy as a cowardly optimistic worldview with another outsider, Friedrich Nietzsche. In The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche argues that tragedy was born in the youth of the Greek people, when they had the moral strength to confront the ambiguity of goodness and to accept the pessimism of the tragic worldview. It dies at the hands of Socratic philosophy.

According to Nietzsche, the problem of Socratic philosophy is that it attempts to create a science of ethics by professing to discover universal rules under which all our moral dilemmas can be subsumed. Philosophic absolutism, and the dogmatism of Christian ethics, which follows from it, constitute not just a denial of tragedy but of life itself.

...nothing could be more opposed to the purely aesthetic interpretation and justification of the world which are taught in this book than the Christian teaching, which is, and wants to be only moral and which relegates art, every art, to the realm of lies; with its absolute standards, beginning with the truthfulness of God, it negates, judges, and damns art. Behind this mode of thought and valuation, which must be hostile to art if it is at all genuine, I never failed to sense a hostility to

life--a furious, vengeful antipathy to life itself: for all of life is based on semblance, art, deception, points of view, and the necessity of perspectives and error.⁶¹

We can hear echoes of the concepts natality and plurality in Nietzsche's passionate prose. Like Arendt, Nietzsche sees that the founding premises of philosophy are hostile to life which disqualifies them as foundations of political theory. Further, he defines reality in terms of appearance and denies the comforting fiction of objective truth just as she does. But Arendt's "interpretation and justification of the world" is not aesthetic but rather political: where Nietzsche works these assumptions into a philosophy of pessimism and political elitism, Arendt creates a life-affirming democratic theory.

I have argued that the position Arendt develops in The Human Condition is congenial to both feminist and democratic theory. The strongest opposition to this argument comes from scholars who not only hear strains of Nietzsche in Arendt, but argue that she plays them out into an aesthetic political philosophy. There are three important aspects of the "aesthetic interpretation" of Arendt. First, these scholars interpret Arendt's use of dramatic metaphors and definition of action in terms of virtuosity as a politics of individualism that establishes a hierarchal relationship between actors and

⁶¹Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random, 1967), p. 23.

passive spectators.⁶² Second, they interpret Arendt's critique of instrumentalism to mean that action, if it is to be truly meaningful and free, must be utterly unrelated to worldly goals or purposes.⁶³ Third, because Arendt argues that action is exempt from evaluation in terms of motive and intent, they conclude that she means it to be exempt from all moral judgment. This focus on performance leaves little basis for distinguishing action, which Arendt praises, from totalitarianism, which she condemns.⁶⁴

The "aesthetic theorist" interpretation is not without grounds in Arendt's work. She uses the language of performance to recapture the participatory dimension of politics. The concepts public space, actor, audience, and story are the terms on which she challenges us to reconceive the way we think of freedom and power. But she is careful to note that the aesthetic analogy is valid only when politics is conceived as a performing art and not as a work of art; the former "marks the state as a product of action" that depends on action to sustain

⁶²See Margaret Canovan, "On Pitkin 'Justice,'" Political Theory, 10 (August 1982) 464-68; B. Honig, "Arendt, Identity, and Difference," Political Theory, 16 (February 1988) 77-98.

⁶³See Noel O'Sullivan, "Hellenic Nostalgia and Industrial Society," Contemporary Political Philosophy, ed. Anthony de Crespigny and Kenneth Minogue (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1975); Martin Jay, "Hannah Arendt: Opposing Views," Partisan Review 45, pp. 348-67; Benjamin I. Schwartz, "The Religion of Politics," Dissent 17, pp. 144-61.

⁶⁴See George Kateb, Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil (New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), esp. Chapter 1 "The Theory of Political Action," pp.1-51.

it while the latter suggests a static entity that exists independently of the citizenry.⁶⁵

Although Arendt poses the dramatic metaphor as an alternative to liberalism, some interpreters read into it elements of competitive individualism. Noel O'Sullivan writes, "[H]er conception of politics as the sphere in which each man seeks to establish his identity by great deeds that impress his peers means that fellow actors are consistently assigned the role of an appreciative but essentially passive audience; they are treated, that is, as spectators watching a drama unfold."⁶⁶ This misinterpretation is as much a misunderstanding of the performing arts as it is of Arendt. The idea that a play or dance is the stellar performance of a few individuals and the audience and production crew are like props establishes a false dichotomy between performers and audience. It is the kind of misconception that is to be expected from young actors, people who have never worked in the theater, and people who have never been truly engaged by a performance.

When Arendt talks about politics as a performing art her emphasis is precisely not on the individual actor but on the physical and social organizations that make performance possible. She writes, "[P]erforming artists--dancers, play-actors, musicians, and the like--need an audience to show their

⁶⁵Arendt, "Freedom," p. 153.

⁶⁶N.K. O'Sullivan, "Politics, Totalitarianism, and Freedom: The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt," Political Studies 21 (1973), p. 197.

virtuosity, just as acting men need the presence of others before whom they can appear; both need a publicly organized space for their 'work,' and both depend upon others for the performance itself."⁶⁷ Both the performing arts and politics are collective activities where, when we think of the event as a whole, no one individual can assume credit or responsibility for its occurrence. Because it depends on the contributions of a plurality of individuals, a play or a ballet or a symphony is different every time it is performed; it cannot exist as spectacle without being observed and without being shaped by that observation.

Hannah Pitkin makes a powerful and persuasive statement of the individualism argument that is particularly important because she gives Arendt's work a gendered reading that is in direct contradiction to the thesis I have proposed. She sees Arendt's as an aestheticized view of politics that expresses not the voices of women but rather those of men. Pitkin argues that the citizenry of Arendt's ideal polity "resemble posturing little boys clamoring for attention ("Look at me! I'm the greatest!" "No, look at me!") and wanting to be reassured that they are brave, valuable, even real."⁶⁸ Pitkin states that Arendt carries into her concept of politics the agonal spirit of the age of the Homeric hero and that this is a significant

⁶⁷Arendt, "Freedom," p. 154.

⁶⁸Hanna Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Private and Public," Political Theory 9 (August 1981), p. 338. Hereafter cited as "Justice."

departure from Aristotle with whom she otherwise has much in common.

In fact, Arendt recognizes that the agonal spirit of the polis "eventually was to bring the ruin to the Greek city states because it made alliances between them well-nigh impossible and poisoned the domestic life of the citizens with envy and mutual hatred...."⁶⁹ Where Pitkin argues that Arendt parts from Aristotle on the question of political friendship, it is actually the case that friendship is the basis of Arendt's understanding of community.⁷⁰ Arendt is not just critical of individualism; she defines political action as collective action. Arendt argues that any single individual who presumes to instruct others in politics or to conduct politics in isolation from others is "really not an actor [but] an anarchist."⁷¹

Pitkin attributes the competitive individualism she sees in Arendt to a particularly masculine fear of death.

Though Arendt was female, there is a lot of machismo in her vision. Unable to face their mortality and physical vulnerability, the men she describes strive endlessly to be superhuman, and, realizing that they cannot achieve that goal, require endless reassurance from the others in their anxious delusion.⁷²

Arendt does say that action is an expression of the human

⁶⁹Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," p. 37.

⁷⁰For further discussion, see Chapter 5.

⁷¹Arendt, "Hill," p. 310.

⁷²Pitkin, "Justice," p. 338.

"striving for immortality."⁷³ But she argues that the desire for immortality in politics comes not from mortality but rather natality. For politics, as distinct from philosophy, "the decisive trait of the human condition is not that men are mortal, but that they are being born; birth, rather than death, is the decisive factor in all political organization...."⁷⁴ The energy in action is not a neurotic fear of death, but rather faith in the possibility of change and beginning.⁷⁵

The strangest thing about Pitkin's article is that she practically admits to having misrepresented Arendt for the purposes of argument. She acknowledges that

...the appeal to heroism and glory unconnected to any standard of right transcending the individual is bound to produce at best an empty posturing, at worst violence and war. Nothing could be further from Arendt's intentions. She explicitly disparaged trivial and vain self-display.⁷⁶

Pitkin repeats this strange pattern of setting up a straw Arendt and then apologizing for it when she suggests that, given the way Arendt defines the public and social realms, we have cause to "wonder whether she also has her doubts about the 'emancipation' of workers and women."⁷⁷ She retracts this ludicrous statement toward the end of the piece saying that,

⁷³Arendt, Condition, p. 21.

⁷⁴Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," p. 15a.

⁷⁵Arendt, "Freedom," p. 167.

⁷⁶Pitkin, "Justice," p. 341.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 336.

"it is not a particular subject-matter, nor a particular class of people, but a particular attitude against which the public realm must be guarded..."⁷⁸ Pitkin's dichotomous thinking about the relationship of public and social in Arendt is behind her insinuation that Arendt might want women and workers to be excluded from the public space.

Pitkin's "correction" of Arendt--that the public realm is not threatened by women or workers but by a particular attitude toward politics--coincides exactly with the argument we saw Arendt makes about the relationship of public and social in her comments on the early labor movement. In her interpretation of the difference between public and social Pitkin sees a simple, categorical distinction where Arendt theorizes a complex interrelationship. Because Pitkin interprets social and public as a dichotomy, she does not see that Arendt argues that the public and the social are distinct, she does not say they are separable and mutually exclusive but rather dimensions of every single problem.

It is important that Pitkin's reading not stand as the standard feminist interpretation of Arendt. To begin with, there is nothing distinctively feminist about Pitkin's approach. She merely lifts the individualism theme from the position I have identified as an aestheticization of Arendt casts it in gendered terms. More important, Pitkin seems to deliberately overlook Arendt's innovations in order to make

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 342.

this case. Where Arendt writes self-consciously of natality, Pitkin attributes to her the more conventional belief that human activity is a response to mortality. Finally, as with O'Sullivan's separation of actor and spectator, Pitkin dichotomizes the terms Arendt uses in order to criticize her. This oversimplification wholly obscures the uniqueness of Arendt's way of thinking.

So far I have addressed one aspect of the aesthetic interpretation of Arendt and noted that scholars who accuse Arendt of individualism simplify the relation of actors and spectators. We will now address the second aspect of this interpretation which is founded on a misinterpretation of Arendt's distinction between behavior and action. She defines behavior as instrumental activity that is unfree because it is determined by a prescribed end, and action as something not determined by a process but inspired by a principle.⁷⁹ The aesthetic interpretation grounds itself in this distinction which is taken to mean that Arendt "regards political action as an end in itself...."⁸⁰ The misconception that Arendt defines politics as something that must be devoid of purpose and is consequently irrelevant to practical politics, like the perception of individualism, is a result of dichotomous thinking.

In a superb article called "Motive and Goal in Hannah

⁷⁹See Arendt, "Freedom."

⁸⁰Canovan, "On Pitkin, 'Justice,'" p. 464.

Arendt's Concept of Political Action," James Knauer argues that Arendt does not intend the distinction between purposive and principled action to be taken as a dichotomy of particularity and universality.

What the critics fail to understand is that action is a combination of the particular, e.g., goals, and the universal, principles of human association. Arendt's point is not that action must have no goals but that it cannot be defined in terms of them. The particular ends of action are always transcended by the general principles which give them significance and meaning.⁸¹

Knauer identifies these critiques of Arendt as evidence of the problem of dichotomous thinking. Scholars who aestheticize Arendt's concept of action criticize Arendt for having a conception of action that is abstract, universalist, and not grounded in the world because they overlook the power and subtlety of "her account of the relationship between instrumentality and meaning in politics."⁸² They reveal an inability to think in paradox and construct action as something that must be either particularistic and instrumental or universal and expressive.⁸³

Knauer's exposition connects beautifully with Arendt's concept of storytelling. Arendt argues in The Human Condition

⁸¹James T. Knauer, "Motive and Goal in Hannah Arendt's Concept of Political Action," American Political Science Review 74 (1980), p. 725.

⁸²Ibid., 721.

⁸³See the communications between Knauer and Margaret Canovan: Margaret Canovan, "On Pitkin 'Justice,'" and Knauer, "On Canovan, Pitkin, Arendt, and Justice," Political Theory 11 (Aug. 1983).

that action, like labor, is utterly worldless without "the help of the artist, of poets and historiographers, or monument builders or writers," who preserve the memory of action in a story.⁸⁴ Storytelling is for Arendt a medium that can embody the combination of universality and particularity that Knauer sees in Arendt's concept of action. In an essay on Isak Dinesen she writes, "that storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it...."⁸⁵ Where the Dinesen quote highlights the story's capacity to reveal universal themes, her comments on Greek and Roman historiography praises its fidelity to concrete events. Greek and Roman historiographers "take it for granted that the meaning or, as the Romans would say, the lesson of each event, deed, or occurrence is revealed in and by itself."⁸⁶ A story permits an event to transcend its particular circumstances without robbing it of its vitality in the way that analytic philosophy does.⁸⁷

⁸⁴Arendt, Condition, p. 173.

⁸⁵Arendt, "Isak Dinesen," in Men in Dark Times (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), p. 103.

⁸⁶Arendt, "The Concept of History," in Between Past and Future, p. 64. Hereafter cited as "History."

⁸⁷It is appropriate to illustrate this thesis with an example from Arendt's favorite storyteller, Isak Dinesen. One of her most captivating stories, "Sorrow Acre," concerns a mother who bets that she can reap a square acre of rye from sunup to sundown in return for the release of her son who faces many years' imprisonment for allegedly setting fire to a barn. The woman succeeds at clearing the field in a day, thought it would ordinarily require three men to do so, and dies in her son's arms with the sun setting. This, like others of

The third aspect of the aesthetic interpretation is its most comprehensive and disturbing one. This is the argument that Arendt's ideal conception of political action is almost indistinguishable from her vision of political evil: totalitarianism. Noel O'Sullivan writes that Arendt "never considers the possibility that totalitarianism may equally well be seen as a development--albeit a perverse one--of the idea that she places at the center of her own political thought, which is the concept of freedom as participation in government.⁸⁸ In fact, Arendt did foresee this argument. She understood that her definition of freedom could be misconstrued in light of the modern political experience of totalitarianism which "makes us doubt not only the coincidence of politics and freedom but their very compatibility." She argued that further support for this misinterpretation could be found in the Western political tradition which, because it was written by philosophers from the perspective of contemplation, had always conceived of freedom in opposition to public life. While O'Sullivan's argument is simplistic enough to be dismissed along these lines, mere sympathetic thinkers have raised legitimate questions about the existentialist overtones of Arendt's conception of action. The language of performance,

Dinesen's stories including "Babette's Feast," invests activities of the private realm with heroism. Izak Dinesen, "Sorrow Acre," in Winter's Tales (New York: Random, 1970), pp.29-69.

⁸⁸O'Sullivan, "Politics, Totalitarianism, and Freedom," p. 193.

concept of human condition, and idea that action is a new beginning provide very little information concerning the grounds on which action is to be evaluated. George Kateb raises the problem of judgment in his statement of the parallel between her conception of action and totalitarianism:

...the totalitarian leadership was neither ruthless in its pragmatism nor driven by power lust....they did not see their action as a means to some delimited goals...In addition the Nazis sought release from the bondage of nature, of reality; they sought to interrupt the automatism of all processes. They sought to have reality conform to their wish; they believed that everything is possible and acted to verify that belief. Which is to say that their activity, as conceptualized by Arendt, was an assertion of the unnatural or artificial against the natural or the everyday. But so in her view is political action when rightly done.⁸⁹

Clearly, this criticism incorporates aspects of the two misreadings we have already identified: the idea that Arendt defines action in terms of individual glory that is abstracted from worldly goals. It is worthy of serious consideration nonetheless, because it adds to these a third criterion that represents a more genuinely troubling aspect of Arendt's discussion of action.

Kateb argues that the totalitarian leaders were actors because they "believed that everything is possible and acted to verify that belief." Arendt makes the connection between totalitarianism and the belief in infinite possibility in Origins, but she also argues that humans cannot act in a world where everything is possible, in which all laws have become

⁸⁹Kateb, Politics, Conscience, Evil, p. 29.

"laws of movement."⁹⁰ As we have argued, action needs a stage upon which to appear and this stage is constituted by history and tradition. Kateb, in arguing that totalitarian leaders acted on the premise that "everything is possible," forgets that Arendt argues that the ideology of totalitarianism--the philosophy of history as process--renders action impossible. He misses the subtlety of what Judith Shklar calls Arendt's "odd and startling joining of revolution and tradition...."⁹¹ Totalitarianism destroys freedom with its philosophy of history as process; Arendt's storytelling is an attempt to conceive of history in a way that makes freedom possible.

Though Kateb does not go this far, some critics interpret Arendt's position on action in The Human Condition to be similar to Machiavelli's Prince in that both suggest that separate moral standards apply to political action and ordinary conduct.⁹² Arendt does argue that action cannot be judged by "motives and intentions on the one hand and aims and consequences on the other...[but] only by the criterion of greatness because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary."⁹³ Taken out of context, this citation appears to support the argument

⁹⁰Arendt, "Essay," p. 31.

⁹¹Judith Shklar, "Rethinking the Past," Social Research 44 (Spring 1977), p. 89.

⁹²See Benjamin I. Schwartz, "The Religion of Politics," Dissent 17 (1970), pp. 144-61.

⁹³Arendt, Condition, p. 205.

that Arendt, like Machiavelli, divorces politics from morality. When we consider this thesis in light of Arendt's notion that plurality is the condition of politics, it becomes clear that her argument is much more subtle than Machiavelli's.

When Arendt argues that we cannot judge action according to motive and intent, she is not a "teacher of evil" as Machiavelli is reputed to be. She does not mean that we must refrain from judging leaders or subject them to different standards from citizens. Motive and intent pertain to the individual conscience, to the self, and as such have no great influence over politics under the conditions of plurality. Arendt writes:

Human action, projected into a web of relationships where many and opposing ends are pursued, almost never fulfills its original intention; no act can ever be recognized by its author as his own with the same happy certainty with which a piece of work of any kind can be recognized by its maker.⁹⁴

The metaphor of politics as a performance art is another way of expressing the concept of plurality which means that politics is a collective activity whose course can not be determined by the motive and intent of any single person. Motive and intent are relevant to political judgment only in a world without plurality, where we confuse freedom with sovereignty and acting with making.

Arendt does not separate morality and politics. Rather, she argues that our traditional moral categories are not useful

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 84.

to us because they are premised on a political theory that denies plurality and defines acting in terms of making. She writes:

If we would express it paradoxically--and we invariably become entangled in paradoxes as soon as we attempt to judge action by the standards of doing--we can say: Every good action for the sake of a bad end actually adds to the world a portion of goodness; every bad action for the sake of a good end actually adds to the world a portion of badness. In other words, whereas for doing and producing ends are totally dominant over means, just the opposite is true for acting: the means are always the decisive factor.⁹⁵

We might argue that "means" gives us a way to evaluate the sincerity of claims for intent and motive. Since the condition of plurality makes it impossible to infer intents from ends, choice of means may be the only way to judge character.

The argument that Arendt is an aesthetic theorist is troubling for a number of reasons. If it is the case that the aesthetic dimensions of Arendt's thought begin to point to a way of conceptualizing political judgment that moves beyond the dichotomy of objectivism-relativism, the argument that her thought is aesthetic and therefore not political threatens to obscure her contribution by reasserting an idea that is convincing because it is familiar. Further, the idea that Arendt isn't a political thinker smacks of the familiar stereotype that women are naturally uninterested in questions

⁹⁵Hannah Arendt, "Hermann Broch," in Men in Dark Times, p. 148.

of power and unable to think in terms of abstract concepts like freedom and equality. In fact, Arendt's work does address abstract concepts, but as with judgment, she rewrites them through the framework of her new vocabulary. If we do not recognize power or freedom in her writings it may be that our view is distorted by the misconceived definition of politics that she seeks to correct. Finally, Arendt committed herself throughout her life to the tasks of revitalizing political action and political judgment. The idea that she immortalized action at the expense of judgment would be a despairing indictment of politics.

The aesthetic dimension of Arendt's thought brings us back to the question of the Archimedean point. She uses the language of performance to express the complexity of the problem of political judgment. If we cannot stand back from an action in the way that we can from an object or work of art, we must find a perspective from which to judge political events that is neither objective nor relativist. Those who interpret the aesthetic dimension of Arendt's theory as relativism impose the dichotomous thinking of the Archimedean fiction--the idea that we must choose between objectivism and relativism--on her more complex rendering of political judgment.

Plurality raises the problem of the Archimedean point. If the public space exists by virtue of the presence of spectators who see an event from various perspectives and ceases to exist with the disappearance of either the audience or the diversity

of their opinions, then there can be no point external to human affairs from which to judge political events. Thus, plurality renders all traditional grounds for judgment irrelevant, but supplies a new ground for judgment in storytelling. Because we act into the web of human relationships that is plurality we cannot control action but we can understand it in retrospect:

It is because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions, that action almost never achieves its purpose; but it is also because of this medium, in which action alone is real, that it 'produces' stories with or without intention as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things.⁹⁶

The story becomes a ground for judgment that brings together universality and particularity.

It is unfair to charge that Arendt's political theory is wholly without moral grounds. Her project most closely resembles that of pragmatism which argues for a morality based on public principles discovered through discourse. Storytelling is her model of the kind of public discourse that permits the autonomous creation of democratic principles.

Arendt's idea of storytelling has an interesting parallel to Marx. On one level it is, of course, part of her attack on what she believed to be Marx's determinist philosophy of history. On another level it might be seen as an appropriation of Marx's thought. Marx defines justice in terms of the working class which he argues can for the first time in history found a democratic state. The working class is privileged by

⁹⁶Arendt, Condition, pp. 183-4.

virtue of its experience of alienation in capitalist economy and its experience of class struggle gained in assisting the bourgeoisie to overthrow feudalism. Arendt, too, privileges the standpoint of the worker: she turns not to the industrial worker but to the artist whom she calls "homo faber in his highest capacity."⁹⁷ Unlike Marx for whom the superiority of the working class is a result of participation, both in economics and politics, Arendt privileges the storyteller as a spectator.

Arendt's description of storytelling and the privileged position of the storyteller raises questions about the thesis that her work challenges the conventional hierarchy of thought over action.⁹⁸ In describing the epistemic standpoint of the storyteller, she seems to re-establish the actor/spectator dichotomy. Arendt writes:

In matters of theory and understanding it is not uncommon for outsiders and mere spectators to gain a sharper and deeper insight into the actual meaning of what happens to go on before or around them than would be possible for the actual actors and participants, entirely absorbed as they must be by the events themselves of which they are a part.⁹⁹

The whole idea of storytelling, which Arendt admits "brings about consent and reconciliation with things as they are," seems to contradict her claim to shift the orientation of

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 173.

⁹⁸This problem in some ways parallels the problem that Marxist scholars have with the "vanguard of intellectuals."

⁹⁹Arendt, unpublished acceptance address for the Sonning Prize, Copenhagen, 18 April 1975, Library of Congress, pp. 6-7.

political philosophy to action.¹⁰⁰ If we take seriously the claims she makes against the Western political tradition as well as the claims she makes for storytelling, we must question the extent to which her thought is truly innovative.

I think Arendt initiates a radical discourse that joins modern pragmatism with classical ideals of citizenship and freedom. From the ancients she takes the idea that freedom means participation in a public space defined by our choice to grant equal respect to our diverse perspectives and equal validity to a variety of political problems. Though she embraces Aristotle's distinction between the public and the household and accepts the idea that speech is the mode of politics, she rejects crucial elements of ancient thought. She denies the possibility of knowing human nature and, consequently, that nature can be used to determine who is and who is not capable of citizenship. She also denies that there is any universal order of things that prescribes the ends of politics. Instead, politics is a public discourse whereby we define the principles that guide us in collective action; we can appeal to no authority beyond common sense and have no process to determine what this means other than storytelling and conversation.

The thing that I find so unique about Arendt is that she brings to the modern language of pragmatism a voice charged with the nobility and passion of the classical vision of public

¹⁰⁰Arendt, "Izak Dinesen," p. 105.

life. There is tension and dissonance in her work precisely because she rejects the defining characteristics of both classical and modern political thought: she denies the classical belief in hierarchal authority grounded in universal truths and the modern conception of equality in terms of social rights. In their place she constructs a democracy based on a political conception of equality as "a working principle of a political organization in which otherwise unequal people have equal rights,"¹⁰¹ whose task it is to determine its ruling principles in the chaos of an uncertain universe. The fact that she rejects relativism as an easy way out of this task invests her work with a tragic sense of the enormity of our shared political responsibility and introduces dissonance into her writing, which is to be expected in the work of an outsider at its most radical point.

The most radical aspect of Arendt's thought, which establishes her connection both to contemporary feminist and to contemporary democratic theory, is her challenge to dichotomous thinking. I have argued that outsiders characteristically define both the terms of the dominant conversation and its way of framing questions.¹⁰² This attempt to think beyond or between accepted categories introduces dissonance into the outsider's work. Hannah Arendt initiates a discourse of women in the history of political thought because she invents a

¹⁰¹Arendt, Antisemitism, p. 54.

¹⁰²See Chapter 1.

language and a way of thinking that complements contemporary feminist debates.

Arendt's contribution to feminist and democratic theory is obscured precisely by the fact that she does not think in terms of categories. The terms of her thought are woven together in a fabric, rather than laid out clearly and distinctly. Plurality is the best starting place to sort out this picture. Arendt argues that the human condition is one of interdependence and individual excellence where we are actors whose unique identities come out in performance and so require the presence and participation of an audience. Plurality reveals that the categories of political philosophy--which prefers being to appearance, mind to body, and contemplation to action--are alien to life in the world. This change in the orientation of Western political theory from contemplation to action culminates in a new philosophy of judgment that looks to transcend the dichotomy of objectivism and relativism.

Arendt argues that stories, in which we embedded as tellers, rather than facts, to which we accord objective existence, are the foundation of political judgment. Storytelling is the decisive point in her theory with respect to its contribution to modern feminist and democratic theory. Arendt gives conflicting accounts of the standpoint of the storyteller: it is at times embedded in the world and at times a privileged position outside it. It is uncertain whether she makes a challenge to or restatement of the Archimedean point.

The following chapter will chart the dissonance in Arendt's conception of storytelling.

Chapter Five

Dissonance and Double Vision: The Judgment Writings

Judgment is the critical question for modern democratic theory. Our understanding of judgment is decisive for the limits we will set on participatory politics. If we believe with Plato that political judgment rests on truths outside the political world, then we will separate the tasks of thinking and acting; ruling becomes the job of the knowledgeable few who are set above a mass that no longer really acts but follows. The idea that judgment is a cognitive faculty suggests that it is the job of the citizen to elect competent managers and to defer to their expertise in finding solutions to public problems. If the problems of politics cannot be objectively defined and eradicated, however, then judgment is the definitive activity of the citizen. Building a theory of practical judgment, of judgment as a political faculty is the primary task of democratic theory.

The question of judgment is a focal point in the political theory of Hannah Arendt. Her desire to open new public spaces and revitalize our understanding of citizenship rests on the presumption that judgment is not a task for experts but the definitive activity of citizenship. Yet the reader of Arendt's writings on judgment is assailed by a sense of double vision, a feeling of dissonance which comes from the fact that Arendt holds two conflicting and irreconcilable accounts of this faculty. In the first, she argues that judgment is an activity of politics that comes out of conversation which is made possible by political friendship. In the second, judgment is a

faculty of the spectator-historian who, like Hegel's Owl of Minerva, comes on the scene when the action is over to tell what it meant. It is in following her through these contradictions, reading rather than resolving the dissonance, that we can learn the most from Arendt's work on judgment.

Arendt's writings on judgment are worthy of note not only for democratic theorists and Arendt scholars, but also because they are a rich source of material for the study of outsiders and the problem of entrance. As we have seen, Oakeshott argues that in order to gain entrance into a conversation, the outsider must pursue its intimations. I have argued that this poses a problem because when we pick up the threads of a conversation that is already in progress we may find ourselves swept along into a line of argument that is at odds with our fundamental inclinations. The contradictions in Arendt's work are proof of how difficult it is to define political judgment and proof of the fact that Arendt is an outsider to the conversation of western political philosophy. She is a woman with a concern for action writing in a field whose vocabulary, organizing concepts, and method of posing questions--the tools of the trade--were invented by men who were primarily philosophers. Arendt sees double when she looks at the problem of judgment because she looks at it through the distorting lens of questions that are not quite what she wants to ask; she contradicts herself in writing about it because she does not have the appropriate tools for what she wants to say.

Arendt's conflicting accounts of judgment in terms of friendship and spectatorship once again raise the outsider's paradox. We have identified the outsider's paradox as a conflict between storytelling and philosophy, that is, between constructing an historical standpoint for judging a particular social order or building a framework for judgment out of abstract concepts. We previously explored this paradox by means of a conversation between John Rawls and Hannah Arendt. Now we can explore the same dispute by pitting Hannah Arendt against herself. As in the chapter on outsidership, Hannah Arendt's work once again reveals that the question of contemporary feminist theory taps into the ongoing conversation of Western political philosophy.

Before we attempt to chart the dissonance in Arendt's work, let us look at the problem of political judgment in general and locate Arendt's work in the context of this larger debate. Philosophies of judgment break roughly into two camps, one that defines judgment as a objective faculty and species of technical judgment and one that defines it as an activity of politics and species of practical judgment. Objectivism suggests that judgment is the prerogative of the spectator, the neutral observer who stands above politics and adjudicates political conflict with reference to universal principles. If, however, we define political judgment as a practical activity, then it is not spectatorship but membership that is crucial to fairness. From the objectivist's perspective, membership is

antithetical to judgment because it leads to relativism.

Both objectivism and relativism are unfruitful ways of thinking about judgment. Each in its own way denies the possibility of human responsibility, objectivism because it subordinates thinking to truth and relativism because it denies that we can make sense of our thoughts to others. The very problem with the realm of politics is that it offers us no Archimedean point on which to stand and render a neutral verdict, no way to make a clear distinction between actors and spectators in any particular conflict, yet it demands that we judge. As Benjamin Barber writes, "to be political is to be free with a vengeance--to be free in the unwelcome sense of being without guiding standards or determining norms yet under an ineluctable pressure to act, and to act with deliberation and responsibility as well."¹ Thus, the task of a theory of political judgment is to define this faculty in a way that moves beyond the dichotomies of objectivism and relativism, spectatorship and membership.

To illustrate the claim that politics offers us no clear distinction between actors and spectators, let us consider an example of a case in which a community is selected as a potential site for a hazardous waste incinerator by a state siting commission. Of the many actors involved in this conflict--the commission, the community, the voters of the

¹Benjamin Barber, Strong Democracy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 121.

state at large--who is to make the final judgment about site suitability? By virtue of their membership in the community, the citizens have an obvious interest in blocking the siting, yet they are best situated to judge the potential impacts of the facility. But the judgment of the siting commission is no less self-interested: its members have less to lose by siting the facility than they stand to gain by a successful attack on the waste problem, particularly if the site they select is in an undesirable neighborhood. Neither can we claim neutrality for the opinions of neighboring communities or the majority in the state at large for they too will have an interest in supporting any site so long as it is not in their backyard.

The siting example illustrates why we can not define political judgment in terms of spectatorship. There are no spectators in the case of the proposed incinerator site, only actors, each of whom has an interest in the disposition of the facility that precludes their knowing what is in the common good. Further, each actor will tell a different story about the conflict at hand. The community will cast the commission's ruling as a decision made for political rather than technical reasons. The commission will see the community's resistance as an expression of selfishness--the Not In My Backyard Syndrome. Judgment conceived as a cognitive faculty means subsuming particular phenomena under general rules when both the phenomena and the rules are known for certain. It is unsuited to be a model for politics because it is rarely the case in

political conflict that we know for certain what we are fighting about or that there is any clearly superior resolution.

Hannah Arendt struggles with the questions of judgment, membership, spectatorship, and citizenship throughout her work. Her writings give rise to conflicting interpretations as to the extent to which she viewed judgment as a cognitive faculty and prerogative of spectators or an activity of politics and prerogative of members. Arendt's work makes either position defensible because she holds two mutually irreconcilable views of this faculty. In one, judgment is a political activity that comes out of the conversation of citizens who hold a plurality of opinions and beliefs but have a common interest in the world. The task of the statesman is to bring about the condition of friendship and thereby make it possible for this heterogeneous citizen body to function as a political community. In the other, judgment is the prerogative of the spectator who is not embedded in political conflict like the statesman but does not stand fully outside it like Plato's philosopher.

The decisive choice that Arendt's interpreters make is whether to take seriously her insistence on the centrality of action in The Human Condition, or to put more emphasis on the Kantianism of her later writings. Ronald Beiner, who looks at Arendt's work through a Kantian lens, interprets her in terms of the actor/spectator dilemma. He argues that the Eichmann

book and the writings on judgment that followed it illustrate the "tragic conflict...between political membership and political judgment," in which the judging subject must terminate her membership in the community.² He states unequivocally that for Arendt, political judgment requires us to subordinate membership in a particular community for a dispassionate attachment to general principles.

Benjamin Barber concurs with Beiner that Arendt views judgment as a cognitive faculty. It is not the prerogative of citizens, engaged in the struggle over power and interest, but of the spectator who inhabits a realm that is insulated from conflict.

In Beiner's account, Arendt also thrashes against the confines of rationalism -- after all, for her activity (the vita activa) is the key to man's political life -- but she also cannot escape the embrace of Kant, into whose arms she seemed about to recommit herself at the end of her life...Vita activa or no, judgment remained for Arendt a product of detachment, more the function of spectators than of actors.³

What is interesting about Barber's account is that although he concludes that Arendt's philosophy of judgment moves her away from the position she takes in The Human Condition, he acknowledges the dissonance in her work. He sees her as a thinker whose belief in the power of politics and the vita activa made her uncomfortable with the detached rationalism of

²Ronald Beiner, Political Judgment (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 115.

³Benjamin Barber, The Conquest of Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 198.

Kantian moral thought but who, nonetheless, moved closer to the Kantian position in her late writings on judgment.

In contrast to the more Kantian readings of Arendt, Ernst Vollrath questions whether we can even think of Arendt's writings on judgment in terms of the distinction between spectatorship and action. Vollrath argues that because Arendt regards political events not as objects but as phenomena and appearances, there can be no position outside of politics from which to render judgment. Arendt "regards topics within the political field not as 'objects' but as phenomena and appearances...[that] 'include' those to whom they appear along with the space in which they occur."⁴ We cannot think of spectators outside the field of political action because the public realm ceases to exist once we attempt to stand outside it:

Without the participation of acting and speaking persons, the phenomenal space of political phenomena does not even exist. Just as this space is constituted by the participating persons, it also disappears without them.⁵

There is no event without a spectator; thus, there is no spectator who is not at the same time a participant in the spectacle.

Richard Bernstein views Arendt as a great philosopher because she attempts to move beyond the dichotomy of

⁴Ernst Vollrath, "Hannah Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking," Social Research 44 (Spring 1977), p. 164. Hereafter cited as "Method."

⁵Ibid., p. 165.

objectivism and relativism. Bernstein argues that Arendt conceives of judgment as a political faculty. Her

analysis of judgment as an intrinsically political mode of thinking is also motivated by the desire to show how this mode of thinking escapes the dichotomy of objectivism and relativism. Judgment is not the expression of private feelings or idiosyncratic subjective preferences. Neither is it to be identified with the type of universality that she takes to be characteristic of "cognitive reason." Judgment is communal and intersubjective; it always implicitly appeals to and requires testing against the opinions of other judging persons. It is not a faculty of Man in his universality, but of human individuals in their particularity and plurality.⁶

Like Vollrath, Bernstein sees Arendt as fundamentally a political thinker who grounds judgment in the human conditions of plurality and worldliness. If Arendt defines judgment in terms of speech rather than cognition, then she must prefer membership to spectatorship.

The dissonance in Arendt's work on judgment and the conflicting interpretations she inspires can be explained in part by the fact that she is looking for a foothold for her theory that is outside the boundaries of the judgment debate. She agrees with Barber, Bernstein and other democratic theorists that political membership need not be synonymous with relativism and parochialism. Arendt argues that the first problem of a theory of judgment is to overcome the objectivist prejudice that we cannot judge without abstract universals against which to legitimate human judgment.

⁶Richard Bernstein, Beyond Objectivism and Relativism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), p. 219.

How can we measure length if we do not have a yardstick, how could we count things without a notion of numbers? Maybe it is preposterous even to think that anything can ever happen which our categories are not equipped to understand. Maybe we should resign ourselves to the preliminary understanding, which at once ranges the new among the old...and deduces methodically the unprecedented from precedents, even though such a description of the new phenomenon may be demonstrably at variance with the reality.⁷

While Arendt concurs with Barber's understanding of judgment as an autonomous faculty, she disagrees with his conflation of spectatorship with objectivism. Even when she talks about the spectator, Arendt insists that our job is "to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the set of customary rules which is morality."⁸ Regardless whether judgment is a prerogative of spectators or members, the task for a theory of judgment is to redefine it in a way that transcends categorical thinking.

Arendt redefines judgment as "thinking without bannisters," that is, without reference to abstract universals.⁹ Bannisters are "categories and formulas which are deeply ingrained in our mind but whose basis of experience has long been forgotten and whose plausibility resides in their intellectual consistency rather than in their adequacy to

⁷Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," Partisan Review 20 (July-August 1953), pp. 377-92.

⁸Ibid., p. 391.

⁹Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt," in ed. Melvyn Hill, Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp. 336-7. Hereafter cited as "Hill."

actual events."¹⁰ Arendt argued that bannisters are attractive to us because they arrange our moral dilemmas into systematic patterns that are far neater than our day-to-day responses to particular events, but they are dangerous because they make us lazy. Categories are to moral thinking as bannisters to climbing a staircase: the climb is a greater risk without them because we must keep balance autonomously by our inner sense rather than by a prop that exists outside ourselves.

When we rely on bannisters we begin to cast moral dilemmas as a choice between right and wrong wherein the right answer is legitimated by citing the appropriate authority.

What people then get used to is less the content of the rules, a close examination of which would always lead them into perplexity, than the possession of rules under which to subsume particulars....If ethical and moral matters really are what the etymology of the words indicates, it should be no more difficult to change the mores and habits of a people than it would be to change their table manners.¹¹

Political judgment is not a question of manners, of choosing the appropriate course of action with respect to a particular situation and culture as one selects the right fork at a formal dinner. It is rather a question of practice where it is not just the response that is open to question, but the nature of the situation itself. Choosing a course of action is not an

¹⁰Hannah Arendt, long draft of lecture "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship," Boston, 1964, Library of Congress, p. 27. Hereafter cited as "Responsibility."

¹¹Arendt, The Life of the Mind, vol. 1, "Thinking" (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 177.

answer to a problem but an act of self-creation that could always have been otherwise. To judge is to tell the story of our life to date and reveal our hopes for the future; acting unfolds our character in that it demonstrates what we will do to make the story come true.

Lifted out of context, Arendt's bannister metaphor, which she never refined because she never published it, might be misconstrued as an existentialist or even nihilist philosophy. While it is plausible that bannisters discourage autonomous thinking, it is also true that they enable us to climb stairs. Political judgment--the judgment of citizens as opposed to that of private persons--requires some means of making questions coherent so that they can be discussed in public. The image of "thinking without bannisters" comes dangerously close to suggesting that all judgment is idiosyncratic. Arendt's analysis of German intellectuals' failure to take a strong stand against Hitler proves that she intends the bannister metaphor to suggest neither nihilism nor relativism.

Nihilism, according to Arendt, provided the intellectual soil for the growth of Nazism. German intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century clung to nihilism as a bannister. Nihilism, an abdication of moral responsibility, grows out of the idea that history as process which descends from Fichte to Hegel to Marx. If history is a process, then each individual life is meaningless, only an instant in an infinite plan. Though it is often construed as a

freedom from convention that would make it similar to thinking without bannisters, Arendt argues that nihilism "is but the other side of conventionalism; its creed consists of negations of the current, so-called positive values to which it remains bound."¹²

Unlike the moral thinker who embraces the complexity of ethical dilemmas, the nihilist yearns for a lost simplicity. Nihilism is simply an inversion of deep faith; where piety is unconditional love of God, nihilism is unmitigated anger at God's absence.

The Holocaust is evidence of the modern a crisis in judgment. On one hand, it is an effect of the refusal to act responsibly that is nihilism. On the other, it is a consequence of relativism which Arendt characterizes as a refusal to think. "Thinking without bannisters" is the antidote to both of these conditions. Those who resisted Hitler did so not because they clung to moral doctrines that countered relativism and nihilism, but because they held to the practice of thinking.

Those few who were still able to tell right from wrong went really only by their own judgments, and they did so freely; there were no rules to be abided by under which the particular cases with which they were confronted could be subsumed. They had to decide each instance as it arose, because no reules existed for the unprecedented.¹³

It is not to the rules they followed, but to the fact that they

¹²Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture," Social Research 37 (Fall 1971), p. 435.

¹³Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem (New York: Penguin, 1983), p. 295.

viewed judgment as a practice that we should attribute the superiority of the few who resisted, according to Arendt. Thus judgment, regardless whether it is an activity of spectatorship or membership, is a question of identifying priorities and inventing principles rather than applying rules.

We are now in a position to understand what Arendt means by judgment, and to identify the problems she needs to solve. Judgment is "a human faculty which enables us to judge rationally, without being carried away by either emotion or self-interest and which at the same time functions spontaneously, that is to say, is not bound by standards and rules under which particular cases are simply subsumed, but on the contrary, produces its own principles by virtue of the judging activity itself..."¹⁴ If judgment is spontaneous, not bound by definite rules and procedures, it is not subject to the test of replicability that we use to test the truth of a claim in the hard sciences. How does Arendt propose to ground political judgment if not in an objective body of rules or categories? Arendt's task in the writings on judgment is then to provide a way to validate it without appealing to abstract principles.

Arendt finds the answer to the problem of validation in Kant's Critique of Judgment. She argues that a valid judgment does not have to be objectively true, but merely plausible. The test of political judgment is publicity or "general

¹⁴Arendt, "Responsibility," p. 15.

communicability," which is our ability to provide others with a cogent defense of our assessment of a problem and proposed course of action. The task of her philosophy is to explain how we make a thought public or generally communicable. It is in developing the concept of general communicability or publicity that Arendt fragments her writings on judgment.

Arendt gives two accounts of general communicability, one defines it in terms of friendship and the other in terms of spectatorship. In her early works on Socrates and Lessing, she argues that we make our thoughts public and our judgments inclusive by means of discourse. The condition for judgment is political friendship, which makes conversation possible. This is clearly a theory of judgment based on membership. In the later works where she draws more heavily on Kant, she argues that it is not through speech but by means of imagination that we formulate judgments. We guarantee their generality by means of "representative thinking." Judgment in this second account is not an activity of politics but a faculty of the mind which she attributes to the spectator.

It is in this conflict over general communicability that we see the problem of entrance. Arendt takes the idea of discourse from Socrates and Lessing and the idea of "representative thinking" from Kant. This is her attempt as an outsider to gain entrance into the conversation, and it distorts what she wants to say. In order to look more closely at the problem of entrance in Arendt's work, it will first be

necessary to examine her contradictory accounts of judgment. The first account of judgment in terms of membership requires that we look at what Arendt means by community and political friendship, and how she conceives of the relationship between them. For the account of judgment as spectatorship, we will look carefully at Arendt's use of Kant's texts.

Arendt's early writings on judgment are a continuation of the line of argument she develops in The Human Condition concerning the orientation of the Western political tradition toward philosophy and mortality rather than action and natality. Because of its predisposition to favor the life of the mind over political life, Western political philosophy is unequipped to advance a conception of judgment that is useful to actors in the political world. She characterizes the conflict between philosophy and political community as a conflict between truth and friendship.

Arendt conceives of political power in terms of friendship. She distinguishes her understanding from the conventional notion that power has to do with a contest of wills, which she regards not as a theory of power but of force. Arendt defines power in terms of speech and action which, in contrast to the will which is an attribute of the individual, can only exist in public.

Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish

relations and create new realities.¹⁵

Friendship is the condition of public power. It makes it possible for members of a heterogeneous public to engage in world-building. Presumably publics spring into being wherever values come into question, vary in size with respect to the scope of the question, and last until they exhaust the need to act and desire to speak.

Both love and truth annihilate politics, the former because it eradicates the space that guarantees plurality, and the latter because it silences discourse. Where friendship makes possible a working association of citizens engaged in defining the values that guide the resolution of public problems, love "by reason of its passion, destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others."¹⁶ It turns politics from a cooperative activity among distinct individuals into a collective enterprise in which dissent is viewed as betrayal. The underlying spirit of political friendship is not eros but respect which, "is a kind of 'friendship' without intimacy and without closeness; it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us...."¹⁷ Eros destroys the space that makes conflict possible, and thus also destroys discourse and

¹⁵Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 200. Hereafter cited as Condition.

¹⁶Ibid., 242.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 243.

the resolution of conflict.

Arendt argues that truth, like love, is antagonistic to politics. She takes this argument from the distinction between philosophy and oratory that Plato makes in Gorgias. Where the philosopher is a seeker and teacher of truth, the orator is a manipulator of mass opinion and cannot be otherwise because of the scale of the political world. Politics, because it is the realm of the many, is the province of opinion. Truth, which otherwise exists without words in the realm of the forms, makes itself known in the world only in the relationship between philosopher and student. Plato draws an analogy between philosophy and medicine: the philosopher is a doctor who "cures" one pupil at a time by bringing his soul in harmony with itself through an argument that makes him aware of the internal contradictions in his beliefs. While the philosopher can have access to reason in the individual, the multitude is moved only by the passions and thus accessible not to philosophy but oratory. If truth is to prevail in public, it must rule which means that it puts an end to opinion, persuasion, and politics.

Western political philosophy is unequipped to advance a conception of judgment for actors in the political world because it descends from Plato who values truth and the safety of the philosopher above the lively exchange of opinion that is politics. Plato defines political judgment in terms of truth and makes it a faculty of mind rather than an activity of

politics because "the death of Socrates made Plato despair of polis life and, at the same time, doubt certain fundamentals of Socrates' teachings."¹⁸ The chief teaching that Plato rejects is Socrates' belief that judgment is based in friendship and disclosed through discourse: "[t]he spectacle of Socrates' having to submit his own doxa to the irresponsible opinions of the Athenians and see it outvoted by a majority made him despise opinions and taught him that yearning for absolute standards by which human deeds could be judged and human thought achieve some measure of reliability which from then became the primary impulse for his political philosophy..."¹⁹ Thus, in order to criticize the tradition's understanding of judgment as a cognitive faculty, Arendt must undertake to challenge Plato's interpretation of Socrates.

The Socrates story is the founding myth of Western political philosophy. But as Plato tells it, this story destroys what it should have secured by depicting philosophy and politics in an irreconcilable conflict. "Our tradition of political thought began with the death of Socrates which made Plato despair of polis life and, at the same time, doubt certain fundamentals of Socrates' teachings."²⁰ Arendt's project is to rediscover political philosophy, which means she

¹⁸Arendt, unpublished essay "Philosophy and Politics: The Problem of Action and Thought after the French Revolution," 1954, Library of Congress, p. 32.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 33.

²⁰Ibid., p. 32.

must lift a new Socrates out of the veil of doubt that Plato cast over his life and teachings.

In order to find out what the conflict is about which gave rise to our whole tradition of political thought and then was forgotten, we shall go back to the beginning of our tradition, to the moment when, in the words of Cornford, the men of thought parted from the men of action, when with Pericles the last philosophic statesman and with Socrates the last political philosopher had died. It was then that Plato formulated the first political philosophy which, at the same time, was the first philosophy in which the philosopher explicitly took position toward and, to an extent, against politics.²¹

In her work on judgment, Arendt completes the task she began in Human Condition. Where in her first work she argues that we must examine politics apart from the shadow cast on it by Platonic philosophy, in constructing her philosophy of judgment she begins to reunite the two by retelling the Socrates story in a way that makes political philosophy possible.

Arendt resurrects Socrates to write a new myth, not of an Achilles of the academy who was doomed to die for the cause of philosophy, but of a man who believed that philosophy was not the final arbiter but rather the medium of political disputes. She depicts Socrates not as a man engaged in a dogmatic project to "correct" the beliefs of the Athenian citizens, but one dedicated to the creation of political friendship in Athens. Many of the dialogues in which he appears end inconclusively, seeming almost to circle back on themselves:

It is obvious that this kind of dialogue which needs no conclusion in order to be meaningful is the kind

²¹Ibid.

of speech which is most frequent and most appropriate for friends. Friendship, indeed, to a large extent consists of this kind of talking about something which is between the friends and which they have in common. By talking about it, that which is between becomes even more common to them. It gains not only in its specific articulateness, but develops and expands and finally, in the course of time and life, begins to constitute a little world of its own which is shared in friendship.²²

Arendt's Socrates is more concerned with meaning than truth, and prefers friendship to political rule.

The new Socrates and the old differ most in their conceptions of how we know what we know. Plato has a mystical view of knowledge as insight into the Forms, or absolute truth, which is accessible only to the philosopher who renounces the material world of passion and opinion. Athens must put Socrates to death because the conflict of truth and politics is irreconcilable: once we know truth we no longer have need of persuasion and opinion. Where Plato's philosopher is martyred by this fundamental antagonism, Arendt's Socrates is a man for whom absolute truth did not exist and who believed as a consequence that philosophy was inherently political.

Arendt uses Socrates to move, in Bernstein's words, beyond objectivism and relativism. Socrates argues that judgment is possible, despite the fact that there are no absolute standards by which to govern the political world. Political judgment is grounded not in philosophic certainty, but in political friendship which makes the public exchange of opinion possible.

²²Ibid., p. 37.

To Socrates opinion,

was not subjective fantasy and arbitrariness, but also not something absolute, valid for all. The assumption was that the world opens up differently to every man, according to his position in it; and that the "sameness" of the world, its common-ness... resides in the fact that the same world opens up to all and that despite all differences between men and their positions in the world, and consequently their doxai, "both you and I are human."²³

This passage echoes Human Condition where Arendt writes, "the reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised."²⁴ The goal of political philosophy is not to reduce the multiplicity of opinions to a single absolute truth but to enable each of us to understand the world from a plurality of standpoints.

The essence of statesmanship consists not in a kind of knowledge but in the ability to promote conversation. The "outstanding virtue" of the statesman is to understand "the greatest possible number and variety of worlds as they open themselves up to the various opinions of their inhabitants, and, at the same time to be able to communicate between them so that the common-ness of this world becomes apparent." Public discourse is possible only among citizens who are articulate enough to express their opinions conversationally, in a way that can be understood by and exchanged with our fellow

²³Ibid., p. 35.

²⁴Arendt, Condition, p. 57.

citizens. "The role of the philosopher--if we may apply this term to Socrates who did not yet think of himself in these terms, is not to rule the city, but to be its 'gadfly,' not to improve the citizens so much as to make their doxai, [the currency of political life,]²⁵ better, a life in which he too took part."²⁶ For Arendt's Socrates, it is not truth (episteme) but opinion (doxa) that reigns supreme in the political world.

In matters that concern the world, opinion is all that each of us has, and our separate opinions contain only partial truths whose validity we cannot ascertain before we submit them to the test of publicity or communicability. Mystic illumination is not relevant to politics because "nobody can know all by himself and without further effort the inherent truth of his own opinion."²⁷ In this account, political judgment can never be the property of an individual. The philosopher can not rule the world of opinion, but philosophy can bring about the exchange of opinion that renders it possible for citizens to rule themselves.

Arendt retells the Socrates story as a conflict between truth and friendship. If truth exists and can be known to the

²⁵The actual clause in Arendt's essay reads "that what political life existed of...." It was her habit to submit essays to be "englished" prior to publication. As this essay was never published, it contains many awkward sentences like this one, which I have attempted to "english" for her.

²⁶Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," p. 36.

²⁷Ibid.

human intellect, then judgment consists in the discovery of rules. It is up to the statesman to design a political realm that permits those who know the rules to govern those who do not. If, on the contrary, politics is an autonomous realm, then judgment is not a question of truth but opinion. In contrast to Plato's portrait of the philosopher-king, "Socrates seems to have believed that the political function of the philosopher is to help establish [a] common world, built on the understanding of friendship."²⁸ Political community depends not on knowledge, but on the existence of friendship that creates an arena in which to dispute questions of right and wrong.

The idea of the conflict between friendship and truth comes to Arendt from her experience in Hitler's Germany. What puzzled Arendt and other Jews in Germany during the Nazis rise to power was "the behavior not of our enemies but of our friends...[who were] impressed by the Nazi success [and] unable to pit their own judgment against the verdict of History, as they would see it."²⁹ For this cadre of intellectuals, the momentum of the National Socialist movement fulfilled Hegel's promise that truth would be revealed over the course of history. In following Hitler and abandoning their Jewish colleagues, they sacrificed friendship to the objective truth of the "historical process."

²⁸Ibid., p. 39.

²⁹Arendt, "Responsibility," p. 12.

Arendt continues to use friendship as a theme to explore the conflict between philosophy and politics in her analysis of the life and works of Gotthold Lessing. Just as Rahel Varnhagen was a kindred spirit who helped Arendt articulate her thoughts about what it means to be an outsider, Lessing's life and works help her build a road through the obstacles of constructing a philosophy of judgment. Arendt paints a portrait of Lessing as a writer who, like herself, understands judgment as a faculty that confronts particular phenomena, grounded not in universal truths but in the world. Like Arendt, Lessing is someone who thinks without bannisters. "Criticism, in Lessing's sense, is always taking sides for the world's sake, understanding and judging everything in terms of its position in the world at any given time. Such a mentality can never give rise to a definite world view which, once adopted, is immune to further experiences in the world because it has hitched itself firmly to one particular perspective."³⁰ Thus for Lessing judgment begins with experience, with particular phenomena unmediated by the comfortable certainty of universal categories.

The human condition of plurality requires that we adopt a particularist method of judging. Because we share the world with beings who are like us only in the unpredictability of our actions and uniqueness of our thoughts and opinions, it is

³⁰Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing," in Men in Dark Times (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), pp. 6-7. Hereafter cited as "Lessing."

fruitless to search for a single standard against which to reduce the infinite plurality of human experiences is an negative response to the human condition of plurality. In fact the search for objectivity, is a negative response to the uncertainty that plurality engenders.

Lessing's greatness does not merely consist in a theoretical insight that there cannot be one single truth within the human world but in his gladness that it does not exist and that, therefore, the unending discourse among men will never cease so long as there are men at all. A single absolute truth, could there have been one, would have been the death of all those disputes in which this ancestor and master of all polemicism in the German language was so much at home and always took sides with the utmost clarity and definiteness.³¹

Friendship, which seeks not to discover truth but to achieve understanding of a multi-dimensioned world, is an affirmative response to plurality.

Lessing, like Arendt, achieved distinction for writing controversial opinion pieces on events of his time. She praises his work for its "astonishing lack of 'objectivity'...which has nothing whatsoever to do with subjectivity because it is always framed not in terms of the self but in terms of the relationship of men to their world, in terms of their positions and opinions."³² Just as Arendt is an outsider to the platonism of the Western political tradition, Lessing was a pariah in his time. His belief that judgment means thinking from particulars made him an iconoclast in an

³¹Ibid., p. 27.

³²Ibid., p. 29.

age when, according to Arendt, "it was hard for the Germans to grasp that justice has little to do with objectivity in the ordinary sense."³³

Arendt celebrates Lessing because he conceives of judgment not as a faculty that we exercise in terms of rules but as an activity among friends. It is Lessing's "curious kind of partiality which clung to concrete details with an exaggerated, almost pedantic carefulness, and gave rise to many misunderstandings" that forced the revolutionaries of his time to engage in critical thinking. Partiality and friendship is an answer to those who permitted themselves to deny their Jewish colleagues with their hands firmly on the bannisters of Nazi anti-semitism. For Lessing, "truth, if it did exist, could be unhesitatingly sacrificed to humanity, to the possibility of friendship and of discourse among men."³⁴

Arendt develops this contrast between partiality, friendship, and politics on one hand and philosophy and truth on the other by means of a contrast between Lessing and Kant. She juxtaposes the humanity of the ethic of partiality and friendship Lessing personifies against Kant's Categorical Imperative. She argues that the triumph of truth over friendship in the Holocaust was made possible in part by German intellectuals' participation in a tradition of moral reasoning that descends from the Critique of Practical Reason.

³³Ibid., p. 6.

³⁴Ibid., p. 27.

The critique is Kant's defense of modern natural rights theory, the foundation of liberal political thought, against David Hume. John Locke articulates the natural rights position in the Second Treatise, which argues that every individual person in the state of nature has access to the universal laws of nature through reason. Judgment is a cognitive faculty attributed to the individual abstracted from membership in the civil society. Hume in the Treatise on Human Nature, argues that our belief in the universality of physical laws is empirically unjustifiable; consequently, nature can not authorize the claim that our ethical principles are either universal or necessary. Hume's Treatise implies that there is no foundation for judgment beyond tradition.

The categorical imperative is Kant's attempt to salvage the possibility of judgment in the face of Hume's challenge to natural rights theory. Like Locke, Kant depicts practical reason as a mental faculty of the solitary moral actor. Kant himself argued that his moral philosophy descends not from Locke but from Rousseau. Self-determination, the centerpiece of Rousseau's theory of democracy, is also the central component of the categorical imperative. Kant argues that as moral beings we are not just actors but legislators and that we must act only according to maxims that we would will as general laws:

The rational being must regard himself always as legislative in a realm of ends possible through the freedom of the will, whether he belongs to it as member or as sovereign. He cannot maintain the

latter position merely through the maxims of his will but only when he is a completely independent being without need and with power adequate to his will.³⁵

While This passage from the Critique could almost have been written by Rousseau, Kant's theory ultimately bears only a formal resemblance to the Social Contract.

Kant transforms Rousseau by taking the general will, an entity that Rousseau argues emerges from the particular cultural identity of a people, and formulating it as a universal principle of reason. Where Rousseau argues that the general will is discovered by a political process of negotiation and persuasion, determining the Categorical Imperative is a purely self-referential moral exercise. Kant writes, "That will is absolutely good which cannot be bad, and thus it is a will whose maxim, when made a universal law, can never conflict with itself."³⁶ Rousseau admits the possibility that different communities will live by different values,³⁷ (SC, II.iii) but Kant asserts that the Categorical Imperative gives rise to "a systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws."³⁸ Though Kant claims to have been

³⁵Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), p. 52.

³⁶Immanuel Kant, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), p. 55. Hereafter cited as Foundations.

³⁷Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract, ed. Roger D. Masters, trans. Judith R. Masters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), II.iii.

³⁸Kant, Foundations, p. 52.

inspired by Rousseau, it is clear that his thought bears much greater resemblance to Lockean liberalism than to Rousseauan democracy. Like Locke, Kant fails to offer a truly political theory of judgment, instead defining it as a mental faculty of the solitary reasoner whose concern is not with the world but with maintaining personal integrity in respect of a general principle of reason.

Kant is the guiding influence of many contemporary political thinkers who, though they recognize the need to transpose the Categorical Imperative before it can be effective as a political ethic, fail to break entirely out of the Kantian conception of judgment as a cognitive faculty. John Rawls, for example, is concerned with resuscitating the possibility of effective social consensus on certain fundamental values such as justice and equity. Rawls understands rationality in the classic liberal sense, as a faculty of mind that enables us to achieve objectivity by taking us outside the passions and interests we feel as a result of our particular historical situation and bodily experiences. Rawls unequivocally establishes his tie to Kant, calling the original position the "point of view from which noumenal selves see the world."³⁹ Like Kant, Rawls presumes that reason can discover universal normative principles that resolve the contradictions in particular historical conflicts.

³⁹John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), sec. 40.

Jurgen Habermas is also a neo-Kantian who defines judgment in terms of impartiality and objectivity. Unlike Rawls, Habermas begins with the assumption that our thinking is irrevocably embedded in a cultural context. He views the problem of justice as a problem of speech. Discourse can produce a rational consensus on political action when we set up an arena for discussion that compensates for the power inequities among actors. His objective is to establish the conditions for "unconstrained speech," and to train citizens in communicative competence.

It is interesting to compare the heritage of these two neo-Kantian thinkers. Rawls whose project descends directly from Kant, excludes discourse. Choosing the principles of justice in the original position is not a question of debate, but a matter of letting self interest guide us to the principle that minimizes our possibility of incurring risk and maximizes gain. Habermas, who claims to have inherited his project not from Kant but from Arendt, centers on speech.⁴⁰ Ironically, his interpretation of her work parallels Kant's appropriation of Rousseau. Where Arendt argues that the idea that rational consensus could direct political action is at odds with the human condition of plurality, Habermas insists that in Arendt's "communications concept of power":

The fundamental phenomenon of power is not the

⁴⁰In "On the German-Jewish Heritage," Telos 44 (Summer 1980), pp. 128-9, Habermas notes: "I have learned from Hannah Arendt how to approach a theory of communicative action."

instrumentalization of another's will, but the formation of a common will in a communication directed to reaching agreement....The strength of a consensus brought about in unconstrained communication is not measured against any success but against the claim to rational validity that is immanent in speech.⁴¹

Habermas assimilates Arendt's thought to match his own by holding it to the test of "rational validity."⁴²

As far as she is concerned, the condition of plurality guarantees that action never proceeds out of a rational principle. The feature that distinguishes action from production is that action can never be explained in terms of the intentions and calculations of the participants, while production is governed by means/end rationality. Doing:

...presupposes a world in which there is only a single will, or which is so arranged that all the active ego-subjects in it are sufficiently isolated from one another so that there will be no mutual interference of their ends and aims. With action the reverse is true; there is an infinitude of intersecting and interfering intentions and purposes which, taken all together in their complex immensity, represent the world into which each man must cast his act, although in that world no end and no intention has ever been achieved as it was originally intended.⁴³

Action is not guided by a rational principle, but happens under

⁴¹Jürgen Habermas, "Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power," Social Research 44 (1977), pp. 3-24.

⁴²For two excellent discussions of the relationship between the ideas of Habermas and Arendt see, Gerard P. Heather and Matthew Stolz, "Hannah Arendt and the Problem of Critical Theory," Journal of Politics 41 (1979), 2-22; Margaret Canovan, "A Case of Distorted Communication: A Note on Habermas and Arendt," Political Theory 11 (February 1983), 105-116.

⁴³Arendt, "Hermann Broch," in Men in Dark Times, p. 147.

haphazard, accidental conditions. While Habermas understands that the state is not an impartial decision-maker--its institutional processes reflect embedded power interests--he argues that a re-structured state should aim at rational decision-making.⁴⁴ Arendt suggests that rationality is beyond the capacities of even the best of states.

Where her colleagues struggle with politicizing Kant's Critique, Arendt argues that it cannot be done. Instead, she makes the aesthetic writings the basis of her own philosophy of judgment. This deliberate shift from Kant's consideration of practical reason to his aesthetic writings invites us to question whether Arendt is any more successful than Rawls or Habermas at freeing herself from Kantian rationalism. It also raises questions about the extent to which Arendt should be categorized a neo-Kantian.

Many Arendt scholars treat her relationship to Kant too simply, as one of direct descent. I agree with Beiner that that Arendt shares with Kant an understanding of human judgment as tragic judgment. The capacity to choose a course of action and accept responsibility for its unforeseeable consequences is the distinguishing characteristic of the human being. But I think it is incorrect to argue that Arendt inherits her

⁴⁴For more on the claim that Habermas reproduces many of the problems of deontological thinking, in particular the opposition of reason and desire and setting a priority on argumentative speech over other means of communication see Iris Marion Young, "Impartiality and the Civic Public," in ed. Seyla Benhabib, Feminism as Critique (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 57-76.

understanding of judgment directly from Kant. Arendt explicitly rejects the Critique of Practical Reason as a foundation for a political ethic, and turns instead to the Critique of Judgment which she puts to what might be called creative mis-use.

Arendt rejects the Critique of Practical Reason because in it, Kant defines judgment as a universalizing faculty. The Categorical Imperative instructs us to "act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."⁴⁵ Arendt argues that the imperative is not at all political because it does not apply to men under the condition of plurality: earth-bound creatures in their relationship to others. Instead, it concerns man as a solitary individual who, "consulting nothing but his own reason, finds the maxim that is not self-contradictory, from which he can then derive an Imperative."⁴⁶ She criticizes Kant because the imperative doesn't apply to people as members of communities.

In order to fully appreciate why she claims the Categorical Imperative is not political, we must recall some ideas from The Human Condition. Arendt describes the human condition as a web of relationships into which we are all thrust at birth and without which it would be impossible to

⁴⁵Kant, Groundwork, p. 39.

⁴⁶Hannah Arendt, Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 49. Hereafter cited as Lectures.

speak of ourselves as inhabitants of a common world. This web of relationships, which she calls plurality, cannot admit of absolutes because "everything that exists among a plurality of things is not simply what it is, in its identity, but it is also different from others....When we try to get hold of it in thought, wanting to define it, we must take this otherness or difference into account."⁴⁷ The categorical imperative, an absolute moral duty that applies to individuals in themselves, not as they are embedded in communities, cannot be a political philosophy because it denies the condition of plurality.

The ideas of plurality and friendship are connected in Arendt's thought. The categorical imperative, because it is a denial of plurality, is also a denial of friendship.

...the inhumanity of Kant's moral philosophy is undeniable. And this is so because the categorical imperative is postulated as absolute and in its absoluteness introduces into the interhuman realm--which by its nature consists of relationships--something that runs counter to its fundamental relativity. The inhumanity which is bound up with the concept of one single truth emerges with particular clarity in Kant's work precisely because he attempted to found truth on practical reason; it is as though he who had so inexorably pointed out man's cognitive limits could not bear to think that in action, too, man cannot behave like a god.⁴⁸

Arendt uses Kant's aesthetic writings at the end of her life to deepen the analysis of friendship that she began when she first started thinking explicitly about judgment.

Arendt's preliminary definition of judgment in terms of

⁴⁷Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," p. 441.

⁴⁸Arendt, "Lessing," p. 27.

political friendship leaves many questions unanswered. In the early work on Socrates and Lessing, Arendt almost idealizes friendship, obscuring the important and necessary distinctions between the relations of friends and those of citizens. Politics exists to regulate the affairs of strangers and perhaps acquaintances; friends presumably have little need for rules and contracts. While it is both permissible and desirable to discriminate in our choice of friends, politics requires fairness. She cannot answer these questions without modifying her initial thoughts. These modifications introduce a note of ambivalence regarding the question whether judgment is a cognitive faculty of the spectator or a political activity of membership. How far in space and time must we remove ourselves from an action in order to judge it? In exploring the complexities of this problem, she abandons some of her first ideas about judgment. The most striking change is that she discards partiality, which she developed in her work on Lessing, for impartiality, a much more conventional idea.

Arendt looks to the Critique of Judgment to give her a way to talk about judgment that avoids both the subjectivism of idiosyncratic personal preference and the cold abstraction of an objective standard external to human relationships. The ambivalence in her work comes from Kant, whose writings on aesthetics she treats as Kant's political theory because his project in the Critique of Judgment, like hers, is to talk about a sense that connects the inner world of thought to the

intersubjective world of politics. Like Arendt's "friendship," Kant's "taste" is a faculty that, although it is subjective and immediate, can nonetheless construct general principles. Kant's aesthetic writing moves her from her political definition of judgment in terms of partiality to the less conventional "impartiality."

Arendt explains that she is drawn to Kant's aesthetic writings because they permit her to talk about judgment in experiential and political terms rather than as an individual, cognitive faculty. In the aesthetic writings nowhere "does Kant speak of man as an intelligible or a cognitive being."⁴⁹ Further, political judgment defined as taste is compatible with Arendt's conception of history. Taste relates to particular objects in themselves and does not reduce them to phases in a process or components of a system. Likewise, an action is a story in itself to which we respond with immediacy. Taste is "subjective because the very objectivity of the seen or heard or touched thing is annihilated in them...because the food we taste is inside ourselves, and so, in a way, is the smell of the rose."⁵⁰ In matters of taste as in matters of politics, it is difficult to separate the spectator from the action.

The reason why I believe so much in Kant's Critique of Judgment is not because I am interested in aesthetics but because I believe that the way in which we say "That is right, that is wrong," is not very different from the way in which we say, "This is

⁴⁹Arendt, Lectures, p. 13.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 66.

beautiful, this is ugly." That is, we are now prepared to meet the phenomena, so to speak, head-on, without any preconceived system.⁵¹

In judgments of taste and ethical judgments we confront particular phenomena as if they were unprecedented, that is, without formulas--bannisters--that tell us what to think about them.

Further, Arendt argues that Kant's philosophy is essentially political because he makes an explicit connection between political freedom and freedom of mind. Kant views communication as a necessary part of opinion formation; thus freedom of thought requires freedom of public expression.

Freedom of speech and thought, as we understand it, is the right of an individual to express himself and his opinion in order to be able to persuade others to share his viewpoint. This presupposes that I am capable of making up my mind all by myself and that the claim I have on the government is to permit me to propagandize whatever I have already fixed in my mind. Kant's view of this matter is very different. He believes that the very faculty of thinking depends on its public use; without the "test of free and open examination," no thinking and no opinion-formation are possible.⁵²

Without freedom of expression, there is no way to put our judgments to the test of communicability, no way to temper private judgment with the intersubjectivity of common sense.

The importance of this teaching is that if speech is necessary to thinking, then freedom of mind is inextricably

⁵¹Arendt, unpublished transcript of Remarks to the American Society of Christian Ethics, Richmond, VA, January 1973, Library of Congress, p. 9. Hereafter cited as "Remarks."

⁵²Arendt, Lectures, p. 40.

bound to political freedom. Philosophy, storytelling, art, or any other cognitive activity is never fully separate from the political realm: the judge is never simply a spectator. Of course, Arendt is not arguing for a conflation of the public and private realms. She is careful to distinguish between free speech and free thought, acknowledging the publicity of the former and the privacy of the latter: "...it is of course by no means true that you need or even can bear the company of others when you happen to be busy thinking; yet, unless you can somehow communicate and expose to the test of others, either orally or in writing, whatever you may have found out when you were alone, this faculty exerted in solitude will disappear."⁵³ Arendt discovers the shadow of Socrates here in Kant, invoking the model of judgment-as-conversation she developed in her writings on Socrates.

In invoking Kant's concept of taste as the foundation for a theory of judgment, Arendt once again opens herself to the charge of relativism. Taste can not be the central component of a political theory because it is the most private and idiosyncratic of all the senses. Arendt is saved from relativism by the fact that both she and Kant tread the line of paradox in arguing that taste is a "subjective universal." Arendt is drawn to Kant because he "was very early aware that there was something nonsubjective in what seems to be the most

⁵³Ibid.

private and subjective sense."⁵⁴ The nonsubjective element in taste is "intersubjectivity," which is to say that we can neither formulate nor validate our sense of taste without appealing a common, social standards. Where Kant's practical reason is solitary, taste, or aesthetic judgment, "always reflects upon others and their taste, takes their possible judgments into account."⁵⁵ Taste in Kant, like action in Arendt, is a public sense, grounded in the condition of plurality.

Kant tries to argue that taste is a kind of subjective universal, a principle that--though not grounded in rationality--can win universal consensus. He introduces taste with the paradoxical assertion that it is a "subjective principle which determines what pleases or displeases only by feeling and not by concepts, but yet with universal validity."⁵⁶ According to Kant, aesthetic judgment cannot claim the unconditional validity of pure reason, but neither is it devoid of principle. Taste is a

faculty of judgment which, in its reflection, takes account (a priori) of the mode of representation of all other men in thought, in order, as it were, to compare its judgment with the collective reason of humanity, and thus to escape the illusion arising from the private conditions that could be so easily taken for objective, which would injuriously affect the judgment. This is done by comparing our judgment

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 67.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment, trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Macmillan, 1951), sec. 20.

with the possible rather than the actual judgments of others, and by putting ourselves in the place of any other man, by abstracting from the limitations which contingently attach to our own judgment.⁵⁷

Judgments of taste appeal to feelings of pleasure and displeasure that Kant claims are universal but not cognitive or rational.

Taste can be both subjective and universal because it is not an immediate response to an object, but to the image of the object re-presented by the imagination and tempered by comparison with the anticipated judgments of others. But by adding the mediating step of re-presentation, Kant revises his earlier assertion that taste is not a faculty of the mind but of feeling. He now argues that taste involves comparison which is an act of cognition or reflection. There are two contradictions in this account, one in the fact that Kant, in order to argue that taste is both subjective and universal, re-defines taste in a way that diminishes its subjectivity. The second contradiction is that Arendt uses the writings on taste to construct a moral judgment whose immediacy parallels that of aesthetic judgment, but in Kant's account taste does not meet phenomena "head-on," but is rather mediated by the imagination which re-presents the object and conjures up the possible responses of our fellows.

Though Kant begins by asserting that aesthetic judgment is both subjective and universal, this proves too radical an idea

⁵⁷Ibid., sec. 40.

for him to work out. He ends up arguing that taste cannot attain universality unless we extricate ourselves "from the limitations which contingently attach to our own judgment." The difficulty Kant has in sustaining the idea of a subjective universal is evidenced in this passage where he almost apologizes for his definition of common sense:

Now this operation of reflection seems perhaps too artificial to be attributed to the faculty called common sense, but it only appears so when expressed in abstract formulae. In itself there is nothing more natural than to abstract from charm or emotion if we are seeking a judgment that is to serve as a universal rule.⁵⁸

Rather than sustain his argument and acknowledge the dissonance in the idea of a universal principle based in feeling, Kant abandons the concept.

Arendt imports Kant's definition of common sense into the center of her account of political judgment. With it she inherits his ambivalence about the possibility that we can see and articulate moral principles from a standpoint embedded in the world. Arendt interprets the troublesome passage where Kant argues that taste must abstract from the limits of contingency to mean "disregarding what we usually call self-interest" to arrive not at a universal principle but a general standpoint.⁵⁹

This generality is not the generality of the concept—for example, the concept "house," under which one can then subsume various kinds of individual

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Arendt, Lectures, p. 43.

buildings. It is, on the contrary closely connected with particulars, with the particular conditions of the standpoints one has to go through in order to arrive at one's own "general standpoint."⁶⁰

Where Kant poses the tension between subjectivity and universality as a question of reconciling particularity and contingency with universality, Arendt redefines it as a struggle between self-interest and generality. Arendt argues that a viable principle must be informed by a richness of detail concerning our own particularity and that of many who surround us. Where Kant hopes to define taste as faculty that achieves subjective universality, we might say that Arendt aims for particularized generality. The "enlarged mentality" that is a prerequisite of judgment does not come from abstraction, as in Kant, but from understanding.

Arendt is careful to distinguish between political thinking, or understanding, which makes possible critical thinking from a 'general standpoint,' and empathy, which annihilates critical distance. We usually think of understanding as an empathic connection with another; it is a virtue of intimate friends rather than citizens or political friends. For Arendt, understanding does not mean knowing how someone else feels, but instead knowing how the world looks to them.

This process of representation does not blindly adopt the actual views of those who stand somewhere else, and hence look upon the world from a different perspective; this is a question neither of empathy,

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 43-44.

as though I tried to be or to feel like somebody else, nor of counting noses and joining a majority but of being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not.⁶¹

In understanding we train our imaginations to "go visiting" not into others' souls but into their shoes. The question we try to answer is not why they respond as they did to the world as they see it, but how we would respond if we lived in their world. While it is selfish to assume with the objectivist that everyone sees the same world I do, and irresponsible to argue that our worlds are so diverse that there can be no communication among us, fairness means seeing a plurality of worlds and finding a standard I could live by in any one of them.

The idea of the enlarged mentality as Arendt describes it here begins to sound more like the kind of Kantianism we associate with John Rawls' original position than it does like political friendship which Arendt develops in the writings on Socrates and Lessing. Seeing from another's perspective is very much like the original position in that it is a thought experiment; it is different in that where the original position removes us to a point outside of real political interests and identities, Arendt asks us to understand a plurality of embedded standpoints. Given her earlier texts on friendship and conversation, she ought to argue that we reach this standpoint by means of conversation but instead she assimilates

⁶¹Arendt, "Truth and Politics," in Between Past and Future, p. 241.

Kant's concept of representative thinking:

The more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinion. (It is this capacity for an "enlarged mentality" that enables men to judge; as such, it was discovered by Kant in the first part of his Critique of Judgment, though he did not recognize the political and moral implications of his discovery.)⁶²

With the idea of representative thinking, Arendt supplants an account of judgment as a cognitive faculty for the more political notion of friendship she developed in the writings on Socrates and Lessing.

Arendt seems not to recognize the implications of transplanting Kant in this fashion. In search of a footing between direct experience which, for the purposes of judgment "establishes too immediate and too close a contact and mere knowledge [which] erects an artificial barrier,"⁶³ (p. 12 On the Nature) she follows Kant in accepting the mediation of the imagination. She still wants to argue that judgment is not wholly a faculty of mind because it "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

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Arendt, unpublished essay "On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding," Library of Congress, p. 12. Hereafter cited as "Essay."

others...."⁶⁴ The idea of anticipated, imaginary communication is strikingly at odds with the account of judgment she gave in the early writings. If she wants to see judgment as a political and contextual faculty, why does she follow Kant in arguing that judgments are formed not in real conversation but in the imagination?

Arendt concludes that judgment is not synonymous with taste, but rather with taste once removed from its object by the imagination.

One then speaks of judgment and no longer of taste because, though it still affects one like a matter of taste, one now has, by means of representation, established the proper distance, the remoteness or uninvolvedness or disinterestedness, that is requisite for approbation and disapprobation, for evaluating something at its proper worth. By removing the object, one has established the conditions for impartiality.⁶⁵

Both Kant and Arendt retreat from radical definitions of judgment to safer, more conventional arguments. Kant begins, as Arendt notes, by recognizing that taste is both private and public, subjective and universal. Arendt begins by arguing that judgment is both particular and general, contextual and transcendent. Both resolve the tension in their thought by retreating to the life of the mind. Kant argues that common sense requires reflection and abstract thinking; Arendt defines judgment as impartiality.

⁶⁴Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture," in Between Past and Future, p. 220. Hereafter cited as "Crisis."

⁶⁵Arendt, Lectures, p. 67.

Although impartiality takes Arendt far from the Lessing essay where she defined judgment in terms of partiality, she does not abandon the world altogether. She is careful to distinguish her new position from the objectivist stance she rejected so adamantly in those early writings. Impartiality "is obtained by taking the viewpoints of others into account; impartiality is not the result of some higher standpoint that would then actually settle the dispute by being altogether above the world."⁶⁶ Where the objectivist claims an authority based on removing oneself from the human condition and human sense experiences by meditating on abstract ideas, impartiality retains its bearings and its humility among the plurality of human perspectives.

For Ronald Beiner, the decisive question for the purposes of determining whether Arendt makes judgment a political or a cognitive faculty is whether impartiality is possible for the actor or must always only be the standpoint of the spectator. Arendt raises this question in her analysis of Kant's treatment of the French Revolution. Kant's ambivalence toward action and its results is evidenced by the fact that he deplors revolution as illegal, even when it establishes a better order, but welcomes the French revolution as an opportunity for spectators to sharpen their moral sentiment in the public exchange of judgments about it. Arendt writes, "[T]he importance of the occurrence is for him exclusively in the eye

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 42.

of the beholder, in the opinion of the onlookers who proclaim their attitude in public. Their reaction to the event proves the 'moral character' of mankind."⁶⁷ But Arendt argues that his stance is untenable because there is an irresolvable tension in Kant "between the principle according to which you should act and the principles according to which you judge. For Kant condemns the very action whose results he then affirms with a satisfaction bordering on enthusiasm."⁶⁸

Arendt argues that while the actor and spectator are distinct beings, their frames of reference are not and cannot be at odds with each other. As Kant's judge, "[I am] absorbed by the spectacle, I am outside it, I have given up the standpoint that determines my factual existence with all its circumstantial, contingent conditions. Kant would have said: I have reached a general standpoint, the impartiality the Judge is supposed to exercise when he lays down his verdict."⁶⁹ This outsider is Kant's world citizen which, Arendt argues, is an oxymoronic concept. It is not possible to be a citizen of the world because the duties of citizenship are always historically specific; neither is it possible to abstract the judge from politics because without the values that attach to citizenship in any particular regime it is impossible to make sense of an event. Arendt asks: "does this easy phrase of idealists,

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 46.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 48.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 56.

'citizen of the world,' make sense? To be a citizen means among other things to have responsibilities, obligations, and rights, all of which make sense only if they are territorially limited."⁷⁰ Arendt's critique of Kant's 'world citizenship' suggests that the dichotomous categories of actor and spectator are not useful in understanding what she means by impartiality.

I find no answer to this question of spectatorship and judgment in the Kant lectures. The passages where she raises the distinction between spectators and actors deal principally with explication of Kant's text, thus, it is difficult to tell what we are to take in her own voice and what is in his. One place where she explicitly appropriates and, perhaps, revises Kant is on the question whether spectatorship is a faculty of individuals or communities. Since in Plato's cave the men in shackles are unable to face each other or talk to each other, it is customary to speak of 'the spectator' in the singular. Arendt argues against this, and claims that for Kant:

Spectators exist only in the plural. The spectator is not involved in the act, but he is always involved with fellow spectators. He does not share the faculty of genius, originality, with the maker or the faculty of novelty with the actor; the faculty they have in common is the faculty of judgment.⁷¹

Here spectatorship and membership come together. Not action but judgment is the distinctive responsibility of the citizen. It is witnessing historic events and evaluating them with other

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 44.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 63.

citizens, not enacting them, that constitutes membership in a political community.⁷²

This position raises a crucial question about the integrity of Arendt's corpus. Does the idea that judgment is the distinctive and definitive activity of the citizen contradict the position she argues in The Human Condition, where she takes a stand against philosophy and states explicitly that "...action is the political activity par excellence"? If so, how can we make systematic sense of her work? Beiner's interpretation of the Kant lectures suggests that Arendt does move away from these writings. Before considering this question, I would like to return to the problem of outsidership that I raised in the beginning of this chapter.

Arendt is an outsider who uses Kant to secure a foothold in a conversation about judgment. Her own thoughts on judgment challenge the conceptual categories of this discussion. Where it is framed by the dualities of spectatorship/membership, objectivism/relativism, cognition/politics, she wants to think between or beyond these dichotomies. Kant does offer her a

⁷²I think Beiner's interpretation wholly overlooks the public, conversational aspect of Arendt's philosophy of judgment. In the interpretive essay that follows Arendt's lecture notes he writes, "[t]he more she reflected on the faculty of judgment, the more inclined she was to regard it as the prerogative of the solitary (though public-spirited) contemplator as opposed to the actor (whose activity is essentially nonsolitary" [Lectures, p. 94]. It is as if he wholly overlooks her discussion of the fundamental importance of free speech in Kant.

foothold for a theory of judgment as an experiential but non-relativist faculty; he, too, wants to transcend dichotomies and argue that aesthetic judgment is both subjective and universal even though this sounds like nonsense. But he ultimately recasts this radical understanding in more conventional terms as a separation of action from spectatorship. Using him without clearly distinguishing her thoughts from his, either in writing or even perhaps in her own mind, Arendt absorbs Kant's double vision.

I think Arendt really meant to depict judgment as a faculty that has aspects of both universality and subjectivity. This would mean that her notion of judgment does not support a strict separation of spectatorship and membership. She would have been able to make this argument had she, instead of looking to Kant, returned to her own thoughts on political friendship and integrated them with her ideas about storytelling as a basis for her philosophy of judgment.

Like the social forces that she believed gave rise to totalitarianism, the storytelling theme is a subterranean current that runs through Arendt's writings. I think it is incorrect to view the Kant lectures as an approximate rendering of what she would have written on judging for the Life of the Mind because in order to finish her theory of judgment, she would have had to think through its relationship to storytelling which receives little mention in the lectures. Storytelling gives Arendt a way to talk about judgment that

overcomes the limitations of the dichotomy of objectivism and relativism and conceives the relationship of spectatorship to membership in a new way.

The characteristics Arendt attributes to stories and storytelling parallel the account she gives of the characteristics of judgment in her writings on political friendship. Stories, like friendship, direct us to particular details rather than sweeping abstract truths. A story is the starting place for public discourse. Storytelling is a kind of thinking that is not reserved to philosophers, rather "[e]verybody who tells a story of what happened to him [sic] half an hour ago on the street has got to put this story into shape. And this putting the story into shape is a form of thought."⁷³ The story is the real answer to the problem of "universal subjectivity" that Kant's writings are unable to solve for her; it approximates "thinking without bannisters."

Storytelling is a way to re-introduce particularity into the universalist discourse of political theory. Arendt argues that contemporary political theory, like modern science and modern art, has taken a wrong turn in limiting itself to textual interpretation. Just as works of modern art attempt to transcend perspective and disguise the particularity of the subject, the idea that universal categories underly all texts and that the political philosopher is a transmitter for these categories denies the subjectivity of the theorist and the

⁷³Arendt, "Hill," p. 303.

historical particularity of the work. The modern hermeneutic tradition is a repudiation of "old fashioned storytelling."

I have always believed that, no matter how abstract our theories may sound or how consistent our arguments may appear, there are incidents and stories behind them which, at least for us ourselves, contain as in a nutshell the full meaning of whatever we have to say....In other words, the curve which the activity of thought describes must remain bound to incident as the circle remains bound to its focus; and the only gain one might legitimately expect from this most mysterious of human activities is not a result, such as a definition, or the attainment of a goal, such as a theory, but rather the slow, plodding discovery and, perhaps the mapping survey of the region which some incident had completely illuminated for a moment.⁷⁴

Distilling our experience into theory is tedious and robs it of the intuitive appeal which we can only capture in a story. When we abandon first person narration we forget this vital connection of thought and experience and lose a way of thinking about the world that is more genuine than abstract philosophy.

A story is an account of an event that reveals its meaning but does not attempt to define its "causes." A story is an attempt to find a foothold for action between the purely theoretical understanding of the world that presents everything that is as rational and predictable, and pure intuitionism which asserts the arbitrariness of history. Where theories impose definitive categories on a world that is governed by contingency, stories ask us to hold our answers to the "why" questions until we have heard the "how." In the Dinesen essay

⁷⁴Arendt, "Action and the Pursuit of Happiness," paper delivered at the American Political Science Association, New York, September 8-10, 1960, Library of Congress, pp. 2-3.

she writes, "...storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it, [that] it brings about consent and reconciliation with things as they really are, and [that] we may even trust it to contain eventually by implication that last word which we expect from the 'day of judgment.'"⁷⁵ Storytelling permits judgment even though it claims to know an event in itself, not in terms of objective standards or categories.

Stories strike this balance between universality and particularity by creating a community of discussants whose conversation raises personal opinion to a principled stance. A good story incites conversation by engaging the reader imaginatively in all sides of a conflict. Full imaginative participation in the complexities of an issue and a lively discussion of its many dimensions brings us to the general standpoint that is necessary for judgment. This account of the relationship between stories and judgment echoes the discussion of political friendship we examined earlier.⁷⁶ Arendt put this conception of judgment into practise in a course called "Political Experiences in the Twentieth Century," taught at the New School in 1968. It was not a course about judgment, but

⁷⁵Arendt, "Dinesen," p. 105.

⁷⁶Here again, I am at odds with Beiner who argues that Arendt has no substantive goal in mind for politics. I think her vision of public space and the writings on judgment clearly indicate that she wants to revitalize citizenship along the lines of public friendship. Friendship is, for her, both the substantive goal and the enabling condition of politics.

rather in judging, that is to say, its purpose was to have the students engage in critical thinking. On the first day of class she asks the students to "...forget all theories. We want to be confronted with direct experience, to relive this period vicariously." The syllabus for the course consists of novels, biographies, autobiographies and poems from WWI through WWII.

In the first lecture, Arendt explains the rationale behind the use of novels, arguing that storytelling is an alternative to conventional historiography:

There is another way of writing history, the original way of telling a story. The meaning of such stories is different from the grandiose meanings of which the historians speak; it is not a pattern, and hence can hardly be caught in one sentence. We think here in terms of a lifestory, a biography. Of what a man could or would tell when he were [sic] to tell his story, and how he would distill, as it were, its essence.⁷⁷

Storytelling abandons the quest for meaning construed as a general perspective on the movement of history for a search for meaning in particular lives and events. Where philosophy seeks to master an event by explaining it in terms of a universal plan or pattern, storytelling is superior for its capacity to find meaning in the particular on its own terms. Arendt writes, "no philosophy, no analysis, no aphorism, be it ever so profound, can compete in intensity and richness of meaning with

⁷⁷Arendt, unpublished lecture from a course at the New School on "Political Experiences in the Twentieth Century," 1968, Library of Congress, p. 3.

a properly narrated story."⁷⁸ Storytelling asserts that particular events are meaningful in themselves, regardless whether they fit in a broad plan of history, or whether we believe such a plan exists and can be known by us.

The idea that stories put us in the proper frame of mind for judgment brings us back to Lessing and the idea of political friendship. Public speech is critical to Arendt, not just for the purposes of judgment, but for creating history and constituting the human as a being with a distinct place in time.

For the world is not humane just because it is made by human beings, and it does not become humane just because the human voice sounds in it, but only when it has become the object of discourse. However much we are affected by the things of the world, however deeply they may stir and stimulate us, they become human for us only when we can discuss them with our fellows....We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human.⁷⁹

It is discourse that forms community and signifies membership, and storytelling that initiates discourse. Storytellers, "the poet in a very general sense and the historian in a very special sense...have the task of setting this process of narration in motion and involving us in it."⁸⁰ We give ourselves a meaningful place in history only by committing ourselves to membership in a political community that is

⁷⁸Arendt, "Lessing," p. 22.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 24-25.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 21.

constituted not so much from action but judgment.

Here again it is clear that spectatorship takes priority over action in Arendt's later discussions of political community. We must return to the problem of action and the question of the relationship between Arendt's early and later writings. The idea that spectatorship is the definitive activity of citizens is not a retreat from her belief in the primacy of action, but a necessary corollary to the teaching of the Human Condition. In the earlier work she argues that plurality is the condition of politics, "the reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives...." This early book is an attempt to redefine our political vocabulary, here she defines the concept "public space" abstractly in terms of perspective. In the work on judgment she fleshes out the idea of perspective, talking about citizens as spectators who constitute the public space by witnessing and judging the events that occur within it. Where Human Condition focused on the way the condition of plurality presents obstacles to human action, the unfinished later works concern the relationship of plurality to judgment and the idea that judging, like acting, is a realization of the promise of natality.

Judgment, a faculty that acts autonomously and spontaneously in the absence of traditional rules, is a counterpart to action as a means of expressing natality--the principle of new beginnings that is within every human being.

"Even though we have lost yardsticks by which to measure, and rules under which to subsume the particular, a being whose essence is beginning may have enough of origin within himself to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the set of customary rules which is morality."⁸¹ Judgment, like action, is a self-disclosing activity that declares our free agency at the same time as it acknowledges the tragic implications of a freedom that is conditioned by plurality.

The idea that plurality is the condition of politics is as important to Arendt's understanding of judgment as it was to her redefinition of the concepts of power and freedom in Human Condition. Viewed through the lens of plurality, the idea that all politics occurs within a pre-existing web of relationships, the traditional definitions of these concepts conflate freedom with sovereignty and power with force. The condition of plurality determines the methodology of political science: it cannot be "science" as it is generally understood but must rather be storytelling.

The realm of human affairs, strictly speaking, consists of the web of human relationships which exists wherever men live together....It is because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions, that action almost never achieves its purpose; but it is also because of this medium, in which action alone is real, that it 'produces' stories with or without intention as naturally as

⁸¹Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," p. 391.

fabrication produces tangible things.⁸²

Plurality forges a connection between judgment and storytelling.

Ernst Vollrath, too, makes storytelling and outsidership central to his interpretation of Arendt. He hears her radically different voice and argues that her work is difficult to understand not because it is inconsistent but because she is subject to "persistent if futile attempt[s] to categorize it within the known traditional schools and trends of political philosophy or the contemporary formulations of political theory."⁸³ Arendt's storytelling is an act of rebellion against "the fashionable trends emerging from the desperate efforts of current political theorists to appear properly 'scientific'...."⁸⁴ But Arendt's storytelling is more than a protest, according to Vollrath; the writings on storytelling connect Arendt's account of the nature of political phenomena to the method of political thinking she develops in the writings on judgment.

Plurality, the condition of action and freedom for Arendt, is incompatible with the notion of causality. Political phenomena cannot be explained by the analytic methods of the 'hard' sciences because they

...emerge into their space from an opaque and

⁸²Condition, pp. 183-84.

⁸³Vollrath, "Method," pp. 160-182.

⁸⁴Ibid.

impenetrable darkness, which is the human heart. Forever closed to "scientific" inquiry, it may yet be illuminated by the insight of poets. Hannah Arendt never shared the unfounded disdain of poetic insight on the part of those who extol the exactness of "scientific" truth claims. In fact, her interpretive writings on poetry are among her most beautiful works.⁸⁵

Because it is the product of the human capacity to originate, which Arendt calls natality, politics cannot truthfully be captured except in a story. Storytelling has twofold significance for Arendt: she makes it the foundation of her philosophy of judgment and engages in it for much of her own political thinking.

Hannah Arendt is a storyteller because she cannot be an analyst. No political phenomenon is ever whole and finished but is rather an expression of natality, the principle of new beginnings that is in each of us from birth. Where analytic reasoning--thinking with bannisters--is a forensic science, politics calls for a science that can capture the confusion of living phenomena. Hegel understood the problem of analyzing history in its unfolding and so to secure his philosophy first claimed that he was no analyst but a prophet, then later claimed that he stood at the end of history. Those of us who--unlike Hegel--claim neither the visionary passion of the young philosopher at dawn nor the certainty of the aging analyst at dusk, know that we live our lives in confusion somewhere in between. Through stories we create a "standing now," a frame

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 166.

for the study of an event in its particularity. The story itself creates a moment to stand and think; there is no other point, external to the event, from which anyone can claim a privileged perspective. Thus plurality makes the political theorist a storyteller.

From the perspective of the actor, plurality means that all judgment in the present--the realm of the actor--is imperfect. Because each actor exists in a web of relationships with others who are equally capable of spontaneity and surprise, an action "...is never consummated unequivocally in one single deed or event, and...its very meaning never discloses itself to the actor but only the the backward glance of the historian who himself does not act."⁸⁶ It is a mistake to conclude from this that Arendt defines judgment solely in terms of spectatorship. Her conception of judgment does not end with the historian's retrospective glance; the story serves as a focus for critical thinking as she practised it with the students in her course.

So far we have seen that Arendt's ideas on storytelling parallel her writings on judgment. Her argument that the storyteller sets the judging process in motion by providing a focus for public discourse echoes the account of political friendship she gives in the writings on Lessing and Socrates. It seems that Arendt could have turned to her own writings on storytelling to resolve the question of judgment and avoid the

⁸⁶Arendt, Condition, p. 233.

problems she creates for herself in turning to Kant. Like the writings on judgment, however, there is dissonance in her thoughts on storytelling and this dissonance concerns the problem of spectatorship.

On one hand, Arendt's account of judgment in terms of storytelling shifts the terms of the debate. We are accustomed to thinking of political judgment as a property of citizens choosing a course of action. When judgment is presented in terms of spectatorship, reflecting on a completed event, we tend to divorce it from the idea of membership and dismiss it as non-political. Arendt argues that the distinctive characteristic of a community is not just what it wills for the future, but how it comes to terms with its past. Reflective judgment, which is not a cognitive faculty of the solitary individual but a function of conversation among political friends, is as much a part of citizenship and membership as practical judgment.

Spectators and actors occupy different positions in the public realm for Arendt and are thus distinct identities. Action cannot exist without spectators who immortalize the words and deeds of actors in stories. "We...are inclined to think...that the spectator is secondary to the actor; we tend to forget that no one in his right mind would ever put on a spectacle without being sure of having spectators to watch it."⁸⁷ Spectatorship must be distinct from action if action is

⁸⁷Arendt, Lectures, pp. 61-62.

to have a space in which to appear, but both are aspects of membership. Spectators do not stand outside a community, but are embedded in it by virtue of the critical discourse made possible by the moral vocabulary and belief system they share with actors.

The public realm is constituted by the critics and the spectators, not by the actors or the makers. And this critic and spectator sits in every actor and fabricator; without this critical, judging faculty the doer or maker would be so isolated from the spectator that he would not even be perceived.⁸⁸

Thus for Arendt, spectatorship is not opposed to membership but intrinsically related to action and participation by the faculty of judgment.

Spectatorship and membership are intertwined in the person of the storyteller and in the community that gives audience to the tale. It seems that Arendt sets up an irreconcilable contradiction between the idea that the meaning of an event is not accessible to actors and the idea that judgment is an unmediated confrontation with political phenomena. If meaning is only accessible to those who come after it, judgment must be the task of future generations who can see the story in its entirety. But how can the children of history witness the events of their past first-hand? The storyteller resolves this contradiction: the story is both the enabling condition for unmediated judgment in the generations that come after and a catalyst to their public discourse. The storyteller is

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 63.

essential to judgment because storytelling makes possible vicarious participation in an historic event.

The integrity of Arendt's philosophy of judgment as spontaneity, "confronting phenomena head-on," rests on the standpoint of the storyteller: if the story is not a first-hand account then it cannot be the focus of spontaneous judgment by future generations. The dispute over the integrity of Arendt's corpus rests on the standpoint of the storyteller which Arendt names with a distinction between impartiality and objectivity. The storyteller is not objective but impartial, an interweaving of membership and spectatorship. As in the judgment writings where she advances a radical idea of a universal subjectivity, the seeming oxymoron of spectating membership introduces dissonance into her writing. Here the dissonance comes from her discussion of impartiality where, as in the judgment writings, she first offers a definition that is subtly paradoxical and then retreats to a more conventional dichotomy. In her early writings she says the storyteller is an impartial participant in the world, but later she argues that impartiality is at odds with participation and the storyteller is an outside observer.

The subtler account of impartiality comes from her image of Homer and Thucydides. Arendt praises Homer because he depicted the heroism of the Trojans as vividly as that of the Greeks, and lauds Thucydides for re-creating the speeches of Athens from a plurality of perspectives. Here the

storyteller's impartiality is not a product of distance but of a combination of deep engagement in a conflict and a passion for the art of storytelling itself. The storyteller is simultaneously member and spectator. While membership lends vitality and urgency to his account, his commitment to art makes him a disinterested spectator who can celebrate and speak for both winners and losers.

In a later essay, she severs spectatorship and membership in much the same way as she does in the Kant lectures. Talking about judgment Arendt states unequivocally that "there is no doubt that all these politically relevant functions are performed from outside the political realm. They require non-commitment and impartiality, freedom from self-interest in thought and judgment."⁸⁹ In the first account impartiality is guaranteed by the fact that good storytelling combines a love of life with an equally passionate love of art that acts as a counterforce to political bias. In a piece on Isak Dinesen she writes: "[t]o be an artist also needs time and a certain detachment from the heady, intoxicating business of sheer living that, perhaps, only the born artist can manage in the midst of living."⁹⁰ In the second account, impartiality is described in much more conventional terms of removal from the political space.

There is a second problem in Arendt's concept of

⁸⁹Arendt, "Truth and Politics," p. 262.

⁹⁰Arendt, "Dinesen," p. 97.

storytelling. The particularity of the story is meant as a counter to the nihilism of the idea that history is a process in which particular moments are meaningless. Where nihilism permits us to act, but enables us to deny responsibility for what we do, Arendt's particularization of history recovers meaning and responsibility but possibly at the cost of action. She argues that the purpose of storytelling is reconciliation:

After the First World War we experienced the "mastering of the past" in a spate of descriptions of the war that varied enormously in kind and quality...nearly thirty years were to pass before a work of art appeared which so transparently displayed the inner truth of the event that it became possible to say: Yes, this is how it was. And in this novel, William Faulkner's A Fable, very little is described, still less explained, and nothing at all "mastered"; its end is tears, which the reader also weeps and what remains beyond that is the "tragic effect" or the "tragic pleasure," the shattering emotion which makes one able to accept the fact that something like this war could have happened at all.⁹¹

Where philosophy asserts mastery over the past by denying the contingency of historical events, storytelling accepts this contingency and can therefore only reconcile us to the inherent tragedy of human action. There is a passivity implicit in the idea of storytelling as reconciliation that is at odds with the imperatives of the political world. In "Truth and Politics," Arendt makes this passivity explicit, writing that "the political function of the storyteller--historian or novelist--is to teach acceptance of things as they are."⁹² The idea of

⁹¹Arendt, "Lessing," p. 20.

⁹²Arendt, "Truth and Politics," p. 262.

reconciliation once again reveals a place where her philosophy of judgment is in tension with her writings on action.

Arendt may have an answer to this second paradox in her discussion of forgiveness in The Human Condition. She argues there that for those who live under the condition of plurality, forgiveness is necessary to renew the condition of natality.

...trespassing is an everyday occurrence which is in the very nature of action's constant establishment of new relationships within a web of relations, and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly. Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new.⁹³

Retrospective judgment has a twofold connection to action. It enables us to forgive and to find meaning in the random events of history. Without the capacity to forgive, we rob the children of history of their opportunity to begin anew. Further, if we cannot discern meaning in what has come before and cannot believe that the insertions we make into the flux of history are meaningful, we lose faith in the fundamental distinction between action and behavior and rob ourselves of both agency and responsibility.

It is now time to make an assessment of Arendt's writings on judgment and the critical interpretations she has received. We asked at the outset how her writings can give rise to such conflicting interpretations. Ronald Beiner asserts

⁹³Arendt, Condition, p. 240.

unequivocally that Arendt's "writings on the theme of judgment fall into two more or less distinct phases: early and late, practical and contemplative."⁹⁴ Many interpreters agree with Beiner and argue that Arendt's work is unsystematic. Ernst Vollrath, however, makes a spirited and passionate defense of Arendt:

Despite the open and spacious style in which it is cast, Hannah Arendt's thought appears to me marked by a matchless logical cohesion. I would insist that every attempt to show some discontinuities in her work is inherently doomed. Nor do I believe that Arendt reversed herself in her last and partly still unpublished work, that she turned away from the political realm, which had been the principal motif of her thinking.⁹⁵

Which of these interpretations, if it can even be judged, is more faithful to Arendt?

I have argued with Vollrath that Arendt's work is systematic, and that those who cannot see its internal logic misunderstand the unconventionality of her thought. Her position on judgment is a necessary corollary to the arguments she makes about action in The Human Condition, but it can only be seen as such by the reader who understands fully the epistemological implications of the concept plurality. But I make more than Vollrath does of the fact that Arendt is an outsider.

Arendt's assimilation of Kant's categories and Kantian readings of Arendt exemplify what I have called the problem of

⁹⁴Beiner, "Interpretive Essay," in Lectures, p. 92.

⁹⁵Vollrath, "Method," p. 161.

entrance. The task of entering both prevents Arendt from bringing the discrete parts of her conception of judgment together into a single image, and causes a proliferation of mutually irreconcilable interpretations of her work. Barber dismisses Arendt's conception of judgment too quickly because he sees it, through Beiner's eyes, as an echo of Kantian rationalism. Beiner understands that she turns to Kant's aesthetic writings "to find a way out of pure subjectivity by appealing to a notion of moral taste that can act as a bridge between judging subjects brought into a company of shared or agreed judgments."⁹⁶ But Beiner does not hear Arendt's rejection of Kant's "world citizen" and thus does not see that Arendt has a more complex understanding of the relationship between spectatorship and membership than Kant does.

The problem of entrance affects not only how she is seen but how she sees. While I agree with Vollrath that she is treated unfairly in secondary literature, I think there is dissonance in Arendt's writings, both on judgment and friendship and that this comes from her inability to distinguish herself from Kant. She uses Kant to gain entrance into the conversation of political theory. In her mind and in her work she is influenced by his ambivalence on the question of spectatorship. Unfortunately the question we can never know is whether the effort of working through these contradictions in writing the judging volume would have forced her to reassess

⁹⁶Beiner, "Interpretive Essay," p. 112.

her relationship to Kant.

The judgment writings are perhaps the strongest example in Arendt's work of the way the problem of entrance affects the work of an outsider. It is particularly striking given that Arendt was an established political theorist when she turned to the question of judgment. If outsidership were merely a normal career phase for Hannah Arendt, we would not expect to find the problem of entrance so late in her life. The fact that it marks the writings on judgment suggests that she is, in fact, a different voice whose struggle to break into the conversation of Western political theory continues even beyond her death in the writings of other women who understand the world on her terms.

Chapter Six: Intimations

I chose silence as a focus for thinking about women's inequality as a way to raise the question of difference within a radical framework. The idea that women are outsiders to the conversation of mankind suggests that women's political thinking is different from men's. Yet there is a danger in using the rhetoric of difference in feminist scholarship because difference traditionally has been responsible for creating and perpetuating gender inequality. I raise the question of difference because I think the liberal answer to the problem of women's inequality--extending equal opportunity to women--is inadequate because it leaves the fundamental language of politics and rules of the public space unchanged. Hannah Arendt puts forth a new vision of the public space and a new language with which to secure a genuine equality in place of the illusory freedoms of liberalism.

Liberalism answers the problem of inequality with a vocabulary of separation. The liberal polity ensures that each individual has an equal opportunity to achieve excellence in his or her chosen field with guarantees of such things as public education, unrestricted rights of travel and self-expression, protection against arbitrary infringements of authority. I see two problems with this answer. First, as I argued in the opening chapter, women's inequality is embedded deep in the conversational aspect of institutions and liberation is a task of finding a way into these conversations. My work on Arendt explores the problems associated with entrance not in the actual structures of institutions, but rather their reflection in the

dissonance and double vision that marks the work of a woman philosopher who enters the male dominated tradition of philosophy.

Arendt's work both exemplifies the problem of entrance and reveals its fundamental source. Equality means free choice for all those who participate in the economy, unfettered by household cares. Men secure freedom from the responsibilities associated with human interdependency by the institution of the traditional family in which the wife is economically dependent on her husband and he is, in turn, supposed to be emotionally, physically, and usually sexually dependent on her. While this should be a relationship of mutual dependence and thus secure for both parties, economic dependency is qualitatively different from physical, sexual and even emotional dependency. Because sexual and house care services can be purchased, it turns out that a woman's security depends exclusively on maintaining her husband's love; thus, he has greater possibility to exit the relationship. The woman who wants to enjoy the full range of liberal freedoms must confront an inescapably tragic choice between connectedness and separation.

The fact that in the traditional family, interdependency is not reciprocal but is rather distributed in an inegalitarian fashion, in the traditional family, means that for women connection is not partnership but rather domination. Because it begins from the premise of individuality rather than plurality, liberalism offers women little room to renegotiate the terms of

human connection. The facade of "the individual" crumples without the division of labor in the traditional family institution. Yet, individualism is a fundamental assumption of liberalism which means that the traditional family is necessary to it. Thus, while it grants women a political voice and extends to them protection under the law, it leaves them without the conceptual resources to question the family which is the primary source of their oppression. The concept plurality demystifies motherhood by taking the question of difference outside the framework of liberalism. On Arendt's terms, feminists who talk about connectedness are not displaying an exceptional kind of "maternal thinking," but rather expressing a fundamental insight into the human condition.

I use the image of the outsider to call attention to the fact that Arendt offers a way out of the framework of liberalism. My argument about entrance calls attention to the problems associated with thinking in dissent from the language of a dominant tradition. The concept entrance stands on the assumption that philosophy, like any genuine discipline, is a practice. A practice is a body of knowledge and skill perpetuated by the existence of a community of practitioners who hold in common beliefs about the requisites of entrance into their profession. The integrity of a practice is sustained less by the rules that govern the activity to which its practitioners devote themselves than by their participation in a common history and shared expectations that govern their relationships to each

other.

I have argued that establishing relationships with the "masters" of a tradition is crucial to the task of entrance because the constituting principles of a practice are not solely abstract but rather personified in its practitioners. Such relationships are inherently hierarchal because the whole concept of apprenticeship rests on the premise that entrance has more to do with emulating the habits and spirit of a discipline than with assimilating a concrete body of knowledge. Alasdair MacIntyre writes:

It belongs to the concept of a practice as I have outlined it...that its goods can only be achieved by subordinating ourselves to the best standard so far achieved, and that entails subordinating ourselves within the practice in our relationship to other practitioners. We learn to recognize what is due to whom; we have to be prepared to take whatever self-endangering risks are demanded along the way; and we have to listen carefully to what we are told about our own inadequacies and to reply with the same carefulness for the facts.¹

As MacIntyre describes it, the practitioner's power consists in defining the standards that are used to judge the apprentice and in setting the terms of their relationship.

Practices are profoundly conservative. They are resistant to change because the apprentice system makes them difficult to criticize. Candidates are discouraged from voicing their dissent by the threat that it would be taken as proof of the candidate's unsuitability for membership in the community. Even the initiate

¹Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 178.

who enjoys a relationship of reciprocity, mutual respect, and shared openness to growth that invites critical response may be reluctant or even unable to voice dissent for fear that it would jeopardize the bonds on which entrance depends. While mutual respect is necessary to an apprenticeship that succeeds in adding a new practitioner to the discipline, the better the apprenticeship the less likely it is to produce a candidate who is critical of the structure of the practice because genuine respect conceals the hierarchal and arbitrary aspects of the initiation process. Thus there is something deeply paradoxical about using the language of practice and tradition to tell a story of change and liberation.

At one level, I have used the concepts 'tradition' and 'practice' in a purely descriptive manner. They speak to my experience as an initiate into a discipline and help me organize my empathic understanding of Arendt's writing into a piece of scholarship. The fact that I use these concepts in this way does not mean that I accept every aspect of the world they describe, but merely that they capture the subtle ways I have experienced being an outsider. Yet there is a reverence in my work toward the idea of a practice that calls into question the extent to which I write as an outsider or as someone who expects to be an insider and thus deliberately resists challenging the fundamental inegalitarianism of these kinds of institutions. In treating entrance not only as a phenomenon that shapes Arendt's work and as a task to be achieved I have shown more patience with a

fundamentally elitist institution than perhaps I should.

Separatism is the radical answer to the problem of entrance. Some feminists may find my insistence on entrance tiresome. If difference is so important to me, they would ask, why bother joining the conversation at all? The ideal of separation, though supposedly a mark of the most radical feminist thought, seems to me to run counter to the facts of natality and plurality which I consider fundamental to a feminist epistemology. Separation is the argument of the individualist who denies the fact of plurality. It replicates rather than challenges the epistemological and ethical perspective of liberalism. The challenge for contemporary feminism, as for Hannah Arendt, is to make an entrance into a tradition without losing the standpoint of outsidership. As evidenced by her writings on judgment, Hannah Arendt allowed herself to be drawn onto the more traditional turf of the conversation, losing the voice of The Human Condition and the Lessing essay in her late writings on Kant.

Arendt's failure raises the question whether I have not done the same thing in talking about the Western political tradition as a practice. If a practice is a kind of historical narrative, is it susceptible to change or will the radical voice inevitably be compromised in its struggle to be heard? Alasdair MacIntyre argues that a genuine tradition sustains a tension between old and new such that "an adequate sense of tradition manifests itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past has

made available to the present."² I follow MacIntyre in seeing a tradition not as a fixed entity but an ongoing conversation. My work on Arendt looks both at the possibilities she exploits and at the ways in which the problem of entrance prevents her from fully exploring these possibilities. The changes in Hannah Arendt's thinking about judgment are a powerful testimony to the reality of these constraints; her inability to free herself from Kantian categories interferes with the transmission of her own original insights into the question of judgment.

It can be objected that there is no dramatic shift in Hannah Arendt's voice; as a storyteller she introduces nothing entirely new to the Western political tradition because theorists before her have written as outsiders to the dominant analytic tradition and have used storytelling to express their dissent. It is true that Niccolo Machiavelli, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, and even Plato are sometimes storytellers and in one sense Arendt enters the tradition by pursuing the intimations of this outsiders' conversation-in-a-conversation. Storytelling traditionally serves as a way to ensure the continuation of tradition. But just as a character's entrance in a play marks the beginning of a new scene, Arendt's entrance into the tradition marks a new beginning in political thinking. Arendt turns to storytelling not to conserve the past, but as a response to the fact that she lived in an age when traditional beliefs about ethics had been

²Id., p. 207.

disrupted and rendered meaningless by the Holocaust.

In outlines and letters she wrote during the time of composing Origins, Arendt stated her position on storytelling. She argued that her book would avoid "historical writing in the strict sense because I feel that this continuity is justified only if the author wants to preserve, to hand down his subject matter to the care and memory of future generations."³ She needed to invent a kind of storytelling that would not preserve but rather criticize totalitarianism. She notes that Marx answered the problem of critical storytelling in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, his famous satire. But satire, Arendt notes, is permitted only when the author "stands--even without knowing it--on the firm basis of traditional values on which judgments are formed and against which events are measured."⁴ If totalitarianism had dissolved the foundations of western morality, satire will not work for Arendt. She turns to storytelling in order to "try to recapture experiences but not those of the makers of history but of those who were its 'sufferers,' by which I mean no more than: those who were not in charge."⁵

If women are outsiders to the tradition and to the realm of

³Arendt to Mary Underwood at Houghton Mifflin, 9-24-46, Library of Congress.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Arendt, unpublished lecture from a course at the New School for Social Research on "Political Experiences," Spring 1968, Library of Congress.

power it purports to explain, then on Hannah Arendt's terms they are its storytellers. The distinctive character of gender outsidership, in relation to outsidership premised on race or class, may give them a special talent for storytelling. By virtue of their status as wives, women--unlike blacks, indians, or other groups that have suffered oppression in this country--have a dual consciousness. As a "good wife" she identifies with her husband and thus shares his power and his perspective on it, yet at the same time she experiences alienation in being limited to the role of helpmate and never actor. Women have a unique appreciation for the fact of perspective and a special capacity to mix speech with listening that makes them exceptional storytellers.

Storytelling names the voice that corresponds to women's different perspective, and tragedy is the mode in which it speaks. In arguing that women speak differently about politics, I do not suggest that women have a natural proclivity to view power differently than men, but rather that by virtue of their exclusion from its public exercise, women have a perspective on power that is fundamentally at odds with that of conventional political theory. This perspective is tragic not because women are victims of history, but because tragedy is fundamental to the human condition conceived on Arendt's terms. Each human birth is an unprecedented entrance into a web of connection that twines our lives together with others whom we do not control. The principle expressed in this unprecedented moment of birth is that

of beginning. Natality, the faculty of beginning, together with plurality, the web of relationship that represents human interdependency, carries the promise of uniqueness--a promise that distinguishes human being from species being. The tragic aspect of this perspective lies in its insistence on particularity: plurality and natality mean that each of us is irreplicable and irreplaceable.

Storytelling, the narrative unity and distinctiveness of each human life, marks the difference between human beings and the rest of nature. We are part of the animal world, but also distinct from it in that we are both natural and historical creatures. Each one of us, during our time in the world, lives a unique and unpredictable life story. It is by means of storytelling that we show that our lives have a significance beyond the mere fact of occurring in time like a natural process. The "I" that is disclosed over the course of my life story is not a random event, not a happening in a process, but an appearance on a stage where entrances and exits are meaningful by virtue of the fact of plurality which means that others like me are there to witness and remember my life. Arendt's conception of the human condition is thus fundamentally premised on human connection.

There is something inescapably tragic about a worldview that acknowledges my profound spiritual and physical connection to people whom I can not hold onto forever and can not replace when they are gone. To miss someone or someplace is a uniquely human

condition. Like the faculty of beginning, it helps account for why we tell stories; it reaffirms that each human life is distinct and therefore susceptible to narration. But there is also something deeply optimistic about a worldview that acknowledges the inescapability of my connectedness to others. The image of the web, which symbolizes connection, means that I am never wholly out of touch with anyone who is a part of my story even when they are no longer present in my life.

Arendt pits her tragic perspective against that of philosophy, the voice that dominates the Western political tradition. In so doing, she takes part in a quarrel that begins early in the history of Western political thought, when Plato bans tragic poetry from his ideal city in speech in Book III of The Republic. Plato suppresses tragedy on the grounds that philosophy is a superior way of knowing the world because while the philosopher knows true being in the forms, the dramatic poet trades in the realm of appearance. Philosophy, Plato argues, trains and strengthens the calculating part of the soul to perceive the simple unity of being that underlies the multiplicity of appearances in the world. Tragedy, on the other hand, incites the "ordinary" part of the soul that is attached to the world and makes it less able to resist the impulse toward connection with others.

Tragedy accepts that the events and people in the world exist only in relationship to others and can therefore never be precisely known or calibrated against a single objective

standard. Tragedy acknowledges that while we are agents, much that we cannot control goes into making a single life story. Philosophy, on the other hand, conceives of being as something changeless and universal. It seeks to transcend the experienced world where goods are relative and inhabit the realm of theoretical truth where there is a clear hierarchy of being. Where philosophy promises the serenity of order, tragedy admits that because we are inevitably confronted with competition between qualitatively different goods, conflict and pain are endemic to the human condition. When we must choose one good at the cost of another, all that is left to us is to suffer.

Tragedy has been overmastered by philosophy because while the former moves our emotions it is mute, and the latter has the power of words. The importance of Arendt's work is that she gives tragedy a voice and a vocabulary so that it can argue with philosophy. I have noted the way she holds Plato up for ridicule by calling the epistemology of the cave--the distinction between being and appearance--a "metaphysical fallacy."⁶ The appropriate object of philosophic wonder, Arendt argues, is not the mystic unity of being but the multiplicity of appearances in the world. Further, she argues that the solitary philosopher who leaves the cave is not wise but rather insane given that plurality, not solitude, is the necessary condition of reality. The concepts plurality and natality, which point to an epistemology of

⁶See Chapter IV for a discussion of Arendt's critique of Platonic epistemology.

storytelling, secure a victory for tragedy over philosophy.

The tragic perspective resonates in the work of contemporary women scholars like Carol Gilligan whose work articulates a morality premised on the fundamental fact of human plurality and on a rejection of the notion of universal standards of moral development. Gilligan explicitly identifies this tragic perspective with the worldviews of women. She finds that women are usually more willing than men to tolerate competing priorities and acknowledge the ambiguity of ethical questions. Where a man characterizes morality as "a prescription...a thing to follow...a kind of balance, a kind of equilibrium, a harmony in which everybody feels he has a place and an equal share in things," a woman responds that "...there's not just a principle that once you take hold of you settle--the principle put into practice here is still going to leave you with conflict."⁷ That Gilligan grounds her work in experienced relationships rather than abstract principle and develops from this a morality that acknowledges the centrality of conflict makes hers a tragic ethic, although she does not identify it as such.

Martha Nussbaum makes the connection between tragedy and the ethic of relationship explicit in her treatment of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry. Nussbaum characterizes this quarrel as a contest between luck and ethics. The history of philosophy, according to Nussbaum, is an attempt to answer the

⁷Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 309-310.

problem of tragedy by securing ourselves against attachment to others which makes us vulnerable to luck. Plato defines the good life as that which devotes itself to contemplation of the forms. Such a life is unassailable by tragedy because it involves a solitary activity directed toward an immutable object. Further, in learning to regard each particular in light of a universal we discover that all values are commensurable. This means that nothing and no one is ever irreplaceable, and no person or experience is ever wholly new to us.

Tragedy accepts the human condition of plurality, the inevitability of competing priorities, the human vulnerability to luck, and the "fragility" of goodness. Nussbaum articulates the tragic worldview:

That I am an agent, but also a plant; that much that I did not make goes towards making me whatever I shall be praised or blamed for being; that I must constantly choose among competing and apparently incommensurable goods and that circumstances may force me to a position in which I cannot help being false to something or doing some wrong; that an event that simply happens to me may, without my consent, alter my life; that it is equally problematic to entrust one's good to friends, lovers, or country and to try to have a good life without them - all these I take to be not just the material of tragedy, but the everyday facts of lived practical reason.⁸

Tragedy is superior to philosophy as a way of knowing because it is truer to the conditions under which we live our lives, namely to the condition of plurality. In a plural universe, there are no absolutes yet there must be judgment; there will always be

⁸Martha Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 5.

conflict but there must be commitment.

Arendt's work carries with it aspects of a past tradition and makes a new beginning for tragedy and storytelling. The fact of entrance means that coming into a conversation is a mark of both continuity and change. Arendt, Gilligan and Nussbaum define tragedy as a clash of the moral frameworks of storytellers and philosophers. This is a change in that it abandons the classic subjects of tragedy--conflicts of rich and poor, of parents and children, of man and nature. Yet it is also a continuation in that it resonates with ideas of particularity, relationship, and connectedness that are the substance of tragedy.

Tragedy flourished in the age of aristocracy; tragic stories are embedded in patriarchal institutions like monarchy and the aristocratic family. George Steiner argues that tragedy is inseparable from this institutional context. Tragedies must concern the struggles of kings and heroes because only in stories of great men are the stakes high enough to merit our attention:

There is nothing democratic in the vision of tragedy. The royal and heroic characters whom the gods honor with their vengeance are set higher than we are in the chain of being, and their style of utterance must reflect this elevation. Common men are prosaic, and revolutionaries write their manifestoes in prose.⁹

Steiner believes tragedy cannot work in an age without kings because when transposed into common life and common speech, the tragic story becomes maudlin or grandiose. Of course, Steiner's is a conservative view of tragedy. With the democratization of

⁹George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 241.

politics comes a democratization of the art form as evidenced by Death of a Salesman, a story in which the fact that a man is simply decent and good but no hero is the wellspring of his tragedy. In Miller's play, as in the works of Arendt, Gilligan and Nussbaum, it is a woman who redefines tragedy. To Lohman's sons and colleagues he is a pitiful has-been; it is his wife who makes him a tragic hero.

There is a stronger argument against the possibility of democratizing tragedy in the structure of the tragic plot which, defined by Aristotle in the Poetics, depends on recognition and reversal. Sophocles' Oedipus Rex is a classic tragedy about a search for self-knowledge in which Oedipus' fortunes reverse at precisely the moment he comes to know himself. The fundamental assumptions about identity and character that are the material for such plots change so radically in the passage from aristocracy to democracy that tragedy becomes impossible. Equality is premised on the idea that each of us is born with the capacity for self-invention: I am not what the fates decree but what I make myself. Recognition and reversal depend on the existence of a power higher than myself that created me and waits for me to discover who I am. The notion of self-invention renders recognition and discovery impossible, and thus makes reversal meaningless.

Finally, tragedy, like politics, depends on the existence of a public space. The narrative form presupposes the existence of a social and political community where there is some consensus on

the nature and meaning of human existence. Without such a consensus to provide standards of excellence and failure, the audience is without a context for judging the tragic plot. Judgment, like the concepts recognition and reversal, becomes incoherent in the absence of moral standards. If it is the case that the tragic story, the tragic plot structure, and the tragic audience are all deeply embedded in the patriarchal and elitist institutions of aristocracy, how can tragedy be a standpoint for contemporary feminist thought? Once again, the language of entrance helps account for this seeming contradiction. A feminist ethic of tragedy marks a new scene in the unfolding of the traditional conversation. Nussbaum and Gilligan define tragedy in a new way that reveals a fundamental contradiction between the values I have identified in the practice of tragedy and the social and cultural institutions that have traditionally embodied tragedy.

Though tragedy has flourished in Aristocratic ages that enjoy an exceptionally high degree of moral consensus, Gilligan and Nussbaum observe that it is premised on the ambiguity of moral questions. The conservative social institutions that support the writing and production of tragedy are at odds with the radical ethical teachings embedded in tragic stories. Ironically, modernity, which has little taste for tragedy, displays the kind of political, social, and moral instability that tragedy is particularly well suited to describe. This contradiction raises the important question whether the

practice of tragedy, which informs the language and conceptual framework of contemporary feminist theory, can be separated from its traditional institutional context.

The modern theorist who wishes to evoke the practice of tragedy as a means to the liberation and legitimation of a radical ethical perspective must consider whether a worldview premised on relationship and narrative is separable from the kinds of institutions--like the feudal manor, the Southern plantation, and the traditional family--that have historically been the means for its social organization. Contemporary feminist theory draws on the practice of tragedy, but rejects the social and cultural institutions with which it is historically associated. In After Virtue Alasdair MacIntyre makes an argument that legitimates the feminist project. MacIntyre argues that it is in the nature of a practice to be at odds with the institutions that effect its social organization. The sense of purpose, discipline, and ideals of those who engage in the practice protect it against corruption by the institution.¹⁰

If MacIntyre is correct, the connection between contemporary feminist theory and tragedy is not conservative but rather profoundly radical. A new tragic ethic ought to supply a framework for reinterpreting old tragic stories. To test this hypothesis, I will look at the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau's work can be read as a manifesto for patriarchal thinking. Emile contains almost every myth that has ever been

¹⁰MacIntyre, After Virtue, p. 182.

used to obstruct women's passage to liberation. Sophie's self-esteem is wholly premised on her chastity. She is to live an entirely private life as Emile's wife. Her virtue is her purity, and her coquettishness, which will preserve the flame of Emile's passion for her once they have fallen into the habits of married life. Though written within the framework of institutions that are enemies of feminism, Rousseau's works can be radically reinterpreted through a new feminist ethic of tragedy.

While on one hand Rousseau's stories work because they take for granted a static conception of gender that feminists reject, on the other hand, they also give rise to the richly textured, conflictual, and ambiguous moral universe that Arendt, Nussbaum, and Gilligan capture in their work. I see both the conservative and the radical sides of tragedy in Rousseau's best loved novel, La Nouvelle Heloise.¹¹ The novel tells the story of Julie, a young woman who falls in love with her tutor, St. Preux, whom her father forbids her to marry because he is not of her class. Julie loses her virginity and, in the eyes of her father, her honor to St. Preux early on in the novel. Her father forces her to marry a suitor he chooses to salvage the appearance of virtue. The book ends in Julie's untimely death.

Viewed with modern eyes, this story is easy to dismiss. It would not be tragic without the structures of class and patriarchal authority that separate young lovers from each other

¹¹Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Julie ou La Nouvelle Heloise (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967).

and identify a woman with her virtue. It is particularly frustrating to the modern reader in that in order to regain the "honor" she "loses" by her autonomous sexual relationship with St. Preux, Julie must play the devoted wife to Wolmar. Had she not accepted the authority first of her father and then of Wolmar, her surrogate father, Julie might have lived a fulfilled and happy life. On one level, the work has little to say that the feminist reader has not already lost patience with.

Yet, I cannot let Julie go so easily because it seems to me that she is somewhat autonomous of her creator. While Rousseau may see Julie as a victim of St. Preux, theirs is an unconventional relationship in that she is not seduced by St. Preux but rather chooses to have an affair with him. Once it begins, she arranges their meetings. Where Julie is confident about the authenticity of their love despite its unconventionality, it is St. Preux who makes a fool of himself simultaneously beating his breast with regret and lusting after his mistress. Julie's confidence and self-respect suggests that though Rousseau judges her virtue to be irretrievably lost, Julie no more equates her loss of virginity with a loss of honor than any modern woman would and in fact displays anger against her father who constructs it that way.

Of the three main characters in the book, Julie is both the most courageous and the most tragic. Her strength is revealed when, after years of marriage to Julie, Wolmar decides to exorcise the lovers' passion by taking St. Preux into his home.

This works for St. Preux who obediently enters Wolmar's world where the boundaries of relationships are neatly demarcated by the requisites of honor and friendship. Julie, on the other hand, lives not according to rules but inside her own history; when St. Preux rejoins her household she is reminded of the past and fully opened to the ambiguity of her connection to both men and to her competing desires for passion with St. Preux and for the more conventional happiness she enjoys with Wolmar.

Unable to deny either the reality of her passion for St. Preux or her love for her family, Julie must live with a tragic conflict between competing goods. She will not betray their passion, as St. Preux does, by judging it any less valid and honorable than her marriage to Wolmar. She dies because she can no longer endure the pain of two sets of feelings that are equally authentic but mutually opposed; she, unlike the coward St. Preux, can find no serenity. Rousseau underscores the ambiguity of Julie's moral dilemma in the ending. Julie dies as a result of a fever she catches from jumping into a pond to save one of her sons: it is an heroic expression both of a mother's virtue and of a lover's despair. While it is true that this story depends on the structures of the aristocratic world for its tragic effect, and that these structures suggest that Julie is more victim than heroine, I think it is more interesting to see the connections between Julie's character and the tragic perspective I have identified in Arendt's work and the work of contemporary feminists. Rousseau personifies the quarrel between

philosophy and tragedy in the characters of Julie and Wolmar (as well as in St. Preux's struggle against himself), and in creating Julie as the most compelling character leaves open the possibility that the tragic perspective is superior. Wolmar represents philosophy in the way he trains both Julie and St. Preux to govern themselves by a conception of honor that constrains the impulses of their hearts. Where St. Preux relieves himself of the pain of loving Julie by following Wolmar's rules, Julie remains embedded in the tragic narrative because St. Preux--as in the description of Emile--has entered her soul. To me, St. Preux is superficial in that he trades the chaos of passion for an easy and regulated friendship, and Wolmar is cruel and arrogant to bring St. Preux into his house knowing that Julie will wrench herself in two rather than betray either her lover or her family.

Contemporary political theory is part of an ongoing narrative shaped by the traditions of philosophy, drama, literature, and science. Entering a tradition depends on establishing a relationship with its practitioners in which both the initiate and the established member recognize in each other the virtues necessary for excellence in the practice. I argue that entrance can be difficult for the initiate whose potential for excellence may be obscured by the residue of old stereotypes that cloud the vision of those who evaluate her. It can be nearly impossible for the talented individual who is too far outside a practice to see in herself the capacity for achievement

and to feel the desire to realize it.¹² If I have used the language of traditionalism, it is not because I advocate conservatism on the question of social change, although the world as I have experienced it is not a place where permanent and meaningful change happens overnight. Rather, I think that conversations, even though rooted in tradition, are susceptible to change.

The story I tell of Hannah Arendt is about a changing conversation. It is a story of tension and dissonance because Hannah Arendt is one of the few women who have entered the male dominated conversation of political philosophy. It is not through argument, but by the story I have told through Hannah Arendt's work that I hope to reveal the radical possibilities in her thought. For me, Hannah Arendt's words ring with the promise of new directions in the conversations of philosophy, political theory, and ethics. For others she sounds the notes of conservatism. The vocabulary of connectedness, of storytelling, and tragedy does resonate with a conservative tradition. Yet, as Rousseau illustrates with Julie's story, the cost of silencing this perspective for the neatly ordered world of universal principles and well-defined boundaries is too high. Arendt

¹²In a recent essay, Christopher Jencks argues that physical isolation plays a critical role in maintaining blacks as outsiders. As middle class blacks move out of inner city neighborhoods, those left behind feel that the possibility of finding a job that pays enough to provide for a family--of living what is regarded to be a "responsible life"--is even more remote. "Deadly Neighborhoods," The New Republic, 13 June 1988, pp. 23-32.

breaks the silence of women by giving Julie a powerful vocabulary with which to answer Wolmar, and giving contemporary feminist thought an answer to the Western political tradition.

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