

## **Aesthetic Community: Recognition as an Other Sense of *Sensus Communis***

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In her last published work, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Hannah Arendt extrapolates from what she takes to be the socializing aptitude of Kantian aesthetic judgment and implicitly revives a long-dormant project of Western philosophy: the ideal of the aesthetic state.<sup>1</sup> In the act of imagining a politics for Kant, Arendt evokes the Greek faith in making political order out of aesthetic judgment: the ethical artifice of the polis. Within the specifically Aristotelian tradition that Arendt works so productively, there is no invidious hierarchy of aesthetic and political values. This admittedly partial view of the Greek polis nevertheless shows aesthetic and political values to be determinable within a context of human choice making constrained by social recognition. Such was the spirit of Greek republicanism itself, a spirit that I will argue contemporary aesthetics is bound to reckon with again in its pursuit of ethical and political goods.

1. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *Lectures*.

In a recent work entitled *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought*, Joseph Chytry has sketched a historical basis for the link between aesthesis and republican government in a way that highlights the relevance of Arendt's work on Kant to contemporary debates about the relation of art to political life in postmodern culture.<sup>2</sup> Chytry traces the ideal of the aesthetic state originally to Paris's judgment among Hera (property as power), Athena (authority, martial success), and Aphrodite (the procuress of beauty). Prior to the act of judging, the three divinities present a problematic configuration of the disciplines of the ethical, the political and the beautiful as alienated from one another. This mutual alienation of the disciplines bears a striking resemblance to the perceived overspecialization of science, morality, and aesthetics that Jürgen Habermas, among other communitarian universalists, has decried as the specter of doom upon the modern state.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Chytry's glance backward shows how well founded Habermas's conscientiously forward-looking concern might be. After all, the healing of the split between the disciplines is precisely what was proffered in Paris's judgment, a judgment the efficacy of which was promulgated in the ideal of beauty. By rewarding Paris with Helen, Aphrodite heralded a "presencing of beauty" that brooked no divisions between power and authority, politics and ethics.

The ideal of judgment purveyed in Greek myth had its political analogue in fifth-century participatory democracy, under the beneficent rule of Solon. The paradigmatic sense of justice, for which the name Solon is emblematic, follows from his extending participatory rights, a protocol of choice, to the lowest classes, the "Thetes,"<sup>4</sup> and fostering a universality of

2. Joseph Chytry, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *Aesthetic State*. In this context, it is worth pointing out that the Athenian polis (particularly in light of Aristotelian politics) is a crucial touchstone of Arendt's reading of Kant. It is a conspicuous resource of argument, where the political trajectory she imputes to Kant's thinking about judgment exceeds any textual warrant, especially in the third critique.

3. See the full text of Jürgen Habermas's "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Literature* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), and *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 1–22. For the more general dissemination of this stance among communitarian universalists, see *The Communicative Ethics Controversy*, ed. Seyla Benhabib and Fred Dallmyer (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

4. W. Robert Connor suggests how the commitment to this social class indexed the "disinterestedness" of civic leadership. This standard of disinterestedness and the protocol of political friendship in Athens will bear comparison with the notion of aesthetic dis-

judgment within a practicable public sphere. On this basis, it could be said that the idea of beauty, or the judgment of the *aesthete*—an individuality determined in the realm of *aistheta*—holds out a concern for a practical particularity that is not sacrificed to an abstract universality. Correspondingly, the “presencing of beauty” in an act of judgment shows itself to be preferable to the insubstantial, metaphysically abstract ideals otherwise proffered independently by politics and morality: it comes through the offices of human, rather than natural or divine, ordination. Under the auspices of beauty, judgment is securely anchored within the realm of malleable appearances over which human choice exercises an inclusive will. Willful human nature is coextensive with appearances. In this way, it projects an optimistically historical, rather than a fatalistic and metaphysical, trajectory of knowledge. It plausibly incorporates both political and ethical interests rather than setting them tragically, because mutually exclusively, against one another.

In Chytry's narrative of Greek social institutions, the realm of the aesthetic split off from the political and the ethical again at a distinctly “metaphysical” moment in the history of the Athenian polis. At this time, the participation of *particular* individuals in the governance of the state ceased to be a reality of civic life. Such was the consequence of the decline of the Ionian League and the loss of Athenian independence that climaxed with Sulla's razing of the city in 86 B.C.<sup>5</sup> In other words, subsequent to the dissolution of a political structure that promoted the particular rights of individuals as effectual participants in power, the aesthetic, understood as a locus of universality, displaced the aesthetic understood as the locus of particularity.

This is a story of cultural dissolution that we might usefully, if tragically, see reprised in the waning of the Florentine Renaissance, and that Habermas influentially (following Horkheimer and Adorno) equates with the historical vicissitudes defining the movements of romanticism and modernist formalism. Not coincidentally, these are three signal moments of Western cultural history (Renaissance humanism, English and German romanticism, and international modernism) when artistic production resumes its antagonism with political and ethical institutions by presuming its transcen-

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interestedness that underwrites Arendt's will to link aesthetic and political judgment. See Connor's *New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 73–84.

5. I ought to acknowledge here that my view of the Greek institutions, which are so suggestive for theorizing a cognitive aesthetic, is, like Arendt's and Chytry's, candidly instrumental. It cannot encompass the full range of competing institutional and religious forces that would count as a fully adequate historical presentation.

dence of them, thus leading judgment back into a realm of metaphysically absolutizing mutual exclusions.

I would suggest that it is precisely the dissolution of a political structure dependent on the productive acts of particular human agents that Hannah Arendt means to redress in the *Lectures*. Her purport here is to refocus attention on the particular human agent, such that agency is susceptible to universalization without succumbing to a preemptive universal. This is a defining concern in Arendt's work beginning with *The Human Condition* (1958) and extending through the incomplete *The Life of the Mind* (1971). The *Lectures* (1982) remain the last clue about how this project would have been concluded. I will argue that, specifically in the *Lectures*, Arendt appropriates the Kantian concept of "exemplary validity" in order to bridge aesthetic judgment with political agency; in this way, she rearticulates for the late twentieth century rudiments of the Greek project of making judgment universalizable within a social universe that accommodates the particular as particular. It will therefore be my contention in this essay that the redemption of such particularity ought to be an ethical common stake of aesthetics and politics. Indeed, particularity constitutes the genealogical link between the "aesthetic state" and the aesthetic ideal of ethical community (politics), which Kant famously reformulated in the term *sensus communis*.<sup>6</sup> *Sensus communis*, identified with the judgment of taste in Kant's third critique, denotes a common sense that is neither commonplace nor ahistorically universal but constitutive-analytical of the idea of community itself. *Sensus communis* is therefore a resource of reflective mind that, particularly in Arendt's reading of it, has political consequence because

6. Our point of departure here must be Kant's own formulation in section 40 of the third critique: "We must [here] take *sensus communis* to mean the idea of a sense *shared* [by all of us], in our thought, of everyone else's way of presenting [something], i.e., a power to judge that in reflecting takes account (a priori), in our thought, of everyone else's way of presenting [something], in order *as it were* to compare our own judgment with human reason in general and thus escape the illusion that arises from the ease of mistaking subjective and private conditions for objective ones" (Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987], 160). However, we will see in what follows that for Arendt's purposes, particularly in the last pages of the *Lectures*, *sensus communis* carries a burden of action that Kant eschews. See also Ronald Beiner's quotation from unpublished lectures in his "Interpretive Essay," in *Lectures*, 141, which correlates Arendt's attempts to equate political action with deliberative judgment (i.e., the public realm as she defines it in *The Human Condition*). Hereafter, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* is cited parenthetically as *Critique*; Beiner's essay is cited parenthetically as Interpretive Essay.

it elides community with the communicability of individual nature. In one of his last essays, "Perpetual Peace" (1795), Kant himself aptly purveys a notion of community that shows strong affinity with the political principle of republicanism: the *freedom* of the members of a society "accords with the principles of the *dependence* of everyone on a single, common [source of] legislation (as subjects), and . . . accords with the law of the equality of them all."<sup>7</sup> In the following pages, I will propose that the idealism that was inherent in the aesthetic state or *sensus communis* for the Greeks, for the Florentine Renaissance, and for Kantian idealism ought to become the abiding framework within which any contemporary discussion of the category of the aesthetic as a value-making enterprise takes place.

It will not be my purpose to assert the truth or even the scholarly success of Hannah Arendt's coupling of Kantian aesthetics to a politics he never wrote.<sup>8</sup> Rather, I wish to see how her reading of *sensus communis* gives a more general warrant for rethinking the category of the aesthetic in light of the political exigencies of human judgment. This rethinking intimates a productive reckoning between the artwork and social community, such that the idea of social community may be seen to be consistent with ideals of justice and perfectibility that have long been assumed to be touchstones—albeit spiritual—of artistic truth and praxis. I take Arendt's work as emblematic of the need to respond to a world in which aesthetics and politics have succumbed to a singularly unproductive dualism, where aesthetics has been corrupted into aestheticism for the mutually destructive sake of making invidious distinctions on both sides.<sup>9</sup> To show the urgency of a warrant for rethinking the aesthetic along such lines, it will therefore be necessary to examine the historical reasons that precipitated the dualism. These reasons concomitantly explain the disappearance, until recently, of the ideal of the aesthetic state, or *sensus communis*, as a lever of cultural creativity. Then we shall see how Arendt's revisionist reading of *sensus*

7. Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 112.

8. Arendt herself is quite candid about the liberties she takes with the Kantian text. See *Lectures*, 31, 33.

9. Here I am thinking of the increasing animus against the category of the aesthetic. This antagonism arises in art critical circles, where the pretext of political ends presupposes a reprise of the very dualism of sentiment and reason that ironically launched the aesthetic as a creditable political enterprise in the eighteenth century. See especially Hal Foster's *Anti-Aesthetic* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), Tony Bennett's *Outside Literature* (London: Routledge, 1990), Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne's *Thinking Art: Beyond Traditional Aesthetics* (London: ICA, 1991).

*communis* in Kant's third critique both reflects these reasons and the history that embodies them. Furthermore, we will see how Arendt anticipates the resurgence of the ideal of *sensus communis* in postmodern philosophy and the corresponding resurgence of ethical concerns in poststructuralist literary theory, where the gap between poetics and politics has become an increasingly anxious locus of critical inquiry. Indeed, I think that Arendt's work of the sixties and seventies constitutes a prescient corrective to the noncognitive reconstructions of the aesthetic that prevail in the poststructuralist era. Contemporary literary criticism has given new currency to the ideal of *sensus communis*, but at the expense of a credible social-political agency. As if in response to recent valorizations of an essentially disinterested and hence unreflectively pluralistic "political aesthetic" promoted by Lyotardians, multiculturalists, and feminists,<sup>10</sup> Arendt's work permits us to speculate that the category of the aesthetic, and its speculative corollary in *sensus communis*, might lead us toward a notion of the political that has real cognitive-rationalist potential for maximizing the choice-making capacity of the members of a social community. Such a program would confer the ethical nature of these members with more authority than they might otherwise muster from regnant noncognitive and antirationalist agendas that valorize pluralism at the expense of human plurality. It might, along these lines, offer a framework for rescuing aesthetics from aestheticism.

## 2

If we are to approach the history of *sensus communis* as an encompassing of the aesthetic and the political (not a reduction of one to the other), we must begin where the classical etymology of aesthetics begins—with sense, the proverbial ground of the beautiful and the locus of individual experience. Since the ill-fated struggle of neo-Platonism to reconcile "intelligibles" with "sensibles," we have accepted that sense qua sensation is always multiple in our deferral to a discriminatory faculty by which we might gain a reflective purchase on it. Yet insofar as this discriminatory faculty calls each individual's particular experience to account, it implicitly solicits a standard of publicity and consensus. Following Plato, the uni-

10. For the range of this "political aesthetic," which too reductively confuses cognition with instrumentalism/political domination, see Jean-François Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), Nancy Fraser's *Unruly Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), and Terry Eagleton's *Ideology of the Aesthetic* (London: Blackwell, 1990).

versalist consensus presupposed successively by classical, neoclassical, and romantic aesthetics has eluded the contradiction between privacy and publicity by positing in beauty or sublimity a community of judgment that lacks an effectual protocol for individual judging.<sup>11</sup> It is the inescapable self-contradictoriness of this proposition that has induced the consequent and recurrent alienation of the aesthetic from the political. In other words, the alienation of art from politics accrues precisely in proportion to the tendency to ignore or forget the provenance of consensus in the capacity for discrimination (choosing) itself.

In the 1770s, J. G. Herder, working in the service of an emergent cognitive aesthetic and concerned to preempt such forgetfulness, insightfully characterizes this capacity for discrimination as an “apperceptive discrimination.”<sup>12</sup> In his *Essay on the Origin of Language* (1771), Herder wants to distinguish a passively sense-bound connoisseurship of taste—which he would associate with classical theories—from an active, conceptually productive philosophy of taste. By this designation, Herder makes the point that we reflect upon experience not by recognizing properties in objects but by recognizing properties that distinguish objects from one another.<sup>13</sup> This insight imposes a burden of communicability on the formation of consensus. Herder himself became more mystically minded about the consensus forged in the judgment of taste. But if we confine ourselves to his pre-*Sturm und Drang* writings, we may extrapolate that insofar as classical and romantic aesthetics evade a standard of communicability in judgment, they produce an impoverished social consensus.<sup>14</sup> The judgments they promulgate will tend to be objectifying rather than reflective, owing to their inability to distinguish the properties of objects judged from the capacity of judgment endowed by the discursive situatedness of the judger.

11. Here the authoritative precedents are set by Nicholas Boileau, (Anthony Ashley Cooper) Earl of Shaftesbury, and Francis Hutcheson.

12. Howard Caygill makes this characterization in his account of Herder's *Essay on the Origin of Language* (1771), in *Art of Judgment* (London: Blackwell, 1989), 177–78. Herder expands on Alexander Baumgarten's theory of the relation of perception to human action in the seminal Enlightenment aesthetic treatises *Aesthetica* (1711) and *Reflections on Poetry* (1735).

13. J. G. Herder, *Essay on the Origin of Language*, trans. John H. Moran (New York: Ungar, 1967), 34–35.

14. See Frederick C. Beiser's *The Fate of Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 29–43, for a useful assessment of the degree to which the *Sturm und Drang* insisted on the nondiscursive nature of aesthetics, particularly in J. G. Hamann's *Aesthetica in nuce* (1765).

Even more important for the argument that follows, I believe that this impoverished consensus is underwritten and perpetuated by a flawed concept of human self-recognition: one that is unreflective, insofar as it is nonreciprocal. Recognition is, in fact, key to the republican idealism of the aesthetic state and the concomitant ethical charge of *sensus communis*, because it indexes self-knowledge within a social consensus to human activity or interaction with another.

To put this in its richest historical perspective, we must note that the exemplar for this interaction with another within the Greek polis—which in turn gives us the prototype of *sensus communis*, albeit by Roman extraction—is the discipline of eristics, or sophistical persuasiveness. Peitho, the goddess of persuasion, was the assistant and double of Aphrodite in Athens, a fact that suggests the entailment of rhetoric in the knowledge of beauty and, correlatively, the rhetorical pragmatism of the beautiful (*Aesthetic State*, xi). Though in the age of its flourishing, it contended with mystical counterforces that were abroad in Greek culture, eristics, the salient *techne* of sophism, is a touchstone of reciprocal recognition, insofar as whatever truths may be propounded within the dialogic structure of its discourse depends on what Hannah Arendt will call a mode of “representative thinking.” Representative thinking promotes the insight that thought cannot be thought directly but only in relation to the means of our representing to ourselves that which we do not perceive—an *indirection* predicated on proliferating the “standpoints I have present in my mind” (*Lectures*, 107). We will see shortly that Arendt qualifies the practical sociality of this idea. But for the moment, it suffices to say that the operative indirectness of eristics indexes the agonistic other.

Eristics, or sophism, is a dialectical *métier* of argumentation that subsists on a highly thespic protocol of questioning the other. It intimates the idea of a world of sense—*aistheta*—that is potentially communitarian by virtue of the priority given to communication over sensuous ecstasy. This communication, because its intelligibility within the scope of representative thinking defers strategically to another, depends on a structure of discursive reversibility: the sense dependent on a sign presupposes the acceptance of its (the sign’s) meaning by another, whose acceptance, in turn, submits to a standard of knowledge claims rendered revisable in its very implementation. It is this principle that guarantees the reciprocity of recognition as a predicate of what I will call the cognitive aesthetic.

We can more clearly see the special affinity of eristics for the aesthetic if we realize how the principle of reversibility, so integral to eristical



practice, both recapitulates the peripety of Aristotelian tragedy and proffers an extension of the knowledge purveyed in tragedy. Eristics recapitulates peripety insofar as peripeteia marks the recognition of the limits of self. By the same token, eristics extends tragic knowledge inasmuch as it is related to Aristotelian *phronesis* (prudence). In the Aristotelian schema, *phronesis*, which also denotes an ideal of self that emerges on the threshold of a limit,<sup>15</sup> is a fulcrum of tragic action. In tragic action, the self emerges by positing ends beyond the knowledge of self. Teleology submits to contingency, without abandoning the teleological perspective. The contingency of tragic fate is, of course, distinct from the contingency of *phronesis*, because *phronesis* escapes the fatality of the tragic protagonist. In fact, for Aristotle, the difference between art and *phronesis* is that art is end-bound, while prudential praxis is means determinant (*Ethics*, 6.5.209). This difference is critical where Aristotle stipulates the conditionality of *phronesis* upon a process of deliberation. Deliberation is understood as the procedure by which an agent gives himself a rule through action rather than follows a preconstituted rule or fate (*Ethics*, 3.3.118–19, 6.5.209, and 6.7.213). As Aristotle says, one does not deliberate where ends are already known (*Ethics*, 3.3.118) or, we might add, where they are formally necessary, as is the case in tragic drama.

More importantly, in book 3 of *Ethics*, where Aristotle considers the actions that determine the quality of the good life, *phronesis* is scrupulously deployed in such a way that it encompasses both praxis and poetics. The practicality of *phronesis* follows from its situatedness in a crisis that demands action. Its relation to art follows from the assertion that the arts (*poesis*), which Aristotle alleges “call for more deliberation than the sciences,” take as their field of deliberation “that which happens . . . when the result is obscure and the right course not clearly defined” (*Ethics*, 3.3.119). Ethics and tragedy intersect here in the interest of a self-knowledge that is not ego-logical, or an end that does not succumb, like the tragic hero, to the fatalism of knowledge, whereby *éthos* is determined in a fulfillment of preordained ends.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, the tragedy that historically befell eristics as a source

15. See chap. 5 of Aristotle's *Ethics*, trans. J. A. K. Thompson (London: Penguin, 1976), for the exposition that bears most directly on this aspect of my argument. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *Ethics*. References are to book, chapter, and page numbers.

16. Paul Ricoeur points out a “quasihomonymy” between *éthos* (character) and *ethos* (habit, custom) that chimes with my suggestion that there are good reasons to read Aristotelian *phronesis* as encompassing both praxis and poetics. See his *Oneself as Another* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 121.

of knowledge in the Greek polis, and, consequently, the tragedy that befell tragedy—most notoriously in Athens—was the institutional polarization of eristics from metaphysics; eristics would then lead in the direction of political action and metaphysics to contemplative reverie.<sup>17</sup> We will see that this is prototypical of the alienation of praxis from poetics and devolves to the severance of the aesthetic from the life of the polis, that is, from the community as a locus of credible political agency. Such an alienation set the pattern for the alienation of politics and aesthetics that Arendt wishes to remedy by reviving the idea of *sensus communis*. But before we leap the centuries to contemplate a remedy for this problem, we must continue to sketch the historical-institutional markers by which we can identify it as a problem that denotes a plausible continuity between classical and modern cultural crises.

As I have already noted, the polarization of eristics and metaphysics occurred between the fifth and second centuries B.C. as a result of the collapse of the Ionian league and the retreat of intellectual individuality from the public sphere. This course was complemented within the Athenian academy by a split between the sophists and the metaphysical philosophers. Inasmuch as eristics and sophism promoted the rule of persuasion over passion or violence (*bia*—the antagonist of *Peitho*)<sup>18</sup> as a political means, it was a philosophical stance that encouraged the leveling of social barriers of class and ethnicity and precipitated an unprecedented level of public conflict (*Aesthetic State*, xlii–xliii). The dialectical spirit thus advanced in the polis an agonistic ethos and a tide of democratization, which threatened aristocratic and authoritarian social establishments. Antidemocratic forces met this threat by espousing an ideal of beauty in the place of the praxis of argument, a conveniently metaphysical truth by which to mediate social conflicts and check the decentralizing drift of power in civil society. Where formerly beauty's link to judgment denoted an exercising of participatory political rights in the practice of the art of persuasion, the eclipse of a public sphere within which those rights could be exercised displaced them into a meditative sphere. This was correlative with a privileging of inborn value, a return to feudal and monarchical forms of government. Just when a practice of judgment linked to the aesthetic might have heralded something presciently akin to the Herderian prospect for a cognitive philosophy of taste

17. William Scott Ferguson gives the broad historical sweep of this development in *Hellenistic Athens: An Historical Essay* (London: Macmillan, 1911).

18. R. G. A. Buxton, *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy: A Study of Peitho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 58–63. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *Persuasion*.

(a mode of judgment pegged to the active production of concepts), it disappointingly gave way to the attenuated conceptuality of aestheticism—sublimity and the arrogance of connoisseurship. Active reflection succumbed to a contemplative judgment.

We can even better understand the difference between aesthetics and aestheticism implicit in this history by observing how the Florentine republic, in the early fifteenth century, reprised the fate of its Greek precursor. The dawn of Florentine Hellenism, the importation of neo-Platonic philosophy from the East, coincided with the rise of the Florentine civil state as a locus of republican activity.<sup>19</sup> Insofar as beauty and the patronage of art were intimately linked with this innovation of civic government, they were linked with a Greek sophistic tradition. Bruni's *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis* (1403) is an exemplar of this ethos of civic humanism in its equating of beauty with the constitutional delegation of social powers, such that the "aesthetic vision of a material city" becomes an imperative of the *vita activa* (*Aesthetic State*, xlvii). The constitutional guarantees of the free access of citizens to the offices of the republic presuppose a reciprocity of the recognition of the civic roles of individual citizens and their representatives.<sup>20</sup> But no sooner was the role of the artist equated with the creation of the state through participatory action than the Medician introduction of councillor government co-opted the artist's public prestige. Drawing on neo-Platonist, and hence nonsophistic, models of the artist/creator who can impose a unity without disclosing the rules of its production, the Medici promulgated an idea of the state as a work of art indebted to a comparable political autonomy—autocracy. Following the pattern of the Greek displacement of sophistic beauty with metaphysical beauty, this notion of the state as a work of art drew on a model of recognition that, because it was nonreciprocal, would not submit to any cognitive protocol of access.

In the late Renaissance, the eliding of the beautiful with the political structures of aristocratic oligarchy was completed and epitomized in treatises such as Castiglione's *Courtier* (1528), which characterized the relation of art and politics as "an aesthetic utopian ideal." This utopianization of sense is tantamount to the supplanting of experience with affect and atti-

19. For a full account, see George Holmes's *The Florentine Enlightenment: 1400–50* (New York: Pegasus, 1969), Eugenio Garin's *Italian Humanism: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, trans. Peter Munz (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), and Hans Baron's *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

20. See *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies with the Renaissance Society of America, 1987), 18–19, and Baron's *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 171–75.

tude, what has been aptly called a "poetic theology."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, such terms demonstrate how the particularity of sense experience attested to in the aesthetic is sublated into a social sentiment and made metaphysical. This metaphysical community of sentiment, in contrast to a more sociable community of sense, comes at the expense of the constitutive roles of individuals in the very social structures that claim to be predicated on their individuality. When the Florentine Grand Council, which at one time comprised three thousand citizens representing diverse strata of society and enjoining reciprocal responsibilities between individuals and classes, gave way to councillor control, it reconstituted social community in chiefly symbolic, rather than active, participatory terms. This shift in social structure indicates the degree to which the aesthetic, cast in the epistemic shadow of a modernity driven to abstraction by an increasingly deactivated social agency, represents an antithesis of the premodern *techne* of Greek sophism. It accommodates nothing like the social structure of the polis, wherein we might, for example, credulously equate dramatic with political representation. It is well known that Greek tragic drama was performed for citizens by citizens (*Persuasion*, 17). In the absence of such practices, dramatic representation becomes a more one-sided proposition comparable to the one-sidedness of nonrepresentative, nondemocratic political regimes, wherein the particularity of political participation is supplanted by the abstract universality of citizenship.

I take Kantian aesthetics, almost three hundred years after the Florentine Enlightenment, to be the next significant moment for theorizing the aesthetic state precisely because Kantian aesthetics holds faith with particularity as a ground of judgment. In the complex and controversial aim of *sensus communis*, Kant augurs the resurgent political efficacy of the aesthetic. And yet, a famous problem ensues from Kant's own universalizing imperative, marked as it is by the convergence of aesthetic with moral doctrines. As Hans-Georg Gadamer has pointed out in *Truth and Method*, and by comparison with Aristotle and Vico, Kant's persistent merging of aesthetic judgment with morality (moral feeling contrasted with interested pleasure) (*Critique*, 167) tends to "depoliticize," or to "aestheticize," the ideal of *sensus communis*.<sup>22</sup> By this critique, which harks back to Greek and Ro-

21. Garin provides a valuable context for comprehending this term in his discussion of how the contemplative drag of Platonism constrained the work of Cristoforo Landino. See *Italian Humanism*, 84–85.

22. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1975), part 1.

man civil society for an invidious comparison with Kant, Gadamer wants to redeem a substantive, as opposed to a merely formal, notion of the ideals of beauty, taste, and community. The incipient split between the willful agency of community and the communitarian ideal that produces the depoliticizing effect diagnosed by Gadamer, ominously echoes the split between sophists and metaphysicians. This seems to be the case especially when Kant's moral duty threatens to preclude reflective volition. In fact, reflective judgment—which is as close as we come to a practical province of art in the third critique—is deemed by Kant to be instrumental to community precisely insofar as it is noncognitive. Because it is my desire, in what follows, to secure the potential cognitive usefulness of aesthetics as a means for rationalizing human community—hence my need to go beyond Gadamer's critique—I am bound to negotiate this famous Kantian impasse within the purview of Hannah Arendt's reading of Kantian judgment.

### 3

I anticipated in part 1 of this essay that what is lost in the sacrifice of cognition to aesthesis is particularly well comprehended in Hannah Arendt's project of reading political implications into the *métier* of Kantian judgment. The keystone of this reading is her solidarity with the Kantian goal of an "enlarged thought" (also called "enlarged mentality," or "broadened way of thinking"), which, for her, shapes much of the argument of the third critique and has particular resonance in section 40, "On Taste as a Kind of *Sensus Communis*." While enlarged thought is explicitly pegged to noncognitive aesthetic judgment in Kant's text, Arendt's reading of that text hints at a distinctly cognitive agenda latent in the communicative imperatives of enlarged thought. These imperatives constitute, for her, the lever of a plausible politics. According to Arendt, "'enlarged thought' is the result of first 'abstracting from the limitations which contingently attach to our own judgment,' of disregarding its 'subjective private conditions . . . , by which so many are limited' . . . which, according to Kant is not enlightened or capable of enlightenment but is in fact limiting" (*Lectures*, 43). Here the standard of disinterestedness, so famously set as the condition of aesthetic judgment, has a decidedly volitional cast, whereby the eschewing of "private conditions" is a threshold of "thinking" qua discriminatory act.

Enlarged thought provides a further springboard for Arendt's extrapolation to politics from Kant's aesthetic, because it points out the contradictoriness of moralizing beauty that, as Gadamer sees it, is otherwise the

drift of Kant's philosophy, especially where the discussion of the sublime in the third critique dovetails with the deontological premises for the metaphysics of morals. Arendt sees this self-contradiction most clearly in terms of the tension between human dignity and human progress that is harbored within the prospect of enlarged thought. Arendt points out that the possibility of human dignity, for Kant, demands that human judgment (of the beautiful) be particular. Such particularity is the *sine qua non* of the aesthetic. But she notes that to *think*, the impetus of enlarged thought, means to generalize (*Lectures*, 76). And indeed, such generalizability is the crux of moral duty. To compound this paradox, Kant insists that the fate of the human species, which guarantees the integrity of thinking particulars, depends on a principle of "infinite progress," which is actualizable only by way of generalization.<sup>23</sup> Dignity, a corollary of the aesthetic, and preservation of the species, a corollary of morality/universal reason, are thus mutually dependent but mutually exclusive.

I have suggested that Arendt seeks to overcome the contradiction by focusing on Kant's term *exemplary validity* as a vehicle for producing enlarged thought. Interesting enough, Arendt's fullest account of exemplary validity charts a path from the particular to the general, which secures grounds for speculating productively on the prospect of bridging the gap between art and politics. The point would be to escape the deontological strictures of Kantian moral duty without giving up a purchase on rational agency.

Fittingly, the communicability of the idea of "bridging" itself serves as the exemplifying instance of Arendt's reading of exemplary validity. Exemplary validity, for Arendt, obtains in an exigency of communication, where one seeks to express an idea for which there is no a priori concept that could solicit perception in the mode of active imagination. Arendt specifically sees the warrant for exemplary validity in the formal necessity of the Kantian schema, in the "bridging" activity of imagination that links a percept with a concept in Kantian judgment. This schematizing function she conspicuously characterizes as compensating for a deficit of recognition: "without a 'schema' one can never recognize anything" (*Lectures*, 81). Her excursus on exemplary validity is an extension of this point: "Suppose someone comes along who does not know 'bridge,' and there is no bridge to which I could point and utter the word. I would then draw an image of the scheme of a bridge which *of course is already a particular bridge*, just to remind him

23. See *Lectures*, 77, for Arendt's contextualization of infinite progress and dignity.

of some schema known to him such as 'transition from one side of the river to the other'” (*Lectures*, 83; my emphasis). Interestingly, because Arendt makes the particularity of the bridge an irreducible feature of its conceptualization, exemplary validity seems to denote the dependency of the concept on a transition between particulars, such that no particular is adequate to its concept and no concept is adequate to the imagination's power of adducing particulars. As we shall see more explicitly later, exemplary validity seems to make the threshold of knowledge tantamount to a mode of *linkage* between particulars that effectively bridges the distance between particulars and universals without any concessions to the unsituated intelligibility or to the metaphysical adequacy of the metaphor of the bridge itself.

In order to fully appreciate the thrust of Arendt's thinking here, however, it helps to remember that her original impetus for an exposition of exemplary validity seems to derive from her reading of section 59 of Kant's third critique, "On Beauty as a Symbol of Morality" (*Critique*, 84). Curiously enough, she characterizes this section of the critique as a discussion of schema, in which Kant solves the problem of combining universals with particulars that otherwise—in the absence of a cogent account of schematization—remains intractable. She notes that the act of thinking the particular itself impels Kant to find a *tertium quid* to mediate the otherwise incommensurable registers of general and particular knowledge entailed by such thinking (*Lectures*, 76). The example, the particular bridge, understood to be analogous with a schema, is this *tertium quid*.

For my purposes, however, the real force of Arendt's reading of section 59 of *The Critique of Judgment* depends paradoxically on our knowing that it is not given over primarily to an exposition of schema, as Arendt implies, but to mastering a distinction between schema and Kantian symbol. I believe that this fact prompts us to see the potential for reading a reciprocity of recognition into Kantian schematization and hence into exemplary validity. After all, the distinction between schema and symbol itself entails a strong intimation of this reciprocity. I will furthermore show that it is Arendt's own reticence about featuring the significance of the Kantian symbol and reciprocity as aspects of exemplary validity that weakens the argumentative force of her own account of exemplary validity. My task, then, will be to complement her reading of exemplary validity, such that her claim for its importance vis-à-vis a political aesthetic has the consequence she advertises, even if her own conclusions do not fully justify it.

For Kant, both schema and symbol are types of hypotyposis (that which makes a concept sensible [*Critique*, 226]), one a direct and the other

an indirect representation of a concept. Kant goes to considerable lengths to explain the latter. By indirect representation, Kant means that “symbolic exhibition uses an analogy (from which we use empirical intuitions as well), in which judgment performs a double function: it applies the concept to the object of a sensible intuition; and then it applies the mere rule by which it reflects on that intuition to an entirely different object of which the former object is only the symbol” (*Critique*, 227). Schematic hypotyposis, according to Kant, denotes a direct relation between a concept formed by the understanding and its intuition. By contrast, in symbolic hypotyposis, the application of the rule that conditions our reflection on an intuition “to an entirely different object” imputes a bridging, transitional linkage between particulars, which I would compare with that already imputed to exemplary validity. Kant’s well-known exemplification of the principle of symbolic exhibition is as follows: a monarchy ruled by constitutional law would be presented as an animate body, and a monarchy ruled by an absolute power would be presented by a machine like a hand mill (*Critique*, 227). Accordingly, we are meant to understand that insofar as the presentational power of the symbol (which is a vehicle for “our reflection”) depends on a “transfer of our reflection” (*Critique*, 227), our reflective purchase inheres as a condition of transition between particulars.

Following from Kant’s distinction between the schema and the symbol, it makes sense to note that Arendt equates the access to enlarged mentality with the imperative to “train one’s imagination to go visiting” (*Lectures*, 43, 18).<sup>24</sup> In light of what I have just observed in the affinity of exemplary validity with symbolic hypotyposis, exemplary validity plausibly facilitates this “training” in the following way. Like the symbol, the presentation of an image, which is the crux of exemplary validity, does not depend on its status as a kind of Platonic ideal, an image in itself, with which all experience must comply.<sup>25</sup> Neither is it a deduction from the experience of particulars that transcends the register of particularity. The exemplary image of exemplary validity has a different status. As Arendt puts it, “This exemplar is and remains a particular that in its very particularity reveals the generality that otherwise could not be defined. Courage is *like* Achilles” (*Lectures*, 77).

24. See Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” 118, for a consideration of the attendant “right to visit.”

25. Indeed, the image seems to be most relevant to Arendt’s concerns here, insofar as it denotes what is not there: “(i.e., we have a kind of ‘intuition’ of something that is *never* present) and by this he [Kant] suggests that imagination is actually the common root of the other cognitive faculties, that is, it is the ‘common, but to us unknown, root’ of sensibility and understanding” (*Lectures*, 81).



While Kantian beauty is an end in itself, eschewing cognitive *linkage* with other instances of beauty, exemplary validity would seem to depend instead on an interaction (hence training—i.e., imagination goes visiting) that has no generalizable end except the enlargement of the community of knowledge that it instantiates. In this case, the imagination is trained to go visiting, so to speak, by virtue of the insufficiency of the image to itself (as implicit in symbolic hypotyposis) and hence its articulation with another particular. This instantiates a generalizability without succumbing to a historically inert generalization.

In the existing text of the *Lectures*, Arendt stops short of this understanding by putting her emphasis on the example as something temporally prior to the meaning it exemplifies—“this particular table is valid for all particular tables” (*Lectures*, 83). What she therefore misses is the fact that recognition of the table as “valid” is the condition of a reciprocity of recognition, insofar as the criterion of validity changes with each particular (e.g., each new table adduced as possessing exemplary validity). That is, exemplary validity conjures an activity of making the image adequate (adequation), rather than granting the adequacy of the image itself, independent of the agencies of its use.

We will remember that for the Kantian symbol it is similarly the reflection (*Critique*, 227) on the rule that presents the image (intuition) to a concept that is material to the intelligibility of that image and, as Arendt is quick to point out, that makes its intelligibility equivalent to its communicability (*Lectures*, 83). Arendt asserts that what makes particulars communicable “is that in perceiving a particular we have in the back of our minds . . . a ‘schema’ . . . and . . . that this schema is in the back of the minds of many different people” (*Lectures*, 83). This, of course, evokes a decidedly *nonreciprocal* recognition tantamount to the subsuming of particularity under a concept. But on the same page, Arendt also links communicability with *reflective judgment*, as invidiously distinct from *determinant judgment* with its irreversible subsuming of the particular under a concept. For Arendt, reflective judgment—understood as the act of “bringing [the particular per se] to a concept,” as opposed to “subsuming [it] under a concept”—gives exemplary validity its strong purchase on the communicability, which in turn conditions the political efficacy of human community.

If we can equate the communicability Arendt privileges here with the notion of exemplary validity as an activity of adequation (reflection), and not as a conceptually preemptive standard of adequacy (determinant concept), then her argument may appear to suffer less glaringly from internal contra-

dictions. Her argument will be seen to show stronger solidarity with the *vita activa* so strategically integral to the historical precedents for a political aesthetics going back to the Greek polis. This may take us some way toward mitigating the fact that in her other mature works Arendt retreats problematically in the direction of the *vita contemplativa*. She seems to abandon the deliberative sphere of action that her sense of the political would otherwise seem to depend on for its historical efficacy.<sup>26</sup>

Arendt herself, however, gives us the strongest impetus for this equation of exemplary validity with an activity of adequation/reciprocal recognition in her striking assertion that the exemplary particular on which judgment presumes "has exemplary validity to the extent that the example is *rightly chosen*" (*Lectures*, 84; my emphasis). Though this imperative of choice appears as a kind of postscript to the *Lectures* proper ("Imagination"),<sup>27</sup> I believe it indicates Arendt's stake in a reflective aspect of judgment, thereby mitigating the appearance elsewhere in this text that the concept of exemplary validity is collapsible into the schematic priority of the example (mere adequacy). Rather, this postscript on imagination intimates precisely what her discussion of exemplary validity at the conclusion of the *Lectures* does not: that the exemplarity of exemplary validity is communicable only because the recognition of it is reciprocal. In the caveat of "right choice," Arendt seems to conjure the very recognition of a recognition *as valid*, to be key to its efficacy. The constraint of the recognition of recognition that I believe is implicit in the requirement that exemplary validity satisfy a standard of "right choice" depends, of course, on taking the mandate to train the

26. There is more evidence that Arendt's apparent defection from the *vita activa* is hedged with doubt. Ronald Beiner cites Arendt's identification with historical moments of futile rebellion, such as the Warsaw Ghetto: moments where dignity and progress intersect. Beiner quotes the Warsaw Ghetto resistance: "Not one of us will leave here alive. We are fighting not to save our lives but for human dignity" (*Lectures*, 127). Where Arendt valorizes such instances of human action (particularly where she adduces them as instances of exemplary validity) she seems to indicate a will to overcome the clash of judgment and action that otherwise inhibits the political thrust of her reckoning with Kantian judgment. We will see how Hegelian recognition and his correlative theory of forgiveness might be construed as a methodological remedy for the cultural/historical "melancholy" that Arendt herself confesses Kantianism gives rise to in the incommensurability of dignity and progress.

27. These are notes from a seminar on Kant's third critique that Arendt delivered at the New School for Social Research in the fall of 1970. Beiner says these notes supply "an indispensable piece in the puzzle if we hope to reconstruct the full contours of Arendt's theory of judging" (*Lectures*, 79).

imagination to go visiting as the driving insight behind Arendt's politicization of Kant.

Right choice demands extending a maxim to cover a multiplicity of cases, such that what is being exemplified is both reflected and reflected on as a reflection: for example, Napoleon only exemplifies the qualities that are constitutive in the person when they are recognized in successive instantiations of what would count as examples (*Lectures*, 84). Their counting as examples is a function of their *linkage*, rendering the content of exemplification an effectively cumulative, rather than an intuitional, phenomenon. Accordingly, Arendt herself stipulates that exemplarity is something that is made ("we . . . proceed to make it 'exemplary'" [*Lectures*, 85]). When she affirms that examples lead us and guide us, she is strictly in step with Kant's more deontological doctrine of moral duty. But when she appends a requirement of right choice, she goes beyond Kant to intimate that we are led in turn to lead.<sup>28</sup> If exemplarity is contingent on a multiplicity of contextual imperatives (particularly if we must choose rightly), if it is contingent on a proliferation of cases, then the judgment it facilitates appears to have more affinity with Aristotelian *phronesis* than with Kantian morality. As we have seen, *phronesis* promulgates a protocol of deliberation or training, insofar as it forces a reconciliation of discrete temporal moments and contexts through a perforce, rule-generative practice of judging. We "go visiting," so to speak, insofar as this reconciliation cannot be conceptualized independent of our inhabiting particular standpoints other than our own. It thus constitutes a solicitude of others. Without saying so explicitly, Arendt suggests by this course of reasoning a solution to the original contradiction between the particularity of dignity (a basis of cognitive experience) and the generality of progress (a noncognitive basis of experience). She makes the *actual* transition from particular to particular the condition of a *virtual* generality (by stressing the virtuality of the general).

I must confess that what is suggested here constitutes precisely that modality of linkage between instances of judgment that is anathema to Kantian beauty. As we have seen already, Arendt understands quite well that Kantian beauty must be posited as an end in itself ". . . —without linkage . . . to other beautiful things" (*Lectures*, 77). Interestingly, however, Arendt's *Lectures* break off with an acknowledgment of the difficulty of sus-

28. In *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), Arendt keys the meaning of action etymologically to the Greek *archein*, "to begin, to lead" (177; my emphasis). Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *Human Condition*.

taining the contradiction that “it is against human dignity [particularity] to believe in progress [generality]” (*Lectures*, 77). It is as if she seeks an alternative that she cannot supply out of the resources of her own argument. So I would admit that my construal of the implications of exemplary validity in some ways goes against the grain of Kantian beauty. But only by reading exemplary validity in this way does Arendt’s grasp of aesthetic judgment accommodate precisely what, at the end of the *Lectures*, she fears will be lost in the capitulation of dignity to progress: “a point at which we might stand still and look back with the backward glance of the historian” (*Lectures*, 77). In other words, the alternative Arendt seeks here involves some mode of linkage if her proposed assimilation of the aesthetic to the political is to have the pragmatic consequence implied by her dual emphasis on exemplary validity and enlarged mentality—the backward glance of the historian would seem the logical corollary of that pragmatism.<sup>29</sup>

In this connection, Ronald Beiner points out that the destination of Arendt’s final projected volume in *The Life of the Mind*, on judging, would have been a return to the concept of history (*Lectures*, 131). This speculation is supported in Arendt’s own “Postscriptum” to the first volume on “Thinking,” in which she alleges an etymological link between the judge and the historian that follows the logic of exemplary validity itself. The historian, by relating to the past, is bound to sit in judgment of it. The mandate of *historein*, not unlike that of *theorein*, is “to inquire in order to tell how it was.”<sup>30</sup> The juxtaposition of the activity of inquiry with the activity of telling promulgates the Kantian ideal of a “general standpoint.” Significantly, in the *Lectures*, Arendt approaches this general standpoint by formulating the imperative to “go through” (*Lectures*, 44)—as in pass through—the particular conditions of any particular standpoint. This formulation contains the strong inference that every particular standpoint is thereby reconstituted retrospectively by transition to a new set of particular conditions. The active stance of the imperative to “go through” seems to be the crux of the matter, inasmuch as it intimates specific terms according to which the imagination might “go visiting” in a realm where the “general [or universal] standpoint” is coherent with the world of appearances—the world where Kantian judgment itself is securely anchored.<sup>31</sup>

29. For a corroboration of this nod toward a more materialist pragmatism, see Arendt’s own excursus on the role of the historian as an extrapolation of Nietzsche’s “eternal return” in chap. 20 of “Thinking,” in *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978).

30. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 5.

31. See Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 161, for the basis of what ensues vis-à-vis the aesthetico-political implications of the general standpoint.

We might recall in this context that the aim of the enlarged mentality, which prompted us to go visiting in the first place, was tantamount to an admonition against prejudicial attitudes. It was an admonition to take another's point of view. Kant, of course, does not want to be misunderstood as advocating simple empathy. One does not purport to move into another's consciousness. He is careful to insist that one can only take another's point of view with respect to a notion of *one's self* as constituting a limit that one must "go through" to arrive at the more "general standpoint" (the standpoint of the other). And indeed, Kant holds, quite rightly, that the literal assumption of another's point of view is as fatefully prejudicial as closing oneself up in one's own standpoint, since one would still be bound within a non-generalizable circumstance (see *Critique*, section 40). Nevertheless, within Arendt's purview, Kant's requirement for achieving a general standpoint is seen to be just as self-deceiving as the blindly empathic identification with another: after all, the self that Kant admonishes to adopt the general standpoint possesses a constitutive basis that is at odds with the requirement to "go through" particular conditions of knowledge in any credibly pragmatic way (*Lectures*, 43–44).

My position is that one could not meaningfully "go through" without soliciting recognition,<sup>32</sup> unless the imperative for the imagination to go visiting (to move from particular to general) is to be rendered as antinomical as dignity and progress. On the contrary, if we solicit recognition, we in effect concede a cognitive scope (enlarged mentality) for noncognitive ideals (general standpoint). Clearly, I am suggesting that Arendt's valorization of exemplary validity as the crux of Kantian judgment reorients us to the Kantian contradiction between dignity and progress in such a way that we can contemplate a modification of the Kantian position: establishing a relation between the cognitive dimension of dignity and the noncognitive (deontological) dimension of progress by treating the imperative to *go through* or to *go visiting* as a strictly historical phenomenon. This, of course, entails surrendering the rigid dichotomy between cognitive and noncognitive dimensions of experience that Kant adamantly maintains (*Interpretive Essay*, 137). We might speculate, therefore, on how to keep faith with the ideals of Kant's exemplary validity and enlarged mentality (as Arendt wishes to do) without succumbing to the methodological impasses through which these ideals have been revealed by Arendt to be significant in the first place.

32. Paul Ricoeur offers a rich meditation on the notion of solicitude as an access to the lack, without which self-reflection would seem to be a tautological proposition, in *Oneself as Another*, 192–93.

The vicissitudes of this idealism can perhaps best be indicated by Arendt's own concession in *The Human Condition*: that Kant makes the faculty of judgment inherently tragic because he never resolves the antinomy of dignity and progress, of the cognitive and noncognitive.<sup>33</sup> Human action inevitably "falls into the determinism of natural laws," and judgment "cannot penetrate the secret of absolute reality" (*Human Condition*, 235 n. 75). Arendt finesses the difficulty by making a virtue of necessity. She abdicates any effectual analytics of this tragedy by pointedly abandoning the *vita activa* (which had been the impetus of *The Human Condition*) for the *vita contemplativa*, which she justifies in terms of the Kantian valorization of disinterested spectatorship.

I think Beiner correctly points out that in this move Arendt is abandoning what was, in the earlier installments of *The Life of the Mind*, a productive tension between a view of judgment as cognitive, in the guises of representative thinking, enlarged mentality, dignity, and so on, and a view of judgment as noncognitive, in the guises of retrospective judgment, disinterestedness, and infinite progress. In my judgment, Beiner assesses the costs realistically:

Arendt tries to overcome this tension [at the end of the *Lectures*] by placing judgment squarely within the life of the mind, yet it remains the mental faculty that verges most closely upon the worldly activities of man. . . . By adhering to a firm disjunction between mental and worldly activities, Arendt was forced to expel judging from the world of the *vita activa*, to which it maintains a natural affinity. The upshot is that her more systematic reflection on the nature of judging resulted in a much narrower . . . concept of judgment. (Interpretive Essay, 140)

I believe that this expulsion of judgment from the world of the *vita activa* constitutes an evasion of the tragedy of judgment. As such, it in effect promulgates an ethically and reflectively useless corollary of Aristotelian catharsis. In its retreat from the *vita activa*, it concedes what Paul Ricoeur calls the "unanalyzable mixture of constraints of fate and deliber-

33. Beiner again provides useful commentary on this point, explaining that "[tragic judgment] continually confronts a reality it can never fully master but to which it must nonetheless reconcile itself. Arendt finds in Kant a unique expression of this tragic quality associated with judgment. This helps us also to see why the image of the spectator is so vital and why the burden of judgment is conferred wholly upon the judging spectator" (Interpretive Essay, 143).

ate choices”<sup>34</sup> that is the core of tragedy. In light of Arendt’s own political interests, the role of awestruck spectatorship it fosters would seem to be a profoundly inapt response to human tragedy.

Contrarily, I now want to speculate about how the cognitive aesthetic, which I alleged Arendt intimates but does not articulate herself, may be duly articulated by a social theorizing that resists treating human tragedy either as a mode of resignation to the “unanalyzable mixture” of fate and choice or as a capitulation to the antinomy between dignity and progress. In this case, the storytelling function of tragedy, which Arendt herself professed to value for its capacity to renew human agency through reversal<sup>35</sup>—a prototypical “going through”—could be shown to have cognitive consequences consistent with Arendt’s earliest stake in political agency, where the province of judgment remained the *vita activa*. Arendt herself sees that in the peripetic structures of tragic drama, thinking *becomes judging*, insofar as it (thinking) returns to the world of appearances to reflect on particulars (Interpretive Essay, 154). It goes without saying that this world of appearances is the threshold of the aesthetic that Arendt must cross in her extrapolation of a Kantian politics from the judgment of taste.

So, in keeping with the gist of argument to this point, the theoretical perspective with which I now propose to complement Arendt’s stance toward judgment will be seen to suffice insofar as it deepens our understanding of what would be involved in restoring a protocol of reciprocal recognition—derived from paradigms of tragic emplotment—to the project of judgment generally, and to aesthetic judgment in particular. In this way, both may be seen as instrumental in reconceptualizing the goal of *sensus communis* as the responsible political enterprise intimated in Arendt’s gloss on exemplary validity. They will give us an example of “going through” that is not inevitably a going outside of the historical, cognitive situation of tragic experience.

34. The particular relevance of Ricoeur’s characterization of tragedy obtains in his notion that tragedy constitutes the warrant for a stance of solicitude. Whereas in my argument solicitude warrants a redefinition of tragedy, for Ricoeur it threatens to merely confirm tragic knowledge as divorced from action (see *Oneself as Another*, 242).

35. Here I am extrapolating a principle of reversibility from Arendt’s notion of the hopefulness inherent to historical storytelling. This hopefulness obtains insofar as every ending of a story is perforce a new beginning. For Arendt, this is the case if we stay within the perspectives of judgment. See Hannah Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” *Partisan Review* 20 (1953): 388–89.

## 4

If the ideal of *sensus communis* is inhibited by the failure to make recognition reciprocal—which I see as the corollary to the split of dignity from progress, reason from duty, knowledge from universality—we can begin to see what might be gained from resituating that goal (*sensus communis*) in the framework of tragic knowledge. In tragedy, recognition is keyed to reconciling the form of human fate with the exigencies of human understanding. Thus, recognition is strictly conducive to reciprocity. I have already noted how, because the tragic self emerges on the threshold of a limit, it posits ends beyond the knowledge of self. Furthermore, and in contrast to other epistemologies of selfhood, I would assert that this is conceivable as a non-transcendental posit in tragedy because it defers to another positing agent in the reversibility of fate denoted by peripeteia and catharsis.

As we saw earlier, this implication of the intersubjective substrate of tragedy is consistent with the social and cultural imperatives of its Greek prototype. We will recall that in G. A. Buxton's account of Greek tragic drama and its relation to the art of persuasion, he intimates an affinity of catharsis—the structural core of tragic experience—with sophistic modes of argumentation promulgated within the cult of Peitho. Buxton further emphasizes that the name of the deity Peitho evokes the susceptibility of all action (praxis) to the Pythagorean maxim: where two antithetical sides of an issue present themselves—the site of catharsis—there is an inexorable third term. This term arises not logically but discursively from the recognition of the contradiction, which is perforce the threshold of discursivity itself (*Persuasion*, 29). This fact mitigates the popular conception that catharsis is a blind access to the irrational. The equation of catharsis with the irrational has perpetuated the idea that tragedy elicits a detachment from practical experience comparable to the stance of the Kantian judge of beauty. Hence the reputed political impotence of tragic drama in particular and of poesis in general. Such detachment would, of course, presuppose the rigid distinction between cognitive and noncognitive modes that we have been resisting and that we shall see in a moment is strictly antithetical both to the cult of Peitho and to the efficacy of persuasive praxis in the overcoming of radical (noncognitive) differences. Tragic catharsis otherwise compels us to confront these differences without rational recourse.

It is, after all, precisely this distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive protocols of experience that we have seen Arendt maintain at the cost of her desire to assimilate aesthetics to politics in *sensus communis*.



Consequently, we might now contemplate the possibility that *sensus communis* is a social ideal that, barring the distinction between cognitive and noncognitive modes, Arendt herself might have seen as an overcoming of differences compatible with tragic Peitho. After all, her linking of *sensus communis* to a standard of communicability in the case of exemplary validity already charts a parallel rhetorical path. For this reason, I want to suggest that tragedy ought to be seen as inducing *sensus communis*, not as an end in itself but as a condition of the solicitude that tragic experience reveals, putting *sensus communis* and tragedy into a potentially dialectical relation. This solicitude is especially pertinent to tragedy conceived under the signs of eristics and Peitho, where dialogue is an imperative of the recognition of differences, where all questions about the self are predicated on the disposition of another to give an intelligible answer. We would thereby be led to construe tragedy not simply as the misrecognition of the other—the impasse of deliberative action—but, in a more Hegelian mode, *as an anxiety about the possibility of mutual recognition of equality, which such misrecognition arouses.*

Within Buxton's account of the cult of Peitho as a cultural underpinning of Greek tragic drama, we can imagine how this anxiety is both conditioned by, and appealable through, a contextualization of self-recognition that is the corollary to a principle of reversibility. Because Peitho makes persuasion depend on a recognition that must be solicited across a boundary of difference and a threshold of inequality, it portends an intersubjective dynamic that resists finality of argument. This follows from the fact that every solicitation is modified in its discursive effectivity so as to augment its discursivity. Its reversibility follows as a ratio of effectivity and discursivity. By the same token, the standard of Peitho/persuasion belies the metaphysical limit of absolute otherness or impasse otherwise implied in tragic fate, where catharsis is seen to mark only the collision of incommensurable wills. One of the tenets of Peitho most famously attacked in Plato's *Gorgias* is the ongoingness of reasonability in debate, the deferral of final truths (*Persuasion*, 56). My point is that this need not be seen as inducing the relativity of infinite differences. Rather, we may more positively construe it as the reconciliation of differences within historically provisional frameworks of consensus. For where the power of Peitho does not submit to a higher logos, it is perforce self-regulating in its very ongoingness. As I have anticipated, reconciliation here is a rhetorical, not a metaphysical, proposition. That is, the stance of solicitude implicit in persuasion is at once temporally determinate and temporally open-ended in its very dialogic dimension. It is an artifact of an

irreducible, because inexhaustible, social praxis that bears further fruitful comparison with Aristotelian *phronesis*.

That this stance of solicitude is understood to have social institutional ramifications within the worldview fostered by tragic knowledge is furthermore evident in Buxton's characterization of the realm of Peitho as a key site of interaction between public and private realms.<sup>36</sup> This interaction is posited in the highly conventionalized opposition of Peitho to violence (*bia*) in Greek culture, where we understand violence to be a touchstone of the radical difference that instantiates tragedy. The opposition *peitho/bia* recurs in Greek oratory as well as tragedy, where *peitho* proffers an antidote to violence from above (tyranny) and is correlative to tradition (*nomos*) as an antidote to violence from below (mob rule). Indeed, the pair *peitho/nomos* intimates something like the dynamic of reciprocal recognition I wish to elicit from tragedy. For presupposed in it is the idea that one cannot have community of rule (*nomos*) without recognition (*peitho*) of it (i.e., its publicity); but, by the same token, one cannot have recognition without rule, since the efficacy of rule depends on its acceptability, without which violence and the mutual exclusiveness of private and public realms would be inevitable (*Persuasion*, 59).

There is a striking analogy to the "stance of solicitude" limned above with Hegel's well-known ideal of forgiveness, which, by no small coincidence, is the telos of Hegelian tragedy.<sup>37</sup> As it is the case in the Greek prototype, Hegelian tragedy has the function of binding private and public realms. For Hegel, tragic catharsis seen only as misrecognition would, in contrast to forgiveness, imply the *irreversibility* (*contra peripeteia*) of human actions. There is a complex set of reasons why this is unacceptable to Hegel. Again, following Greek precedent, Hegelian tragedy assumes the inevitability of trespass against others in the exercise of personal will.<sup>38</sup> This inevitability obtains in the necessity to act from a law of subjective moral conscious-

36. The figure of Peitho is linked to eroticism where the public and private realms intersect. This intersection is marked most conspicuously in the linkage with prostitution and a consequent blurring of the lines between persuasive reason and physical disposition. See Buxton, *Persuasion*, 32–33.

37. See Hegel, "Evil and Forgiveness," in *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 667–79. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *Phenomenology*.

38. Robert R. Williams supplies a useful correlation of Hegelian forgiveness with Arendt's faith in an intersubjective plurality as underlying the moral code. See *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 209.

ness, as if its universality with respect to the other could be presupposed. But for Hegel, such presuppositions constitute a cardinal “hypocrisy” (*Phenomenology*, 670). The determinateness of negating consciousness, while it “determines from itself alone” (*Phenomenology*, 654), depends for its content on “sensibility,” which is the “circle . . . within which determinateness as such falls” (*Phenomenology*, 654). Sensibility, in this capacity, entails a gesture toward the physical world that is socially mediated in the imperatives of *Sittlichkeit* (*Phenomenology*, 651, 658).

In deference to *Sittlichkeit*, this hypocrisy—characterized as a kind of indulgent aestheticism in Hegel’s concept of “the beautiful soul”—is remediable by understanding that moral self-consciousness requires a reevaluation of the subjectivity of consciousness. This is the birth of “conscience.” Conscience, in contrast to self-consciousness, is, for Hegel, the “substance in which the act secures . . . reality [because it is] the moment of being recognized by others” (*Phenomenology*, 650). Precisely because subjective conscience is determined by the difference and distance obtaining in action, it constitutes a de facto injury to the other. For this reason, it requires forgiveness. Just as important, however, we must note that Hegelian forgiveness prompts us to conclude that inasmuch as tragedy, for Hegel, is conceived of as an impasse of action (i.e., conflict of perspectives), it also acknowledges an inexorable slippage between the ideal conditions of knowledge presupposed within the self and the actualizable claims of knowledge dictated by its social situatedness (*Sittlichkeit*). This slippage would be a necessary constraint of any social self-understanding conditioned by the original Hegelian distinction between self-consciousness and conscience, where the identity of self-consciousness is ironized by the contingency of conscience.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the correlation of Hegelian action (difference and distance) with a slippage between ideal conditions of knowledge and the actualization of knowledge potentially militates against the fatalism of tragedy: by understanding its necessarily discursive determination to be mandated in the eliding of substance and recognition. All of this goes to say that tragedy harbors a beneficent insight about the social dynamics of self-knowledge, to which, according to the Hegelians, only the phenomenon of forgiveness yields access.

I believe that this insight is most perspicuously signaled for us by

39. See Hannah Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture,” *Social Research* 38 (1971): 417–46, in which she sees the realization of thinking dialectically bound to judgment on the model of this dialectic between conscience and self-consciousness.

the implicit necessity to appreciate that where Hegelian action trespasses against another, that other can only speak in a mode of solicitude. That is, he can only speak of the wrong in a language that assumes the inadequacy of the knowledge of the trespasser and thus appeals to a standard of knowledge *yet to be* articulated.<sup>40</sup> Such a judgment demands a compromise of competing perspectives, since they must otherwise be accepted as paradoxically mutually exclusive and mutually dependent. As such, they would be unacceptably indeterminate. This compromise of perspectives, in turn, acknowledges that perfect knowledge must therefore be a variable of the inherent variability of the conditions of imagining it. Contrary to the notion of tragic catharsis as a terminal (nonnarrative) misrecognition that does not offer scope for this variability, Hegelian forgiveness would thus proffer the possibility of undoing (reversibility, not irreversibility) what has been done in the realm of human action, specifically by submitting it to a further constraint of contextuality. But in this case, *undoing* would still constitute a dutiful doing. The slippage between ideal conditions of knowledge and actualizable knowledge claims devolves to a dutiful reciprocity of recognition, at least insofar as one presupposes the other as its necessary, but unfulfillable, condition of intelligibility. Here, we conjure the sense of *sensus communis* with a potential for judgment that remains within the constraints of the knowledge and experience that instantiated it.

Arendt evokes this Hegelian appreciation of forgiveness—which she calls a “redemption from the predicament of irreversibility”—as a “constant willingness to change [one’s] mind and start again” (*Human Condition*, 240). Arendt furthermore pegs forgiveness to an intersubjective “plurality” (*Human Condition*, 237) in direct refutation of the common charge that Hegelian forgiveness is hopelessly monosubjective.<sup>41</sup> There is, both in the condition of changing one’s mind and in the condition of acceding to an intersubjective publicity—if we accept these as intrinsic elements of tragedy—precisely the intimation I proposed earlier: that the burden of tragedy is, above all, to establish a standard of recontextualization that obviates any strong distinction between cognitive and noncognitive experience. The force of this discussion of Arendt/Hegel on the subject of forgiveness furthermore intimates that in pursuing a rational consensus (*sensus communis*) based

40. The affinity of this stance with Jean-François Lyotard’s recent exposition of the *differend* bears scrutiny. See *Just Gaming* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), and *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

41. Williams offers a corroboration of the bases of Arendt’s thinking along these lines in *Recognition*, 209.

on forgiveness, we would, in fact, be obliged to conscientiously blur the distinction between cognitive and noncognitive modalities of experience: only in this way can catharsis be a mode of self-transcendence, a release from the consequences of our actions, a redemption from the "predicament of irreversibility." Arendt observes, "Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover" (*Human Condition*, 237).

On this basis, we might speculate that the impetus to blur the distinction between cognitive and noncognitive registers of knowledge, implicitly sanctioned in forgiveness, ought to be a necessary condition for speculating pragmatically on the prospects for *sensus communis*/the aesthetic state that prompted our consideration of tragedy in the first place. This emphatically would be the case if, as I have already proposed, we see the idea of *sensus communis* not as an end in itself but as the condition of solicitude that tragedy reveals. This way of thinking satisfies our previously stated desire to elude the inherent tragedy of judgment (where the rigid distinction between cognitive dignity and noncognitive progress is maintained), so that the aesthetic determinant embedded in *sensus communis* might be elucidated as a socially constructive response to tragedy. This would be an alternative to the evasion of society that threatened in Arendt's ultimate willingness to treat tragedy as a necessary sacrifice of the *vita activa* to the *vita contemplativa*.

Another way of understanding the deliberate blurring of distinctions between cognitive and noncognitive knowledge as a positive social practice consistent with the recognition value of tragedy is to put it in terms of what Raymond Geuss, in *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, has called the "freeing" of recognition from self-deceiving constraint.<sup>42</sup> This he takes to be the cardinal aim of critical theory. Critical theory arises from the need to escape the inherently tragic circumstance of being unable to recognize what our real interests are in that conflictual encounter with the "other," which is also and inexorably the expressive threshold of human action. In other words, our pursuit of self-interest compels us to confront the incommensurability between our idealizations of knowledge and the less than perfect conditions under which such ideals could be realized. Geuss, in fact, sees the possibility of "freer" recognition as tied to a ratio of ideal conditions and

42. Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *Idea*.

perfect knowledge, reminiscent of the relationality that obtains in Hegelian forgiveness and tragedy.

For Geuss, however, this ratio is the alternative to a tenacious double bind. He points out that knowing our real interests depends on the possible convergence of perfect (ideal) knowledge with optimal conditions for attaining such knowledge. But, he concedes that “to be in ‘optimal conditions’ is not only to be in conditions of freedom but also not to lack any relevant knowledge. We can’t be fully free without having perfect knowledge, nor acquire perfect knowledge unless we live in conditions of complete freedom” (*Idea*, 54). Geuss’s way out of the double bind is, disarmingly, to accept it but to stipulate expressivistic terms for this acceptance: though we may not live in the utopia of judgment that self-knowledge requires, the knowledge of what we don’t know, in this case, is “enough to recognize how we might act to abolish some of the coercion [ignorance of conditions] from which we suffer and move closer to optimal conditions of freedom and knowledge” (*Idea*, 54). Here, insofar as knowledge of real interests concedes the asymmetry of perfect knowledge and ideal conditions, it also seems to demand their reciprocity. After all, the only available alternative would seem, in contrast, to require the mediating office of a third term that would neutralize the temporal/narrative praxis of tragic recognition driving self-knowledge in the previous episodes of this argument. In effect, the moral charge of critical theory, construed in this case as a freeing of recognition from the limiting cases of knowledge, is not an appeal to a far from optimal *freedom per se*—where knowledge departs from experience—but a conscientious elaboration of the experiential protocols of recognition (knowledge) that denote the prospect for such freedom.

This reasoning might now be seen as having the result of making what Ricoeur accepted as the tragic “unanalyzability” of fate and choice proffered in tragic catharsis, amenable to analysis in such a way that analysis is judged equivalent to a choice-making activity.<sup>43</sup> To grant the constraint of unanalyzability, in contrast, would be to reduce the aesthetic dimension of tragedy to the counterrationalistic caricature of its most politically minded critics (i.e., to catharsis *per se*). This would consign its meaning to the solipsistic sensuous register of tragic spectacle/visual gestalt and would perpetuate the very violent incommensurability of perspectives that tragedy otherwise seems designed to avert. Quite to the contrary, my contention from the start of this essay was that aesthetics must be seen as a constraint

43. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 242.

to think what, in catharsis, appears, qua appearance, to be unthinkable. In this way, it better serves a Herderian aim of making the sensuous counter of spectacle (e.g., the visual) more dialectical with cognitive decision making (i.e., a faculty for making differentiations). Thought, then, crosses a threshold of activity. Above all, this course of action ratifies Herder's censure of the eliding of sensuous with noncognitive experience that occurs within the protocols of art connoisseurship. Moreover, it supplants the connoisseur's metaphysically inclined standard of artistic perfection with a more political standard of prospective *perfectibility*.

The privileging of knowledge over perfection here does not mean, however, that aesthetics is subsumed into philosophy once and for all, as if to satisfy the demands articulated in Plato's infamous disenfranchisement of art. Rather, it means we propose to draw a distinction between the Platonist version of aesthetics as *teaching* "the truth" (which devolves to uncritical moralizing and varieties of political repression) and what we may now call an "Arendtian" version of the aesthetic as expressly *teaching imagination to go visiting*, or in the recent parlance of Albrecht Wellmer, producing a regimen of *training* in reciprocal recognition.<sup>44</sup> For such teaching constitutes an activity (praxis) within which the political remains a contingency of the historical. The "freeing" of recognition that I have postulated as the project of tragedy and that I see as consistent with Geuss's "idea of critical theory" helps us to draw precisely this distinction between merely didactic teaching and teaching to go visiting, which is to say it is a good warrant for seeking the cognitive aesthetic I have been adducing in this essay.

By seeking this warrant, I have tried to meet the demand of Arendt's project for a political judgment of taste/*sensus communis* without incurring the liabilities that arise from the deontological bias she shares with Kant in pursuit of that end. Specifically, we go visiting when we formulate the interests of others—on which the freeing of recognition depends—because such a formulation entails a conscientious prolepsis. As Geuss explains, in formulating the interests of others, we

may impose upon them a determinateness they didn't before possess. . . . When I describe the epistemic principles of the "addressed" agents from which the critical argument begins, this description itself is proleptic; the epistemic principles are "theirs" in the sense that they

44. See Albrecht Wellmer, *The Persistence of Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 210. See also my essay, "The Adequacy of the Aesthetic," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 20, no. 1–2 (1994): 39–72, for an amplification of this training as aesthetic practice.

can be brought to recognize these principles as a good rational reconstruction of conceptions underlying their behavior. But, of course, the basic assumption of the critical theory is that simply bringing certain attitudes, beliefs, behavioral patterns etc. to full consciousness changes them. (*Idea*, 94)

I would say that the difference between teaching and teaching to go visiting is captured in this account of prolepsis as a potential aesthetic tenet, insofar as Geuss understands how the field of choices from which we solicit recognition expands in proportion to the knowledge possessed: where the proleptic status of such knowledge is stipulated as knowledge of *what we don't know*. For with this stipulation, the knowledge of what we don't know remains a *yet rationalizable contingency* rather than a stigmatically irrational misrecognition. We can reasonably call it a mode of visiting, because prolepsis dictates that any reconciliation between self and other arising from it is understood to be constrained by a standard of acceptability (an exigency of time), not a standard of truth (an exigency of ontology). When we are asking for acceptance, we are conceding a communitarian interest, where a change of consciousness is perforce constitutive, not destructive, of social identity. It is predicated on a real, instead of a virtual, intersubjectivity.

The *change of consciousness* that we saw Geuss solicit as the recognition of "how we might act to abolish . . . the coercion[s]" that are implicit in what we don't know (i.e., the interests for which we cannot acknowledge cogent motive) may now be seen as coterminous with cognitive prospects for the augmented scope of reflection. This "enlarged mentality" is purveyed in tragedy and in the paradigm of reciprocal recognition that tragedy bestows to aesthetics. Indeed, it might now be fair to say that the real *sensus communis* of tragedy is that common sense of anxiety about prospects for the equality of recognition from which we all suffer. To confront this anxiety without seeking to allay it, but only to make it more cogent, is the task that I have tried to promulgate here. I have tried to show how the attitude of solicitude, which expresses that anxiety, lends itself to procedures of self-recognition based on freer choice making. This procedural imperative is what is at stake in the prospect of teaching the imagination to go visiting. It is perhaps the most pragmatic intimation of what the idea of aesthetic community can bring to the enterprise of social conscience.



