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Politics between philosophy and polemics : political thinking and thoughtful politics in the writing of Karl Popper, Leo Strauss, and Hannah Arendt

Cornelissen, W.W.H.

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Politics between Philosophy and Polemics:
Political Thinking and Thoughtful Politics in the Writing of
Karl Popper, Leo Strauss, and Hannah Arendt

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Wilhelm Wouter Herman Cornelissen
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Promotores: prof.dr. P. Kleingeld
prof.dr. H.H.A. van den Brink

Commissie: prof.dr. E.H.L. Brugmans
dr. P. Markell
dr. H.W. Siemens

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INTRODUCTION

Callicles: 'You're in nice time, Socrates. For a war or battle, as the saying goes.'
*Socrates: 'Does that mean we're too late? Have we missed the feast, as they say?'*¹
Plato

Not all of us are interested in politics, and none of us is interested in politics all the time. However, to the extent that we are interested in it, that is to say, in passing the right political judgments and making the right political decisions, in doing what is, politically speaking, the right thing to do, we need to have some kind of acquaintance with politics. At least implicitly, we need to have some kind of answer to the question: what is “political”? For instance, we need to be able to distinguish between political and non-political “things”. On the basis of this distinction, we can decide whether what is *presented* to us as “political” or what is *said* to belong to the sphere of “politics” (e.g. by the government or the powers that be) is “really” political, is “rightly” on the political agenda. The converse is also true: we need to be able to decide whether what is implicitly *ignored* or what is explicitly *denied* to be “political” and is instead labeled as, for instance, “merely” “technical”, or “personal”, ought, to the contrary, be characterized as “political”. To be sure, the question what “counts” as political is by no means merely *theoretical*, for we also need to possess some kind of knowledge of what it means to *act* politically, what is involved in actually exercising political judgment and in taking political decisions in concrete situations. In other words, we need to be able to *orient* ourselves within “the political” as a specific realm of human interaction.

It is by no means evident that we should turn to philosophy if we wish to learn something about politics in the sense just described. Other disciplines, such as journalism, historiography, literature, and other arts such as theatre, film, and photography, may seem to serve as a much better guide, insofar as they acquaint us with and attune us to political reality in its concreteness and particularity. More often than not, political philosophy, being a “branch” of philosophy, considers itself as an attempt to justify in an intellectually rigorous way certain (moral) standards, criteria, principles, or ideals in light of which actual political practices (institutions, forms of legislation, policies, etc.) are to be evaluated, that is, to be adopted or rejected.² Typically, a political philosopher claims to provide a rationally justified answer to the question of which policies or forms of legislation

¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 447a, opening sentences of this dialogue.

² See e.g. Wolff, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, 2: “Political philosophy is a *normative* discipline, meaning that it tries to establish norms (rules or ideal standards).”, Bird, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*, 4: “...our political arrangements are subject to rational assessment and choice. This assumption lies behind the effort to distinguish political practices and forms of political action that can be justified and those that cannot. That effort, more than anything else, defines the general project of political philosophy.”; Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 3, 7.

a state or government may legitimately adopt, or to the question of the conditions under which we are even permitted to speak of legitimate power or rule, with reference to a certain standard, principle, or ideal which should in itself also be capable of rational justification.

Usually, this conception of political philosophy is called “normative” political philosophy – as opposed to what is termed “conceptual” political philosophy – but in fact this name is not entirely felicitous. In so far as political *practice* itself is inherently normative (as such, all human actions, including political ones, are capable of being approved or disapproved of, of being called good or bad, right or wrong, legitimate or illegitimate, desirable or undesirable, etc.), political philosophy – as *theory* of that practice – can never completely avoid becoming to some extent evaluative, even if it considers itself to be “merely” conceptual.³ It is impossible to separate the allegedly conceptual question “what is politics?” from the allegedly normative question “what is *good* politics?”, or “what is political *par excellence*?” Hence, in fact it is not the normative character *as such* which constitutes the specific difference between this conception of political philosophy and other possible conceptions. Rather, I submit, the specific character of the self-conception of political philosophy just introduced lies in a combination of the following two elements: (i) the positing of certain *normative propositions* (ranging from more abstract or theoretical standards or principles to more concrete or practical proposals or judgments); (ii) the validity of which it derives exclusively from their (being capable of) being *rationally justified*.

According to this conception of political philosophy, Plato is taken to argue in favor of the “ideal state” presented in his *Republic*, whereas Aristotle, his archetypical adversary, is understood to have decided in favor of the “mixed regime” as presented in his *Politics*. We read these philosophical texts “as if” their authors were actually in a position to *decide* which proposal is to be adopted and which is not, or what course of action is “allowed” and what is “not allowed”,⁴ which brings them close to what actual politicians and legislators are doing. Yet, at the same time, we understand them as positioning themselves at a certain distance from actual politics, for their “proposals” lay claim to validity *exclusively* on the basis of their being *rationally justified* according to specific universal epistemological (or “methodological”) criteria of validity which are themselves understood as being non-political, or at least as not being political in the strict sense of the term.⁵

³ Lane, ‘Constraint, Theory, and Exemplar’, 133: “We are reflective as well as political animals, which makes us (among other things) reflectively political; the two practices cannot be segregated or insulated from each other. The study of what political agents do becomes normative when pursued in light of what they should do.”

⁴ Waldron, ‘What Would Plato Allow?’, who turns against this approach.

⁵ Lane, ‘Constraint, Theory, and Exemplar’, 131-132: “Insofar as it is ‘normative’, political theory is a branch of moral theory considered in its widest sense: it involves the advancing and testing of ought-claims, both prescriptions for actions and claims about how concepts ought to be understood. Insofar as it is ‘theory’, it positions itself at some remove from actual practice, though the nature of

This tension can be traced back to the opposition traditionally derived from Plato, especially from his *Gorgias*, in which a *privileged* (because “rational” and truthful) philosophy on the one hand is played off against a *depreciated* (because “irrational” and untruthful) politics on the other. To be more specific, the Socratic search for *true* knowledge is contrasted with the sophists’ competition [*agōn*] for political *success* or *victory*. Accordingly, “dialectical” conversation or discussion is contrasted with the “rhetoric” of polemical speech, and “being right” is contrasted with “being proved right”. Plato allows his main character, Socrates, to present himself as Athens’ only “true politician” because he,⁶ in contradistinction to Callicles and other sophists, rationally examines his opinions [*doxai*] according to the criterion of truth / untruth rather than success / failure: the truth, and not “the majority” or “the strong”, should “decide”. Only the philosopher is capable of reaching true knowledge [*epistēmē*], and only a life devoted to a search for the truth is worth living. Yet, at the same time, Socrates clearly draws on the vocabulary of actual politics, as when he depicts the struggle for truth within the soul as an “*agōn*”.⁷

Political philosophy thus understood usually takes for granted what politics typically consists of, viz.: lawmaking by the government; advocating proposals before or within a people’s assembly; the solution of social problems by institutional reform, etc. Put otherwise, by focusing on the question of what “politics” is to *do*, or what counts as legitimate “outcomes” of politics (which decisions the government is to take, which laws the state is to adopt), the answer to the question of what “politics” *is*, is already presupposed, i.e., it is not first treated as a *question*. Little is explicitly *articulated* about the nature of politics as a peculiar form of human interaction, nor about its difference from other forms of human action – one of these being the practice of philosophizing itself.

Indeed, more often than not, philosophy tends to disregard the fact that its own activity of theorizing, testing propositions and thus acquiring knowledge, is itself also a practice. As a consequence, political philosophy tends to interpret politics, its object of investigation, in the image of its own activity – i.e. the rational justification of cognitive claims – and it tends to disregard the respects in which it is precisely *at odds* with the practice of politics. Thereby, certain features or aspects of the practice of politics tend to disappear from view, among them being the contingent temporal and spatial conditions under which political “things” (i.e., the words, deeds, and events which make up political reality) occur, as well as the relations of power within which, with which, and against which human beings operate.⁸

that remove and relation to such practice is a matter of divergence among diverse theorists. Yet insofar as it is ‘political’, it must be related to the political as a domain of practical predicament.”

⁶ Plato, *Gorgias*, 521d.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 526e.

⁸ See Tully, ‘Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy’; Geuss, ‘Political Judgment in Its Historical Context’.

Political philosophy does not seem to offer much, then, if we wish to find an explicitly articulated answer to the question “what is political?” Yet, what we have described so far is by no means the only possible self-conception of the intellectual pursuit named “political philosophy”. In fact, what we have presented so far is primarily a specific way of *reading* political-philosophical texts, which are indeed often read “as if” the authors offer a proposal to *do* something; but they may as well be read “as if” they aim to offer a certain *understanding*, or to make sense of something, such as the phenomenon we call “politics” itself.⁹ To stick to the example of Plato’s *Republic*: instead of reading it “as if” Plato presents a blueprint for a perfectly just society which is to be realized in practice, we may read it as an attempt to understand the problem of justice and its political realization.

Moreover, we can go one step further, since what the reading of texts as if they present a practical “proposal” or “ideal” and reading them as if they offer a specific theoretical understanding (of a problem, or a phenomenon) have in common, is that they remain focused on the explicit *propositions* that are contained in a text, the truth value and / or normative validity of which we may examine. By contrast, we may say that there are texts which can be read not so much as to offer a certain “result” or a “last word” (either in the form of a practical proposal or a theoretical proposition), but rather so as to stage and *set the example* for a certain way of thinking or for a certain “thoughtful” attitude or approach to politics, which we may or may not start to practice for and by ourselves. Accordingly, we may take into account that Plato’s *Republic* is written in the form of a dialogue (instead of considering the dialogue as a mere left-over of a “primitive” stage of philosophy when it had not yet developed into its “mature” form of “Aristotelian” rational justification) and discover that Socrates, Plato’s main interlocutor, eventually lets go of the “constitutional” proposal of the rule of philosopher-kings and instead claims that the ideal state serves as the model for the individual soul. What is ultimately at stake becomes clear in the concluding myth of the dialogue: learning “to distinguish the good life from the bad and always to make the best choice possible in every situation”.¹⁰ Similarly, Socrates’ famous words in Plato’s *Gorgias* that he is the only “true politician” may be read not so much as the *prescription* of an alternative way of life (viz. the only “true” way of life with its one and only “method” of philosophical “dialectics”), but rather as an *invitation* to us, as readers of this text, to investigate for and by ourselves whether what *presents* itself as the best way of life (or what *pretends* to be the best way of life – indeed, *even* if that

⁹ See Waldron, ‘What Would Plato Allow?’, 143: “we run a great danger if we think of theory – even *evaluative* theory – as primarily political advocacy or as primarily the laying out of a social or a constitutional “wish-list.” We should think of it instead, I want to say, literally as political *philosophy* – a deepening of our insight into the realm of the political and of our understanding of what is involved in making judgments and decision in that realm.” For example, Waldron himself speaks of “the circumstances of politics” as “the felt need among the members of a certain group for a common framework or decision or course of action on some matter, even in the face of disagreement about what that framework, decision or action should be” (Waldron, *Law and Disagreement*, 102). See also Dunn, *The Cunning of Unreason*.

¹⁰ Plato, *Republic*, 618c.

way of life is said to consist in the application of the philosophical “method” of “dialectics”) *is* indeed the best way of life.¹¹

Furthermore, insofar as political philosophy (and political thinking in general) is expressed in speech or writing, it becomes itself, as action or as work, part of political reality; it becomes part of its own object of examination. As soon as we realize that texts, pieces of writing, are “frozen” practices, we may even go so far as to suggest that, just as in the case of “real” practices, we can take our cue not only from their explicit propositions (i.e., from what is *said* or claimed to be intended), but by taking our cue from their performance (i.e., from what is in a certain sense *not* said), from what kind of *activity* they actually enact. When we apply this manner of reading, we will learn from these philosophical texts not only “thanks to” themselves, that is, thanks to what they explicitly assert, propose, or claim to intend, but “despite” themselves, that is, thanks to what they do not say but nevertheless *do*. To put this in another way, political philosophies can be understood and judged not only in terms of the validity of their *propositions* (the politics they *claim* to support, that is, descriptive and normative propositions *about* politics that are either verifiable and justifiable or not), but also in terms of their *performance* (the politics they *enact* and thereby implicitly further). In other words, we may find an answer to our initial question “what is political?” not only in what political philosophers explicitly say *about* politics (if indeed they do so at all), but also and perhaps even primarily by the politics that they actually *enact*.

We may receive an initial indication of the performative meaning of political-philosophical texts by taking our cue from their *actual* “influence” or “success” within political reality. As Raymond Geuss has claimed: “In the long run, ... when a theory is widely believed and has come to inform the way large groups of people act, deeply hidden structural features of it can suddenly have a tremendous political impact.”¹² These hidden features may exist in the assumptions that people who are going to *act* upon the theory are bound to make, or in forms of language that are *used* rather than mentioned, such as certain analogies and metaphors or a polemical rather than an argumentative way of reasoning. Hence, it may well be possible that a political philosophy which explicitly offers and understands itself as offering a certain proposal for a “good” or even the only “right” form of politics (for instance, one based on individual freedom and responsibility) has in fact achieved the opposite (Marx being the classical example). Of course, the actual impact of a certain text depends not only on the “deeply hidden structural features” of the writing itself, but also on the contingent historical circumstances and specific institutional context within which it is received.¹³ Accordingly, we can distinguish at least three different ways in which political philosophical texts may be read: (i) according to their *propositional* contents (their “proposal”, “theory”, or “argument”); (ii) according to their *performative* meaning (their “action” or “practice”, whether intended or not); (iii)

¹¹ Cf. Lear, *A Case for Irony*, 22.

¹² Geuss, *Outside Ethics*, 35.

¹³ Cf. Geuss, *Outside Ethics*, 36.

according to their *historical* impact (their actual “influence”, “success”, or “legacy” within political reality).

By confronting the first two readings with each other, we are able to reconstruct the understanding of politics or the specific orientation towards politics that is presupposed and furthered by the “performance” of a political philosophy which otherwise considers its own pursuit as being merely “propositional”. On this basis, we will be able to assess the extent to which the political philosophy in question does actually enable us to make sense of politics and to develop a sense for politics, that is to say, whether it teaches to adequately assess our day-to-day political reality that is constituted by actions and events and of aptly *attuning* ourselves to that reality. As John Dunn has argued: “Few factors have more causal force in politics (do more to determine what in fact occurs) than how well we understand what we are doing. ... If we understood politics better we would certainly be less surprised by its outcomes, as well as surprised much less often.”¹⁴ In other words, an adequate understanding of politics seems to be a necessary prerequisite for the formation of sound political judgment, for taking the right political decisions, and for choosing the right courses of action, *hic et nunc*.

Given the political condition to which all political philosophy (and political thinking in general) is subject, we may ask which specific demands we may set for political philosophy, should it wish to do justice both to the peculiar nature and demands of politics (as its object of examination) *and* to the peculiar nature and demands of thinking itself (as its manner of enquiry). The question of what is involved in acting politically thus leads us back to the question of what is involved in the activity of thinking.

This leads to the following questions: (i) how can we philosophize (think) about politics (action) in such a way; (ii) that it takes into account the specific characteristics of both politics (action) and philosophy (thinking); (iii) and that it prepares us to exercise what may be called “thoughtful politics”, that is, forming sound political judgments, taking adequate political decisions, choosing the right courses of political action?

In answering these questions I argue as follows. In the first place, a political philosophy should possess / develop a realistic / adequate understanding not only of politics (action) but also of philosophy (thinking), for which it is at least required to offer some degree of critical distance from what is *generally* called “political” (e.g. state / government legislation) and what is *generally* called “philosophical” (e.g. the rational justification of propositions). In the second place, a political philosophy should possess / develop some degree of theoretical self-consciousness about the implications of its necessarily being a practice (a) for the validity or status of its propositions / theory and (b) for its possible impact within political reality / actual politics. In the third place, the forms of “thoughtful”

¹⁴ Dunn, *The Cunning of Unreason*, x. See also: idem, 92-93: “What might make it worthwhile to understand politics is the effect of doing so on our political judgment, and hence on our political actions. The less we understand what is really going on, the less likely are we to act, individually or collectively, in a well-advised way.”

political decision-making and judgment suggested or embodied by a political philosophy should meet these first two demands.

These questions are refined and answered by offering a reading of the writings of Karl Popper (1902-1994), Leo Strauss (1899-1973), and Hannah Arendt (1906-1973). All three may to some extent be considered outsiders within political philosophy, in the sense that, in confrontation with the events and ideologies of their time, they *explicitly* address the question of the relation between politics (action) and philosophy (thought), albeit in very different ways and varying degrees. To be more precise, all three attempt to “save” a kind of what I call “thoughtful politics”, which may be said to be constituted by proper cooperation between thought and action, while at the same time doing justice to their specific difference and peculiarity.

Moreover, all three authors attempt to rethink the relation between philosophy and politics (or between thought and action) by relating to the conceptualization of the relation between the philosophical life [*bios theōrētikos*] and the political life [*bios politikos*] as it assumed shape in Plato’s dialogues (again, especially in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*). In the work of Popper, Strauss, and Arendt, the names of Plato, Socrates, the sophists (especially Callicles and Thrasymachus) and statesmen (such as Pericles) function as placeholders for specific positions that may be occupied within this framework. Popper aligns the philosopher “Socrates” and the statesman “Pericles” together as friends of the “open society” against the pseudo-philosopher “Plato” as its enemy. By contrast, Strauss draws a sharp distinction between the philosopher “Socrates” and the statesman “Pericles”, while defending “Plato” (albeit a different Plato than Popper’s) against both of them. Finally, Arendt, while at first sight choosing a position similar to Popper’s (defending “Socratic” thinking and “Periclean” acting against “Platonic” making), in fact aims to think outside the underlying “Platonic” framework as such.

Furthermore, the thought of both Popper and Strauss, in contradistinction to Arendt’s, acquired a certain historical influence in the guise of political movements, ideologies, or schools that base themselves on their thought,¹⁵ which makes us attentive to the performative meaning of their political thinking. In Popper’s case, the substitution of political Islamism for communism as the “enemy” of the open society, makes us aware of the force of the friend-enemy logic prominent in his writing. In the case of Strauss, him being named the “godfather of the neo-cons” during the war against Iraq causes us to attend to the question of the extent to which his political philosophy implies a rehabilitation of

¹⁵ In the case of Popper, especially his theory of the “open society” has been utilized by liberal political parties and activists in Europe to provide an ideological foundation. In the case of Strauss, especially the neoconservative movement is, in part, inspired by his thought. Perhaps more importantly, he deliberately founded his own “school” of political philosophy. Although Arendt’s reflections on the Eichmann case and Little Rock have generated a lot of discussion and controversy in public debate, it is striking that there does not seem to be such a thing as an “Arendtian” political movement or ideology.

the merits of war as instrument of “regime change” and of the use of “noble lies” by “the few” against “the many”. The thought (or at least the writing) of both authors has been acted on in recent history, and this historical “influence” or “success” provides us with a glimpse into the deeply hidden structural features of their thought.

Finally, the choice of three rather than two authors (or even one) reduces the risk that we in turn, as readers, lapse from the outset into an approach that focuses exclusively on the philosophical and / or polemical weighing of the validity of *propositions* for and / or against concerning a common issue and according to a common set of criteria that are self-evidently presupposed and perhaps even imposed on their texts from the “outside”, a weighing that is supposed to “result” in our own positing, in turn, of a rationally justified and / or polemically defended “last word” or “bottom line”. In the secondary literature, these authors have thus far been compared as pairs: Popper and Strauss,¹⁶ and Strauss and Arendt.¹⁷ The advantage of the choice of *three* authors is that it increases the number of perspectives on the political and thus stages a *plural* and *perspectival* in-between.¹⁸

As indicated, in order to trace the political within the philosophical (and the other way round), it is necessary to study the writings of our authors not only in terms of what they say *thanks to* themselves (their propositions, what they explicitly *argue* for), but also, and more fundamentally, in terms of what they say *despite* themselves (their performance, what they *do*). We may learn from them not only from what they say (what they propose, or what they intend), but also from what they do (the principles inherent in their action).

Popper sets the scene, as we demonstrate what the problem of political thinking is by providing a reading of his work. By offering a specific reading of his

¹⁶ For a comparison of Popper and Strauss, see e.g.: Lane, ‘Plato, Popper, Strauss, and Utopianism: Open Secrets?’; Mueller, ‘Fear and Freedom: On ‘Cold War Liberalism’.

¹⁷ For a comparison of Strauss and Arendt, see e.g. Beiner, ‘Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss: The Uncommenced Dialogue’; Villa, ‘The Philosopher versus the Citizen: Arendt, Strauss, and Socrates’; Harald Bluhm, ‘Variationen des Höhlengleichnisses. Kritik und Restitution politischer Philosophie bei Hannah Arendt und Leo Strauss’; Widmaier, *Fin de la philosophie politique? Hannah Arendt contre Leo Strauss*. The volume edited by Kielmansegg et. al., *Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss* contains essays devoted to either Arendt or Strauss. Except for the chapter by Kateb, ‘The Questionable Influence of Arendt (and Strauss)’ (ibid., 29-43), it hardly offers any explicit comparison of the two.

¹⁸ The only (other) scholarly piece of work that has ever been published in which the same three thinkers (Popper, Strauss, Arendt) are being compared is: Holmes, ‘Aristippus in and out of Athens’. Holmes uses a single criterion to measure them: allegedly, they devote insufficient consideration to the fundamental distinction between the classical Greek *polis* on the one hand, which, being a “total” state, knew of no distinction between state and society, and our modern society on the other, which, by contrast, is essentially characterized by “functional differentiation”. As a result, he not only misses the fundamental differences among them within their interpretations of “the Greeks” – Holmes asserts, for instance, that Arendt aims for a return to Plato (!) – but, more fundamentally, his approach assumes that these philosophers should in the first place be read as if their primary goal lies in presenting some decisive standpoint or proposition (answer), instead of articulating and understanding a theoretical problem (question).

work we can show that political thought, insofar as it is expressed, also becomes a form of political *practice*; a practice that can be at odds with the *theory* of politics that is formulated in the very same work. It will be argued, however, that Popper does not explicitly display any awareness of this performative condition of philosophy, nor does he offer a strategy to deal with it. Strauss, by contrast, explicitly shows awareness of the implications of this condition, but it will be argued that the remedy he offers amounts to the unrealistic fantasy of *escaping* from that very condition. Finally, Arendt is shown to be also aware of the predicament, but it will be argued that her thinking offers strategies to deal with this condition, which do not amount to an escape from it.

The first two chapters of this dissertation are devoted to a reading of the writing of Karl Popper, especially his *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945). Popper conceives of political philosophy as the application of epistemological or methodological principles, or the “rational” methods of science to political practice: “piecemeal social engineering”. According to him, this approach to politics serves the freedom and responsibility of individual citizens. As we will argue, however, his methodological assumptions cause his conception of “rationality” to be too narrow to account for the normative validity of political proposals and decisions (Chapter 1). Subsequently, our attention shifts from the level of the inner consistency of the *propositions* or argument of his texts (i.e., what he explicitly accounts for) to the level of *performance*. We will argue that Popper fails to offer a “theoretical self-consciousness” (Geuss) of the political conditions to which all thinking about politics is necessarily subject. It is demonstrated that his texts do not escape from this condition. In the first place, his texts rest upon the force of the *analogy* with science – a use of language which seems to overstep the limits of scientific language he himself explicitly sets. In the second place, his texts are written in accordance with a *polemical* friend-enemy logic that is in flat contradiction with the rules of rational discussion he himself determines (Chapter 2).

Strauss, in contradistinction to Popper, acknowledges that philosophy (or thinking), insofar as it is expressed in speech or writing, is subject to the conditions of politics: one may say that *scribere est agere* (“writing is acting”). This political condition of philosophy (or thinking) is diagnosed as problematic: according to Strauss, philosophy and politics are naturally *at odds* with each other. Although it is often stated that Strauss’s thought in the last instance is meant to serve the philosophical way of life, I argue that he also offers a specific theory or understanding of the political and a specific form of guidance for actual political decisions and judgments [*phronèsis*]. He presents this as an alternative to both modern “doctrinairism” and ultramodern “existentialism” (Chapter 3). However, the strategies Strauss develops to deal with the conflictual relation between politics and philosophy in order that we may philosophize (or think) independently and, as an *indirect* consequence, make better political judgments and take better political decisions, implies that he neglects the peculiarity of this relation. It will be demonstrated that his theory reflects the supposedly sovereign position of

philosophy over politics. A reconstruction is given of his account and practice of the *politics* of philosophy, the “art of writing”, which consists of a “Platonic” cooperation between philosophical dialectics (Socrates) and polemical rhetoric (Thrasymachus), the latter of which is supposed to be entirely “ministerial” to the former. Yet, the *performance* of this politics of philosophy attests to the problematic presupposition that the contingent (political) conditions of thinking can be completely known and controlled from the supposedly sovereign position of the philosopher (Chapter 4).

In the case of Arendt, this deconstructive reading of her work – the confrontation of its propositions with its performance – has already received quite a lot of attention in the secondary literature. In her case too, it can be demonstrated that the performative meaning of her writings is at some points at odds with the explicitly formulated intention. Yet we will argue that this reading tends to disregard the fact that it is not her intention to offer a “proposal” in the guise of a “solution” or “ideal” – her alleged and, according to many, deficient *advocacy* of “Greek” political life – for this would place her within the traditional philosophical framework which she precisely and *explicitly* rejects. Instead, space is given to what she asserts is her original intention: to *understand* the specific conditions of political action and decision-making. More specifically, we will present her conception of politics as one of “public freedom”, by reconstructing the way she attempts to understand the question of the legitimacy of political order (power, authority) that has “traditionally” been understood as a *philosophical* (theoretical) question, as an “originally” *political* (practical) question instead (Chapter 5). By sticking to Arendt’s explicitly formulated wish not to move within the traditional framework, we subsequently allow ourselves to present alternative ways of thinking that *are* capable of doing justice to politics. For, in contrast not only to Platonic contemplation and contemporary “thoughtlessness”, and – in contradistinction to what is sometimes asserted – *also* in contrast to Socratic dialectics, Arendt presents two different ways of thinking that may be considered suitable ways to think about politics and make us more attentive to political reality, in order that we may make better judgments and take better decisions. These ways of thinking are “representative” thinking – which, in contradistinction to Strauss’s conception of *phronèsis*, aims for *perspectival* judgment – and “poetic” thinking – which amounts to a re-conciliation with and *praise* of the world by making adequate use of the metaphorical and analogical power of language (Chapter 6).