Politics and Reflection

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Abstract

In public discussion and political philosophy alike, there are frequent calls for citizens and politicians to be more "reflective". However, it is not always clear what this means. This thesis investigates what the political practice of reflection entails and why we should engage in it. After setting out the wide range of contemporary political problems reflection is thought to solve, I outline the broad definitional contours of the concept as I understand it, distinguishing it from other such related terms as 'deliberation' in the first chapter.

Following this, I examine the idea of reflection in accounts from ancient, early-modern, and modern writers. I show how the metaphor of the mirror was used to illustrate reflective thought in the political ideas of Socrates, Plato, stoicism, and Augustine. I identify three different aspects of reflection: epistemic reflection, which emphasises gaining knowledge through reflection, self-reflection, which emphasises self-correction through self-understanding (strictly speaking a sub-type of epistemic reflection focused on knowledge of the self), and finally ethical reflection, the idea that even if human intellectual powers are limited, reflection can nevertheless open an inner space for cultivating ethical virtue. In the ancient world, we also find a counter-tradition: the mirror has also been associated with deception and confusion in fable and myth. The realist histories of Herodotus and Thucydides were alert to the costs and dangers of reflection—most importantly, the idea that emphasising reflection risks becoming quietist, intellectualist, and inimical to political engagement.

Following this, I turn to examining reflection as a theme in the thought of Thomas Hobbes. His call for readers to reflect is fascinating since it combines all three aspects of reflection together. He seeks both to adjust and expand citizens' political vision whilst inculcating distinctly Hobbesian ethics of obedience and subservience to authority. It can thus be called a 'composite' account. Whilst his account benefits from the integration of the three aspects, its authoritarian and deliberately anti-political character makes it a poor example to uphold for reflection today.

Next, I turn to two modern interpreters of Kant; Hannah Arendt and John Rawls. Both rightly interpret Kant, like Hobbes, as seeing reflection as vital to politics. However, their interpretations are markedly different. Rawls's call for citizens to aim for 'reflective

equilibrium' emphasises the epistemic aspects of reflection—the goal of reaching a highly coherent philosophical theory of justice which could command agreement and produce political stability. Arendt, by contrast, was sceptical that reflection could ever produce such epistemic outputs, but nonetheless emphasised the ethical importance of withdrawing from the world into an inner, reflective space—such as the cultivation of conscience and engaging of judgement.

Finally, using these conceptual resources, I ask what role reflection might play in contemporary politics. I argue that reflection must be rescued from both opponents and proponents. Opponents—such as realists and certain deliberative democrats—are sceptical that reflection has much to offer politics. I argue that their concerns can be met, partly because they tend to misconceive reflection as a primarily epistemic in purpose. Proponents, on the other hand, focus too much on one or another particular aspect of reflection such that they, too, produce theories with anti-political implications. For example, a heavily epistemic theory risks intellectualism, whilst theories calling for self-reflection along narrow identitarian lines risk closing down open political thought and engagement.

By way of conclusion, I sketch a theory of political reflection which is both *composite* and *political*. That is, it aims to promote political engagement by combining all three elements. Furthermore, I argue a degree of emphasis must be placed on the ethical aspect of reflection. In a contemporary world of often rapid and confusing political turmoil, reflection can provide refuge and orientation. Far from being intellectualist or an escape from reality, this model of political reflectiveness offers the opportunity to remember what truly matters to us, to step into others' shoes—even when we disagree—and cultivate moral conscience and courage when conducting ourselves as citizens.

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Introduction

1. Reflection as a Political Concern

When we think of politics, we most likely think about the bustling life of public institutions—press conferences, legislative debates, protests, election campaigns, lobbying, international organisations, and perhaps even the machinations of spin doctors and propagandists. These images epitomise the active life; a life of public engagement in dialogue and debate with other citizens. Political philosophy, too, tends to examine values and practices which are central to such active participation such as justice, liberty, equality, democracy, and community. These themes evoke images of collective participation—dialogue, debate, and protest.

Bearing these in mind, one might not typically think of the contemplative life and quiet reflection as central to politics, far as it is from this bustling world. And yet, we talk remarkably often about reflection in Western politics. Being unreflective is seen as a great failure of citizenship—for example, as when one Bruce Springsteen criticized Donald Trump in no uncertain terms, calling him a "toxic narcissist" and saying "he's such an unreflective person".[1] The instruction to reflect is often used as criticism directed at political opponents, as when, following Hilary Clinton's election defeat, Kellyanne Conway said she ought to "[…] take a look in the mirror and reflect on what went wrong".[2] Reflection is also often seen as a means of catharsis in the aftermath of political failure, with political groups calling for a "period of reflection"—for instance by the UK Labour

[1] Gil Kaufman, 'Bruce Springsteen Calls Donald Trump "Toxic Narcissist"', Billboard, 19 October 2016, http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/rock/7549075/bruce-springsteen-calls-donald-trump-toxic-narcissist.
[2] Marisa Schultz, 'Conway to Clinton: Take a Look in the Mirror', *New York Post* (blog), 13 November 2016, https://nypost.com/2016/11/13/conway-to-clinton-take-a-look-in-the-mirror/.

Party following their 2019 election defeat and the European Council following the failed ratification of the EU Constitutional Treaty in 2005. Evidently, there is an interest among democratic citizens, public figures, and others in how our internal life of thought relates to, and might support, our engagement in politics.

This interest is not lost on moral and political philosophers. After all, it is their job to reflect critically and carefully upon political questions. However, in addition to reflecting carefully about politics themselves, contemporary theorists are also interested in understanding and strengthening citizens' political thought processes, in turn. In pursuing this interest, they often use the term "reflection"—citizens, they say, should try to avoid the vice of unreflectiveness by reflecting more carefully. This theme can be found in John Rawls's idea of "reflective equilibrium"[3] which has been influential in recent political theory. Hannah Arendt, too, emphasised the importance of reflection and "reflective judgement"[4] in her later work, and Robert Goodin has developed an approach to democratic theory emphasising the importance of "reflective democracy".[5] In philosophy more broadly, Christine Korsgaard argues that "reflective agency" is essential to autonomy,[6] Hugh LaFollete argues that the failure to reflect can be seen as among the greatest moral vices,[7] and Ernest Sosa argues that "reflective knowledge" is essential to epistemology.[8]

Despite this preponderance of the language of 'reflection', it is still not at all clear what reflection *is*, and is *for*, in politics and political philosophy. What common feature joins these various theories together? How does reflection differ from, and relate to, other concepts such as 'deliberation'? What does it actually entail? What problems is it thought

[3] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Revised Edition (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971).
[4] Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
[5] Robert E. Goodin, *Reflective Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[6] Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[7] Hugh LaFollette, 'The Greatest Vice?', *Journal of Practical Ethics*, 4, no.2 (December 2016) 1-24 http://www.jpe.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/JPE0030-LaFollette.pdf
[8] Ernest Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

to solve, and how? Who should be doing it, and why? How does it relate to other practices such as public debate, legislation, policymaking, campaigning, and so forth? More broadly, where does this language of reflection—with its ocular and optical connotations—originate?

2. Contemporary Calls for Reflection

We can gain a greater sense of the subject by examining the political concerns and problems to which reflection is thought to be a solution. Understanding these concerns also motivates the thesis—what might we expect to gain politically be looking at the practice of reflection?

There is a wide range of such concerns—many hopes and dreams are pinned on reflection, especially by intellectuals, as a civic practice. Such hopes tend to share a general common structure; political decisions and behaviour are heavily determined by what happens inside human minds. If we could improve the way people *think* about politics, then resolving political problems would be made much easier. The way to do this, so the story goes, is by teaching and encouraging people to reflect more carefully.[9]

These concerns have been inflamed in the last few years in the aftermath of major political events—particularly the results of the UK Brexit referendum and the 2016 US presidential election. So, too, has the suggestion from the public and political theorists alike that people must learn to reflect more carefully. As we shall see presently, these

[9] This structure helps explain why many areas of political theory focus on psychological questions including, in the analytic tradition, reflective equilibrium, public reason, epistemic democracy, and epistemic injustice, and, in the critical theory tradition, theories of ideology, reflexivity, and false consciousness. Many books are also written for broader audiences which seek to shed light on politics using psychology: see, for example, Drew Westen, *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007); George Lakoff, *The Political Mind: A Cognitive Scientist's Guide to Your Brain and Its Politics* (London: Penguin Books, 2008); Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (London: Penguin, 2013); William E Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis, MIN ; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

concerns are long-standing in contemporary political theory. As the following chapters demonstrate, similar concerns and calls for reflection can be found throughout the history of Western political philosophy.

i. Political Disagreement

Firstly, reflection is thought to help alleviate deep problems of profound disagreement in contemporary, multicultural democracies. Rawls's idea of "reflective equilibrium" sought, in his early work, to encourage a systematic approach to political thinking which would enable agreement to be reached on key political questions through an analytically coherent conception of justice.[10] His later work in *Political Liberalism* revised and extended the kinds of reflection citizens were to engage in. Reflection upon their "comprehensive doctrines" such as religious views would enable citizens to justify their belief in a public, political conception of justice.[11] This public conception could then provide a freestanding basis from which to reflect upon questions of justice. In both cases, a tremendous amount of hope is placed upon citizens' capacity to reflect privately upon political questions as a key means of achieving political stability and resolving deep political disagreements.

Rawls's approach has had a profound effect on political theory. Theories of "deliberative democracy" can be seen as both a development from, and a critique of, Rawls's approach. Some prominent deliberative democracy theorists viewed the emphasis on public discussion as a compliment to private reflection. As Gutmann and Thompson put it "Although his theory of constitutional democracy leaves room for such discussion, it emphasizes instead a solitary process of reflection, a kind of private deliberation".[12] In

[10] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*.
[11] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Expanded Edition (New , NY: Columbia University Press, 1993).
[12] Amy Gutmann and Dennis F Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 37.

their view, "Deliberative democrats also rely on solitary reflection […]"[13] which "[…] supplements rather than substitutes for deliberation".[14]

On the other hand, some have viewed the emphasis on public deliberation as a distraction. As Goodin puts it, "What is required is a new way of conceptualising democratic deliberation–as something which occurs *internally*, within each individual's head, and not exclusively or even primarily in an interpersonal setting".[15] He terms this "reflective democracy". Whilst Goodin takes this to be a new approach, it can also be read as something of a return to the earlier (Rawlsian) emphasis on private reflection as key to political decision-making. Goodin adds an additional layer to the problem, however, by arguing that there can be an unhelpful, mutually reinforcing pattern of unreflectiveness between both citizens and politicians. As he puts it "[…] The unreflectiveness of voters might evoke an analogous misbehaviour among politicians attuned to them, thus infecting the whole political process".[16]

ii. The problem of "voter incompetence"

Concerns about the prospects for resolving democratic disagreement have been further fuelled by a wide range of evidence from social and political psychology which calls into question the quality of human reasoning. For example, Todorov et al. found they could predict the outcomes of US gubernatorial elections with an astonishing degree of accuracy based merely upon "rapid and unreflective" judgements of candidates' face photographs.[17] Researchers found that Israeli parole court judges made decisions which were significantly

[13] Gutmann and Thompson, 38.
[14] Gutmann and Thompson, 38.
[15] Goodin, *Reflective Democracy*, 7.
[16] Goodin, 7.
[17] Charles C. Ballew and Alexander Todorov, 'Predicting Political Elections from Rapid and Unreflective Face Judgments', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 104, no. 46 (13 November 2007): 17948–53, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0705435104.

influenced by how hungry they were.[18] Haidt et al. found that moral judgements can be significantly influenced by irrelevant factors such as the presence of an unpleasant odour.[19]

This research has been popularised most famously by Daniel Kahneman in his distinction between two mental systems—System 1 and System 2.[20] System 1 is fast, automatic and unconscious, whereas System 2 is slow, conscious, and attended by a subjective feeling of deliberate control. He terms System 2 "reflective". The problem is this: System 2 is profoundly lazy and it takes considerable effort and energy to motivate it into action. As a result, people who would otherwise reason well using System 2 regularly reason poorly through a dependence on System 1 which is highly susceptible to a plethora of unconscious biases.

Some have taken this evidence to demonstrate that too much hope has been pinned on reflection for solving political problems. As Lakoff, Westen, Haidt, Achen and Bartels, and others have argued, political theorists and organisations should abandon an Enlightenment vision of the political mind which emphasises powers of reflection.[21] This would mean moving beyond deliberative and reflective models of democracy, dismissing them as, in the words of Achen and Bartels, a "folk theory".[22]

By contrast, others emphasise the importance of reflection. Some draw on evidence that reasoning can be motivated much more easily in the context of group discussion and dialogue.[23] For instance, by increasing the number and quality of opportunities for citizens

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[18] Shai Danziger, Jonathan Levav, and Liora Avnaim-Pesso, 'Extraneous Factors in Judicial Decisions', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 108, no. 17 (2011): 6889.
[19] Simone Schnall et al., 'Disgust as Embodied Moral Judgment', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 34, no. 8 (2008): 1096–1109.
[20] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (London: Penguin, 2012).
[21] Lakoff, *The Political Mind*; Westen, *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*; Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*; Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).
[22] Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, 1.
[23] Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber, *The Enigma of Reason: A New Theory of Human Understanding* (London: Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2017); Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber, 'Why Do Humans Reason? Arguments for an Argumentative Theory', *Behav Brain Sci* 34, no. 2 (2011): 57–74. There is disagreement in

to participate in group discussion and deliberative assemblies.[24] Others argue that the cognitive science evidence ought to encourage us to try and reflect more carefully as individuals.

Responding to the politics of Brexit and Trump in 2016 as an "*annus horribilis*", Quassim Cassam argues that, even in light of the kind of biases identified by Kahneman, people can nevertheless be responsible and blameworthy for their own "epistemic vices"[25] and must try to reduce these through, in part, a process of "rational reflection".[26] As he puts it, "epistemic vices […] have been at least partly responsible for a series of political and other disasters. The only hope of avoiding such disasters in the future is to improve our thinking, our attitudes, and our habits of thought and inquiry."[27] A similar view can be found in Miranda Fricker's approach to epistemic injustice.[28] Goodin and Spiekermann responded to 2016 in a similar way, claiming that Brexit and Trump were the result of voters misperceiving their own interests, failing to evaluate evidence correctly, believing blatant lies, and treating politics as a form of entertainment.[29] In the US election case, they describe 2016 as a case of " 'fools led by knaves' […] with voters being made more foolish by the malicious undermining of all standards of truth, and knaves being more knavish for their deliberate role in so doing".[30] Part of their proposed solution involves

this literature as to whether the "dual process" theory of mind can be sustained but I will not explore this here since it has no bearing on my argument.

[24] Hélène Landemore, *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); Simone Chambers, 'Human Life Is Group Life: Deliberative Democracy for Realists', *Critical Review* 30, no. 1–2 (2018): 1–13.

[25] Quassim Cassam, *Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political*, *Vices of the Mind : From the Intellectual to the Political*, First edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), sec. Preface.

[26] Cassam, 143.

[27] Cassam, 187.

[28] Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[29] Robert E. Goodin and Kai Spiekermann, *An Epistemic Theory of Democracy* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), sec. Epilogue. Whilst I do not concur entirely with their political analysis, I will not evaluate it here as I am merely interested in how they understand the problem and the role reflection plays in solving it.

[30] Goodin and Spiekermann, 367.

improving the standards of reasoning among citizens—partly through education and partly through encouraging group discussion.[31]

Whilst I am deeply sceptical of the idea that it is for political theorists to label huge swathes of the electorate as "incompetent", it is nevertheless true that, in some cases, evidence from social psychology should provoke us to consider whether we ought to be more mindful of *how* we think through things, not merely *what* we think about political matters. As we shall see, this is not a new concern in political theory, but a very longstanding one.

iii. Disintegration of Political Culture

The foregoing concerns about political disagreement and voter incompetence are about the quality and standard of *reasoning* among democratic citizens. This is not the only kind of political problem to which reflection is thought to be a solution. Cultural commentators and political theorists alike are also concerned about our *style* of politics, government, and public affairs today. They are often concerned with both *time* and *language*: the pace of public life and the words we use to speak in public.

Using Brexit and Trump as starting points, Michael Freeden examines populism's relationship to ideology, arguing that two common traits are the repetition of deceptive, "deliberate and unreflective"[32] language which construes "a *part* of the people" as "the people"[33] and, secondly, the "fundamental preoccupation of populists with speed in implementing the 'will of the people' before that will can be unpacked as consisting of diverse particular components".[34] This explains, for Freeden, the association between

[31] Goodin and Spiekermann, 320.
[32] Michael Freeden, 'After the Brexit Referendum: Revisiting Populism as an Ideology', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 22, no. 1 (2017): 7.
[33] Freeden, 8, citing Müller, J-W, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 22.
[34] Freeden, 7.

populism and contempt for due process and the rule of law with their "unavoidable 'slowness'."[35] For Freeden, this undermines a more considerate politics such as one inspired by a Rousseauian 'general will' "[…] which is painstakingly forged out of a reflective exercise by which each person is individually asked not what is good exclusively for him- or herself […] but what would be good for everyone else *as well as* the reflecting individual […]."[36]

These concerns—corruption of language and preoccupation with speed—are also raised in relation to culture more broadly. Lakoff calls for more sophisticated reflection on the ways in which language is used and manipulated by political actors.[37] Concerning speed and urgency, Sheldon Wolin wrote that

> "[…] political time is out of synch with the temporalities, rhythms, and pace governing economy and culture. Political time, especially in societies with pretensions to democracy, requires an element of leisure […] in the sense, say, of a leisurely pace. This is owing to the needs of political action to be preceded by deliberation and deliberation, as its "deliberate" part suggests, takes time […]. […]
>
> In contrast to political time, the temporalities of economy and popular culture are dictated by innovation, change, and replacement through obsolescence. Accordingly time is not governed by the needs of deliberation but by those of rapid turnover".[38]

This, says Wolin, has had a deleterious effect not merely on citizenship, but also on political theory which has "[…] exchanged the tempos of deliberation and contemplation for the temporal rhythms of contemporary culture and economy".[39] Cultural commentators

[35] Freeden, 8.
[36] Freeden, 8.
[37] Lakoff, *The Political Mind*.
[38] Sheldon S Wolin, 'What Time Is It?', *Theory & Event* 1, no. 1 (1997), https://muse.jhu.edu/article/32440. For a discussion of Wolin's ideas on this matter, see Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed*, chap. 6.
[39] Wolin, 'What Time Is It?'

have associated this with the rise of 24-hour news cycles and social media—for example, as expressed in Feldman and Rosenberg's book *No Time to Think* named after the eponymous Bob Dylan song. Such rapidity is thought to crowd out opportunities for genuine, careful reflection.[40]

These concerns about our style of contemporary politics, much like concerns about the quality of reasoning within it, have resulted in strong emphases on recovering reflection as a practice for all people involved in government in any way—from the ballot box to the dispatch box. There is a fourth area in which political theorists have called for reflection. It has less to do with official, public, political arenas of decision-making and more to do with the effects of individuals' actions on social justice.

iv. Structural Injustice

Political philosophers' attention has diversified in the last decades to embrace not merely questions of values in public (e.g. constitutional, legislative, and policy) contexts, but also by viewing the private actions of individuals as having political significance. G A Cohen argued for a generalisation of the feminist slogan "the personal is political" to distributive justice, suggesting that its "site" it is not merely a question of legislation and policy, but also a matter for individuals' private, uncoerced choices.[41] Justice in distribution could only fully be reached, in Cohen's view, if people made just choices about how to deploy their labour in public exchange and how to divide domestic labour in the household.

These kinds of concerns have inspired considerable interests in 'structural injustice' in political theory. Whilst policy and government have roles to play, some have

[40] As several senior management consultants writing for the *Harvard Business Review* recently argued, there is a need to recover the "lost art of reflection" amidst the unrelenting rapidity of modern business: Martin Reeves, Roselinde Torres, and Fabien Hassan, 'How to Regain the Lost Art of Reflection', Harvard Business Review, 25 September 2017, https://hbr.org/2017/09/how-to-regain-the-lost-art-of-reflection.
[41] G. A. Cohen, 'Where the Action Is: On the Site of Distributive Justice', *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 26, no. 1 (1997): 3–30.

suggested that part of the solution to such problems involves encouraging a certain kind of self-reflection. As Martha Nussbaum puts it, "sincere self-examination" can be a vital part of people being able to identify ways in which they bear responsibility and even guilt for contributing to structural injustice.[42] This suggestion parallels Miranda Fricker's treatment of epistemic injustice—the idea that, among other things, unconscious biases can lead marginalised groups to be wronged by systematically being ignored or not taken seriously—an idea called "testimonial injustice".[43] Fricker argues that people should self-reflect on the extent to which they are susceptible to such biases and correct for their epistemic deficiencies—thus contributing to justice not merely on a personal level, but also on a social level.

These ideas have a certain commonality—though they are by no means identical—with areas of sociological and critical theory. The 'structuration' theory developed by Anthony Giddens emphasises "[…] the *transformational capacity* of self-reflection within human affairs".[44] Using the concept of "reflexivity", such social theories understand the human capacity to reflect upon themselves and their actions as a primary factor in their identity and behaviour.[45] In political theory, the critical theory tradition has developed the concept of reflexivity to emphasise the importance of self-reflection in overcoming the ideological blinkers thought to be imposed oppressively upon citizens by both liberalism and capitalism.[46] This style of reflection, emphasising reflection from the marginalised

[42] Martha Nussbaum, 'Foreword', in *Responsibility for Justice*, by Iris Marion Young (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[43] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*.
[44] Anthony Giddens, *In Defence of Sociology: Essays, Interpretations and Rejoinders* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 110.
[45] For a development of such views, see for example Margaret S. Archer, *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation by Margaret S. Archer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139087315.
[46] Lois McNay, 'Contemporary Critical Theory', in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies*, ed. Michael Freeden and Marc Stears (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

viewpoints of vulnerable people, is understood within critical theory in direct opposition to the "abstract logical reflection" proposed by liberal theoretical approaches above.[47]

v. Reflection and its Critics

These political problems are diverse. The common view connecting them all is that "more reflection" is the cure. However, there is also disagreement among those advocating for reflection as a key practice in politics. Some focus on reflection as a tool to improve the quality of reasoning. Others see this as a hopeless project unless we first reveal to ourselves, through reflection of another kind, our biases and ideological blinkers. Still, others view reflection not merely as a matter of reasoning or self-understanding, but also as a means of improving our style of politics by giving ourselves the mental space and time to do so. One key aim of this thesis is to try and understand what distinguishes such different conceptions of reflection and what—if anything—unites them.

In addition to the disagreement between those advocating for reflection in politics, there is also scepticism *in general* about pinning hope on reflection as a solution to the discontents of modern democracy. Some such sceptical perspectives have been mentioned above in relation to doubts about the competence of citizens to reason which have arisen from political science and psychology. There are several strands of political theory literature which seek to downplay the role of reflection in politics in all its forms, calling for a less cerebral account of political participation than what most political theorists have developed so far.

A major school of thought in this regard is 'realism'. For example, Raymond Geuss's reaction against neo-Kantian political thought and practice:

[47] McNay, 139. Further articulations of such ideas can be found in ideas such as "strong objectivity" and "standpoint epistemology" discussed in the conclusion.

> "[…] most human agents most of the time are weak, easily distracted, deeply conflicted, and confused […]. People often have no determinate beliefs at all about a variety of subjects; they often don't know what they want or why they did something; even when they know or claim to know what they want, they can often give no coherent account of why exactly they want what they claim to want; they often have no idea which portions of their systems of beliefs and desires—to the extent to which they have determinate beliefs and desires—are "ethical principles" and which (mere empirical) "interests". This is not simply an epistemic failing, and also not something that one could in principle remedy, but a pervasive "inherent" feature in human life".[48]

In the eyes of realism, the problem with the neo-Kantian approaches inspired by Rawls and others as outlined above is that they offer a hopelessly utopian view of what careful reflection could ever do for politics. For realists, such views reach beyond the limits of reasonable optimism in an attempt to answer multifaceted political problems with Euclidian geometric precision—a project doomed to failure for even the most seasoned of professional philosophers, let alone the man on the Clapham omnibus. Achen and Bartels's *Democracy for Realists* presents a similar view; deliberative democracy and other such models of democratic engagement, they argue, completely ignore the reality of what could ever reasonably be hoped for in human thinking.

As regards our political culture, and the issue of time, Michael Ignatieff—one of the few experienced politicians among contemporary political theorists—viewed the speed of political processes, and its lack of conduciveness to philosophical reflection, as an unavoidable feature of politics which requires its own skill. He recalls Machiavelli's infamous 25th chapter of The Prince as an apt description of how politics, by contrast with philosophy, works:

[48] Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 2–3.

> "Once you set aside his metaphors, Machiavelli's insight endures. Politics plays itself out beneath the gaze of a fickle goddess. Practical politics is no science, but rather the ceaseless attempt of wily humans to adapt to what Fortuna throws in their paths. Its basic skills can be learned but they cannot be taught. While a painter's medium is paint, a politician's medium is time: he must adapt, ceaselessly, to its sudden, unexpected and brutal changes. An intellectual may be interested in ideas and policies for their own sake, but a politician's interest is exclusively in the question of whether an idea's time has come. When we call politics the art of the possible, we mean the art of knowing what is possible *here and now*".[49]

To try and slow down politics to make time for reflection—to make it more amenable to the kind of thinking philosophers do—is a mistake arising from a misunderstanding of what politics actually entails.

In the agonist tradition, theorists such as Bonnie Honig and Chantal Mouffe have criticised the Rawlsian and Habermasian traditions of public reason and discourse ethics for trying to over-intellectualise politics by attempting to sanitise political language.[50] In their view, our style of politics should involve a lively clash and contestation of ideas. Requiring participants in democratic processes to use a rigid philosophical framework for political reflection and communication is only going to exclude and alienate people rather than enable their views to be heard and judged publicly. Doing so leaves, in Honig's words, too many 'remainders' of resentment and frustration among excluded and alienated parties. On such views, systems such as "reflective equilibrium" can appear as totalising and anti-political attempts to constrict the thoughts of others.

From a different perspective, conservatism is also often thought to stand against heavily intellectualised approaches to politics. Oakeshott's *Rationalism in Politics* opens

[49] Michael Ignatieff, *Fire and Ashes Success and Failure in Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 34.
[50] Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, Contestations (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, Radical Thinkers (London: Verso, 2005).

by criticising political views inspired by enlightenment liberalism and its view of the human mind as inherently rational with advanced powers of reason.[51] He argued that such views attempt to understand and practice politics using "technical knowledge"—knowledge based on rule-following and technique—rather than another kind which is "not reflective" but is instead "practical" and "traditional".[52]

Criticism of reflection is not limited, however, to academics criticising one another. When politicians and political organisations announce they are to enter a "period of reflection", criticism inevitably ensues, and they are accused of using it as a sham to cover up or move away from their own embarrassing failures.[53] Reflection can thus seem like a loser's game. The accusations of unreflectiveness and the injunctions to others to reflect often heard in in our political discourse can easily be read merely as insults and jibes rather than having any genuine substance.

In light of all of this, we need to understand what reflection really *is* and what—if any—role it ought to play in our politics. These are the fundamental questions under investigation in this thesis. Is reflection anything more than an insult or a loser's game? Is the instruction to reflect simply a covert request for your opponents to withdraw from the political arena? Is reflection necessarily an anti-political, over-intellectualising and totalising activity, attempting to purify politics artificially by limiting the ways in which

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[51] Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indiannapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1991).

[52] Oakeshott, 12. These kinds of criticism have been referred to as claiming that typical liberal political theories offer a "seminar room" or "gentleman's club" theory of democracy (for these terms, specifically referring to deliberative democracy, see Goodin, *Reflective Democracy*, 13, citing Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) ch.3, and Sanders, 'Against Deliberation', *Political Theory* 25, no.3 (1997): 347-76)).

[53] For example, results of the Labour Party's "period of reflection" were derided by some as a "desperate whitewash." Harry Yorke, 'Labour's Post-Election Report Branded as "desperate" Whitewash', *The Telegraph*, 28 January 2020, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/01/28/labours-period-reflection-branded-whitewash-election-report/. Commenting on the European Union "period of reflection" after the failure of the constitutional treaty, *The Economist* wrote, "This flurry of activity is extraordinary for many reasons, but perhaps most of all because those involved know nothing will come of it." 'Dreaming of Bolivian Moments', *The Economist*, accessed 4 April 2020, https://www.economist.com/europe/2006/05/04/dreaming-of-bolivian-moments.

people are allowed to think about their political world? In what follows, I aim to explain the breadth of what reflection is thought to involve and to evaluate its place in politics.

3. Outline of the Thesis

It is clear from the foregoing that the concern with reflection is not limited to recent events. The sense of grief over our "lost art of reflection"[54] gives the impression that the vice of unreflectiveness is a markedly modern-day social and political problem, underscored by the fact that new journalism technologies, smartphones, and social media have produced non-stop news cycles and tantalising new distractions carried in most citizens' pockets.

The history of political thought might therefore seem an unlikely source for looking at the political significance of reflection. We are not surprised to find historical treatises on political justice, liberty, equality, and constitutional design. These are all central political concerns, whereas reflection, it would seem, is marginally relevant to politics at best. Furthermore, one might think, generations of past political thinkers had far less reason to be concerned with reflection. In a world without smartphones, social media, and non-stop news, one might think that reflection must have been so easy and commonplace that it was hardly worth writing home about.

And yet, the concern with reflection in political thought is an extremely long-standing one. This is a fact recognised by moral philosophers and philosophers of mind—as John Doris puts it, "A preoccupation with reflection is, arguably, the Western

[54] Reeves, Torres, and Hassan, 'How to Regain the Lost Art of Reflection'.

philosophical tradition's most distinctive feature, in both historical and contemporary contexts".[55]

Since the political dimension of this history has not fully been examined, this thesis demonstrates that our concerns with reflection in politics today have strong affinities with the concerns of some of the earliest figures in the canon of Western political thought.[56] Many of them, too, thought that in order to achieve virtuous politics—as orderly, just, and so on—political actors must have a virtuous practice of internal, reflective thought. So, too, did many notable early modern figures of Enlightenment political thought. By tracing this history, we can identify a forgotten theme in the history of political thought—one that, despite its lack of recognition, continues to play a considerable role in contemporary political theory.

Doing this has two benefits. Firstly, we can gain a sense of where this aspect of our political vocabulary might originate. Secondly, in doing so, we can gain a sense of the variety of conceptions of political reflection—thus revealing conceptual space we can benefit from recovering.

Achieving the first of these requires attention to the imagery used in describing reflection. We use the imagery of sight regularly in political theory, as in Quentin Skinner's *Visions of Politics*, Sheldon Wolin's *Politics and Vision*, or James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State*. Political theorists label citizens and opponents as visually limited in sight, such as being "blinkered"[57] and suffering from "short-sightedness".[58] We speak today of the need for corrective lenses to adjust our political vision, as in the call for a "bifocal

[55] John Michael Doris, *Talking to Our Selves: Reflection, Ignorance, and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 17–18.
[56] There are, of course, other traditions in intellectual history which would be fascinating to examine—particularly those which, too, make use of the mirror metaphor in describing the mind and the role of reflection in political affairs.
[57] McNay, 'Contemporary Critical Theory', 139.
[58] Goodin, *Reflective Democracy*, 6.

approach" to questions of justice.[59] Such visual metaphors, as Arendt noted, have been used to describe the human mind by numerous writers in Western intellectual history.[60] Reflection is one of them—but what does it mean, and where does it come from?

It is helpful to note that the word "reflection" is connotative of a mirror. Perhaps, today, its usage to mean something like "careful thought"[61] is so separated from its use in describing the literal reflection of light that we rarely pause to recognise the link. That was not the case in the history of political thought. As we will see, the images of mirrors and reflected light were used to illustrate key points about moral and political psychology in several major texts.

We can gain a preliminary appreciation of this image by noting what mirrors do. They allow us to see things we wouldn't ordinarily see, such as one's own face, or couldn't see very easily, such as looking in a rear-view mirror whilst driving. So, too, with abstract reflection—there is something special about trying to get to grips with political matters not "in the thick of it" but by reflecting upon them by ourselves. To do this, one must represent them to oneself in one's 'mind's eye'—much like a mirror enables a representation (re-presentation) of an image.

This connection—between politics and reflected images—has been highlighted recently in British culture by the artist Mark Wallinger. His RIBA Award-Winning architectural artwork *Writ in Water* at Runnymede presents clause 39 of the Magna Carta—protecting liberty and the rule of law—upside down around a circular pool of water. It can only be read by looking at its reflection in the still water below. Surrounded by concentric circular walls, the artwork aims to provide "a new immersive space for

[59] Michael Goodhart, 'The Bifocal Approach', in *Injustice: Political Theory for the Real World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[60] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think* (HMH, 1981).
[61] A much more formal definition is provided below.

contemplation and reflection" with clear political connotations on the site of the sealing of the Magna Carta.[62]

The thesis draws extensively on historical texts and theories. An obvious methodological question is, why? To be clear, this is not intended to be an historical thesis. That is, it does not put forward a comprehensive history of the concept of reflection in the history of political thought. Such a project would be utterly vast in scope. The thesis might be of use to someone wishing to complete such a project, but that is not the intention here. Furthermore, the thesis is not intended to make historical claims of influence; whilst I claim that conceptual similarities exist between texts spanning thousands of years, correlation does not entail causation. A historical-genealogical project of that kind would be fascinating, but it would require vastly more contextual investigation and historical scruple than I can provide here. There may be occasional remarks which are of interest to intellectual historians—perhaps most especially in the chapter on Hobbes where I examine one thinker's ideas in more depth. However, this is not the principal aim of reading historical figures' works.

Rather, the thesis is principally conceptual. I am to uncover a wide breadth of conceptual space available when thinking through what reflection as a practice might be in politics, and then to offer a normative approach to it using those conceptual resources. This might provoke the objection that, if the primary aim is conceptual, why not just use contemporary sources instead of historical ones? The primary reason is that, by *not* limiting my sources to contemporary texts, I can hope to avoid arbitrarily limiting the conceptual scope available to whatever ideas current thinkers happen to be discussing. That is, it widens the potential scope of conceptual space that can be considered. In addition to this, I would argue that the *un*familiarity of historical thinkers' intellectual

[62] 'Writ in Water', National Trust, accessed 6 April 2020, https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/runnymede/features/turner-prize-winning-artist-to-create-new-work-to-celebrate-magna-carta.

and political worlds as compared to our own can be a helpful tool in encouraging us to set aside contemporary concerns when thinking through political issues.

The thesis offers, in Chapter 1, a conceptual analysis of the broad concept of 'reflection' as used in the thesis. Following from this, I examine, in Chapter 2, both proponents and critics of reflection in the ancient world. Many of these use, in different ways, the image of a reflective surface or mirror as a metaphor for the human mind and its capacity to reflect upon things. I look first at Socrates who encouraged Alcibiades to reflect by looking at his own reflection on the surface of another person's eyeball. This somewhat mysterious injunction to reflect can be found in many of Socrates' students, but with markedly different kinds of emphasis.

In Plato, I argue, we find an outward-looking epistemic focus on reflection in politics. The metaphor of the mirror can be found at the heart of the most famous image in Plato's *Republic*—the allegory of the cave. In the stoics, by contrast, the metaphor of the mirror is used to illustrate something markedly more inward-looking. It involves knowing one's place in the natural political order and staying in it—by managing one's emotions through careful self-examination. In Augustine, we find another approach entirely; whilst he takes some inspiration from both Plato and the stoics, he follow's Paul's description of the mirror in his letters to Corinth, that whilst, on the one hand, human knowledge is necessarily limited—we see 'in a mirror, dimly'—we should nevertheless reflect because the *process* of reflection *itself* opens the possibility for personal ethical transformation. These three accounts, I argue, open up conceptual space emphasising three different aspects of reflection: *epistemic* reflection (Plato), *self*-reflection (stoicism), and *ethical* reflection (Augustine).

Finally, the mirror does not, in the ancient world, always serve as a metaphor for the road to intellectual or ethical illumination. It has also been used, in myths and fables, as an illustration of trickery and confusion. I end by considering critics of reflection who

offer realist perspectives on it and its place in politics. Historians Herodotus and Thucydides present reflection as a double-edged sword; whilst it might at times provide insight, it is something of a remedial practice needed by those who cannot instinctively grasp the right thing to do in political situations. Furthermore, such critics point out the *costs* of reflection; it can become intellectualist, elitist, and a waste of time.

In sum, the second chapter reveals conceptual space both among *proponents* and *opponents* of reflection as a political ideal. Among proponents, the three different models of reflection can be identified, and among opponents, accusations of anti-politics abound. In Chapter 3, I turn extensively to the work of Thomas Hobbes since, by my reading, he—contrary to the typical portrayal of him as a simple institutionalist—saw reflection as crucial to politics. His account is especially fascinating since he combines *all three* aspects of reflection. In this sense, we can understand his account as a 'composite' one which encompasses epistemic, self-, and ethical aspects of reflection. Fascinatingly, though, his account turns anti-political objections about reflection on their head and offers an account which is deliberately anti-political and absolutist by design.

Such an account, I submit, would be less than satisfactory. It is not an account of *political* reflection at all. In the 20th Century, Hannah Arendt and John Rawls drew upon another philosopher who put reflection at the heart of his moral, political, and aesthetic philosophy; Immanuel Kant. Whilst Arendt and Rawls draw on this source of inspiration, they both offer markedly different accounts of reflection in politics. Rawls principally focuses on the epistemic dimensions in his 'reflective equilibrium' which, I argue, he intended as an ideal for citizens, not just philosophers. Arendt, on the other hand, was sceptical of the epistemic *results* that reflection might provide, but emphasised, I argue, the ethical aspects of reflection; interrupting political processes, cultivating conscience, and engaging judgement.

Whilst both Arendt and Rawls offer a *political* account of reflection (their intention, at least, is to engage the public in political processes in the ways they conceive of them) their accounts are, nonetheless, limited to one or another aspect of reflection. Whilst they are preferable to Hobbes's deliberately anti-political approach, they do not benefit from the multidimensional approach he offered. I argue Rawls misses some of the ethical aspects and Arendt some of the epistemic aspects.

By way of conclusion, I draw these thinkers into dialogue with contemporary proponents and opponents of reflection in chapter 5. I argue that by rescuing reflection from both its opponents (who would de-emphasise reflection altogether) and its proponents (who often miss one aspect or another in setting out their views), a plausible defence of reflection as a vital political practice can be made. I offer an account which aims to be *both* political *and* composite (involves all three aspects) and demonstrate how this can be applied in response to those areas (set out above) where reflection is envisaged to be a solution to contemporary political problems.

Chapter 1: The Concept of Reflection

In the Introduction, I have used the term "reflection" freely without giving it a formal or precise definition. This is because doing so requires unpicking a large number of overlapping definitions and distinctions in the literature. In the introduction, I outlined the conceptual distinctions developed in this research (epistemic, self-, and ethical reflection) and in this chapter I address the question of what I take to be the master concept of reflection. How does reflection differ from deliberation, contemplation, reason, and other such semantically related terms?

There are few conceptual analyses in the literature; yet looser definitions abound, such as Doris's: "Where I claim there's difficulty about reflection, I'll be using "reflection" quite broadly […]"[1]. He does this to avoid an excessively narrow definition of the term, pointing to Hilary Kornblith's usage, which, he claims, ties reflection too closely to introspection.[2]

Neither of these approaches are satisfying for my purposes. The excessively narrow definitions available in the literature often leave out perfectly ordinary uses of the term such as those used by the public figures cited above. I aim to offer a definition which is neither too narrow to exclude ordinary uses of the term "reflection" nor too broad to be philosophically useful.[3] To unpick this conceptual confusion, I will work through the large number of conditions attached to reflection by various writers and consider whether they

[1] Doris, *Talking to Our Selves*, 19.
[2] Doris, 18.
[3] Language and vocabulary evolve organically through usage, hence my attempt to offer something of a "definition in use" to characterise its meaning. It might be described as something like the approach of the later Wittgenstein by philosophers of language. Questions regarding the metaphysics of meaning, language, and reference are too complicated to ask or answer here.

can be treated as necessary and/or sufficient to define the term 'reflection.' They are (i) internality, (ii) consciousness, (iii) retrospectivity, (iv) representativeness, (v) consecutiveness, (vi) second-order thought, (vii) interrogative thought, (viii) generality, (ix) reasoning, and (x) phenomenology and the conditions of reflection.

1. Defining Reflection

i. Internality

Common to all accounts is the idea that reflection is something that takes place within one's own mind. This is put in various ways by different philosophers, but a clear common thread is that reflection characteristically occurs "inside the head of each individual"[4] and is "[…] private in the sense that what goes on in one's own mind is not in the public realm".[5] This is still the case even if reflection needs certain social conditions to flourish.[6]

This helps distinguish reflection from one use of the term "deliberation" commonly employed by political theorists: the idea that "deliberation" is a characteristically public activity requiring discussion between other people. This does not, however, distinguish reflection from all senses of "deliberation" since, as Goodin acknowledges, "deliberation" can also mean something else, such as "the weighing of reasons for and against a course of action".[7] For this reason, I discuss the various reflection / deliberation distinctions in section viii of this chapter.

Nevertheless, whilst being a necessary condition for reflection, internality cannot be sufficient. A very wide range of other activities, processes, operations, and so on go on

[4] Goodin, *Reflective Democracy*, 171.
[5] William Ransome, *Moral Reflection* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 53.
[6] Ransome, 53.
[7] Goodin, *Reflective Democracy*, 169.

inside the mind which are not exactly what we call reflection, even if they are related causally to it. For example, internally we can believe, imagine, remember, reason, deliberate, worry, delight, introspect, meditate, pray, and so on. What *aspect* of our internal, mental lives does reflection refer to?

ii. Consciousness

Reflection is a conscious mental activity. Sometimes there is a tendency to confuse the mind, mental activity, and cognition with consciousness. They are conceptually distinct. We do plenty of things unconsciously and unreflectively. Thank goodness we do; if I had to think consciously about whether or not to apply the brakes as my car approaches a stationary truck, it would be too late. Likewise, if a pianist or typist had to think of exactly where to place each finger at each moment, music would be dull and typing interminable.

It would seem wrong to say that these actions were not a product of the mind, however. The mind does a tremendous amount of reasoning unreflectively. Kornblith illustrates this helpfully with the example of Mary who, having misplaced her keys, consciously thinks where they might be. A lot of relevant facts, that Mary clearly knows, are needed for her to think where they may be. Some of these are entertained consciously, such as the places she last remembers seeing them. Some of them, however, are not: she does not "[…] entertain the thought that her keys cannot travel discontinuously through space and time".[8] As such "[…] it is perfectly clear that the conscious contents of her mind cannot exhaust what goes on in her reasoning".[9]

[8] Hilary Kornblith, *On Reflection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 144.

[9] Kornblith, 144. The idea that reasoning and other mental processes are related to a large number of unconscious activities has in recent decades been popularised by the "dual process" theories mentioned above, such as that developed by Daniel Kahneman. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Such theories interpret experimental data to suggest that the mind runs on two systems: System 1, which is fast, automatic, and unconscious, and System 2 which is slow, lazy, and unconscious. As Kornblith notes, numerous theorists describe System 2 as both "conscious" and "reflective" and System 1 as neither of these things. Kornblith, *On Reflection*, 141; See also George Lakoff, *The Political Mind: A Cognitive Scientist's Guide to Your Brain and Its Politics* (London: Penguin, 2008), 9. However, often "[…] the term 'reflective' is redundant. They mean to

This tells us two things: firstly, whilst consciousness is a necessary condition for reflection, reflection could not happen without a large web of interconnections between conscious and unconscious mental activity. Secondly, not all of conscious thought counts as reflective thought. The criterion of consciousness still does not distinguish reflection from other conscious mental activities listed above. What is needed in addition to internality and consciousness?

iii. Retrospectivity

Reflection is sometimes described as though it always involves looking backwards in time to think about one's own experience. Ransome describes 'moral reflectiveness' as "a specific retrospective moral state"[10] which "operates" upon "direct conscious experience […] made available for moral reflection through its agent's memory".[11] This may, prima facie, be an attractive and intuitive way of defining reflection, but on further inspection is too narrow.

Whilst it is perfectly natural to reflect upon the past—particularly by reflecting upon episodic memories—this is only a part of "reflection." We can also reflect upon the future of things, as in such titles as *Reflections on the Future of the Left*[12] and *Reflections on the Future of Democracy in Europe.*[13]

Still, these titles might seem jarring to those who would associate reflection with a distinctly retrospective character. The term "reflection" comes, etymologically from the Latin root of *flectere*, to 'bend' (as in 'flexion' and 'flexible') and the prefix 're-', meaning

say nothing more than that the kind of thought characteristic of System 2 is conscious". Kornblith, *On Reflection*, 141.

[10] Ransome, *Moral Reflection*, 43.

[11] Ransome, 50.

[12] David Coates, *Reflections on the Future of the Left*, Building Progressive Alternatives (Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2017).

[13] *Reflections on the Future of Democracy in Europe*, Making Democratic Institutions Work (Strasbourg: Directorate General of Political Affairs, Council of Europe, 2005).

'backwards' (as in 'return').[14] How can reflection be "bending back" if it is not retrospective?

This is possible since there are many things in the mind which are not essentially retrospective as with episodic memory. For example, concepts, ideas, plans, and so forth. These have to be in the mind before we can reflect on them, and so the mind can 'bend back' without doing so retrospectively. This leads directly to a broader feature often associated with reflection of which retrospective thought is but one example: "representation".

iv. Representativeness

One aspect of our internal, conscious lives is our ability to present before our own mind images, ideas, thoughts, and so forth that are not present to our perceptual experience. I can be walking in a park whilst thinking about all kinds of things that have nothing to do with the park: what to have for dinner, the state of international politics, or a conversation I had the previous evening. Each of these trains of thought begins with bringing to consciousness some set of ideas, beliefs, memories, and so forth that I already have in my mind. In this sense, the mind views a representation or, as Hannah Arendt puts it in her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, the mind is "capable of *re*presentation, making something present that is absent".[15] This is always entailed in Kant's "operation of reflection".[16] This idea of representation as making present something that is absent has a very long cultural and political history.[17]

[14] T. F Hoad, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), sec. 'reflect", "RE-" & "flex'.
[15] Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 64.
[16] Arendt, 65.
[17] Quentin Skinner, 'Hobbes on Representation', *European Journal of Philosophy* 13, no. 2 (2005): 160–61.

It is easy to see why the term "reflection" is associated with representative (*re*-presentative) aspects of the conscious mind. The term "reflection" reminds us of reflected light in mirrors and other reflective surfaces. As we shall see in the next chapter, the image of the mirror was used by numerous ancient political thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, the Stoics and Augustine to illustrate aspects of human psychology and their relevance to politics. Mirrors are also capable of 'making something present that is absent' by enabling us to see something without looking directly at it, as in a rear-view mirror in a car, or watching the moon reflected in still water.

This, I maintain, is a necessary feature of reflection in the sense that reflection always *involves* mental representation. This helps us separate reflection from a great deal of our internal consciousness such as, for example, simple perception, or emotions felt in direct response to experience, such as feeling scared in the face of an immediate threat. These are not reflective elements of internal, conscious experience because they do not involve any kind of representative thought.

However, as Arendt points out, this feature alone is described by Kant as the "imagination" and could easily be described as imagination today.[18] Reflection is something more than imagination. To be sure, the imagination is important for the human capacity to reflect, but simply having "imagined" something is not sufficient to have "reflected" upon it. John Dewey agreed: the word 'thought' "[…] is restricted by excluding whatever is directly presented; we think (or think of) only such things as we do not directly see, hear, smell, or taste".[19] However, for him, not all thoughts are *reflective* thoughts. What else does reflection require?

[18] Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 64.
[19] John Dewey, 'The Project Gutenberg EBook of How We Think', sec. I.1, accessed 16 January 2020, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/37423/37423-h/37423-h.htm#CHAPTER_ONE.

v. Consecutiveness

In his *How We Think*, John Dewey began by distinguishing reflective thought from other kinds of mental activity. The feature he identifies can be termed 'consecutiveness'. Dewey notes that many things we call 'thoughts' couldn't count as reflection since they seem too random:

> "In its loosest sense, thinking signifies everything that, as we say, is "in our heads" or that "goes through our minds." He who offers "a penny for your thoughts" does not expect to drive any great bargain. In calling the objects of his demand *thoughts*, he does not intend to ascribe to them dignity, consecutiveness, or truth. Any idle fancy, trivial recollection, or flitting impression will satisfy his demand […]
>
> Now reflective thought is like this random coursing of things through the mind in that it consists of a succession of things thought of; but it is unlike, in that the mere chance occurrence of any chance "something or other" in an irregular sequence does not suffice. Reflection involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a *con*sequence—a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome, while each in turn leans back on its predecessors. The successive portions of the reflective thought grow out of one another and support one another; they do not come and go in a medley".[20]

I agree that such consecutiveness is a feature of reflection. However, it is still ambiguous. It might be thought that what Dewey calls a "*con*sequence" requires something that very much resembles a series of deductive syllogisms. This would be too stringent a requirement for defining reflection. I might begin by reflecting on something by "brainstorming"—coming up with a series of related thoughts and considerations around a theme. This process might not involve joining them up or ordering them in a logical and

[20] Dewey, sec. I.1.I.

coherent way to begin with, but, so long as I have the *intention* of doing so, I see no reason not to call this a kind of reflection.[21]

vi. Second-Order Thought

Reflection is also often described as characteristically "second order"[22] or "higher order"[23] thought. This is used by many contemporary philosophers to explain what is significant about human cognitive faculties.[24] "Second-order" is a technical term and means "[…] thinking about one's own first-order mental states in a first-personal way".[25] That is, I could see a panda in a forest and, as a result, acquire a belief that there is a panda in the forest. This is not reflective mental activity. It becomes reflective once I entertain the *fact* that I have this belief and begin thinking about it: Why do I believe there is a panda there? Was my vision reliable? Did I see it clearly? Could it have been someone dressed as a panda? And so forth.

This capacity to consider our own mental states is often seen as fundamental to distinguishing humans from other animals. Philosophers have applied this to a great many mental capacities. For example, Sosa distinguishes between "animal knowledge" (knowing as a result of beliefs directly acquired from one's environment) and "reflective knowledge"—knowing by considering the reliability of a given belief, such as by thinking about the way in which a belief was acquired and how well a belief coheres with other

[21] Dewey might, on the other hand, have described the process of brainstorming as a "consecutive ordering" because the things I was thinking about were done so consecutively and orderly in the sense that I thought about them one at a time, one after another, and *because* they were centred around one theme; they were not random. There is, as yet, no strict deduction or syllogism involved. As long as Dewey's terms "consecutive ordering" and "consequence" are interpreted in this broader sense, I agree that they count as a features of reflection.
[22] Kornblith, *On Reflection*, 28.
[23] Ransome, *Moral Reflection*, 51.
[24] Kornblith, *On Reflection*.
[25] Kornblith, 28.

beliefs one holds.[26] To take another prominent example, Korsgaard argues that human beings have reflective agency which involves not merely having reasons and motives for action, but also having the capacity to know what they are, consider their merits, and implement and act upon them.[27]

In each case—be it knowledge or agency—the person reflecting is characteristically representing one of their *own* mental states (a belief or desire). That is what makes it second-order. This is taken to be a characteristic feature of reflection. Should we consider second-order thought, defined in this way, a necessary criterion for "reflection"?

I do not think so. This is because—as several authors acknowledge—it seems too narrow. I would not deny that we can reflect on our own beliefs and desires. Reflection can *include* what these authors describe as second-order thought. However, as Kornblith acknowledges, he uses the term "reflection" in a specific sense—one more specific than how it is often used.[28] Doris points out that Kornblith's way of defining reflection "[…] looks a lot like what often gets called introspection"[29] and is for that reason too narrow. We can reflect upon things *external* to ourselves that are not normally considered part of our own "mental state" such as reflecting upon whether someone else has good grounds for *their* beliefs or ought to undertake certain actions. Doris suggests that this might well be called "extrospection" and understands reflection "[…] quite broadly, to cover a range of introspective and extrospective processes".[30]

Given this, it seems too narrow to define reflection as essentially a matter of second-order thought.[31] This does not mean this criterion is of no interest—on the

[26] Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge*; Kornblith, *On Reflection*, 14.
[27] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*; Kornblith, *On Reflection*, 86.
[28] Kornblith, *On Reflection*.
[29] Doris, *Talking to Our Selves,* 19.
[30] Doris, 19.
[31] Someone might respond that, in fact, Doris's "extrospective" forms of reflection can be explained entirely within the framework of "second-order thought". If I reflect on whether the USA is justified in applying economic sanctions to Iran, I am really reflecting on whether *I believe that* the USA is justified in these

contrary, I think the phrase is helpful in picking out a certain *class* of reflective thought distinguished above, namely, *self-reflection*. This idea has a very significant history in political philosophy which this thesis examines, but it is, on my view, a mistake to think that this is all there is to reflection.

At this point, we are left still wondering what aspect of internal, conscious, representative, and consecutive mental activity should be described as "reflection." The "second-order" criterion turned out to be too narrow, and so we are left looking for other criteria.

vii. Interrogative Thought

Another aspect used to define reflection is expressed in several ways and involves thinking in an interrogative way—thought aimed at finding the truth. Dewey distinguished "reflective thought" from other kinds of thought by defining it as "*Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends.*"[32] He insisted that any kind of thought that does not aim at truth, such as imagination, cannot count as reflective since *"they do not aim at knowledge, at belief about facts or in truths.*"[33]

Others capture this idea with the terms "critical", "sceptical", and "discursive". Broadly, the idea is that to be reflecting on something, I cannot simply have it represented

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sanctions. Aren't I *in fact* reflecting upon one of my mental states—namely, my beliefs about the ethics of warfare? This revision suffers from three problems. Firstly, it is a clear departure from the ways in which Kornblith and the authors he cites understand the phrase "second-order" as he excludes such general understandings of the term (Kornblith, *On Reflection*, 28.) More problematically, this understanding is unintuitive since, when we reflect on many such questions, we don't necessarily think of ourselves as reflecting on *our beliefs* but rather as reflecting directly on *what is true* or *what ought to be done*. Thirdly, and most problematically of all, it is hard to think of any internal, conscious, representative mental process which, under this revised definition of "second-order", would *not* count as reflection, thus making the term definitionally redundant beyond the conditions we have already assembled. Any act of thinking "about x" can be expressed as an act of thinking "about my beliefs about x". Thus, such a revised understanding of "second-order" takes us no further than what has already been said about representation.

[32] Dewey, 'The Project Gutenberg EBook of How We Think', sec. I.1.IV.

[33] Dewey, sec. I.1.II.

before my mind, but must also be thinking about some question related to that thing. I must in some sense "scrutinise" whatever I am considering.[34] In distinguishing "moral consciousness" from "moral reflection", Ransome argues that (among other features) the latter must be "actively sceptical".[35]

One treats the subject one intends to reflect upon in a "sceptical" way by entertaining multiple incompatible or opposing views on the subject. I must, therefore, be "[…] prepared to dissent from my existing first-order moral response if examination of the experience finds me wrong or mistaken".[36] In the literature on reflective practice, practitioners are encouraged to be "critically reflective", asking of ourselves "[…] how we think, feel and act and the assumptions we might be making".[37]

Being critical, sceptical, or "scrutinising" something requires examining it from multiple perspectives. For this reason, reflection is also often described as "discursive" since it is as though we are having a conversation within ourselves.[38] Goodin's account of political reflection is a kind of "democratic deliberation within": it is a "reflective mode" of deliberation which is "fundamentally argumentative" but the argument, instead of being public, takes place between people who are "imaginatively present".[39] Arendt speaks of "mental dialogue" and "inward discourse".[40] This means examining the different sides of something and weighing up contrasting and opposing viewpoints on it. To describe this feature of reflection, I will use the term "interrogative" as shorthand.

I would agree that all thought we would consider "reflective" would have this feature. However, once again, it is not sufficient to *define* reflection since, it seems to me,

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[34] Kornblith introduces the term "scrutiny" in introducing reflection. It is not clear whether he thinks this is an *essential* feature of reflection, unlike other authors discussed in this section Kornblith, *On Reflection*, 1.
[35] Ransome, *Moral Reflection*, 51.
[36] Ransome, 52.
[37] Barbara Bassot, *The Reflective Practice Guide: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Critical Reflection* (London: Routledge, 2015), 130.
[38] Goodin, *Reflective Democracy,* 169.
[39] Goodin, 169–71.
[40] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think* (New York; London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 185–86.

we can consider multiple viewpoints on many things that would not ordinarily be described as reflection. For example, I could consider whether to go on holiday next month or in three months' time. I can take into account different people's perspectives on such a decision, such as those of my family and my colleagues. I can take into account the costs of travel at different times, the quality of accommodation on offer, the likely seasonal weather and business at my destination, and so forth. Would we describe this thought process as reflection?

My intuition is that we ordinarily would not. This intuition stems from several sources, including that, in this case, at all times, my thinking is narrowly focused on making one particular decision. To my mind, the strictly practical scope of my thinking seems too narrow to be called "reflection".

viii. Generality: the deliberation / reflection distinction

The kind of thinking involved in deciding when to go on holiday might well be described as a "deliberation". This raises, once again, the question of the distinction between reflection and deliberation. In section i of this chapter, I considered the idea that reflection is internal whilst deliberation is external or conversational. This may be one way in which political theorists often think about deliberation, but it is not helpful as a strong distinction since, clearly, I can deliberate on my own about something, such as deliberating between going on holiday next month or in three months. Here, the conceptual waters are murky. How *exactly* do "reflection" and "deliberation" relate to one another?

Scholars have addressed this question in at least three subtly different ways which it will be helpful to examine here. Three representative approaches are those of Robert

Goodin, Joshua Hordern, and Robert Talisse. Their respective approaches can be summarised as follows:

Author(s)	**Goodin**	**Hordern**	**Talisse**
Deliberation aims at	Action	Action	Decision
Reflection is	Internal thought	General thought	[?]
Relation between Reflection and Deliberation	Can conceptually coincide. Deliberation can be reflective or collective.	Are conceptually distinct. However, they are strongly *causally* related: deliberation may provoke reflection.	No firm view, but suggests it may ultimately be difficult to distinguish the two.

Beginning with Goodin's account, "Deliberation consists in the weighing of reasons for and against a course of action. In that sense, it can and ultimately must take place within the head of each individual".[41] Goodin allows that there can be both "internal-reflective" deliberation and "external-collective" deliberation. In a political context—in the ideal of a "reflective democracy" he upholds—Goodin describes "internal-reflective" deliberation as "democratic deliberation within".[42] This tells us two things. Deliberation, for Goodin, always aims at *action*. It is, thus, a kind of practical reason. It is possible to aim at action by arriving at a decision 'within one's head' which, it would seem, is understood as what makes a certain kind of deliberation "reflective". Thus, deliberation and reflection can coincide conceptually: there can be deliberation which is reflective and there can be deliberation which is not (that which involves substantial public conversation). For Goodin, reflection and deliberation are not mutually exclusive members of the same

[41] Goodin, *Reflective Democracy*, 169.
[42] Goodin, chap. 9.

category, as with red cars and blue cars, but rather members of two different kinds of category, as with red cars and new cars.

This is not the case in Hordern's use of the terms. Both deliberation and reflection are, on his account, exclusive members of the same category, just as with red cars and blue cars. Following Lacoste, Hordern describes 'moral reflection' as

> "[…] a process of discerning the nature of the world in which we act—the interrelation, goodness, and badness of its various parts. Reflection is an extensive activity, not reduced to some narrow sphere of ethical issues. Rather it explores the way the human species discovers its interrelation with the rest of the cosmos".[43]

This is contrasted with 'moral deliberation' which, "[…] on the other hand, will mean the process of deciding what to do in the world".[44] This is not to say the two are not *causally* intertwined:

> "To deliberate without reflection would be unwise since we would simply be stumbling forward and thrashing about without any sense of how the world in which we intend to act hangs together. And yet at the same time, the process of deliberation may provide cause and content for reflection"[45].

To return to the automotive metaphor, red cars and blue cars are different things, but they sure enough can bump into one another. This differs from Goodin's approach which allows that there can be such a thing deliberation which *in itself* is reflective.

Goodin and Hordern are united, however, by the fact that on their accounts deliberation is distinctly *practical*. It aims at *action*. This distinguishes their views from

[43] Joshua Hordern, *Political Affections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 71.
[44] Hordern, 71–72.
[45] Hordern, 72.

that of Talisse, for whom "*Deliberation* denotes any activity aimed at bringing rational considerations to bear on a decision".[46] This, says Talisse, can be a decision about what one ought to *do* or what one ought to *believe*, thus "[…] we can distinguish theoretical from practical deliberation".[47] The key word is *decision*. One can decide about the truth of something as well as on a course of action.

Talisse does not explicitly seek to distinguish reflection from deliberation, although he does use the term in passing, seeming to use the term as interchangeable with "deliberation" in a way that the Goodin and Hordern do not.[48] This is, I suspect, because anything that Hordern calls "reflection" would count, on Talisse's terms, as "theoretical deliberation", which would make the term "reflection" redundant.

Laying out these accounts tells us that even among philosophically sophisticated authors, there are subtle differences in the interpretation of the terms.[49] Any definition I offer beyond this point will depend more strongly on my semantic intuitions and will become more of a term of art. Still, it will be difficult to proceed without adding greater clarity to what is meant by "reflection". One advantage of laying out these alternatives is that it shows us two important questions that must be answered to give greater conceptual clarity. Firstly, should "reflection" necessarily concern "action" or can it more broadly concern "decision"? Secondly, should we allow that deliberation can, in some circumstances, *count as* "reflection" or not?

In answer to the first question, it is worth unpacking what a "decision" about *truth* means. This is not the place to enter a detailed discussion about the metaphysics of action and belief, but a few remarks will be helpful. Firstly, it seems to me that a decision is

[46] Robert B. Talisse, 'Deliberation', in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Emphasis his.
[47] Talisse.
[48] Talisse, sec. 1 (penultimate paragraph).
[49] Some authors, perhaps recognising this, seem reluctant to define the difference between them, such as O'Donovan speaking of "[t]he mysterious relation between the reflective and the deliberative operations of moral thought". Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment*, Bampton Lectures ; 2003 (Grand Rapids, Mich. ; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), ix—x.

characteristically *specific*. That is, there is some particular proposition which one wishes to determine as true or false. Given this, Talisse's "theoretical deliberation" will always refer to 'deciding on the truth or falsity of *p* by bringing rational considerations to bear on *p*'.

This alone seems too narrow to count as reflection. If I know very well my *prima facie* reasons for believing *p* and my *prima facie* reasons for believing *-p*, and also the relative strength of those reasons, the task I have before me is one of simple calculation. I stack up whether there are compelling reasons either way, and I can decide on what I believe: *p*, *-p*, or some particular probability assigned to each. What more would need to be added before my stream of thought deserved the honorific "reflection"?

I think it is this: to be *reflecting* on the truth of *p*, rather than just *deliberating about p*, I would need to think much more broadly and generally about the truth of *p*. For example, I might think I have reason *R* for believing *p*, but I am not sure about *R*. I would then need to turn to deliberating about the truth of *R* to decide on whether or not to believe *p*. This could apply, too, to all kinds of other reasons for believing *p*. Likewise, I might realise that I am unsure of my reasons for believing *R*, and so I need to examine my reasons for that: *R'*, *R**, *R***, and so forth. Now, we have a stream of consecutive thought which involves not merely *one*, but *multiple* theoretical deliberations. As a result, it will begin to take into account *general* beliefs about one's orientation towards the world; what one takes to matter in life, what one thinks is good, bad, right, wrong, and so for. This extended stream of thought, I think, can count as reflection. Reflection is, on this understanding, a considerably broader and more general mental activity than deliberation which relates only to deciding, from a narrow set of reasons, on specific actions and beliefs.

In answer to the first question, then, yes, I allow that deliberation can be about *both* belief *and* action. So, too, can reflection, since I can reflect in this extended way on

the truth of something and on whether or not to do something. That said, reflection on whether to do something will almost always involve considerable reflection upon what one ought to believe, and so a distinction between "theoretical reflection" and "practical reflection" cannot be as rigid as that between "theoretical deliberation" and "practical deliberation". This can be represented thus:

		Aim of Thought	
		Belief	**Action**
Scope of Thought	**Specific**	Theoretical Deliberation	Practical Deliberation
	General	Theoretical Reflection	Practical Reflection

In sum, this means I disagree at one point or another with all of the authors I have summarised, although I have used their conceptual resources in devising my own framework. To my mind, this maps more neatly onto our ordinary semantic usage of the terms 'reflection' and 'deliberation'. What then is the relation between the two? Reflection and deliberation are, in my view, best distinguished not by the line between theoretical and practical thought, but rather by *scope*. Reflection is much broader in scope and can be *comprised* of a very large number of deliberations about different ideas and questions, even though *one* instance of deliberation can never amount to reflection.

ix. Reasoning

In the previous section I mentioned "reasons". Sometimes writers describe reflection as an aspect of "reasoning" such as Hordern's account in which moral reasoning can be

divided into moral reflection and moral deliberation[50]. Does reflection characteristically involve reasoning? I have already argued that reflection is "interrogative"; it is in some sense critical, sceptical, and discursive. Does that mean it always involves reasoning?

This depends on what is meant by "reasoning" which, in itself, is a difficult word to define.[51] I will not get bogged down in definitions here, but for purposes of clarity I want to point out one way of construing "reasoning" that I do *not* count as a necessary feature of reflection.

One way of understanding "reasoning" is that it always refers to determining the truth of claims (positive or normative) by examining the relations between reasons which are always taken to be propositional in form. On this model, imagining by way of mental pictures cannot count as reasoning. It might contribute to reasoning but cannot *itself* count as reasoning. For instance, imagining a beautiful sunset might contribute to my reasoning through to the conclusion "I ought to watch the sunset this evening". Likewise, imagining scenes of what it might be like to live in poverty might contribute to my reasoning through to the conclusion "I ought to donate more to charity". However, the imagination *itself* cannot, on this view, be described as reasoning.

If this is what reasoning means, then, whilst I affirm that reasoning will always be *involved in* reflection, not all aspects of reflection involve reasoning. It will always be involved in reflection since I struggle to see how one can think in the critical and dialogical fashion outlined above without using reason. However, reasoning is, on my account, only *part* of reflection. In line with the idea that reflection is more general than deliberation, so too is reflection more general than reasoning. Reflection can, and very often will, involve an imagistic, imaginative dimension. It can also involve representing sounds, such

[50] Hordern, *Political Affections*, 71.
[51] For a helpful recent work on the subject, see Mercier and Sperber, *The Enigma of Reason: A New Theory of Human Understanding*.

as tones of voice, or even music, to oneself. None of these things, alone, can count as reflection, but can nonetheless be a part of reflection.

x. Phenomenology and the Conditions of Reflection

Drawing together the various strands examined thus far, reflection is internal, conscious, thought which is representative, discursive, interrogative, and general. It can involve deliberation and reasoning, but these alone are insufficient to amount to "reflection". Finally, reflection is sometimes described phenomenologically. That is, philosophers sometimes describe what it *feels like* to reflect. I will briefly recount three which are discussed in the literature: distance, quietness, and solitude. These can also be understood as *conditions* of reflection. They are the psychological and environmental conditions under which reflection will flourish. I add to these two features of my own: complexity and sensitivity. Some of these, we shall see, are not new features but are rather first-person descriptions of features that have already been discussed in the third person. I begin with 'distance' which can be thought of as a first-person description of 'representativeness'.

Firstly, in describing the reflective nature of the human mind, Korsgaard suggests that our capacity to reflect "[…] is also a capacity to distance ourselves from [our own mental activities] and to call them into question".[52] Likewise, Arendt introduces the Kantian idea of the "operation of reflection" by suggesting that it is impossible without the "operation of imagination"[53] which represents an object before the mind such that the "operation of reflection" can be allowed to judge that thing with "[…] the proper distance, the remoteness or uninvolvedness or disinterestedness".[54]

[52] Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 93.
[53] Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 68.
[54] Arendt, 67.

Secondly, the term "reflection" often runs together with the word "quiet". Michael Walzer describes "deliberation" as "a particular way of thinking: quiet, reflective, open to a wide range of evidence, respectful of different views".[55] Hobbes spoke of the "sedatus animus" which has been translated with the terms "calmer moments" and "quiet mind" or "mind at rest" and "calm reflection".[56] In describing mental activity, Arendt recounts Hegel's term "*leidenschaftslose Stille"*—"dispassionate quiet"[57] to suggest that thinking, willing, and judging all "[…] depend on a certain stillness of the soul's passions".[58] The idea is that in reflection, one's mind has a certain freedom from unhelpful distraction, and enjoys a calm, quiet atmosphere in which to think clearly. This aspect is well-captured in the famous line of Quaker poet John Whittier's *The Brewing of Soma* (from which the hymn *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind* was excerpted): "O still, small voice of calm".

One might wonder whether this is a limiting requirement for reflection. Can't we reflect upon things about which we feel intense emotion? Can't someone in love reflect with passion upon the virtues of their beloved? Can't a melancholic or upset person reflect with sadness or anger?

These feelings can, I agree, form an important part of reflection. However, the dialogical, critical, and sceptical nature of reflection means that they also have to try and see things differently. The person in love has at some point to be open to understanding their beloved from different perspectives. To fail to do so is to risk loving merely an idea or false apprehension of another person, rather than the person themselves. Likewise, the melancholic or sad person has to try and see their situation from other perspectives—maybe things aren't so bad after all. Each of these lines of thought require trying to set

[55] Michael Walzer, 'Deliberation, and What Else?', in *Thinking Politically : Essays in Political Theory*, ed. David Miller (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 2007), 134.
[56] David Singh Grewal, 'The Domestic Analogy Revisited: Hobbes on International Order', 637n83, accessed 28 March 2018, https://www.yalelawjournal.org/essay/the-domestic-analogy-revisited-hobbes-on-international-order; Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 53.
[57] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 70.
[58] Arendt, 70.

aside one's primary emotional state at some point, and this will be difficult without trying to enter a quiet mental space free from distraction.

Later, I will address the concern that emphasising reflection runs the risk, especially in politics, of quietism: in essence, recommending to others that they keep quiet in public. This is a serious concern, but it does not itself challenge the idea that reflection has quietness as a phenomenological feature. On the contrary, by expressing this concern, it in fact reinforces the idea that reflection depends upon having a quiet state of mind. The question of whether this feature of reflection makes it unsuitable or undesirable as a political practice is another issue entirely.

Thirdly, *solitude* was described by Arendt (again, as an aspect of all mental activity, which includes reflection) as distinguishable from 'loneliness' since when one is lonely, one desires the company of others, but in solitude, one keeps company with oneself.[59] This, says Arendt, is necessary for having internal, reflective inner dialogues. I would agree, and this will become a significant point in discussions about politics. One of the drawbacks of using the blanket term "deliberation" to cover both public discussion and inner, rational decision-making is that it fails to capture the difference in dynamic between the two scenarios. As I shall argue later, reflecting in solitude has different benefits and drawbacks to public discussion. By understanding reflection as a practice which flourishes in solitude, we can better understand what it can distinctively contribute to politics.

A fourth phenomenological dimension to reflection is a sense of the 'complexity' of what is being reflected upon. This is related to the feature of 'generality' described above. Unlike mere deliberation, reflection is *general* in the sense that it involves turning the mind to a complex web of thoughts and ideas, not merely identifying and weighing reasons for or against a certain decision. To reflect upon something is to recognise at the outset

[59] Arendt, 74.

that the subject matter is complex and that one cannot, and quite possibly never will, fully apprehend the whole of it. It does not make sense to say that one needs to reflect upon the answer to "2 + 2 = ?"—the answer is manifestly obvious to a person with minimal numeracy. The reason is that the question lacks the complexity necessary for provoking reflection.

The classic cases of reflection all contain a sense of the awesome complexity of the area to be reflected upon: past mistakes, the beauty of nature, moral values, the meaning of life, and so on. As we shall see, this relates to what Kant intended to capture in describing the nature of "reflective judgement" (distinguished from a "determinant judgement"): a judgement that has to be made in the absence of any determining criteria.[60] To apprehend the *width* of a flower, one needs the determining criteria of length, described in a metric such as centimetres. To apprehend its *beauty* is another sort of judgement entirely. It is hard to know even where to start. We feel the sense of complexity involved in a judgement of beauty. We begin by struggling and searching for words but find it hard to say what we mean. Often, but not always, the terms 'mystery' or 'ineffability' might well capture this feeling.

Lastly, I would add the term 'sensitivity'. If something is a 'sensitive subject', it is one that has to be treated with care. The subject is one of consequence and importance to what we most value: our sense of reality, our sense of identity, our sense of purpose, what we value, what we find beautiful, and so forth. To reflect upon something is to recognise the delicacy of the subject matter, and its profundity for our lives. For example, one would feel this in a particularly strong way when asking whether one might be wrong about one's self-conception, aesthetic taste, and moral, political and religious views. Reflection upon such matters can lead to major changes in how one acts and relates to others.

[60] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

These feelings might be felt more or less intensely: one might feel some sense of the complexity and sensitivity of reflecting upon the beauty of a landscape whilst walking in the countryside. One might feel an almost overbearing sense of complexity and sensitivity in the throes of an existential crisis. Nevertheless, I would suggest that reflection always carries these features in some degree.

It is because of these features—complexity and sensitivity—that the conditions of distance, quietness, and solitude are particularly important. Under these conditions, where we feel a sense of detachment, have freedom from distraction and can take time to reflect by ourselves without feeling lonely that we can most effectively address complex and sensitive subjects. This raises the question—not explored in depth in this thesis—of distributive justice in these conditions. Does everyone enjoy sufficient access to these conditions? What can be done, in terms of social organisation, cultural norms, and public provision to encourage and ensure people lead lives where there are windows of opportunity for reflecting? As noted in Chapter 5, these considerations formed part of the motivation for forming the National Trust as an organisation to protect landscapes in which people could reflect. I consider this point more fully in that chapter.

2. The Concept of Reflection

The concept of reflection is not well-defined in the existing literature. This is hardly surprising: even central political concepts such as "justice" are defined in a large number of different and incompatible ways.[61] However, unlike other concepts, that of "reflection" has not yet been subjected to the kind of extensive analysis presented here. By mapping

[61] Samuel J Bruce, 'What Is the Difference between a Claim of Justice and Any Other Kind of Moral Claim?' (MPhil Dissertation, University of Oxford, 2016).

out the wide range of conceptual attributes associated with reflection, as well as their structure, this section aims to bring clarity.

Of course, such terms are regularly used as terms of art by political theorists and are thus taken as having a stipulative meaning within a theoretical framework. However, stipulative meanings should not function as esoteric terms if they are to connect with the political vocabulary of our political life. By defining the term in the way outlined above, I hope to have defined the concept in a way that is both useful for the present theoretical project and also captures as much of the semantics of the term as possible in our political life. As can be seen, the most important feature that picks out reflection as against other similar thought processes is that of *generality*. This distinguishes reflection from deliberation which is specific to a particular decision, be it about an action or belief.

Although the concept is resistant to very terse definition, I think the above can be effectively captured in the following:

> Reflection is the internal, conscious mental activity of critical, consecutive, and interrogative truth-seeking which is *general in scope*. Reflection concerns areas that seem complex and sensitive, and is generally attended by a feeling of distance, quietness, and solitude. Reflection always *involves* representative thought and reasoning but cannot be narrowly defined by either of these attributes.

With this in mind, we can turn to exploring the place of reflection in the history of political thought, turning back two and a half millennia to ancient Greece.

Chapter 2: Three Aspects of Reflection:

The Mirror Image in Ancient Political Thought

1. Introduction: Antique Mirrors

As outlined in the previous chapter, the human capacity to reflect is, in a sense, mirror-like. When we reflect upon something, we do so with a mental representation or "re-presentation" of it in the mind—just as a mirror shows us a reflected image of an object rather than the object itself. Today we (in common parlance, and in political theory) regularly use the language of "reflection" in this abstract sense. However, we rarely pause to consider its connotations with material mirrors and reflected light. This was not so in the ancient world. This chapter focuses on a likely origin of the idea of reflection in the history of Western political theory: the mirror as a metaphor for mental activity.

We make use of mirrors every day. However, we rarely notice how deeply human this activity is. So far as we know, only a tiny number of other mammals, one bird (the magpie), and one fish (the cleaner wrasse) can recognise themselves in mirrors.[1] These animals' abilities to use mirrors are, however, vastly less sophisticated than that of certain apes, who can spontaneously use reflective surfaces (such as water) and other shiny objects to inspect themselves.[2] Even great apes, however, do not have anything like

[1] Masanori Kohda et al., 'If a Fish Can Pass the Mark Test, What Are the Implications for Consciousness and Self-Awareness Testing in Animals?', *PLoS Biology* 17, no. 2 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3000021; Manuel Soler, Tomas Pérez-Contreras, and Juan Manuel Peralta-Sanchez, 'Mirror-Mark Tests Performed on Jackdaws Reveal Potential Methodological Problems in the Use of Stickers in Avian Mark-Test Studies', *PLoS ONE* 9, no. 1 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0086193.

[2] Frans B M de Waal, 'Fish, Mirrors, and a Gradualist Perspective on Self-Awareness', *PLoS Biology* 17, no. 2 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3000112.

the human capacity to fabricate mirrors and strategically place them in their environment.

This human activity has been used as a metaphor for human cognitive abilities since antiquity—to "reflect", to "speculate" (from *speculum*, mirror), and so on. We use the metaphor of reflection with the same ease as the mirrors we use each day: we speak of the need to reflect on something, we might accuse someone of being unreflective, and we might offer our reflections on past events. The mirror-metaphor is, in a sense, a deeply human connection between us and our forebears.

However, it would be wrong to think that ancient mirrors were the same as modern ones. They were built differently and carried different social and spiritual connotations. Whilst man-made mirrors in late-modern, post-industrial societies are typically clear, large, relatively inexpensive, and ubiquitous, the opposite was true in the ancient world. Mirrors were expensive, rare, and not made of the flat, reflective glass we know today: in different places, they were made of polished materials including copper, bronze, silver, gold, anthracite, slat, pyrite, and obsidian.[3] As can be read in Plutarch, ancient mirrors were "[…] embellished with gold and precious stones".[4] In the ancient world, mirrors were often viewed as mysterious objects carrying strong associations with divinity. Numerous ancient cultures

> "[…] buried their dead with ancient stone reflectors, to hold the soul, ward off evil spirits, or allow the body to check its appearance, before taking the final trip to the after-life. Because a

[3] Melanie Giles and Jody Joy, 'Mirrors in the British Iron Age: Performance, Revelation, and Power', in *The Book of the Mirror : An Interdisciplinary Collection Exploring the Cultural History of the Mirror*, ed. Miranda Anderson (Newcastle: Scholars Press, 2007), 60–69; Mark Pendergrast, 'Mirror Mirror: A Historical and Psychological Overview', in *The Book of the Mirror : An Interdisciplinary Collection Exploring the Cultural History of the Mirror*, ed. Miranda Anderson (Newcastle: Scholars Press, 2007), 60–69.

[4] Edward N O'Neil and Plutarch, *Plutarch Moralia : Index*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 307 (139F). This is in the course of Plutarch explaining that a good wife should be like a mirror of her husband; not having feelings of her own but merely mirroring those of her spouse.

> round mirror can both reflect the sun and become a miniature imitation of it, early metal reflectors came to be associated with sun gods".[5]

In ancient Greek divination, occasionally a practice called "catoptromancy"—derived from *katoptron* meaning "mirror" or "reflection"—was used in which knowledge was sought by looking at reflective surfaces such as a mirror or a pool.[6]

Romans made rudimentary glass mirrors, but this technique was forgotten until the renaissance when flat glass mirrors were made for the first time in the Venetian lagoon in the 15th Century.[7] These became a luxury must-have item for royalty and nobility. The Venetian monopoly on flat mirror-making was eventually broken by industrial espionage orchestrated by Frenchmen serving Louis XIV in order to make one of the most famous architectural representations of state power in history: the *Galerie des Glaces* at Versailles.[8] Mirrors, lenses, and optical instruments became objects of fascination for early modern scientists and, as we shall see with Hobbes, were used to illustrate the aspiration of geometric precision in moral and political philosophy.

Just as our mirrors, and the ways we understand and use them, differ markedly from those of the ancient world, so too do our connotations with "reflection" and the metaphor of the mirror for psychological activity. Today's mirrors are no longer particularly mysterious objects. Likewise, there is less of a tendency to associate human reflective capacities with mystery and divinity nowadays. Cheap mirrors are available to almost everyone in the modern world. Again, something relevantly similar is true of the activity of reflection; there is less of a tendency to believe that the ability to reflect is held only by a small, intellectual élite.

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[5] Pendergrast, 'Mirror Mirror: A Historical and Psychological Overview', 1–2.
[6] Crystal Addey, 'Mirrors and Divination: Catoptromancy, Oracles and Earth Goddesses in Antiquity', in *The Book of the Mirror : An Interdisciplinary Collection Exploring the Cultural History of the Mirror*, ed. Miranda Anderson (Newcastle: Scholars Press, 2007), 60–69.
[7] Pendergrast, 'Mirror Mirror: A Historical and Psychological Overview'.
[8] Mark Pendergrast, *Mirror Mirror : A History of the Human Love Affair with Reflection* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), chap. 6. §"Breaking the Monopoly".

However, this does not mean that studying the ancient origins of our language of "reflection" in political thought has no value. Socrates used the metaphor of the mirror and his intellectual descendants latched on to this metaphor and used it in specific ways, emphasising different aspects of its meaning. I argue that three ancient aspects of reflection can be identified which still resonate today—all of which use the mirror-metaphor in distinctive ways. They are *epistemic reflection, self-reflection* and *ethical reflection* as noted in the Introduction.

The first type of mirror-metaphor emphasises the way in which a mirror *enhances* our vision. That is, a mirror, when used as an instrument, allows us to look at things which we would not ordinarily be able to see, such as looking in a rear-view mirror (since it wouldn't be safe to look back whilst driving) or, as we shall encounter with Plato, seeing reflections of the sun (since it is too bright to perceive with direct eyesight). This first type I call *epistemic reflection*. Just as literal, physical mirrors enable people to see more effectively, so too does reflecting upon things enable people to understand them better. Perceiving truths indirectly by reflection is thus a metaphor for the epistemic, educative process of becoming wiser and more intelligent.

The second type of mirror-metaphor emphasises a very specific way in which mirrors enhance vision: they enable us to see ourselves. Why would we want to do this? A key reason is to *correct* for problems in our appearance or vision. Thus, we can *adjust* our vision through self-reflection. One might look in a mirror to remove an ink mark on one's face, or to remove a speck caught in one's eye. In moral and political thought, introspection—the act of taking a careful look at oneself—has been illustrated through the image of a mirror angled specifically towards one's own self. This is often for the purpose of revealing and correcting for moral flaws in one's character (such as habits of mind and behaviour) of which one may have been unaware. I will refer to this as *self-reflection*. Strictly speaking, this is a sub-type of epistemic reflection since it clearly is

aimed at understanding—just in the specific form of self-understanding for self-correction. However, it merits singling out since, as we shall see in stoic thought, it is used to motivate specific forms of political argument.

Finally, the third mirror-metaphor does not focus on the way in which mirrors enhance vision, but rather focuses on the idea that mirrors do *not* always re-present objects and perspectives clearly. As noted, ancient mirrors were not nearly as clear as those we see today—they often carried a connotation of mysteriousness. Why bother looking in a mirror if they do not enhance our vision particularly well? As we shall see, some writers, such as Augustine—following Paul's letters to Corinth (a city known for the manufacture of mirrors[9])—emphasised the importance of the *experience* of trying to see in a mirror, even if one does not see clearly in it. This experience could *in itself* be morally transformative independently from whether one gained new information or knowledge by looking in the mirror. As such, I will refer to this as *ethical* reflection.

By investigating these three aspects of reflection, the conceptual space of contemporary ideas can be more effectively understood. This is not to say that elements of all aspects cannot be found in each of the writers discussed below. Rather, my aim is to draw out the special emphasis they place on the nature and purpose of reflection by examining their distinctive uses of this metaphor.

In addition to revealing the conceptual space available, this study also enables us to see several of the pitfalls that might be encountered when emphasising each aspect of reflection. As we shall see, both self-reflection and epistemic reflection have a surprising feature: by encouraging the seemingly innocuous activity of reflection, in various ways, theorists of each of these schools of thought have *discouraged* political participation among those who are insufficiently reflective. As I argue in the conclusion, this is one way

[9] Mark Kauntze, 'Seeing Through a Glass, Darkly: The Interpretation of a Biblical Verse in Augustine of Hippo', in *The Book of the Mirror : An Interdisciplinary Collection Exploring the Cultural History of the Mirror*, ed. Miranda Anderson (Newcastle: Scholars Press, 2007), 60–69.

in which political theorists seeking to emphasise reflection risk doing so at the price of genuine politics.

One way of responding to this is found in both ancient and contemporary political theory: expressing scepticism towards the idea that reflection has much to do with politics at all. In the final section of this chapter, we encounter such views in Herodotus, Thucydides, and in numerous places in Greek myth and legend. These views present what I call the 'anti-political challenge': can reflection be encouraged, endorsed, and emphasised without betraying the reality of practical political engagement? The study begins with Socrates.

2. Socratic Reflection

There is a sense in which all writers explaining the place of reflection in politics are students of Socrates. His reputation is manifestly that of the reflective citizen; relentlessly interrogative and examining very general questions about morality and the good life in quiet solitude. Whilst he is perhaps best known for his determined questioning of others in public, it is also clear that his inner life was of utmost importance to him. He regularly tells others of his relationship with his *daimonion* or 'tutelary spirit' which has been understood in various ways as "[…] a form of divine revelation, the voice of Socrates' inner conscience, or simply (as Nietzsche speculated) an ear infection[…]".[10] He consistently argued that everyone, and especially those seeking to enter politics, ought to take particular care of the health of their soul and seek virtue above all else.[11] Some have

[10] M. S Lane, *Plato's Progeny : How Socrates and Plato Still Captivate the Modern Mind* (London: Duckworth, 2001), 14.
[11] Lane, 12.

considered this to be symbolised by "[…] his remarkably ugly face, which concealed the beauty of his soul in a way repellent and fascinating to the beauty-loving Greeks[…]".[12]

Despite his reputation as the original and model reflective citizen (or perhaps in part because of it) what Socrates actually thought political reflection entailed and could achieve has been interpreted in very different ways by his students and interlocutors. As Melissa Lane demonstrates in her survey of the ancient and modern reception of Socrates, there is still a stunningly wide variety of views on what a Socratic intellectual life means both in general and, in particular, for politics.[13]

Instead of rehearsing the long history of commendation and critique directed towards Socrates, I will focus on his use of the mirror as a metaphor for the mind. In this metaphor, I argue, we can find grounds to see all three elements of the analytical framework (epistemic, self-, and ethical reflection). I focus on the *First Alcibiades* written by Plato as the key source since the mirror-metaphor is employed particularly prominently by Socrates in that dialogue. Doing this, however, raises several philological questions.

Firstly, *how do we know that First Alcibiades is authentic?* My answer to this is in essence that, as it stands, the balance of evidence points in favour of this being an authentic work.[14] Secondly, *how do we know that the Socrates of the text is not merely a mouthpiece of Plato?* As regards this question, I argue that we can follow the 'Early

[12] Lane, 12.
[13] M. S Lane, *Plato's Progeny : How Socrates and Plato Still Captivate the Modern Mind* (London: Duckworth, 2001).
[14] The first question relates to doubts, first raised by Schleiermacher at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, about the authenticity of the text (see Jakub Jirsa, 'Authenticity of Alcibiades I: Some Reflections', *Listy Filologicke* 132, no. 3–4 (2009): 225–244. Jirsa provides a useful summary of the philological debate). Julia Annas argued strongly against this view in the late 1980s and the stylometric study of Gerald Ledger classified it among the authentic works (see Jirsa also). I would concur with Jirsa's argument that the burden of proof rests with those doubting the work's authenticity to fashion new arguments as existing arguments seem far from sufficiently strong to justify viewing *First Alcibiades* as vastly more doubtful than other works in the Platonic corpus. In any case, the fact that the dialogue was considered authentic for so long is sufficient reason to study it since we are interested primarily, here, in the development of a tradition of thought rather than philological particularities.

Dialogue Theory' which holds that early dialogues such as this can be considered to represent more accurately the voice of Socrates as opposed to that of Plato.[15]

In this dialogue, Socrates speaks with one of his pupils, Alcibiades—the young aspiring statesman—long before his notoriety in the disastrous Sicilian Expedition described by Thucydides.[16] He is eager to enter politics but seems to know little about it. Alcibiades has a very high opinion of himself. It takes a great deal of effort on Socrates' part to enable him to see this. It is this deeper problem that is most concerning to Socrates who strongly advises Alcibiades to "know thyself" and uses several mirror metaphors to make the point.

Socrates points out to Alcibiades that every one of his lovers has found his "[…] spirit too strong for him and has run away".[17] Socrates claims to know why: "Now I have been observing you all this time, and have formed a pretty good notion of your behaviour […]".[18] Socrates has been considering Alcibiades' character for some time: "[…] I shall propound to your face quite another set of your thoughts, whereby you will understand that I have had you continually before my mind".[19]

In this opening passage, the theme of reflection is already raised. Socrates has evidently been mindful of Alcibiades and has been reflecting on his character. The term 'reflection' is appropriate in the technical sense described in the previous chapter since Socrates has been considering a mental representation (re-presentation) of Alcibiades privately before his own mind and considered—internally and interrogatively—general,

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[15] As Graham points out, there is a strong tradition of philosophers and philologists supporting the Early Dialogue Theory which holds that in the early dialogues, Socrates' words represent his own views, whereas in later dialogues Plato put more of his own thought into Socrates' mouth (see Daniel Graham, 'Socrates and Plato', *Phronesis* 37, no. 2 (1992): 141–65, https://doi.org/10.1163/156852892321052588.). Since First Alcibiades is typically regarded as an early dialogue, this seems a reasonable view to take.

[16] See Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, Revised, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), bk. VI.

[17] Plato, *Charmides. Alcibiades I and II. Hipparchus. The Lovers. Theages. Minos. Epinomis*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library 201. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927), 99. 103B-104, http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674992214.

[18] Plato, 99 (103B).

[19] Plato, 103 (104E-105).

sensitive and complex questions about his character. Socrates is already claiming that Alcibiades lacks a degree of self-understanding which he himself can supply. By propounding Alcibiades' character to his face, it is easy to read Socrates as claiming to be like a mirror for Alcibiades. Later in the dialogue, this is precisely the metaphor he develops.

Socrates thinks Alcibiades is extremely ambitious since he believes himself ready to stand before the Assembly and make speeches which will win him the reputation of being the greatest statesman, not merely in Athens but anywhere![20] Socrates says he will be invaluable to Alcibiades in his ambitions.[21] Alcibiades is impressed with Socrates' insightfulness and asks him to explain exactly how he can help.[22]

Socrates begins his characteristic questioning. Asked what he would in fact say if he were about to make a speech, Alcibiades replies, "I should say, I suppose, it was something about which I knew better than they".[23] Socrates pushes him further, pointing out that he has only learned the irrelevant subjects of writing, harping, and wrestling.[24] Alcibiades responds with an answer which is amusing to readers familiar with the story of his disastrous military antics: "On war, Socrates, or on peace, or on any other of the state's affairs".[25] Pushed again, Alcibiades confesses that he knows nothing about this subject. Socrates tells him it would be disgraceful to lecture the Assembly without having anything meaningful to say.[26]

Next, Socrates turns to asking Alcibiades about whether he knows anything about another crucial political question—the difference between justice and injustice.[27] When Alcibiades' answers to Socrates' questions are manifestly incoherent, he still seems

[20] Plato, 103 (105-105B).
[21] Plato, 105. (105E).
[22] Presumably it didn't in fact take much effort on the part of Socrates to notice Alcibiades' lofty ambitions!
[23] Plato, *Charmides. Alcibiades I and II. Hipparchus. The Lovers. Theages. Minos. Epinomis*, 107 (106D).
[24] Plato, 109 (106E).
[25] Plato, 113 (107D).
[26] Plato, 107D – 109.
[27] Plato, (§§109-112).

incapable of recognising that he does not understand what 'justice' means. Instead of simply *telling* Alcibiades *that* he is mistaken, Socrates takes a clever rhetorical tack:

> "Alcibiades: Why, do you say that I do not know about the just and unjust?
>
> Socrates: Not at all.
>
> Alcibiades: Well, do *I* say it?
>
> Socrates: Yes.
>
> Alcibiades: How, pray?"[28]

Socrates is of course trying to point out to Alcibiades that he has stated manifest contradictions, thus demonstrating his purported expertise to be incoherent. Alcibiades finally concedes that he has been spouting nonsense:

> "Socrates: And it was said that Alcibiades, the fair son of Cleinias, did not know just and unjust, but thought he did, and intended to go to the Assembly as adviser to the Athenians on what he knows nothing about; is not that so?
>
> Alcibiades: Apparently.
>
> Socrates: Then, to quote Euripides, the result is, Alcibiades, that you may be said to have "heard it from yourself, not me" and it is not I who say it, but you, and you tax me with it in vain. And indeed what you say is quite true. For it is a mad scheme this, that you meditate, my excellent friend—of teaching things that you do not know, since you have taken no care to learn them".[29]

The quote from Euripides is crucial—Socrates wants Alcibiades to recognise *for himself* how unprepared he is to rush into the Athenian assembly. Shortly later, we learn why. Socrates wants to extract contradictions from Alcibiades because the person most likely

[28] Plato, 133 (112E).
[29] Plato, 135 (113B-C).

to convince Alcibiades is… Alcibiades himself.[30] As Benjamin Jowett translated it: "And can you be persuaded better than out of your own mouth?"[31] After further questioning, Socrates is finally in a position to reprimand Alcibiades in no uncertain terms:

> "Alack then, Alcibiades, for the plight you are in! I shrink indeed from giving it a name, but still, as we are alone, let me speak out. You are wedded to stupidity, my fine friend, of the vilest kind; you are impeached of this by your own words, out of your own mouth; and this, it seems, is why you dash into politics before you have been educated. And you are not alone in this plight, but you share it with most of those who manage our city's affairs […]".[32]

This particular 'plight' which Socrates finds difficult to name runs deeper than merely not knowing about justice or warfare, but, more generally, in not knowing *himself*: "Ah, my remarkable friend, listen to me and the Delphic motto, *Know thyself* […]"[33]. If Alcibiades is to go into politics, he must fix his double failing of ignorance and self-ignorance with a double remedy of knowledge and self-knowledge.

Self-knowledge is necessary to know what areas of one's own abilities are lacking, and therefore to assess which areas of self-improvement are necessary to engage in a desired activity.[34] This ability, to know oneself and to adjust oneself according to one's needs and deficiencies, is described by Socrates as "temperance".[35] What, however, does it mean to know oneself?

Socrates argues that knowing oneself requires knowing more than one's physical possessions and physical body through a series of thought experiments. The arts involved in producing shoes, rings, and clothing are not arts which directly involve taking care of

[30] Plato, 141 (114D-E).
[31] Plato, *Alcibiades I*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Alcibiades One (Champaign, Ill.: Project Gutenberg, 1990), 25.
[32] Plato, *Charmides. Alcibiades I and II. Hipparchus. The Lovers. Theages. Minos. Epinomis*, 155 (118-B).
[33] Plato, 173-175 (124-B).
[34] Plato, 195 (129-B).
[35] Plato, 203 (131B).

the body parts to which the shoes, rings, and clothing belong, namely feet, hands, and the whole body which is to be clothed. If this is the case, then the arts of shoemaking, jewellery, and weaving are not helpful if one wishes to know how to take care of the hands, feet, and body in general. Rather, one must learn (what is translated as) "gymnastic"[36] to take care of the body adequately.

This art—gymnastic—is in turn not the same thing as taking care of "oneself". That is because people have the sense that they use their own bodies as *tools* to act when they engage in various tasks, and, in this sense, have the impression of being a "ruler" over their body.[37] What is the self, then, if one wishes to "know" oneself? Does it consist in the body, or is the body in fact separable from it? Socrates poses this question as a trilemma: "[…] man must be one of three things. […] Soul, body, or both together as one whole".[38]

Socrates eliminates the possibility that it is *merely* the body in which consists the soul since they have already established the experience people have of ruling the body. Turning to the possibility that it is *both* soul and body, he argues that since "[…] one of the two does not share in the rule, it is quite inconceivable that the combination of the two can be ruling".[39] On these grounds, it turns out that to know oneself one must have a strong acquaintance with the less "physical" aspects of one's being since, in the end, they are not the true essence of one's self. This is why Alcibiades is wrong to point to his physical appearance, family relationships and material wealth as evidence that he is well-prepared for politics. Rather, he must take stock of his mental abilities. This is why "[…] farmers and craftsmen generally, are far from knowing themselves"[40] since they are concerned with activities in the material world rather than the with the soul itself. This

[36] Plato, 193 (128C).
[37] Plato, 199 (129E-130).
[38] Plato, 199 (130).
[39] Plato, 201 (130B).
[40] Plato, 203 (131).

is also why Socrates claims to be Alcibiades' truest lover, since, he claims, he is in love with Alcibiades' soul itself, and not merely his body.[41]

Finally, Alcibiades is convinced that he must learn to know himself and thereby become more virtuous:

> "Socrates: Exercise yourself first, my wonderful friend, in learning what you ought to know before entering on politics; you must wait till you have learnt, in order that you may be armed with an antidote and so come to no harm.
>
> Alcibiades: Your advice seems to me good, Socrates; but try to explain in what way we can take pains over ourselves".[42]

Socrates obliges to Alcibiades' request by attempting to elucidate the Delphic inscription using an analogy with vision:

> "Socrates: I will tell you what I suspect to be the real advice which that inscription gives us. I rather think there are not many illustrations of it to be found, but only in the case of sight.
>
> Alcibiades: What do you mean by that?
>
> Socrates: Consider in your turn: suppose that, instead of speaking to a man, it said to the eye of one of us, as a piece of advice—"see thyself"—how should we apprehend the meaning of the admonition? Would it not be, that the eye should look at something in looking at which it would see itself?
>
> Alcibiades: Clearly.
>
> Socrates: Then let us think what object there is anywhere, by looking at which we can see both it and ourselves.
>
> Alcibiades: Why, clearly, Socrates, mirrors and things of that sort.
>
> Socrates: Quite right. And there is also something of that sort in the eye that we see with?
>
> Alcibiades: To be sure.

[41] Plato, 205 (131C-132).
[42] Plato, 207 (132B).

> Socrates: And you have observed that the face of the person who looks into another's eye is shown in the optic confronting him, as in a mirror, and we call this the pupil, for in a sort it is an image of the person looking?"[43]

Here, the mirror-metaphor features prominently. Socrates wants Alcibiades to see himself clearly for what he is, and this can only be done by reflecting in the right way. It is not enough to perceive one's beauty or confidence—these things are largely peripheral to politics. One must rather perceive accurately the state of one's *intellectual* capacities. To do this, and hence to be a good ruler, Socrates tells Alcibiades to "[…] act with your eyes turned on what is divine and bright […] and looking thereon you will behold and know both yourselves and your good [… b]ut if you act unjustly, with your eyes on the godless and dark, the probability is that your acts will resemble these through ignorance of yourselves".[44] As Jowett translates it, "In that mirror you will see and know yourselves and your own good?"[45]

This raises a significant exegetical question: what exactly is the mirror in which Alcibiades ought to see himself? Various interpretations have been offered, as Renaud and Tarrant point out, including thinking about oneself by thinking about god and the divinity of goodness and truth—the 'theocentric' reading—or the character of another (virtuous) person—the 'anthropocentric' reading.[46] I will not try to adjudicate between these varying readings since they are all compatible with the idea that Alcibiades is being asked to reflect upon his own character, *for himself*, with a view to becoming more knowledgeable and virtuous. This fits with the framework presented in the previous chapter. Socrates asks Alcibiades to do much more than deliberate about one subject. He

[43] Plato, 209 (132C-133A). As the *Loeb* translation notes, the Greek and Latin words for 'pupil' (pupilla) meant "little girl" or "doll" and were used to refer to the centre of the eye since a tiny representation of one's own face can be seen when looking into the centre of another eye.
[44] Plato, 134D-E.
[45] Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 44.
[46] François Renaud and Harold Tarrant, *The Platonic Alcibiades I: The Dialogue and Its Ancient Reception*, Cambridge Books Online (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 64–71.

must reflect on quite general questions, for himself, which are especially sensitive and complex.

How might Socrates' articulation of the nature of reflection fit into the threefold analytical framework? By my reading all three aspects are present and more or less equally emphasised. There is a clear epistemic component of looking upon the mirror to gain conceptual wisdom and knowledge—Alcibiades must know about the things he wishes to lecture the Assembly on! Furthermore, Socrates strongly recommends self-reflection; understanding the true scope of one's abilities—especially intellectual abilities—when acting (and refraining from acting) in public. By looking at himself in the mirror of God or another person, Alcibiades must recognise that he is not nearly sufficiently competent to speak in the public arena at this point. Finally, there is a clear ethical component to the reflection Socrates recommends. Alcibiades must take care of his soul and keep it in good order if he is to be prepared to enter politics. A fundamental part of doing that involves looking in the mirror of what is 'bright and divine', The mirror of reflection expands the scope of people's vision to achieve better knowledge both in the abstract and of themselves, and the *act* of looking in the mirror is *itself* important as a form of moral and political self-care.

That all three aspects of reflection are found in Socrates' advice might be corroborated by the fact that different modern interpreters have focused on each when recommending Socratic reflection to the politics of their day: James and J S Mill both admired the logical, epistemic rigors that Socratic reasoning could bring to politics; Matthew Arnold saw in Socrates the importance of self-reflection for revealing the flaws of Victorian cultural philistinism; and later writers such as Michel Foucault read in the *Alcibiades* dialogue the importance of ethical self-care.[47] As we shall see in this chapter,

[47] Lane, *Plato's Progeny : How Socrates and Plato Still Captivate the Modern Mind*, 24–26, 44.

a similar diversity of interpretations which highlight one particular aspect of Socratic reflection can be found in Ancient writers as well.

Before turning to these writers, it is worth asking what the political upshot of Socratic reflection is. One might think it is the presence of a laudably well-informed and self-aware political class. This is a perfectly reasonable aspiration to draw from dialogues such as this. However, one might also raise a worry which will haunt the call for a more reflective politics to the present day: the concern about an anti-political, intellectualist politics. Grounds for this worry might be found in the fact that Socrates discourages Alcibiades from political engagement, at least for now, and, it seems, for a considerable time to come. Socrates drives this point home using the ship of state metaphor:

> "Socrates: again, in a ship, if a man were at liberty to do what he chose, but were devoid of mind and excellence in navigation, do you perceive what must happen to him and his fellow-sailors?
>
> Alcibiades: I do: they must perish.
>
> Socrates: And in just the same way, if a state, or any office or authority, is lacking in excellence or virtue, it will be overtaken by failure?
>
> Alcibiades: it must.
>
> Socrates: Then it is not despotic power, my admirable Alcibiades, that you ought to secure either to yourself or to the state, if you would be happy, but virtue.
>
> Alcibiades: This is true.
>
> Socrates: And before getting virtue, to be governed by a superior is better than to govern, for a man as well as a child".[48]

Ideally, it seems, politics should be conducted by the most virtuous, and, therefore, the most reflective. One should not enter politics until one has achieved sufficient (i.e. quite considerable) intellectual powers. A major function of self-reflection is to get people to

[48] Plato, *Charmides. Alcibiades I and II. Hipparchus. The Lovers. Theages. Minos. Epinomis*, 135A-B.

realise how fit they are for political participation. More often than not, one suspects, Socratic self-reflection will make them realise how terribly *inadequate* they and their epistemic perspective is for politics, and thus aims to ensure they remain quiet in public until they reach the required level of knowledge. This kind of reflection is designed to keep undesirable people *out* of the political sphere and instruct them that, if they really wish to participate in politics, they have a lot of intellectual work to do first.

In this sense, one might read in the Alcibiades text a tendency towards quietist anti-politics. The implication of this would be the ideal of rule by an expert élite as proposed by Plato. This isn't a necessary result of *First Alcibiades*. After all, Alcibiades is clearly presented as an obnoxiously overconfident character with particularly poor powers of self-awareness. Socrates' counsel, from this perspective, can thus be seen as the right medicine for the right patient, but not a general recommendation. And yet, it is clear that Socrates' intellectual progeny *did* emphasise some of these tendencies as we shall now see.

3. Plato and Epistemic Reflection

Whether or not the history of Western philosophy really is a series of footnotes to Plato,[49] there can be little doubt that our association of the term "reflection" with forms of careful thinking and consideration has his development of Socrates' teaching as a major source. At the heart of the *Republic* is the most famous thought experiment in philosophy: the allegory of the cave. Reflection plays a key role in this passage. Plato uses the mirror metaphor to illustrate the intermediate stage between being hidden in moral and intellectual darkness and coming to perceive truth and justice directly. The *Republic* makes use of the mirror metaphor in three places in total. He uses it to portray political

[49] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality : An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

reflection as a strongly *epistemic* activity. That is, an activity aimed at gaining knowledge of the truth. This argument is vital for Plato's Socrates to reject the arguments of Cephalus "[…] who represents both the possibility of unreflective traditional virtue and its incapacity to explain itself".[50]

In the previous section, when discussing *First Alcibiades*, I referred to the dialogue as representing the views of Socrates following the Early Dialogue Theory. Here, too, I will follow the same theory, treating the *Republic* as representative of Plato's thought—at least in the middle era of his work.[51]

In Book VI of the *Republic,* Socrates likens understanding to the faculty of sight which is, among the other senses, "extremely lavish".[52] Its lavishness comes from the fact that in order to see, one needs not only an object to perceive, but also the power of the sun's bright light. In the same way, the "mind's eye" can only see when it is "[…] fixed on objects illuminated by truth and reality".[53] Light stands metaphorically for reality and truth which gives vision; the power of knowledge. The source of light—the sun—is greater still; it is the Platonic 'form of the good'—the essence of goodness itself. In the edition I have been referencing so far, this metaphor is represented schematically in a helpful way:[54]

[50] Alan Ryan, *On Politics: A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 49.
[51] Plato's views in later works such as the *Statesman* and the *Laws* can easily be interpreted as less anti-political as my reading of *Republic*, but I will not address them here since I am interested in *Republic* as an origin of the idea of reflection. Again, this is not the place to make a full philological case either way, but this approach is reasonable given the present state of scholarship. The approach has an expositional advantage: Socrates can be read as emphasising self-reflection as a practice, and Plato can be read as emphasising epistemic reflection. If it turns out that both men held both views, then it affects the thread of the argument very little.
[52] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin, 2007), 232.
[53] Plato, 234.
[54] Plato, 231. See the editorial note at the beginning of §2.

Visible World	**Intelligible World**
The Sun	*The Good*
Source of growth and light	*Source of reality and truth*
which gives	*which gives*
visibility to objects of sense	*intelligibility to objects of thought*
and	*and*
the power of seeing to the eye.	*the power of knowing to the mind.*
The faculty of sight.	*The faculty of knowledge.*

How can people come to enjoy the illuminating brightness of understanding?

Socrates tells Glaucon in the same book of the text "I want you to go on to picture the enlightenment or ignorance of our human condition somewhat as follows".[55] The allegory of the cave ensues which tells us that people are born into the world like prisoners who have been chained inside a dark cave from infancy. In front of them is a screen, behind which is a fire, and in between the fire and the screen are men using objects to project flickering shadows. The cave represents their ignorance—they cannot see reality. In order to perceive what is truly real, the prisoners must leave the cave and become enlightened. They need to be unshackled and led outside so they can behold the beauty of the sun in all its glory. Finally, they will have moved from an inward life based on mere opinion (*doxa*) to one based on knowledge (*episteme*).[56]

[55] Plato, *The Republic*.
[56] Plato, 236. See editor's notes.

There is a problem, however. One cannot easily leave a very dark place and then stare directly at the sun—in doing so, one would become "dazzled".[57] To avoid this, there has to be a process of adjustment as one makes progress from the cave of ignorance to beholding directly the bright sun of all goodness:

> "[…] of course, he would need to grow accustomed to the light before he could see things in the upper world outside the cave. First he would find it easiest to look at shadows, next at the reflections of men and other objects in water, and later on at the objects themselves".[58]

To progress from the cave to seeing the sun, one needs to be able to look at reflections of things so as not to be blinded their brightness. Eventually, the aim is to "[…] look directly at the sun itself, and gaze at it without using reflections in water or any other medium, but as it is in itself".[59] The mirror-metaphor here represents the journey from ignorance to enlightenment; again, the mirror is a tool used to expand the horizons of our mind's eye, and thereby aid our perception. How, then, does one achieve this? What is the psychological equivalent of such reflection?

It is, in essence, nothing short of a rigorous training in philosophy; one in which "the mind as a whole must be turned away from the world of change until its eye can bear to look straight at reality, and at the brightest of all realities which is what we call the good".[60] To make this Platonic ascent, one must go through decades of training from infancy, learning eventually mathematical subjects (arithmetic, plane geometry, solid geometry, astronomy and harmonics) which lead to a study of dialectic.[61] Dialectic is the last stage of education which brings the mind finally to its ultimate vision, and Plato

[57] Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, ed. Adam Kirsch, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 194.
[58] Plato, *The Republic*, 242.
[59] Plato, 243.
[60] Plato, 245.
[61] Plato, pt. VIII.

recapitulates the mirror metaphor when describing it.[62] For the individual, this takes the form of a critical, inner conversation oriented towards the truth—from *dia* (through, inter) and *logos* (truth, to speak). Plato writes that:

> "Dialectic, in fact, is the only procedure which proceeds by the destruction of assumptions to the very first principle, so as to give itself a firm base. When the eye of the mind gets really bogged down in a morass of ignorance, dialectic gently pulls it out and leads it up, using the studies we have described to help it in the process of conversion".[63]

Dialectic destroys false assumptions people have about the world; by questioning the fundamental categories used to describe reality, it "[...] sets out to determine what each thing essentially is in itself".[64] Such dialectical reasoning seems to be illustrated by Plato in his dialogues where the true essence or meaning of a fundamental category such as "truth", "justice", "beauty", or "love" is found. It aims at coherence to build a "comprehensive view" of the "nature of reality".[65] Finally, through all of this reflection, at the age of fifty,

> "[…] those who have come through all our practical and intellectual tests must be brought to their final trial, and made to lift their mind's eye to look at the source of all light, and see the good itself, which they can take as a pattern for ordering their own life as well as that of society and the individual".[66]

Plato's metaphor of reflection, then, illustrates the thought processes involved in elevating the mind far beyond its ordinary intellectual capabilities. This is necessarily

[62] See Plato, sec. 532c.
[63] Plato, 265 (533 c-d).
[64] Plato, 265.
[65] Plato, 270 (537c).
[66] Plato, 273.

also an ethical transformation of the person reflecting, but this entirely a result of the *truth* of what is perceived by the person reflecting. We can consider Plato's account to count as reflection conceptually (as described in the previous chapter) since it involves thought at a much more general level than a single deliberation, is interrogative to the ultimate level, and necessitates individuals considering questions, for themselves, about immensely sensitive and complex issues such as the nature of ultimate goodness. The mirror metaphor is apt since, when looking upon a reflection, one perceives an image of something, but not the thing itself. To reflect philosophically is, for Plato, to realise that the everyday concepts we use, and our understandings of them, often turn out to be mere images of deeper realities. Dialectical reasoning is like looking at a reflection because in order to see the ultimate truth, one must first look carefully and critically at some subject matter in an indirect way before finally coming to see the full truth as a whole.

What is the political upshot of this view of reflection? Quite simply, it is the aspiration that an astonishingly well-trained élite of philosophers could become "guardians"—the ruling class. They will be highly revered: "[…] the state will set up a public memorial to them and sacrifice to them, if the Pythian Oracle approves, as divinities, or at any rate as blessed and godlike".[67] Their philosophical reflections have made them wise enough to rule the city with optimal skill. The exemplar model of such reflection can be found in the "city in speech" which Plato's Socrates uses to try and improve the intellectual vision of people who wish to understand justice but are, as yet, unable to perceive it:

> "[…] if someone had, for example, ordered men who don't see very sharply to read little letters from afar and then someone had the thought that the same letters are somewhere else also, but

[67] Plato, 274.

> bigger and in a bigger place, I suppose it would look like a godsend to be able to consider the littler ones after having read these first, if, of course, they do happen to be the same".[68]

Since a city is "bigger than one man,"[69] justice in a city rather than one individual would be "easier to observe closely".[70] In essence, Socrates is suggesting that the city-in-speech can help expand the scope of limited vision, and, specifically, political short-sightedness. For this reason, Socrates suggests watching "[…] a city coming into being in speech".[71] He describes the foundations of a just city, its social class structure, and the educational systems used for each class. In this city, the future rulers are given a highly controlled and advanced education. In describing this vision of a city, the theme of seeing larger and smaller letters appears, but now connected with the theory of the forms using the metaphor of the mirror.

The guardians must have a highly attuned sense of goodness and badness in their city. This is particularly important in aesthetic matters since poetry, music (this exchange takes place in a discussion about music), and so on can hold such considerable sway upon the minds of citizens. To do this, their education must carry the guardians beyond seeing mere reflections of letters and eventually to see the truth about goodness and badness in itself:

> "[…] just as we were competent at reading only when the few letters there are didn't escape us in any of the combinations in which they turn up, and we didn't despise them as not needing to be noticed in either small writing or large, but were eager to make them out everywhere, since we wouldn't be skilled readers before we could do so—
>
> "True"

[68] Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 45.
[69] Plato, 45 (368e).
[70] Plato, 45 (368e).
[71] Plato, 45 (369a).

> "Now isn't it also true that if images of writings should appear somewhere in water or in mirrors, we wouldn't recognize them before we knew the things themselves […]?"[72]

In this passage, the mirror plays a similar role; the re-presentation of a just city imaginatively—in the city-in-speech—stands as a mid-way point to full political illumination. It is a mirror in which something of true justice can be seen—but it is not a complete political education. To perceive justice fully, it is necessary to move beyond seeing mere reflections into perceiving the whole of truth and goodness. The word used for "the things in themselves" in the passage is *eideos*; a word used by Plato for the forms.[73] It is only once this is accomplished that such people are qualified to rule since they finally know "[…] the forms of moderation, courage, liberality, magnificence, and all their kin, and again, their opposites".[74] Finally, and only after having taken reflection sufficiently far, can they return to the cave to rule.

This is not an easy task since, even though guardians will know exactly what to do in each situation, they will have to rule over people who do not share their lofty levels of philosophical training. This, Plato describes as the reverse of being dazzled; being unable to see in the dark before one's eyes have adjusted to it.[75] It is thus unsurprising if things go amiss when such philosophers re-enter the real world and are, for instance, placed "[…] on trial in the law-courts or elsewhere about the shadows of justice or the figures of which they are shadows, and made to dispute about the notions of them held by men who have never seen justice itself".[76]

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[72] Plato, 80-81 (402a-b).
[73] See Plato, *The Republic*, 99 (402c) n74. Editors' note – they translate the term as 'qualities'.
[74] Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 81 (402c).
[75] Plato, *The Republic*, 245.
[76] Plato, 244. Presumably an allusion to the trial and death of Socrates.

The solution to this problem is to allow the rulers to do something that those of lesser classes are never allowed to do: to lie.[77] Those not fit to rule are not offered the full, reflective justification as to why they are not entitled to rule. This would invite too much chaos in discussion from those whose faculties of reason are insufficiently well-developed to rule. Rather, they are famously told that nature itself mixed in different metals of bronze, silver and gold among the people. A select few, having gold in their constitution, are fit to rule.[78] The relationship between rulers and ruled is not one of equality, and that is the case because they are not, and cannot be, on the same epistemic playing field. The relation of the rulers to their inferiors ought to be one of benevolent dictatorship, with rulers assuming an attitude of "pity".[79]

Of course, it is perfectly possible that certain people in the polity will have aspirations to philosophical knowledge and wisdom and to be recognised as intelligent and wise, but, in fact, are mere pretenders to those titles. This, Plato also illustrates with a mirror metaphor. Such people have not carried reflection sufficiently far to warrant participation in politics—although they claim to be wise, they are not ultimately informed and in touch with the form of the good. Such people include painters and artists. Socrates illustrates this in Book X by comparing three ways of creating furnishings such as couches and tables: (i) someone can make a *specific* couch or table, which (in Plato's system) would be an instantiation of the (ii) *form* of a couch or table, which could be made by God.[80] Finally, (iii) one could make a *representation* of a couch or table in painting or art.

Socrates points out that one could give the superficial appearance of someone who is God-like, "clever and wonderful", by seeming to "make everything that each one of the manual artisans makes separately", and not only this but "[…] everything that grows

[77] Plato, 389b-c.
[78] Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 93-94 (414-415).
[79] Plato, 197 (518b).
[80] Plato, 278 (596a-c).

naturally from the earth [… and] earth, and heaven and gods and everything in heaven and everything in Hades under the sun"[81]. This is achieved, says Socrates,

> "[…] if you are willing to take a mirror and carry it around everywhere; quickly you will make the sun and the things in heaven; quickly the earth; and quickly, yourself and the other animals and implements and plants and everything else that was just now mentioned".[82]

Holding a mirror up to nature in this way does indeed produce an image or imitation (mimesis) of nature, but it is far removed from reality. This mirror-metaphor, too, can thus be connected to the mirror in the simile of the cave. In both cases reflections in the mirror describe partial glimpses into ultimate reality. The difference between them, Plato wishes to press upon his readership, is that the artist and the philosopher use them in different ways. Unlike the poets and painters who are mere charlatans, the philosopher makes such a systematic use of reflection through dialectic that he is eventually able to see the sun—the form of the good.

In sum, then, Plato's development of Socrates' aspiration to a more reflective politics, whilst containing elements of self-reflection and having ethical effects, is unabashedly epistemic in character. The only people who should be ruling are those with rigorous philosophical training. It would do little good for rascals like Alcibiades to reflect and recognise their unfitness for politics. If they tried, they would hardly get anywhere—let alone out of the cave! Because of this, they must be told noble lies.

Such a vision has, for obvious reasons, been seen as anti-political in the sense that it excludes a lively exchange of views from all sides and encourages silencing of the supposedly unintelligent. As Ryan puts it, Plato can be criticised for the "*unpolitical* or

[81] Plato, 278.
[82] Plato, 279 (596d-e).

antipolitical nature of these thoughts about justice"[83] since his "[…] account of the ideal polity belongs to soul craft rather than to statecraft; it is not a picture of political life at all."[84]

If there were any ambiguity about how (anti-)political Socrates' injunction to reflect for the sake of politics was, Plato's interpretation in the *Republic* results in an account which is anti-political by design since it pushes the vast majority of people out of the business of politics by construing reflection as a demandingly epistemic activity. Here again, the anti-political challenge presents itself. Must the call for a more reflective politics result in an exclusionary intellectualism in public life?

4. Stoicism and Self-Reflection

This is a challenge that will face another school of thought which also followed in Socrates' wake. The stoics, too, encouraged reflection in politics using the metaphor of the mirror to make their points. However, I shall argue, they did this by stressing the importance of self-reflection in contrast to Plato's epistemic emphasis. Stoicism refers to a range of thinkers who founded and re-founded the school of thought, including Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus.[85] They gained their name from meeting and discussing philosophy by the Painted *Stoa* colonnade to the north of the Athenian *Agora.*[86] Alas, we have no surviving written records of these discussions, and thus must rely upon much later authors for evidence of Stoic ideas.[87]

Stoicism shared with the Cynics a common interpretation of Socrates, not as Plato had done (by attempting to work out universal and comprehensive answers to the Socratic

[83] Ryan, *On Politics: A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present*, 64.
[84] Ryan, 70.
[85] Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 2nd Edition (London: Routledge, 1967), 100–101.
[86] John Sellars, *Stoicism*, Ancient Philosophies (Chesham: Acumen, 2006), 1.
[87] Sellars, 3–4.

definitional questions) but by taking inspiration from Socrates' way of life as "[…] essentially the critic, the outsider, the private foe of public confusions and hypocrisies".[88] They "[…] stylized the Socratic way of life and drew their moral code from this style of life rather than from reflection on the character of definition".[89]

Among the stoics, this idea of philosophy as a way of life is central—"philosophy" mattered to the stoics in a much broader way than contemporary academic philosophy is traditionally conceived; it is a comprehensive way of life with an emphasis on practice rather than theory.[90] This might sound as though, for the stoics, reflection was oriented towards a distinctly *ethical* end—or was not even reflection at all. Whilst they did aim—like Plato—at ethical goods through reflection, the ability to reach this end revolves around a very strong emphasis on accurately perceiving, monitoring, and improving one's own character and attitude towards the world. This is because the human condition is, in their view, ordinarily plagued by all kinds of *emotional* disorders: inclinations to act unvirtuously and indifference towards acting well.[91] These debilitating emotional states are caused by faulty judgements about the world, which, in turn, are caused by false beliefs. Since, for stoics, emotions were thought essentially to be beliefs, they can be controlled by changing patterns of reasoning.[92] Much of this reasoning involves correcting one's beliefs with regards to oneself. It is by becoming more rational that people learn to live well. Philosophy is the route to becoming more self-consciously rational and is thus a "cure" for the soul's emotional diseases—stoics are therefore continuing the Socratic idea that "[…] that the most urgent task we face is that of taking care of our own souls".[93]

What does this philosophical development lead people to become? What are the ethical demands of stoicism? Stoic ethics involves a strong emphasis on natural law and

[88] MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 97.
[89] MacIntyre, 97.
[90] Sellars, *Stoicism*, chap. 2.
[91] Sellars, *Stoicism*.
[92] Sellars, 117.
[93] Sellars, 35.

living according to "Nature". For all beings, this means continued self-preservation. For *human* beings, this means continual existence of what is special about humans: their *rationality*.[94] To be a rational person, for the Stoics, is to be a virtuous person, which means two things: acting appropriately at all times in accordance with the natural law and valuing as good and bad only the *internal* development of virtue in oneself—*not* external factors.[95] For instance, one cannot value as good (and thus experience emotional elation) receiving large financial gains by chance, but one can value as good (and thus experience a sense of joy) one's having conducted oneself in a virtuous way over time. Likewise, one cannot value as bad external things such as an unexpected financial loss, but one can value as bad one's poor emotional response to the situation such as becoming angry or violent. In essence, the only things we should value as good and bad are those things that are "up to us".[96]

To become virtuous in this sense, one must use philosophy to improve one's habitual dispositions in behaviour; to do this fully is ultimately to become a stoic "sage".[97] Using philosophy involves two things: a theoretical training in Stoic fields of logic, physics, and ethics, and also a considerable practice in "spiritual exercises" which are designed to translate theory into habituated practice.[98] As Sellars puts it, the sage takes up an "outward-looking cosmic perspective"[99] or "the perspective of God so to speak"[100] which informs their view of the world, their decisions, and their actions. Adopting this perspective, however, is absolutely impossible without taking a long, hard look at oneself using the spiritual exercises. Thus, for the stoics,

[94] Sellars, 110–11.
[95] Sellars, chap. 5.
[96] Sellars, 113–15.
[97] Sellars, 36.
[98] Sellars, 45. The term "spiritual exercises" (as applied to Stoicism) is taken by Sellars from Pierre Hadot.
[99] Sellars, 127.
[100] Sellars, 127.

> "[…] the outward-looking cosmic perspective will depend upon correct judgements about our place in Nature, and these correct judgements will only be possible if we first attend to ourselves via the inward-looking perspective. It is the same set of mistakes in our reasoning that gives rise to both unwanted internal emotions and a confused understanding of our place in Nature".[101]

These spiritual exercises take several forms which have often been translated as forms of "reflection" and illustrated using the mirror-metaphor. Only a very brief survey of some key passages will be possible in the space available here. Cicero[102] has Scipio argue in *The Republic* that an ideal statesman

> "[…] should be given almost no other duties than this one (for it comprises most of the others)—of improving and examining himself continually, urging others to imitate him, and furnishing in himself, as it were, a mirror to his fellow-citizens by reason of the supreme excellence of his life".[103]

The epistemic and ethical goods of knowledge and right conduct all hinge upon acts of careful introspection to understand one's own place in the world correctly. The moral mirror in a virtuous Ciceronian leader is fashioned through "improving and examining himself continually" and enables other citizens to perceive the deficiencies in their own character. This practice is of paramount importance since from it flow all other virtues of mind, character and conduct. Such self-examination can rightly be regarded as 'reflection' in the sense outlined in the previous chapter since examining oneself requires much more generally than mere deliberation. Furthermore, the kinds of questions one must ask of oneself are necessarily complex and sensitive—if one finds fault within oneself, one must

[101] Sellars, 127–28.
[102] Who was not a straightforward Stoic, but drew upon a mixture of stoicism and scepticism—see Bryan Garsten, *Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), chap. 5.
[103] Cicero, *On the Republic & On the Laws*, trans. Clinton W. Keyes, vol. 213, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 181.

have the moral sensitivity and humility to be prepared to admit it, in all honesty, to oneself.

Similar themes can be found in Seneca's counsel to Novatus in *On Anger* and Nero Caesar in *On Mercy*. These texts are well within the 'mirror for princes' genre and offer counsel to political leaders. As we shall see, Seneca makes explicit use of the mirror metaphor in several places, including describing the text of *On Mercy* as a whole in this way. He is acutely aware that the human tendencies towards anger and inclemency are dangerous—especially in the hands of political rulers. The cure for these emotional diseases is philosophy which enables people to examine themselves, improve themselves, and act according to reason. In *On Anger*, Seneca counsels Novatus to avoid anger—it is, for Seneca, always a deeply dangerous and destructive emotion. He considers the importance of the mirror as a device for cooling off:

> "As Sextius remarks, it has been good for some people to see themselves in a mirror while they are angry; the great change in themselves alarmed them; brought, as it were, face to face with the reality they did not recognize themselves".[104]

The mirror accurately reveals to them their true self, and they realise the extent of their self-delusion. Seneca points out that a physical mirror is, however, not enough: it is necessary to go beyond what it reveals about the physical body to perceive the state of the soul:

> "And how little of the real ugliness did that image reflected in the mirror disclose! If the soul could be shown, if it were in some substance through which it might shine, its black and mottled, inflamed, distorted and swollen appearance would confound us as we gazed upon it. Even as it

[104] Seneca, *Moral Essays*, trans. John Basore, vol. 214, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 249.

> is, though it can only come to the surface through flesh, bones, and so many obstacles, its hideousness is thus great—what if it could be shown stark naked?".[105]

Seneca is very pessimistic about the state of the typical soul—and especially when angry. Self-reflection is necessary to save the soul from destructive emotions such as anger. However, he immediately turns to consider the following:

> "You may perhaps think that no one has really been frightened out of anger by a mirror. Well, what then? The man who had gone to the mirror in order to effect a change in himself was already a changed man; while men remain angry no image is more beautiful than the one which is fierce and savage, and they wish also to look the sort they wish to be".[106]

The observation is astute, but also seems to air some scepticism about his foregoing encouragement of self-reflection. Will self-reflection really have any effect if those who are motivated to do it are in fact not in real need of it? Was Seneca merely considering a suggestion of Sextius' just to dismiss it as irrelevant?

I do not think so since Seneca turns to Sextius later as an authority in recommending the vital importance of daily moral self-examination. A more plausible reading seems to be that Seneca is alerting readers to the possibility that self-reflection may well be difficult and fruitless *whilst one is angry*. This is why Seneca tries to shock any angry readers out of their emotional state by immediately afterwards offering a bold and dramatic illustration of the dangers of anger. Once any anger is quelled, they can engage in self-reflection, as Seneca implores Novatus to do:

> "[The mind] should be summoned each day to give account of itself. Sextius used to do this. At the day's end, when he had retired for the night, he would interrogate his mind: 'What ailment

[105] Seneca, 214:249.
[106] Seneca, 214:249.

> of yours have you cured today? What failing have you resisted? Where can you show improvement?' Your anger will cease or moderate itself, if it knows that each day it must come before a judge. Could anything be finer than this habit of sifting through the whole day? Think of the sleep that follows self-examination! How calm, deep and unimpeded it must be, when the mind has been praised or admonished and—its own sentinel and censor—has taken stock secretly of its own habits".[107]

Seneca goes on to illustrate how he uses this technique for himself. He has very little praise for either himself or others: it is almost entirely a stream of criticism which seems appropriate given his stoic pessimism about human nature.

In Seneca's *On Mercy*, the theme of self-reflection also plays a major role. At the very opening, Seneca tells Nero that he has written the text "[…] in order to serve in a way the purpose of a mirror, and thus reveal you to yourself as one destined to attain to the greatest of all pleasures".[108] He reveals to the young emperor, and the wider audience the text was intended to reassure,[109] a vision of both the astonishing power now placed at the imperial leader's fingertips and also the character traits the emperor should have.

This clearly establishes the text as a 'mirror for princes', and one that emphasises from the outset the importance of political leaders seeing themselves in the mirror of the text: "For, though the true profit of virtuous deeds lies in the doing, and there is no fitting reward for the virtues apart from the virtues themselves, still it is a pleasure to subject a good conscience to a round of inspection […]".[110] Seneca offers Nero a series of hypothetical reflections on Stoic virtue such as "With all things thus at my disposal, I have been moved neither by anger nor youthful impulse to unjust punishment, nor by the foolhardiness and obstinacy of men which have often wrung patience from even the serenest souls[…]",

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[107] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays*, trans. John M Cooper and J. F Procopé, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 110.
[108] Seneca, *Moral Essays*, 214:357.
[109] Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays*, (Introduction, 119).
[110] Seneca, *Moral Essays*, 214:357.

"With me the sword is hidden, nay, is sheathed[…]", and "Sternness I keep hidden, but mercy ever ready at hand".[111] This imagined conversation of Nero with his own reflection emphasises the importance of preserving his Stoic character: "I so hold guard over myself as though I were about to render an account to those laws which I have summoned from decay and darkness into the light of day".[112]

What are the political implications of the strong emphasis on self-reflection? For one thing, it is clear that Seneca believed the practice to be indispensable for attaining virtue, and especially important for those who have significant political power. What could possibly be concerning about encouraging people to be so laudably self-aware? Again, Stoicism's encouragement of reflection provokes the anti-political challenge from its critics. Seneca's opinion of common people was quite low. He tells Nero that after perceiving the virtues in oneself through reflection, one should "[…]cast one's eyes upon this vast throng—discordant, factious, and unruly, ready to run riot alike for the destruction of itself and others if it should break its yoke."[113] With Seneca exalting moral character to such a high place of importance, and with his markedly low opinion of the "vast throng" of common people, as Cooper and Procopé note,

> "[…] a reader of these essays might easily get the impression that all would be well with society if only its top people such as Seneca himself and his dedicatees—a future provincial governor, the emperor, a prefect of the Praetorian Guards and a provincial grandee—could train themselves to stay good-tempered, merciful and generous"[114].

Whilst we cannot be sure of Seneca's exact views with regards to political arrangements, such an interpretation would not be an unreasonable reading of Seneca's moral essays.

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[111] Seneca, 214:259.
[112] Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays*, 359.
[113] Seneca, *Moral Essays*, 214:357.
[114] Seneca, *Moral and Political Essays*, sec. General Introduction, p.xxvi.

Indeed, as Skinner notes, such ideas inspired early modern neo-Stoic writers such as Lipsius and Montaigne (hailed by Pasquier as "another Seneca in our language") to offer a markedly quietist outlook in politics in which "[…] everyone has a duty to submit himself to the existing order of things, never resisting the prevailing government but accepting and where necessary enduring it with fortitude."[115]

This kind of political quietism from self-reflection is similar to that of Socrates: self-reflection is used to point out to others how unqualified they are for political participation, and to reveal to themselves their political hubris and self-deception. We will encounter it again with Thomas Hobbes in the following chapter and critical theorists in the final chapter. Such quietist attitudes are, of course, not always welcome. The later stoic Epictetus showed awareness that instructing others to self-reflect seems to imply a sense of moral superiority that they do not appreciate. He notes that people might tolerate him telling them that they do not understand complex things such as divinity and human nature, but,

> "if I say that you do not understand your own self, how can you possibly bear with me, and endure and abide my questioning? You cannot do so at all, but immediately you go away offended. And yet what harm have I done you? None at all, unless the mirror also does harm to the ugly man by showing him what he looks like […]".[116]

To a Stoic such as Epictetus, revealing to others their moral shortcomings, though uncomfortable, is a perfectly laudable activity. Indeed, to Stoics, what could possibly be more important?

[115] Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), vol. II pp.276-279.
[116] Epictetus, *The Discourses as Reported by Arrian, the Manual, and Fragments*, trans. W. A Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA. : London: Harvard University Press, 1985), 307.

This points to another kind of quietism to be found among the stoics. By exalting moral self-reflection to such a great position, stoicism de-emphasises the moral importance of practical, local politics and in doing so can also be read as discouraging concrete political participation. Stoic political theory is bound up with the idea that what matters most is living a life in harmony with the moral order of the cosmos.[117] States and *poleis* are viewed as arbitrary dividing lines in the order of the world.[118] Moral concern for others should not stop arbitrarily at state borders, but should include all humanity, and, indeed, extend beyond this to the entirety of the cosmos itself. Such cosmopolitanism emphasises the primacy of the moral quest, of which careful self-reflection is the lynchpin, to achieve this goal.

Whilst stoics were acutely aware of the existence of actual states and the practical need to participate in them at times, membership and participation in these were entirely secondary to that of the cosmos. As Sellars explains, participation in actual politics was permitted for the stoic sage only on the condition that it did not interrupt their development as a moral character but, as Sellars puts it,

> "[…] it is tempting to say that the Stoics only needed to state this explicitly precisely because many of their other ethical and political doctrines implicitly suggest otherwise. The Stoic outlook is broadly apolitical when it comes to conventional politics"[119].

By heavily emphasising self-reflection as a political practice, the stoics, too, are open to the charge of anti-politics. Stoic reflection has the strong and intended tendency to reveal to people their own weaknesses and aims to ensure that people know their place—for the vast majority of people, this is not a place in the political fray. For the

[117] Sellars, *Stoicism*, 129–33.
[118] Sellars, 129–33.
[119] Sellars, 133.

stoics, reflection can and often should be used to discourage the unqualified from political participation. With Hobbes, we will once again see the metaphor of the mirror—along with myriad other optical metaphors—used to accomplish the same task in an even more radical form: to encourage people to renounce their right to independent political judgement altogether.

5. Augustine and Ethical Reflection

Whilst Plato and the stoics focused respectively upon the epistemic and self-reflection elements they inherited from Socrates, Augustine is interesting as an example of a political writer focusing on the ethical aspects. One might think Aristotle would be the crucial intellectual descendent of Socrates as regards a primarily ethical treatment of reflection. After all, Aristotle famously ended the *Nicomachean Ethics* with the idea that the greatest good that could be achieved is philosophical contemplation itself. This raises the question, when speaking of an ethical approach to reflection in the ancient world, of *why not Aristotle?*

The first problem is that the exaltation of philosophical reflection comes as an explicit argument for its superiority over the kinds of ethical goods needed in the practical endeavours of politics.[120] Indeed, to place philosophical reflection at the service of politics would be to *instrumentalise* it and thereby diminish its value, or to value it for the wrong reasons; not as a good in itself. We might, then, alternatively turn to another Aristotelian concept: *phronesis*—practical judgement. On some accounts, it strongly resembles Plato and Socrates—he emphasises training the "eye of the soul" to aim action towards what is

[120] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp, Revised Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), sec. X. 7-8.

truly good.[121] This means that *phronesis* is not limited merely to deliberating between alternative courses of action regarding specific choices, but also about learning to reflect on much more general questions of the good life and human flourishing. The ends to which one aims can thus be understood as *archê* or 'starting points' from which flow the aims of one's action.[122] This need for well-formulated starting points requires a general picture of what living well consists in and that requires reflection on philosophical questions which, on Kraut's reading, places Aristotle "[…] firmly in the camp of Socrates and Plato".[123] Indeed, MacIntyre notes that Aristotle too has been accused of intellectualism in his ethics by realists and romantics alike.[124]

However, Aristotelian *phronesis* is, on most renderings, decidedly practical. Whilst necessary for attaining a fully virtuous existence, is not entirely, or even mostly, an intellectual activity. Rather, it is strongly rooted in *practice* and the idea, quite antithetical to Plato and the Stoics, that one can attain a good deal of virtue without much intellectual activity. The role of *phronesis* is simply to clarify the contours of good judgement by building on an already sound foundation of a well-formed character. As MacIntyre puts it, "For Aristotle, the role of intelligence is to make articulate principles on which a man whose natural dispositions are good will have already been acting […]".[125] In Ryan's words, "We try to improve our ethical understanding by reflecting on the way we praise and blame certain actions and characters and ways of life; but we do it to live better, not to gratify curiosity".[126] As Kraut points out, success in this in large part

[121] Richard Kraut, 'Aristotle on Becoming Good: Habituation, Reflection, and Perception', in *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, by Christopher Shields (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 549. Citing the Nicomachean Ethics (VI 12 1144a29–30)
[122] Kraut, 543.
[123] Kraut, 555.
[124] MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 70.
[125] MacIntyre, 72.
[126] Ryan, *On Politics: A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present*, 78.

depends upon moral formation and habituation during early childhood before people have the opportunity fully to develop *phronesis.*[127]

This, in my view, makes Aristotle less of a theorist of political reflection and one more of action and practice. Rather than get into a complicated debate about what exactly *phronesis* is and means, it will be more instructive for the purposes of fleshing out the concept of ethical reflection to turn to Augustine's account which assigns the practice of reflection a markedly ethical role even in the face of doubts about its epistemic efficacy.

The philosophical anthropology and political theory in Augustine's *City of God* famously plays out against the theological backdrop that humankind fell from grace with the original sin of Adam and Eve.[128] As Christopher Brooke puts it, the fourteenth book in which Augustine presents this argument can be considered the "[…] pivot on which the rest of the work turns".[129] Humanity needs rescuing from this condition of moral and intellectual darkness. For Augustine, only a redeeming faith in Jesus Christ is sufficient for this. As a result, there are "two main divisions, as we may call them, in human society" which Augustine calls "two cities".[130] Simply put, those in the City of God (the 'Heavenly City') love God above all things, whereas "[…] the earthly city glories in itself […]".[131] Those seeking to live in the Heavenly City must be determined to live according to godly standards in the midst of the manifold temptations afforded in their earthly existence. The crucial question is: how can people do it? How can hearts and minds be turned towards godliness and the standards of the Heavenly City?

The idea of reflection plays a central role in Augustine's answer. It develops in dialogue with both Platonic and stoic ideas. Augustine had a considerable, but clearly

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[127] Kraut, 'Aristotle on Becoming Good: Habituation, Reflection, and Perception'.
[128] Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, ed. G. R Evans, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 2003), bk. XIV ch1. (p.547).
[129] Christopher Brooke, *Philosophic Pride : Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau*, *Philosophic Pride : Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1.
[130] Augustine, *City of God*, XIV ch.1 (p.547).
[131] Augustine, bk. XIV. ch.28 (p.593).

critical, admiration for Plato and Platonism. The central theme upon which all of this admiration turns is that of light and eyesight as a metaphor for intellectual illumination. This is evident in multiple places in the *City of God* as when he asserts that "Theological questions are to be discussed with the Platonists rather than with any other philosophers […]"[132] since "[…] the Platonists assert that the true God is the author of the universe, the source of light and truth, and the bestower of happiness".[133] In particular, the Platonists were able to grasp that the human intellect is like a kind of immaterial sight; the "mind's eye" is capable of representing material things immaterially and considering them, but must be illuminated by a source of wisdom outside of itself.[134]

Augustine points to similar ocular imagery in the Bible as evidence that the Platonists came closest among philosophers to appreciating the truth of Christianity:

> "There is no conflict on this subject between us and those eminent philosophers. For they saw, and in their writings proclaimed, with abundant emphasises and in all kinds of ways, that those beings received their happiness from the same source as we do, by a kind of light which is shed on them, a light apprehended by the intellect. This light for them is God. It is something other than themselves: it brings them illumination, so that they are full of light, and, by participation in this light, exist in a state of perfection and bliss".[135]

The affinity here, Augustine explains, is clearly seen in the opening passages of the Gospel of John in which John the Baptist is presented as illuminated by, and reflecting, the light of God:

> "[…] He was not the light, but he had to bear witness to the light. The true light was that which illuminates every man coming into the world.' [quoting John 1, 6] This distinction clearly shows

[132] Augustine, bk. VIII Ch.5 (p.304).
[133] Augustine, 306. See also bk.VIII ch.1, bk. X Ch.1, bk. X. ch.2. etc.
[134] Augustine, bk. VIII Ch.6. (pp.306-307).
[135] Augustine, bk. X. ch2. (p.374).

> that the rational (or intellectual) soul, like the soul of John, cannot be light itself, and that it shines only by participation in the true light of another".[136]

Very similar to the Platonic account, the reflection of light stands for wisdom and truth being received through illumination from an external, divine source. However, the difference is that, for Augustine, this source is not an abstract 'form of the good' but a single, personal God who took on physical, historical, human embodiment in Jesus Christ as the 'only sufficient mediator'.[137] This is crucially different from Plato. Platonic illumination was thought only to be available to

> "[…] men of wisdom, when, through a strenuous effort of the soul, they have withdrawn themselves from the body as far as may be, to receive an apprehension of this God, and for this illumination to shine on them at intervals, like a sudden flash of dazzling light in the depth of darkness".[138]

This is because, on the Platonist view, the gods would be 'contaminated' if they came into contact with people who were not very wise and had not withdrawn themselves sufficiently from the world. On Augustine's view, Christ makes divine illumination available to all because he became 'lowly' in human embodiment whilst nonetheless remaining divine.[139] It is by reflecting upon the moral example of Christ in an active, worshipful, and participatory way—as Augustine puts it, "when we lift up our hearts to Him"[140]—that the human soul finds redemption and illumination. Thus, for Augustine, Platonic rationalism can only be half right. Indeed, humanity needs illumination from the source of ultimate goodness for right political conduct, but this cannot be attained through

[136] Augustine, bk. X ch.3. (pp.374-375).
[137] Augustine, bk. IX. chs.15-17.
[138] Augustine, bk. IX. ch.16. (p.362).
[139] Augustine, bk. IX. ch.17. p.364.
[140] Augustine, bk. X ch.3 (p.375).

such a 'strenuous effort' of reason available only to the most intelligent. The problems with the mind of mankind are not merely intellectual but also ethical. As Augustine puts it,

> "[…] the mind of man, the natural seat of his reason and understanding, is itself weakened by long-standing faults which darken it. It is too weak to cleave to that changeless light and enjoy it; it is too weak even to endure that light. It must first be renewed and healed day after day so as to become capable of such felicity".[141]

In Larry Siedentop's words, for Augustine, "Instead of confidence in deduction, we have prayer. For through prayer humans can seek the support of grace for their better intentions. Only with such support can they hope to act as they ought to act".[142] Such prayer is a connection between divinity and humanity and is inspired by Jesus Christ; the human being who is also the Son of God. However, whilst truth-seeking through reflection is a laudable aim[143] it is hopeless if construed as a purely *epistemic* practice of dialectical reason. Rather, it is fundamentally *ethical*. That is, the mind's involvement in reflection enables God to reshape the mind and will of the whole human being.

Augustine also, as Brooke discusses at length, critiques the stoic approach to ethics which centres on self-restraint through self-reflection. As Brooke puts it, for Augustine, "This, then, is the characteristic vice of the Stoics: their pride leads them to believe that it is in their power to control their emotions".[144] Thus, the Stoic idea of self-reflection discussed above wouldn't be fitting for an Augustinian theory of reflection and its place

[141] Augustine, bk. XI. ch.3. (p.430).
[142] Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 104.
[143] See Book XIX ch.19. "[…] we should should employ our freedom from business in the quest for truth […]" (p.880) etc.
[144] Brooke, *Philosophic Pride : Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau*, 7.

in the moral lives of good citizens. This doesn't mean that they ought not to self-reflect; on the contrary—but only in light of Christ's example which must first renew their minds.

Since Augustinian reflection places emphasis neither on the epistemic reflection nor self-reflection variety discussed above, it might be tempting to read Augustine as not a theorist of reflection at all; as contemporary theologian James K. A. Smith argues in outlining a philosophical anthropology inspired by Augustine,

> "To be human is to be […] a lover—a creature whose orientation and form of life is most primordially shaped by what one loves as ultimate, which constitutes an affective, gut-like orientation to the world that is prior to reflection and even eludes conceptual articulation".[145]

Smith is certainly right in acknowledging that reflection—*contra* a Platonic conception—is not *central* to Augustinian human anthropology. Love is central, and this is shaped by, in the same vein as Aristotle, practices which form habits and the will.[146] However, even on Smith's account, reflection is not to be written off; it is nonetheless vital to reflect upon and reorder the practices, dispositions, and habits that shape our sense of love: "To get at this requires quite a bit of patient reflection and analysis, both introspective and communal".[147] Fundamentally, for Smith, Augustinian, and indeed Christian, spirituality requires "prayer for illumination" in which "[…] we are training ourselves in a stance of reception and dependence, an epistemic humility".[148] An Augustinian account of reflection thus places emphasis on the ethically transformative effects of the *process itself* quite aside from the ability of the person reflecting to reason accurately, either theoretically in

[145] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 51.
[146] Smith, 56.
[147] Smith, 84.
[148] Smith, 194.

general or about their own thoughts and behaviour. The point is that people are *not* naturally good at reflecting but, even so, they ought to do it as it creates an inner space for God to transform their hearts and minds.

One might also, at this point, worry that the activity Augustine has in mind does not entirely square with the broad conceptual contours of reflection outlined in the previous chapter. I think it is clear enough that what he envisaged was much more than mere deliberation; the things which must be reflected upon are vastly more general in scope than making specific decisions. Furthermore, it is also quite clear that the things to be re-presented and considered are especially sensitive and complex. We might worry, however, that Augustine's account is not truly *interrogative*. That is, it seems to seek the sole perspective of Christ rather than trying to understand serious issues from a variety of perspectives. Such a view, however, seems strongly at odds with the approach Augustine follows in expressing his own thoughts in the *City of God* since, as noted, he engages at length with philosophical systems from outside the Christian tradition and with which he ultimately disagrees.[149] Thus, it is reasonable to take Augustine's account as one of reflection according to my own conceptual analysis.

Interestingly, his account also makes use of the mirror-metaphor in illustrating his point. Nowhere is this idea clearer than in the closing pages of the *City of God* where Augustine contrasts "The kind of vision with which the Saints will see God, in the world to come"[150] with the vision—both physical and intellectual—of men on earth. Augustine ends his entire work with an image of the 'beatific vision' in which the saints will gaze worshipfully and directly upon the glory of God at the end of all things. It is a far cry from the darkness of human existence on earth:

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[149] One could press the point further and argue that since Augustine recommends specifically Christian grounds for reflection, his view can never be sufficiently open to be genuinely interrogative. This might make it unsuitable as a model for *all* citizens to adopt—clearly, it couldn't be adopted wholesale by all contemporary citizens. That does not mean, however, that the account cannot count *conceptually* as one of reflection (as per the conditions identified in the previous chapter).

[150] Augustine, *City of God*, bk. XXII. ch.29. (p.1081).

> "There we shall be still and see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise. Behold what will be, in the end, without end! For what is our end but to reach that kingdom which has no end?"[151]

In the text leading up to that final point, he illustrates—by contrast—the vision of those on earth by drawing on the famous passage in the First Epistle to the Corinthians:

> "For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; 10 but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood".[152]

It is likely that Paul used the mirror metaphor in writing to Corinthians not merely because they would have been familiar with Platonic philosophy (and the associated imagery of illumination and reflection) but also, as Kauntze points out, because Corinth was known for producing mirrors.[153] To say that this verse was important to Augustine would be a gross understatement. It is cited in the final pages of three of his best-known texts; the *Confessions,*[154] *On the Trinity,*[155] and *The City of God* in which the verse is referenced no less than five times in the closing pages.[156] In *The City of God*, Augustine references this verse to point out the contrast between the dim way in which the inner

[151] Augustine, 1091 (Book XXII, Ch. 30).
[152] World Publishing Company, *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*, Revised Standard Version (London: Meridian (Penguin Group), 1962), bk. 1 Corinthians 13:9-12.
[153] Kauntze, 'Seeing Through a Glass, Darkly: The Interpretation of a Biblical Verse in Augustine of Hippo', 61.
[154] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S Pine-Coffin, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), 323.
[155] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, trans. Rev. Arthur West Haddan, The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo : A New Translation (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1872), 429 (Book XV Chap. XXIII).
[156] Augustine, *City of God*, 1082 (x2), 1083, 1085, 1086.

vision of mankind sees God in the present life on earth as compared to the directness and clarity of spiritual vision in the life to come.[157]

The fact that human capacities of reflection are limited should not, however, deter citizens from aspiring to the Heavenly City since reflecting upon Christ is the only way that the human character, will, mind, and whole being can be transformed. He connects the two Pauline mirror metaphors in Book XXII, Ch. 29 of the *City of God*. As Kauntze points out, he does this in *On the Trinity*.[158] 1 Corinthians 13 v.12 (quoted above) is connected together with 2 Corinthians 3 v.18, which reads: "But we with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord".[159] The term "beholding" can also be translated as "reflecting".[160] The Latin translation of "beholding" is "speculantes" which could be related etymologically to two words, "speculum" for "mirror" and "specula" for "watch-tower."[161] As Cain summarises it, for Augustine, "[t]he mind is the *speculum* of God, but it is also *speculantes*: the speculating mind can speculate on the speculum."[162]

This intricate web of mirror-metaphors creates philological problems which Augustine acknowledges and tries to solve. He points out that in Greek the word for "mirror" is entirely different from that of "watch-tower".[163] He is emphatic that the term is intended to relate to the image of a mirror, but this connection seems rather "creative" on the part of Augustine since it depends on the similarity between Latin rather than Greek words.[164] As Kauntze points out, Paul's word for 'mirror' "[…] has no etymological

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[157] Augustine, bk. XXII. 29.
[158] Kauntze, 'Seeing Through a Glass, Darkly: The Interpretation of a Biblical Verse in Augustine of Hippo', 64.
[159] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 393 (XV ch.VIII).
[160] World Publishing Company, *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*, bk. 2 Corinthians 3 v18, fn.a.
[161] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 393.
[162] Emily Cain, 'Through a Mirror Darkly: Mystical Metaphors of Sight from Paul to Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine of Hippo', *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 2016, 309.
[163] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 393 (XV ch.VIII).
[164] Cain, 'Through a Mirror Darkly: Mystical Metaphors of Sight from Paul to Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine of Hippo', 309.

relationship with Greek words for 'thinking.' "[165] On the other hand, one might argue that since Augustine was well aware of the Platonic association between reflected light and mental illumination from his encounters with Neoplatonism,[166] he may well have expected that the Corinthians would have understood this association.

Whatever the philological merits of Augustine's readings of Paul, it is clear that he wanted to draw together these two passages to emphasise that the activity of contemplative reflection in the inner mind can be transformational to the soul.[167] By opening the mind to encounter Christ through inner reflection, human nature is "[…] transformed from a form that is defaced into a form that is beautiful".[168] The connection of the passage from 1 Corinthians is significant because it illustrates how the human ability to reflect God's light is very gradual and slow; this side of eternity, human beings can only reflect it "in a mirror dimly", but eventually will be able to see God face-to-face once this full transformation has taken place. Most importantly, the efficacy of such reflection does not depend upon becoming supremely intelligent or self-aware—thus delivering epistemic outputs—but comes rather through the practice itself. By looking in the mirror dimly, human beings are transform*ed*—they do not, and cannot, transform themselves through an intellectual 'strenuous effort'. Only Christ, as the mediator, can do that. The mirror of Augustinian reflection allows humans only to "glimpse"[169] divinity whilst they remain on earth, but this is enough to hope for a complete moral transformation in eternity. Such an ethical transformation paves the way for reasoning and understanding oneself more effectively. However, these latter things are, for

[165] Kauntze, 'Seeing Through a Glass, Darkly: The Interpretation of a Biblical Verse in Augustine of Hippo', 64.
[166] Augustine, *City of God*, bk. X.2.
[167] Kauntze, 'Seeing Through a Glass, Darkly: The Interpretation of a Biblical Verse in Augustine of Hippo', 63–64.Kauntze points out how, for Augustine, in this context this was related to reflection upon the tripartite image of the Trinity.
[168] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, Book XV ch. VIII.
[169] Cain, 'Through a Mirror Darkly: Mystical Metaphors of Sight from Paul to Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine of Hippo', 33.

Augustine, hopeless without the prior, primary ethical transformation which can only come from reflecting, most importantly, on Jesus Christ and his example.

What is the political upshot of this view of reflection? For Augustine, Christians on earth should consider themselves primarily as citizens of the heavenly city. That city is full of citizens who are in love with God and not themselves; it is a vision of perfect peace and order. By contrast, those who are not members of the Heavenly City are—wittingly or not—citizens of the earthly city whose inhabitants are ultimately in love with themselves rather than God.

Whilst on Earth, citizens of the heavenly city—the City of God—do not see God in all His fullness. Until they can finally leave earth to enjoy the "beatific vision" with the other saints, Augustine encourages Christians to participate as citizens with an attitude of "*peregrinatio*"– the feeling of being a "resident alien".[170] Such an attitude or posture towards public life can only be created by divine grace through the kinds of transforming reflection described above. This was to be encouraged by the organised church which, however imperfect, ought to "[…] open the individual soul to the work of grace, encouraging humility, continence, and prayer".[171] This, Siedentop describes as the cultivation of 'conscience'; for Augustine "[…] it was the task of the church to try to create and tend consciences. For conscience provides access to the city of God, a sense of belonging to another, a better or 'heavenly city'".[172] This very general political picture in the *City of God* breaks with various forms of "ancient rationalism" which—as epitomised by Plato—made rational intelligence a precondition on political participation and justified an aristocracy of the rational.[173] For Augustine, since God's transforming love is open to

[170] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, New ed. with an epilogue. (London: Faber, 2000), 323.
[171] Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*, 109.
[172] Siedentop, 109.
[173] Siedentop, 104.

all and all are equal in his eyes, beliefs in the natural or intellectual superiority of some over others are no longer possible foundations for a theory of politics.[174]

One might think that this ethical conception of reflection in politics is far less intellectualist, and, as a result, far less open to the charge of being anti-political. However, the anti-political challenge has also been raised against Augustine's view. The concern is that if one encourages citizens to acquire a sense of membership in the otherworldly heavenly city, the implication appears to be that this diminishes, belittles, or destroys the significance of their participation in earthly cities. This has been a serious concern for political theorists engaging with Augustine. A strong version of this worry holds that the upshot of Augustinian politics is to encourage people to leave the public square altogether. Ryan clearly articulates this concern by comparing Augustine with Cicero (before rejecting it):

> "Cicero's thinking is this-worldly, Augustine's other-worldly; Cicero's republic is worthy of respect, admiration, and loyalty, and its glory is a great good, but Augustine thinks all earthly states are the playgrounds of violent and self-deluded men, and earthly glory mere vanity. The temptation that we must resist is to conclude that Augustine has nothing good to say about earthly life and that the state is to be regarded with contempt."[175]

A similar worry accepts that Augustine's views of human nature are compatible with concrete involvement in this-worldly relationships—such as political participation and marriage—but is still concerned that his otherworldly attitude *instrumentalises* such involvement. That is, it makes political, marital, and other relationships a mere *means* to expressing divine love. As Lamb has pointed out, such concerns have been raised by

[174] Siedentop, 102.
[175] Ryan, *On Politics: A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present*, 172–73.

Martha Nussbaum who followed Arendt's accusation that Augustine "makes a "desert out of this world" and thereby diminishes political agency".[176]

Both Sidentop and Lamb respond to this by appeal to Augustine's understanding of hope. Siedentop highlights Augustine's dispute with Pelagius who argued that all Christians should "[…] approach something like the condition of monks" and form a "[…] visible, distinctive and irreproachable society".[177] Augustine rejected this view and instead emphasised that citizens should live in the world as sojourners and 'resident aliens' and being 'otherworldly in the world'.[178] Siedentop emphasises that this is achieved through a distinctive sense of hope: "They have a better hope, a hope that they carry into their relations with others".[179] Lamb makes a similar move by pointing out that Augustine's account depends on his "participationist ontology".[180] As Lamb puts it,

> "Augustine's God is not located simply in some "absolute future" or "transcendent region" as Arendt and Nussbaum assume […] Rather, God is "Being itself,"; the "author and creator of everything". If God is the "true ground" of all Being, then God is not completely separate from the world […]. Rather, everything that exists has its being because it participates in God's being […]".[181]

This demonstrates how Augustinian citizens can love, care, and hope for others—including their fellow citizens and political institutions—*for their sake*; to love others is to love God precisely because the grounds of their very being *is* God. The same applies to political participation; one can seek to further the cause of justice on earth *for the sake of*

[176] Michael Lamb, 'Between Presumption and Despair: Augustine's Hope for the Commonwealth', *American Political Science Review* 112, no. 4 (2018): 1036–49, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055418000345; Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
[177] Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*, 108.
[178] Siedentop, 108–10; Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 324.
[179] Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*, 110.
[180] Lamb, 'Between Presumption and Despair: Augustine's Hope for the Commonwealth', 1039.
[181] Lamb, 1039. References to the various quotations are omitted here but available in Lamb's paper.

justice on earth because this can, at one and the same time, be understood as an act of divine service.

In sum, whilst Augustine's view of political reflection escapes the charge of intellectualism due to its emphasis on the ethical aspects of reflection, it nevertheless is vulnerable to a different charge of anti-politics: otherworldliness. By recognising the place of hope in his 'participatory ontology,' we can see how this challenge can be met. Thus, Augustine offers a way of understanding reflection as an ethical practice without cultivating an ethos of estrangement from political engagement here-and-now. Rather, it encourages citizens to be engaged with courage and fervour in politics without making these, in themselves, the final objects of their lives. Reflection opens an inner space for personal moral transformation and grounding; one within which people can return to find a moral centre among the manifold distractions which are to be found in the earthly city.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that this inward, spatial idea of reflection is found in other writers with ethical dimensions to their writing. Marcus Aurelius spoke of maintaining the 'inner citadel'.[182] St. Francis de Sales endorsed St. Catherine of Siena's practice of cultivating an imaginary inner oratory to which she returned for prayer and contemplation.[183] Montaigne recommended maintaining a "[…] room at the back of the shop, keeping it entirely free and establishing there our true liberty, our principal solitude and asylum".[184] Hobbes and Arendt, in their own way, we will see speak respectively of 'calmer moments' an withdrawal into a world of inner dialogue. Octavia Hill spoke of physical spaces as vital for cultivating "[…] that sense of quiet in which whispers of better things come to us gently".[185] These people, just as Augustine, were all highly politically

[182] Pierre Hadot and Marcus Aurelius, *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Cambridge, MA ; London: Harvard University Press, 1998).
[183] St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd, 1937), chap. XII.
[184] Michel de Montaigne, *On Solitude*, trans. M. A Screech, *On Solitude* (London ; New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 7.
[185] Octavia Hill, 'Space for the People', *Macmillan's Magazine, 1859-1907* 32, no. 190 (1875): 332.

engaged. They cultivated their inner space of reflection not merely for the purpose of gaining knowledge, but to maintain a space of ethical centring; to bring them back to what matters most, and to enable the cultivation of ethical virtues in their lives. As I argue in the conclusion, such an ethical approach to reflection is an invaluable idea which deserves revival in contemporary political thought.

6. The Anti-Political Challenge

The foregoing accounts of the place of reflection in politics all suffered from accusations of anti-politics. These were not wholesale charges against the very idea that reflection belongs in politics, but rather against the particular *conception* put forward by each author. These constitute disputes between proponents of the idea that reflectiveness is, in general, a virtue in politics. However, there are several views which are opposed to this in general. Opponents of recommending reflectiveness as a political virtue all pose a version of the challenge that it is, in some sense, anti-political. It is, such critics allege, quietist, distracting, intellectualist, exclusionary, and so forth. Whilst we will encounter such views in contemporary writers in the final chapter, we can see how these views were already present in the ancient world.

Both Herodotus and Thucydides vividly portray characters who are strongly opposed to emphasising a reflective approach to politics. Overthinking and intellectualising politics, they suggest, leads to dithering and ineffective political action. This raises the question of whether the *Histories* and the *Peloponnesian War* were intended by their authors to encourage scepticism about political reflection. I argue that to a lesser extent than their most reflection-sceptical characters (Xerxes and Cleon), both authors were moderately sceptical about the place of reflection in politics. They are acutely aware that reflection can come at a *cost*, and that those costs must be taken into account when acting in politics.

Unlike the texts discussed in subsequent sections, these texts do not use the metaphor of mirrors to illustrate their points. That said, there are notable examples of mirrors used to illustrate sceptical attitudes to reflection in ancient Greek fable and myth. Just as the mirror has been used to illustrate the brightness of truth, so too has it been used to illustrate the vices of self-delusion, self-obsession, folly, and greed. Before turning to the historians' texts, it is worth considering these portrayals of the mirror-metaphor.

i. Myths, Mirrors and Illusions

Several of Aesop's fables make use of reflection as a metaphor. Three of them are worth considering since they can be read as perfect counterpoints to the three forms of reflection outlined above. The idea behind the epistemic aspect is that reflection expands one's knowledge. This contrasts starkly with the mirror as an image in two of Aesop's fables: the stories of *The Fox, the Moon, and the River* (264) and *The Dog, the Meat, and the Reflection* (263). The fox sees the reflection of the moon in the river and mistakes it for a piece of cheese. The fox tries to lap at the water in an attempt to eat the cheese. Alas, the fox finally dies of choking. This fable is typically taken to illustrate the vice of greed,[186] but can also be read as using the mirror-metaphor to illustrate the vices of ignorance and confusion. The reflection of the moon led the fox to a false belief: that there was cheese in the water. The fable about the dog with meat (Fable 263) is similar: the dog, carrying a piece of meat, sees its reflection in water and mistakes it for another piece of meat. In trying to grab the meat, it loses what it already has and ends up with nothing. Unlike the fox, the dog fails even to recognise that what he sees is his own reflection and is instead confused by false beliefs. In both of these fables, we can see how reflected images are used to illustrate ignorance and confusion.

[186] Aesop, *Aesop's Fables*, trans. Laura Gibbs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 128.

Scepticism about self-reflection can be found in *The Stag and His Reflection* (Fable 262): a stag sees his reflection in water and disparages his legs for being too slender whilst praising his antlers for their beauty. When some hunters suddenly arrive and chase the stag, he escapes by outrunning them. However, he gets his antlers caught in branches. Soon, the hunters catch him up and he is captured. The fable illustrates the fact that people are liable to misestimate themselves when reflecting upon their own character. The downfall of the stag was caused by a complete failure to perceive himself accurately; he realises that his legs, which he thought were ugly, were in fact capable of saving him from the hunters. His antlers, which he thought were beautiful, brought about his demise. This might be an allusion to the fact that reflections are in a sense deceiving by displaying a reversed image: what is in fact on the left from the perspective of a mirror appears on the right, and vice versa. In the same way, what was good for the stag was perceived as bad, and vice versa. This may be read as an image of the rhetorical technique of *paradiastole*—representing a vice as a virtue, and vice versa. Furthermore, the fable serves as a warning against vanity and self-obsession: looking at oneself in the mirror can in fact be deleterious to one's own moral character.

The final aspect, ethical reflection, emphasises the capacity to help improve one's moral character. In *The Goat and His Reflection* (Fable 266), the opposite occurs. The fable runs as follows: a wolf is chasing a goat, but the goat manages to climb up a cliff and thereby escape. Days later, the goat goes away to drink and, in doing so, notices his reflection in the water. He says "Oh what fine legs I have and what a beautiful beard and what great horns! Just let that wolf try to make me run away: this time I will defend myself! I will not let that wolf have any power over me!"[187] Meanwhile, the wolf had found the goat, and, standing behind him, heard everything the goat had said. Offended at the goat's cheek, he pounced on the goat and devoured him.

[187] Aesop, 129.

What was the goat's error? Unlike the dog and the fox, the goat correctly identified what it saw in the reflection: himself. Unlike the stag, the goat's judgement of himself wasn't exactly off the mark: his legs had indeed enabled him to escape the wolf. Rather than being an epistemic error, the act of reflection had deleterious effects on his character: it kindled in himself feelings of pride, which led him to distraction, which brought about his death.

A similar warning about reflection can also be found in the sad myth of Narcissus, recounted by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*[188] and famously depicted by Caravaggio. Having spurned the love of Echo, Narcissus was punished by Nemesis. She caused him to come across an immaculately flat pool of water which produced a perfect reflection of himself when he looked upon it. He fell madly in love with the image he saw in the pool and became more and more desperate as he tried to embrace and kiss the image. His feelings turn into a self-destructive obsession which causes him to wither away, lose his beauty, become utterly miserable, and eventually perish. When they came to prepare his funeral, his body was nowhere to be found. In his place there grew a daffodil—a narcissus flower—with its head continually drooped downwards staring at its own image in the pool.

Narcissus clearly made an epistemic error—he failed to recognise that the reflection had no substance but was merely a representation. This epistemic error brought about a tragic obsession with himself which prevented him from ever finding happiness or fulfilment. Reflection, it would seem, is not all good. Even a highly accurate representation of oneself, in a perfectly reflective surface, can stir up trouble and bring about destructive consequences.

These fables and myths demonstrate the dangers associated with reflection: mistaking appearances for real substance, becoming obsessed with oneself, misjudging

[188] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller and G. P Goold, 2nd ed., Loeb Classical Library (London : Cambridge, MA: Heinemann : Harvard University Press, 1921), 149-161 (340-510).

oneself, stirring up feelings of pride, distracting oneself, becoming vain and so forth. These kinds of criticism are, too, deployed in ancient Greek political texts in relation to reflection[189] as a mental activity. Passages from Herodotus and Thucydides are worth considering. Both are concerned with the tension between reflection and action. They present a variety of perspectives on the matter, some of which express clear scepticism as to the value of reflection in political affairs.

ii. Reflection Scepticism, Herodotus and Xerxes

Herodotus and Thucydides both wrote in an age of increasing awareness of the differences between authoritarian forms of barbarian rulership over subjects and Greek self-government among citizens under the law.[190] One of the things that made Greek governments different to their neighbours was the degree of discussion and debate involved in political assemblies. Such debates invite private reflection upon subjects to be discussed. What role ought reflection play in governments, Greek or otherwise? Should it be extensive or limited? What is its purpose? In this and the following section, I consider the place of reflection under authoritarian rule in Horodotus and in democratic Athens in Thucydides.

In Book Seven (7.44-50) of Herodotus' *Histories*, Xerxes the Great decides he would like to survey his entire army at Abydum and climbs to a high vantage point where a *dias* (platform) had been constructed especially for him. The importance of clear vision is immediately obvious: from here, he has an excellent *overview* of the land army and the fleet just beyond the shore. He takes great pleasure in ordering and watching a race

[189] That is, what we would call reflection (outlined above in the introduction) – both authors' texts have been translated as using this English word, as we shall see.
[190] Ryan, *On Politics: A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present*, chap. 1.

between his ships, and, Herodotus tells us, this whole vision gives him a "feeling of deep self-satisfaction." Following this, however, he begins to weep.[191]

Artabantus is surprised at his change in mood, and, explaining himself, Xerxes says that he was

> "[…] reflecting on things and it occurred to me how short the sum total of human life is, which made me feel compassion. Look at all these people–but not one of them will still be alive in a hundred years' time".[192]

Artabantus replies in a similarly melancholic tone by commenting that human tragedy, including accidents and illnesses, often make people feel so overwhelmed and unhappy that they wish they were dead, and that this happens often in life.

Xerxes abruptly ends these reflections; he does not wish to be discussing negative things when he is engaged in such a positive project as attempting to dominate Greece.[193] Reflection had a negative effect on Xerxes' mood, even if his reflections portrayed the cold truth about human existence. It was a distraction from the task at hand. In these passages a stark contrast can be found between the joy and success Xerxes experiences at his literal, physical overview of his army, and his reflections upon human life. It seems better to have an overview of the world, in the moment, as it is, and act from there, rather than reflecting upon things.

One might think that another kind of reflection—not the melancholic sort just mentioned—might enable one to have a good overview of the world even when one cannot have a such a great vantage point as Xerxes enjoyed at Abydum. This is precisely what Artabantus suggests; he counsels Xerxes to consider the possible alternative outcomes of

[191] Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 424 (7.45).
[192] Herodotus, 424 (7.46).
[193] Herodotus, 424 (7.47).

his endeavours: "A man of true calibre is one who combines fear when laying his plans, so that he weighs up everything that might happen to him, with courage in carrying out those plans".[194] Artabantus illustrates this technique by weighing up the threats facing Xerxes' plans. Xerxes says that Artabantus's concerns are reasonable, but counsels him against all of this analytical reflection:

> "[…] you still shouldn't be afraid of everything or give everything equal weight. If you were to give everything equal weight in every situation you found yourself in, you'd never do anything at all. It's always better to adopt a positive outlook and experience danger half the time than to worry about everything and avoid experience altogether. You may dispute every proposal, but as long as you can't come up with an alternative course of action which is demonstrably safe, there's nothing to tell between you and the person making the risky proposals, and so your argument should not be regarded as any stronger than his. Anyway, we're only human, so how can we know where safety lies? We can't, in my opinion. Prizes are invariably won, then, by those who are prepared to act, rather than by those who weigh everything up and hesitate".[195]

Xerxes goes on to argue that the many triumphs of the Persian Empire wouldn't have been achieved if everyone set about calculating courses of action in the kind of cautious way advised by Artabantus. There are two lines of argument pressed by Xerxes. The first is scepticism about the epistemic capacity of human reflection. The future is always uncertain, and this is especially so in the activities of conquest and warfare. It is simply not possible to know what the future holds, and so the human capacity to reflect on future outcomes is necessarily limited. Rather than reflecting extensively on all possible outcomes and worrying about them, it is better just to go with what seems intuitively right provided that there is no alternative which is obviously better.

[194] Herodotus, 425 (7.49).
[195] Herodotus, 425 (7.50).

The second line of argument concerns the *ethical* effects of reflection on human conduct and character. Firstly, there is the concern that spending time in reflection necessarily comes at an opportunity cost: time spent in action. Xerxes' view seems to be that time spent in action is vastly more important and significant to military success than is time spent in reflection. The second ethical dimension concerns the effect reflection has on one's mindset. Xerxes is concerned that reflecting breeds hesitation since, at least in the form recommended by Artabantus, it brings to mind the many dangers and possible negative outcomes of one's endeavours. This sense of hesitance has an unhelpful paralytic effect upon one's determination to achieve success. Even if reflection were epistemically helpful, the negative effects it has on the mind—such as diminishing courage—might, on balance, make it not worthwhile.

In this passage, then, it seems that Xerxes has nothing but a negative opinion of reflection and its place in politics. The melancholic reflection he initiated himself led him to a dispiriting attitude which he found unhelpful to his military endeavours. The kind of careful, calculating reflection recommended by Artabantus is no good either; Xerxes is sceptical of it on both epistemic and ethical grounds.

Herodotus vividly portrayed this account of Xerxes, but what did he think of reflection himself, then? Did he agree with Xerxes? On one hand, Herodotus tells us that Xerxes failed to listen to the advice given him that Greeks would be prepared to fight for their freedom in a way that other non-democratic states would not. In the end, Xerxes' failure to reflect on this point seems to have been one of his greatest failings. On the other hand, Xerxes and his predecessors were extremely successful in their past imperial endeavours. Reflection thus emerges as a double-edged sword: sometimes unreflective impetuosity is an effective strategy, and indeed led to the victories over other states, but, on the other hand, led to the downfall of Xerxes in his attempt to conquer Greece. Far

from the resounding endorsements of reflection for political leaders found in Socrates, Plato, the stoics, and Augustine, Herodotus points out its *costs*.

iii. Reflection Scepticism, Thucydides and Cleon

A similar lesson might be drawn from Thucydides. He, too, was a Greek historian acutely aware of the differences between Greek and barbarian ways of governing.[196] He, too, understood that citizens of Greek *poleis* were—at least officially—distinctively *political* in their structure of government and often thought of themselves as intellectually adept in political affairs—as famously expressed in the Funeral Oration of Pericles.[197] That is, he recognised the importance Athenians placed on lively and active political debate, deliberation, and participation for citizens—unlike barbarians who were thought to live in authoritarian rather than democratic societies which left far less room for political engagement among the citizenry. In a similar way to Herodotus, one of the themes Thucydides addresses in his text is the question of whether reflection is helpful or detrimental to good government.

In Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*, it emerges that not all Athenians believed such a reflective approach to politics was sensible—especially in wartime. Concerns similar to those of Xerxes are raised in the Assembly. The epitome of Athenian scepticism about reflection in politics can be found in the speech of Cleon during one of the most notable acts of collective reflection[198] in political history—the infamous Mytelinian Debate.

In 427, following the revolt of Mytilene, the Athenian Assembly "[…] in their angry mood, decided to put to death not only those now in their hands but also the entire adult

[196] Ryan, *On Politics: A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present*, chap. 1.
[197] Ryan, chap. 1 §Pericles's Funeral Oration.
[198] It involves reflection, not just deliberation, because, as we shall see, people changed their minds once they went home from the assembly and thought about the decisions privately and from a more general perspective.

male population of Mytilene, and to make slaves of the women and children".[199] A trireme was then sent with orders to execute the decision. This decision, taken in an "angry mood", was particularly drastic. "Next day, however, there was a sudden change of feeling and people began to think how cruel and how unprecedented such a decision was—to destroy not only the guilty, but the entire population of a state".[200] The Athenians were thus moved to reflect on their actions by the weight of their own conscience.

An assembly was called to review the decision. The debate was especially pressured because, if they were to reverse the decision, it would have to be done quickly as the trireme with orders was already underway. The speeches that follow in Thucydides' text are fascinating because they discuss not only the merits of the particular decision that was taken the previous night, but also the merits of reflecting on a decision already taken and whether to reverse it, as well as the merits of Athenian democratic practices more generally.

The first to speak is Cleon who "[…] was remarkable among the Athenians for the violence of his character, and […] exercised far the greatest influence over the people".[201] In his intervention, Cleon makes it clear that he is entirely opposed to revoking the decision about Mytilene for a variety of reasons, including that a reversal will make Athens appear weak, that it will encourage revolts from other cities, and that these things will damage the strategic position of the Empire in the future. In addition to opposing the particular issue at hand, Cleon interweaves strands of his argument with criticisms of Athenian democratic practices. It concerns ways in which he thinks an over-intellectualisation of politics leads to serious political problems. As he puts it, a "[…] lack of learning combined with sound common sense is more helpful than the kind of cleverness

[199] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 212 (III.36).
[200] Thucydides, 212 (III.36).
[201] Thucydides, 212 (III.36).

that gets out of hand, and that as a general rule states are better governed by the man in the street than by intellectuals".[202]

Why is this? He is discussing not *merely* what we, today, would describe as reflection, but also public speech. Specifically, he is discussing the mutual relationship between a highly intellectualised culture of political speech and the merits of practices of reflection it encourages. His scepticism about reflection can be read using the analytical framework of epistemic, self-, and ethical reflection.

Firstly, he makes the argument that extensively reflecting upon things has a negative epistemic effect upon political decision-making. This is exacerbated by the Athenian political system which incentivises people to overthink things in an unhelpful way. People who wish to use political speech as a chance to show off are particularly dangerous and likely to "bring ruin on their country" because they have an incentive to criticise existing legislation.[203] Those who want to "appear wiser than the laws" must necessarily criticise the law.[204] Often, laws will have been put in place for good reason and so criticising the law requires concocting an elaborate argument which is likely to be both superficially impressive and dangerously wrong. The gist of Cleon's point is that the abundance of chances to make highfaluting speeches generates incentives to reflect in creative ways on political issues, and these creative takes on current affairs are rarely aligned with common sense.

It is much better, argues Cleon, to trust "[…] the people who are not so confident in their own intelligence […]" since they

[202] Thucydides, 213 (III.37).
[203] Thucydides, 213 (III.37).
[204] Thucydides, 213 (III.37).

> "[…] are prepared to admit that the laws are wiser than they are and that they lack the ability to pull to pieces a speech made by a good speaker; they are unbiased judges, and not people taking part in some kind of a competition; so things usually go well when they are in control".[205]

Political judgement, we hear, is best when *not* given to extensive reflection upon things. The gut instincts of someone with everyday common sense is far preferable to the musings of some academic overthinking things with a dubious grand theory.

Here, we see a similarity with Xerxes. There was a stark contrast between the positive experience of seeing things with his own eyes, epitomised by his *overseeing* the army and the fleet, and the negative experience of reflecting upon things later with the eyes of the mind. Cleon, too, emphasises the difference between making decisions according to what one actually sees compared to the dangers of trying to perceive something from interesting angles. Cleon's view is that this practice has become a bad habit in the Athenian assembly:

> "You have become regular speech-goers, and as for action, you merely listen to accounts of it; if something is to be done in the future you estimate the possibilities by hearing a good speech on the subject, and as for the past you rely not so much on the facts which you have seen with your own eyes as on what you have heard about them in some clever piece of verbal criticism".[206]

As a result, the degeneration of public life into "seminar room" politics is not far away: "You are simply victims of your own pleasure in listening, and are more like an audience sitting at the feet of a professional lecturer than a parliament discussing matters of state".[207] So much for the idea that reflection has a positive epistemic effect on the mind.

[205] Thucydides, 213 (III.37).
[206] Thucydides, 214 (III.38).
[207] Thucydides, 214 (III.38).

The second line of scepticism from Cleon suggests that Athenian practices of reflecting on things have a negative ethical effect upon conduct and character. This happens in three ways. Firstly, reflecting upon and reconsidering things costs time, which is especially unhelpful in a war. Secondly, it is distracting from decisions which are more pressing: "What you are looking for all the time is something that is, I should say, outside the range of ordinary experience, and yet you cannot even think straight about the facts of life that lie before you".[208] Thirdly, it affects the mindset of the Athenians, causing them to soften:[209]

> "[…] I am amazed at those who have proposed a reconsideration of the question of Mytiline, thus causing a delay which is to the advantage of the guilty party. After a lapse of time the injured party will lose the edge of his anger when he comes to act against those who have wronged him; whereas the best punishment and the one most fitted to the crime is when reprisals follow immediately".[210]

In stark contrast to ancient and modern political theories commending the role of reflection in stilling the passions of anger and fear, Cleon emphasises the opposite: reflection is *un*helpful precisely because it enables these instinctive reactions to dissipate! In these three ways, Cleon suggests that reflecting upon things can be ethically detrimental; it causes delays, distracts from tasks at hand, and causes people to grow soft.

The final objection to this reflective approach to politics is related to the concern about citizens growing "soft" in their approach to political judgement and connects it to the idea of selfhood. As we saw with the stoics, and will see in Hobbes and critical theory, there is no shortage of ethical and political theories emphasising the need for clear self-

[208] Thucydides, 214 (III.38). As we shall see, Hobbes turns this on its head, and argues that the primary political problem is that people are preoccupied with the problems they face directly but fail to have *foresight* to see problems that loom far off–a skill that only comes through careful reasoning
[209] Thucydides, 217 (III.40).
[210] Thucydides, 214 (III.38).

perception in politics (for instance, to achieve moral autonomy and reduce unconscious bias) and arguing that reflection is the key to effective self-understanding. Here, Cleon argues for the opposite position. Rather than enabling better self-expression, the political reflection of the Athenians, in Cleon's view, in fact precipitates *disloyalty* to oneself: "I urge you, therefore, not to be traitors to your own selves".[211] The feelings of anger and outrage the Athenians feel are, in Cleon's view, seemingly the expression of their true selves, and the feelings of compassion they feel on reflection are, says Cleon, disloyal to their true feelings.

What are the Athenians to do now in his view? Interestingly, he recommends another psychological technique as a remedial measure:

> "Place yourselves in imagination at the moment when you first suffered and remember how then you would have given anything to have them in your power. Now pay them back for it, and do not grow soft at this present moment, forgetting meanwhile the danger that hung over your heads then".[212]

The kind of imagination Cleon recommends is not reflection—it does not encourage general, representative thought from different perspectives as outlined in the first chapter of this thesis. It is intended, rather, as a remedial measure to recover original feelings—the 'true self' of the Athenians—and thereby to motivate them to aggression. It is rather a form of 'psyching up'. Rather than having to engage in even this imaginative practice, it would have been better just to have acted in the moment and moved on.

What did Thucydides think of all of this? One might think that Cleon's speech is nothing more than a parody of demagoguery which is intended to satirise anti-intellectualism about politics. After all, Thucydides does not seem to want to endear the

[211] Thucydides, 217 (III.40).
[212] Thucydides, 217 217 (III.40).

reader to Cleon for at least three significant reasons. Firstly, the introduction highlighting the "violence of his character",[213] secondly, Cleon's hypocrisy of using a long and complicated speech to criticise the practice of making long and complicated speeches,[214] and thirdly the fact that the final word in the debate as recorded is had by Diodotus who repudiates Cleon's points, arguing both for reversing the decision and upholding the importance of democratic debate and discussion.

That said, Diodotus, on the other hand, is far from perfect; he, too, is guilty of hypocrisy since he argues that making accusations of corruption (using the assembly to further private interests rather than the public good) is wrong as it pollutes the debate by undermining trust in democratic discussion—only after himself accusing Cleon of being paid to make his speech.[215] Thucydides does not want readers simply to accept the view of Diodotus. It seems, rather, that Thucydides wants readers to see two sides of both the debate at hand and the meta-debate about democratic practice which it raises. Thucydides' stance, one might reasonably suspect, lies somewhere between two very different and imperfect speeches.

As Ober points out, this can be confirmed by the contrast between Diodotus and Themistocles who is highly praised by Thucydides.[216] Themistocles, says Thucydides,

> "[…] was quite exceptional, and beyond all others deserves our admiration. Without studying a subject in advance or deliberating over it later, but using simply the intelligence that was his by nature, he had the power to reach the right conclusion in matters that have to be settled on the spur of the moment and do not admit of long discussions. […] He was particularly remarkable at looking into the future and seeing there the hidden possibilities for good or evil. To sum him

[213] Thucydides, 212 (III.36); Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*, Martin Classical Lectures (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University press, 1999), 102.
[214] Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*, 98.
[215] Ober, 98–99.
[216] Ober, sec. C.1. & p.102.

> up in a few words, it may be said that through force of genius and by rapidity of action this man was supreme at doing precisely the right thing at precisely the right moment".[217]

Themistocles is praised precisely because he has little or no need of reflecting at all. His mind delivers all of the advantages reflection can offer simply by its "unmistakable natural genius"[218] and thereby encounters none of the costs. It would seem that for Thucydides, if it is possible for people involved in politics and government not to need to reflect, then so much the better. If people have a naturally excellent sense of instinctive judgement, then why allow reflection to get in its way?

In this sense, Thucydides, the famously realist historian, can be read as a sceptic of reflection in politics. For people not as naturally gifted as Themistocles, reflection can be helpful as a remedial measure to think through situations where natural instinct is not enough. The intellectual activities of reflection and dialogue can thus be helpful in politics but are very far from being without their costs and dangers. A theme running through Thucydides, highlighted by Ober, is the contrast between *Erga* (hard, observable facts) versus *Logoi* (things considered and reported in speech).[219] On one hand, speeches (*Logoi*) and the attendant cognitive faculty (*logismos*) which uses words to think can greatly improve one's ability to think *beyond* mere appearances of images and gain a greater depth of understanding.[220] On the other hand, words can entirely distort realities, as happens with the "many incorrect assumptions" Hellenes make about their "dimly remembered past,"[221] and the poets' accounts which "exaggerate the importance of their themes,"[222] the chroniclers "who are less interested in telling the truth than in catching

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[217] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 117 (I.138).
[218] Thucydides, 117 (I.138).
[219] Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*, sec. 2.A.1.
[220] See, for example, Didodotus' speech: "we who give you our advice ought to be resolved to look rather further into things than you whose attention is occupied only with the surface" Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 219 (III.43).
[221] Thucydides, 47 (I.20).
[222] Thucydides, 47 (I.21).

the attention of their public"[223] and eye-witnesses who "[…] give different accounts of the same events, speaking out of partiality for one side or the other or else from imperfect memories".[224]

Systematic reflection upon a subject will necessitate the use of words and, as much as words can help, words can also distort, and thus we can well conclude from the Thucydides, as from Herodotus, that reflection is a double-edged sword. Do it well, and it will be useful, but do it poorly, and you might well go astray. Far from being the greatest good a society can achieve, it is rather a remedial measure which makes up for a lack of instinctive insight among those who are not naturally as gifted as Themistocles.

iv. The Anti-Political Challenge

This section explored the image of the mirror as associated with vice rather than virtue. Not all images of the mirror in the ancient world were associated with divinity and wisdom. They were also associated with vice, folly, and ignorance as in the fables and the story of Narcissus. Whilst Herodotus and Thucydides did not explicitly use the image of reflection in their writing, they nevertheless used vivid imagery to illustrate arguments which are sceptical of the role of reflection in politics.

The lines of scepticism about reflection found in the fables and in the histories, as mentioned, are mirror images of the arguments made in praise of reflection; that it confuses as least as much as it brings knowledge (both of the world and of the self) and that it deforms as least as much as it improves character. These snapshots demonstrate the long history of both proponents and opponents of reflection. Among proponents, the debate revolves around what reflection ought to entail, and the debate with opponents

[223] Thucydides, 47 (I.21).
[224] Thucydides, 48 (I.22).

poses the challenge that encouraging reflection *in general* is anti-political. In the next chapter, we will experience a fascinating transposition of these categories into a new key entirely. Hobbes consistently recommends the practice of reflection in all three forms, but does so, ultimately, to *discourage* reflection. His is a fascinating and sophisticated attempt to turn the power of reflection against itself.

Chapter 3: Hobbes and the Problem of Political Vision

The previous chapter demonstrated that in the ancient world, the mirror-metaphor appears as an illustration of the mind and its place in politics. I argued that this ancient source of our present talk of 'reflection' (as outlined in Chapter 1) can be broken down into two major parts: epistemic and ethical, and that within the idea of epistemic reflection, two distinct uses of the mirror metaphor are significant: using reflection to see the world more clearly and accurately, and using reflection to see oneself more clearly.

In early modern Europe, the mirror once again fascinated and engaged intellectual minds, along with the burgeoning science of optics. In this chapter, we encounter Hobbes—the self-proclaimed founder of both political science and optics—using optical analogies, including that of the mirror, to illustrate the philosophical anthropology which gave shape to his political ideas. He presents a fascinating case for in-depth study; not only—so I argue—did he make the practice of reflection central to civic virtue, he also combined all three elements described in the foregoing analytical framework in outlining what it entailed and what it should achieve. Furthermore, he turned reflection upon its head as a deliberately anti-political and self-undermining practice. For Hobbes, people ought to reflect in all three ways just enough to recognise that it is not—for the vast majority of people—their business to be reflecting, let alone publicly engaging, on political matters. Such 'reflection against reflection'[1] becomes a useful resource in outlining my own theory of reflection in the conclusion. I aim at a tripartite theory of reflection which is political, rather than anti-political, by design.

[1] A phrase I adapt from Garsten's description of Hobbes's approach to rhetoric ("rhetoric against rhetoric") Garsten, *Saving Persuasion*, chap. 1.

Hobbes's political theory can be understood as, in the broadest terms, answering a question about order and perception: how can peace be secured among people who see the world differently? Hobbes is often thought of as a straightforward institutionalist on this question: a strong state creates the right incentives that suppress rebellion and secure peace. Against this view, authors have demonstrated Hobbes's approach to such practices as rhetoric,[2] education,[3] and civility[4] which also help secure peace but are not narrowly about institutional arrangements. Here, I show that the practice of reflection is fundamental both to laying down a civil science, and to communicating that science to the public.

In the following section, I demonstrate how Hobbes was interested in problems both of physiological and political vision. Next, I demonstrate how he saw these as solvable through proper scientific reasoning—a method which was unavailable until, he claims, he himself applied it both to optics and politics. The scientific method is derived from geometry and involves making accurate, demonstrable deductions from axioms which are either knowable with certainty because directly accessible within the scientist's mind (such as drawing up geometric shapes for analysis) or are hypothesised about the external world which can never be known with certainty, but can nevertheless be investigated through making plausible hypotheses. Such hypotheses must avoid, at all costs, 'absurd' and 'insignificant' postulates about nature which couldn't possibly be true.

Following this, I demonstrate how Hobbes deploys this method in both optics and politics. In contrast to an aspect of Tuck's analysis, I demonstrate how Hobbes sought to found his science of politics on the epistemically *certain* ground of assumptions about human nature. They are certain because they are known directly to the human mind

[2] Garsten, chap. 1.
[3] Teresa M. Bejan, 'Teaching the Leviathan: Thomas Hobbes on Education', *Oxford Review of Education* 36, no. 5 (1 October 2010): 607–26, https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2010.514438.
[4] Teresa M. Bejan, *Mere Civility* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

through introspection. This is the first purpose for which Hobbes asks readers to engage in a certain kind of introspection: to grasp, and therefore know with certainty, the fundamental *axioms* underlying and justifying his conclusions. Hobbes also argues that such reflection makes the law of nature he claims to deduce from these starting points much easier to understand, and therefore the practice of reflection takes on a second purpose: it becomes invaluable in communicating his message such that people act in accordance with it.

In the penultimate section, I show that in *Leviathan*, Hobbes emphasises how his conception of human nature is the 'key' to decipher fundamental principles of good politics. He argues that people must use this key to reflect upon their self-conception. In analysing this aspect, I critique existing accounts by highlighting the strong connection between self-conception, pride and optics in *Leviathan*. Hobbes illustrates pride through optical analogies: since people's immediate interests are closer to them, they believe them, mistakenly, to be more important than they truly are. They mistake the possibility of a civil war as a small problem since it is remote, and they fail to reason through scientific arguments correctly. The remedy for this is to supply the public with a 'prospective glass' through which people can perceive accurately the terror of a civil war and the importance, therefore, of respecting the state. That prospective glass is provided, specifically, by the argument of *Leviathan*. Thus, Hobbes argues that citizens and subjects must look in the mirror to recognise their own lack of political perspective, and thence use his scientific reasoning as a prospective glass which leads them to submit, in all matters, to the perspective of the state.[5] Finally, in contrast to an argument advanced in Skinner's recent

[5] Oakeshott, in his *Introduction to Leviathan* described Hobbes's approach to philosophy as "the world as it is in the mirror of reason" (see Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, 237.) It is strange that he does not make the connection between Hobbes's own illustration of mirrors in the forematter to *de Cive*, but nonetheless underscores the importance of introspection for securing certainty in Hobbes's epistemology (see p.239).

work, I argue in favour of interpreting an aspect of the frontispieces to *Leviathan*, when read alongside Hobbes's optics, as a representation of perspective.

In the final section, I argue that Hobbes's approach to reflection involves a synthesis of epistemic, self-, and ethical reflection which is deliberately anti-political by design. It is tantamount to a kind of manipulative epistemic absolutism akin to Plato's which is designed to close off free thought about politics and generate support for an absolutist political theory by engendering distrust in readers' own sense of judgement and claiming the epistemic superiority of a certain "scientific" perspective. Along similar lines of Garsten's reading of Hobbes as a theorist of 'rhetoric against rhetoric,' I read him as a theorist of 'reflection against reflection;' he wants people to reflect just enough that they recognise they should not be in the business of reflecting on political matters.

1. Hobbes and Political Vision

Whilst Hobbes is (in)famous today as a political philosopher, his interests stretched far further than politics. He wrote extensively on optics and at the end of his "Minute or First Draught of the Optiques," he claimed to deserve

> "[...] the Reputation of having beene the first to lay the ground of two Sciences, this of Opticques, the most curious, and that other of naturall Justice, which I have done in my booke de Cive, the most profitable of all other."[6]

The optical writing, however, has been considered "irrelevant to Hobbes's moral and political philosophy."[7] Tuck has contested this view by emphasising the importance of

[6] Elaine Stroud, 'Thomas Hobbes' A Minute or First Draught of the Optiques: A Critical Edition' (PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1983), 622.
[7] Thomas Hobbes, *Man and Citizen: De Homine and De Cive* (Indianapolis ; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1991), 35 editor's note.

optics to Hobbes in responding to scepticism.[8] Here, I also contest this by demonstrating how Hobbes identifies a commonality between limits of ocular vision and limits of political vision, to which the correct application of science—through education and fashioning scientific instruments—is the common solution. Hobbes then repeatedly uses the imagery of sight and optical instruments to illustrate his political point.

Ocular vision is problematic, Hobbes argues, because the state and position of our eyes determines how we see the world. In the same way that ancient writers viewed human perception as defective, limited, and in need of correction or augmentation using mirrors (such as in Plato's cave, or Augustine's view of the fall), Hobbes too views human vision as naturally limited. One cannot simply infer that the world is exactly as one sees it. The opening chapters of *Leviathan* offer an account of sense and imagination. Hobbes points out that during the day, stars are shining just as they are at night. The only difference is that their light is drowned out by that of the sun such that "[…] the predominant onely is sensible […]".[9] In the first chapter, he points out that he has written extensively on vision and sensation elsewhere.[10]

In *De Homine*, Hobbes discusses optics in more detail. In that text, he describes several further problems of vision. Motion is problematic because it is not always easy to discern whether oneself or the object one is looking at is moving.[11] When sailing past the shore, it can seem that the shore and not the ship is moving. Likewise, says Hobbes, on a much larger scale it is difficult to discern from vision whether the stars, the earth, or both are in motion. In addition, disturbances to the brain or optic nerve can cause the illusion of motion—for instance, as caused by drunkenness.[12] There can also be physiological

[8] Richard Tuck, 'Optics and Sceptics: The Philosophical Foundations of Hobbes's Political Thought.', in *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Edmund Leites (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de L'homme, 1988), 235–63.
[9] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16.
[10] Hobbes, 13.
[11] Thomas Hobbes, *De Homine*, trans. Elaine Stroud, unpublished, 2.6. I am grateful to Elaine Stroud for her translation of the original latin text. Cited with the author's permission.
[12] Hobbes, 2.7.

problems with the eye (often associated with old age) which cause problems in seeing small written letters,[13] dim-sightedness,[14] and short-sightedness.[15]

Problems with visual perception become even more pronounced when different people *interpret* what they see in different ways. For Hobbes, beliefs in satyrs, fawns, nymphs, fairies, ghosts, goblins, and witches are the result of people being unable to distinguish "[…] Dreames, and other strong Fancies, from Vision and Sense[…]."[16] More problems arise in memory: memories of vision are as unclear as far-off objects: "For as at a great distance of place, that which wee look at, appears dimme, and without distinction of the smaller parts […]: so also after great distance of time, our imagination of the Past is weak […]".[17] Likewise, the ability to predict future events, or, *foresight*, is limited, and varies according to the ability and experience different people have in observing events in the past.[18]

These problems of vision are simply a fact of human nature. Different people have different positions in the world, different ocular physiology or "constitutions", different interpretations of what they see, different memories of what they have seen, and different accounts of what can be foreseen in the future. It is hardly surprising, then, that there is disagreement about the nature of the world. Some believe there to be ghosts, fairies, demons, and so on, and others believe this is nonsense.[19] Some believe in geocentricism, and some in heliocentricisim. Such debates could cause famously fierce disagreement.[20]

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[13] Hobbes, 8.1.
[14] Hobbes, 2.4.
[15] Hobbes, 2.4.
[16] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 18. See also Ch. XLV.
[17] Hobbes, 16.
[18] Hobbes, 22.
[19] Hobbes, *Leviathan* See esp. 77, and Ch.XLV.
[20] According to Aubrey, when Hobbes "[…] was at Florence […] he contracted a friendship with the famous Galileo Galilei". John Aubrey, *Brief Lives* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), 366. He would have been well aware that Gallileo's views on astronomy, as developed through using the telescope, would cost him his freedom. Aubrey recalls that the two "[…] pretty well resembled one another […]" since they "[…] were both cheerfull and melancholique-sanguine; and had both a consimilitie of fate, to be hated and persecuted by the ecclesiastiques" Aubrey, 366.

In addition to his interest in ocular vision, Hobbes repeatedly illustrates his political ideas using ocular and optical metaphors, even speaking of "political sight" in *de Cive* when discussing government reconnaissance:

> "Reliable *intelligence agents* are to those who exercise sovereign power as rays of light to the human soul; and it is more correct to say of political sight than of natural sight that perceptible and intelligible appearances of things are carried invisibly through the air to the soul (that is, to those who exercise the sovereign power of the commonwealth). Hence they are as necessary to the safety of a commonwealth as rays of light to the safety of a man".[21]

Just as natural sight is vital, so too is political sight. Like Plato, Hobbes tends to use ocular and optical metaphors in his political theory when describing the importance of reasoning and understanding in politics. He emphasises the importance of good reasoning to offer the "*clearest light*"[22] and that in good reasoning "[…]*we must find our illumination*".[23] Again, emphasising that reason depends in part on clarity of language, Hobbes says that "the light of humane minds is Perspicuous Words".[24] In *de Cive*, when setting out his account of natural laws, he says they are revealed by reason and can be confirmed as divinely ordained by citing a string of scriptural passages linking light, reason, and law:

> "Psal. 18.8 *The law of the Lord is immaculate converting the soul,* v.9 *The Lord's precept is lucid, enlightening the eyes.* […] Psalm. 118.34 *Give me understanding and I will explore your law*, v. 105: *Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths.* […] At [John 1] verse 9 *Christ* is

[21] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 145. Here, Hobbes is alluding to the 'species' theory of vision mentioned later in this chapter.
[22] Hobbes, 5.
[23] Hobbes, 5.
[24] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 36.

> called *the true light that illuminates every man that comes into this world*. All these descriptions are of *right reason*, and it has been shown before that *the natural laws* are its dictates."[25]

In many other places, as we shall see, Hobbes links reason and vision in describing good politics. The problem, however, is that just as ocular vision is bedevilled with problems, so too is most people's sense of political vision. These are multiple, and include descriptions of people suffering from political short-sightedness,[26] lacking perspective,[27] and being blind.[28] As we shall see, pride is a major obstacle to political vision, and this occurs because, as Hobbes puts it in the most famous chapter of *Leviathan*, "[…] men see their own wit at hand, and all other mens at a distance".[29] In the state of nature, this leads, very quickly, to an "[…] equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which neverthelesse they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies".[30] This is the cause of the famous Hobbesian war "[…] as is of every man, against every man".[31]

This is a distinctively human problem. Unlike ants and bees who do not need to *interpret* their sense perceptions using reason, human beings have a tendency to perceive things incorrectly where they fail to reason about their sense perceptions well. Hobbes saw this problem in ocular vision where people failed to interpret the movements of celestial bodies correctly. It is a serious issue in political vision as well, and can even risk undermining an established commonwealth:

> "[…] these creatures, having not (as man) the use of reason, do not see, nor think they see any fault in the administration of their common business: whereas amongst men, there are very

[25] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 59.
[26] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 129.
[27] Hobbes, 87.
[28] Hobbes, 205.
[29] Hobbes, 87.
[30] Hobbes, 87.
[31] Hobbes, 88.

> many, that thinke themselves wiser, and abler to govern the Publique, better than the rest; and strive to reform and innovate, one this way, another that way; and thereby bring it to Distraction and Civil warre".[32]

Since everyone has an inflated opinion of themselves, their political vision is distorted, and they think they should be given more control over the political system, and this simply produces conflict. This problem is quite general:

> "[…] so is it also in debates of what kind soever: And when men that think themselves wiser than all others, clamor and demand right Reason for judge; yet seek no more, but that things should be determined, by no other mens reason but their own […]".[33]

This state of affairs is "intolerable in the society of men".[34] People who have been appointed as councillors to figures in authority are not entirely to be trusted to reason independently since they each have their own private perspective:

> "And though it be true, that many eys see more then one; yet it is not to be understood of many Counsellors; but then only, when the finall Resolution is in one man. Otherwise, because many eyes see the same thing in divers lines, and are apt to look asquint towards their private benefit; they that desire not to misse their marke, though they look about with two eyes, yet they never ayme but with one […]".[35]

Everyone's understanding is different, and in the corner of everyone's eye is a view to self-interest. This state of affairs, says Hobbes, is about as useful to government leaders as

[32] Hobbes, 119.
[33] Hobbes, 33.
[34] Hobbes, 33.
[35] Hobbes, 182.

trying to play tennis whilst being pushed about in a wheelbarrow.[36] Except in special circumstances where some force can unite different people with different perspectives, "no great Popular Common-wealth was ever kept up".[37]

It is not merely pride that causes poor political judgement. Some people are so politically naïve and self-delusional in their seditious schemes that they are needlessly politically blind:

> "Those that deceive upon hope of not being observed, do commonly deceive themselves, (the darknesse in which they believe they lye hidden, being nothing but their own blindnesse;) and are no wiser than Children, that think all hid, by hiding their own eyes".[38]

The point in each of these cases is a basic problem in politics. The world appears differently to different people because of differences in the way they see. Some are blind to important facts, some are short-sighted with regard to the future, some keep an eye on their own self-interest, and a great many, through a false opinion of their own wisdom, think they would make better governors than those presently in power.

This is an epistemic problem: people cannot agree on political matters because they do not agree on questions of the truth. If the world appears differently to different people, both in a literal visual sense, as well as in a political sense, where might we look for a solution? In Chapter XVIII, Hobbes uses the ideas of lenses and distance to express the problem once again, and to indicate a solution:

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[36] Hobbes, 182. This comparison may not be as far-fetched as it would at first seem. As Malcolm suggests in commenting on the mention of a wheelbarrow in Hobbes's correspondence, "[...] perhaps wheelbarrows in the 17th cent. had a sporting potential which they have since lost".
Noel Malcolm, *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 366.
[37] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 182.
[38] Hobbes, 205.

> "For all men are by nature provided of notable multiplying glasses, (that is their Passions and Selfe-love,) through which, every little payment appeareth a great grievance; but are destitute of those prospective glasses, (namely Morall and Civill Science,) to see a farre off the miseries that hang over them, and cannot without such payments be avoided".[39]

People see the world differently because their natural political vision works differently. Everyone's sense of self-worth is inflated, and this makes every contribution to the common pot appear more costly than it really is. Nobody wants to invest in long-term planning to prevent breaches of security because long-term security risks appear less serious than they really are. The lenses affixed to people's eyes make the world look different to different people and so for Hobbes the challenge of politics is to create a stable society out of visually impaired people.

The epitome of this challenge is found in the state of nature. There, there are no definitions of terms which enable people to interpret what they see in the world on a common basis. The state of nature, where "[…] every one is governed by his own reason […]"[40] is a "[…] condition of Warre of every one against every one […]".[41] Given this, there is no agreement on the meanings of words such as 'mine' and 'thine'.[42] We can both look at the same field and think it to be "my field" and if there is no way of arbitrating between our different interpretations of the world, then neither of us can be right. There is no "God's eye perspective" on the matter available to us. If there is no such thing as 'mine' and 'thine' (propriety), then, argues Hobbes, there is no such thing as justice.[43] If we cannot agree using words, then we will take up arms, and thence ensues the war of all

[39] Hobbes, 129.
[40] Hobbes, 91.
[41] Hobbes, 91.
[42] Hobbes, 90.
[43] Hobbes, 101.

against all in which life is, famously, "[…] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short".[44] How might this terrible problem be solved?

Hobbes suggests (in the last passage quoted above) that moral and civil *science* can work as a solution. In essence, science can function as a prospective (magnifying) glass or lens through which people can see the world more accurately. In the next section I explore this idea; just as science and the instruments it enables us to create (such as telescopes, microscopes, spectacles, and so on) can offer a solution to the problems of physiological vision, so too, thinks Hobbes, can political science and the tools it enables us to create be a solution to the problem of political vision.

2. Geometry and Hobbes's Scientific Method

These problems of political vision, for Hobbes, were to be solved through *science*. Hobbes was keen that his work was accepted as a civil "science"[45]—even, reasonably, to the point that he has been regarded as "scientistic".[46] As mentioned, he thought of himself as the first to lay the grounds of two sciences in particular: optics and politics.[47] He saw a dire need for such science owing to the prevalence of misguided reasoning based, often, on superstitious religious notions and Aristotelian scholastic philosophy—as in, for example, his attack on scholastic philosophy in the opening chapter of *Leviathan*.[48] What exactly marked out this "science" from what had gone before for Hobbes?

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[44] Hobbes, 89.
[45] Tom Sorell, *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 2.
[46] Terence Ball, 'Hobbes' Linguistic Turn', *Polity* 17, no. 4 (1985): 760; Sorell, *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, chap. 2, p.47.
[47] Stroud, 'Thomas Hobbes' A Minute or First Draught of the Optiques: A Critical Edition'; Franco Giudice, 'The Most Curious of Sciences Hobbes's Optics', in *The Oxford Handbook of Hobbes*, ed. Al P. Martinich and Kinch Hoekstra (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[48] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 14.

As is widely known among scholars, Hobbes's view of science took geometry to be the "[…] ideal for all demonstrative knowledge […]"[49]—the discipline he supposedly fell "in love" with when he discovered it for the first time at the age of forty upon seeing a copy of Euclid's *Elements of Geometry* lying open in a "gentleman's library".[50] As he put it in *Leviathan*, geometry "[…] is the onely Science that it hath pleased God hitherto to bestow on mankind".[51] He goes out of his way to argue that geometry is applicable to all science, and seeks to demonstrate this most extensively in the context of both optics and politics.

Exactly what Hobbes meant by "science" and the sense in which his politics was "scientific" has been a matter of substantial scholarly debate. Ryan's statement of Hobbes's position in his 1970 *The Philosophy of Social Sciences* was once thought to be representative of the "standard" position: that what makes political science *scientific* in Hobbes's view is its dependence upon natural sciences such as physics for providing an account of human nature, which in turn can provide a foundation for politics—as in the structure of the *Leviathan* chapters and the ordering of the *Elementa* of body, man, and citizen.[52]

Against this view, Sorell argued that the Preface to the Reader of *de Cive* in fact argues for the *independence* of political science from dependence upon the natural sciences.[53] Indeed, in that preface, commenting on why he published *de Cive* first (before the sections on body and man) Hobbes writes "[…] I saw that it did not need the preceeding parts, since it rests upon its own principles known by reason".[54] What is special about Hobbes's philosophy of science must therefore lie elsewhere. Sorell's argument is that it

[49] Douglas Jesseph, 'Hobbes and the Method of Natural Science', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, ed. Tom Sorell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 87.
[50] Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, 150.
[51] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 28.
[52] Tom Sorell, 'The Science in Hobbes's Politics', in *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes*, ed. G. A. J. Rogers and Alan Ryan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).
[53] Sorell, 76–77.
[54] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 13.

follows a certain *method*–that is, the method of *deduction* from first principles. One must begin with clearly elucidated fundamental laws of nature and deduce from them further truths.

Malcolm argues that neither view is quite correct—Hobbes spoke in *Leviathan* of elucidating the *matter* and *form* of a commonwealth—explaining the *matter* depends upon a science of nature in Ryan's sense, and elucidating its *form* depends upon the deductive method in Sorell's sense.[55] As Malcolm shows, and as other scholars have noted, it is this *method* that Hobbes so much admired in geometry. As Jesseph succinctly puts it, geometry is distinguished from other sciences first because its "[…] terms are carefully defined and explicated […]"[56] in the sense that the terms are unambiguous and meticulously worked through from one deduction to the next, *and*, secondly, that "[…] the objects of geometric investigation are fully known to the geometer because their causes are completely understood […]"[57]—essentially because the geometer must have drawn up the terms in the first place. This is done through the imposition of *names* upon objects in sensory experience in clear and precise fashion, which can then be reasoned with in the logical, deductive fashion characteristic of geometry. Jesseph points out that, however, Hobbes's understanding of the metaphysics of geometry was not the same as that of Euclid:

> "Hobbes felt that traditional geometry had been hampered by its reliance upon definitions that were not grounded in the consideration of causes, and part of his project was to rewrite the traditional geometric definitions to include the motions by which geometric objects are produced".[58]

[55] Noel Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 2002), 151–52.
[56] Jesseph, 'Hobbes and the Method of Natural Science', 87.
[57] Jesseph, 87.
[58] Jesseph, 87–88.

Malcolm points out that this relationship between geometry and motion was in fact a changing aspect of Hobbes's thought, and, hence, his understanding of science. Before the 1640s, Hobbes had argued that the title "science" could only be enjoyed by "[…] those disciplines, such as geometry, which yielded universal truths. The knowledge of physical causes, on the other hand, belonged to the realm of experience, conjecture and hypothesis".[59] However, during the 1640s, Hobbes's views on geometry began to shift, and he "began to include the knowledge of causes in his definitions of science".[60] This was specifically to do with his new understanding of geometry in which both the relationship between motion and the relationships between clearly-defined terms could be understood, in a sense, as the same kind of 'cause'. As Malcolm puts it, the idea was that "[…] to know the *meaning* of the word 'circle' was to know what sort of motion of a point was the *cause* of a circle".[61] These, however, as Malcolm points out, are two entirely different senses of the term "cause" between which Hobbes was sliding: "The motion of a pair of compasses certainly causes a mark on a page; but what 'causes' that mark to be a circle is the equidistance of the resulting line from the central point".[62] Thus, the idea of uniting both views was "[…] in the end a snare and a delusion and this accounts for much of the floundering in Hobbes's later writings […]".[63]

Regardless of whether Hobbes's unified theory of science worked or not, it certainly meant that after this turn in his thinking, he could include much more than merely geometry as a science. Physics, and other sciences, could be genuine sciences because although the propositions comprising physics were uncertain (since they were not the inventions of the scientist, but conjectures about what the world of matter in motion might be like), they could at least be reasoned about using the same method of geometric

[59] Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, 154.
[60] Malcolm, 154.
[61] Malcolm, 155.
[62] Malcolm, 155.
[63] Malcolm, 155.

analysis.[64] Physics, as compared to geometry, was thus a science, but nonetheless a *hypothetical* one where one can be certain of the scientific truth of conclusions *provided that* one's starting points about the nature of matter in the world are accurate.[65] In this sense, geometry enjoys a certain privilege as a role model among the sciences.

3. Optics as a Geometric Science

Hobbes saw this geometric scientific method as fundamental to *both* of the two branches of science which he claimed he founded: optics and politics. There are fascinating parallels about his thought between both sciences. Richard Tuck has outlined one such parallel: the effect Hobbes's work in optics had on his view of epistemology, and the implications of that on his political thought. I agree with a substantial part of Tuck's argument, but depart from it in two ways: firstly, I suggest that it construes Hobbes as a little too pessimistic about our abilities to know the exact nature of the external world (albeit that he was doubtless a pessimist in this regard) and, secondly, that it does not take sufficient account of the role of reflection in Hobbes's epistemology—a practice that he describes using the optical language of mirrors and perspective. I will begin with the first of these critiques in relation to Hobbes's optics in this section, and then draw out its implications for politics in the following section.

Tuck has argued that the thinkers gathering through correspondence around the Minime friar Marin Mersenne were concerned to respond to the kind of sceptical epistemological doubts raised by Grotius and that became famous in Descartes' writing—doubts about whether the existence of an external, material world can be known beyond sense perception.[66] This was a pressing issue since modern science seemed to be promising

[64] Malcolm, 155.
[65] Malcolm, 155; See also Sorell, *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, Jesseph chapter, p.101.
[66] Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chap. 7.

exciting new discoveries, but this could do little good if it would never be possible to tell whether one had correctly understood the reality beyond one's own sense impressions—if even there is one! As Tuck explains, this interest grew out of an interest in optics—a passion Hobbes shared, and debated about, with Descartes.

Descartes famously used the *cogito* argument along with the idea that God, being necessarily good, would not trick people into having sense perceptions which were systematically and radically different from material reality as it is.[67] Hobbes, on the other hand, rejected these arguments and drew on the idea of *motion* to respond to the sceptics. In Tuck's words,

> "Hobbes insisted that our perceptions *are* material objects. They must be, since they exhibit *change*, and we can only conceive of change as motion, i.e. alteration in spatial location; and spatial location is by definition what material objects and only material objects possess. But they are, of course, not material objects like those in the world outside us; what the world consists of, we cannot properly know. But we can know in principle that it works through the motion of material objects: this is the second thing one could say with certainty. […]
>
> The reason for Hobbes's confidence in the 'real' existence of motions is suggested in the draft of *De homine*: 'it is not conceivable that there could be vision without action nor action without motion' ".[68]

Hobbes was thus arguing that one could know with certainty that there is matter and that it moves; this must be true since these propositions being false would be inconceivable.[69] Although this gives us confidence about "[…] the *form* which our science should take […]" this kind of response to scepticism leaves a "[…] radical uncertainty […]

[67] Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572-1651*.
[68] Tuck, 299–300.
[69] Tuck, 300.

about the truth of any *particular* claim about the world".[70] It isn't possible to know whether one's *interpretation* of the motions that cause one's sense perceptions is correct *for certain*. This is the sense in which optics is hypothetical—one can know for certain through geometric demonstration that one's optical calculations are internally consistent and correct, but one cannot know for certain whether they accurately reflect the world as it is.[71] This is compounded by the difficulties arising from human language: unlike Aristotelian properties, for Hobbes, the words we use to describe the world are really descriptions of our own sense perceptions, not of the world as it actually is, and, as such, may well be wrong and, worse, may be inconsistent between different individuals' perceptions.[72] Such "equivocation of names"[73] could even take place within one person's usage of a term. We thus ought to be extremely careful to maintain "ordered thought"[74] when reasoning scientifically.

Tuck's argument is basically correct. However, it is worth clarifying and emphasising one aspect of it: Hobbes was keen to maintain "ordered thought" and considered it to be fundamental to good science—one can see this, for example, in the extreme care he takes over fixing definitions in *Leviathan*. This is significant because one can eliminate in this way a significant amount of *absurd* reasoning as even being possible interpretations of the external world. Even if it does not eliminate uncertainty altogether, it can nevertheless narrow the range of possible views by eliminating, with certainty, those views that must necessarily be false. This, I take it, is what Malcolm is emphasising when he writes that

[70] Tuck, 304.
[71] Franco Giudice, 'Optics in Hobbes's Natural Philosophy', *Hobbes Studies* 29, no. 1 (2016): 86–102. Tuck describes scientific explanations as "essentially hypothetical" Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572-1651*, 300.
[72] Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572-1651*, 301.
[73] Tuck, 301.
[74] Tuck, 301.

> "He was a nominalist, not an arbitrarist. Hobbes believed that all blue objects, for example, are really similar: our use of the same word to describe them is not a mere freak of human will or fancy. Indeed, his mechanistic theory of sense-perception ensures this, since the nature of the conception in our brains which we connote with the word 'blue' is *caused* directly by the motion of the object which we see. We experience objects as similar because they really do cause similar motions".[75]

To claim that all blue objects are *dis*similar with respect to colour would be an absurd view and, therefore, could be eliminated with certainty. Therefore, to conduct science, one can allay the degree of uncertainty one faces by being quite careful about the words one uses to describe and reason about the world.

We find Hobbes underscoring the importance of avoiding such pitfalls in reasoning in *Leviathan*, for example: firstly, by reasoning badly in the sense of failing to follow through accurately the terms of argument from one stage to the next—even "professors" are subject to this possibility.[76] A case in point is failing to add up or subtract things properly. Secondly, it is possible to fashion terms (words) which have no meaning at all, and are thus 'absurd', 'insignificant', and 'non-sense' such as a 'round quadrangle' or 'immateriall substance'.[77] Thus, mankind's special privilege of reason is a mixed blessing since it is "[…] allayed by another; and that is, by the priviledge of Absurdity; to which no living creature is subject, but man onely".[78]

The proper application of geometric science to optics should prevent these pitfalls because it will preclude insignificant (absurd, meaningless) terms and incorrect deductive reasoning. However, as Hobbes explains in the opening lines of the book, philosophers, being so strongly influenced by Aristotle, have constantly failed to get optics right.[79] Their

[75] Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, 152.
[76] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 32.
[77] Hobbes, 34.
[78] Hobbes, 34.
[79] Hobbes, 14.

poor understanding of vision was a direct result of conceptual absurdity or "insignificant speech".[80] *Insignificant* is the key word here—their science followed a "species" theory of sight: "[…] For the cause of *Vision*, that thing seen, sendeth forth on every side a *visible species* (in English) a *visible shew*, *apparation*, or *aspect*, or a *being seen*; the receiving whereof into the Eye is *Seeing*".[81] However, there is no such thing, for Hobbes, as a visible "species"—the term could not possibly refer to anything and is thus insignificant and absurd.[82] In his view of vision, as Giudice clearly puts it, "As with all other sensible qualities, visual images are not real things existing in the external world; they are only motions in us arising from motions produced by the objects".[83] A proper science would follow the geometric method of only beginning with significant (non-absurd) starting points or *axioms*, and would thus preclude such Aristotelian views since they begin from a manifestly impossible starting point. Hobbes illustrates the failure of beginning to reason from such solid definitional points with an hilarious and rather cutting ocular metaphor:

> "For the errours of Definitions multiply themselves, according as the reckoning proceeds; and lead men into absurdities, which at last they see, but cannot avoyd, without reckoning anew from the beginning, in which lyes the foundation of their errours. From whence it happens, that they which trust to books, do as they that cast up many little summs into a greater, without considering whether those little summes were rightly cast up or not; and at last finding the errour visible, and not mistrusting their first grounds, know not which way to cleere themselves; but spend time in fluttering over their books; as birds that entering by the chimney, and finding themselves inclosed in a chamber, flutter at the false light of a glasse window, for want of wit to consider which way

[80] Hobbes, 14.
[81] Hobbes, 14.
[82] Hobbes may well have been very uncharitable to scholastic proponents of such theories of optics–see Jan Prins, 'Hobbes on Light and Vision' §XI, in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 6, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521410193.007.
[83] Giudice, 'The Most Curious of Sciences Hobbes's Optics'. §3.

> they came in. So that in the right Definition of Names, lyes the first use of Speech; which is the Acquisition of Science[…]".[84]

What is needed for the acquisition of science, then, is the *correct* application of this geometric scientific method. Otherwise, like the flustered bird, we will have a very poor and flustered appreciation of our environment if we fail to narrow the scope of possible views of the world by eliminating explanations we can know, with certainty, to be false.

Hobbes took his optical research to have followed this method and thus to have explained as best as possible the nature of optical phenomena such as reflection, refraction, and perspective in his optical works such as the *First Draught* and *De Homine*. In these works, he uses diagrams that we would still, today, call and recognise as geometrical. This is why optics appears to be such a fascinating and exemplary science for Hobbes: it makes obvious use of the best of geometry—the only God-given science—by starting with non-absurd axioms and then reasoning through meticulously to the correct conclusions from them. So long as one got the axioms or starting-points right, one could be sure that the conclusions were correct. In this way, thought Hobbes, the uncertainty of scientific investigation could be sharply limited, and numerous established views (such as Aristotelian optics) could be debunked and struck off.

The benefits of this science that Hobbes outlines in his optical texts are manifold. Broadly, they can be gathered into two kinds. Firstly, by getting people to reason through their own visual perceptions using precise, geometric argumentation, various misapprehensions about the world could be eliminated. For example, optics can dispel superstitions arising from poor interpretations of sense perception. In Hobbes's chapter on demonology in *Leviathan*, he aims to dispel some beliefs in demons by undermining their origins using his account of optics.[85] Older philosophies, relying on the species

[84] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 28.
[85] Hobbes, chap. 45.

theory, and without an adequate theory of matter in motion, couldn't account for how, for example, a flicker of light in one's field of vision could be produced in fact by disturbances within the brain. As such, they were accounted as evidence of 'incorporeal bodies' which grounded the belief in demons.

Another example of correctly interpreting visual perception through optics involves understanding motion relative to oneself. A simple example is that in *De Homine* where Hobbes points out that in order to know that you are sailing past the shore, and that the shore is not sailing past you, thought is needed *on top of* perception to gain a good interpretation of your vision.[86] This is a smaller-scale example of much more sophisticated problems: advanced scientific reasoning is required to understand the movements and speed of stars and other celestial bodies.[87] In order to understand the motion of celestial bodies, a good science of astronomy is needed, which can only be provided through the correct application of geometrical reasoning to visual perception.

There is also a second sense in which optics helps—a way which requires far less reasoning on the part of the beneficiaries of science. It enables the fashioning of *instruments* which can improve ocular perception. This is a very practical payoff from reflecting in the right way. As is clear from his optical works, Hobbes took a considerable interest in how understandings of reflection and refraction could contribute to the fashioning of instruments to enable clear vision. In *De Homine,* he lays out how telescopes might be fashioned using carefully-designed lenses and how perspective paintings can be drawn up using precisely-measured pyramid structures to calculate the correct proportions of objects represented on a canvas. Hobbes points out that ancient philosophers had no knowledge of how to use lenses, and laments that the old man Plautus, who complained of being unable to see text, could have been able to read if only

[86] Hobbes, *De Homine*, 2.6.
[87] Hobbes, 2.6.

a proper knowledge of lenses were available to enable the development of reading glasses.[88]

4. Politics as a Geometric Science

Just as science promised to provide correctives for faults of ocular vision, Hobbes saw science as the key to correcting poor political vision. Indeed, his claim to be the inventor of political science was grounded on his claim to be the first to apply the geometric method to politics, as he puts it the dedicatory epistle of *De Cive*,

> "[…] whatever in short distinguishes the modern world from the barbarity of the past is almost wholly the gift of Geometry; for what we owe to Physics, Physics owes to Geometry. If the moral philosophers had done their job with equal success, I do not know what greater contribution human industry could have made to human happiness".[89]

What exactly did Hobbes mean by this? How exactly does geometrical science, which seems much more readily applied to optics, assist in the cultivation of political science?

As we have seen, Hobbes thought the virtue of geometry to consist not so much in the particularity of its contents (diagrams and calculations of geometrical shapes, etc) but about its form—the careful demonstration of conclusions which could be known with certainty to follow from axioms, and, furthermore, carefully choosing good axioms to begin with which avoid absurd and insignificant starting points. It was these features which Hobbes hoped to apply to politics just as he had to optics.

Following directly from the analysis mentioned in the previous section, Tuck demonstrates political implications of Hobbes's optical views. I will set out Tuck's

[88] Hobbes, 8.1.
[89] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 5.

argument first, before showing where I depart from it. According to Tuck, (as mentioned) Hobbes could remain certain of the *existence* of an external world because sense perception exhibits change, which implies motion, which implies the existence of matter.[90] Nevertheless, we must *interpret* our sense perceptions and unfortunately we can never be certain that our interpretations accurately judge the world as it is. This, Tuck explains, has direct implications for moral thought. Thus, "[i]n many ways […] Hobbes and the sceptic linked hands: a radical uncertainty remained about the truth of any *particular* claim about the world. Nowhere did this uncertainty have a greater impact, he went on to argue, than in ethical life".[91] This is because, just as language is subject to indeterminacy in natural science, so too with moral terminology; what one person interprets as "good" and "evil" is not the same as what another person calls "good" and "evil"—just as theories of optical phenomena must be regarded as hypothetical. This results in a major epistemic problem of judgement:

> "[e]ach person makes his own assessment of the character of the external world, and no one can be said non-contentiously to be mistaken in what they think about it. It was this radical uncertainty which led to social instability, for each man might judge anything at all to be necessary for his own preservation and act accordingly; in this sense, Hobbes argued, 'every man by nature hath a right to all things'[…]".[92]

Tuck points out that this 'right of nature' leads sadly but inevitably to the famous Hobbesian war of all against all unless a collective defence against it can be constructed. Since there is widespread natural disagreement on *how* to defend everyone from such violence,

[90] Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572-1651*, 299–300.
[91] Tuck, 304.
[92] Tuck, 306.

> "[…] there must be an artificial agreement: men must co-ordinate their judgements so that whatever their differences in their views of the world, they will agree on what measures are necessary or appropriate for the defence of each of them. Independent judgement must destroy itself, just as relativism had to destroy itself".[93]

Thus, people must obey the law of the land to ensure they all converge on *one* interpretation of such ambiguous terms as "good" and "evil". Tuck points out that this seems, in a sense, paradoxical: "How can we at the same time have a right to do anything we think fit, and be constrained by a set of rational laws to do a particular set of actions?"[94] The answer is not, as critics such as Robert Filmer had argued, that Hobbes was straightforwardly confused, but rather that Hobbes argued that the "[…] human intellect should limit or bind itself […]".[95] Tuck points out that in the vernacular of contemporary philosophy, this would be described as 'higher-order desires' binding those of a lower order. Thus, people should be convinced that the best possible response to the state of nature is to get out of it—and remain out of it—by abdicating one's right to be an independent judge in "[…] all matters which are *debatable*".[96] Those are simply the terms of the social contract which protect order and peace.

Whilst I am sympathetic to the thrust of this interpretation (Hobbes *did* see political conflict as one fundamentally of judgement arising out of epistemic and linguistic differences), I depart from it at a couple of points. Firstly, I do not think that Tuck's interpretation that "Each person makes his own assessment of the character of the external world, and no one can be said non-contentiously to be mistaken in what they think about it"[97] is right. Whilst this is true in a great many cases, there are types of views which can be said *for certain* to be mistaken in Hobbes's view. Namely, as discussed above,

[93] Tuck, 307.
[94] Tuck, 307.
[95] Tuck, 307.
[96] Tuck, 309.
[97] Tuck, 306.

those that are *absurd* or *insignificant*. It is not that such views are a possible but, in fact, in Hobbes's view, wrong interpretation of sense perception. Rather, they are literally insignificant and therefore *couldn't* be right. As discussed, optics works this way: optics is somewhat hypothetical, but not entirely hypothetical. Whilst the starting points or axioms of optics are hypothetical, some starting points are absurd and thus not even possible descriptions of the external world of matter as it is—such as the 'species' view of optics. Furthermore, views arrived at by improper reasoning from the axioms to conclusions can also undermine an argument for certain—leaving the thinker fluttering hopelessly like the flustered bird Hobbes depicts.

Some optical problems of vision could be improved by dispelling beliefs which began from starting points which Hobbes was certain were wrong because they were absurd—namely, problems of interpreting one's sense perceptions correctly. Thus, whereas Tuck has it that Hobbes thought "no one can be said non-contentiously to be mistaken" when interpreting the external world, I argue that Hobbes, in fact, thought there to be a *range* of possible views among which nobody could be said non-contentiously to be mistaken. However, outside of that range, in the realm of false calculation and linguistic absurdity, people could be said to be wrong.

This was significant in both optics and politics because a large number of people believed views which did indeed fall squarely outside the range of non-absurd doctrines, including Aristotelian and scholastic theories of vision which Hobbes goes to the trouble of dubbing "insignificant speech" in the very first chapter of *Leviathan*.[98] It is on this basis of implausible axioms that Hobbes, at the outset of *De Cive*, seeks to persuade the reader that the Aristotelian view of politics, too, is false:

[98] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 14.

> "The majority of previous writers on public Affairs either assume or seek to prove or simply assert that Man is an animal [citing Aristotle's *Politics* 1.2] born fit for society […]. On this foundation they erect a structure of civil doctrine, as if no more were necessary for the preservation of peace and the governance of the whole human race than for men to give their consent to certain agreements and conditions which, without further thought, these writers call laws. This Axiom, though very widely accepted, is nevertheless false; the error proceeds from a superficial view of human nature".[99]

With this, Hobbes thought himself able to dispose of such views of politics as falling well outside the range of doctrines which begin from axioms which could even be candidates for a plausible interpretation of reality—just as the Aristotelian view of vision had.

Secondly, in Tuck's analysis it is not completely clear what he takes Hobbes's understanding of the epistemic status of his own argument to be. On what basis does Hobbes think he can convince people to accept that argument? Is it on the basis of contingent judgements about the world which are *in fact* universally shared, or on the basis of a self-evidently demonstrable axiom? In Tuck's view, that argument depended on finding a widely-accepted starting point, namely that

> "[…] whatever they might disagree about, all men will acknowledge that each man possesses a right to defend himself against wanton attack. They will also acknowledge that no one is justified in perpetrating such a wanton attack on another man, that is, an attack which cannot be explained as functional in some way to his own defence".[100]

Whilst this is right, it admits of two possible interpretations. To see why, we can ask *on what basis* will all men acknowledge these rights? This must be *either* (a) because they are based on judgements of empirical facts about the external world which are by no

[99] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 22.
[100] Tuck, *Philosophy and Government 1572-1651*, 304.

means certain but which all men, it so happens, in fact share, *or*, (b) because they are based on truth which is demonstrable from axioms which are knowable with certainty. I am not sure which interpretation Tuck would lean towards, but it appears to be towards (a). Tuck quotes Hobbes saying the following: "And that which is not against reason, men call RIGHT, or *jus*, or blameless liberty of using our own natural power and ability. It is therefore a *right of nature*: that every man may preserve his own life[…]".[101] Tuck says, "The remark, 'men call RIGHT' is to be taken seriously: Hobbes was claiming that all men will (whatever else they believe) concede to one another the right of self-defence."[102] Tuck seems to be emphasising the idea that, for Hobbes, this is one contingent judgement about the external world which, it turns out, commands universal agreement, and thus would act as firm ground upon which to build Hobbes's arguments. However, this wouldn't, for Hobbes, be *certain* ground upon which to construct his arguments since it would be, inevitably, merely a judgement about the world, which *could* be wrong.

By contrast, it seems to me that Hobbes claimed much stronger epistemic status for the argument that people ought to renounce their right to independent judgement and obey an artificial sovereign. It is clear from the dedicatory epistle of *De Cive* that Hobbes viewed his arguments establishing the right and law of nature as axiomatic and completely certain. After complaining that philosophers had signally failed in writing about morals because they failed to follow the geometric method, he writes that through his train of thought about the origins of social and political order, he

> "[…] obtained two absolutely certain postulates of human nature, one, the postulate of human greed by which each man insists upon his own private use of common property; the other, the postulate of natural reason, by which each man strives to avoid violent death as the supreme evil in nature. From these starting points I believe I have demonstrated by the most evident

[101] Tuck, 305.
[102] Tuck, 305.

> inference in this little work the necessity of agreements and of keeping faith, and thence the Elements of moral virtue and civil duties".[103]

This passage, alluding to Euclid, shows that Hobbes took the epistemic status of the arguments showing the derivation of his laws of nature to be "absolutely certain"—just as with geometry. Thus, even if perception and language were too ambiguous to produce a thoroughgoing ethics upon which agreement could be achieved, an argument based on the solid ground of geometric derivations could be used to compel a rational reader to accept Hobbes's argument. Thereby, they would be compelled to renounce their right to independent judgement and accept the judgements of the sovereign, thereby achieving the artificial agreement on moral, judicial, and all other matters.

This seems puzzling. How can Hobbes's "postulates" about human nature be both "absolutely certain" *and*—manifestly—about the external world in which human beings live, in which we can have hypothetical knowledge at best? Why wouldn't they remain just as hypothetical as postulates in the field of optics? Surely, claims about anthropology are of an utterly different, empirical kind from geometrical axioms which are known through grasping their meaning alone, and not through observation of the external world.

The simple answer to that question is that they are *not* in fact 'external'—they are known by *introspection* and thus are not part of the knowledge of the external world. As Sorell puts it, "[…] *knowledge* of the truths of civil philosophy […] can indeed be acquired on the basis of a certain self-knowledge, or acquaintance, with human passions in oneself".[104] As we shall now see, such knowledge which one can find through examining one's own mind becomes essential for Hobbes in establishing his anthropological claims with absolute certainty, and, upon which, he can build his moral and civil science. In

[103] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 6.
[104] Sorell, *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes*, 56.

addition, this practice of self-reflection also becomes vital to communicating Hobbes's political ideas.

5. Reflection in *de Cive*

From the stress Hobbes places on science and precision in outlining his theory, the modern reader might well be forgiven for thinking that he intended his writing to express a political theory for other political theorists and scientists to read. In fact, Hobbes was writing for a broader audience and expected his works to be read, reflected upon, and to have a political impact. As he says it in the *Preface* to *de Cive*, he hurried to publish the political material of the *Elementa* first not "[…] to win praise […] but for your sake, Readers"[105] due to the unfolding political circumstances:

> "My hope is that when you have got to know the doctrine I present and looked well into it, you will patiently put up with some inconveniences in your private affairs (since human affairs can never be without some inconvenience) rather than disturb the state of the country. My hope is that you will measure the justice of what you are thinking of doing by the laws of the commonwealth, not by the talk or counsel of private citizens, and no longer allow ambitious men to get power for themselves by shedding your blood".[106]

Hobbes's injunction to the readers to "look well into" his doctrines is more than a passing comment. He wishes people to consider very carefully what he has to say, and repeatedly uses ocular metaphors to describe the process of gaining understanding, and being politically transformed, through reading his civil science. By tracing his use of these analogies, we can shed further light on the relationship between his optics and his politics.

[105] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 13.
[106] Hobbes, 13–14.

As mentioned in the first section, Hobbes repeatedly uses ocular and optical illustrations of his ideas, including citing the string of scriptural passages which link light, vision, reason, and law.[107] The key to gaining such right reason is, following his geometric method, gaining the right *starting points*, as Hobbes puts it in the dedicatory epistle:

> "*For the starting point of a science* [scientia] *cannot be set at any point we choose as in a circle. In the very shadows of doubt a thread of reason (so to speak) begins, by whose guidance we shall escape to the clearest light; that is where the starting point for teaching is; that is where we must find our illumination as we direct our course to clear away doubts*".[108]

This theme is continued in *Leviathan* with the aforementioned illustration of one who tries to reason without proper starting points as like a trapped bird fluttering wildly.[109]

However, Hobbes is alert to a tension in his work. On the one hand, he argues for the immense complexity of science, and the rarity of people who understand it, claiming that he himself was the first to follow a proper method in political science. He writes in the dedicatory epistle of *de Cive* that

> "[…] I have long been of the opinion that there was never an exceptional notion that found favour with the people nor a wisdom above the common level that could be appreciated by the average man; for either they do not understand it, or in understanding it, they bring it down to their own level."[110]

On the other hand, Hobbes is deeply concerned that people should understand what he has to say, accept it, and follow his doctrines politically by not undermining rulers. Several

[107] Hobbes, 59.
[108] Hobbes, 5.
[109] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 28.
[110] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 4.

scholars have noted this tension, and ways in which Hobbes seems at times to try and resolve it. Skinner emphasises how in *de Cive* (but not *Leviathan*) Hobbes thought people could follow reason if rhetorical floridity was prevented from obscuring the truth.[111] Bejan emphasises how Hobbes sought to teach his doctrines in two ways: indoctrination through preaching for those who could not grasp complex reasoning, and a more intellectual version for those who could grasp the full scientific picture Hobbes was offering.[112] Here, I wish to examine a different way in which Hobbes sought to resolve the tension: by offering a reflective exercise for all readers as a short-cut to his proofs and conclusions. He describes this using the analogy of a mirror.

In the preface to the readers of *de Cive*, Hobbes uses the language of "reflection" to describe the kind of careful, scientific thinking his readers ought to engage in. He wants them to do this with great care to enjoy the light of reason:

> "For if an error creeps into speculation on subjects which we take up as intellectual exercises, no harm is done, all that's lost is time. But in subjects which each man should reflect on for the conduct of life, error and even ignorance must necessarily give rise to offences, quarrels and killing. It is because the damage is so great that a properly expounded doctrine of duties is so Useful."[113]

In the original Latin of this passage, Hobbes did not use the verb "reflectere" (literally 'to bend back' or to 'reflect upon') but rather "meditari"[114] and thus the original version of that word does not have quite the connotation of mirrors that the translation might

[111] Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[112] Bejan, 'Teaching the Leviathan'.
[113] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 8.
[114] Ursula Renz, 'Self-Knowledge and Knowledge of Mankind in Hobbes' Leviathan', *European Journal of Philosophy* 26, no. 1 (2018): 4; Thomas Hobbes, *De cive: the Latin version entitled in the first edition Elementorum philosophiae sectio tertia de cive and in later editions Elementa philosophica de cive*, ed. Howard Warrender (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 78, Preface [4].

suggest. However, Hobbes does use the word "speculamur"[115] which is cognate with the latin "speculum" meaning, among other things, "mirror".

This is interesting because, in the opening lines of the dedicatory epistle, Hobbes describes the process of reasoning that leads to grounding the right of nature as like looking in a mirror:

> "Though men have a natural tendency to use rapacity as a term of abuse against each other, seeing their own actions reflected in others as in a mirror where left becomes right and right becomes left, natural right does not accept that anything that arises from the need for self-preservation is a vice."[116]

The idea, I take it, is that in the state of nature, one recognises that whilst others' violent actions appear as wanton rapacity, once one steps into their shoes, one can recognise the plausibility and reasonableness of their needing to defend themselves given the lack of reliable protection from elsewhere. As I shall now demonstrate, later in *de Cive,* Hobbes discusses the importance of standing in another's shoes and seeing one's own actions from their perspective to apprehend the law of nature. From this, we can see how Hobbes intended to encourage a kind of self-reflective exercise on the part of the reader. This has two advantages: the first, as mentioned above, is that it can act as confirmation for the certainty of the axioms from which Hobbes believed the laws of nature could be derived. That is, they are identified directly through introspection and thus known with certainty—thus, reflection plays a strongly epistemic role. Secondly, this kind of reflective exercise is substantially easier to follow than going through the whole process of Hobbes's scientific reasoning. In this way, he hopes to convince a wide public—even the "ignorant

[115] Hobbes, *De cive: the Latin version entitled in the first edition Elementorum philosophiae sectio tertia de cive and in later editions Elementa philosophica de cive*, 78 Preface [4].
[116] Hobbes, 4.

and uneducated" of his views. Immediately after stating what he takes to be the laws of nature, he writes the following:

> "Someone will perhaps say, on seeing this, that the deduction of these laws is so difficult that they cannot be expected to become widely known, and hence are not obligatory. For laws do not oblige unless they are known, are not in fact laws. I give him this reply. It is true that *hope, fear, ambition, greed, vainglory* and the other emotions do impede one's ability to grasp the laws of nature, while they prevail. But no one is without his calmer moments, and at those times, nothing is easier to grasp, even for the ignorant and uneducated. The only rule he needs is that when he is in doubt whether what he proposes to do to someone is in accordance with *natural right* or not, he should think himself into the other person's place. Immediately the passions which were prompting him to act will now discourage him from action, as if transferred to the other pan of the scales. This rule is not only easy; it has long been famous in the words: *Do not do to another what you would not have done to you*".[117]

This passage clearly shows that Hobbes thought everyone could follow the essence of his argument through the kind of self-reflective exercise he outlined in the dedicatory epistle using the analogy of a mirror, where viewing oneself from another's perspective causes a shift in perceptions in oneself. Reflecting upon one's own passions from the other person's viewpoint is a transformative experience which, in simple terms, enables people to see Hobbes's fundamental point: it can be *proven* that one must renounce one's right to independent judgement precisely because one's own perspective is *not provably* better than anyone else's.

Furthermore, the passage shows how Hobbes was alert to the importance of ensuring that people did not let their passions of 'hope, fear, ambition, greed, [and] vainglory' get in the way of their reflection. Hence, the importance of reasoning in a 'calmer moment'. Thus, in *de Cive*, Hobbes is advocating that the light of reason and

[117] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 53.

natural law can be accessed through careful geometric science—a process which itself can be abbreviated by looking in the mirror of self-reflection. That mirror leads people to recognise the limitations of their own views, the *possible* validity of others' views, and the dangers that arise where there are unprovable disputes. What *is* provable, in Hobbes's view, is that to resolve the situation, an artificial agreement must be made and supported absolutely in the form of a powerful state. It is provable *precisely because* the axioms which lead to its proof are found entirely within oneself and confirmed as true in this "quiet moment" of self-reflection.

6. Reflection in *Leviathan*

In *Leviathan*, too, Hobbes is concerned that the views he expresses should be communicated publicly through the dissemination of the text itself, as he puts it in the *Review, and Conclusion*, "[…] I think it may be profitably printed, and more profitably taught in the Universities[…]".[118] On that final page, the ocular language is apparent once again, with Hobbes stating his purposes in publishing the text, to "set before mens eyes the mutuall Relation between Protection and Obedience". In *Leviathan*, how did he hope to "set before mens eyes" his views?

I argue that, once again, he wanted to encourage readers to engage in a certain kind of self-reflection and did this by extending the ocular and optical illustrations developed in *de Cive*. Evidence for this is immediately apparent in the *Introduction* where Hobbes instructs the reader to engage in self-reflection through a curiously unconventional translation of the famous Delphic maxim: "*Read thy self*".[119] This passage has received surprisingly little attention from scholars but has recently been examined

[118] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 491.
[119] Hobbes, 10.

by Ursula Renz.[120] She points out that it has traditionally been read merely as Hobbes explaining a foundation for his scientific views in line "[…] with the remark in §7 of the chapter on method of *De Corpore*, where Hobbes claims that we know the human mind […] 'by any man's experience that will but examine his own mind' ".[121] Renz argues that, in fact, these remarks show that Hobbes is doing something new and distinctively different in *Leviathan*, namely, to teach Hobbes's views to an audience interested in politics rather than to improve upon and explain his science to an audience interested in science.[122] Renz considers this latter goal to be the aim of the texts constituting the *Elementa* by contrast to those of *Leviathan*. In *Leviathan*, she contends, Hobbes stresses self-reflection at the outset because he wants to teach his views rather than merely to explain them.

I agree with Renz that these remarks at the beginning merit further investigation and that they have interesting implications for how we read *Leviathan*. Furthermore, I agree that Hobbes was asking his readers to engage in candid self-reflection which would re-configure their self-conception, such that they would "[…] understand both how man is the matter of the commonwealth and how he can be the maker of the state".[123] However, I do not agree that this marks out a major difference from the *Elementa*. Renz argues that "[In *Leviathan*], by contrast, Hobbes dispenses with farther-reaching causal analysis; as he says in the beginning of the first chapter, '[t]o know the natural cause of Sense is not very necessary to the business in hand' ".[124] On my reading, this cannot be taken as evidence that Hobbes meant to omit his scientific method, but rather that he wanted to put it briefly since the remainder of the paragraph reads: "[…] and I have else-where written of the same at large. Nevertheless, to fill each part of my present method, I will

[120] Renz, 'Self-Knowledge and Knowledge of Mankind in Hobbes' Leviathan'.
[121] Renz, 4; Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic: Part I, Human Nature, Part II, De Corpore Politico ; with Three Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 200.
[122] Renz, 'Self-Knowledge and Knowledge of Mankind in Hobbes' Leviathan'.
[123] Renz, 8.
[124] Renz, 'Self-Knowledge and Knowledge of Mankind in Hobbes' Leviathan'.

briefly deliver the same in this place".[125] Clearly, he *was* hoping to fulfil his 'present method' albeit in an abridged way. In addition, the fact that Hobbes downplays the importance of basic questions of perception and physics in developing the argument in *Leviathan* is by no means a departure from the *Elementa* since, as mentioned, he argued in introducing *de Cive* that "[…] it did not need the preceding parts, since it rests upon its own principles known by reason".[126]

In addition to this problem, one cannot look to the injunction to "read thyself" as an entirely new element of Hobbes's work appearing for the first time in *Leviathan* because, as I have argued in the previous section, Hobbes was concerned to provide his readers with a form of self-reflection which could enable them to grasp the laws of nature more easily than following a train of scientific thought from axiom to conclusion. He alludes to this using the metaphor of looking in the mirror in the dedicatory epistle of *de Cive* and then expands upon the idea after stating the laws of nature in Chapter III of that text. *Leviathan* cannot be read as *distinctively* educational, in a way that the *Elementa* were not, since Hobbes hoped to educate his audience to achieve political ends as he unmistakably put it in the preface to the readers as mentioned.

What I think *is* going on in *Leviathan* is a *development* of this strand of Hobbes's thought: the idea that his scientifically-derived views could be more effectively communicated by calling on readers to engage in a kind of self-reflection. I will argue that in *Leviathan*, the practice of self-reflection Hobbes urges upon readers becomes yet more self-critical, taking into account explicit recognition of the warping effects of *pride* on political vision, which naturally distorts their sense of perspective. The passage in the *Introduction* is central to my case, and it will be helpful to state it in full. Hobbes says the injunction to "Read thy self," was meant

[125] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 13.
[126] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 13.

> "[…] to teach us, that for the similitude of the thoughts, and Passions of one man, to the thoughts, and Passions of another, whosoever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth, when he does *think, opine, reason, hope, feare,* &c, and upon what grounds; he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts and Passions of all other men, upon the like occasions. […] And though by mens actions we do discover their designe sometimes; yet to do it without comparing them with our own, and distinguishing all circumstances, by which the case may come to be altered, is to decipher without a key, and be for the most part deceived, by too much trust, or by too much diffidence; as he that reads, is himself a good or evil man.
>
> But let one man read another by his actions never so perfectly, it serves him onely with his acquaintance, which are but few. He that is to govern a whole Nation, must read in himself, not this, or that particular man; but Man-kind: which though it be hard to do, harder than to learn any Language, or Science; yet, when I shall have set down my own reading orderly, and perspicuously, the pains left another, will be onely to consider, if he find not the same in himself. For this kind of Doctrine, admitteth no other Demonstration".[127]

In *Leviathan*, as with *de Cive*, Hobbes also asks readers to compare others' actions and intentions with our own in another place: after the derivation of the laws of nature, where Hobbes once again says there is a short-cut to perceiving their truth rather than following the full derivation process:

> "[…] they have been contracted into one easie sum, intelligible, even to the meanest capacity; and that is, *Do not that to another, which thou wouldest not have done to thy selfe;* which sheweth him, that he has no more to do in learning the Lawes of Nature, but, when weighing the actions of other men with his own, they seem too heavy, to put them into the other part of the balance, and his own into their place, that his own passions, and selfe-love, may adde nothing to the weight; and then there is none of these Lawes of Nature that will not appear unto him very reasonable".[128]

[127] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 11.
[128] Hobbes, 109–10.

This passage and that of *De Cive* quoted in the previous section are very similar, but one notable difference is that, whereas in *De Cive* Hobbes spoke generically of "passions" that prompted someone to act, in *Leviathan*, he singles out "selfe-love" in addition to "passions". Thus, seeing oneself from another's viewpoint can enable one to overcome the kind of corrupting pride which is liable to lead to violations of the law of nature. This reflective exercise is thus both epistemic and ethical: it enables one to grasp the laws of nature intellectually, but also enables one to muster the motivation to follow them. In *Leviathan*, the obstacle Hobbes singles out is self-love.

What Hobbes says he is offering in the introduction to *Leviathan* is a kind of generalised viewpoint of "man-kind" which will reveal to people the truth about their own passions and from which they can come to understand themselves and how they ought to behave. The method is the same as in the previous political works; to offer a vision of the right starting points from which to think about basic political points which can be confirmed through a first-personal knowledge of one's own mind. Hobbes is thus keen to provide people with the "key" to understanding their own mind to provide the right starting point or axiom for thinking about politics which, following the geometric method, will lead to correct political conclusions. It, too, has both an intellectual and motivational aim: he hopes to enable people to access the correct scientific view of human nature which, in turn, will motivate them to conduct themselves so as to avoid undermining state power. As we shall see, one of the principal things Hobbes wishes to reveal to readers is the extent of their pride, and that this is caused by a certain natural short-sightedness and lack of perspective. The *Levitathan* creates an impartial perspective which is then capable of quashing such pride to bring all to a common point of view—one which can be seen, as discussed later, in the frontispieces.

7. Pride and Perspective in *Leviathan*

Brooke has recently demonstrated the centrality of overcoming pride to Hobbes's political thought.[129] He demonstrates how pride is seen by Hobbes as a direct hindrance to ending the state of nature (since it prevents people from acknowledging their mutual equality) and thus is proscribed by natural law.[130] Brooke points out how this fits with Hobbes's own explanation of the title of *Leviathan* as the character who humbles the children of pride in the Book of Job.[131] This can be found at the end of Chapter 28: "*He is made so as not to be afraid. Hee seeth every high thing below him; and is King of all the children of pride*".[132]

Hobbes wrote frequently of poor self-understanding specifically in relation to pride. He viewed pride as a serious impediment to right reason and conduct. Here, we can see clearly another fascinating relationship between Hobbes's optics and his politics: his use of optical metaphors in describing pride. The visual aspect of beholding a great figure was already apparent in the preface to the readers of *de Cive* when Hobbes praises people who

> "[…] revered sovereign power, whether it resided in a man or in an Assembly, as a kind of visible divinity. And thus they did not, as they do now, side with ambitious or desperate men to overturn the order of the commonwealth".[133]

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes is concerned to make this abundantly clear to his readers by encouraging them to correct their proud self-conception through self-reflection. Hobbes writes, "*Pride* or *selfe-conceipt*" arises from "[…] Excessive opinion of a man's own self, for

[129] Brooke, *Philosophic Pride : Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau*, 69–75.
[130] Brooke, 74.
[131] Brooke, 74.
[132] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 221. Brooke, *Philosophic Pride : Stoicism and Political Thought from Lipsius to Rousseau*, 74.
[133] Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 9.

divine inspiration, for wisdome, learning, forme, and the like […]".[134] This leads to vain-glory, which develops because proud people "[…] without assured ground of hope from the true knowledge of themselves, are enclined to rash engaging[…]".[135] Such rash engaging from pride leads directly to the kind of civil war Hobbes hoped to avoid, driving the point home by repeating multiple times the idea that people falsely understand themselves:

> "And that such as have a great, and false opinion of their own Wisdome, take upon them to reprehend the actions, and call in question the Authority of them that govern, and so to unsettle the Lawes with their publique discourse, as that nothing shall be a Crime, but what their own designes require should be so. […] These I say are effects of a false presumption of their own Wisdome. For of them that are the first movers in the disturbance of Common-wealth (which can never happen without a Civil Warre,) very few are left alive long enough, to see their new Designes established: so that the benefit of their Crimes, redoundeth to Posterity, and such as would least have wished it: which argues they were not so wise, as they thought they were. And those that deceive upon hope of not being observed, do commonly deceive themselves, (the darknesse in which they believe they lye hidden, being nothing else but their own blindnesse;) and are no wise than Children, that think all hid, by hiding their own eyes."[136]

Here Hobbes once again uses the ocular metaphors to illustrate a lack of understanding, suggesting that some people are so vainglorious and proud that they are in fact blind, and, worse, ignorant of their own blindness. Above I pointed out how Hobbes also uses ocular metaphors to describe a lack of political sight but using the metaphors of perspective and short-sightedness as in, "Yet they will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves: For they see their own wit at hand, and other mens at a distance".[137] The idea is that

[134] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 54.
[135] Hobbes, 72.
[136] Hobbes, 205.
[137] Hobbes, 87.

people mistake themselves for being politically very wise because their own wisdom is more familiar to them and thus appears to be larger than it really is.

He makes a similar point in Chapter 18, but this time using the optical language of lenses and magnifying glasses as an illustration. Responding to the possible objection of someone suggesting that the "Condition of Subjects is very miserable" because it brings with it all kinds of obligations and restrictions, Hobbes argues that such people fail to perceive just how very miserable a civil war really is, and this is because their pride makes them mistake a close thing for a large thing, and a remote thing for a small thing:

> "For all men are by nature provided of notable multiplying glasses, (that is their Passions and Selfe-love,) through which, every little payment appeareth a great grievance; but are destitute of those prospective glasses, (namely Morall and Civill Science,) to see farre off the miseries that hang over them, and cannot without such payments be avoided".[138]

In each of these cases, pride prevents people from seeing correctly. Correcting their vision, as we have seen, can only be done through a proper science. The trouble, as explored in the case of *de Cive* and now in *Leviathan* is that people find it difficult to grasp science—partly because it is challenging to understand and partly because they are too proud. The closest link between self-understanding and reason found in *Leviathan* is consistently that of epistemic pride, and it is in large part why Hobbes is keen to encourage people to engage in self-reflection of the sort urged in the introduction. They must recognise and compensate for their own pride if they are to see correctly.

This has important consequences for practical deliberation—which Hobbes understands as "de-liberation" or "[…] a putting an end to the *Liberty* we had of doing, or omitting, according to our own Appetite, or Aversion".[139] Hobbes also describes this using

[138] Hobbes, 129.
[139] Hobbes, 44.

the language of being able to see into the distance—it involves, specifically, having good *foresight*:

> "And because in Deliberation, the Appetites, and Aversions are raised by the foresight of the good and evil consequences, and sequels of action whereof we Deliberate; the good or evill effect thereof dependeth on the foresight of a long chain of consequences, of which very seldome any man is able to see the end. […] so that he who hath by Experience, or Reason, the surest and greatest prospect of Consequences, Deliberates best himselfe; and is able when he will, to give best counsell unto others".[140]

Here, reasoning through a "long chain of consequences" is best done, as we have seen, through the scientific, geometric method which Hobbes claims to be practicing in a uniquely exemplary fashion in the realm of politics. This puts Hobbes in a lofty position: namely, the person with the greatest foresight, and therefore the person in the best position to instruct people in their practical deliberations. He is thus providing people with the "prospective glass" which can correct for their natural pride and enable them to see far into the distance and detect the dangers of civil war in the proper proportion: such dangers are very great indeed. The contents of *Leviathan*, when taken as the resources of a self-reflective exercise, can thus be read as Hobbes supplying people with a mirror in which they can perceive their need to look at society through a *corrective lens*–Hobbes's political science. This scientific instrument thus corrects their deficient political eyesight—just as modern optics has allowed for the development of eyeglasses which enable people to read, unlike poor Plautus in the ancient world who never had the opportunity, as Hobbes laments in *De Homine*.

This fits well with Hobbes's project of communicating science to the wider public. In describing the power of science in *Leviathan*, Hobbes recognises that the drawback of

[140] Hobbes, 46.

science is that, whilst it holds the key to understanding human nature—and thus political peace—it is hard to understand, and it therefore must be communicated carefully. One way to do this is through the fashioning of artificial *instruments* to convey the power of science. As he puts it in Chapter 10:

> "The Sciences, are small Power; because not eminent; and therefore, not acknowledged in any man; nor are at all, but in a few; and in them, but of a few things. For Science is of that nature, as none can understand it to be, but such as in a good measure have attayned it.
>
> Arts of publique use, as Fortification, making of Engines, and other Instruments of War; because they conferre to Defence, and Victory, are Power: And though the true Mother of them, be Science, namely the Mathematiques; yet, because they are brought into the Light, by the hand of the Artificer, they be esteemed (the Midwife passing with the vulgar for the Mother,) as his issue".[141]

Hobbes can be read as attempting to bring his science "into the Light" by fashioning artificial instruments which, as midwives of science, bring people the benefits of science without having themselves to understand it in all its full detail. These are, first, the text as a *mirror* (as in the introduction to *de Cive*, and the gist of self-reading in *Leviathan*) which reveals to people their poor political eyesight (blindness, short-sightedness, and failure to judge objects in perspective) and the need for a corrective *lens* through which they can gain foresight. Instruments are but the midwives of science, but since "the vulgar" are not fully able to appreciate science in its rawest form, Hobbes has made it more amenable and communicable to the reading public by fashioning an instrument: the text of *Leviathan* and its political recommendations.

8. Self-Reflection and Fear

[141] Hobbes, 63.

At this point, it might be argued that this reading of Hobbes places too great an emphasis on reflective aspects of political life. After all, Hobbes is generally thought to be the classic institutionalist in the sense that he thinks it is the power of the *state* that, fundamentally, causes people to behave properly, not their own capacity to reflect. This is because, in a famous Hobbesian phrase, "The Passion to be reckoned upon, is Fear"[142] and again, "Of all Passions, that which enclineth men least to break the Lawes is Fear. Nay, (excepting some generous natures,) it is the onely thing […] that makes men keep them".[143]

Whilst this might appear plausible as a *prima facie* argument against my interpretation, it does not sit well with scholarship that has found in Hobbes a greater interest in, and recognition of the importance of, citizens' ethical conduct and their 'inner lives'.[144] Whilst I would not agree with all such readings of Hobbes, I do think that, properly construed, Hobbes's account of fear in fact *highlights* the importance of the kind of self-reflection described above. The problem, for Hobbes, is that people tend to fear the wrong things—precisely because of their lack of perspective. They fail to see that protesting against the state to lessen a minor fear in the short-run (such as not being allowed to express their beliefs in public) in fact has the effect of destabilising the state in the long-run which ultimately precipitates something they ought to fear even more: political instability, civil war, and death. They need to see the state as far greater than themselves and see the threat of instability as far greater than it might otherwise appear to enable fear to produce political peace.

Just as with optics, there are two ways in which science enables this: firstly, careful reasoning to enable better interpretations of sense perceptions—you need to reason carefully to understand that the stars are moving even though they appear static, just as

[142] Hobbes, 99.
[143] Hobbes, 206.
[144] For example, Alan Ryan, *The Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), chap. 10; Mark E Button, *Contract, Culture, and Citizenship: Transformative Liberalism from Hobbes to Rawls* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), chap. 1.

you need to reason carefully to realise you must restrain yourself from causing political disruption even though it feels unfair. Secondly, through the fashioning of instruments—you need telescopes to see things far away in their correct proportion, just as you need texts such as *Leviathan* to help you recognise your own deficient political eyesight and to help correct for it.

The self-reflective activity Hobbes encourages is designed precisely to re-configure peoples' thought processes, and, in particular, to re-configure what they fear. By looking through the lens of *Leviathan*, one gains a new perspective on politics and recognises the folly involved in challenging and disrupting political authorities. Civil science itself is hard to understand, but Hobbes offers the reflective process to make it easier, and thus to shape people's passion of fear. Once they understand it, they will realise that they should get out of the business of political reflection altogether and subscribe straightforwardly to Hobbes's—and hence the sovereign's—views. In this sense, Hobbes could be read as a theorist of 'reflection against reflection'—in ways similar to how Tuck has read him as proposing that "independent judgement must destroy itself" and Garsten's interpretation of his use of rhetoric as "rhetoric against rhetoric".[145] Hobbes thus contrasts fascinatingly with the authors of the previous chapter; like Socrates, Plato, Augustine, and the Stoics, Hobbes encourages reflection upon all of his readers. He combines all three aspects of reflection but does so for the explicit purpose of encouraging most people to *refrain* from political action and interference. He seems much more aligned with the anti-politics of those stressing *realpolitik*—unlike Plato, Hobbes did not argue that rulers ought to rule on the basis of their reflectiveness and epistemic superiority.

This does not mean, however, that Hobbes was not interested in *other* ways of getting his point across. Since science is "small power"; other methods of communicating his ideas and forming peoples' passion of fear would be necessary. As Malcolm puts it,

[145] Garsten, *Saving Persuasion*, chap. 1.

> "Hobbes would be the first to admit that it is utopian to imagine, let alone aim at creating, an entire population of rational political scientists; 'for the Passions of men, are commonly more potent than their Reason' ".[146]

There would always be, for Hobbes, those whose passions, at times, were too powerful to be disarmed by self-reflective thought—just as there are some ocular problems which careful interpretive reasoning alone is not sufficient to resolve, such as short-sightedness. One obvious method, of course, will be penal systems. Another is education—Bejan demonstrates that since sovereigns are unable to monitor everyone all the time and people will break the law when they think they can profit and get away with it, "Teaching acts as a supplement to the 'terror' of punishments for Hobbes by constantly keeping men in mind of the terrible consequences (namely, the state of nature) that must result from the neglect of their duty of obedience […]".[147]

Whilst the text of *Leviathan* itself could be taught in universities, "[…] the majority of men lacked the time, interest, or even sometimes the capacity to comprehend the whole; pithy summaries were therefore required".[148] These summaries were to be preached from the pulpit such that the population would become like 'monks and friars' under monastic vows of 'simple obedience'.[149] The lessons of civic education should be taken like lessons in religion, as "[...] wholesome pills for the sick, which, swallowed whole, have the virtue to cure, but chewed, are for the most part cast up again without effect".[150] Attending a Hobbesian church on the Sabbath would be like attending 'a kind of civic Sunday school'.[151]

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[146] Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, 228.
[147] Bejan, 'Teaching the Leviathan', 615.
[148] Bejan, 617.
[149] Bejan, 619.
[150] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 32:3, in Bejan, 618.
[151] Hobbes, 618.

I am in broad agreement with Bejan's interpretation that the state ought to have a role in encouraging the population to make internal changes to their psychology, and that in addition to reason, direct pedagogic instruction would be necessary from an early age. From this account of Hobbesian education, however, one might think that the kind of reflective self-reading which can lead to internal changes in attitude is reserved only for the educated. From everyone else, argues Bejan, "unreflective obedience"[152] is required. This, I believe, would be too quick since, as demonstrated above, Hobbes clearly argues in both *de Cive* and *Leviathan* that even those of the most meagre intellect can come to apprehend the rights and laws of nature through the reflective exercise of stepping into another person's place.

An additional way in which sovereigns can inculcate fear is through appealing directly to the passions. As Malcolm observes, the sovereign must thus be persuasive to the passions as well as reason, for "The sovereign functions as a 'visible Power to keep them in awe', having sufficient 'Power and Strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof, he is inabled to conforme the wills of them all".[153]

One of the ways in which Hobbes communicates this is through the frontispieces (the first, with heads facing outwards and in different directions, and the famous second with characters facing upwards) which Malcolm analysed against the background of anamorphic art using optical devices in early-modern European art.[154] Malcolm argues that it was inspired by an early modern optical device which caused multiple paintings of faces to converge together and form a new, single face when viewed through an ingeniously cut lens.[155] Malcolm relates how these artworks were sometimes interpreted as presenting moral lessons to the viewer. He argues that viewing the frontispieces

[152] Bejan, 'Teaching the Leviathan', 618.
[153] Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, 228.
[154] Noel Malcolm, 'The Titlepage of Leviathan, Seen in a Curious Perspective', *The Seventeenth Century* 13, no. 2 (1 September 1998): 124–55, https://doi.org/10.1080/0268117X.1998.10555445, citing *Leviathan* ch.17.
[155] Malcolm.

presents two ways of viewing the sovereign: one in which one recognises oneself as one of the people making up the artificial person of the state and another in which one is simply in awe of the leviathan and fears him. These correspond to both the rational and passionate ways of effecting obedience to the sovereign.

As a final point in the present chapter, I too would like to offer an interpretation of an aspect of the frontispiece which could, similarly, work on both levels. It relates to an aspect of it that Skinner has recently examined: the triangular formation of the sword and crozier. Skinner argues that the leviathan holds his sword and crozier at angles suggestive of a geometric shape, which, if we "follow this hint" reveals the formation of a triangle.[156] He suggests that "[f]or Hobbes's original readers, this superimposition would have carried some powerful symbolic resonances"[157] which include a representation of Britain, which was often thought of as being triangular in shape, and, even more powerfully, a representation of the Holy Trinity.[158]

Whilst these interpretations are possible, I see one issue with interpreting the formation of the sword and crozier as straightforwardly triangular. This is because a triangle is a two-dimensional shape, but the sword and crozier are drawn as three-dimensional objects. They clearly stretch out over the land. If they are intended to suggest a geometric shape, I would first suggest that they hint at a *pyramid* rather than a triangle. The pyramid is a significant shape for Hobbes since, as he relates in *De Homine* Ch.4 §1, the art of perspective consists entirely of working with planes of pyramids. The two objects could be interpreted as representing the plane of a pyramid and, if taken together with the body of the leviathan, could be interpreted as forming a triangular pyramid. This connotation with perspective could be interpreted, therefore, as suggesting that the

[156] Quentin Skinner, *From Humanism to Hobbes: Studies in Rhetoric and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 290.
[157] Skinner, 290.
[158] Skinner, 290–93.

leviathan—the state—is the perspective to which, and through which, everyone in the commonwealth should seek to see.

Of course, following Malcolm's reading of the image as admitting both rational and passionate interpretations, one can view the image much more simply and just be struck with awe and fear at the awesomeness of a powerful ruler wielding both ecclesiastical and military power over the land, but the more intellectual point about perspective is also there for people to appreciate if they can. This point is particularly powerful in the original frontispiece which, as Malcolm points out, is likely to be closer to Hobbes's original intentions.[159] All of the constituent faces in that image face outward in a plethora of different directions and thus see a completely different view, and none of them look directly at the viewer. Their only chance of unification is by being constituents of the sovereign who, in fact, gazes directly out of the frontispiece at the reader.

9. Reflection Against Reflection

Whilst Hobbes might not typically be thought of as a philosopher encouraging reflection as a civic practice, from the foregoing interpretation, he can indeed be read as such. He merits inclusion in a study of political reflection precisely because of the fascinatingly jarring sort of reflection he recommends—encouraging people to engage in just a sufficient amount of reflection to recognise that they ought to stop reflecting for themselves and utterly change their own political viewpoint. This is the sense in which I have suggested Hobbesian reflection is a kind of 'reflection against reflection'.

The particular kind of reflection he urges upon readers is not simply and straightforwardly to consider the terms of his arguments. Whilst, as with optics, science has the ability to help correct people's defective vision, the intellectual difficulty of

[159] Malcolm, 'The Titlepage of Leviathan, Seen in a Curious Perspective'.

scientific reasoning prevents "the vulgar" from understanding it. As such, people suffer from a double deficiency of political eyesight: firstly, their failure to follow scientific reasoning to its proper conclusion, and, secondly, their failure to recognise their own inability to engage in such reasoning.

Hobbes offered his readers a reflective activity that would remedy both of these defects. In *de Cive*, he encourages readers to imagine seeing themselves and their political world from other peoples' perspectives and likens this to looking in the mirror. This enables them to grasp the starting points or axioms of his natural law for themselves, and thereby grasp their utter certainty. From there, readers can more fully follow his train of thought to his conclusions. Thus Hobbesian political reflection includes a strong element of outward-looking epistemic reflection; as with Plato's mirror that enables people to get out of the proverbial cave, Hobbes explicitly claims in concluding Part II of *Leviathan* that he has made good on Plato's project by rendering the idea of a philosopher king properly scientific and providing governments with a correct guide to moral and civil science.[160]

In *Leviathan*, we find in the introduction the injunction to "read thy self". This practice is not merely, I argue, a matter of reflecting so as to apprehend, from within oneself, Hobbes's starting points, but *also* a matter—as Renz argues—of relating Hobbes's anthropological claims to one's own self-conception so as to have one's mind shaped and changed for good citizenship or subjecthood. This involves, I argue, recognising not merely that one is a co-constituent of an artificial sovereign, but also involves recognising that it is normal and common to have a skewed perspective on politics due to pride. Since one sees one's "own wit at hand", one is liable to think of one's own interests as more important than they actually are, and one is likely to underestimate the scale of misery involved in a civil war since it seems far off. Hobbes urges people to exchange their natural multiplying glasses of pride and self-love for the prospective glasses he has fashioned in

[160] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 254.

providing *Leviathan* as an instrument for improving their political perspective. By reflecting in this way, citizens can finally come to appreciate how they ought to substitute their own private perspective in all debatable matters for that of the sovereign, which forms the basis of an artificial agreement in public intended to prevent a real disagreement which could lead to a catastrophic war. Thus, Hobbes *also* urges upon his readers practices of self-reflection akin to Socrates and the stoics recommending that they understand properly themselves and their place (or lack thereof) in politics. Necessarily, the Hobbesian 'calmer moments' of reflection are also intended to engender ethical changes as well—in a way comparable to that suggested by Augustine. By reflecting in the right way, people learn the unmistakably Hobbesian virtues of humility, obedience, submissiveness, and peaceful conduct. Thus, Hobbes can be viewed as recommending a composite, tripartite practice of political reflection which includes all three of the aspects of political reflection identified in Chapter 2.

This is by no means to suggest that Hobbes thought this was the *only* way to shape hearts and minds to obey the sovereign. Didactic education, systems of punishment, and artistic propaganda were all, also, seen as vital to inculcating obedience. However, the reflective exercises Hobbes recommends were nonetheless crucial. The conflicts that plagued England during Hobbes's lifetime were struggles among people with radically divergent political vision. He sought to explain how many of their views were profoundly misguided, and encouraged them to recognise and correct their poor political eyesight. By interpreting the formation of the sceptre and crozier on the frontispiece as a pyramid, rather than a triangle, one can appreciate a way in which Hobbes may have been communicating the idea that the leviathan's perspective on all matters—ecclesiastical, civil, and everything else—is the one to which all others should submit.

This chapter thus contributes to the interpretation of Hobbes scholarship by revising the understanding of the relationship between his optics and his politics in three

ways. Firstly, by clarifying Tuck's interpretation somewhat to take account of the fact that Hobbes thought he could write off a large number of views as absurd for certain, and, secondly, by offering his laws of nature as accessible through self-reflection such that they can act as certain axioms from which a political theory can develop. Thirdly, by demonstrating the ways in which Hobbes draws on optical ideas of reflection, perspective, and the fashioning of instruments in illustrating his political theory. This enables us to appreciate more clearly the meaning of the self-reflective exercises he urges upon readers. They are designed, firstly, to reveal people's lack of good political eyesight and, secondly, to correct it.

This chapter is also intended to contribute to political theory more broadly by providing an example of political reflection which is both elaborate and anti-political by design. Its elaborateness can be seen by the fact that Hobbes's account combines all three kinds of reflection identified in the previous chapter. The aspiration to scientific reasoning is clearly an epistemic role for political reflection. Self-reflection plays a role in identifying axioms—within oneself—which serve to undergird scientific reasoning as well as recognising the flaws of pride that lead people to mis-estimate their own abilities to reason. The effect of the 'calmer moments', for Hobbes, is to put people in a state of mind in which they can recognise this, and, ultimately, surrender their right to independent judgement in political matters. Hobbes's approach can thus be understood as 'composite' in the sense that he combines all three aspects of reflection identified in the previous chapter. It is, however, clearly also anti-political given the absolutist implications it has.

Hobbes's absolutism is of course alarming to many contemporary readers. What seems so strange at first face is that the practice of self-reflection could lie at the very intellectual foundation of political absolutism. We tend to regard reflection as a healthy and innocuous activity, but here it is used to justify absolutist politics. How? The answer is simply that it encourages stringent self-criticism which is intended to undermine

readers' confidence in their judgements, and, by extension, their confidence to participate in public. It is also intended to inculcate in readers a certain reverence for Hobbes's own views.

This ought to be of interest to political theorists of today since, by my reckoning, we find contemporary Hobbesians in surprising places. As I argue in the conclusion, critical theory in particular urges a kind of self-reflection which is stringently self-critical and designed to have a similar effect: to convince readers that their political vision is corrupt and in need of fixing *before* they dare venture into thinking about politics. In the next chapter, I examine two interpretations of a very different thinker's views on reflection—Kant's—by looking at his reception by, and influence in the work of, John Rawls and Hannah Arendt.

Chapter 4: A Tale of Two Kantians:

Reflection as a Political Practice in Rawls and Arendt

The events of the 20th Century included some of the greatest horrors in human history. Coming to terms with such events was a major project of post-war intellectuals. Among them were arguably the two most influential political theorists of the 20th Century, John Rawls and Hannah Arendt. They are rightly regarded as very different political thinkers in their literary and theoretical style and, perhaps unsurprisingly, are thus typically read by different audiences.[1] Despite this, they share something significant: their interest in, and emphasis on, the role of reflection in politics. In stark contrast with Hobbes who—as recounted in the previous chapter—used reflection to support and reinforce absolutist rule, Arendt and Rawls sought the opposite.

As we shall see, and against common misconceptions, both thinkers saw reflection as not merely a theoretical tool for academics, but also as a vital political practice to sustain the life of the polity—not least to guard against the resurgence of totalitarianism. Indeed, both thinkers drew upon Kant in explicating what they take reflection to entail. Despite this common interest in reflection, their understandings of it are strikingly different—its contents, its purpose, and the way in which it can guard against the collapse of a society into totalitarian oppression. They thus make for fascinating comparative study for the present project. I argue that Rawls's view is, like Plato's, heavily epistemic in the sense that it aims at an analytically rigorous theory which can robustly justify a

[1] Albeit that this is more true in Britain than in the United States where, until recently, she was read much more broadly (see, for example, the discussion of her among British Arendt scholars in the episode of BBC Radio 4's *In Our Time*.) It has always been true that Arendt has had a much wider reputation and broader audience than Rawls outside of professional political theory as a simple Google NGram search will reveal (search "John Rawls, Hannah Arendt" conducted 14th September 2020).

certain form of government. Arendt always rejected such approaches for what she saw as their totalising effects and destructive consequences for the political sphere. Rather, her idea of reflection, I argue, emphasises the ethical aspect of reflection; she aims at cultivating the moral conscience and political dispositions of citizens through reflection *without* recourse to theoretical justification. As she puts it, the value of "thinking" is in the act itself—not in its product, but rather its "by-product".[2] After looking briefly at the background of Kant, I begin with an analysis of the nature and purpose of Rawls's "reflective equilibrium" before turning to Arendt's understanding of reflection in politics. Arendt's writings are somewhat more challenging to reconstruct,[3] and hence I dedicate more space to examining her views.

1. Why Kant? Why Kantians?

Whereas Hobbes proves fascinating for turning the idea of being a reflective citizen on its head in what I labelled "reflection against reflection," Kant's approach comes much closer to what we might intuitively imagine reflectiveness to entail. He is fascinating precisely for this reason. Kant argued famously in *What is Enlightenment?* that "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another".[4] As Melissa Merritt explains, Kant saw reflection as crucial to becoming a self-directed agent such that "It is no exaggeration to claim that Kant accords supreme value to being rationally reflective".[5] This can be found in his repeated claim, explains Merritt, "that 'all judgements … require

[2] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 193. References are to the *Thinking* section (Vol.1).
[3] For a variety of reasons, including her less direct, and often more poetic style, and the fact that her work on 'thinking' and 'judging' develops over a long period but was left unfinished and unpublished at the time of her death.
[4] Immanuel Kant, Hans Reiss, and H. B Nisbet, *Kant's Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 54.
[5] Melissa Merritt, *Kant on Reflection and Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 2.

a *reflection*'—if not before the judgement, then 'at least following critically after it' (A260—1/B316—7)".[6]

However, as she points out, a very wide range of interpretation of what Kant meant by reflection and its role in epistemology and ethics is present in the literature.[7] Many take "the reflective person of Kantian ethics" to "have some particular skill at identifying 'subjective principles'—or *maxims*—on which he proposes to act and he is supposed to be resolute about submitting those principles to the appropriate test".[8] Kant's formulation of the 'categorical imperative' would be an exemplary case-in-point. Merritt points out that it is hardly surprising, therefore, that many critical interpreters suppose that "the Kantian reflective ideal is precious, hyper-deliberate and repugnantly moralistic".[9]

On Merritt's view, this "common caricature" turns out to be wrong once one interprets Kant more carefully. She argues for both the centrality and plausibility—once properly construed—of reflection in Kantian ethics and epistemology. Her recent study of the concept of reflection in Kant's work engages in detail with the broad corpus of his texts including the works on logic and his handwritten notes. The present chapter is not intended to achieve this same task, but rather draws upon Arendt and Rawls as Kantian thinkers. By this, I mean nothing more than that they were thinkers in their own right for whom reading Kant was a considerable source of inspiration.

There is good reason to think that neither author achieved a consistently robust interpretation of Kant's work in their political theory or were even genuinely 'Kantian' when they claimed to be.[10] The aim of this chapter is neither to pronounce on the adequacy

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[6] Merritt is citing the first (1781) and second (1787) Academy editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* under 'A' and 'B'. See p. xiii of her text.
[7] Merritt, *Kant on Reflection and Virtue*.
[8] Merritt, 4.
[9] Merritt, 2.
[10] Kerstin Budde, 'Rawls on Kant: Is Rawls a Kantian or Kant a Rawlsian?', *European Journal of Political Theory* 6, no. 3 (2007): 339–58; Onora O'Neill, 'Constructivism in Rawls and Kant', in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, ed. Samuel Freeman, Cambridge Companions to Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 351, https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521651670.010; Matthew C Weidenfeld, 'Visions of Judgment: Arendt, Kant, and the Misreading of Judgment', *Political Research Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2013): 254–66.

of their exegesis nor to assess their fidelity to genuine 'Kantian' ideas, but rather to examine, compare, and contrast what they took the role of reflection in politics to be. Neither author engaged in detailed philological investigation of Kant's work in their political theory works, and where they did draw upon Kant, they did so using quite different parts of his corpus. Rawls drew mostly on Kant's moral theory, whereas Arendt, as discussed below, drew unusually upon Kant's aesthetic work in the *Critique of Judgement* where Kant emphasises the "operation of reflection"[11] as crucial to judgement.

These two very different thinkers found inspiration in Kant and, in doing so, placed the practice of reflection at the heart of their political thought. The marked differences in the accounts of political reflection they present can be explained by multiple factors; by the fact that they drew inspiration from different works of Kant, the fact (as Merritt makes clear) that Kant's conceptions of reflection require careful interpretation across his works, and the fact, as critics have suggested (see note above), that the exegetical robustness of their readings is doubtful. This latter issue may stem from an intended or unintended superimposition of their own ideas onto Kant's.

Regardless of their exegetical merits, the broad thrust of Kant's emphasis on the importance of reflection remains in their work. Of course, there are other writers who inspired them, many of whom also emphasised the importance of reflection. For example, Locke's arguments for toleration rested—at least in part—on the grounds that people must come to their views about religion for themselves.[12] There is thus little point in foisting religion onto people who do not want it. In thinking these matters through for themselves they will need to use—as Locke argues in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*—"Ideas of Reflection" which are fundamental to the understanding.[13] Mill

[11] Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, secs 40, 294. (p.124).
[12] John Locke, 'A Letter Concerning Toleration', in *A Letter Concerning Toleration and Other Writings*, ed. Mark Goldie, Thomas Hollis Library (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 2010), 1–68.
[13] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), sec. II.VI-VII. G. A. J. Rogers argues that Locke, despite his empiricism, inherits a thread of Platonist thought with respect to his view of reason, especially in his interaction with Damaris Masham who moved in the

sought to empower individuals to be progressive: to think through and constantly re-evaluate their views.[14] They should not be subject to state interference unless they are liable to harm others or do not have the "full use of the reflecting faculty" as in children and delirious persons.[15] These writers, too, played a significant role in emphasising reflection as a practice in modern political thought. However, in Arendt and Rawls, it is Kant who features as the key source. For this reason, this chapter is a tale of two Kantians. Rawls's views are somewhat easier to set out, perhaps owing to his less poetic way of writing. For this reason, I devote considerably more space to unpacking Arendt's views in her later work against the broad background of her other works.

2. Rawls and Reflection as a Civic Practice

The concept of reflection played a significant role in Rawls's philosophy. He famously argued that "philosophical reflection" can enable people to reach "reflective equilibrium".[16] Reflective equilibrium can be understood as a kind of mirror which reflects an individual's sense of justice. This is one way in which Rawls can be understood as Kantian—he understands the very idea of a 'theory of justice' as a critique of a mental faculty: "It is a theory of the moral sentiments (to recall an eighteenth century title) setting out the principles governing our moral powers, or more specifically, our sense of justice".[17] The term "moral sentiment" might seem like more of an allusion to Adam Smith than Kant, but it becomes clear in *A Theory of Justice*, that Rawls understands his account to be Kantian in form.

Cambridge Platonist circles. G. A. J. Rogers, 'Locke, Plato, and Platonism', in *Platonism at the Origins of Modernity : Studies on Platonism and Early Modern Philosophy*, by Douglas Hedley and Sarah Hutton, Archives Internationales d'histoire Des Idées (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2008).

[14] Ryan, *The Making of Modern Liberalism*, 25–26.

[15] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism, and Other Essays*, New (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 93.

[16] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 18–19.

[17] Rawls, 44.

Specifically, it is Kantian in the sense that giving an account of one's moral senses is a necessary condition for moral autonomy. A person is autonomous (from *auto*—self + *nomos*—legislation) "[…] when the principles of his action are chosen by him as the most adequate possible expression of his nature as a free and equal rational being".[18] To enjoy moral autonomy, we therefore need a way of understanding our rational "nature", and this means, in the realm of justice, an account of our "sense of justice".

For Rawls, this can be achieved by reaching the state of reflective equilibrium. This state reflects back one's moral sense of justice in a clear and coherent way: "It is an equilibrium because at last our principles and judgements coincide; it is reflective since we know to what principles our judgements conform and the premises of their derivation".[19] Rawls developed a method for reaching this state—one which has been widely adopted and discussed in moral and political philosophy.[20] I will sketch it here briefly.

The starting observation is that we do not reach adulthood automatically with a coherently articulated set of moral and political principles. Rather, we have an intuitive sense of justice from which we can make political judgements such as whether a given law or policy is justified. Sometimes these judgements seem unduly affected by one's emotional state—such as when we are "upset or frightened".[21] Such judgements shouldn't count politically; they are not, in Rawls's terms, "considered judgements" which are those "[…] favourable to the exercise of the sense of justice".[22]

However, even our considered judgements will not always be consistent. "Those who suppose their judgements are always consistent", as Rawls would later put it, "are

[18] Rawls, 222.
[19] Rawls, 18.
[20] Norman Daniels, *Justice and Justification: Reflective Equilibrium in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[21] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 42.
[22] Rawls, 42.

unreflective or dogmatic; not uncommonly they are ideologues or zealots".[23] They are "unreflective" since they are, on Rawls's account, unable to step back and see their own natural sense of justice for what it is: incoherent and inconsistent. To resolve the incoherence, we must work "back and forth" between considered judgements and general principles.[24] In doing so, we must be prepared to allow several of our judgements to be "revised, suspended, or withdrawn".[25] Once we have clarified and made consistent our moral judgements, and articulated them as general principles, we have reached reflective equilibrium.

Finally, this "reflective equilibrium" is likely to be somewhat "narrow" if we have taken into consideration only our *own* judgements, or at least those of people who share a similar moral and political outlook to ourselves. To move from "narrow" to "wide" reflective equilibrium, we must have "[…] carefully considered alternative conceptions of justice and the force of various arguments for them".[26] For Rawls, in a "well-ordered society", each citizen should have "[…] achieved wide (versus narrow) reflective equilibrium".[27] Furthermore, they should all converge on the *same* wide reflective equilibrium, making it "general". To be well-ordered, a society must have reached *both wide and general* reflective equilibrium—what Rawls termed "full" reflective equilibrium.

Rawls saw a well-ordered society as "plainly a very considerable idealization",[28] but nonetheless saw it as an aspirational normative standard towards which contemporary democracies ought to aspire. In his later work, Rawls introduced the idea of an "overlapping consensus" to "[…] make the idea of a well-ordered society more realistic".[29] In articulating his account of "political liberalism", Rawls argued that citizens

[23] John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 30.
[24] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 18.
[25] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 30.
[26] Rawls, 31.
[27] Rawls, 31.
[28] Rawls, 9.
[29] Rawls, 32.

in pluralistic societies should support the same "public political conception of justice", but needn't do so "[…] for all the same reasons, all the way down".[30] Rather, a wide variety of worldviews, or "comprehensive doctrines", could support the same conception of justice for different reasons, and thus "overlap". Rawls therefore came to argue that wide reflective equilibrium need only be "general" insofar as justifying the "freestanding" conception of public political justice, not a full-blown justification "all the way down".[31]

However, in public, citizens must be able to explain to others their justification for the "legislation and public policies" they support "in terms of public reasons".[32] *Public* reasons are those grounded in "plain truths now common and available to citizens generally" and thus, "[t]his excludes comprehensive religious and philosophical doctrines (the whole truth, as it were) from being specified as public reasons."[33] In sum, Rawls's later view was that citizens must learn to reflect on political matters in two distinct ways; first to figure out how their personal worldview (such as, for example, a religious creed) squares with the public political conception of justice, and, secondly, how to articulate justifications for this conception, if asked, which do *not* appeal to their personally held worldview.

From this sketch, we can see that the kind of reflection Rawls has in mind right through his theorising can be described as *epistemic*. That is, it aims at developing an articulated framework of political principles which aim at accurate knowledge. Akin to the reflection emphasised by Plato, for Rawls it takes us out of a cave—not of total ignorance and darkness, but the natural incoherence in our own political intuitions. Reflective equilibrium is a tool for arriving at political principles which then enable citizens to live autonomously. Through them, citizens can develop, and live under, a

[30] Rawls, 32.
[31] Daniels, *Justice and Justification*, 149.
[32] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 90.
[33] Rawls, 90.

coherent, articulated moral law which effectively reflects their political nature as rational, free, and equal. By my reading, Arendt's account is less akin to Plato in this regard and more akin the kind of ethical reflection emphasised by Augustine.

Before turning to Arendt, however, it is necessary to address an exegetical question. I have been describing Rawls's account of political reflection as a "civic" practice by which I mean (nothing more or less than) one intended for *citizens*. This might strike some political theorists as odd. Wasn't "reflective equilibrium" intended as a method for moral and political philosophers, not citizens in general?

This interpretation of Rawls is understandable—Rawls was a philosopher and indeed developed reflective equilibrium as a method for "moral theory".[34] For example, de-Shalit interprets Rawls's account of reflective equilibrium as one which "[…] establishes a balance between the philosopher's intuitions and his or her theory" and is concerned that Rawls's account is excessively "private" in the sense that it fails to take seriously what members of the public think about politics.[35] The assumption throughout is that the method of reflective equilibrium is undertaken by "the philosopher" and not "the citizen". For de-Shalit, the possibility of citizens reaching reflective equilibrium in general "[…]seems quite far-fetched".[36]

As Baderin has pointed out,[37] Wolff and de-Shalit appear to argue in *Disadvantage*[38] that a problem with Rawlsian reflective equilibrium is that it fails to engage the public in the reasoning process. Baderin, too, interprets the early Rawls (whilst acknowledging the difficulty of interpreting him on this subject) as restricting the process of reaching reflective equilibrium to "the philosopher" rather than the public.[39]

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[34] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sec. 9.
[35] Avner De-Shalit, *Power to the People: Teaching Political Philosophy in Skeptical Times* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 77–85.
[36] De-Shalit, 83.
[37] Alice Baderin, 'Reflective Equilibrium: Individual or Public?', *Social Theory and Practice*, 2016, 9.
[38] Jonathan Wolff and Avner De-Shalit, *Disadvantage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[39] Baderin, 'Reflective Equilibrium', 10.

She argues that Rawls's view of reflective equilibrium changed and became increasingly "public" once it developed a "political component" in *Political Liberalism*, but suggests that it is not clear as to "[…] whether the *process* of political RE is a public or individual one".[40]

Here, I dissent from these views. It is clear to me that Rawls—even the early Rawls—consistently believed a well-ordered society would be one in which all citizens can and should engage in the process of philosophical reflection as a civic practice. This case can be made by appealing to three sources: his early and late philosophy and his approach to teaching political philosophy.

In his account of how a well-ordered society achieves social stability in Part III of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls emphasises that social stability comes not primarily from some institution of government enforcement, but from citizens achieving moral autonomy by being shown how to think through, for themselves, and thence come to accept, the conception of justice governing society. To demonstrate this, it is worth quoting Rawls at length:

> "Thus moral education is education for autonomy. In due course everyone will know why he would adopt the principles of justice and how they are derived from the conditions that characterize his being equal in a society of moral persons. It follows that in accepting these principles on this basis we are not influenced primarily by tradition and authority, or the opinions of others. However necessary these agencies may be in order for us to reach complete understanding, we eventually come to hold a conception of right on reasonable grounds that we can set out independently for ourselves".[41]

[40] Baderin, 10 n36. By "individual" Baderin means an "individual philosopher" and by "public", she refers to "a wider, non-philosophically trained, public" See p.2.
[41] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 452.

In *Reflective equilibrium and justice as political* (which Rawls read) Norman Daniels goes so far as to describe *A Theory of Justice* as encouraging a "philosopher's dream" in which "philosophical argument" is tasked with "[…] moving everyone who can think clearly and rationally about matters, regardless of their starting beliefs, to convergence on justice as fairness".[42] The importance of public participation in reflective equilibrium was so important in this approach that "The specific content of justice as fairness is thus made determinate through this process in which all of us are invited to participate. All of us are, in effect, put in the driver's seat for purposes of theory construction and justification".[43]

Daniels recalls the concerning feeling of "philosophical loss" that he and other academic philosophers encountered when they realised that, given the fact of reasonable pluralism, philosophy could not play so ambitious a public role as was suggested in *A Theory of Justice.*[44] Nontheless, it remained vital in *Political Liberalism* that political reflection should play a major role in the lives of citizens, albeit in the different, two-stage process outlined above.

Another way of arguing that Rawls envisaged reflection as a practice for philosophers (and not citizens generally), might be drawn by highlighting certain passages in *Political Liberalism*, the most persuasive of which would be Rawls's remark that an "effective public conception of justice" must be "public", but that it is sufficient for the "full justification" of this conception merely to be "publicly available". This condition, says Rawls, "[…] allows for the possibility that some will not want to carry philosophical reflection about political life so far, and certainly no one is required to".[45] As long as

[42] Daniels, *Justice and Justification*, 160.
[43] Daniels, 161.
[44] Daniels, 160.
[45] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 67.

citizens can *access* the full justification, they needn't actually do any full philosophical reflection, one might argue.

This, however, would be a systematic misreading of *Political Liberalism* because it fails to take account of the "three levels" of publicity outlined by Rawls. The idea that "[…] no one is required […]" to "[…] carry philosophical reflection so far […]" applies only at the *third* level and refers only to giving a "[…] full justification of the public conception of justice as it would be presented in its own terms […]".[46] That is, I take it, to offer a complete philosophical defence of public principles of justice. At the *first* level of publicity "everyone with reason recognises" that the institutions of the basic structure are just "[…] on the basis of commonly shared beliefs confirmed by methods of inquiry and ways of reasoning generally accepted as appropriate for questions of political justice".[47] The *second* level concerns "general beliefs about human nature and the way political and social institutions generally work" which citizens must, too, consider using "[…] publicly shared methods of inquiry and forms of reasoning […]".[48] What are such appropriate methods of inquiry and ways of reasoning? Rawls makes it clear in his *Reply to Habermas* (*PL* Lecture IX) that in a well-ordered society, it is the method of reaching wide reflective equilibrium on the public political conception of justice.[49]

If this were not enough evidence, it can also be shown from Rawls's account of the "duty of civility" that citizens must do this. Rawls makes it abundantly clear that citizens must use public reason such that they are "[…] able to explain to one another on those fundamental questions how the principles and policies they advocate and vote for can be supported by the political values of public reason".[50] Rawls argues that if this duty applied only in official forums, such as the legislature, executive, and judiciary, it would "[…] not

[46] Rawls, 67.
[47] Rawls, 66.
[48] Rawls, 66–67.
[49] Rawls, 384 n16.
[50] Rawls, 217.

go far enough […]".[51] This applies as part of the democratic relationship between citizens "[…] within the basic structure of society into which they are born and within which they normally lead a complete life […]".[52]

The fact that philosophical reflection, for citizens, plays this role in Rawls's later ("politicized") work is precisely why Daniels argues that, in *Political Liberalism*, there is no "unacceptable philosophical loss", and that "[w]ide reflective equilibrium, and thus justification, remains alive and well after politicization".[53]

Finally, further evidence of Rawls's views about the place of political reflection among citizens can be seen in his comments on the purpose of political philosophy given at the beginning of his Harvard lectures on the history of political thought. Whilst political philosophy has the familiar role of "probing the limits of practical political possibility",[54] it also plays a further vital role in society: maintaining social order—since "[…] a constitutional regime may not long endure unless its citizens first enter democratic politics with fundamental conceptions and ideals that endorse and strengthen its basic political institutions".[55] This should happen "not so much in day-to-day politics as in educating citizens to certain ideal conceptions of the person and political society before they come to politics, and in their reflective moments througout life".[56]

3. Arendt and Reflection as a Political Practice

Rawls's ideas were animated, at least in part, by a background concern about totalitarianism: "One of the many reasons why the Weimar constitution failed was that

[51] Rawls, 217.
[52] Rawls, 217.
[53] Daniels, *Justice and Justification*, 174.
[54] John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Samuel Richard Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 10.
[55] Rawls, 5.
[56] Rawls, 7.

none of the main intellectual currents in Germany was prepared to defend it, including leading philosophers such as Heidegger and Thomas Mann".[57] Thus, political philosophy, as a model of political reflection, has an important role to play in a democracy and is not merely an academic exercise. Furthermore, it is not sufficient for philosophers merely to defend democracy publicly; as we have seen, citizens should be encouraged to think through the issues for themselves to the point of reflective equilibrium. The twin concerns of totalitarianism and political engagement under pluralism also animated Arendt to develop her account of political reflection. However, as we shall see, her account differs markedly from Rawls's.

The most obvious place one might look for Arendt's thoughts on reflection and its political role would be her later works—most obviously her unfinished and posthumously-published *The Life of the Mind*. In introducing that text, she cites two sources from which her interests in the *vita contemplativa* (contemplative life) stem. The first stems directly from her infamous commentary on the Eichmann trial in which she described the kind of evil at work in Adolf Eichmann's participation in the holocaust as "banal".[58] Eichmann spoke constantly in clichés which, to Arendt, betrayed his astonishing shallowness and inability think for himself—thus the kind of evil which led an habitually obedient bureaucrat to commit crimes against humanity by simply following orders was "not stupidity but *thoughtlessness*".[59] This led her to want to develop more fully an account of exactly how the mind can and should operate to prevent such thoughtless crimes—including crimes against humanity.

The second source of interest for Arendt comes from what she describes as "[…] certain doubts that had been plaguing me ever since I had finished a study of what my publisher wisely called "The Human Condition", but which I had intended more modestly

[57] Rawls, 6.
[58] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem : A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 2006).
[59] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 4.

as an enquiry into "The Vita Activa." "[60] Arendt is rightly known for highlighting the importance of political *action* in the public square as a vital and diminished aspect of life under conditions of modern, bureaucratic government. Some commentators have pointed out that it might seem strange that in her final works she should claim that "[…] thinking, not acting, is what counts "when the chips are down"[…]".[61] It is not clear to me that by investigating thinking, she also entailed the claim that acting is 'not' what 'counts', but rather seems to present the investigation into the *vita contemplativa* as a missing complement to her analysis of the *vita activa*. Both 'count', and both are relevant to 'the human condition', and thus a more full analysis of the life of the mind in human activity and politics became an important concern for Arendt. She says she was particularly inspired to challenge common assumptions about the contemplative life in Western philosophy, including the idea that "[…] contemplation is the highest state of mind […]" and "[…] is not an activity but a passivity".[62] She highlights a quote ascribed to Cato by Cicero which stands out against this tradition: "[…]"never is a man more active than when he does nothing, never is he less alone than when he is by himself" (*Nunquam se plus agere quam nihil cum ageret, nunquam minus solum esse quam cum solus esset*)".[63]

This quote, she notes, was the final "curious sentence" on which she finished *The Human Condition*.[64] There, she highlighted the potential for examining contemplation as an activity for all:

> "[…] As a living experience, thought has always been assumed, perhaps wrongly, to be known only to the few. […] For if no other test but the experience of being active, no other measure but the extent of sheer activity were to be applied to the various activities within the *vita activa,* it

[60] Arendt, 6.
[61] Rei Terada, 'Thinking for Oneself: Realism and Defiance in Arendt. (Hannah Arendt)', *ELH* 71, no. 4 (2004): 839.
[62] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 6.
[63] Arendt, 7–8.
[64] Arendt, 7.

> might well be that thinking as such would surpass them all. Whoever has any experience in this matter will know how right Cato was when he said: *Nunquam* [etc.]".[65]

The later works can thus be read as a continuation or completion of an as-yet underexplored interest from both the Eichmann case and *The Human Condition*. That said, the relationship between thinking and politics was in fact a long-standing interest of Arendt's. *The Human Condition* was itself presented as an attempt to "[…] think what we are doing".[66] Between writing *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind*, she had written on the nature of thinking and judgement in a series of lectures and essays, many of which were published in *Between Past and Future* and the collection, posthumously-published and edited by Jerome Kohn, *Responsibility and Judgement*. But Arendt's interests in the place of mental activity in politics go even further back than *The Human Condition*—somewhat surprisingly, she doesn't note that she *also* included the Cato quote in the final pages of the revised *Origins of Totalitarianism*.[67] I summarise here several salient features of her approach to the life of the mind in politics which run through her works before turning to her accounts of thinking and judgement in more detail.

In numerous texts before *The Life of The Mind*, Arendt demonstrated a sustained interest in the role of thinking in 'solitude' and its place in politics. Unlike Rawls, who fashioned 'reflective equilibrium' as a term of art in his work, Arendt used the word 'reflection' freely to describe different mental states and processes.[68] Only in her *Lectures on Kant* did she begin using the phrases 'operation of reflection' and 'reflective judgement' as technical terms. She also used the term 'thinking' freely to discuss psychological

[65] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition: Second Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 325.
[66] Arendt, 5.
[67] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin Classics, 2017).
[68] Examples include presenting her own thoughts as 'reflections', speaking of certain psychological processes as 'reflecting activities' and speaking of the ideas of philosophers in the Platonic style as a 'reflection of the eternal' respectively: Hannah Arendt and Jerome Kohn, *Between Past and Future : Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, Penguin Classics (New York ; London: Penguin Books, 2006), 63; Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think* (New York; London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 78; Hannah Arendt, 'Philosophy and Politics', *Social Research* 71, no. 3 (2004): 432.

phenomena that she would later distinguish more sharply into 'thinking' and 'judging'. In the second part of this section on Arendt, I turn to examine more precisely what she meant by 'thinking' and 'judging' as distinct processes drawing chiefly on her remarks in her last works. First, however, I will set the scene by drawing out several distinctive features of Arendt's approach to the political mind which run through all of her work. I argue that these features point to a distinctively *ethical* conception of the political mind. Arendt broad outlook stood opposed to the idea that reflection can lead to the identification or construction of a theory of justice which will command near universal acceptance and thereby justify the state. She valued the *process* of reflection because of its potential for indirect, ethical effects on people's character and behaviour even if it doesn't produce final answers to questions of justice.

i. Aversion to totalising regimes and systems of thought

Firstly, Arendt consistently highlighted the dangers of systems of thought and social environments which seek to force the mind into adhering to rigid ideas, thereby constricting freedom of thought. This is a major point she makes in the final section of *The Origins*. Arendt argues that a distinctive feature of totalitarianism is the use of an 'ideology'—an all-encompassing, oversimplified narrative of the world—which "[…] to the satisfaction of their adherents can explain everything and every occurrence by deducing it from a single premise[…]".[69] People become resistant to experiencing reality for what it is by becoming determined to interpret everything in light of this narrative to ensure "[…] a consistency that exists nowhere in the realm of reality".[70] Ideology (in Arendt's sense, Nazism, Stalinism, or otherwise) thus cuts off the possibility of free thinking within, and

[69] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 615.
[70] Arendt, 619.

open political dialogue between, people's minds by demanding total "submission" to its explanations.[71]

It was not merely totalitarian ideology, however, that could constrict the mind in Arendt's view. Philosophical systems, such as those developed by Plato and philosophers who followed in his intellectual wake, could also have this effect. As noted below, she was sure to make clear that the 'logic' of totalitarianism was distinctive and not the same as that employed in the philosophical systems such as those of Plato and Kant. That said, she maintained that both systems have the tendency of claiming a total monopoly on "Truth" and are thereby psychologically totalising and hostile to genuine political engagement. As Dolan points out, the relationship between philosophy and politics is an issue we find Arendt addressing in texts from *The Human Condition,* through the 1960s with *Between Past and Future* and *Men in Dark Times*, right until the end with the *Lectures on Kant* and *The Life of the Mind.*[72] She addressed the matter directly in her posthumously-published essay *Philosophy and Politics*. Dolan points out the common theme running though Arendt's reflections on this topic: she presents two very different ways of conceiving the relationship between politics and philosophy; one, Socratic, and the other, Platonic.[73]

Arendt saw the history of Western philosophy as changing tack at a critical juncture—the execution of Socrates.[74] This event proved to Plato that "the city is no safe place for the philosopher".[75] Plato sought to get *out* of the city in order to practice

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[71] Arendt, 622.
[72] Frederick M Dolan, 'Arendt on Philosophy and Politics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 261–276.
[73] Arendt's readings of Socrates and Plato differ somewhat to my own—partly because of my distinctive focus on the role of the reflection metaphor in their works. I concur with Arendt that Plato's approach claims a philosophical tyranny on truth, but read Socrates (focusing on the *First Alcibiades*) as more ambiguous; he started a tradition of thought which admitted of extremely varied interpretation (as Plato, the Stoics, and others did). Her reading of Socratic reflection is nevertheless fascinating and plays a significant role below. Arendt can be read as another philosopher in a long tradition examining what the true Socratic legacy really is (see Melissa Lane's *Plato's Progeny* as mentioned above).
[74] Hannah Arendt, 'Philosophy and Politics', 428; Dolan, 'Arendt on Philosophy and Politics'.
[75] Arendt, 'Philosophy and Politics', 428.

philosophy away from the chaos and foment of conflicting, incoherent, and confused *doxa* or 'opinions'. Philosophy was to put forward its own theory which would be so perfect as to be absolutely and undeniably true. 'Truth' and 'opinion' would now be seen as utterly opposed. This understanding of philosophy, as both aiming at objective truth and opposed to engagement with 'opinion', Arendt describes as the "tyranny of truth".[76] Thus, there is a commonality between Arendt's opposition to totalitarianism and Platonic philosophical theorising: both, she argued, shut down political life by claiming, in their different ways, a monopoly on truth. A heavily epistemic conception of reflection as employed by absolutists from Plato to the 20th Century becomes a means to divorcing 'truth' from 'opinion' and it is this that Arendt challenges strongly.

Arendt's distinctively *political* solution to the problem of totalising thought systems is well-known. Her work in *The Human Condition* emphasised the importance of lively public engagement through what she described as 'action'—a lively exchange of views in the public square on the model of Socrates, a thinker who lived in the city and debated with fellow Athenians, rather than Plato, who, being disillusioned with political engagement, fled the city. Socratic political engagement, says Arendt in *Philosophy and Politics*, enables people to cultivate civic friendship precisely because they take interests in one another's different views of the world (their *dokei moi* or the world as 'it-appears-to-me').[77] Thus, the idea of political 'action' in the *vita activa* always relies upon a flourishing life of the mind or *vita contemplativa*. We can turn to examining several aspects of this life of the mind that run consistently through Arendt's work.

[76] Arendt, 431.
[77] Arendt, 434.

ii. Resistance to 'Logic' as standard or method for political thought

A good starting point for recognising what, in Arendt's view, the *vita contemplativa* ought to entail can be found in something she thought it ought *not* to be: founded on 'logic'. In *The Origins*, she criticises the "logicality of ideological thinking"[78]—thinking which "springs from a fear of contradicting ourselves".[79] As she put it,

> "The tyranny of logicality begins with the mind's submission to logic as a never-ending process, on which man relies in order to engender his thoughts. By this submission, he surrenders his inner freedom as he surrenders his freedom of movement when he bows down to an outward tyranny".[80]

To Arendt, the emphasis on "logic" becomes a tyrannical menace by constricting the minds of citizens and thereby strangling and suffocating the possibility of genuine political difference and disagreement.

It can seem strange to read Arendt attacking totalitarianism for its 'logic'. From the perspective of the kind of liberal analytic philosophy epitomised by Rawls, it seems an unhelpfully complimentary term for systems of thought such as Nazism, Stalinism, and racism which, one might imagine, can be robustly and comprehensively undermined precisely by pointing out their *lack* of logic. On one hand, one can interpret Arendt as talking about a specific *kind* of 'logic' which, she writes, is substantially different to that employed by major philosophers; it is "[…] neither Plato's eternal essence grasped by the eyes of the mind nor Kant's regulative principle of reason but has become an instrument of explanation".[81] That is, a dialectical meta-narrative which claims to explain events

[78] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 623.
[79] Arendt, 621.
[80] Arendt, 622.
[81] Arendt, 616.

through a single, totalitarian ideological perspective.[82] On the other hand, however, Arendt objected to totalising systems of logic in all forms, considering them to close off the possibility of genuine political difference in the public square and genuine free thought within oneself—including those propounded by major philosophers in Western intellectual history.

This can be seen in her introductory essay to *Between Past and Future* where she wrote that that the "kind of thinking" in her essays, all of which address social and political phenomena, is "[…] different from such mental processes as deducing, inducing, and drawing conclusions whose logical rules of non-contradiction and inner consistency can be learned once and for all and then need only to be applied".[83] Here, again, she seems to take aim at 'logical' thinking in the political sphere. However, she is clearly not taking aim at a narrowly defined 'logic' of totalitarianism but rather logical reasoning in general.

It isn't clear what Arendt meant by these claims against logic. Perhaps we ought to take Arendt's claim at face value and interpret her as arguing that her writings involve *no* deduction, induction, and so forth. That would be a strange interpretation since Arendt clearly does make arguments in the essays in *Between Past and Future*, and these *do* use, albeit informally just as in any other text, deductive arguments as a method of making points. I think we can interpret her as making two weaker claims.

Firstly, I think she meant that insisting on the articulation of political positions in a philosophically technical system of logic where points are made premise-by-premise, would be inimical to public debate. It gives the impression that one must have mastered an art of technical argument before one can make political points, and this would prevent people from feeling they could participate in the kind of 'action' Arendt felt necessary to

[82] Arendt, 616–17.
[83] Arendt and Kohn, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 13.

politics. As we shall see, she was keen to ensure that public debate was not the preserve of an elite of philosophers.

Secondly, we can interpret her as rejecting the idea that any system of 'logic' which insists upon a set of unquestioned primary assumptions can be helpful in politics. This is what, I think, she means by rejecting the idea of a system whose principles are settled 'once and for all' and 'need only be applied'—be they the claims of a totalitarian regime or a system of philosophy such as Plato's or Kant's moral philosophy. This idea we will see her develop in her emphasis upon 'reflective judgement' where one judges without 'subsuming' the thing to be judged under a pre-determined standard or yardstick.

iii. Reflection as a space of independence from totalising forces

If the *vita contemplativa* is supposed to create an inner space of freedom, unshackled from stringent requirements of 'logic' and totalising systems of thought, how should it operate? How might it be described? Arendt used a series of phrases to describe the style of free thinking she had in mind, some of which have become strongly associated with her work, such as thinking 'without a banister' and thinking 'between past and future.' She ended *The Origins* with a quotation from Augustine's *The City of God*: "that a beginning be made man was created".[84] She wrote that "[…] Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man's freedom".[85] Arendt probably took this phrase to be so profound that it held many layers of meaning. One meaning is that a necessary condition of freedom consists in the ability to consider and decide where one takes one's bearings when considering how to live and behave. This means being free from the constraints of a given system of thought and its 'logic':

[84] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 629.
[85] Arendt, 629.

> "Freedom as an inner capacity of man is identical with the capacity to begin, just as freedom as a political reality is identical with a space of movement between men. Over the beginning, no logic, no cogent deduction can have any power, because its chain presupposes, in the form of a premise, the beginning".[86]

By thinking independently from a psychologically totalising system of thought, one gains freedom from it. This theme can also be found in the introduction to *Between Past and Future* where Arendt also emphasised the importance of thinking afresh with new beginnings, without relying on a foregoing and established system of thought to determine one's ideas. Such established systems include political philosophies, such as those of Plato and his intellectual descendants, as mentioned above. Arendt argues that establishment of 'tradition' has undermined people's ability to think in free ways:

> "The trouble, however, is that we seem to be neither equipped nor prepared for this activity of thinking, of settling down in the gap between past and future. For very long times in our history, actually throughout the thousands of years that followed upon the foundation of Rome and were determined by Roman concepts, this gap was bridged over by what, since the Romans, we have called tradition."[87]

This "gap" is what Arendt takes from Kafka's description of a "thought event"—the moment in which what has gone before in one's life and the future ahead of oneself "clash with each other".[88] This is the phenomenological point at which one can develop one's own sense of identity and individuality and can fashion a future based on those reflections. One major danger, then, is that tradition causes people always to be stuck in the past

[86] Arendt, 622.
[87] Arendt and Kohn, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 13.
[88] Arendt and Kohn, 10.

such that no "gap" ever opens up in which one can gain a sense of personal individuality not absorbed into a past system of thought. There is an opposite danger, however. Arendt stresses that thinkers must not make the opposite mistake of presuming that it can stand entirely outside of space and time. As Arendt put it, one must not fall

> "[…] into a dream of a region over and above the fighting line—and what else is this dream and this region but the old dream which Western metaphysics has dreamed from Parmenides to Hegel of a timeless, supersensuous realm as the proper region of thought?"[89]

One must aim to think *between* past and future, not *outside time*—thus avoiding aiming at a Platonic 'eternal essence' through logic as she emphasised in *The Origins*. The sources of one's thought can avoid becoming excessively abstract by remaining tied to one's concrete experiences. As Arendt wrote, "[…] my assumption is that thought itself arises out of incidents of living experience and must remain bound to them as the only guideposts by which to take its bearings".[90]

This fits with her approach to the relation between philosophy and politics. Following the example of Socrates, citizens ought to pay close attention to understanding how the world appears to others—their *dokei moi*.[91] Arendt famously described this kind of independence of thought as thinking 'without a banister' which illustrated the idea that under intellectual conditions of modernity one cannot rely on a given set of categories to govern one's thought.[92] This theme is continued in Arendt's emphasis on 'reflective judgement' (those which, unlike 'determinant' judgements, do not subsume the thing to be judged under a pre-determined yardstick) which I come to consider in more detail

[89] Arendt and Kohn, 11.
[90] Arendt and Kohn, 14.
[91] Arendt, 'Philosophy and Politics', 434.
[92] Hannah Arendt, *Thinking Without a Banister: Essays in Understanding, 1953-1975* (New York, N.Y.: Schocken Books, 2018), 473.

below. In *Philosophy and Politics*, Arendt argued that the insistence of philosophy in providing set rules and yardsticks led to a futile attempt, lasting centuries, to defend philosophy against what she took to be its manifest uselessness in the modern political realm:

> "Yet while Plato's inhuman ideal state never became a reality, and the usefulness of philosophy had to be defended throughout the centuries—because in actual political action it proved utterly useless—philosophy rendered one signal service to Western man. Because Plato in a sense deformed philosophy for political purposes, philosophy continued to provide standards and rules, yardsticks and measurements with which the human mind could at least attempt to understand what was happening in the realm of human affairs. It is this usefulness for understanding that was exhausted with the approach of the modern age."[93]

iv. The use of phenomenological description to capture the nature of reflective thought

Arendt claimed that free thought, unconstrained by pre-determined standards and categories, is facilitated by 'solitude'. This theme can be found in many of Arendt's texts in which 'solitude' (the condition of being alone without the desire for the company of others by keeping company with oneself) is contrasted with 'loneliness' (being alone and desiring others' company).

Arendt ends *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by highlighting loneliness as a key catalyst for totalitarian terror.[94] Totalitarianism makes people lonely by annihilating all possibility of truly political relationships which thrive on dialogue in the public realm. All that seemingly remains for them to hold on to as a source of purpose, meaning and self-

[93] Arendt, 'Philosophy and Politics', 452–53.
[94] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 624–29.

worth is the logic of the totalitarian system itself. She underscores the importance of this observation not merely for understanding past atrocities but also for preventing totalitarianism returning again under the societal and cultural conditions of modernity. As "[…] political institutions and social traditions […]"[95] break down in societies which have experienced industrialisation and imperialism, people feel increasingly lonely and disoriented, reduced to a condition of mere producers—*homo faber*.

Under totalitarianism, where the public realm has been obliterated by this "logic", political action becomes impossible. Arendt proposes a way in which loneliness can be overcome—by "thinking" in "solitude". This is because, with the company of oneself, one can have an inner dialogue as "two-in-one".[96] Arendt laments that finding solitude in loneliness is basically impossible under totalitarianism:

> "By destroying all space between men and pressing men against each other, even the productive potentialities of isolation are annihilated; by teaching and glorifying the logical reasoning of loneliness where man knowns that he will be utterly lost if ever he lets go of the first premise from which the whole process is being started, even the slim chances that loneliness may be transformed into solitude and logic into thought are obliterated".[97]

Thus, when she wrote that section of *The Origins*, she considered the practice of inner thought in solitude to be a powerful antidote to the return of totalitarianism, but not powerful enough to resist established totalitarian regimes. She seemed to change her mind about this, as we shall see, by the time she gave the Gifford lectures that became *The Life of the Mind*.

In her reflections in *Philosophy and Politics,* Arendt dwells on the difference between the phenomenological conditions of appearance in public and reflection in

[95] Arendt, 624.
[96] Arendt, 625–26.
[97] Arendt, 628.

solitude. When appearing in public to speak and present one's opinions or one's *doxa*, there is a certain performative element which comes with pressure to appear coherent and appreciated:

> "[t]he word *doxa* means not only opinion but also splendour and fame. As such, it is related to the political realm, which is the public sphere in which everybody can appear and show who he himself is. To assert one's own opinion belonged to being able to show oneself, to be seen and heard by others".[98]

Even though this a distinctively public activity it depends upon citizens approaching politics in the right frame of mind—that of being "together with oneself".[99] If one is to appear in public and receive recognition for one's *doxa*, one must try to avoid contradicting oneself and appearing incoherent. Here, Arendt points out that the beauty of solitude is that people can enter the state of being "two-in-one" carrying out an inner dialogue with oneself, thinking from different perspectives.[100] In solitude, says Arendt, "[…] I can contradict myself because in thought I am two-in-one; therefore I do not live only with others, as one, but also with myself".[101] Arendt was not suggesting that one can engage in *endorsing* blatant self-contradictions in one's own thought but, rather, that one has the freedom to view the world from multiple perspectives and see multiple sides of arguments when one thinks in solitude. One does not necessarily have this freedom when appearing in public. Thus, there is a certain sense in which one enjoys greater intellectual freedom in solitude owing to the lack of public pressure to appear coherent. Her spatial language ("space between men" and the space "between past and future") points to the importance of cultivating both social and psychological space to develop one's own sense of identity.

[98] Arendt, 'Philosophy and Politics', 433.
[99] Arendt, 439.
[100] Arendt, 438.
[101] Arendt, 438.

This theme develops into a rich phenomenology of what it means to 'withdraw' from the world of appearances in her work on 'thinking' discussed below.

v. Reflection as an activity for all, not just professional thinkers

The idea that the kind of liberating thinking Arendt has been describing is not dependent on a pre-determined technical 'logic' and set of ideas links to another theme consistent in her works: the idea that whilst thinking is a vital practice that needs to be revived and renewed, it is not something that is only for, or even practiced especially well by, a group of elite philosophers or professional thinkers. In *The Origins* Arendt pointed out the difficulty facing philosophers wishing to live a life totally withdrawn from the world and who believed that 'philosophy is only for the few'.[102] That condition, too, leads to loneliness since, without being able to disclose the selfhood and meaning that one finds in solitude, one feels perpetually misunderstood.[103] In her essay on the relationship between philosophy and politics, she stressed that philosophers ought to follow the model of Socrates in dwelling in the city and practicing *dialegesthai*, thereby cultivating civic friendship even in the midst of political difference. This friendship is possible because, through critical dialogue, citizens "can understand the truth inherent in the other's opinion".[104]

We see this theme also in the introduction to *Between Past and Future* where, too, her distancing of thinking from being stuck in the past on one hand, and trying to stand outside of time on the other hand, leads to Arendt's emphasis on the idea that political

[102] See Arendt's remarks on p. 626.
[103] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 626.
[104] Arendt, 'Philosophy and Politics', 436.

thinking is not for a privileged elite of philosophers ("[…]those few who made thinking their primary business"[105]) steeped in traditions of thought and logic, but "for all".[106]

vi. Reflection as an ethical activity

Arendt viewed the purpose of Socratic *dialegesthai* to be cultivating *friendship* between citizens, and not to hold out the hope of reaching final, conclusive *truths* on questions of justice.[107] Whilst citizens could articulate opinions (*doxa*) speaking in public, this must be presented as *dokei moi*—the world as I see it—and not a claim to the full and absolute truth of all things. In presenting their *doxa*, citizens must thus maintain a keen awareness that their perspective is limited and that others' perspectives can and do contain unique and valuable contributions. She described total claims to the truth as a 'tyranny of truth'.[108] Thus, Arendt can be read as placing a primarily ethical value on public discussion: its benefit, even if it will never lead us to the full truth, is in enabling people to realise the good of civic friendship.

Just as she viewed the purpose of public discussion as largely ethical, so too did she see the purpose of the *vita contemplativa* in the same way. She consistently downplayed the idea that thinking could lead to a settled vision of the truth. In her introduction to *Between Past and Future*, she cautioned against the idea that her own reflections led to any political truth, introducing her essays as "[…] exercises, and their only aim is to gain experience in *how* to think; they do not contain prescriptions on what to think or which truths to hold".[109] In turning to her work on thinking, we shall see how

[105] Arendt and Kohn, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 13.
[106] Arendt and Kohn, 13.
[107] Arendt, 'Philosophy and Politics', 434.
[108] Arendt, 431.
[109] Arendt and Kohn, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 13–14.

she thought that thinking couldn't lead to final truths, but was nonetheless valuable for the ethical qualities it could develop in thinkers.

Arendt held that several ethical goods were realised through solitude in dialogue with oneself as 'two in one'. In *The Origins*, Arendt points out that the space of thinking in solitude is vital for sustaining a sense of one's own individuality as distinct from others—the sense of being a unique "self"—which can be disclosed and confirmed once returning to the company of others.[110] This enables one to have a sense of belonging to the world since belonging requires a unique sense of one's own character where one belongs. This is particularly important, says Arendt, since in the last century industrialisation led people to feel "uprooted" and "superfluous"—thus losing any sense of individuality, and hence belonging, in the world.[111] This prepares the ground for totalitarianism by making the destructive and corrupt narratives of totalitarian mass movements seem alluring as a source of identity and purpose:

> "What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience of the evergrowing masses of our century".[112]

Thus, if we are to recover a sense of individual place and purpose in the world which is not derived from a destructive grand totalitarian narrative, an essential component of this is learning to reflect in solitude in the form of an inner dialogue. In *Philosophy and Politics*, Arendt describes this as developing a sense of humanity within the self:

> "Moreover, while engaged in the dialogue of solitude in which I am strictly by myself, I am not altogether separated from that plurality that is the world of men and that we call in its most

[110] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 626.
[111] Arendt, 624–25.
[112] Arendt, 627.

> general sense humanity. This humanity, or rather this plurality, is indicated already in the fact that I am two-in-one".[113]

This sense of humanity conditions one to act and behave within a world of plural human beings with a distinct voice.

This idea of thinking as an activity that conditions one to act in the world links to a second ethical aspect of reflection which can be found in several of Arendt's writings. It is developed in more detail in the *Thinking* section of *The Life of the Mind* which I consider in more detail below. It is the idea that when holding an inner dialogue within one's own mind, an unintended consequence is that one develops a sense of conscience, accountability, and responsibility to oneself. In her essay *Collective Responsibility*, Arendt argues that the "[…] faculty of thought, which is exercised in solitude […]" is essential to enabling people to take responsibility for actions.[114] This is based on the idea that in wrongdoing the person who has this moral sense of self-awareness would think, "[…] I could no longer live with myself; my life would cease to be worthwhile for me […]."[115] It is an idea she develops in *Thinking and Moral Considerations* (which would form the basis for key components of *The Life of the Mind*) where she asks:

> "[…] could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining and reflecting upon whatever happens to come to pass, regardless of specific content and quite independent of results, could this activity be of such a nature that it "conditions" men against evildoing?"[116]

It is a question Arendt answers in the affirmative, citing several reasons. Firstly, thinking—the "wind of thought"—forces people to "*stop* and think", thus interrupting the

[113] Arendt, 'Philosophy and Politics', 440.
[114] Hannah Arendt and Jerome Kohn, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 1st ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 157.
[115] Arendt and Kohn, 156.
[116] Arendt and Kohn, 160.

flow of activity which might well be in the grip of an evil, totalising system of thought.[117] Secondly, it raises the sense of conscience she discussed at the end of *Collective Responsibility* which she illustrates, as she did in *Philosophy and Politics*[118] and in *The Life of the Mind* with the example of a murderer's conscience weighing upon them: "[…] who would want to be the friend of and have to live together with a murderer? Not even a murderer".[119] Reflective thinking is essential, in Arendt's view, to bring about this sense of conscience since, if one is not in the habit of splitting one's mind into two in order to keep company with oneself, one is never concerned about keeping company with the wrongdoer that one has been. One simply *is* a wrongdoer. Refusing to reflect is a way of numbing the sense of accountability one has to oneself. Thus, reflection is essential for cultivating one's conscience, and this theme is one we can see developed in *The Life of the Mind*.

A further aspect of reflection Arendt repeatedly develops is the idea of a 'common sense' judgement which was her preferred approach for formulating opinions to be disclosed in public. She refers to this as the *sensus communis* in numerous places[120] and takes inspiration, as noted, from Kant's *Critique of Judgement* to develop her ideas. The fundamental idea is that, by viewing the world from other people's perspectives, one gains a developed sense of political taste. This has the advantage of avoiding any heavily theoretical demands on people to exercise political judgement—reflecting from others' perspectives is an imaginative rather than theoretical and calculating activity. Once one has reflected from different perspectives, one is then in a position to judge. As Garsten points out, Arendt's insistence on the lack of recourse to theoretical *grounds* of judgement means that she is able to tie the act of judgement very strongly to personal responsibility

[117] Arendt and Kohn, 176.
[118] See Arendt, 'Philosophy and Politics', 440.
[119] Arendt and Kohn, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 185.
[120] In various forms, see for example Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 625; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 209; Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think*, chaps 8–10; Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, secs 12–13.

for one's judgements.[121] That is, one cannot say 'I was simply following theory *x*' if one's judgement turned out to be wrong. One must say 'I judged wrongly' if one turns out to have made a poor judgement. This is one ethical effect of the approach to judgement Arendt develops.

An additional ethical effect is found in the idea that common sense judgement prepares people to enter the political realm by having reflected on others' views even if they do not endorse them. Again, reflection as it is implicated in judgement, for Arendt, plays a strongly ethical role. Whilst she downplayed the role of truth in politics as well as the role of 'logic', it is an open question, I argue, as to what sort of epistemology Arendt understood judgement to have. I suggest that she leaves multiple possible interpretations open, none of which are entirely satisfying. I turn to examining this in detail below, after considering her approach to thinking in her last work.

4. Reflection in Arendt's accounts of Thinking and Judging

We can now turn to examining Arendt's account of thinking and judging in more detail. Whilst she referred to thoughtful mental activity quite generally (as many writers do) as "reflection", in her later works, she began to use the term more specifically in reference to mental representation or 're-presentation' which is implicated in both thinking and judging.

In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt begins her account of thinking with a phenomenology of what it feels like to think. Paradigmatically, thinking involves a sense of "withdrawal" and "solitude"; by thinking one withdraws from the world of sensory experience and appearance into the invisible world within one's own mind.[122] This is

[121] Bryan Garsten, 'The Elusiveness of Arendtian Judgment', *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (2007): 1071–1108.
[122] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think*, 74 & 78.

necessary because the phenomenological conditions of appearance before others are markedly different as compared to reflecting in solitude. For Arendt, a significant aspect of human nature is the "[…] "urge to self-display" (*Selbstdarstellung*)".[123] This is true of other creatures—

> "It is indeed as though everything that is alive—in addition to the fact that its surface is made for appearance, fit to be seen and meant to appear to others—has an *urge to appear*, to fit itself into the world of appearances by displaying and showing, not its "inner self" but itself as an individual".[124]

That said, it is this trait of "[…] self-display, quite prominent already in the higher forms of animal life, that reaches its climax in the human species".[125] We want to be "fit to be seen". This is made more complicated by the fact that humans alone are capable of choosing "how they *wish* to appear".[126]

Although Arendt is well known for emphasising the importance of public 'action' to politics as a space of free expression in *The Human Condition*, here she is acutely aware of the limitations of action as compared to withdrawn thinking: "Whatever the motives may be, success and failure in the enterprise of self-presentation depend on the consistency and duration of the image thereby presented to the world".[127] There is a pressure to be consistent when appearing before others—and this is clearly true in pressurised political environments. She points out the importance of avoiding hypocrisy when self-presenting to the world.[128]

[123] Arendt, 29.
[124] Arendt, 29.
[125] Arendt, 30.
[126] Arendt, 34.
[127] Arendt, 36.
[128] Arendt, 36.

By withdrawing, one can reach a calm state of "dispassionate quiet" ("*leidenschaftslose Stille*"), a phrase Arendt takes from the preface to the second edition of Hegel's *Science of Logic*.[129] Withdrawal into solitude is essential as one needn't feel the pressure to be consistent: "Certainly when I appear and am seen by others, I am one; otherwise I would be unrecognizable. And so long as I am together with others, barely conscious of myself, I am as I appear to others".[130] It is only once I withdraw into this position of quiet solitude that I can "know with myself" and become "two in one" such that "[a] difference is inserted into my Oneness".[131] The state of withdrawal into solitude enables one to become a "spectator" and think about appearances and actions in the world, but this also has its limitations since it precludes the possibility of public action: "[…] as a spectator you may understand the "truth" of what the spectacle is about; but the price you have to pay is withdrawal from participating in it".[132] She describes this as being able to have a broader field of vision on public events:

> "[…] only the spectator occupies a position that enables him to see the whole play—as the philosopher is able to see the *kosmos* as a harmonious ordered whole. The actor, being part of the whole, must *enact* his part; not only is he a "part" by definition, he is bound to the particular that finds its ultimate meaning and the justification of its existence solely as a constituent of a whole. Hence, withdrawal from direct involvement to a standpoint outside the game (the festival of life) is not only a condition for judging, for being the final arbiter in the ongoing competition, but also the condition for understanding the meaning of the play".[133]

The phrase "understanding the meaning" here is significant because Arendt takes the *contents* of reflection to concern "meanings" and not "truths". She argues that the

[129] Arendt, 70.
[130] Arendt, 183.
[131] Arendt, 183.
[132] Arendt, 93.
[133] Arendt, 94.

"faculty of thinking" (*Vernuft* / reason) is "altogether different" from the "faculty of cognition" (*Verstand* / intellect).[134] The difference is that thinking aims at grasping the *meaning* of things, whereas cognition aims at *truth*.[135] From her essay *Truth and Politics*[136] and her work on the difference between politics and philosophy we know she thought of politics as having a complex relationship with truth. In *Truth and Politics*, she distinguished between "factual truth" (truth of bare facts, such as "In August 1914 Germany invaded Belgium"[137]) and "rational truth"—reasoning about political events as Plato and other philosophers did. Whilst factual truths are always vulnerable to totalitarian and other political regimes and must be protected, she was careful to maintain that the pursuit of rational truth is an enterprise detrimental to politics. Rather, one should aim at seeking *meaning* in *opinion* rather than totalising systems of absolute truth when interpreting political events.

It is from this withdrawn psychological position that one can begin to engage in thinking which aims at grasping "meaning"—which Arendt describes as a "reflecting activity".[138] Arendt points out that "[…] our whole mental terminology is based on metaphors drawn from vision's experience".[139] She uses a series of visual words to explain her position. Since, when thinking, one must withdraw from the world of sensation, one must learn to see with the "mind's eye".[140] This involves mental representation, or, as Arendt puts it, "re-presentation" which is possible only through "imagination".[141] As we

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[134] Arendt, 57.
[135] In relation to my own conceptualisation in Chapter 1, Arendt's idea of 'thinking' being distinctively orientated towards 'meaning' is not quite the same as what I intend by 'reflection' but is nonetheless close. Under my description, reflection involves consideration of things which are general in scope and are both 'complex' and 'sensitive' as subject matter. Because of this, a great many of the things which are included under my definition will be about questions of meaning and meaningfulness—what do we take to be valuable in life? How should we live? And so forth—but I avoid the term 'meaning' as it is can be difficult to identify exactly what it means.
[136] Arendt and Kohn, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, chap. 7.
[137] Arendt and Kohn, 235.
[138] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think*, 78.
[139] Arendt, 76.
[140] Arendt, 104.
[141] Arendt, 77.

shall see shortly, this process is extremely similar, if not exactly the same, as what Arendt would call (following Kant) the "operation of reflection" in her work on judgement. Whilst she used the term "reflection" to describe mental activity in general, here it seems to take on the specific meaning of re-presenting something to the mind. The term seems apt—just as a mirror re-presents an image in its reflection and thereby enables us to see an object differently, so too does mental representation.

The advantage of such re-presentation over direct sense experience is that the thinker can "go further" than merely seeing the object itself by considering it critically from different perspectives.[142] This happens by proceeding from imagined images to the invisible; things which are not even in principle visible such as "[…] thought-objects, concepts, ideas, categories, and the like […]".[143] Because of this, the reflecting activity of thinking is "reflexive" in the sense that it always involves the mental agent "acting, implicitly or explicitly, back upon himself".[144] Thus, "[…] every thought is strictly speaking an after-thought".[145] Such reflection proceeds through a "soundless dialogue between me and myself" which "takes place only in solitude".[146] Through inner dialogue, we are free to raise critical questions about our own assumptions and conceptual frameworks by continually asking Socratic questions such as "*What do you mean when you say…?"*[147]

What good does this activity achieve? One might think, as with Rawls, that the purpose of thinking is *epistemic* in the sense that it enables us to discover *answers* to moral and political questions. For Arendt, this is not the case. The epigram to *Thinking*, taken from Heidegger, reads as follows:

[142] Arendt, 83.
[143] Arendt, 77.
[144] Arendt, 74.
[145] Arendt, 78.
[146] Arendt, 64.
[147] Arendt, 185.

"*Thinking does not bring knowledge*
As do the sciences.
Thinking does not produce usable
practical wisdom.
Thinking does not solve the riddles
of the universe.
Thinking does not endow us directly
with the power to act".[148]

The problem with thinking, for Arendt, is that it simply raises more questions instead of providing answers. The Socratic question, "what do you mean when you say…?" can always be asked in response to any given answer. This is why Socrates, through his questioning, "[…] teaches nothing and has nothing to teach […]".[149] When we try to interrogate the meaning of fundamental concepts such as "*happiness, courage, justice,* and so on",[150] we find ourselves unable to do so:

> "These words are part and parcel of our everyday speech, and still we can give no account of them; when we try to define them, they get slippery; when we talk about their meaning, nothing stays put any more, everything begins to move".[151]

As a result of this fundamental and radical conceptual indeterminacy of what seemed to be perfectly plausible, "[…] this kind of pondering reflection does not produce definitions and in that sense is entirely without results […]".[152] She put the point clearly in *Thinking and Moral Considerations*: "[…] we cannot expect any moral propositions or commandments, no final code of conduct from the thinking activity, least of all a new and

[148] Arendt, 1.
[149] Arendt, 173.
[150] Arendt, 170.
[151] Arendt, 170.
[152] Arendt, 171.

now allegedly final definition of what is good and what is evil".[153] This is a surprising and profoundly different conclusion to that of Rawls. If thinking cannot provide us with definitions of key political terms such as 'justice' then what is the point of political thinking?

Arendt adds to the sentence quoted above from page 171 that thinking is "entirely without results" that, "[…] though somebody who had pondered the meaning of the word "house" might make his own look better".[154] She does *not* say that he would *know* how to make it look better. He might simply *make* it look better. Arendt's answer is that "If there is anything in thinking that can prevent men from doing evil, it must be some property inherent in the activity itself, regardless of its objects".[155] In contrast to Rawls's *epistemic* view of political reflection, we can understand Arendt's perspective as *ethical*. The practice of thinking *itself*, she claims, is ethically valuable. Her approach seems reminiscent of my interpretation of Augustine—even though people's intellectual are shrouded in darkness such that illumination is difficult, people should nevertheless reflect since the *activity* holds the prospect of changing them ethically. For Augustine, this takes place through Christ as mediator, but Arendt offers a different explanation based on her reading of Socrates.

Arendt takes her lead from her reading of Socrates who taught that "[…] thinking about piety, justice, courage, and the rest were likely to make men more pious, more just, more courageous, despite the fact that neither definitions nor "values" were given them to direct their future conduct".[156] Arendtian thinking is valuable in three significant *ethical* ways as discussed above. That is, it transforms the way people behave and act without giving them articulated and explicit *knowledge* of how and why to act. These can

[153] Arendt and Kohn, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 167.
[154] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think*, 171.
[155] Arendt, 180.
[156] Arendt, 171. As mentioned, this is what I take to be Arendt's interpretation of Socrates—I take Socrates to be difficult to interpret and admits of multiple possible readings. She appropriates Socratic ideas for her own theoretical purposes in fascinating ways which are of independent interest here.

be described as *paralysis, conscience,* and the *liberation of judgement*. The first effect involves a "twofold" "paralysis" induced by thinking.[157] Firstly, by disrupting action, paralysis is "[…] inherent in the *stop* and think, the interruption of all other activities […]".[158] By disrupting the flow of actions, thinking causes people to stop what they are doing and reflect. This is one sense in which men such as Eichmann could have benefitted from thinking: it might have stopped their activities and paralysed them. This idea has considerable resonance with the introductory remarks in *Between Past and Future*—by stopping to think, one prevents oneself from becoming absorbed into the flow of time from past to future and creates a space in which one can think for oneself, thus interrupting one's pattern of behaviour. The second sense in which thinking paralyses oneself is that "[…] it also may have a dazing after-effect, when you come out of it, feeling unsure of what seemed to you beyond doubt while you were unthinkingly engaged in whatever you were doing".[159] This is Arendt's idea of the 'wind of thought' that "If what you were doing consisted in applying general rules of conduct to particular cases as they arise in ordinary life, you will find yourself paralyzed because no such rules can withstand the wind of thought".[160]

This resonates with Arendt's ideas about both totalitarianism and the totalising systems of political thought associated with Plato and the tradition of Western political philosophy—both allegedly try to create a general, absolutely true system of political ideas and rules, and then insist that in politics, judgements must be *deduced* from such systems of rules.[161] Whilst I do not think Arendt intended in any way to equate the horror of

[157] Arendt, 175.
[158] Arendt, 175.
[159] Arendt, 175.
[160] Arendt, 175.
[161] To compare much—if not all—Western political theory with totalitarian regimes is not entirely fair on the part of Arendt in my view. Whilst she would no doubt agree that the consequences of totalitarianism were far worse than that of Plato's or Kant's moral writings, the comparison still seems a little harsh. For one thing, 'deductive' reason is necessary in, for example, any legal system—totalitarian or otherwise—and, whilst Plato advocated noble lies and Kant attempted to develop a comprehensive system of thought, nevertheless neither advocated the kinds of brutality used under totalitarianism. Still, we can take the point from Arendt that

totalitarianism with Western philosophy after Plato, both styles of thought, she claimed, tend to destroy genuine political engagement by substituting the lively exchange of *doxa* for complete political theory. By encouraging the destruction of such totalising systems through the 'wind of thought', Arendt aimed to recover genuine political engagement through 'judgement' as we shall see shortly.

The second way in which thinking has an ethical effect is through *conscience*. By splitting one's own consciousness into an internal dialogue, the thinker can develop a moral conscience. If we are to listen to our own inner voice, we feel a need to be "friends" with ourselves.[162] If one feels an inclination to do something morally wrong, this desire for "friendship" with oneself will give a strong hesitance and discourage one from the action. This is why it is "[…] better to suffer wrong than to do wrong, because you can remain the friend of the sufferer; who would want to be the friend of and live together with a murderer? Not even another murderer".[163] The benefit of thinking is thus a "moral side-effect" of the activity itself; for Arendt, it is this kind of conscience which can prevent "unthinking" men such as Eichmann from the "banal" forms of evil she claimed facilitated the Third Reich.[164] It is through this kind of reflection that one exercises responsibility, as she puts it in her essay *Collective Responsibility*:

> "If I would do what is now demanded of me as the price of participation, either as mere conformism or even as the only chance of eventually successful resistance, I could no longer live with myself; my life would cease to be worthwhile for me. Hence, I much rather suffer wrong now, and even pay the price of a death penalty in case I am forced to participate, than do wrong and then have to live together with such a wrongdoer".[165]

philosophical systems can have totalising tendencies which may be unhelpful, even if it wouldn't be fair to compare this to totalitarianism.

[162] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think*, 188.

[163] Arendt, 188.

[164] Arendt, 191.

[165] Arendt and Kohn, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 156.

The third ethical effect of thinking is that once one realises that thinking does not produce final answers to moral and political questions, one feels liberated to use another faculty in political life; the faculty of *judgement*. This "liberating effect of thinking" destroys all previously-held "values, doctrines, theories, and even convictions" which is of special importance when "[…] everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in […]".[166]

Here, we can see yet another contrast with Rawls. Whereas, for Rawls, reason comes to the rescue of judgement by making the sense of justice coherent, principled, and orderly, for Arendt the opposite happens: judgement comes to the rescue of reason. Reason fails to offer any rules, standards, or values, and thus must set judgement free to judge without recourse to pre-determined standards. Judging, for Arendt, also requires reflection, but it is of an utterly different kind to that of thinking.

When Arendt died, her typewriter was found with nothing more than the title page of what was to become the *Judging* section of *The Life of the Mind.*[167] Since she never completed that text, one faces a significant exegetical and interpretive challenge when attempting to reconstruct what she might have said. Some, such as Mary McCarthy[168] and Ronald Beiner[169] have drawn upon her remarks on judgement in the first volume of *The Life of the Mind,* as well as her posthumously published *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Others, however, dissent from this approach, pointing out that she discussed the question of judgement and its political significance in a range of other writings.[170] These include essays in the first and second editions of *Between Past and Future*

[166] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think*, 192.
[167] Mary McCarthy, 'Editor's Postface', in *The Life of the Mind*, by Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 242.
[168] McCarthy, 'Editor's Postface'.
[169] Ronald Beiner, 'Interpretive Essay', in *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, by Hannah Arendt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
[170] Dianna Taylor, 'Hannah Arendt on Judgement: Thinking for Politics', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 10, no. 2 (2002): 151–69.

(published respectively in 1961 and 1968), *The Crisis in Culture* and *Truth in Politics*. In addition, several of her essays and notes in the *Responsibility and Judgement* collection also contain similar remarks on the subject. I will not attempt to identify an "authentic Arendt" in these writings, but simply acknowledge interpretive issues where they arise.

All of the key elements of Arendt's theory of political judgement—along with several internal tensions—can be found in *The Crisis in Culture*, so I will begin with that text. Her remarks on judgement draw upon Kant's *Third Critique* which she takes to be part of his "political philosophy".[171] This is a strange ascription since, as she seems to acknowledge herself in the following paragraph, his political philosophy is normally thought to be found in the *Critique of Practical Reason* not the *Critique of Judgement.*[172] From her remarks elsewhere it is clear that she thought Kant was the first to discover the faculty of judgement.[173] The faculty of judgement contrasts with "[…] the lawgiving faculty of reason".[174] Whereas reason gives law by ensuring that agents are not in self-contradiction (as in the famous 'categorial imperative'), judgement does not work on such logical lines. Kant's *Critique of Judgement* focused on aesthetic taste in which one cannot expect to use the force of reason to persuade others, but "[…] can only "woo the consent of everyone else"[…]".[175]

This raises the question of the basis on which judgements ought to be made. How can we expect to "woo" others' consent? On the one hand, Arendt has ruled out reason and theory, but, on the other hand, aesthetic judgements seem too subjective to be a basis for political decision-making. Her solution to this dilemma is to navigate a course between subjectivity and objectivity—namely, as she put it her later writing, "intersubjectivity".[176]

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[171] Arendt and Kohn, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 216.
[172] Arendt and Kohn, 216.
[173] e.g. Arendt and Kohn, 237.: "Though he did not recognise the political implications of his discovery" and Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think*, 215 (Postscriptum).
[174] Arendt and Kohn, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 216.
[175] Arendt and Kohn, 219.
[176] Arendt and Kohn, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 141.

How is this possible? The answer lies in the Kantian concepts of "enlarged mentality" and "common sense":

> "The power of judgement rests on a potential agreement with others, and the thinking process which is active in judging something is not, like the thought process of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement".[177]

The idea is that one can look upon things to be judged from others' perspectives and thereby develop one's own capacity to judge. This is why Arendt reads Kant's aesthetic philosophy as "political". It inherently involves "[…] the ability to see things not only from one's own point of view but in the perspective of all those who happen to be present".[178] This enables one to reduce the effect of one's own subjective partialities—as Arendt puts it, judgement "[…] gains in validity to the degree that it has liberated itself from merely individual idiosyncrasies".[179]

This ability to look upon the world from others' perspectives Arendt, following Kant, calls '*sensus communis*' or 'common sense':

> "Common sense—which the French so suggestively call the "good sense," *le bon sens*—discloses to us the nature of the world insofar as it is a common world; we owe to it the fact that our strictly private and "subjective" five senses and their sensory data can adjust themselves to a nonsubjective and "objective" world which we have in common and share with others. Judging is one, if not the most, important activity in which this sharing-the-world-with-others comes to pass."[180]

[177] Arendt and Kohn, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 217.
[178] Arendt and Kohn, 218.
[179] Arendt and Kohn, 220.
[180] Arendt and Kohn, 218.

By contrast, Arendt notes that in terms of judgement, "[…] subjective private conditions", that is, the private idosyncracies which determine the outlook of individuals are "not fit to enter the marketplace and lack all validity in the public realm".[181] This marks the difference between judgement and mere taste for Arendt. As Arendt observes in the *Lectures*

> "One then speaks of judgement and no longer of taste because, though it still affects one like a matter of taste, one now has, by means of representation, established the proper distance, the remoteness or uninvolvedness or disinterestedness, that is requisite for approbation and disapprobation, for evaluating something at its proper worth".[182]

To become "fit" for the political marketplace, it takes a considerable degree of awareness of others' perspectives, of cultivation, and of reflection. Here, we can appreciate how Arendt's theory of judgement, too, is markedly *ethical* in nature. That is, she places great value on the judging process itself. This process—seeing the world from other people's perspectives—is what enables us to share a common world together; "sharing-the-world-with-others".[183] It reflects, cultivates, and strengthens a kind of "kinship".[184] It does not necessarily mean that people will reach the same judgements but does mean they can disclose more authentically who they are in the public realm—the "who one is" Arendt refers to.[185] As Mark Button points out,

> "[…] according to Arendt, the raison d'être of public words and deeds is self-disclosure, the disclosure of one's unique *humanitas* to others in a plural, public context. "In acting and

[181] Arendt and Kohn, 217.
[182] Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 67.
[183] Arendt and Kohn, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 218.
[184] Arendt and Kohn, 220.
[185] Arendt and Kohn, 220.

> speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world" ".[186]

At the end of the *Thinking* section of *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt makes clear that she intends to focus on the Kantian idea of the faculty of judgement:

> "It is the faculty that judges *particulars* without subsuming them under general rules […]. The faculty of judging particulars (as brought to light by Kant), the ability to say "this is wrong," "this is beautiful," and so on, is not the same as the faculty of thinking […]".[187]

This indicates the emphasis Arendt wished to place on the importance of Kantian 'reflective' judgement as opposed to 'determinant' judgement which she discusses elsewhere in *Thinking*.[188] Whereas 'determinant' judgements are where "[…] particulars are subsumed under general rules in the form of a syllogism […]",[189] a 'reflective' judgement is one that "[…] does not descend from the general to the particular but ascends "from the particular … to the universal" by deciding, without any over-all rules, This is beautiful, this is ugly, this is right, this is wrong […]".[190] The idea of judging without 'subsuming' the particular things to be judged under general rules is entirely coherent with her approach of thinking 'without a banister' and emphasising the importance of thinking in the 'gap between past and future'—the note on which she finishes the *Thinking* section.

Arendt expands upon the idea of 'reflection' as a technical Kantian term in the *Lectures*. Much of what she says there coheres with what she said earlier, but it goes into

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[186] Mark Button, 'Arendt, Rawls, and Public Reason', *Social Theory and Practice* 31, no. 2 (2005): 265; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 179.
[187] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think*, 193.
[188] Arendt, 69.
[189] Arendt, 69.
[190] Arendt, 69.

considerably more detail on the *Third Critique*. Since I am interested in the concept of reflection, it is worth momentarily focusing on this idea in the *Lectures*. Kantian judgement works, according to Arendt, through the "operation of reflection".[191] The "operation of reflection" is what enables one to judge something when it is not present to oneself. It thus relies on the imagination to represent (re-present) the thing to be judged to oneself.[192] This matters for two reasons. Firstly, because being in the presence of something to be judged may unduly affect the judgement,[193] and secondly, because it is only through such mental representation that one can imaginatively view things from others' perspectives.[194] It seems that this "operation of reflection" plays the same role as that described in the *Thinking* section (pp.76-78) where Arendt describes thinking as a 'reflecting activity'. From this, we can understand how Arendt viewed reflection as central to both thinking and judging but functioning in each process in very different ways.

Arendtian thinking demonstrates only that there are no hard and fast yardsticks under which political judgements can be made. This *liberates* the faculty of judgement to function independently as a distinct mental process from thinking. The political relevance of this is clear from her reflections on totalitarianism and the Eichmann trial. She saw men such as Eichmann as failing to think and judge for themselves. Rather than reflecting upon their actions from the perspectives of those who would become victimised by Nazi atrocities, they subsumed all judgements under the pre-existing rules laid down by the Third Reich and simply obeyed orders. As Arendt would note in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* it was as if Nazi criminals were obeying a corrupted version of Kant's philosophy. She writes (of Eichmann speaking during his trial),

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[191] Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 65–69.
[192] Arendt, 68.
[193] (One must have "[…] established the proper distance, the remoteness or uninvolvedness or disinterestedness, that is requisite for approbation and disapprobation" Arendt, 67.
[194] Arendt, 73.

> "Eichmann stated that he had read Kant's critique of practical reason. He then proceeded to explain that from the moment he was charged with carrying out the final solution he had ceased to live according to Kantian principles, that he had known it, and that he had consoled himself with the thought that he no longer "was master of his own deeds" that he was "unable to change anything." What he failed to point out in court was that in this "period of crimes legalized by the state," as he himself now called it, he had not simply dismissed the Kantian formula as no longer applicable, he had distorted it to read: Act as if the principle of your actions were the same as that of the legislator or of the law of the land—or, in Hans Frank's "formulation of the categorical imperative in the Third Reich," which Eichmann might have known: "Act in such a way that the Führer, if he knew your action, would approve it" (*Die Technik des Staates, 1942, pp.15-16*). Kant, to be sure, had never intended to say anything of the sort[…]".[195]

Thus, for Arendt, Eichmann's crimes were the product of "thoughtlessness".[196] It is important to note the difficulty of translating the German word for 'thoughtlessness' here. As Amos Elon notes in introducing Arendt's text,

> "Mary McCarthy would soon take her to task, and not for the first time vainly, for her use of the word *Gedenkenlosigkeit*, which in English didn't mean what it means in German. In English "thoughtlessness" means forgetfulness or neglect. "Inability to think," McCarthy suggested, would have been better".[197]

However, its antidote—thoughtfulness—does not straightforwardly supply an alternative account of political justice as would, for example, Rawls's philosophy. Rather, it is the *process* of reflective thought for Arendt, not its product, that enables people to share a political world and thereby "prevent catastrophes" such as the Nazi "final solution". As Elon points out, she changed her view from the Kantian notion of radical evil in *The*

[195] Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem : A Report on the Banality of Evil*, 136.
[196] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think*, 4.
[197] Amos Elon, 'Introduction', in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), xxiii (n.7).

Origins of Totalitarianism to a different one expressed in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that good can be radical whereas evil never can be:

> "[…] for it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension […]" since "Evil comes from a failure to think. It defies thought, for as soon as thought tries to engage itself with evil and examine the premises and principles from which it originates, it is frustrated because it finds nothing there. That is the banality of evil".[198]

Thus, we can view Arendt's account of political reflection as thoroughly ethical and downplaying the epistemic dimension of reflection in the sense that reflection enables us to formulate rules and yardsticks for measuring justice. After describing the importance of both thinking and judging, she writes,

> "The manifestation of the wind of thought is not knowledge; it is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly. And this, at the rare moments when the stakes are on the table, may indeed prevent catastrophes, at least for the self".[199]

That said, this raises the question of the extent to which Arendt's account of judgement in fact provides an epistemology for politics—that is, a way of knowing what is right and wrong in the political world.

In her essay *Truth and Politics*, Arendt distinguishes 'factual' from 'rational' truth. Factual truth involves facts, such as historical events, as in her example "in August 1914 Germany invaded Belgium".[200] Rational truth, on the other hand, involves interpreting the meaning of these facts. Whilst she is keen to preserve factual truths which she says are particularly fragile and vulnerable in political and totalitarian orders, she is highly

[198] Elon, xiii–xiv.
[199] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think*, 193.
[200] Arendt and Kohn, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 235.

sceptical of 'rational truth' in politics. As she put it, "seen from the viewpoint of politics, truth has a despotic character".[201] Rather, politics ought to be a place of exchanging opinions rather than claiming absolute truths. It is at this point that she repeats and reiterates the idea of Kantian judgement and the 'enlarged mentality'; "I form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent; that is, I represent them".[202] She tries to steer this middle course between the tyranny of truth and the subjectivity and prejudice of taste, using the framework of Kantian reflective judgement. As noted, she claims for this the epistemic status of 'intersubjectivity'.

This is a particularly difficult interpretive point when reading Arendt. As Garsten notes, the *grounds* of judgement, for Arendt, are "elusive".[203] Garsten points out that Arendt's aspiration to *intersubjectivity* (neither objectivity nor subjectivity) in judgement[204] ultimately collapses into subjectivity.[205] This is because one is necessarily bound to draw upon one's own subjective experience when imagining what even the perspective of 'humanity' might be. As Garsten notes, this was, to Arendt, a positive feature of her theory: "[…] the elusiveness of Arendt's account of this wrongness is central to her point. She thought any standard that no longer eluded us threatened to become a source of unthinkingness and an excuse not to judge for ourselves".[206] On this question, as discussed below, I am minded to view this as a bug rather than a feature.

[201] Arendt and Kohn, 237.
[202] Arendt and Kohn, 237.
[203] Garsten, 'The Elusiveness of Arendtian Judgment', 1099.
[204] Garsten, 1086.
[205] Garsten, 1087–89.
[206] Garsten, 1099.

5. Arendtian versus Rawlsian Reflection

Both Arendt and Rawls were acutely aware of the dangers of totalitarianism and saw reflection as a vital practice. They both saw it as important not merely for professional philosophers but also for citizens and those engaged in the business of politics. Both recognised the value of reflection in preventing a return to totalitarianism. They both did this by drawing on Kant's philosophy, albeit in different ways. Rawls's theory views reflection as a tool for constructing philosophically robust and coherent justifications of liberal democracy which can be accepted by citizens in a diverse society.

Arendt, by contrast, was sceptical of such theorizing. The strongest contrast between both of them can be seen in their view of the relationship between reason and judgement: for Arendt, reason leads nowhere on its own, and must liberate the faculty of judgement to work independently. For Rawls, the opposite is true: we have all kinds of conflicting judgements which may not be coherent. The process of reflective equilibrium is necessary to clarify our thoughts into a coherent theory. Both figures, I believe, were right in underscoring the importance of reflection. Neither, however, offers a theory which is in fact workable in the public square. As I will argue in the conclusion, Rawls's, on the one hand, is too intellectually demanding as a standard for political reflection. Arendt's, on the other hand, whilst more accessible, sacrifices too much by way of reason in politics. I argue in the next chapter that a better theory of reflection ought to draw upon the best parts of both thinkers' work. At this point, I simply wish to draw out the fascinating differences between the two views.

Arendt maintains that thinking—the "wind of thought"—destroys established criteria for political judgement, that is, it prevents people from judging using fixed systems of reasoning from which they thoughtlessly deduce their judgements and which inform all of their actions. As she puts it "[…] thinking inevitably has a destructive,

undermining effect on all established criteria, values, measurements of good and evil […]".[207] This undermining effect works by demonstrating to the thinker the ultimate meaninglessness of terms which comprise such criteria. As she puts it, after thinking you realise that "[…] you have nothing in your grasp but perplexities […]".[208]

It seems to me that there are at least two issues with Arendt's view of reflection in 'thinking'. Firstly, her account seems to be in a sense self-defeating. If thinking is truly as destructive as she claims—it destroys all concepts and reveals them as mere perplexities—then surely it must also destroy the thinking that leads to Arendt's theory as well as all concepts which are used to express judgements in the public sphere. In other words, why doesn't Arendtian thinking destroy Arendtian (and all other) political theory? Taken at her word in *The Life of the Mind*, what she seems to develop is a strong form of epistemic nihilism in which the very act of thinking destroys all results of thinking. Perhaps she intended something less—simply the idea that one must try to create critical distance, when thinking, between established ideas and oneself in order to think freely (as in the ideas of being 'between past and future' or thinking 'without a bannister'). If we take this to be a preferable rendering of the Arendtian idea, then it undermines the idea that thinking cannot be used to produce theories and principles in the style of Rawls.

Secondly, the strong claims for the destructive effect of thinking Arendt makes do not seem to be empirically true. People who think long, hard, and in genuine ways about political questions can and do arrive at views they take to be justifiable by their process of rational thought. They do hold on to values and principles to guide their decision-making and do in fact take them to stand up to political thinking. One might say that Rawls did that. Or, for example, a judge reviews sentencing precedents, legal principles, and legislation when considering an appropriate punishment for a criminal.

[207] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think*, 175.
[208] Arendt, 175.

He or she will rightly think carefully using the kind of internal dialogue that Arendt describes as the thinking process. This will furthermore feed into, and become a part of, a final judgement. On this point it seems to me that Rawls's theory is preferable to Arendt's. We cannot expect constantly to 'begin afresh' constructing principles of government without reference to principles that have gone before and the wisdom of those who have created them. This would be wasteful foolishness. The call to express views as a *dokei moi* cannot be a call for everyone to accept a radical relativism. At best, rather, it must be a call for people to express their views with epistemic humility, recognising that their perspective on the world necessarily has its limits, and a commitment to take an interest in, and reflect from, others' views. That said, Arendt's theory provides the conceptual and theoretical resources to argue that civic virtues such as epistemic humility can be cultivated through the practice of reflection itself.

Arendt's emphasis on the ethical aspects can be seen in several ways. Firstly, Arendt draws our attention to the phenomenological difference between appearing in public and withdrawal in solitude. As she points out, we feel pressured to appear coherent when acting and speaking in the public realm. She reminds us of the value of withdrawing in solitude to consider political questions from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, in a world of constant news and distracting social media we must recover the practice of withdrawing into solitude to reflect without the pressure of social media presenteeism which citizens expect and to which politicians succumb.

Secondly, Arendt I think is right in drawing our attention to the role of reflection in stirring one's political conscience. She highlights the idea that reflection can provoke us to "*stop* and think"—that thinking is 'out of order'—and can therefore prevent us from being rigidly tied to a fixed set of political ideas. In addition, since thinking involves a dialogue with oneself, Arendt demonstrates how the process of thinking itself can enliven

one's sense of conscience. In doing so it may just prevent such 'banal' forms of evil that she described.

Thirdly, Arendt's point that by enlarging one's mentality and informing one's judgement by looking at political decisions from a wide variety of perspectives is also ethically valuable. Through the practice of "sharing-the-world-with-others" we come to be more fully able to participate and disclose our authentic selves in public. This is a point on which several scholars such as Button[209] and Zerilli[210] have already suggested that an Arendtian perspective would be preferable to that of Rawls. They argue that Rawls's approach of limiting the place of comprehensive doctrines in public justification is excessively limiting to the civic activity of public reason. Rather, they argue, what is needed is the Arendtian ability to step into others' shoes, see the world from others' perspectives, and disclose one's true self in public. A public sphere can then be built where, instead of sweeping comprehensive doctrines under the political table, people have a greater understanding of others' points of view and can reflect from them.

Here we must be careful to distinguish between reflection as an *individual* activity and public reason as the activity of giving reasons to others to justify one's political views. I agree that Rawlsian public reason is unhelpfully limiting on questions of public justification. However, we should be careful to recognise that Rawls *did* go out of his way to underscore the importance of reflection from a very wide range of philosophical perspectives and traditions ('wide reflective equilibrium'). As he put it in the last book he wrote, *Justice as Fairness*, "Wide and not narrow reflective equilibrium is plainly the important concept".[211]

However, it is true that Rawls does not emphasise wide reflective equilibrium as an ethical practice in the Arendtian sense. Rather, it is an intellectual tool for the

[209] Button, 'Arendt, Rawls, and Public Reason'.
[210] Linda M. G Zerilli, 'Value Pluralism and the Problem of Judgment: Farewell to Public Reason', *Political Theory* 40, no. 1 (2012): 6–31.
[211] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 31.

justification of political theories. We can learn from Arendt the distinctly *ethical* value of seeing the world from others' perspectives. In so doing, we make it easier for others—actors—to disclose their true self in public. That is, if someone with a minority view voices their opinion in public, knowing that all others in the public realm—spectators—have gone to the effort of trying to see the world charitably from their minority perspective, they might well feel less vulnerable and more confident and able to express their authentic self in public, even if they know they will ultimately be disagreed with. In this sense, writers such as Button and Zerilli are right to point out the value of this Arendtian practice in building a sense of civic friendship and a common political world.

In conclusion, by reviewing the theories of both Rawls and Arendt, we should appreciate that political reflection can and should be *both* epistemic *and* ethical, and that if we want to have more effective political discussion in the public realm, those involved must pay greater attention to the ethical dimensions of reflection. Reflection is not merely for the luxury of gaining greater political knowledge or developing better political theories; it is a vital practice for becoming more conscientious as citizens.

Chapter 5: A Theory of Political Reflection

Far from being a marginal political concern, this thesis has demonstrated that the practice of reflection plays a central role in Western political thought. Through examining historical snapshots in the development of political ideas, reflection can be seen as a practice encouraged centrally in the ancient world (Socrates, Plato, the stoics, and Augustine), developed by early modern writers such as Hobbes, and through to twentieth-century intellectuals such as Arendt and Rawls who drew on, among other sources, Kant's ideas to argue for a role for reflection in upholding political societies in the aftermath of totalitarian tragedy.

Despite its ubiquity in the history of political thought, it is rarely treated as an integrated subject in itself in political theory today. If it is, it is often treated as a methodological concern for professional theorists as in the literature on Rawlsian "reflective equilibrium". Where it is considered as a practice for citizens, it often falls within well-established systems of political thought such as liberal political philosophy and critical theory. This thesis has offered the first study of the concept, drawing on a wide breadth of both historical and contemporary writers.

Whilst it is intrinsically interesting to examine historical accounts, the primary purpose of this has been to lay out the conceptual space available for understanding what political reflection can and should entail. In the foregoing chapters, I have sought to examine reflection in several historical snapshots. In the ancient world, we find writers highlighting the idea that reflection can lead to knowledge about the world (epistemic reflection), knowledge about ourselves (self-reflection) and enable us to develop a sense of conscience and character (ethical reflection). Drawing on the conceptual resources

provided by historical research, we are now in a position to return to some of the normative questions with which this thesis began.

In contemporary political culture, there is no shortage of calls for a more reflective approach to politics. These arise both within academia and in the public square more broadly. Reflection is said to be a vital part of the remedy for a very wide range of political ailments: resolving democratic disagreement, improving the 'inputs' to democratic processes (such as electoral and legislative voting), repairing a disintegrating political culture, and mitigating structural injustice. Can reflection help meet these contemporary challenges? If so, how? What does political reflection actually involve, who should be doing it, and why?

In this conclusion, I argue that the practice of reflection has a distinctive role to play in politics that is sorely lacking today. That role has, however, been misunderstood and misconstrued—in different ways and to varying degrees—by both its proponents and opponents in political theory. If we are to understand what reflection might do for politics, I argue that we must take seriously its ethical dimension and not merely focus on the epistemic and self-reflective aspects. Whilst these are both indispensable, I argue that they must be supported and grounded in an understanding that reflection is an important ethical practice—one that is not merely about finding the truth or unmasking our prejudices.

Before this conception of reflection can be elucidated, it is therefore necessary to rescue the concept from both its opponents *and* proponents. The two deficient sides of this debate are linked: the misconceptions embodied in many contemporary calls for a more reflective politics are precisely what make reflection unpalatable to its opponents. Once reflection is understood as an ethical practice, many of the critics' concerns can be met.

1. Rescuing Reflection from its Opponents

As discussed in previous chapters, the demand for a more reflective politics is not without its critics. As shown in the second chapter, the mirror metaphor has a strangely double meaning. Whilst it is in many places a tool for gaining enlightenment, it is also a metaphor for trickery, deception, and narcissism. The story of Narcissus, the letter of St. James, and several of Aesop's fables present the image of reflection as one of foolishness, trickery, self-obsession and conceit. In Herodotus's *Histories*, reflection emerges as a double-edged sword; it can lead to hesitation and consequently a lack of action, but a lack of it in the right moment can also be deeply unhelpful. Thucydides praises Themistocles the most precisely because he rarely if ever needs to reflect—he simply has excellent intuitive judgement which means that he is never bogged down by reflection. These realists remind us that when wishing for a more reflective politics, we should be careful what we wish for: we must be careful to avoid a 'seminar room' political atmosphere prone to overthinking and hesitation in our efforts to avoid rashness and impetuousness.

In contemporary political discussion, one line of scepticism highlights the sense in which reflection in politics is a 'loser's game'. Among the most prominent recent examples of politicians saying they would reflect include the European Council in the aftermath of the failed ratification of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005[1] announcing a "period of reflection", Theresa May announcing she would "reflect" on her loss of seats at the 2017 General Election,[2] and Jeremy Corbyn announcing a "process of reflection" in the aftermath of his 2019 General Election defeat.[3] Critics tend to view such announcements

[1] European Council, 'Declaration by the Heads of State or Government of Hte Member States of the European Union on the Ratification of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe' (European Council, 16 June 2005), https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/85325.pdf.
[2] PoliticsHome.com, '"Sorry" Theresa May Promises to Reflect on Changes after Election Setback', Text, PoliticsHome.com, 9 June 2017, https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/political-parties/conservative-party/theresa-may/news/86572/sorry-theresa-may-promises.
[3] 'Corbyn: I Will Not Lead Labour at next Election', *BBC News*, 13 December 2019, sec. Election 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/election-2019-50766114.

with distain and as an attempt to "whitewash" problems with superficial rhetoric designed to sound conscientious and considerate.[4] The language of 'reflection' in these scenarios might well sound like an attempt to gloss over a practice otherwise known as 'sulking'. Indeed, one of the most strategically attractive things about saying one will reflect is that, given its inherent internality, there is very little that can be done to check whether someone is indeed reflecting. It is thus difficult to be accountable about reflection to the wider public, which makes it an easy target for criticism.

That said, these concerns needn't undermine a commitment to reflection as a political practice. The concern that reflection is a "loser's game" would be to mistake the way reflection is typically discussed in politics for all it has to offer. On the contrary, we ought to be proactive rather than reactive about reflection: instead of waiting until things go wrong to reflect in the aftermath, we should be making space for reflecting in the midst of political decision-making. The concern that reflection constitutes a way to "whitewash" political problems, whilst legitimate, needn't be true of all cases of reflection either. We are capable of reflecting sincerely and carefully on all kinds of questions in our personal lives and do not take ourselves to be whitewashing our own problems. Why should we presume this is always the case in politics?

A second concern is that reflection is a distraction and a waste of time. The concern is very old indeed. The episodes in Herodotus of Xerxes counselling Artabantus not to spend time reflecting on things because it is a distraction from action and a waste of time are ancient versions of this concern. As recounted in the introduction, similar concerns can be found in Ignatieff's reflections on the difference between political theory and practice in his *Fire and Ashes*. Philosophy offers time to think in depth and detail about fundamental problems, whereas, in politics, time is expensive and must not be lost. Issues that arise in current affairs require responses *now*, not a response in the form "this raises

[4] Yorke, 'Labour's Post-Election Report Branded as "desperate" Whitewash'.

several interrelated and interesting questions with no obvious answers which will take us a while to reflect upon before we can provide a definitive answer". To answer in that way is, very often, immediately to cede ground to one's critics. It is doubtless for this reason that Plato in the *Republic* wished to ensure the philosophers could rule uninterrupted by political struggle through a heavily autocratic political system. That way, rule would always be *preceded* by reflection. Does this make reflection unfit for democratic politics as we know it? Is it a distracting waste of time, as Xerxes and Cleon suggested? Is it incompatible with *political* time as Ignatieff suggests?

Two points need to be made in response to this kind of reflection scepticism. The first point is simply to remember that both Xerxes and Ignatieff had two things in common; they both operated in the highest echelons of the system of government, and both had the aim of gaining considerable political ground. If ever there were a corner of government where time is at a premium, then this is it. The demands on politicians' time at the highest levels are extreme, but this is often not the same for those in less exposed parts of political systems. The argument is thus less strong when it concerns citizens in everyday life who are further away from the lofty heights of executive political power.

The second point is that, even in busy lives, there can and should be space for reflection. This does not mean, however, that reflection must be interminably time-consuming. Part of the reason for avoiding reflection found in both Herodotus's Xerxes and Ignatieff's work is the worry that reflection entails a search for answers to fundamental political questions and that, to find answers, such a search must necessarily be long and hard.[5] This might well be true. However, as I argue below, by drawing on Augustine and Arendt, we needn't be concerned if we are not fully satisfied with answers to political questions. This is because a large part of the value of reflection lies in the

[5] Hobbes, too, clearly believed that reflection—of the properly scientific sort—is necessarily a long and hard task, but nonetheless advocated for the very best of this (namely, his own reflections) to be adopted and followed which could be achieved through elements of reflective activity among all members of a commonwealth. As such, he was a reflection proponent, albeit of an unusual sort!

activity itself rather than the specific results it delivers. Considered in this light, reflection needn't seem so daunting and time-consuming.

A third charge that might be levelled against reflection is that it is quietist—that it is used to push people out of the political sphere and into the inner, private realm where reflection typically takes place. This, too, is an old practice, with Socrates counselling the young Alcibiades to look in the mirror and avoid entering politics until he has become much wiser and more mature.

In political theory today, this charge might well be seen as coming most prominently from agonists and critical theorists who consider models of liberal reflection to be anti-political and incapable of accounting for the inevitable conflicts that arise in politics. Bonnie Honig suggests that Rawls depended upon Kantian principles which require people constantly to self-censor, thus leaving "remainders" of frustration and unspoken disagreement which are bound, eventually, to cause political trouble in the proposed Rawlsian state.[6] A similar charge is made by Chantal Mouffe against Rawlsian and Habermasian systems of public reason and deliberation.[7]

This objection is indeed concerning, but I think it is difficult to make out against reflection *simpliciter* rather than against a *specific model* of political reflection. As we shall see below, Honig and Mouffe, along with other critical theorists and agonists, oppose a *specific version* of reflection which is highly intellectualised, modelled on analytic philosophy, and designed to produce a coherent political theory which forms the foundation of a constitution (be it a substantive theory of justice or an 'overlapping consensus'). Such models seek to shun any kind of clash or contest between worldviews in

[6] Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*, chap. 5.
[7] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*.

the public realm and are often criticised with the accusation of being a "'seminar room' model of democracy"[8] or "gentleman's club"[9].

Many of these points are understandable objections to liberal theories of public reason, deliberation, and reflective equilibrium but they by no means amount to a wholesale rejection of reflection as a political practice. This can be seen from the fact that critical theorists and agonists, whilst arguing for the vital importance of public clashes of political worldview, also propose schemes of reflection themselves.

To this, an agonist or critical theorist might well respond that even if they do not *oppose* reflection as a political practice, they do nonetheless think it has been egregiously overstated by political theorists who fall into the long-established trap of mistaking the philosophy seminar for the *agora*. To this extent, they would argue that political theorists ought to reduce the scope attributed to the importance of quiet reflection as a practice. Such arguments have their merits. However, they do not demonstrate that reflection has no place in politics at all. Rather, they acknowledge that it does, and simply that we ought to be clear about what that place is, perhaps by reflecting upon it.

Finally, a set of related objections might arise from proponents of deliberative democracy. It might be argued that the whole point of the movement towards deliberative democracy was to de-emphasise internal reflection and personal preference formation as the primary mode of democratic participation. The emphasis on deliberation is supposed to emphasise the *public* character of good political discussion such that people need not take their decisions alone and are open to changing their minds as a result of democratic discussion. If deliberative democracy is true, one might argue, reflective democracy must be false.

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[8] Goodin, *Reflective Democracy*, 13. citing Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) ch.3, and Sanders, 'Against Deliberation', *Political Theory* 25, no.3 (1997): 347-76.

[9] Goodin, ibid. see Dryzek, ibid. 75, 169.

This objection misconstrues the deliberative turn in democratic theory which, in fact, saw reflection as central to deliberative democracy. Dryzek writes,

> "[…] democratic legitimacy came to be seen in terms of the ability or opportunity to participate in effective deliberation on the part of those subject to collective decisions. […] Thus claims on behalf of or against such decisions have to be justified to these people in terms that, on reflection, they are capable of accepting. The reflective aspect is critical, because preferences can be transformed in the process of deliberation. […] The only condition for authentic deliberation is then the requirement that communication induce reflection upon preferences in non-coercive fashion".[10]

The private activity of reflection, in addition to the public activity of deliberation, plays a central role in deliberative democracy for Dryzek.[11] Indeed, on his account, without inducing reflection, deliberation cannot be "authentic". As Goodin has pointed out, deliberative democracy suffers from a 'scaling' problem since democracies have far more citizens than seats available in deliberative forums and thus reflection, in numerical terms, plays a much greater role in deliberative democracy than is typically thought.[12]

These arguments appeared in the early 2000s, before certain developments in social and experimental psychology which challenge the common-sense view sketched by Dryzek and Goodin about the relationship between deliberation and reflection. Since then, social psychologists have devised models such as Sperber and Mercier's "argumentative theory of reason" to explain a wealth of evidence in social psychology suggesting that the human faculty of reason does not merely seek the truth (as is often thought), but rather seeks to defend one's views against the arguments of others.[13] Their

[10] Dryzek, 1–2.
[11] Dryzek understands the relationship between reflection and deliberation slightly differently to myself, seemingly along the lines of 'deliberation = public / reflection = private', but nevertheless the point stands that reflection, as an internal activity, is central to deliberative democracy.
[12] Goodin, *Reflective Democracy*.
[13] Mercier and Sperber, 'Why Do Humans Reason? Arguments for an Argumentative Theory'.

theory thus takes account of the notorious "confirmation bias" or "myside bias": i.e. the fact that we often do not seek new *information* to find the truth, but rather more *confirmation* of our own existing opinions. Additionally, Kahneman's research indicates that active, deliberate, conscious, and controlled processes of human reasoning are effortful, and thus lazy and reluctant to engage.[14]

Taken together, Sperber and Mercier argue that the best way to encourage our powers of reason to seek the *truth* rather than mere confirmation is to encourage discussion to take place in dialogue with actual others.[15] Debates between actual different people will channel the defensive responses of the human faculty of reason into, on the whole, truth-seeking, and motivate them to do so. Given this, it seems that there are clear advantages to emphasising the importance of public discussion rather than private reflection. In short, when discussing in public, we are much more likely to a) be motivated to reason, and b) as a group, engage in truth-seeking rather than confirmation-seeking.

This evidence has been taken up by Helène Landemore to argue that, whilst internal reflection and collective deliberation are both valuable in politics, the evidence indicates "a certain priority, if not superiority, of deliberation with others over internal deliberation".[16] Democracy fares better epistemically, she argues in *Democratic Reason*, when institutions are arranged so as to make decisions through public discussion "[...] in an inclusive fashion, pooling everyone's information, arguments, and perspectives".[17] On such a model, prioritising internal reflection (as, for example, Goodin does in *Reflective Democracy*) will not do, since it fails to take into account the evidence of recent social psychology. This, it seems to me, is one of the most effective ways to challenge the place of reflection in politics. Ought we, on the basis of this evidence, be more pessimistic about

[14] Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.
[15] Mercier and Sperber, *The Enigma of Reason: A New Theory of Human Understanding*.
[16] Landemore, *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many*, 136.
[17] Landemore, 232–33.

the place of reflection in politics? Doesn't public deliberation look like the way to go, rather than encouraging private reflection?

This would be too quick, primarily since there is a considerable, but often overlooked, *phenomenological* difference between private reflection and public discussion as seen in Arendt's thought in the previous chapter. In the withdrawn position of quiet, reflective solitude, one has a certain kind of mental freedom not experienced in conversation. When appearing before others, there is a degree of pressure to appear confident, coherent, and not voicing controversial or taboo views.[18] This is especially true in public debate today where speakers must exercise extreme caution to avoid being labelled as bigoted or beyond the pale of public debate. In solitude, without this pressure, one has the freedom to reflect more freely and honestly with oneself. One can admit to oneself areas in which one is unsure or puzzled. One can entertain political possibilities or approaches that might be deemed outlandish or strange. One can think in a very general, exploratory way which is focused on one's own personal set of questions and concerns. One can engage in extended imaginations of what it might be like to be another person in the polity.

In what follows, I argue that these are all valuable forms of reflection in politics, and that they can flourish in distinctive and important ways in the quiet solitude of reflection as opposed to the heat of political debate. In addition, there is experimental evidence that reflection can increase political independence of thought and reduce partisanship.[19] In the end, there is not so much a conflict between reflection and deliberation as there is complementarity. The value of taking scepticism about reflection seriously is thus in coming to understand the relationship between the place of reflection and other practices.

[18] This is often true even if one's remarks are intended as exploratory or 'thinking out loud.'
[19] Ted Brader and Joshua A. Tucker, 'Unreflective Partisans? Policy Information and Evaluation in the Development of Partisanship', *Political Psychology* 39, no. supplement S1 (2018): 137–157.

The sceptical arguments presented here should lead us to a realistic picture of the limits of reflection by reminding us that taking time to reflect comes at a cost, and that there is a wide variety of such costs. These include the time spent reflecting, the effort and energy taken, the *risk* (but by no means the necessity) of the injunction to reflect having anti-political consequences or being used to whitewash political problems. The conception of reflection outlined below seeks to avoid these dangers. This section has demonstrated, however, that none of the objections presented amount to knock-down arguments against reflection having a place in politics. Rather, they do the service of helping shape and construe more carefully the proper place it ought to have.

2. Rescuing reflection from its proponents

Whilst political reflection can be rescued from its opponents, we are not out of the woods yet. The critics of reflection take aim at specific conceptions of reflection, many of which I agree are unappealing. Reflection must still be rescued from an excessively intellectualised account of it and from accounts which depend upon a narrow theory of class interest. This can be found in major areas of contemporary political thought. The former stems, most prominently, from analytic political philosophy and the latter from critical theory. I argue that we should be cautious about both approaches to reflection in politics. In different ways, they both risk becoming inimical to political engagement because they can be used to demand that citizens reflect in ways that many find inaccessible or reasonably reject. I argue that these two traditions fall short because they assign an unhelpful priority and emphasis to one of the three aspects of reflection to the detriment of the others. The inheritance of analytic philosophy found in political liberalism and public reason theories leads to an unhelpful emphasis on the epistemic

dimension and the inheritance of Marxist class consciousness theories found in critical theory leads to an unhelpful emphasis on self-reflection.

i. Intellectualism about Reflection

Aforementioned critics of reflection object to the 'seminar room' attitude to politics often seen as characteristic of liberal public reason and deliberative democracy theories. If these objections are levelled at reflection in general, they miss the mark since, as I argue, a commitment to reflection needn't be a commitment to what we might call 'intellectualism'. Nevertheless, there are proponents of political reflection who speak of little other than aiming to work through a theoretically complex system to achieve a God's-eye view of politics.

I agree that a model of reflection which is excessively intellectualist is unhelpful. In short, I consider it to assign disproportionate priority to the epistemic aspect of reflection to the exclusion and detriment of other aspects. I would like to draw out here why. There are several connected reasons for its deficiency as a model of reflection: it is overly demanding, politically exclusionary, elitist, and hubristic.

As we saw in the second chapter, the epistemic aspect of reflection is caught clearly by the image of the sun reflected in water in the *Republic*. Reflection can lead us to 'see the divine' through 'theoria' or *theory*.[20] The ideal ruler presented in the republic is one who has escaped the cave and understands the 'form of the good' in its spectacular glory. The unfortunate reality is that few will reach such lofty intellectual heights and, as a result, only a very few ought to be involved in the business of politics. An ideal

[20] From *Theoria*; "I see (*orao*) the divine (*theion*)" Luc Ferry and Theo Cuffe, *A Brief History of Thought : A Philosophical Guide to Living* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2019), 19.

philosopher-king regime would have to be maintained through the dissemination of noble lies.

It is rare today to hear calls for philosopher-kingship.[21] Much more common is the call for philosopher-citizenship. This is most often found in the tradition of liberal political thought today which inherits, as discussed in the previous chapter, modern ideas that led to the development of liberalism drawn from, among many others, Locke, whose argument for toleration rested, at least in part, on the premise that people must come to their views about religion for themselves, and Kant, who argued famously that enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed 'immaturity'.

The tradition reaches its apogee in the 20th Century in the work of Rawls who saw a significant public role for philosophy in the lives of democratic citizens—they ought to aim to achieve 'wide reflective equilibrium'. When outlining the nature and purpose of political philosophy, he was careful to distinguish his position from that of Plato (and the same position he also attributed to Lenin) that a claim to know grounds a claim to rule.[22] Rawls was a democrat; Plato was not.

Nevertheless, Rawls shared the view that individual reflection of a rigorous and systematic kind should play a central role in politics. In reflective equilibrium, as with Platonic dialectic, one reasons carefully, consistently, and persistently to arrive at a theory of political justice which one takes to be fundamental to the justification of political authority. As Rawls put it on the uncharacteristically poetic final page of *A Theory of Justice*, one ought to aspire to see the political world *sub specie aeternitatis* when acting within it.[23]

[21] With occasional exceptions; Jason Brennan's work might be read in this way: Jason Brennan, *Against Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).
[22] John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 3.
[23] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 514.

Daniels rightly referred to Rawls's early work as embodying a 'philosopher's dream' in which good democratic citizenship would involve something closely resembling analytic philosophy. Even subsequent modifications of it, such as Daniels' own, remain highly intellectualised, as do, I would argue, many of the demands on reflection made by deliberative democrats such as Dryzek, Gutmann and Thompson.[24] As Ryan points out, the emphasis upon adopting a "rational, scientific attitude" towards political authority and its justification is a hallmark of the liberal tradition.[25] Many of these theories make very strong intellectual demands of citizens in ways that leave multiple pitfalls open.

The first problem is that aspiring towards a world in which all citizens have reached 'wide reflective equilibrium' or have reflected sufficiently to become model deliberative democrats and public reasoners is that it is unrealistically demanding. Wide reflective equilibrium, which Rawls still recommended in *Justice as Fairness*, requires not only achieving an explicitly articulated philosophical position which is internally coherent, it also requires considering all alternative positions to such a sufficient extent that one can claim the superiority of one's own position. I am not convinced that this is epistemically possible even within a lifetime dedicated to philosophy. For one thing, articulating a theory of politics and its underpinnings in a very narrow subject area is something many professional political theorists attempt over years at a time, with still no consensus that their views are coherent. Even then, the task of getting to know alternative political positions (which would need to include those rooted in alternative intellectual traditions, ideological positions, religions, and so forth) to make one's equilibrium "wide" is the task of a lifetime. The highly demanding standards set for reflection by such theories can in addition be demotivating; why bother trying if it's really that hard?

[24] Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations*; Gutmann and Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement*.
[25] Ryan, *The Making of Modern Liberalism*, 29.

Excessively cognitively demanding accounts of reflection in politics can fall afoul of a second problem: they can become politically *exclusionary* by giving the impression that those who fail to meet high intellectual standards of reflection have little or no place in politics. As agonists and realists point out, deliberative democracy, public reason, and discourse ethics approaches run the risk of calling for a politics of the intelligent which negates the fact that political interaction is always likely to involve a lively and not always orderly clash of opinion. Here, there is a danger that the aspiration for philosopher-citizenship becomes gradually less democratic as it turns out that citizens cannot meet this standard. Its place is gradually taken by an aspiration towards technocratic government where experts hold power over properly political decisions in supreme courts, central banks, and central planning departments. Intellectualist approaches to reflection thus risk perpetuating the spirit of Douglas Jay's notorious quip that "[…] the gentleman in Whitehall really does know better what is good for people than the people know themselves".[26] As Jonathan Sumption put it in his recent Reith lectures,

> "Judges are intelligent, reflective and articulate people. They are intellectually honest, by and large. They are used to thinking seriously about problems which have no easy answer and contrary to familiar clichés, they know a great deal about the world. The whole judicial process is animated by a combination of abstract reasoning, social observation and ethical value judgment that seems, to many people, to introduce a higher morality into public decision-making. So as politics has lost its prestige, judges have been ready to fill the gap".[27]

[26] Douglas Jay, *The Socialist Case* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937); 'Douglas Jay 1907–96', Oxford Reference, accessed 6 November 2020, https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2460/view/10.1093/acref/9780199572687.001.0001/q-author-00002-00000817?rskey=lQtmnx&result=736.
[27] Jonathan Sumption, 'The Reith Lectures 2019: Law and the Decline of Politics' (BBC Radio 4, 2019).

That said, even if judges are to be praised for being 'reflective', this doesn't necessarily mean that the gradual accrual of properly political power towards the judiciary is desirable:

> "Law is rational. Law is coherent. Law is analytically consistent and rigorous. But in public affairs these are not always virtues. Opacity, inconsistency and fudge maybe intellectually impure, which is why lawyers don't like them, but they are often inseparable from the kind of compromises that we have to make as a society if we are going to live together in peace".[28]

That said, judges can sometimes be seen as more 'reflective' than other citizens and this can contribute to their gain in power. As Bejan puts it in the context of discussing civility,

> "The problem seems to be that, like Locke, these theorists take an elite, and frankly elitist, standard of civil discourse appropriate to particular formalized and limited conversational contexts—a philosophy seminar, a legislative chamber, the Supreme Court, or an "ideal speech situation"—as paradigmatic for civility, and then apply it to others where the rules of civility are more nebulous".[29]

Such theories make unrealistic and excessive demands upon the thought processes of citizens and fail to recognise that "unreflective habits" can, too, play a significant and important role in cultivating civil politics.[30]

The idea that the more rational ought to have more power (even if that power ought not to be absolute) tends to rest on the assumption that they have more knowledge than others. As Sowell points out, however, whilst intellectuals may have more *per capita*

[28] Sumption.
[29] Bejan, *Mere Civility*, 149.
[30] Bejan, 160.

knowledge than others, they do not come close individually to having anything more than a small percentage of the knowledge available to society.[31] Thus policies of central planning, which wreaked so much havoc in the 20th century, rested on the false assumption that rule by the more knowledgeable would marshal available knowledge through society:

> "No doubt central planners had far more expertise, and far more statistical data at their command, than the average person making transactions in the market. Yet the vastly greater mundane knowledge brought to bear by millions of ordinary people making their own mutual accommodations among themselves almost invariably produced higher economic growth rates and higher standards of living after central planning was jettisoned […]".[32]

Sowell argues on this basis that "free markets, judicial restraint, and reliance on decisions and traditions growing out of the experiences of the many […] are so important to those who do *not* share the social vision prevalent among intellectual elites".[33]

Such elitism encounters a further, ethical pitfall: it breeds hubris and arrogance. One need not look far for accusations of liberal 'self-righteousness' and 'smugness' in the media. Sowell argues that the temptation of hubris is particularly acute among intellectuals whose job it is to produce ideas: there is a pattern among public intellectuals of assuming that because they are an expert in one technical academic area they can pronounce on matters of public policy with similar confidence—with Bertrand Russell's call for British unilateral disarmament in the 1930s an egregious case-in-point.[34] The danger of arrogance and condescension emerging from a belief that one has seen the world *sub specie aeternitatis* is old; as Lilla points out, Plato saw it in Dionysius as his rule

[31] Thomas Sowell, *Intellectuals and Society*, Ebook Central (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011), 17.
[32] Sowell, 18.
[33] Sowell, 19.
[34] Sowell, 13. Others include Noam Chomsky, Edmund Wilson, and George Bernard Shaw

became increasingly more tyrannical.[35] Oakeshott saw it in contemporary liberal intellectuals, as he put it in *Rationalism in Politics*:

> "The general character and disposition of the Rationalist are, I think, not difficult to identify. At bottom he stands (he always *stands*) for independence of mind on all occasions, for thought free from obligation to any authority save the authority of 'reason.' […] But besides this […] he is something also of an individualist, finding it difficult to believe that anyone who can think honestly and clearly will think differently from himself".[36]

These are pitfalls of placing a very heavy emphasis upon rational, epistemic reflection. To be clear, I do *not* think all liberal theories emphasising epistemic reflection necessarily fall into every pitfall. Nevertheless, many are intellectually demanding in a way that risks creating a politics which is exclusionary, elitist, and hubristic. The question is, how can we avoid these dangers? One method would be to insist on a sharp distinction between politics and truth as Arendt did. As discussed, she disliked 'logic' for its coercive character and its relationship to the 'tyranny of truth'. In her view, logic and truth belong to philosophy, whereas opinion belongs to politics. That was why she insisted on being called a political theorist and *not* a philosopher. In the *Thinking* section of her last work, logical reasoning (in which Arendtian thinking consists) has an extremely limited, if any, epistemic role, with the Heideggerian slogan being "Thinking does not bring knowledge as do the sciences. Thinking does not produce usable practical wisdom".[37]

Arendt's rejection of the epistemic role of thinking, aversion to logic in general, and scepticism about the public role of philosophers is understandable.[38] However, her

[35] Mark Lilla, *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics* (New York, NY: New York Review Books, 2001), 207–11.
[36] Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, 5–6.
[37] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 1.
[38] The intellectual condescension and bullying she received from characters such as Isiah Berlin can, one imagines, only have cemented her scepticism of political *philosophy*. See Berlin's condescending letter to Faber and Faber which blackballed publication of *The Human Condition* in the United Kingdom.

argument goes too far. I cannot see how one can argue literally against 'logic' and 'truth' without making manifestly self-defeating claims. In rescuing political reflection from intellectualism, we needn't throw out the baby with the bathwater and become radical relativists. Rather, we ought to acknowledge that the epistemic component of reflection shouldn't aim at something like analytic philosophy or 'wide reflective equilibrium', but something more accessible. Nevertheless, in building arguments and expressing opinions, citizens should be free to aim at truth, even whilst recognising that their perspective on the truth is necessarily limited. This is not to say that all perspectives are therefore equally valid, or that no perspective can be true. Rather, it is to voice one's own endeavour at thinking about the truth with humility.

The importance of making the truth-seeking aspect of political reflection more amenable than thinking in a heavily philosophical format has been recognised by several scholars in different ways. Goodin's *Reflective Democracy* recognises the challenge and notes that just as rigorous logic is a poor model for public deliberation—"In ordinary conversation, people do not tediously elaborate complete syllogisms. (Nobody listens, if they do.)"[39]—so, too, argues Goodin, is it a poor model to uphold for 'democratic deliberation within' or 'internal-reflective' thought in politics. Goodin proposes a model of reflection which emphasises the imaginative and narrative elements of reflection as vehicles for considering political issues—it is much more effective to imagine oneself as Valjean than it is to consider the events of the Bastille in the abstract.[40] Having imagined the world from all relevant prototypical narrative perspectives—including those

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Isaiah Berlin, 'Supplementary Letters 1946-1960' (Isaiah Berlin Online / Wolfson College, Oxford, 2020), 53, https://isaiah-berlin.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/sites/www3.berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/files/2020-06/Bib.270%28s%29%20-%20Supplementary%20Letters%201946-1960%20%5BIBO%5D%20%5B10%20June%202020%5D_1.pdf. and letters to Elzbieta Ettinger in which he described Arendt his lack of admiration for "Miss Arendt" both in "her work and her personality", describing her as "virtually a bête noire" Isaiah Berlin, 'Supplementary Letters 1975–1997' (Isaiah Berlin Online / Wolfson College, Oxford, 2020), 38–39, https://isaiah-berlin.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/sites/www3.berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/files/2020-06/Bib.286%28s1%29%20-%20Supplementary%20Letters%201975-1997%20%5BIBO%5D%20%5B10%20June%202020%5D_0.pdf.

[39] Goodin, *Reflective Democracy*, 179.

[40] Goodin, 179–93.

perspectives that are underrepresented or mute such as minorities and the unborn—one must then exercise judgement.[41] Goodin's approach seems similar to Arendt's reflective judgement through enlarged mentality. However, it still emphasises the importance of 'reason-giving'[42] in constructing, clarifying, and judging on the basis of these imaginative positions. That said, reasoning is far from being the whole of the story; it is supplemented and sustained by the imaginative elements which are essential to it, and only possible in reflection as compared to conversation.

Other scholars have emphasised the importance of recognising judgement as a way of avoiding an excessively intellectualised notion of democratic reflection. In the context of defending the epistemic value of rhetoric, Garsten writes,

> "In a time when we find our lives increasingly governed by the standardised rules of large bureaucracies and corporations and by the technocratic decisions of policy-making experts, it is important not to lose track of our natural human capacity to make sense of complex situations. As humans we have a way of deciding what to do in particular situations that cannot be expressed in a set of rules."[43]

That capacity is *judgement*. For Garsten, Rawlsian and Habermasian models of public reason attempt to constrain in advance what judgement can and cannot do by alienating it to a supposedly universally valid set of rules and principles—rules and principles which, in fact, are not universally endorsed by reasonable people.[44] Such models become politically counter-productive as they close down conversation in what Garsten describes as a "campaign against controversy"[45] between groups whose grounds of judgement are markedly different; it artificially limits the bounds of legitimate political argument.

[41] Goodin, 228.
[42] Goodin, 227.
[43] Garsten, *Saving Persuasion*, 175.
[44] Garsten, 185–91.
[45] Garsten, 191.

Instead, as Garsten recommends, we must try to engage judgement rather than alienate it by encouraging people to dialogue with, and reflect from and upon, perspectives other than their own without requiring them to let go of their commitments in advance.[46]

Judgement can be more effectively engaged by, among other things, understanding the importance of 'partiality and passion' in judgement.[47] Whereas public reason and discourse ethics approaches aspire towards a politics of dispassionate impartiality, Garsten's approach draws upon recent social-psychological research which demonstrates the important role of emotion in reason. For example, following Sharon Krause's work, a sense of honour tends to foster a desire to be seen as upholding obligations with self-command, and thus engages judgement to discern how and in what ways to do this.[48] This necessarily involves viewing and evaluating our actions from perspectives much broader than a narrowly self-centred one: "[…] a concern for our honor can draw us out of smaller forms of self-concern and help provide the distance from the narrowest forms of self-interest that is necessary for reflection".[49] Furthermore, following the work of Marcus, a degree of anxiety can lead to examining arguments for and against an issue in a more focused way.[50]

These approaches to reflection—as imaginative and as engaging judgement—portray its role as something much closer to how we reflect in everyday life than the highly abstract forms of reflection recommended for citizens under, at the extreme, Rawlsian reflective equilibrium. Reflecting through narrative, and as a matter of preparing to make a judgement rather than constructing an all-encompassing theory, is a more accessible approach and as such will be less exclusionary. By understanding epistemic reflection in these ways, it can be rescued from its proponents who would seek, with the best of

[46] Garsten, 191–99.
[47] Garsten, 194–96.
[48] Garsten, 196.
[49] ibid. citing Sharon R Krause, *Liberalism with Honor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 4.
[50] ibid. citing George E. Marcus, *The Sentimental Citizen: Emotion in Democratic Politics* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), chap 6 esp 101-108.

intentions, to encourage what Arendt recalled Madison as calling a "nation of philosophers" that is, in reality, "as little to be expected as the race of Kings wished for by Plato".[51] Equally, though, we needn't reject the idea that reflection has an epistemic role to play in politics. We needn't drive such a strong wedge between truth and politics, and between reason and judgement, as Arendt did. Rather, we can see judgement and reason as mutually reinforcing.

This is not to say that the enterprises of political theory-construction and expert policy analysis are not helpful. Carefully developed political theories, well thought-out legal judgements and expert policy recommendations can bring freshness and refinement into the public realm. They can, as Rawls put it, be seen as "[…] probing the limits of practicable political possibility".[52] They seek to clarify strands of arguments and disentangle conceptual confusions that might well be prevalent. This naturally requires more reflection upon political questions than will be incumbent upon ordinary citizens. This needn't be seen as an elitist position: an analogy with hygiene can be drawn here. We would expect general practitioners to practice higher standards of personal hygiene than what is considered adequate for typical citizens. We rightly expect the utmost hygiene from surgeons. We do not, however, consider surgeons to be *elitist* about hygiene. In the same way, a role for citizens who make their living by reflecting on political matters is compatible with a non-elitist politics.

Nevertheless, there is always a risk that such activities *become* elitist, contemptuous and condescending towards the political views of "ordinary people". I certainly wouldn't be the first student of political theory to admit, regrettably, to having fallen into such traps. A healthy sense of seeking to hold an honourable political position can slide into an unhealthy pharisaical pride which is inimical to political engagement.

[51] Arendt and Kohn, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 231. Citing *Federalist* 49.
[52] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness*, 4.

We have to remember that well-intentioned experts—political theorists, technocrats, supreme court justices, and so forth—can make, and have made, terrible errors of judgement, sometimes with catastrophic consequences. We must therefore be cautious about what Kleon called "the kind of cleverness that gets out of hand"[53] without descending into the demagogic, anti-intellectual politics that he practiced. Political theorists should be cautious about adopting a posture towards citizens and politicians as necessarily less reflective than they are. There is much more to reflection than constructing theories.

Between intellectualism and anti-intellectualism there lies a happy medium—a golden mean—where the epistemic component of reflection ought to reside. Its position navigates a course between timidity and arrogance about one's political opinions. It exhibits humility without cowardice and confidence without condescension.

This points to a second role for reflection in politics. Judgements about how to do this are in themselves *ethical.* Reflection, as I shall argue, is essential for creating the mental space needed to consider and maintain an ethical balance of character when engaging in political thought and argument. In reflection, the still, small voice inside us is vital for fostering the ethical virtues of citizenship. By focusing on reflection as an ethical practice, we can not only make it more accessible but also temper the manifold temptations towards irresponsible conduct in the public sphere. I turn to this dimension of reflection more fully shortly. Before this, reflection must also be rescued from another pitfall which can have similarly anti-political consequences; certain calls for 'self-reflection'.

ii. Self-Reflection and Self-Censorship

[53] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 213.

In Chapter 3, I explored the meaning of the injunction to "read thy self"[54] with which Hobbes opened *Leviathan*. It is partly, as he had instructed readers in *de Cive*, an invitation for readers to consider their rightful place in the commonwealth through introspection into their own motivations and comparison of these with those of others. His political science, Hobbes claimed in *Leviathan*, would act as the guide or 'key' for this task. Once we read this alongside his anthropological claims, we learn that the most salient fact people fail to recognise is that their pride and self-love prevents them from grasping a truly rigorous science of politics. Reading *Leviathan* enables people to grasp this through looking in the mirror at themselves in a frank and sober way. Once they do this, they will recognise the salience of Hobbes's argument that they ought to resign their right to independent judgement and submit to the absolute sovereignty of the state—the mortal god whose job it is to humble the children of pride.

Hobbes's injunction to 'read thy self' was far from a new one in political theory. It stems from the inclination that most people are unlikely to reach the correct view of politics if they simply set about reflecting on political affairs. People fail to realise that their mind works in a naturally skewed and biased fashion such that they are set to reach false conclusions. Until they are made aware of their systematically erroneous way of thinking, they cannot be expected to reason properly. Thus, any kind of political reflection must, so the argument goes, begin with *self-reflection*; candidly aiming to rid oneself of unconscious biases and self-delusions. In Hobbes's hands, the call for self-reflection is used for anti-political purposes: the aim is to use the capacity to reflect as a self-undermining force. He can be understood as offering a practice of 'reflection against reflection' which is, by design, anti-political and authoritarian.

In Chapter 2, we saw Socrates counsel the over-eager Alcibiades to view his own reflection in the pupil of another person's eye—to recognise his unfitness for speaking in

[54] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 10.

the public arena and to direct him to educate himself if he wishes to make a helpful political contribution. Today, such calls for people to self-reflect can be found regularly in the public square. In contemporary political theory and philosophy, various theorists have advocated self-reflection as a vital practice. What do these calls entail? Are they as discouraging and anti-political as Hobbes's approach?

In my view, some of them are, and some of them are not. Echoes of Hobbes can be found in a somewhat surprising corner of contemporary political theory—one not normally associated with Hobbes: critical theory. For critical theorists, liberal practices of epistemic reflection among citizens and—perhaps especially—political philosophers are seen as fundamental to the ideological corruption of society. In McNay's words, liberal "abstract, logical reflection" will simply reproduce the "exploitative and deeply irrational system" of capitalism which has "profoundly alienating, even pathological effects, upon the bodies and minds of its subjects".[55] Liberal thought has limited the political vision of its followers: "Liberalism is, for critical theorists, the paradigm of traditional thinking that perpetuates an ideologically blinkered view of the world".[56]

Such blinkeredness must be exposed and thrown off, for critical theorists, in a throughgoing "critical reflection upon one's own normative thought".[57] Instead of simply encouraging people to reason, critical theorists argue that they must first unmask and cast off the shackles of capitalism, racism, sexism, and so forth which are thought to dominate their minds—if not consciously then unconsciously. Such psychological emancipation is only possible through "reflexivity", "[…] a reflexive self-awareness of unexamined theoretical presuppositions".[58] Without an "imperative" for "critical self-reflection", argues McNay, "intellectual enquiry, especially normative thought […] runs

[55] McNay, 'Contemporary Critical Theory' 138-39.
[56] McNay, 139.
[57] McNay, 139.
[58] McNay, Abstract.

the risk of becoming reified".[59] It is not only liberal intellectuals who are exposed to this risk—as Adorno and Horkheimer argued, the general public are thought to be duped into consenting to social structures against their real interests by the "culture industry" (*Kulturindustrie*) which, through "mass deception",[60] manages to "manufacture political quiescence".[61]

The roots of these ideas are not in Hobbes, of course, but Marx. Instead of using self-reflection to reveal to people their lack of proper deference to a sovereign, critical theory seeks to reveal people's lack of regard for marginalised and oppressed voices and perspectives. The original idea of a marginalised and oppressed proletariat found in classical Marxism has developed, along with critical theory, to include other groups such as women and ethnic minorities. In feminist critical theory, for example, Sandra Harding argued for "strong objectivity"—the view that objective knowledge can only be produced effectively by acknowledging one's starting point or perspective and the fact that it has a considerable effect upon one's own thought.[62] Knowledge must be produced by taking as a "starting off" point the perspective of "marginalised lives" rather than the "unexamined lives of members of dominant groups" which includes "[m]ost natural and social scientists (and philosophers!)".[63] To achieve "strong objectivity", it is necessary to practice "strong reflexivity"—the idea that those producing knowledge ("observers and reflectors") must also subject themselves to "observation and reflection" by recognizing their own privilege, lest they "unknowingly" reproduce the "unexamined beliefs" of the society they live within.[64]

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[59] McNay, 139.
[60] Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, *Dialectic of Enlightenment : Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).
[61] McNay, 'Contemporary Critical Theory', 139.
[62] Sandra Harding, 'Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is "Strong Objectivity"?', in *Feminist Epistemologies*, ed. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, Thinking Gender (New York ; London: Routledge, 1993).
[63] Harding, 62.
[64] Harding, 69.

This kind of self-reflection involves looking at oneself from a perspective outside of oneself; not Hobbesian political science, but rather the perspective of the oppressed: "[u]nderstanding ourselves and the world around us requires understanding what others think of us and our beliefs and actions, not just what we think of ourselves and them".[65] Most importantly, people engaged in reflection should first understand themselves "[…] only from the perspective of those whose lives have been marginalized by such communities".[66] Rather than being practiced alongside general epistemic reflection, this self-reflection is a fundamentally important *prior* exercise which, such theorists argue, should shape and colour all subsequent thought. Jane Flax made a similar call for self-reflection from a Freudian perspective.[67] Nancy Hartsock developed the idea of 'standpoint epistemology' which argues for the primacy of standpoints representing marginalised social classes including women.[68]

Self-reflection is also an abundant theme in the work of Michel Foucault who distanced himself from Marxism but clearly drew on Socrates' critical character and, in particular, on the *First Alcibiades*. Foucault's idea that power structures—often in the form of medical and penal systems—systematically shape human "selves" in insidious ways through "governmentality" led him to argue, in his later work, for the importance of

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[65] Harding, 72.
[66] Harding, 69.
[67] Jane Flax used a similar approach but from a Freudian perspective: "The denial and repression of early infantile experience has had a deep and largely unexplored impact on philosophy. This repressed material shapes by its very absence in consciousness the way we look at and reflect upon the world" (Jane Flax, 'Political Philosophy and the Patriarchal Unconscious: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Epistemology and Metaphysics', in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra G Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka, Synthese Library ; v. 161 (New York ; Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 245.) Plato, Descartes, Hobbes, and Rousseau are seen as prime examples of men articulating theories whose subconscious motivations they do not themselves understand; namely, the patriarchal effects of repressed childhood experience. Since their "individual psychological development" was "distorted", their "[…] distortions are elevated into abstract theories of human nature, the character of politics, of the self and of knowledge which reflect, it is then claimed, the unchangeable and inevitable aspects of human existence"(Flax, ibid. p.268). This leads Flax to the view that in the future, "Knowledge and method must be self-reflective and self-critical […] we must be members of a self-reflective society in which social relations (and relations with nature) are not organized on a principle of domination (or race, class, gender […])"(ibid. p.271).
[68] Nancy C. M. Hartsock, *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays* (Boulder, CO; Oxford: Westview Press, 1998).

"care of the self".[69] In his later lectures Foucault argued that the aim of modern philosophy had become misguided: rather than merely seeking abstract knowledge, philosophy should be an activity for the ethical purpose of coming to know oneself.[70] In his last years, he turned to ancient texts to find this ideal of ethical philosophy, and the Socrates of the *Alcibiades* turns out to be the hero.[71] The kind of ethical philosophy Foucault had in mind was centred on self-criticism through self-directed "*parrhesia*" (frank speech).[72] Such self-criticism is supposed to be the solution to unshackling the pervasive and insidious "governmentality" power of social structures. Whilst this idea has elements of ethical reflection (to be discussed below), it is principally a theory of self-reflection in line with much critical theory. The idea is that it is only once people have purged themselves of the psychological constraints imposed by capitalist systems that they can contribute positively to politics and society.

These theories are laudable in a sense: they take seriously the idea that our biases and prejudices might run particularly deep and be formed by our social and political backgrounds. However, they also raise a concern: they can be just as anti-political as Hobbes in their exhortations to self-reflect. They seek to circumscribe what can and cannot count as legitimate political perspectives before political thinking—let alone debate—has begun. It is worth, then, examining their claims that the perspectives of oppressed social classes must take precedence in more detail.

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[69] 'Foucault, Michel: Ethics', Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed 1 November 2019, https://www.iep.utm.edu/fouc-eth/#H5; 'Foucault, Michel: Political Thought', Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed 1 November 2019, https://www.iep.utm.edu/fouc-pol/; Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization : A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973); Michel Foucault and Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Michel Foucault and Alan Sheridan, *The Birth of the Clinic : An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[70] 'Foucault, Michel: Ethics'; Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005); Michel Foucault, *On The Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1979–1980*, ed. Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana (London, 2014).

[71] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*. Gary Gutting and Johanna Oksala, 'Michel Foucault', The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/foucault/.

[72] 'Foucault, Michel: Ethics'.

One way of responding to such theories is to suggest that they are in a sense self-defeating. If the pervasive ideological forces of capitalism really are as powerful as critical theorists suggest, then why aren't oppressed classes and critical theories *also* just as susceptible to their mind-altering powers? Wouldn't this observation undermine the position of critical theory just as much as liberal political philosophy?

This counterargument is of the *tu quoque* form to which G A Cohen responded in his article "The Workers and the Word".[73] He points out how, strictly speaking, it does not apply because Marxism does not claim that *all* people's minds are corrupted by capitalism. In essence, oppressed minorities are exceptions to the rule—they, "The Workers", possess privileged epistemic access to the truth—"The Word". Why, then, is this? Cohen offers four arguments, three of which he openly acknowledges are feeble. The case thus rides on the remaining one.

This argument holds that the proletarians—unlike the bourgeoisie—have no "[…] serious difference between their interests and those of mankind".[74] This premise is supported by several different sorts of backing. The first idea is that the proletarians, as the producing class, are representative of humankind since what distinguishes animals from people is the human capacity to *produce*. This argument seems deeply problematic since, as human beings, we do so much more than "produce".[75] Indeed, as Arendt pointed out in *The Human Condition* and in the final chapter of *The Origins*, once we are reduced to the position of mere producers—*homo faber*—we lose our sense of agency in the world. Meaningful action, through relationships, creative expression, political expression, and so forth, are deeply important to our lives as human beings. An argument for the strong kinds of self-reflection recommended by critical theorists must be grounded in something stronger than this dubious anthropological claim.

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[73] Gerald Allan Cohen, *Lectures on the History of Moral and Political Philosophy*, ed. Jonathan Wolff (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), chap. 9.
[74] Cohen, 276.
[75] It is, furthermore, insulting to beavers and other such industrious animals.

The second, more promising, kind of backing holds that since proletarians have no status or possessions to lose in a revolution, they must be defending interests which are common to humanity rather than those of a privileged class. But is this true? In general, it turns on whether communism is true. If communism is not true, then humanity in general (not just the most privileged people) would have an awful lot to lose in a proletarian revolution—in the violence and economic catastrophe that could ensue. Communist and modernist schemes have precipitated misery for millions in the last century[76] and do not obviously embody a strong enough theory of human interests to ground the argument Cohen wishes to defend.

One might at this point disaggregate and dispute different strands of Marxist theory to try and identify one which is not undermined by historical experience and does embody a cogent theory of human interests. Such an endeavour would be futile for a more fundamental reason. The appeal to a theory of interests to justify a standpoint theory, be it communist, feminist, or otherwise, suffers from a *structural* flaw. This is because the idea of a "standpoint" is supposed to help establish the credibility of arguments being made from that standpoint. To avoid the *tu quoque* objection, the standpoint's epistemic exceptionality must be independently justified. That independent justification will be based on a theory of interests of humanity in general and certain political classes in particular. It holds that the standpoint group's interests are aligned with the interests of humanity in ways that other groups' interests are not.

How is that theory supposed to be established? How would someone become convinced of that theory if they did not already believe it? Either, it is (a) established by pointing to the cogency of the standpoint from which it is put forward or it is (b) established on independent terms. The first option is manifestly circular: one cannot

[76] See, for example, James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale Agrarian Studies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

reasonably be asked to accept standpoint *x* in order to understand the arguments as to why one ought to accept standpoint *x*. The second option might seem more promising but undermines the point of standpoint theory: if one can be convinced independently of a theory of interests underlying and thereby establishing a certain standpoint theory, surely that would *also* be sufficient to establish the political theory the standpoint theory is supposed to support. This, thus, makes the standpoint argument redundant. On this basis, all such standpoint theories making such strong claims fail on structural grounds.

Does this mean critical theories have nothing to offer a theory of political self-reflection in general? Not quite. They remind us that we might have systematic biases and prejudices shaping our thought. It is therefore worthwhile, from time to time, to ask whether we might have these. Furthermore, they remind us that trying to view ourselves and our arguments through the eyes of others and their viewpoints can be valuable. We might indeed find ideas and insights about ourselves we find convincing. This does *not* mean that we simply accept any of these viewpoints as epistemically superior outright. There is no substitute for considering, for ourselves, whether or not we find ideas convincing.

Whilst the strong role for self-reflection advocated by these critical theory approaches doesn't succeed, there is nonetheless a role for self-reflection as a component of a broader theory of political reflection. This can be found in two areas of contemporary political philosophy. One example is Miranda Fricker's work on epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice occurs where someone's testimony is not believed or taken seriously because they are part of an unjustly epistemically under-valued group due to prejudice against that group. This is overcome, in part, through a "*reflexive* critical social awareness" in which

> "[…] when the hearer suspects prejudice in her credibility judgement—whether through sensing cognitive dissonance between her perception, beliefs, and emotional responses, or whether

> through self-conscious reflection—she should shift intellectual gear out of spontaneous, unreflective mode and into active critical reflection in order to identify how far the suspected prejudice has influenced her judgement".[77]

This kind of self-reflection does not amount to a demand that people leave the political sphere entirely or overhaul fundamentally their political beliefs. Rather, it is a call for people to carry along with them a kind of self-awareness that they may be, in certain ways, prejudiced *in ways that they themselves accept are wrong*, and that they should train themselves to stop such prejudice in its tracks.

Fricker's style of self-regulatory reflection is similar to Martha Nussbaum's remarks in introducing Iris Marion Young's work. As mentioned in the introduction, Young was interested—like Fricker—in how to correct for injustices that occur in our everyday behaviour and practices.[78] She argued that making people feel guilty was ineffective as a means to prevent such injustices as it (in Nussbaum's summary) "[…] makes people turn inward and focus on themselves, rather than turning outward to focus on others".[79] Nussbaum responds to this by suggesting:

> "[…] well, again, maybe. But why can't sincere self-examination be a very important ingredient in the process of genuinely turning outward toward others? It seems to me that it's only when we identify and work against our own narcissism, our selfish anxiety, and our desire to lord it over others that we can truly turn toward others, somewhat more free of those powerful impediments. Nor need these processes be two separate phases of a moral life".[80]

[77] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 91.
[78] There is a debate about whether these ought genuinely to be described as injustices, as in, for example, the debates on the 'site' of justice between, among others, G A Cohen, Liam Murphy, and Andrew Williams, but I will not get into that here as it is orthogonal to questions of reflection
[79] Nussbaum, 'Foreword', xxv.
[80] Nussbaum, xxv.

As the last sentence makes clear, such self-reflection is not counterposed to, but is a necessary complement to, the kind of epistemic reflection recommended in the previous section.[81] Scholars have doubted the effectiveness of such self-regulation but the experimental evidence, as well as intuitive experience, seems to bear out that it can clearly play *at least some* significant role.[82]

A second source of self-reflection in contemporary political philosophy can be found in the communitarian tradition. In the work of Michael Sandel, a critique of Rawlsian reflection lies at the heart of his argument:

> "Rawls's account of how we choose would seem to confirm the limited scope for reflection on his conception. While the plan of life or conception of the good most appropriate to a particular person is said to be 'the outcome of careful reflection', it is clear that the objects of this reflection are restricted to (1) the various alternative plans and their likely consequences for the realization of the agent's desires, and (2) the agent's wants and desires themselves, and their relative intensities. In neither case does reflection take as its object the self *qua* subject of desires. The reflection involved in (1), sizing up the alternatives and estimating their likely consequences, is scarcely a form of *self*-reflection at all; it looks outward rather than inward, and amounts to a kind of prudential reasoning […].
>
> The reflection involved in (2), assessing the relative intensity of desires, looks inward in a sense but not *all the way* in. […] Since for Rawls the faculty of self-reflection is limited to weighing the relative intensity of existing wants and desires, the deliberation it entails cannot enquire into the identity of the agent, (Who *am* I, really?) only into the feelings of the agent ('What do I really *feel* like or most *prefer?*'). Because this sort of deliberation is restricted to assessing the desires of

[81] One might object that such accounts are in fact limited in advance to a specific political view because their advocates—Cohen, Fricker, Young, Nussbaum, and others—all argue from a perspective which takes as prime examples of structural injustice the concerns of, broadly speaking, a progressive politics. This however, would be a mistake since one can accept the idea of structural injustice–and the role of reflection in correcting for it—whilst disagreeing with the *contents* of justice advocated for on the part of its proponents. For example, an alternative view might consider family breakdown to be a structural injustice inflicted on children and the phenomenon of 'concept creep' (where, for instance, peacefully expressed views are labelled as 'violent') to be an epistemic injustice inflicted upon those with minority viewpoints. As long as we leave people to discern for themselves what the *grounds* of injustice are, such a view does not become self-defeating and exclusionary in the ways described above.

[82] See Fricker, "Replies to Critics" for several objections and responses.

> a subject whose identity is given (unreflectively) in advance, it cannot lead to self-understanding in the strong sense which enables the agent to participate in the constitution of its identity"[83]

Rawls responded to Sandel's criticisms, and those of other communitarians, in writing *Political Liberalism* as outlined above. There, by distinguishing between a comprehensive metaphysical conception of the person and a *political* conception of the person, it is possible to allow for the kind of deep self-reflection Sandel calls for:

> "It can happen that in their personal affairs, or in the internal life of associations, citizens may regard their final ends and attachments very differently from the way the political conception supposes. They may have, and often do have at any given time, affections, devotions, and loyalties they believe would not, indeed could and should not, stand apart from and evaluate objectively. They may regard it as simply unthinkable to view themselves apart from certain religious, philosophical, and moral convictions, or from certain enduring attachments and loyalties".[84]

This was some concession on the part of Rawls, but it was not a *political* one. As Mulhall and Swift put it, "Rawls is happy to see such modes of self-understanding flourish in the context of families, churches and scientific societies; what he denies is that this way of regarding ourselves is appropriate for the purposes of politics".[85] In the realm of public reason, Rawls maintains, citizens ought always to provide arguments which proceed under the assumption of an essentially Kantian view of human subjectivity. This limits too narrowly the grounds of epistemic reflection since Kantian understandings of human nature are by no means universally accepted.

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[83] Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 159–60.
[84] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 31; Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 195.
[85] Mulhall and Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*.

As such, self-reflection of the kind Sandel describes can be an important part of reflection in politics. Unlike that described by Hobbes or in critical theory, this form of self-reflection is fundamentally open and interrogative; it does not prescribe from the outset a given view of moral personality or interests from which reflection ought to proceed. Rather, it remains open to the possibility that citizens will conceive of human subjectivity in importantly different ways. This kind of self-reflection acts as a guard against falling into a trap where only a narrow set of viewpoints are considered fit for reflection and expression in the public sphere and is thus less exclusionary.

These two forms of self-reflection are both epistemic and ethical in a sense. We can inquire as to the nature of our own human subjectivity in order to understand better the political positions we wish to defend. We can inquire as to the consistency between our actions and our behaviour in order to see where we might make amends. Reflection is in these senses instrumentalised as a tool towards the ethical activities of political advocacy and reforming one's own conduct. This is the sense in which Fricker, for example, describes the virtues of testimonial and hermeneutical justice as both intellectual and ethical virtues.[86]

However, it is also possible to understand the ethical aspect of reflection in a more direct and less instrumental way. The activity of reflection *itself* can be seen as an important aspect of leading an ethical life and cultivating virtues vital in the public square. In the next section, I turn to examine several of these.

3. The Ethical Aspect of Reflection

In the foregoing sections, I argued that reflection must be rescued from both its opponents and proponents. The positions critiqued represent, on one hand, too little of a good thing,

[86] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 176.

and, on the other, too much. Whilst we must avoid the temptation of side-lining the reflective aspect of democracy either by hard-nosed realism or by replacing it with public deliberation alone, so too must we avoid aspiring to turning politics into a philosophy seminar or a forum for debilitating self-criticism along the lines of narrow and unjustified identitarian theories. A happy medium must be sought.

Some ways of doing this have been suggested by authors who share my concerns about intellectualism and calls for self-reflection. They respond by finding ways to make epistemic reflection more accessible and self-reflection open to people who hold a range of political and philosophical views. Whilst I would support much of this, there is another avenue for finding this happy medium which have been less well explored in contemporary political theory. It is the idea identified in several places in this thesis that reflection, in and of itself, even aside from its epistemic outputs, can play an ethical role.

This idea is epitomised by Augustine's interpretation of Paul. As explained in Chapter 2, Augustine drew together the mirror metaphors in the two letters sent to Corinth. He drew together the idea that we see 'in a mirror, darkly' along with the idea that in gazing into that mirror can nevertheless be an ethically transformative experience. Unlike the portrayals of the mirror as representing trickery and narcissism described by Aesop and Ovid, Augustine found a role for reflection which maintained its importance even in spite of an awareness that, very often, like the lack of clarity found in an ancient mirror, we can get lost in our thoughts.

As noted in Chapter 2, writers who emphasise the ethical dimensions of reflection often paid attention to the *experience* of reflection using spatial metaphors such as Marcus Aurelius's "inner citadel", St. Catherine of Siena's "inner oratory", Montaigne's "room at the back of the shop", and Octavia Hill's emphasis on the importance of physical spaces of peace and quiet for contemplation which led to the foundation of the National Trust. All of these characters had considerable dealings with political institutions and

movements—often at the highest levels—whilst being formidable intellectuals in their own right, each having written significant works on social and political matters. They did not call for everyone to become an intellectual but nonetheless called for reflection to play a significant role in people's lives. Reflection emerges as a distinct kind of private mental space which is vital for our wellbeing and the cultivation of ethical virtues in politics. The imaginative elements described by these authors enables this distinct reflective space to come alive in a more accessible way than it could if reflection were simply a matter of working through abstractly articulated political positions.

Hannah Arendt, as discussed in the previous chapter, also devoted considerable attention to the experience of reflection. For Arendt, good spectatorship is inseparable from reflection since only by reflection in withdrawn solitude can we view the world from different angles from a first-personal perspective. To be sure, internal thought is limited by what Goodin called "[…] the obvious absence of an insistent 'other' who is pressing her perspective upon you"[87] but does afford freedoms which Arendt draws out effectively. She argues how without spectatorship, there can be no political action since actors always need spectators to be actors. It then becomes a vital political question as to how we cultivate practices of spectatorship. By contrasting the pressures of 'appearance' in the public square with being a 'spectator' she draws out the very different aspects of each. Appearing in public comes along with a pressure to be confident, coherent, and articulate, whereas being a spectator can be done in solitude which enables a freedom of thought to try and view the world from very different perspectives and ask new, unusual, or more abstract questions. This difference of pressure is surely one that Augustine, Montaigne, St. Catherine of Siena, and Octavia Hill would recognise. It gives us strong reason not to try and supplant reflection with something else such as deliberation. To do so would be to miss out on an area of life which is experientially distinctive and has its own role to play.

[87] Goodin, *Reflective Democracy*, 183.

The inner mental world is one where a certain kind of open vulnerability is possible. Two of the features characteristic of reflection in the conceptual definition (Chapter 1) are 'sensitivity' and 'complexity'. To recognise that the issues about which one wishes to reflect are both sensitive and complex is to adopt an attitude of both vulnerability and humility. This can be difficult in front of others—not least in the political sphere. In the intimacy of keeping one's own company, one can find it within one's heart to admit to oneself that the issues about which we must reflect are indeed complex and must be treated with care. As I will argue shortly, such humble vulnerability is not the same as timidity. It can ground a quiet confidence to present one's honest opinion in the public square whilst avoiding the temptation to attack opponents as stupid, insane, or morally bankrupt. The ethical aspect of reflection commits to cultivating and taking care of this mental space as a vital point of centre in a turbulent political world—to "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart, and in your chamber, and be still".[88] It is here that we can find it within ourselves to cultivate and practice responsibility, moderation, civility, respect, and courage.

In Arendt's final work, the epistemic value of 'thinking' is downplayed considerably. As I have argued, she seems to suggest that the destructive power of the 'wind of thought' is so strong as to uproot and cast aside all previous and standards and systems of thought we might have adhered to. This view is too strong. As indicated above, there is a role for the epistemic dimension of what Arendt called 'thinking'. However, her insistence that the value of thinking lies in the effects of the activity itself and not in its epistemic outputs leads her to highlight several ways in which reflection is ethically valuable. Arendt's work is invaluable in drawing out the ethical goods of reflection. They can be presented in three groups.

[88] Church of England, *Book of Common Prayer* (London: s.n., 1662), sec. Psalm 4. v.4.

i. Conscience

Firstly, by being in the habit of reflecting, we open a space for ourselves to 'stop and think'. Whilst such deliberate interruptions might seem inconvenient, they are a vital check against getting carried away by a political movement, action, or argument one does not, on reflection, accept. This relates directly to the relationship between reflection and conscience—for Arendt, reflection even of a strictly philosophical kind has the potential to nurture moral self-awareness. By continuing a dialogue with oneself, the reflecting person becomes 'two-in-one' and thus gains a sense of having to live with their record of actions. This sense of accountability to the self can ground a strong sense of responsibility to act rightly and provides an inner source of courage to stand up for one's beliefs.

Against this idea, one might suggest that stirring up responsibility and courage is only a virtue if it leads to action which tends towards justice. Surely, we do not want people to be encouraged to do things that they mistakenly believe to be right. A strong but misguided conscience can turn dangerous when it motivates deeply misguided behaviour– such as terrorism. This, however, would be too quick.

Firstly, consider the alternative: a society in which people lack a cultivated sense of conscience can also be dangerous. Disengagement from reflection can lead to ethical passivity which can pave the way for manipulation and demagoguery on a broader scale. The effects of this can be catastrophic in ways that Arendt described. Secondly, the content of one's political conscience—what one takes to be just and unjust, prudent and imprudent, and so forth—can be tempered with other ethical goods which, too, can be cultivated through reflection. These can have mitigating effects on consciences tending towards the truly unreasonable.

ii. Humility and Openness

Secondly, even if Arendt's "wind of thought" isn't as strong as she thought, there is still something significant about the capacity of reflection to enable us to realise the limitations of our own perspectives and viewpoints. Socrates wanted the young Alcibiades to admit *himself* that he had made contradictions because the person Alcibiades was most likely to believe was in fact… himself! There are things that we all surely do not know as securely as we might have imagined. Being able to find some of these and admit them can change our disposition towards others in the political world. It can cultivate an open—even if cautiously open—disposition of interest towards others and their perspectives. The admission that we—our own mind, our own party, our own tribe—cannot not possibly have *all* of the answers is a vital step towards a more genuine dialogue with other people and their perspectives. A particularly effective place to come to this difficult realisation is in the intimacy of reflective dialogue within ourselves.

Against this, it might be argued that being humble and open is a distraction from fighting for just causes. Such a suggestion could be seen as a promoting excessive timidity and quietism. Expressing openness to those with whom we disagree might be taken as a sign of encouragement to them and thus be politically counterproductive.

However, humility and timidity are not the same. An overconfidence and lack of engagement with one's opponents can mask inner insecurity about the integrity of one's own views. Humility can ground a quiet confidence without being quietist. By recognising that one's perspective is limited, challenges to one's views do not come as a shock or surprise but can rather present opportunities for enriching one's own perspective. In politics, as Arendt was keenly aware, furthering the ends of a given political agenda can never be the only aim. If we are to further our views with the dignity of legitimacy, we must also be concerned to maintain the public square as a place of meaningful dialogue.

This is impossible without cultivating an inner sense of humility from which openness towards others can spring.

iii. Engaging Judgement

In addition to opening us up towards others, a degree of humility about our own viewpoints can engage us to take seriously the activity of political judgement. This may seem paradoxical. If we realised that our perspective is limited, might this not just lead us to resign from making political judgements? Couldn't it be a recipe for apathy? It cannot be denied that this is a risk. As Arendt points out, this may have happened to Alcibiades.[89] However, it can also lead to engagement. This is because, very often, our ordinary sources of political judgement are relatively settled partisan and/or ideological viewpoints—"banisters" as Arendt put it. Whilst we will be unable ever to think entirely without banisters of some kind, the recognition that they cannot perfectly provide all of the answers can lead us to become more engaged in judging for ourselves by reflecting from a variety of perspectives.

iv. 'Fitness' for the Public Square

Fourthly, Arendt also points out the importance of being able to disclose our true inner self in public. Whilst appearing in public can be nerve-wracking, there is also a deep human need to be able to express one's views even if they are not widely accepted. A polity in which all citizens regularly reflect from a wide variety of different perspectives is one in which the pressures of public appearance would be significantly reduced as opposed to a society whose citizens do not.

[89] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 175.

This is because, when reflecting from other's viewpoints, one can begin to see the plausibility and reasonableness of those views even if, in the end, one disagrees with them. When we experience viewpoints for the first time, it is natural to feel averse and sceptical towards them—and even towards the people presenting them and their motives. This natural tendency can be tempered by reflecting upon a variety of perspectives since, when we do this, we will not encounter alternative viewpoints as entirely foreign and alien. If a citizen with a minority viewpoint has some degree of assurance that they will not be viewed as an alien to be avoided and shunned, but as a reasonable citizen presenting a sincerely held view in honest good faith, they will feel more free to speak and enjoy greater dignity in public.

This point is subtly different to being open to others as aforementioned. An openness towards others can surely be a significant help to our own sense of judgement. However, in addition, it also affects the shape of the public sphere by affecting the composition of the group of spectators before whom political actors act.

Against this view, one might argue that I have it the wrong way around. One might argue that it is in fact appearance in the public square that leads us to engage with the viewpoints of others. Landemore's call for greater deliberative participation is motivated by such a view.[90] Garsten points out, drawing on the Madison, that well-designed official positions in a constitution encourage representatives to take more seriously others' views and engage with them.[91]

I would hope that the effect of such official positions on representatives' hearts and minds could exist in a mutually-reinforcing relationship with their inner life of reflection. However, as Goodin points out, such positions are necessarily very limited in number. Something similar might be achieved more broadly through participation in running

[90] Landemore, *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many*.
[91] Garsten, *Saving Persuasion*, 205–12.

community organisations and so forth. However, as Putnam has shown, we are increasingly as societies "bowling alone".[92] That is, we tend to set about activities as private individuals rather than in a context of running community organisations in which we come across people who are unlike ourselves. This underscores even more clearly the importance of reflection as a vital part of our formation as citizens. Indeed, it is a necessary activity if we are ever to revive participation in such socially cross-cutting organisations once again.

4. A Tripartite Theory of Political Reflection

The three aspects of reflection have run as a theme throughout this thesis. They have appeared, in various ways, as consistent points throughout the history of political thought. This persistence marks their coherence in comprising a tradition which merits further study and investigation today. This is not to say, however, that there has been consistency or agreement on what reflection is for or ought to involve. In each chapter, we have encountered characters who have placed emphasis on different aspects.

Whilst Socrates inspired his students to advocate reflection as a vital political practice, each did it, still using the mirror-metaphor, but with markedly different emphases. Plato's emphasis on epistemic reflection, the stoics' emphasis on self-reflection, and Augustine's emphasis on ethical reflection help to draw out different aspects of a practice. Hobbes's work is so fascinating for its synthesis of all three kinds of reflection into a composite approach which engages epistemic, self-, and ethical reflection together.

[92] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York ; London: Simon and Schuster, 2001).

However, its implications are markedly anti-political. Whilst Arendt and Rawls, inspired by Kant, do far more than Hobbes to engage citizens politically through reflection, both theories are markedly imbalanced. Rawls's reflective equilibrium leans too heavily towards the epistemic aspect of reflection and leaves out much of the self-reflection and ethical aspects. Arendt's 'thinking' and 'reflective judgement'—though laudably ethical—sacrifices too much by way of the truth-seeking aspect of reflection.

Here, by way of conclusion, I propose a theory which is *composite* and *political*: it integrates all three aspects into a theory which does not compromise political engagement between citizens. The question is, how can this be done? In doing so, should one aspect be emphasised above others? If so, to what extent? In examining this, we can distinguish between according one aspect a 'strong' priority versus a 'weak' priority. A strong priority thesis would make one aspect of reflection *fundamental* to the other aspects. It would mean that before aiming at any of the other aspects, one must begin with, and be entirely determined by, the kind of reflection accorded a strong priority. On the other hand, a 'weak' priority thesis would claim that we ought to focus *proportionately more* on a certain aspect of reflection.

Some have certainly tried to place a strong priority on self-reflection. This move, made by critical theorists for example, is wrong on two fronts. Firstly, self-reflection will inevitably come into dialogue with what one believes that the self *is*. A sense of selfhood to a liberal, or a socialist, or a conservative, or otherwise will be in important ways different, and different within different strands of each tradition. Likewise, it will be different to various kinds of atheist, agnostic, and religious believer. Epistemic reflection has a significant role to play in our considerations of our worldview in these areas. Secondly, questions about oneself are also sensitive and require a degree of honesty and integrity in asking them. To reflect well by oneself, one needs to be prepared to admit one's shortcomings, and this is neither always easy to discern nor particularly pleasant to

do. The idea of ethical reflection becomes vital here—it also takes cultivation of character in solitude to be able to self-reflect. Since both epistemic and ethical reflection are thus vital to self-reflection, it is wrong to try and prioritise it.

We might try to prioritise epistemic reflection instead. Such moves appear to be made by Plato in the *Republic* and, arguably, by contemporary liberals such as Rawls. However, this, too, seems wrong. Investigating questions of political justice by reflection necessarily requires attention to both self-reflection *and* the ethical aspect of reflection. We should reflect as to whether we, in thinking about justice, are subject to biases, prejudices, and so forth in our thinking. This will have to be in symbiotic dialogue with what we actually think justice entails and, as argued, applies to everyone—not just members of a certain class or interest group. Furthermore, thinking about justice must go hand-in-hand with cultivating a set of ethical character traits such as responsibility, conscience, courage, and moderation to take the task seriously, follow it with appropriate care, and stand up in good faith for what one judges to be just. Placing a very strong and fundamental emphasis on the epistemic aspect, then, seems misguided.

Finally, one might want to accord a strong priority to ethical reflection. One might suggest that without cultivating the character traits such as responsibility, courage, civility, and moral conscience through ethical reflection, there is little point in reasoning about justice or engaging in self-reflection. The present fashion for "mindfulness" which prioritises the therapeutic aspects of reflection might be seen as doing this as well. Might this be right?

Once again, the ethical reflection described by Arendt is only sustained through imaginative and dialogical thought processes which involve reason and an awareness of self. As such, it necessitates some level of epistemic and self-reflection even if arriving at the truth is not the only goal. Another way to try and prioritise such ethical reflection is to try and undermine epistemic reflection altogether in a way that Arendt's *Thinking*

section can be read as doing. However, as discussed in chapter 4, this is hard to sustain philosophically.

On this basis, it seems wrong to accord a strong priority to any single aspect of reflection. Indeed, doing so can have constraining and anti-political consequences. Rather, all three aspects should be viewed as mutually necessary and mutually supporting in the ways just outlined. That said, there are good reasons to accord a *weak* priority—a difference in degree of *emphasis*—to the ethical aspect of reflection. One reason is motivational. If finding the truth about justice were the only point of reflecting, then the task would be so great as to seem hardly worth beginning. However, if the activity of reflection itself is also vital for cultivating the ethical virtues necessary for citizenship then we are much more likely to want to do it.

Secondly, by seeing reflection as an ethical activity, we will be more minded to do it *regularly*. It is not merely a matter of gaining information or knowledge through reflection and then running gung-ho into the political arena, but also a matter of cultivating and maintaining our ethical character as citizens. If we recognise the inner mental space of reflection as the place where we cultivate and maintain virtues essential for citizenship, it provides us good reason to do it on an ongoing basis.

Finally, according some degree of priority to the ethical aspect is more democratic than understanding it as a purely epistemic tool. It is not merely for experts, and it is not something that philosophers, bureaucrats, judges, and others are necessarily better at. It is for all citizens to practice and take seriously as a political responsibility. On this basis, whilst all three aspects of reflection are vital, and whilst none can be made fundamental, we can place some special emphasis on the ethical dimension of reflection in our intention to do it.

This may seem, in the end, philosophically thin. I have not offered a system of thought, ideology, or set of political principles other than outlining the breadth of

reflection traditions from which we ought to learn and in which we ought to participate. One response to this worry would be to point out that neither do many other political theories about political practices, including deliberation. On a more principled basis, I submit that this is not a bug but a feature: the inner realm of reflection is a space of political freedom. It is my aim to seek to encourage and sustain such an inner space in our contemplative lives as citizens. We ought to take seriously the activity of conserving and cultivating it however we conceive it: whether it be an oratory, a citadel, or a room at the back of the shop. To do so, we should participate in all three aspects of reflection, and allow them to strengthen and reinforce one another. By placing some emphasis on the ethical dimension of reflection, we can make political reflection more accessible, regular, and democratic.

5. Reflectiveness as a Virtue in Contemporary Politics

In introducing this thesis, I noted four areas of concern in which reflection have been seen as a key piece of the puzzle to mitigating ailments of contemporary democracy. I would like to return to these now to examine how the conception of reflection just outlined can address such concerns today.

The first area of concern relates to disagreement in politics. It is tempting to think that becoming more reflective will enable us to resolve political disagreement by coming to a better understanding of the issues over which we disagree. Perhaps, in some measure, it might. However, holding out the hope of an "overlapping consensus" reached by "reflective equilibrium"—let alone a complete consensus—is an unrealistic one. In the highly diverse societies of today in which no agreement on fundamental values and worldviews can be presupposed, it is critical that if we are to live together and make laws that are for the wellbeing of the whole of society, we take care to understand others'

perspectives. Whilst I agree that there is much value in reflection aimed at finding and articulating our deepest commitments and principles, we reflect for much more than merely epistemic purposes.

This is because the problem of political disagreement is not merely an epistemic one. It is not merely a clash of abstract propositions affirmed by different citizens. It is also an ethical one. It is a question of how we regard and treat others with whom we disagree. Will we give in to the temptation to view and label opponents as fools, frauds, or as mentally disordered, suffering from a "phobia" of one kind or another? Or, will we make a concerted effort to try and see the world charitably from others' perspectives? The value of prioritising ethical reflection is that it sets the scene of an inner mental world to which one can and must return after each venture into the political fray—from casting a single vote at the ballot box right through to speaking at the dispatch box.

Many concerns about political disagreement today are often framed in terms of a worry about polarisation. The view of reflection outlined holds up the hope that even if we, in the end, do honestly and sincerely come to markedly opposing views, a polarisation of beliefs need not lead to a polarisation of how we treat one another. Whilst advocating for justice, in circumstances of disagreement we must also recognise the importance of legitimacy. Legitimacy requires an open hearing of a broad range of political positions from those party to the disagreement. For this to be meaningful all must be able to disclose their considered perspective—what Arendt called "who I am"—without fear of unrelenting disparagement from opposing voices.

Of course, it would be foolish to think that we can ever reach a perfectly respectful and trusting public sphere. However, the aspiration towards a more reflective politics which is accessible to all aims to mitigate the tendency towards exclusionary, and anti-political practices of disagreement where they are overbearing. It entails a commitment to imagine the world from others' perspectives precisely because it will improve the way

in which we will engage with them interpersonally. Equally, in circumstances where the public sphere has deteriorated into a situation of bitter and hostile disagreement, the intimacy of one's own reflective space can provide the inner-strength and courage to speak out in an honest and respectful way.

The second broad area of concern relates to the so-called problem of "voter incompetence"—the view that ordinary citizens routinely take incompetent decisions because they fail adequately to engage their reflective faculties. As noted, this has often been associated by political theorists recently with the election of Donald Trump and the outcome of the Brexit referendum.

One must be cautious labelling voters as incompetent. Many voters cast their ballots the way they did on the basis of sincerely held reasons. The failure of political theorists to recognise this can indicate a demeaning, closed, and condescending attitude towards their fellow citizens. The source of this attitude, I suspect, lies in the belief that there are obvious epistemic deficiencies on the part of those who voted for Brexit and Trump. In the case of Goodin and Spiekermann, this argument is made on the basis that citizens were duped into believing manifest lies put forward by the Brexit and Trump campaigns.[93] This would be too quick since, quite simply, one can support a political outcome without supporting it for the reasons offered by those proposing it publicly.

Casting a vote in a ballot box is a simple act which must be done in the face of an immensely complex landscape of decision. It is a decision which cannot be adequately captured by a technical epistemological framework which could produce an obvious and conclusive answer. Rather, it requires the exercise of judgement. The conception of reflection put forward here holds that everyone can engage their faculty of judgement through reflection. It recognises that reasonable people will come to different conclusions.

[93] Goodin and Spiekermann, *An Epistemic Theory of Democracy*, chap. Epilogue: What about Trump and Brexit?

It does not set out a framework of principles from which citizens could be labelled demonstrably incompetent. This does not mean, however, that practices of reflection could not play a role in enriching our manner of political engagement.

The third area of concern relates precisely to our style of engaging with one another. As noted, political theorists and commentators are concerned about a deterioration of both the language and pace of politics today. Here, the ethical aspect of reflection comes into its own. With regard to language, it is not difficult to detect in today's world a tendency towards using blanket terms to smother any nuance in opposing views rather than engaging with care. Calling names and labelling opponents, for example as suffering from a 'phobia', can all be appealing because they seem superficially exciting. In times of disorientation and confusion, such language can offer a veneer of sturdiness and certainty.

This is not to say that there is not a time and a place for fighting words. However, if outrage and derision become the bread-and-butter of political language, we lose the opportunity for nuance and subtlety in our political interactions which is not only epistemically beneficial but can pave the way for more open public dialogue and hence, legitimacy. Finding the courage and determination to resist the impulse towards extreme language requires reflection. By thinking from multiple perspectives, we can grasp the subtlety of, and good faith underlying, others' positions even if we disagree with them. Once we do this, it is easier to see extremely fierce language for what it often is—pedalling oversimplification and misrepresentation in politics. The fact that reflection opens the space for us to be accountable and responsible to ourselves will also help us resist the temptation to perpetuate language which we know deep down to be over simplified and misleading.

The opportunities for public political speech today have been vastly increased through social media platforms in which all citizens can, at the touch of a button, publish

remarks for all to see. Before social media, they were more natural pauses in the process between thought and publication, allowing for reflective moments. At the very least, one had to write a letter to an editor, make a call to a talk show host, or take the time to assemble placards and leaflets. When publication of one's views is possible instantly and onto a permanent record, it is all the more important that we cultivate our inner reflective spaces as a deliberate check and balance against temptations to indulge in oversimplified language.

This leads directly to the issue of time. One of the ways in which language is often manipulated is by creating an artificial sense of urgency in politics. To be sure, issues do come up that must be dealt with swiftly such as eminent security threat and as we are painfully aware, pandemics. However, these are exceptions to the rule. In general, the complex and multi-faceted nature of most political decisions means that they must be given due care and consideration. It is for this reason that, when making expensive purchases, companies are often required to offer a reflection period in which we can change our mind. So, too, should we value and preserve moments for reflections in politics.

This means that the view of reflection outlined here is sympathetic to constitutional safeguards and practices which protect and preserve spaces for reflection in democratic decision-making. Too often, legislation is passed too quickly in the name of urgency and without adequate reflection. However, it is unrealistic to expect institutions to protect time for reflection for us. It is often a deliberate choice we must make. It is unrealistic to think that the rapidity of dizzying news cycles and social media stories will slow down any time soon. It is therefore imperative that we make the conscious effort to carve out time for reflection, allowing for the conditions (discussed in the first chapter) that enable it to flourish including distance, quietness, and solitude. For example, the politicians called upon on a regular basis to offer opinion on issues about which they have reflected very little run the risk of saying something they regret whilst in pursuit of media

profile. By understanding reflection as an ethical practice, those in such situations can develop the courage to take moments to reflect rather than feeling pressure to speak immediately. By taking time to reflect deliberately before taking decisions or speaking in public, we can stop viewing reflection as a loser's game—as a matter of coming to terms with political failure although it can surely play this role. Rather, first and foremost, it is an activity for all citizens to develop and cultivate the virtues necessary for citizenship.

The fourth area of concern is that of structural injustice. That is, the idea that through reflection we might come to resolve injustices perpetuated by societal habits and norms rather than unjust institutions. To resolve such injustices, the tripartite theory of reflection is absolutely necessary. In order to understand whether we do in fact perpetuate injustices which we believe we ought not, we have to take an honest look at ourselves through self-reflection. In addition, we need to find it within ourselves to do something about it which the ethical aspect of reflection can surely help. However, as indicated, there is by no means agreement on what structural injustices there in fact are, and thus the epistemic component of reflection is necessary for identifying our beliefs about these.

One kind of structural injustice we ought to think more carefully about is that of the structure of spectators before which political actors act. Following Arendt, we can all recognise that each of us plays a part in the informal structure of political spectators. A commitment to reflection is a commitment to play one's part as a political spectator in a responsible way. By doing this, we can play our part in transforming our political environment for the better.

However, we must all recognise that political reflection is only a part of our reflective lives. Augustine ended *The City of God* by highlighting the fact that even though we cannot dwell within and see politics from a perfect, eternal perspective, he held out the hope that one day he might dwell in eternal rest. This, he illustrated with the last sabbath day; an "eighth day" of perfect rest. In a world where political conflict and

struggle are so omnipresent that they might seem to colour all aspects of our world, we ought to remember that our reflective lives—our inner citadel, oratory, or room at the back of the shop—can also be a place of solace and peace. Not everything is political, and not all reflection is political either. We must seek to understand the role reflection plays each aspect of our lives—including as citizens. This thesis has aimed to clarify that role and to underscore its importance as an ethical practice.

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