GERMAN SOKRATES: HEIDEGGER, ARENDT, STRAUSS

Rodrigo Chacón
New School for Social Research

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem of a 'Political Philosophy' Or Why Neo-Socratism?

[M]*ir scheint die moderne Philosophie, zu ihrem Ende gebracht, an den Punkt zu führen, an dem Sokrates beginnt.*

Leo Strauss to Gerhard Krüger[1]

[A]ll problems of political philosophy begin where traditional philosophy, with its concept of man in the singular, stops.

Hannah Arendt[2]

Among the 'What is?' questions of our philosophical tradition, the question 'What is political philosophy?' occupies a peculiar place. Questions of the type, 'What is virtue?', 'What is courage?' or 'What is justice?', that is, of various moral matters, were reputedly first raised by Socrates, who on that account is said to have been the first political philosopher.[3] Yet Socrates did not raise the question, 'What is political philosophy?', and there is no record of him ever using the term.[4]

Strangely enough (or perhaps naturally so), the question 'What is political philosophy?' only began to induce Socratic perplexity in a century in which the most authoritative philosophers became anti-Socratics (such as Nietzsche) or pre-Socratics

[1] ("[M]odern philosophy, brought to its *end*, appears to me to lead to the point where Socrates *begins*.") December 12, 1932. In Leo Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften,* Band 3: Hobbes' politische Wissenschaft und Zugehörige Schriften – Briefe (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 2001), 415. (Hereafter, GS.)

[2] "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought," in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 447.

[3] See Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, V, 4, 10: "Socrates was the first to call philosophy down from the heavens and to place it in cities, and even to introduce it into homes and compel it to enquire about life and standards and good and ill." For an alternative account of the history of moral philosophy as beginning not with Socrates but with Pythagoras, compare J.B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy*, Epilogue: "Pythagoras, Socrates, and Kant: Understanding the History of Moral Philosophy" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1998).

[4] As Heinrich Meier points out, "[t]he concept does not occur in Plato's and Xenophon's writings. In Aristotle, we find *philosophia politike* just once in *Politics* III, 12, 1282b23." *Leo Strauss and the Theological-political Problem* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), vii.

(such as Heidegger); or when moral matters concerning good and evil were revealed as prejudices and questions of the type, 'What is virtue?' were replaced by such questions as 'What is Being?' and 'What is a Thing?'

When we nowadays talk of 'political philosophy' we take it to be a thing that requires little or no explanation. Yet on closer inspection its meaning proves to be as elusive and manifold as the meaning of 'Being'.

Indeed, when we speak of 'political philosophy', the adjective 'political' may denote the *subject matter* of philosophy as in 'philosophy of law' or 'philosophy of education'. It may also refer to a way of *treating* philosophy (namely, *politically*), that is, of being partisan for philosophy as a way of life. Or it may simply be *a pleonasm* as one could say that speaking of the 'philosophy of life' is like referring to the 'botany of plants', if the subject matter of philosophy is human life and human life is political life.

We confront similar problems when we try to explicate 'political *philosophy*' focusing on the noun. For if philosophy is a contemplative activity, then it can hardly be partisan for anything (just as 'philosophical party-member' would seem to be an oxymoron). If it is a quest for knowledge, and knowledge is of things that can be known, and things that can be known cannot be other than they are, then its subject matter can hardly be *political*, since what is political or what pertains to the life of a political community can always be other than it is. And if it is a quest for knowledge of 'all things', then its focus on the human (political) things would be as ungrounded and partial as a philosophy of equine things would be for horses if they could philosophize.[5] If, on the other hand, 'political philosophy' is a practical activity, then the question arises as to what makes it philosophical. Is it its movement from a concern with 'all things' to the

[5] Cf. Stuart Umphrey, "Why *Politiké Philosophia*," in *Man and World* 17: 431-452, here 441.

political things (the movement, say, of the lives of Plato or Spinoza)? Or is it the opposite movement from political involvement to philosophical reflection (for instance, the movement that describes the lives of Thucydides or Machiavelli)?

At the beginning of our philosophical tradition, the paradoxical character of political philosophy as a praxis lacking a concept was embodied in the figure of Socrates. Socrates spent his whole mature life reflecting on the political things and on the relation between the philosophical and the political lives without ever calling what he did political philosophy. The same can be said about Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss. Like Socrates, they believed that the one thing needful for our time is a philosophy of the human things or of the human condition, and like Socrates they devoted their mature lives to reflecting on the problematic relation between philosophy and politics. Like her Athenian predecessor, Arendt did not call what she did political philosophy. As for Strauss, he made 'political philosophy' the object of a Socratic quest which, just as Socratically, yielded no final answer. In spite of this, both became, willingly or not, founders of two of the most powerful schools of contemporary 'political philosophy'.

This chapter begins to lay the basis for reading Arendt and Strauss as Neo-Socratics. Specifically, it suggests a fourfold determination of Neo-Socratism. This determination implies, first, a philosophical turn to the study of the human things or the political things. Second, an act of founding or re-founding since one can only speak of Socratic 'political philosophy' by interpreting a practice for which no such concept existed. Third, a critique of the tradition of western thought or of any previous understanding of the meaning of political philosophy (insofar as it inherits a concept without clarifying the experience behind it). And fourth, an at least partial acceptance of a

philosophical view (best represented by Heidegger) that rejects the use of 'constructive' concepts or generally of thinking that does not arise from experience or that corresponds to experiences that have somehow been lost.

The argument of the chapter is divided in three sections. The first section provides an overview of the lives of Arendt and Strauss and of the way their thought is commonly understood. Beginning with the common opinion that they belonged to different worlds and partly justifying that opinion, it nevertheless begins to show that the way they started as students of Heidegger as well as their fates as determined by the history of the 20th century gave rise to fundamental coincidences—most importantly, to their protracted engagement with the question of the necessity and possibility of a political philosophy.

The second section provides a closer look at how Arendt and Strauss have been read by turning to some of the recent attempts to commence a dialogue between them. In this section I show how these attempts have over time approximated what I take to be the truth about both the relation between Arendt and Strauss and the core of their thinking. I thus show how the latest Socratic reading of Arendt and Strauss by Dana Villa improves on earlier attempts to understand their relation, notably by Ronald Beiner, as thinkers belonging to opposite Platonic (Strauss) and Socratic (Arendt) traditions. Further noting how German scholar Harald Bluhm complements (and partially corrects) Villa's analysis by tracing the origins of their understanding of philosophy as an activity of radical questioning to Heidegger, I conclude the section by suggesting that even this reading fails to fully grasp the implications of accepting the Heideggerian critique of the tradition of philosophy. As I shall argue, accepting that critique, as Arendt and Strauss both do, means to ultimately reject any form of Aristotelianism (and hence any reading of Arendt

as recovering Aristotle, such as Villa's) and any form of Platonism (and hence any reading of Strauss as ultimately a Platonist, such as Bluhm's). Instead, accepting Heidegger's critique of the tradition, however partially, means for Arendt and Strauss returning to its Socratic origins.

The third section provides an account of what it means to speak of a tradition of 'political philosophy' and of a problematic relation between philosophical theory and political praxis. By specifying the traditional origins of our philosophical and political vocabularies, which, I shall argue, still determine how Arendt and Strauss are read, I seek to begin to explain why a critique of the tradition as attempted by Heidegger is necessary and why, if consistently followed as Strauss and Arendt suggest, it necessarily leads to Socrates and to 'political philosophy'.

I. Why 'Arendt and Strauss?'

Who were 'Arendt and Strauss'? Thus far I have referred to these authors as one refers to 'Plato and Aristotle' or 'Marx and Lenin'—thinkers, who despite their differences, shared a common view of the world and of man's place in it, and which thus are naturally discussed together. In fact, however, it rarely occurs to anyone—and especially to so-called Arendtians and Straussians—to even be seriously interested in the work of both, as if their assumptions and aims were fundamentally antithetical. There are, however, some notable exceptions to this rule as we shall see[6]—not the least, Arendt herself seems to

[6] The most extensive 'Straussian' interpretation and critique of Arendt is Thomas L. Pangle's, in *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), ch. 6, 48-61. The

have taken Strauss's work seriously[7]—and there have also been recent attempts to commence a dialogue between both thinkers.[8] In order to frame our discussion of these

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title of the chapter summarizes the argument: "The Philosophic Roots, in Arendt and Heidegger, of the Contemporary Longings for, and the Misconceptions of, Classical Republicanism." Along the same lines see also the implicit critique of Arendt in Thomas L. Pangle and Nathan Tarcov, "Epilogue: Leo Strauss and the History of Political Philosophy," in *Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey* (eds.), *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 928. For reviews of Arendt's work (or of works *on* Arendt) by Strauss scholars, see Werner Dannhauser, "Hannah Arendt and the Jews," *Commentary* 67 (1979). For a very favorable appraisal of Arendt by Irving Kristol (an intellectual commonly associated with Straussianism—at least in his later years) see his "The American Revolution as a Successful Revolution," in American Enterprise Institute (ed.), *America's Continuing Revolution* (Garden City, N.J: Doubleday Anchor Books), 1976. Further favorable critiques of Arendt by Strauss scholars include, Joseph Cropsey, Review of *The Human Condition*, *Social Research,* 26:1/4 (1959); Steven B. Smith, Review of George Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil*, *Ethics*, Vol. 95, No. 2, Jan., 1985, 362-364. William A. Galston, Review of *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Feb., 1984), 304-306.

[7] Even though Arendt disliked Strauss, she had a very high opinion of him as a scholar. Responding to Karl Jaspers' query in 1954 concerning "Leo Strauss…an orthodox Jew of strong rational powers?", Arendt responds: "Leo Strauss is professor of political philosophy in Chicago, highly respected. Wrote a good book about Hobbes (as well as one about Spinoza). Now another about natural law. He is a convinced orthodox atheist. Very odd. A truly gifted intellect. I don't like him." Several years later, in 1963, the year she joined the University of Chicago where Strauss had been named (in 1960) Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and in the midst of what Arendt called the "Eichmann affair" (the heated controversy generated by her report of the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem), she writes to Jaspers from Chicago: "The Eichmann affair continues on its merry way…I spoke on the campus here, with very good success…The only person here on campus who is agitating against me is Leo Strauss, and he would have done it in any case." See Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Correspondence: 1926-1969*, Edited by Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, trans. Robert Kimber and Rita Kimber (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 241, 244, 535. Arendt had good reasons to believe that Strauss would have agitated 'in any case'. In 1956, after returning from Chicago where she delivered the lectures that would result in *The Human Condition*, she reports to Kurt Blumenfeld that even though, "people were at first quite perplexed (*verblüfft*) about a new 'approach' [one must bear in mind that Strauss himself in 1949 and Eric Voegelin in 1951 had given their own programmatic Walgreen Lectures presenting their approach to political philosophizing], they then became after all quite satisfied." Again, however, it was Leo Strauss who had reacted critically to her 'approach' ("*Inzwischen bin ich aus Chicago (wo mich Leo Strauss schönstens geschnitten hat) wieder zurück*…"). Yet again, Arendt shows her appreciation of Strauss's scholarship. In 1956 she writes: "He is very useful in this land, whatever one may otherwise think about him. He has learned something and teaches the youth to read. That then some of them come to the 'insight' that one can find everything, but then really everything, in Aristotle, that is not exactly a catastrophe that the world will not survive. Most human beings have by far more absurd views." See Ingeborg Nordmann and Iris Pilling (eds.), *Hannah Arendt, Kurt Blumenfeld, "In Keinem Besitz Verwurzelt*" (Hamburg: Rotbuch, 1995), 141, 149-50. Most importantly, Arendt regularly assigned Strauss's works in her courses, and considered his work, together with that of Voegelin and Alexandre Kojève, as among the only existing attempts to do political philosophy. In a course she taught at the New School in 1969, under the title, "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?," she thus suggests that "So far as political philosophy still exists it is being taught by traditionalists—Voegelin, a Platonist, Strauss, an Aristotelian, and Kojève, a Hegelian. Each of them believes that tradition is valid…and that the main problems are being solved" (24420). http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mharendt_pub&fileName=04/040460/040460page.db&recNum=5&tempFile=./temp/~ammem_4Sm9&filecode=mharendt&next_filecode=mharendt&prev_filecode=mharendt&itemnum=2&ndocs=81.

attempts a few words should be said to explain the reasons for which one rarely speaks about 'Arendt and Strauss'.

What may first come to mind when these thinkers are mentioned is that their aims were exactly opposite. The aim of Arendt's work as a whole may be said to be the rehabilitation of the active political life, the *vita activa*, both from the neglect it has been subjected to by a philosophical tradition that has typically seen the contemplative life as the highest, or indeed as the only life truly worth living, and from the modern privatization of life—the modern turning inward or subjectivization—which also results in a blindness to the inherent dignity of the life of action. Without such a rehabilitation, without the life of action, which is the *sine qua non* for the constitution of a world as a common world, Arendt would argue, the right to have rights, that is, the right to live in a world that could become our home could never be made a reality. Strauss's aim, by contrast, can be said to be the rehabilitation of philosophical *contemplation* as the highest life and indeed as the essential means—paradoxical as this may sound—to keep the political life in motion. That is, his aim, one could argue, was to affirm the freedom of the mind to raise the one question that matters—the question concerning the right life, or the question, How should I live?—not only by defending the life of free insight from the subjection to any authority—be it the authority of religion or of 'science' or of any tradition, including the philosophical tradition, or finally of any moral and political order—but by *proving* the superiority of such a life. In short, the first impression that

[8] See Ronald Beiner, "Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss: The Uncommenced Dialogue," *Political Theory*, Vol. 18, No. 2. (May, 1990), pp. 238-254; Dana R. Villa, "The Philosopher Versus the Citizen: Arendt, Strauss, and Socrates," in *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Harald Bluhm, "Variationen des Höhlengleichnisses: Kritik und Restitution politischer Philosophie bei Hannah Arendt und Leo Strauss," *Deutsche Zeitschrift Für Philosophie* 47, no. 6 (1999), 911-933.

Arendt stood predominantly for 'the citizen' (and largely against 'the philosopher'), while Strauss stood predominantly for 'the philosopher' (and rarely praised the life of the citizen *per se*) would appear to be justified.

Further differences become apparent when one considers some basic facts about their lives. Strauss (1899-1973) grew up in the small rural town of Kirchhain, Hessen in what he characterized as a "conservative, even orthodox Jewish home,"[9] and seems to have been affected his whole life by the necessity of becoming an atheist in order to become a philosopher.[10] Arendt (1906-1975), by contrast, grew up in cosmopolitan Königsberg, in a non-religious family of German-Jewish progressives.[11] Strauss took an early interest in religion and politics; specifically, in political Zionism and in the dialogues of Plato.[12] Arendt took an early interest in German philosophy—in the philosophy of Kant.[13] In his youth Strauss became an anti-revolutionary conservative, and according to Hans Jonas' memoirs, an early supporter of Mussolini.[14] Arendt was the daughter of a fervent admirer of Rosa Luxembourg and would later become engaged to a participant in the Spartacist uprising of 1919 (Heinrich Blücher). Both Arendt and Strauss were driven into politics, we may say, by a combination of world-history and their Jewish origins, yet their valorization of the political life (at least in their later years) was altogether different. Strauss, who was politically active in his youth, came to see political

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[9] See "A Giving of Accounts: Jacob Klein and Leo Strauss," in Kenneth Hart Green (ed.), *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity* (New York: SUNY Press, 1997), 459-460. (Hereafter JPCM.) On Strauss's youth see Michael Zank's Introduction to his edited volume of Strauss's early writings: *Leo Strauss: The Early Writings (1921-1932)* (New York: SUNY Press, 2002).

[10] See Christian Wiese (ed.), *Hans Jonas. Erinnerungen* (Frankfurt, a. M.: Insel Verlag, 2003), 93-94.

[11] On Arendt's youth see Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 5-41.

[12] "A Giving of Accounts," in Green (ed.), JPCM, 458, 460.

[13] "A Conversation with Günter Gaus," in Kohn (ed.), *Essays in Understanding*, 8.

[14] Jonas, *Erinnerungen*, 262. "[I]mmerhin war Strauss frühzeitig Mussolini-Anhänger gewesen, als dieser noch nicht antisemitisch war."

life as but a potentially tyrannical expression of self-love.[15] Arendt, on the opposite extreme, who was uninterested in politics at first—very much like other intellectuals she would then criticize[16]—vowed, in the early 1930s, "never again [to] get involved in any kind of intellectual business"[17] and became politically active for twenty years, expressing soon thereafter, in 1958, that an inactive life that was not engaged with the 'public things', was as good as "dead to the world."[18]

Not coincidentally, the work of Strauss and Arendt found resonance in rather different intellectual circles as they emigrated to the United States (respectively in 1938 and 1941). Arendt's work, on the one hand, found an early audience among a circle of highly influential Berkeley political theorists including Norman Jacobson, John Schaar, Sheldon Wolin, and Hannah Pitkin. These theorists read Arendt as engaged in their own quest to rescue "the political" first from behaviorism and later from the "unpolitical" political theories of, for instance, Michael Oakeshott or John Rawls—theories which, they argued, either view politics with hostility or see it as merely instrumental (i.e., as a means for attaining order and stability), and which thus fail to value and to understand politics as an end in itself, or, that is, as the creative potentiality of an egalitarian demos.[19] Strauss, on the other hand, became the founder of a school of thought whose most influential representatives (at least as far as cultural questions are concerned) have

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[15] See Victor Gourevitch, "Philosophy and Politics," *Review of Metaphysics* 22, pp. 58-84, (September-December, 1968): 281-328, 308.

[16] Cf. "Portrait of a Period," The Menorah Journal, XXXI (Fall 1943), 307-14. (Review of Stephan Zweig, The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography.) Reprinted in Ron H. Feldman, *Hannah Arendt: The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (NY: Grove Press, 1978), 112-125.

[17] "Conversation with Günter Gaus," 11. "I lived in an intellectual milieu, but I also knew other people. And among intellectuals *Gleichschaltung* was the rule, so to speak. But not among others. And I never forgot that…" (Ibid.)

[18] Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1958], 1998), 176.

[19] See Emily Hauptmann, "A Local History of 'The Political'," *Political Theory*, vol. 32, no. 1, February 2004, 34-60.

been anti-egalitarian conservatives (among them, Allan Bloom, Harry Jaffa, Werner Dannhauser, and Thomas Pangle).[20]

These clear differences in the basic motivation behind their most famous works which respectively praise the active and the philosophical lives; in what we may call their fundamental political dispositions; and in their following in America, have quite naturally made the mention of 'Arendt and Strauss' unusual.

And yet all of these differences are part of a broader context of equally striking coincidences. Arendt and Strauss both belonged to the same generation which had, as it were, one foot in the "lost world" of the relatively peaceful and hopeful nineteenth century. They were both part of the same intellectual milieu, first around Martin Heidegger and his circle of students at the universities of Freiburg and Marburg and later among the Zionist youth in Berlin, where they had common acquaintances such as Gershom Scholem and Walter Benjamin. Their way of thinking was shaped and would later develop in dialogue (with some extending their whole mature lives) with members of the same philosophical community (to which belonged Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, as well as their students, Günther Stern, Jacob Klein, Gerhard Krüger, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, among others). They were both émigrés who became American citizens, and they both became professors of political philosophy at the New School for Social Research and at the University of Chicago.

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[20] Yet it would be a mistake to characterize all 'Straussians' as conservatives. As Steven Smith points out, "Even recently, a distinguished student of Strauss [William Galston] served as a prominent member of the first Clinton administration." Also, it must be mentioned that there were among Strauss's students some, most notably Seth Benardete and Stanley Rosen, who became among the most highly respected classicists and philosophers of our time, whose work does not directly address political questions. (Strauss may have thought of Benardete, above all, as his best student. With no other student did Strauss sustain a continued and extensive exchange. See Heinrich Meier's introduction to *GS 3*, XXXIV, XXXV.) On the relation of Straussianism to political conservatism, see Steven Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 3-4.

Even though they seem to have known each other personally from their Berlin years,[21] and even though they also coincided at the University of Chicago (Arendt taught at Chicago from 1963 to 1967; Strauss from 1949 to 1968), Arendt and Strauss were not on friendly terms with each other and they did not discuss each other's views, at least not openly. Yet one could say that if there should have been an obvious dialogue between the students of Heidegger mentioned above, that dialogue would have taken place between Arendt and Strauss. The reason is that none of those thinkers came to believe, as did they, that the crisis of modernity is essentially a political crisis, which as such needs to be addressed by a form of thinking that is not moral, or scientific, or religious, or philosophic, but likewise distinctively political (or, more exactly, political-philosophical). Consequently too, though many were masterful readers of the philosophic and religious traditions, none of the thinkers in the community of thought around Heidegger to which Strauss and Arendt belonged devoted their efforts to a critical reading of the tradition of *political* thought for the sake of rethinking, and if possible, reviving political philosophy. In short, we can say that while the ramifications of the thought of Arendt and Strauss are widely different, it grows from a common experiential and philosophical soil. Or to put it in rather crude but telling terms: Arendt did not assign Wolin, or Pitkin, or Jacobson in her courses, but (among others) Strauss and Werner Jaeger and Eric Voegelin. Strauss, for his part, does not draw on the insights of any of his American followers in his work, but he does build and expand on the work of Jacob Klein, Gerhard Krüger, and Hans-

[21] According to Elisabeth Young-Bruehl: "Strauss…met with Arendt at the Prussian State Library and made an effort to court her. When she criticized his conservative political views and dismissed his suit, he became bitterly angry. The bitterness lasted for decades, growing worse when the two joined the same American faculty at the University of Chicago in the 1960s. Strauss was haunted by the rather cruel way in which Hannah Arendt had judged his assessment of National Socialism: she had pointed out the irony of the fact that a political party advocating views Strauss appreciated could have no place for a Jew like him." *For Love of the World*, 98.

Georg Gadamer. Above all, if their work as a whole is marked by an unnamed presence, it is the presence of Martin Heidegger.

II. Reading Strauss and Arendt: 'The Philosopher' versus 'The Citizen'?

Perhaps the most common understanding of the political philosophizing of Arendt and Strauss is that they stood for opposite traditions. According to this view, Leo Strauss represents the tradition from Plato to Pascal according to which, in Ronald Beiner's words, "what makes the philosopher a *political* philosopher…is first and foremost the concern for his own survival."[22] Hannah Arendt, to the contrary, "represents but the latest expression of […] [that other tradition] running from Machiavelli to Heidegger," which "celebrates ancient practice at the same time that it denigrates ancient theory" (239). Thus Beiner argues that "on the decisive question" of philosophy and politics "Arendt assumes a position […] that is as radically antithetical to Strauss's as any can be" (247). From this perspective Strauss is said to be fundamentally a Platonist, while Arendt is said to be at bottom a Kantian (at least, as concerns the question of the relation between philosophy and politics). In particular, Strauss is said to stand for the view that there is "an automatic correlation between intellectual gifts and natural entitlement to rule" (246), or that "philosophers […] possess an intrinsic claim to political knowledge that surpasses that of artists, novelists, lawyers, diplomats, and even professional politicians" (245). In sharp contrast, Arendt is read as a Kantian who saw Kant's "fundamental achievement" in his

[22] Ronald Beiner, "Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss: The Uncommenced Dialogue," *loc. cit.*, 248. (Henceforth cited in parentheses in the body of the text.)

redefinition of our understanding of philosophy "such that the community of philosophers and the community of ordinary citizens were no longer fundamentally at odds with each other" (248), and who thus understood that there is "a reason for concerning oneself as a philosopher with politics that [is] not chiefly dictated by the preoccupation with brute self-preservation" (248).

In short, according to this understanding, 'political philosophy' for Strauss means the '*politics of philosophy*', or the political defense of philosophy on the part of a philosophical class of citizens that claims for itself a right to rule on the basis of an alleged superior knowledge of political things. Arendt's turn to 'political philosophy', by contrast, is understood to be grounded on the fact that *the mode of being* of philosophy is political, that is to say, that the conditions of thinking lie in the human (political) condition of plurality (or, in Kant's terms, in the public use of reason). Philosophy must thus be 'political' in order to establish the conditions of both truthful living together and truthful thinking (or philosophizing).

German political theorist, Harald Bluhm, provides an alternative understanding of the two traditions Strauss and Arendt are said to represent.[23] Bluhm, like Beiner, reads Strauss as a Platonist, while Arendt, he claims, attempted to develop a fundamentally *new* way of thinking about political life drawing on the model of Socrates (916). These contrasting approaches, Bluhm argues, are an expression of their different understandings of the origins of the tradition of political philosophy in Socratic-Platonic thought. For Arendt, the consequence that Plato drew from Socrates' trial represents the end of genuine political thinking given Plato's decision to (un-Socratically) turn away from the

[23] Harald Bluhm, "Variationen des Höhlengleichnisses: Kritik und Restitution politischer Philosophie bei Hannah Arendt und Leo Strauss," *loc. cit.* (Hereafter cited in parentheses.)

realm of opinion to the contemplation of the truth and thus to replace Socrates' public questioning with a private thinking that is completely separated from political experience (924). Strauss, by contrast, Bluhm tells us, saw Plato's reaction as the *beginning*, or we may say as the condition for the possibility, of political philosophy, for what Plato did was to combine the power-political way of Thrasymachus with the intransigent philosophical questioning of Socrates (924).[24] 'Political philosophy' thus becomes a way of protecting philosophy from politics (precisely as a reaction to the fate of Socrates): again, a form of 'philosophical politics'. Given what Strauss considers to be the essentially precarious situation of philosophy (as expressed most dramatically by Socrates' trial), political philosophy is from this perspective a form of esoteric wisdom that protects itself through a public or exoteric teaching exalting the civic-friendliness of

[24] This understanding of Plato dates back to the founder of philosophy in Islam, Alfarabi (c. 870-950), who reproached Socrates for having addressed the people in a way that is only suitable to the elite, thus precipitating his condemnation. Socrates' way of philosophical questioning must therefore be complemented by the suitable use of political rhetoric as practiced by Thrasymachus of Chalcedon (c. 459-400 BC) whose art has been immortalized in Plato's *Republic*. Both together produce the Platonic art of writing. See Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato* 10, paragraph 36, in Mushin Mahdi (ed.), *Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle* (NY: Glencoe, 1962), 66-67. For the relation between Socrates and Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*, see Catherine Zuckert, "Why Socrates and Thrasymachus Become Friends," *Conference Papers. American Political Science Association* (2006). The idea that philosophy is essentially a form of legislation for which Plato's art constitutes the original model is held among the moderns most notably by Nietzsche. "Plato has given us a splendid description of how the philosophical thinker must within every existing society count as the paragon of all wickedness: for as a critic of all customs he is the antithesis of the moral man, and if he does not succeed in becoming a lawgiver for new customs he remains in the memory of men as 'the evil principle'." Nietzsche goes on to argue that it is therefore no wonder that Plato "intended to do for all the Greeks what Mohammed later did for his Arabs: to determine customs in things great and small and especially to regulate everyone's day-to-day mode of life…A couple of accidents more and a couple of other accidents fewer—and the world would have seen the Platonisation of the European south." *Daybreak*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), book V, 496. For a reading of Strauss as a Platonic-Farabian-Nietzschean political philosopher along these lines see Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), especially 146-147. For a general historical-philosophical treatment of the relation between philosophy and legislation see Rémi Brague, *The Law of God. The Philosophical History of an Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

philosophers, while at the same time covertly or esoterically attempting to replace accepted opinions by an approximation to the truth.[25]

Noting some of the fundamental agreements between Arendt and Strauss, Bluhm further argues that they were both primarily concerned with making normative political thinking possible again after the crisis of the western tradition that culminated in totalitarianism. Yet while Strauss's quest was for "the simply good order, for a qualitative standard with reference to which all concrete political orders could be measured" (916), Arendt, by contrast, was above all concerned with thinking the conditions for the possibility of political action. Strauss's quest for "the simply good order" becomes manifest in his reading of Plato's parable of the cave. According to Strauss, Plato's cave is the image of the city, and as such—insofar as philosophy is a dialectical ascent from ordinary opinions to knowledge of the truth—it constitutes a positive model for political philosophizing and for the quest for the best political order. Arendt, by contrast, saw Plato's cave simile as a fateful *distortion* of the image of the 'true' city, that is, for her, of the pre-philosophic city or the 'Homeric agora' which embodied the preconditions for the practice of isonomy (viz., rule by plurality, the absence of war, and an agonistic culture of self-display and the quest for immortality) (923). In this way, we can say, Bluhm again underscores the 'two traditions view' according to which Strauss glorified ancient theory against ancient practice, while Arendt did the opposite.

Even though he does not develop this point at length, Bluhm also draws attention to what I will argue is the most important commonality between Arendt and Strauss, namely the influence that Heidegger exerted upon their thinking. As Bluhm notes, this is

[25] See Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), 16-17.

manifested in their understanding of philosophy as an anti-systemic and anti-traditional activity of radical questioning that is also coessential to the human condition. In this way, Bluhm adds to the debate on the relation between Arendt and Strauss a new element that elucidates the meaning of *philosophy* in 'political philosophy'. As we have seen, political philosophy is said to be *political* for Strauss because of its treatment of philosophy (viz., its defense of the way of life of philosophers), while Arendt is said to have understood the political aspect of philosophy as residing in its mode of being (viz., in the fact that the conditions of philosophical thought are given by the political condition of plurality). What Bluhm now suggests is that political philosophy for Strauss and Arendt is political *philosophizing*, and in that sense a practical activity or even perhaps a way of life. Nevertheless, Bluhm does not further consider how this understanding of philosophizing could undermine the view that Arendt and Strauss stood for opposite (Platonic versus Socratic) traditions. (For, simply put, if Strauss was a Heideggerian at least in the sense that he saw philosophizing as essentially a form of radical questioning yielding no final answers, he cannot at the same time be said to have been a Platonist in the sense of someone who believes in the possibility of finding '*the* simply good order'.)

Dana Villa reads both Strauss and Arendt as Socratics in key respects. Thus, we could say, he overcomes the limitation of Bluhm's reading to which we have just referred. In "The Philosopher versus the Citizen: Arendt, Strauss, and Socrates,"[26] Villa argues that there is a "curious intersection in the political theories of Arendt and Strauss" in that "[b]oth point to the possibility of a philosophical or Socratic form of citizenship…that undercuts the dichotomy of philosophy versus politics which otherwise

[26] In Dana R. Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt*, *op. cit.*, 155-180.

structures so much of their work" (157). Rather than seeing their thought as mutually exclusive, Villa argues, Arendt and Strauss should be read as providing a model for "alienated (or philosophical) citizenship" that, in contrast to the dominant "broadly contextualist or hermeneutic view of political theory" "where John Rawls turns out to be just as historicist as Michael Walzer or Richard Rorty," would have "the extraordinary capacity to take us out of the 'cave' of liberal democracy" by confronting us "with the question—the *Socratic* question—of what is the political?," thus persistently reminding us "of the finitude of *our* horizon" (176-79).

Villa begins by highlighting the main difference between both thinkers with respect to the question of philosophy and politics. Implicitly correcting Beiner, Villa notes that "Strauss emphasizes the fact of [the conflict between philosophy and politics] no less than Arendt, seeing it as rooted in man's fundamentally divided nature as a thinking and acting being." "However," he continues agreeing yet again with Beiner and Bluhm, "in direct opposition to her, he turns to political theory, not to save politics from philosophical distortion, but to preserve the possibility of a philosophical politics" (156).

This basic difference is reflected in their contrasting understandings of Socrates. According to Arendt, the Socratic function of philosophy is "to establish the kind of common world, built on the understanding of friendship, in which no rulership is needed" (159). The aim, however, is not reducible to the establishment of ties of solidarity through dialogue (i.e, to the discovery of common purposes and the cultivation of common virtues), but rather it is to cultivate thoughtfulness. Essentially, this is achieved through Socratic discussion—a 'talking through' of problems that liberates the faculty of

judgment from the tyranny of rules and custom, thus forcing citizens to 'stop and think' by dissolving the ground of their unreflective opinions and inducing perplexity (166).

For *Strauss*, to the contrary, Villa points out, Socrates is a *teacher* and not a "citizen among citizens." His dialectic method is *not* primarily meant to establish a common world by 'improving' the citizens' opinions, one at a time, but "to ascend from the many (doxai) to the one (truth)." The political philosopher has a privileged position of judgment (he is, as it were, an umpire) due to the fact that "[h]is inquiry into the 'What is?' questions (what is justice, piety, virtue, etc.) directs him toward knowledge of the good life and the good society." Philosophers and non-philosophers *cannot* have genuinely common deliberations (172). And political life is not an end in itself but derives its dignity from something higher, namely from the life of the philosopher (175).

It would seem, then, that the understanding of Socratic philosophizing of Arendt and Strauss could not be more different. And yet, Villa points out, there is "another Strauss, a more genuinely Socratic Strauss, a Strauss oddly akin to Arendt" (172). For this skeptical Strauss, "human wisdom is knowledge of ignorance," and there can be "no unqualified transcending, even by the wisest man as such, of the sphere of opinion"; philosophy is not a form of foundationalism (i.e., a quest for standards of the good life or the good society), but rather the severest challenge to authority in *all* its forms; and "the 'discovery of nature' may be the work of philosophy, but 'nature' turns out to be…no more than a kind of 'regulative ideal', a symbol not of ready-to-hand yardsticks or banisters, but of a desire to avoid the identification of the moral with the conventional [that historicism facilitates]" (172-73). This is the Strauss for whom political idealism is the gravest danger, and for whom it is the role of philosophy precisely to challenge all

movements that, claiming to be in possession of the truth, “attempt to use theory as a blueprint for political practice, social reform, or societal transformation.” Thus, in the same way as Arendt, *this* “Strauss wants to open up a space for judgment—a space he sees endangered by both historicism and ‘idealist’ or ideological thinking” (173).

Summing up the discussion so far, we could say that Bluhm’s insight into Arendt’s and Strauss’s understanding of political philosophy as a form of philosophizing inspired by Heidegger—that is, as a form of radical questioning rather than a quest for a trans-phenomenal truth or for a ‘system’ of thought—is elucidated by Villa in such a way that both thinkers appear as Socratics. Yet whereas Bluhm traces this commonality to the influence of Heidegger, Villa, who otherwise has done much to further our understanding of the Heideggerian sources of Arendt’s thought,[27] neglects to note the equally important way in which *Strauss’s* thought was shaped by the thought of the German master of Messkirch. Hence, as I shall argue, the still limited understanding of the meaning of the problem and the potentialities of political philosophizing for Arendt and Strauss.

III. The (Non-) Foundation of ‘Political Philosophy’ by Socrates and His Contemporaries

So far, drawing on the scholarly literature, we have understood the differences and similarities between Arendt and Strauss in terms of two traditions—‘Platonic’ versus ‘Socratic’—and in terms of the dichotomies between ‘philosophy and politics’ and ‘theory and practice’. This, however, presupposes the validity of a tradition which Arendt and Strauss did not take for granted: indeed, as we shall see, their return to Socrates is

[27] See Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996.

largely an attempt to redefine that tradition by returning and reinterpreting its roots. Thus, in order to clarify the terms of the discussion—and to see its significance in the first place—it is necessary to provide at least a general view of the traditional understanding of philosophy and politics and their relation.

We begin by noting a central difficulty: the way the western tradition has understood the meaning of philosophy and politics—or, more generally speaking, of (philosophical) theory and (political) praxis—is a function of their relation, and that relation, it seems, has never been clear.[28] That is to say, philosophy as an activity that takes place within a political society and which must justify itself before that society defines its own meaning and thereby also, at least negatively or by exclusion, the meaning of political life. This was done with such effectiveness by the founders of the philosophical tradition—mainly Plato and Aristotle, who first used and defined the term 'philosophy'—that our understanding of 'philosophizing' and 'politicizing', both before that founding moment and after it, has been, strictly speaking, derivative: before that founding moment because the pre-history of the Socratic school was largely written by

[28] According to the author of perhaps the most thorough analysis of the concepts of theory and praxis in Western thought, Nicholas Lobkowicz: "…contrary to all appearances, when taken in the strict sense there never was an account of theory and praxis, in any event not of their relation to one another. There were discussions of various types of praxis and various sorts of theory; there were discussions of the relation between theory and production, between theory and history, and between theory and experience. But the real problem, which the famous passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* poses, has never really been genuinely discussed: namely, is it possible to develop a theory relevant to praxis which actually is a theory and which is actually relevant just to praxis and not to every other possible thing?" "Origins: On the History of Theory and Praxis," in Terence Ball (ed.) *Political Theory and Praxis: New Perspectives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 25. (For Lobkowicz's larger treatment of the problem of theory and praxis see his *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx* (Notre Dame Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967).) For similar arguments, see Günther Bien, "Das Theorie-Praxis Problem und die politische Philosophie bei Plato und Aristoteles," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 76, 1968-1969, 264-314, 268; Franco Volpi, "The Rehabilitation of Practical Philosophy and Neo-Aristotelianism," in Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins, *Action and Contemplation: Studies in the Moral and Political Thought of Aristotle* (SUNY Series in Ancient Greek Philosophy. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 18. Hermann Lübbe, *Politische Philosophie in Deutschland* (Basel: Schwabe, 1963), 11.

that school itself, and after that moment because—as we shall see—from very early on western thought began to understand itself in terms of categories borrowed from the classic thinkers, and in particular in terms of a distinction between theory and praxis and 'theoretical' and 'practical' lives that did not exist, at least in those terms, for the founding thinkers.[29]

Given this difficulty, that is, given the fact that one cannot speak of the meaning of philosophy and politics and their relation without posing a question to thinkers for whom this question did not exist in the terms we use—for instance, when we speak of 'political' or 'practical' versus 'metaphysical' theory, of the '*vita activa'* versus the '*vita contemplativa'*, or of the life of praxis in contrast to the life of theory—we shall limit our discussion, first, to recalling the temporal origins of our philosophical and political

[29] Of this achievement of the Socratic school it has been argued that it set the terms of what the western tradition has deemed to be both (philosophically) thinkable and (politically) doable. Consider, on the one hand, Martin Heidegger's argument that "the fate of philosophy proper in the west" was decided by an arbitrary interpretation that named what Aristotle understood to be the core of philosophy or the "first philosophy," 'metaphysics'—a term, not only that Aristotle does not use, but that in any case could never have meant for him the "*turn[ing] away* from the *physika*" towards "knowledge of the suprasensous" implied by the Latin sense of 'meta', namely: *beyond* the physical, or "the *place* and the *order* of those beings which lie *behind* and *above* other beings." Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. W. McNeill and N. Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, [1929/30],1995), 39, 40, 43. Consider, on the other hand, the argument, whose most extreme manifestation may be found in the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, that the fact that the core of philosophy began to be understood as 'meta-physics'—and that such metaphysical thought began to rule over politics, nay, obliterated all genuinely political thought—was not simply the fault of the first interpreters of Plato and Aristotle but of Plato's and Aristotle's *own* 'politics of philosophy': that is, of their own *political* attempts to define what it means to think philosophically and what it means to act politically. Thus according to Castoriadis, the defeat of the Athenian democracy (in 404) which gives rise to the philosophy of Plato "fixed the course of political philosophy for twenty five centuries." Or as he puts it more explicitly, "Profoundly hating the democratic universe and its arborescences ('sophistry', rhetoric, political activity, even poetry) [Plato] constructs—by strokes of historical falsification, rhetoric, sophistry, theatrical scenes, and demagogy—a false image of it that was later to have weighty historical effects: when referring to Plato, one still talks about 'Greek political thought', whereas he is the total negation thereof…Greek political thought is to be sought, rather, in democratic political creation, and that creation ends basically in 404 (or 399)." See Castoradis' lectures of 1982-83 edited as *Ce Qui Fait La Grèce. 1, D'Homère à Héraclite: Séminaires 1982-1983* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 286 (Plato "fixed the course of political philosophy for twenty five centuries"), and his course *On Plato's Statesman*, trans. David Ames Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), xxii.

vocabularies and, second, to specifying on this basis why it is necessary to return again to the question of the possibility of a 'political philosophy' as Arendt and Strauss do.

'Politics' and 'Praxis'

Our *political* vocabulary dates back to the rise of democracy in the 5th century B.C. It was during the time when the affairs of the polis became the affairs of the citizen body that terms such as *politeia*, meaning the constitution or the regime broadly speaking; *politeuma*, a closely related idea; and *politeuesthai*, meaning to be politically active, were coined.[30] As for the idea of human *praxis*, referring more generally—at least in one of its meanings—to human activity as guided by deliberation (in the political, ethical-individual, or economic domains), it only began to be used terminologically, that is, in the context of the study of human action, by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.). Thus it is notably absent from the work of Thucydides' (ca. 460-395 B.C.) who was otherwise one of the first thinkers to try to account for the 'laws' governing human action, and it was also left largely unexplored *as such* by Plato (424-348 B.C.).[31] Finally, the notion of a political life, or *bios politikos*, as part of a general discussion concerning the best way of life (viz., whether it is political, philosophical or something else) also dates back to the Socratic school and to Plato in particular.[32] It must further be noted that this discussion did *not* refer to the more general difference between *bios* <u>*praktikos*</u> and *bios theoretikos* (let alone

[30] See Christian Meier, "Politeia," in *Historisches Wörterbuch Der Philosophie* (Basel: Schwabe, 1971), Vol. 7, 1034-1036. (Hereafter *HWPh*.) The terms *ta politka* (politics) and *e politike* ('the political') which are substantivized forms of the adjective *politikos* itself derived from *polites* also date back to that period. Meier, "Politik," in Ibid., 1038.

[31] Günther Bien, "Praxis, Praktisch," in *Historisches Wörterbuch Der Philosophie*, vol 7., 1277.

[32] See Werner Jaeger, "On the Origin and Cycle of the Philosophic Ideal of Life," in his *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development*, trans. Richard Robinson (Oxford, Oxford University Press, second ed., 1948), 426-461.

'active' versus 'contemplative'), which are distinctions that became relevant—and apparently only began to make sense—for post-Aristotelian thought.[33]

'Philosophy' and 'theory'

As for our *philosophical* vocabulary, though it also began to be developed in the 5th century Periclean age, it was only completed or consolidated *after* the demise of the Athenian democracy (in 404). Thus the verbal and adjectival forms 'to philosophize' and 'philosophical' appeared towards the end of the 5th century, while the noun 'philosophy' only emerged around the 380s, that is, after the trial of Socrates in 399.[34] Finally, *theoria* only began to be used as a technical term of philosophical knowledge by Plato, while the adjective 'theoretical' was not used before Aristotle.[35]

'Philosophizing' and 'politicizing'

Herodotus (c. 490 B.C.-420 B.C.) refers to the Athenian lawgiver Solon (c. 638-558 B.C.) as someone who 'philosophized' and 'theorized'[36] and, insofar as his quest was for 'the invisible measure' of human affairs—namely, justice—he could be seen as the first to both philosophize *and* politicize, or as the first to philosophize about the (political)

[33] Günther Bien, "Praxis, Praktisch," in *HWPh*, Vol. 7., 1282.

[34] W. Halbfass, "Philosophie," in *HWPh*, Vol. 7, 573. (The earliest reputed 'philosophers' from Ionia referred to their investigations as *istorie* (=inquiry). Pythagoras (c. 582-500 B.C.) is reputedly the first thinker who called himself a 'philosopher' and was also known in antiquity as such, yet that seems to be rather a projection of the term to a time when it did not exist. Ibid. See also Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 15.

[35] G. König and H. Pulte, "Theorie," in *HWPh*, Vol. 10, 1128-1129.

[36] Herodotus, *Histories*, I, 30. "My Athenian guest, the rumor of your wisdom [*sophie*] and your travels has reached us. We hear that since you have a taste for wisdom [*philosopheon*], you have visited many lands because of your desire to see [*theories eineken*]."

order of human life.[37] Yet again, though, quite obviously, the fact of living together in community and the act of thinking exist prior to the emergence of *political* living together and *philosophical* thinking, the raison d'etre for the existence of 'political philosophy' or of an 'art' or '*techne*' of politics is still absent in the pre-democratic times of Solon. This because there is no need for general political education, or one could also say, because the question of the right order of living in community is not yet strictly speaking a question.

'Political science'

The term 'political science' appears in the second half of the 5th century[38] in a time in which, at the wake of Athens successes in the Persian Wars (490-479) and the coming Peloponnesian war (431-404), the question of the right order of living together becomes an urgent one. The thinkers associated with the Sophist movement of the fifth century B.C. seem to have been the first political scientists insofar as it is through them that the quest for wisdom was directed for the first time primarily to the world of human experience and specifically to the experience of living in community. From what is preserved of their writings, and from the (admittedly biased) records of Plato and others, we find in the work of some of the most notable Sophists such as Protagoras, Callicles and Thrasymachus a political science that raises such questions as the origins of the political community, the basis of the 'social contract', and the nature of justice and

[37] The first political articulation of the idea of 'measure' (and of the related notions of moderation and temperance) dates to Solon. K. Mainzer, "Mass," *HWPh*, Vol. 5, 508. According to Solon, "What is most difficult is to perceive the invisible measure, which nevertheless alone has the limits of all things." Fragment D 16. In Solon, *Dichtungen* (Munich: Heimeran), 1945, 46f.

[38] Initially by the linking together of the adjective *politike* to *techne*, *episteme*, or *dunamis*. Meier, "Politik," in *HWPh*, Vol. 7, 1038.

political equality.[39] It is only at this point in western history, it seems, that one can begin to speak of a relation between thought (and/or knowledge or wisdom in general) and political practice.[40]

The question of course is, what kind of 'thought' is this—is it 'philosophical', 'scientific', 'technical'?, and wherein does its interest in political practice lie? These are questions that have been disputed ever since the meaning of philosophy itself became a question, most notably with Plato in his dialogue *Sophistes*. On one extreme, it can be argued that the wisdom sought and sold by the Sophists was concerned with almost everything, except for wisdom for its own sake (what we would call today 'pure theory'), and that what the Sophist movement stands for is the unfettering of the will to power and recognition from the traditional order of goods and values that had hitherto constrained the free shaping of a common (and individual) life.[41] On the opposite extreme, it could be said that the Sophists were really no different from other 'philosophers', and particularly from Socrates, insofar as they were concerned with 'the human things' but also with 'all things'[42] and insofar as their quest was—arguably, just like Socrates'—not (or at least

[39] Protagoras (c. 490-420 BC) was born in Abdera and put on trial by the democracy somewhere around the year 411. He supported Pericles around the years 450 to 444, under whose approval he drafted laws for the colony of Thuroi (founded in 443 in southern Italy). Of Callicles, we only know through Plato's dialogue *Gorgias* and an occasional reference in Aristotle. He is often seen therefore as a fictitious character. Still, his views exercised considerable influence on thinkers of the stature of Machiavelli and Nietzsche. Thrasymachus (c. 459-400 BC) was born in Chalcedon in the Bosphorus. He appeared in Aristophanes' "Diataleis" in 427 and was well-known in Athens at that time as a Sophist. His conversation with Socrates in the *Republic* can be fixed to the year 413. Little else is known about his life. His epitaph names 'Sophistry' as his profession (*e techne sophie*).

[40] On this point and more generally on the Greek 'discovery of the political' see Christian Meier, *Athens: A Portrait of the City in its Golden Age* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 14-15, as well as Ernst Vollrath, *Was Ist Das Politische?: Eine Theorie Des Politischen Und Seiner Wahrnehmung* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 24.

[41] Ralf Elm, "Ethos, Vernunft und Freiheit. Zum Zusammenhang von praktischer und theoretischer Lebensform in der klassischen griechischen Philosophie," in R. Elm (ed.), *Vernunft Und Freiheit in Der Kultur Europas: Ursprünge, Wandel, Herausforderungen* (Freiburg: K. Alber, 2006), 20, 23.

[42] Thus, for instance, Gorgias could write a treatise "On What is Not, or On Nature."

not only) cynically 'technical' (e.g., overcoming a geometrician in debate without knowing anything about geometry), but 'emancipatory' (e.g., showing that 'justice' really means the advantage of the stronger). Thus there seems to be no safe way of distinguishing the relation between 'wisdom' (*sophia*) and practice (especially political practice) in the work of 'Sophists', on the one hand, and of 'philosophers' on the other.[43]

'Philosophy of human things' I: Socrates

The traditional view is that Socrates was the first philosopher to make "human affairs" the center of philosophical attention.[44] More particularly, it can be said that it was Socrates who first attempted a 'theory of praxis' or who first made human praxis a matter—and perhaps *the* matter—of philosophical investigation by famously affirming—here, at least, in sharp contrast to the Sophists—that virtue *is* knowledge or that sound praxis is intimately linked, or indeed may be *nothing other* than 'sound' theory. To explain what this means it is necessary to provide at least an outline of the Socratic way of questioning, and in particular of what is known as the 'Socratic turn'.[45]

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[43] That is to say, one cannot possibly understand the different ('sophistical' versus 'philosophical') origins of political thought in terms of such categories as "traditional theory" –allegedly concerned with ontology and driven by an ultimately religious interest typically ascribed to Plato and Aristotle—, "empirical-analytic" theory driven by "technical" interests (which would correspond to the Sophists); "historical-hermeneutic" theory with "practical cognitive" interests—namely, with the "preservation and expansion of the intersubjectivity of possible action-orienting mutual understanding"— and "critical theory" with an "emancipatory cognitive interest" achieved through self-reflection. The Sophists just as much as 'philosophers' like Socrates, one could say, pursued *all* of these types of theorizing for 'practical', 'technical', 'theoretical', 'emancipatory' reasons. (Whereby the point is not: '*they* did; why can *we* not do this? But: 'has it *ever been possible* to dissociate ontology and ethics, metaphysics and morals, thinking and 'building'/'edifying', 'science' and 'weltanschauung' and so on? And what do we miss—precisely by way of possibilities of 'emancipation'—when we fail to raise these questions?). For the (contrary) view that the distinctions are sound and also necessary see Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 301-317.

[44] See note 3 above.

[45] On this, see, more generally, Catherine Zuckert, "The Socratic Turn," *History of Political Thought* 25, no. 2 (Summer, 2004): 189-219. Rémi Brague, *The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 30 ff. Jacob, Klein, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra* (New York: Dover Publications,

At least in Plato's account, Socrates underwent a conversion, or perhaps a series of conversions, as he learned his unique art of philosophical investigation. Socrates is said to have turned away from natural philosophy to political philosophy, whereby it is of the essence of the latter that it begins—and in a way ends—with the investigation of human opinions. The story of this turn is told in the *Phaedo*. In a very abbreviated form, and just to mention the beginning and end of the story, it is this:

> When I was a young man I was wonderfully keen on that wisdom which they call natural science, for I thought it splendid to know the causes of everything, why it comes to be, why it perishes and why it exists. […] [Until] finally I became convinced that I have no natural aptitude at all for that kind of investigation […] So I thought I must take refuge in discussions and investigate the truth of things by means of words [*logoi*].[46]

Socrates tells the story of his youthful passion for the study of nature and subsequent turn to the human world during the last day of his life. In another late dialogue, *Theaetetus*, Plato elucidates what it means to be a philosopher and in particular to study "human affairs."[47] In perhaps the most famous passage Socrates explains that being a philosopher means "never condescending to what lies near at hand" and refers to Thales as "an instance":

1992), 73 ff. J. Klein, "Aristotle: An Introduction," in Joseph Cropsey (ed.), *Ancients and Moderns; Essays on the Tradition of Political Philosophy in Honor of Leo Strauss* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 178 f. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1983), part III, chapter 1, "The Retraction of the Socratic Turning," especially, 250. Christopher Bruell, "On the Original Meaning of Political Philosophy," in Thomas Pangle (ed.), *The Roots of Political Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). Stuart Umphrey, "Why *Politiké Philosophia*," in *Man and World* 17: 431-452. Stanley Rosen, *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), Chapter 2: "Socrates' Hypothesis," 46-95. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (New Haven: Yale University Press), 65-83.

[46] Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in John M. Cooper (ed.), *Plato*. *Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 96a7-8, 99e3.

[47] According to Xenophon, "conversation [with Socrates] did not turn on the nature of things as a whole, as was the case with most of the others….With him, conversation was always about human affairs [*peri ton anthropeion*]." *Memorabilia*, I 1, II; see also I.1, 9; 12-13; 15-16. Cf. Apology, 26b, Republic vii 517 d. On this peculiarity of Socratic philosophizing and its originality see Richard Bodéüs, *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle's Ethics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 18. See also, Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age,* 246 f.

> [T]hey say Thales was studying the stars…and gazing aloft, when he fell into a well; and a witty and amusing Thracian servant-girl made fun of him because, she said, he was wild to know about what was up in the sky but failed to see what was in front of him and under his feet. The same joke applies to all who spend their lives in philosophy. It really is true that the philosopher fails to see his next-door neighbor; he not only doesn't notice what he is doing; he scarcely knows whether he is a man or some other kind of creature. The question he asks is, What is Man? What actions and passions properly belong to human nature and distinguish it from all other beings? This is what he wants to know and concerns himself to investigate.[48]

Here we see the relation (and the movement) between theory and praxis that characterizes the Socratic way. Socrates says that his investigation is primarily of human words (or opinions, *logoi*)—and what could be 'nearer at hand' than that? Yet the instance of the philosopher "in the highest sense" remains Thales, in Plato's account, a stargazer—the 'theoretician' par excellence. The philosopher asks about human praxis: "What is Man? What actions and passions properly belong to human nature and distinguish it from all other beings?," and yet he "doesn't notice what he is doing" and "scarcely knows whether he is a man or some other kind of creature." Socrates, like Thales, is a 'theoretician', yet in contrast to Thales and the rest of his predecessors, his theory is *a theory of praxis* (viz., of the "actions and passions [that] properly belong to human nature").[49]

What does a theory of praxis do? Ultimately, as we have seen, it may be said to show that 'ethics is an optics', or that somehow theory and praxis are interdependent or may even be the same thing. But primarily, without necessarily reaching such a conclusion, it can be said that what a 'theory of praxis' does is to raise the question of the nature of 'true' praxis and of 'true' theory.

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[48] Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. M.J Levett, revised by Myles Burnyeat, in *Ibid*.,174a1-2; a3-b5.

[49] Here I draw on Hans Blumenberg, *Das Lachen Der Thrakerin: Eine Urgeschichte Der Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987).

Very simply put, to raise the question of true praxis means to raise the question of the good, that is: 'truly human' actions and passions are supposed to make us 'good' and this goodness is supposed to make us happy. As for raising the question of true *theory* it means, similarly, to ask whether we can 'truly' know what a thing *is* without first knowing what *good* it is. To see why this may be the case it is necessary to say more about Socrates' turn.

The main reason why Socrates turned from an investigation of nature to an investigation of human opinions is the following. The so-called 'natural philosophers'—to whose aims and methods presumably the young Socrates subscribed—sought "to know the causes of things, and why a thing is and is created or destroyed" (*Phaedo*, 96a ff.) on the basis of universal substances such as breath or air or fire or blood or of fundamental principles such as 'mind' or 'intelligence' (Anaxagoras).[50] However, Socrates argues, they all failed at the point when it came to account for the reason why it is *good* that things are as they are.

Now, this would hardly convince anyone today as a scientific objection: *who cares* if it is 'good' or not if the world is made up of 'quarks' or 'neutrinos' or merely atoms? For Socrates, however, this *is* a scientific objection. One way to see this, which may not necessarily be Socrates' way but which makes sense to some even today is this. If the way we see the world, that is, if the way we understand the 'stuff' out of which the world is made generates conflict and suffering this means *not* that life in this world *is* suffering but that we are somehow not *seeing* correctly.[51]

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[50] See Zuckert, "The Socratic Turn," 192.

[51] For a brilliant exposition of this way of thinking across various traditions and philosophical genres see Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (New York: Penguin Press, 1993). For the opposite point of view, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, § 50 ("…why in the world should it be

Socrates' own account begins with the claim that his own actions, and specifically the fact that he was spending the last day of his life philosophizing in prison and not somewhere else as a fugitive, could not be explained by any 'material' causes—we would perhaps say today, by the chemical composition of his brain in that particular day—but only by the fact that he thought it *good* to be doing so. However, the question remains: why make the good the criterion not just of sound 'human science' but of all science? The reason (as we will see more clearly in the next chapter) is that we are related to reality in a practical way and thus in a way that is guided by some opinion concerning the good. Hence our primary access to reality is through the opinions we have of it and so through speech. Indeed, thought itself, Plato would argue, is a form of reasonable speech.[52] Any theory, however 'abstract', is ultimately a human articulation of the world—an opinion, a 'hypothesis' or *logos*—of the world as encountered in everyday practice. Thus to place any theory on a sound basis its origins in human opinions (which express our practical encounter with the world) must be investigated. Specifically, the question must be raised whether our theories are anything other than reproductions of what we already 'believe anyway'. For Aristotle, who in this follows the Socratic 'program', this meant to question, for example, with respect to Thales' claim that water is the universal primary substance, whether this does not simply restate the Homeric notion that Ocean and Thetys are the parents of creation.[53] For us, we may say, it would mean to

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assumed that *true* judgments give more pleasure than false ones…? The experience of all disciplined and profound minds teaches the *contrary.*")

[52] "Are not thinking and reasonable speech the same, except that the former, which takes place inside as a voiceless dialogue of the soul with itself is called by us thinking?" (*Sophist*, 263E).

[53] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.3. 983b27. See Joachim Ritter, "Die Lehre vom Ursprung und Sinn der Theorie bei Aristoteles," in *Metaphysik Und Politik. Studien Zu Aristoteles Und Hegel* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1969), 29. This is emphatically not to deny that such 'myths' as arise from our pre-scientific awareness of the world may just as well 'hit the truth' in other cases—indeed in perhaps the most important

question whether our understanding of the world in terms of ‘quarks’ and ‘neutrinos’ does not uncritically presuppose that ‘string theory’—or indeed any other version of modern mathematical science—is the highest form of ‘science’ if by ‘highest’ we mean the science that makes less arbitrary presuppositions and hence allows the most immediate access to the ‘things themselves’.[54]

This will have to suffice for now by way of an explanation as to how the Socratic turn seeks to place *theory* on a sound basis through a better understanding of human opinions which in turn result from our *practical*—and insofar as we are political animals, *political*—engagement with the world. As to how Socrates sought also to question the nature of true *praxis*, it is the same principle that may be said to apply. For now, an example will be enough to illustrate this. Pericles was and is known as the paradigm of the practical wisdom of a great statesman. Yet, Socrates would say, he was not in fact a great statesman because he did not make the people better.[55] Somehow, then, the praxis he stood for—say, the practice of life he commends in the Funeral Oration—is not ‘true’ praxis or does not correspond to the actions and passions that make us truly human.

The account just given of the Socratic turn gives rise to several questions. With respect to praxis or politics: What, then, is ‘the good’ of human praxis and how can it be found? With respect to theory or science: How far can the dialectical investigation of human opinions lead? But perhaps the most important question for our purposes is whether there ever *was* a ‘Socratic turn’, or whether this is not rather a *Platonic* reaction

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ones. See specially, *Metaphysics*, 1074 b1 ff. where Aristotle claims that the ancients’ view that the “first substances” are “gods” was in fact “divinely spoken.”

[54] For different ways of raising this very intricate question, see Victor Gourevitch, “Philosophy and Politics, I-II,” *Review of Metaphysics* 22, pp. 58-84, (September-December, 1968): 281-328, 293. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989), 68-69.

[55] Plato, *Gorgias*, 515e-516d3.

to the execution of his master? If this is the case, then the question arises—some at least believe—if it is philosophically legitimate at all to introduce the question of the good—and thus in a way *morality*—into philosophy as Plato did? What, then, would 'political' philosophy mean if not politicized (or moralized) philosophy? We shall leave these questions open—they will be addressed in subsequent chapters—in order to turn to one last answer to the question, Why 'political philosophy'?—Aristotle's.

'Philosophy of human things' II: Aristotle

Socrates philosophized about "the human things" to "examine in them the truth of realities," and in that sense his study of 'the political' may have been but a means of access to 'the metaphysical', or put differently: the 'political things' may have been the clue to what really concerned him as a philosopher, namely, 'all things'.[56] Aristotle, by contrast, is typically considered to have been the first thinker to make the political things, and more systematically, human praxis, the subject of an independent and self-enclosed science—of what he called the "philosophy of human affairs."[57]

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[56] For the argument that Socrates, contrary to Aristotle's claim in *Metaphysics*, 987b1, may *not* have neglected the study of nature in fact (even in his later years), see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, II, 45; Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 4.6.1. Cf. H. Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 249. It must be noted that in the *Phaedo* itself, Socrates resorts back to cosmology and myth (Ibid., 250-51).

[57] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1181b12-15 (*anthropeia philosophia*). See, for instance, Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Die Begründung der Praktischen Philosophie," in Gadamer, ed. and trans. *Nikomachische Ethik VI* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1998). Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed. (MY: Continuum, 1989), 312 ("By circumscribing the intellectualism of Socrates and Plato in his inquiry into the good, Aristotle became the founder of ethics as a discipline independent of metaphysics.") 21: ("Practical knowledge, phronesis, is another kind of knowledge.") Compare various other views that differ concerning the reasons that lie behind Aristotle's attempt to develop an independent 'philosophy of human affairs' but that nevertheless agree that this *was* in fact his true aim (namely, to argue for the autonomy of the practical): Franco Volpi, "The Rehabilitation of Practical Philosophy and Neo-Aristotelianism," in *Action and Contemplation: Studies in the Moral and Political Thought of Aristotle*, 6. Joachim Ritter, "'Politik' und 'Ethik' in der praktischen Philosophie des Aristoteles," in *Metaphysik Und Politik. Studien Zu Aristoteles Und Hegel* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1969), 106-132, especially, 124-125. Stuart Umphrey, "Why *Politike Philosophia*," 435, 441; Richard Bodéüs, *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle's Ethics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 77-81. Günther Bien, "Das Theorie-Praxis Problem

This view is based on Aristotle's famous distinctions between theoretical and practical wisdom; between the political and the philosophical lives; and between a theoretical philosophy, which deals with what happens necessarily, and a "philosophy of human affairs," which deals with what happens only "for the most part."[58] Departing (at least on the surface) from the interconnection of right seeing and right acting that is presupposed in Socrates' negative judgment of Pericles as well as in his exemplification of paradigmatic philosophizing as a form of theorizing (à la Thales) that is nevertheless centered on the question, What is man?, Aristotle's legendary example contrasted the wisdoms, dispositions, and scientific concerns of precisely such 'natural philosophers' as Thales and Anaxagoras with those of a statesman like Pericles. Thales and Anaxagoras, Aristotle suggested, are wise (*sophos*) but not prudent (*phronimos*); they are not after human goods because they do not regard man as the highest thing in the world; and their science is not of things that can be achieved by human action but of things that cannot be other than they are.

> This is why it is said that men like Anaxagoras and Thales have theoretical but not practical wisdom: when we see that they do not know what is advantageous to them, we admit that they know extraordinary, wonderful, difficult, and superhuman things, but call their knowledge useless because the good they are seeking is not human.[59]

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und die politische Philosophie bei Plato und Aristoteles," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 76, 1968-1969, 264-314, 313. Since no one, it seems, would disagree that Aristotle sought to emphasize the heterogeneity of the practical and the theoretical, perhaps the question is whether he did this merely exoterically or not. In other words, the problem is that he clearly and openly says both things: perhaps most clearly that theory *is* a form of praxis (in *Politics* 1325 b18). That the question needs to be rethought from its grounds will be the argument of the next chapter.

[58] More exactly, Aristotle characterized the theoretical and the practical as different manifestations of human rationality, as different moral and intellectual dispositions, and as different sciences dealing with different regions of being. R. Bodéüs, *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle's Ethics*, 13.

[59] Arisotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (Upper Saddle River, N.J: Prentice Hall, 1999), VI, 1141b4-8.

What was Aristotle's intention in developing an allegedly independent "philosophy of human affairs"? This is a much contested and enormously complicated issue which cannot be fully addressed here. It will have to suffice to say the following.

When Aristotle at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* says that his aim (there and in the *Politics*) is to complete "as far as possible" the "philosophy relating to human affairs"[60] he may be said to be doing several things. One hypothesis is that Aristotle's aim was to complete the task that Plato, for whatever reason, neglected in his own examinations of (political) life most notably by analyzing more than a hundred-and-fifty constitutions in order to systematize a political theory. This raises the question whether in turn this was meant, so to speak, for theory's sake, that is, to make 'a better theory' which could accordingly be 'applied' in a 'technical' way for the preservation of political regimes be they tyrannical or democratic, or whether this science was to serve the *pedagogical-ethical* purpose of educating future legislators and was thus strictly speaking a 'practical' rather than 'poietical' (technological) science.[61] Under the first assumption the (Socratic-Platonic) unity of the questions, 'What is it?' and, 'What good is it?' would be severed while under the second it would be preserved. Under *both* assumptions the (Socratic-Platonic) view that sound theory and sound practice are ultimately the same would be abandoned, that is, the view that one becomes happy and good and 'wise' at the same time. Another hypothesis is that the "philosophy of human affairs" comprising ethics and politics is meant to *complete* the Socratic-Platonic program according to which encountering phenomena in their disclosure "is always a matter of ethos"; that is to say that the means of access to both 'the human things' *and* 'all things' is through the science

[60] *NE*, 10.1181b12-15.

[61] Günther Bien, "Das Theorie-Praxis Problem und die politische Philosophie bei Plato und Aristoteles," 280.

Aristotle calls *politike* and which comprises ethics.[62] ‘Political science’ is accordingly either a prelude to the study of ‘all things’—the science known as ‘the first philosophy’ or ‘metaphysics’—or it is *itself* ‘the first philosophy’. In any case, under this hypothesis, the *rhetorical*-political intention behind Aristotle’s demarcation between the practical and the theoretical becomes central: it is the *popular or exoteric* message that says that politics and philosophy, praxis and theory belong to different worlds—whereas we could say that ‘every true philosopher knows’ that ethics/politics is the all-encompassing, that it is both the access to what is human *and* to what reaches beyond it.

‘Political philosophy?’

The notion of a “philosophy of human affairs” appears only once in Aristotle’s writings.[63] The same holds for the phrase “political philosophy.”[64] Another term that is often used to characterize Aristotle’s achievement, “practical philosophy,” does not appear in the *corpus*. It is not necessary to discuss now what Aristotle may have meant by referring once to a task that requires a special kind of reflection he calls “political philosophy.” What has been said so far suffices to draw the necessary conclusions.

The question these considerations concerning the problem of a ‘political philosophy’ raises is this. Simply put: Does it matter at all that we mostly think in terms that were handed over to us by a tradition of readers of the classics? Do we commit a ‘mistake’, for instance, when we speak of ‘political, not metaphysical’ theory; of something that ‘holds in theory but is not true in practice’; of the life of ‘action’ as

[62] Compare Claudia Baracchi, “The Nature of Reason and the Sublimity of First Philosophy: Toward a Reconfiguration of Aristotelian Interpretation,” *Epoché*, Volume 7, Number 2, 2003, 224.

[63] NE 10.1181b12-15. Richard Bodéüs, *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle's Ethics*, 78.

[64] The sole occurrence is in *Politics* III, 12, 1282b23.

opposed to the life of 'contemplation'; or of 'Platonic political philosophy'? Do we not construct concepts all the time to account for changing realities? Are not clear definitions enough to know what we are talking about? Even with respect to the classic thinkers: Aristotle may in fact never have used the word 'ethics' as a *terminus technicus* in his writings,[65] but can we sensibly deny that there *is* an ethics in the *Nicomachean Ethics*? Are not the questions of the 'Metaphysics' *metaphysical* questions? Is there really no 'political philosophy' in Plato even if he never used the term in his writings?

A final hypothesis must be considered as to why the founders of 'political philosophy' in fact pioneered the philosophy of human affairs but almost never called it that, namely this: they may have seen the task of a philosophy of human affairs—in the fundamental sense of a theory of human praxis—as extremely difficult if not indeed impossible. If a political philosophy cannot be written, then one should not even mention the name, let alone call oneself a political philosopher.

Yet again: if anything characterizes and distinguishes, perhaps from all later thought, the work of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, it is its attention to political reality—*for both political and philosophical reasons*. Indeed, if thinking is a form of inner dialogue and in that sense a form of speech, then we only know what we are thinking if we know what we are talking about, that is to say, if we know what phenomena we mean when we talk about acting or doing or willing or thinking itself. We only know these

[65] Aristotle speaks, for instance, of *ta ethika* (*Politics*, II 2, 1261 a31) or *ethike theoria* (Anal. Post. I 33, 89 b9), and yet ethics as a philosophical discipline is for him *politike* (NE I, 1, 1094 a27). Indeed, the very method followed in ethics is characterized as 'political' (NE I 1, 1094b11). See Hellmut Flashar, "Aristoteles," in H. Flashar (ed.), *Die Philosophie Der Antike*, Band 3. *Ältere Akademie. Aristoteles—Peripatos*. *Grundriss Der Geschichte Der Philosophie* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1998), 336.

phenomena, however, if we look closely at what we are *doing*, and this means: if we look at we are doing *politically* as the political beings that we are.

In short, *there is no political philosophy handed over by the classics* which we could somehow learn and teach. But we find in them the example that every generation must take up anew to Socratically think what it is doing. The chapters that follow offer a reading of the work of Arendt and Strauss as the most important Neo-Socratic thinkers of the twentieth century.