

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick**

**Permanent WRAP URL:**

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/162295>

**Copyright and reuse:**

This thesis is made available online and is protected by original copyright.

Please scroll down to view the document itself.

Please refer to the repository record for this item for information to help you to cite it.

Our policy information is available from the repository home page.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: [wrap@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:wrap@warwick.ac.uk)

**On the Virtues of Truth:  
Generativity and the Demands of Democracy**

by

Clementina Giulia Maria Gentile Fusillo

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics  
and International Studies

**University of Warwick, Department of Politics and International Studies**  
September 2020

*For my town, Noci*



## Acknowledgments

Of the things I wished and looked forward to in the past four years as a PhD student at the University of Warwick, the day I would get to write the acknowledgements of my thesis has been the most anticipated – such was the desire to acknowledge the indispensable contribution of the many people who challenged, inspired, guided and supported me along this beautiful learning experience. In none of my fantasising, however, did I imagine that this day would fall in the middle of a global pandemic. The confusion, the fear, and the sorrow this brought into everybody's life multiplied the difficulties that always accompany the final furlong of a long race, and, to the same extent, they magnified the gratitude that I owe to those who helped me withstand the unexpected obstacles I encountered on the way.

I want to begin by thanking the Department of Politics and International Studies at Warwick: for the generous financial assistance which allowed me to pursue this research full-time, for the administrative support I received, for the irreplaceable intellectual environment and occasions for continuous training. In particular, I am grateful to all the members of the Centre for Ethics, Law and Public Affairs, the company of whom provided me with an exceptional opportunity to expand my curiosity and knowledge beyond what I initially considered to be my research interests. Among these people, I owe my gratitude especially to Professor Matthew Clayton and to Dr Edward Page. In different capacities and in different ways, both Matthew and Ed always ensured I would feel a welcome and valued member of an intellectual community.

I am also grateful to other current and former members of the Departments of Politics and Philosophy with whom I have had the opportunity to discuss, exchange knowledge, ideas and feelings. Amongst these Dr Alexis Boutefeu-Moraitis, Dr Antonio Ferraz de Olivera, Dr Fay Niker and Professor Adam Swift; all the students in the Political Theory seminar groups I was assigned to as a sessional teacher; my dear friends Théo Aiolfi, Sumedha Basu, Michele Giavazzi, Jonathan Hoffmann, Mohsin Hussain, Charlie Price and Hwa Young Kim. A special thankful thought goes also to Professor Giuseppe Moricola, my former supervisor at the University of Naples, and to Giuseppe Di Bernardo, whose generous help was crucial at the time of my application, and whose friendship a source of joy to this date.

My deepest gratitude, however, is reserved for Professors Andrew Mason and Michael Saward, for the patient generosity and the exceptional kindness they showed in guiding my path. Their support, in the past four years, has extended beyond the careful surveillance, the expert advice and the encouragement one would expect from excellent supervisors. In fact, not once in all this time have Andy and Mike left me without the feeling that my wellbeing, as a student and as a person, was always the greatest of their concerns. More than anything else, I hope to have deserved their trust.

Nevertheless, the series of events that initiated my research and brought me to Warwick begun in the southern-Italian town of Noci, to which this thesis is dedicated. Therefore, I also owe my sincere gratitude to all the members – enemies and friends– of the political community of Noci. None of the questions that lead my research, in fact, would have been brought to my attention had I not been part of such a community. In this same community, moreover, belong most of my closest friends and my family, who have each, at some stage, shared with me the material, emotional and intellectual burden that accompanied my academic experience so far. I am sincerely thankful, thus, to my life-long friends Artur Bulak, Gaetana Bruno, Lorena Di Garbo, Rita Laforgia and Grazia Sgobba Palazzi, to my beloved cousins Miriam, Checco and Rosa Curci, to my aunts Isabella and Daniela and to my uncles Vito and Vittorio: together with the usual love, they all shared with me doubts, intuitions and knowledge without which my research would have certainly not been the same. In the same way, I am deeply grateful to Barbara Lucia and Domenico Nisi, not only for their tireless friendship and ever-present intellectual and political company, but also for granting me to share in the intimacy of their current experiences as political representatives. A special kind of gratefulness goes also to Ferri Cormio and Father Jean Paul Lieggi for helping me regain sight of a bigger picture whenever I felt lost.

Not a single line of this thesis, however, would have been written had I not been surrounded by my close family. I will be forever indebted to my sister Gigia, who first recognised in the problem I was concerned with the raw material for an academic research project and trusted that I could start and finish a PhD, and to Nicola, who challenged my views on truth at every single step, with the strictness of a natural scientist and the love of a brother. It was my father Mario, my mother Marilina and my partner Leo, however, who were subjected to the daunting task of tolerating, daily, my often-unbearable presence. In them I found inexhaustible spiritual, practical and intellectual support. Together with endless gratitude, what I owe them is an

apology, for having asked too much at times, and a promise: that I will do my best to be a better partner and a better daughter.

There are two more people, finally, who belong to the list of friends and family I looked forward to thanking, who saw the beginning of this path but who sadly are no longer here to see its end. One is Guglielmo Minervini, whose political guidance and whose friendship I had the privilege to enjoy for some years and from whom I first heard about “generativity.” The other is my Grandmother Miriam. Nonna Miriam had been absolutely present but completely silent for the past four years, and yet, she could convey love with the most perfect clarity. I didn’t have a chance to give her my goodbye, but I want to thank her here, cause with her silence and her clarity she taught me something of the greatest importance, something about truth.

Noci, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020

# Declaration

This thesis is entirely my own work and no portion of it has been submitted for a degree at another university.

# Abstract

In one form or another, the seemingly hostile relationship between truth and politics has for many centuries been a matter of uninterrupted debate. In recent years, this hostility appears to have generated new phenomena – with the ubiquitous label of “post-truth politics” – prompting further attempts to rethink this ancient tension. Operating within a broadly Arendtian perspective, this thesis responds to the challenge posed by these recent developments by reflecting specifically on the truth-related moral demands representative democracy places on its members (representatives and citizens). In so doing, it draws on a number of traditions in political and democratic theory, while also borrowing variously from sociology, developmental psychology and Science and Technology Studies.

The thesis puts forward two parallel and mutually supportive arguments. Central to the first argument is what I refer to as an “extended notion of factual truth”, a notion which stretches the temporal scope of conventional understandings of factual truth. Focussing on the etymological roots of the word “fact” as something that is done or made, an extended notion of factual truth adds to the common *past-regarding* concern for the facts that have already happened, a *future-regarding* concern for the facts yet to come. Based on this future-oriented view, I argue that in addition to the long-recognized virtues of sincerity and accuracy, democracy in fact demands from its members a third virtue of truth – one that I term “generativity”. Defined as the disposition and the ability to turn what one knows to be true into something politically significant, I suggest that generativity – a virtue displayed in the activities of imagining, performing and negotiating the truth with others – is a crucial element of what we can understand as a specifically democratic notion of truthfulness.

The second argument concerns the status of representation in democracy. It points to the importance of representation as an irreplaceable experience, transformative of the civic character of whoever engages with it. Here I introduce a distinctive epistemological perspective, which I call “the representative standpoint”. Looked at from this perspective, representation matters less as the experience of being represented by others than as the practice and the experience of representing others. I argue in particular that, understood as the experience of representing others, democratic representation constitutes an essential training in the virtue of generativity and that, for this reason, it should be valued as an indispensable feature of contemporary democracy.

Building on these theoretical arguments, I am able to reframe the current democratic predicament not as one of “post-truth politics”, but rather one of “post-politics truth” – an era of generalized inability to turn what is known to be true it into something politically significant and a condition that democracies can heal by reinterpreting, reviving and popularizing the experience of representing others.



# Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
THEORETICAL GROUND.....	3
CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE .....	5
ARCHITECTURE AND CHAPTER OUTLINE.....	7
<b>I. TRUTH, FREEDOM, POLITICS</b> .....	<b>11</b>
ARENDT ON THINKING, WILLING AND JUDGING.....	13
THE MIND'S PROJECTS .....	23
FREEDOM AS BEGINNING.....	28
CONCLUSION.....	37
<b>II. TRUTH, CONTINGENCY, FUTURE</b> .....	<b>39</b>
TRUTH IN DEMOCRACY.....	41
RATIONAL AND FACTUAL TRUTH.....	45
AN EXTENDED NOTION OF FACTUAL TRUTH.....	52
CONCLUSION.....	59
<b>III. ACCURACY, SINCERITY, GENERATIVITY</b> .....	<b>60</b>
WILLIAMS' TRUTHFULNESS: SINCERITY AND ACCURACY.....	61
GENERATIVITY .....	68
CREATING (GENERATIVE) CITIZENS.....	76
CONCLUSION.....	81
<b>IV. REPRESENTING OTHERS</b> .....	<b>83</b>
REPRESENTATION AND DEMOCRACY.....	85
THE "NEW CONVENTIONAL WISDOM" .....	92
EPISTEMOLOGICAL INTERLUDE: THE <i>REPRESENTATIVE STANDPOINT</i> .....	96
AUDIENCE, CONSTITUENCY AND SPACE B.....	100
CONCLUSION.....	110
<b>V. IMAGINATION, PERFORMANCE, NEGOTIATION</b> .....	<b>111</b>
"PRESCRIPTIVE FACTS".....	113
FINITUDE AND IMAGINATION.....	117
SOLITUDE AND PERFORMANCE .....	123
MUTABILITY AND NEGOTIATION.....	131

CONCLUSION .....	140
<b>VI. POST-POLITICS TRUTH .....</b>	<b>142</b>
CONCEPTIONS OF “POST-TRUTH” .....	144
VERITAS FILIA TEMPORIS.....	154
POST-POLITICS TRUTH .....	158
CONCLUSION .....	163
<b>CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>164</b>
NORMATIVITY AND JUSTICE .....	167
TWO PATHS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	169
A FINAL THOUGHT .....	172
<b>LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES.....</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>175</b>

*Even the blossoming trees lies the moment its bloom is seen without the shadow of terror; even the innocent "How lovely!" becomes an excuse for an existence outrageously unlovely, and there is no longer beauty or consolation except in the gaze falling on horror, withstanding it, and in unalleviated consciousness of negativity holding fast to the possibility of what is better.*

Theodor Adorno

*I believe we can say, without mythical returns to the past nor easy illusions as to the future, that the evil of the world is before us, constantly, not to hold us in a kind of inadmissible acquiescence and resignation, nor to fall into the aristocratic habit of the historical truth, but for a strength of spirit which will engage us completely, for a clear collocation on the other side, for there is one, of the barricade.*

Aldo Moro

# Introduction

In spring 2013 I was elected to the municipal council of Noci, a town of twenty-thousand inhabitants in the southern Italian region of Puglia. I was soon appointed member of the local government, in charge among other things of civic participation and administrative transparency.<sup>1</sup> My mandate ended less than three years later, when I lost the political trust of the civic movement I represented and was forced to resign. The sudden and bitter end of this experience left me with an urgent question, born specifically out of my direct exposure to matters of transparency and democratic participation: why, despite what I felt was an uncompromised commitment to the truth on my part, had it been so difficult for me to be judged truthful by my fellow citizens? And why, on the other hand, had it been so easy for claimers of blatant untruths to escape the judgment of untruthfulness which, I thought, their political conduct should have attracted?

The question pointed clearly to the classic philosophical dilemmas surrounding the relationship between truth and politics: is truth at all compatible with the political? Is truthfulness even to be counted among political virtues? Can truth and opinion be reconciled? Should democracy side with the former or the latter? I was engaged in attempting to tune my personal experience to the terms of these dilemmas when the language of “post-truth” powerfully invaded the political discourse, inaugurating, both outside and inside academia, an era of renewed and intensive concern for the truth’s place in politics. Over the past years, this concern has been mostly directed towards events of major geopolitical and historical significance that exposed, on a global scale, the dizzying loss of traction undergone by the truth in the political realm – the referendum that decided Britain’s exit from the European Union in spring 2016 and the US presidential elections in the fall of the same year being the first of a long, still expanding series. The phenomenon signalled by these events seemed to be unprecedented, if not in nature or

---

<sup>1</sup> Although subject to progressive erosion, the political and administrative functions of local governments in Italy remain extensive and their sphere of autonomy is constitutionally guaranteed. This is reflected in the relative liveliness of political involvement of the local communities. Indeed, it is not inappropriate to think of the *comuni* as the actual frontline of the relationship between public institutions and people.

degree at least for the extent of its recognition, for the impact of its visible consequences and the size of the discourse it generated. And yet it did not strike me as a phenomenon qualitatively different from the one my fellow citizens and I had been experiencing in the little town of Noci.

The challenge for me, in both instances, was trying to make sense of the jarring disparity between the judgments people can arrive at when it comes to evaluating truth-related political behaviour. Indeed, the mismatch between the positive evaluation I believed my conduct should have elicited and the judgment of untruthfulness I instead attracted, was not due, as I initially had thought, only to matters of an epistemic nature, such as the disproportionality in the access to relevant knowledge or the uneven distribution among people of epistemic virtues and vices. One needs to hold certain beliefs about what is true in order to be able to judge whether somebody is truthful. The quality of such beliefs, i.e. their closeness to the actual truth, undoubtedly affects, indeed, the way their holders judge the truth-related conduct of others. If I ignore or am misinformed about a particular state of affairs – be it out of negligence, error or unavailable information – I may also plausibly misjudge as untruthful a truthful behaviour related to it, or vice versa. This was certainly an important aspect of the problem that concerned me, but not the aspect that I most urgently needed to understand.

What troubled me more, indeed, was that at stake in the mismatch between the judgment that was addressed to me by others and my own there seemed to be very different appreciations of the kind of truthfulness that politics, and democracy in particular, demands. Moreover, and as important, the moral reflection in which I then engaged helped me realize that the normative standards I was now referring to in my evaluations of truth-related political conduct, my appreciation, that is, of the kind of truthfulness demanded by democracy, were in fact new to me: they were the still-evolving product of an ethical transformation that I had undergone as a representative. My intuitive understanding of the truth-related expectations that democratic citizens ought to fulfil, in other words, had been modified by the experience of representing others: it now encompassed a broader spectrum of practices associated with the truth and of relative standards of excellence and therefore required questioning established ways of thinking about the relationship between truth and politics.

The two questions leading the present investigation emerge from these reflections. One asks what are the truth-related demands that democracy places on its members: what are the things that as citizens we ought to do with the truth in a specifically democratic context and what are the standards of behaviour we are expected to match in doing such things? From this follows a second, related question: what resources are available in democratic societies to promote the

cultivation of these virtues in their members? In seeking an answer to these questions, the thesis built on the intersection between two parallel yet convergent intuitions that I distilled from my story of found and lost formal responsibility to represent others in the early “post-truth politics” era. One concerns the status of truth and of truth-related personal qualities in the domain of politics, and it suggests the need for a notion of truthfulness able to respond to specifically democratic demands. The other concerns instead the status of representation in the domain of democracy, and it points at the importance of acknowledging representation as an irreplaceable experience, transformative of the civic character of those who engage with it. Part of the ethical transformation undergone by representative citizens, I crucially want to claim, pertains to acquiring a virtue which, together with accuracy and sincerity, is constitutive of a specifically democratic notion of truthfulness, a virtue I call *generativity*. Bridging these two sets of reflections, then, is the idea of generativity as a virtue of truth, a quality I define as the disposition to turn what one knows to be true into something politically significant.

## Theoretical Ground

Grounding these insights required incursions into many regions of the field of political theory. Broadly speaking, the research had to engage with two major bodies of knowledge.

1. The first encompasses a broad range of philosophical debates dealing with classic and contemporary issues around truth in politics. Here, as will be evident in Chapters I and II, I was particularly influenced by the thought of Hannah Arendt. Integral to the whole corpus of Arendt’s work is a particular conception of the relationship between truth and politics. Earlier interpretations of her writings, such as Ronald Beiner’s and Jurgen Habermas’, suggested her view dismisses objective truth as coercive and thus simply antipolitical, excluding it altogether, that is, from the legitimate realm of politics. Arendt, as Habermas put it, “sees a yawning abyss between knowledge and opinion that cannot be closed with arguments”<sup>2</sup> and that inevitably precludes the possibility of providing a cognitive foundation for “the power of common convictions.”<sup>3</sup> Against this reading I follow instead Linda Zerilli’s alternative interpretation, which understands Arendt’s conception of truth in politics through her unfinished theory of judgment, and in particular through the emphasis this places on freedom. For Zerilli, “foregrounding the problem of freedom rather than the rational adjudication of validity claims as the central work of democratic political judgment does not lead Arendt [...] to exclude the

---

<sup>2</sup> Jurgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power, in Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> Hinchman and Hinchman, p. 225.

question of truth from the political realm. Rather, it leads her [...] both to call into question the idea that proof is our sole access to truth in the political realm and also to reflect on the distinctive character of truth claims in politics and their entanglement in opinion.”<sup>4</sup> It is, indeed, in engaging in a reflection on the distinctive character of truth claims in politics (or more in general, as we shall see, of “truth-related political practices”) that in the definition of a specifically democratic notion of truthfulness I come to assign crucial importance to freedom, as the capacity to begin anew.

While broadly adhering to this Arendtian understanding of the problem of truth in politics, I consider it also from other perspectives. I take interest, for instance, in William James’s view, and while resolutely resisting Richard Rorty’s conclusion that truth is irrelevant in the realm of politics,<sup>5</sup> I retain some general elements of a pragmatist approach to the problem. Crucial to my understanding of the ways in which truth matters in politics, however, is in particular Bernard Williams’s insightful analysis of accuracy and sincerity as “virtues of truth”, qualities people display in carrying out activities associated with the truth. These virtues – we shall see in Chapter III – are the two equally constitutive elements of our common ideas of truthfulness and, in fact, it is their value that we actually have in mind when we talk of the value of truth. My conception of generativity springs from the association of this definition of “virtues of truth” with a notion of truth I elaborate based on my understanding of Arendt’s view of the question of truth in politics. In Chapter II, I call this an “extended notion of truth”, one which, stretching the temporal scope of conventional understanding of factual truth, adds to a retrospective or past-regarding element a perspective or future-regarding one. Williams’ influence on this thesis, however, goes beyond the specific reference to his virtues of truth. Indeed, even where this is not discussed or made entirely explicit, Williams’s claim that constitutive of truthfulness are truth-related practices and relative qualities the value of which is not exclusively instrumental, can be said to have informed the parameters of my investigation as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Linda Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 120.

<sup>5</sup> Francesca Pasquali, ‘Richard Rorty, L’Inconcludenza della Verità’, in *Verità e politica. Filosofie contemporanee*, ed. by Antonella Besussi (Roma: Carocci, 2013); Richard Rorty, ‘Universality and Truth’, in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. by Robert Brandom, *Philosophers and Their Critics*, 9 (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Williams’s defence of the not merely instrumental value of such truth-related practices and qualities establishes a middle ground between what he calls the parties of the “deniers” and of “common sense”. Subscribers to the first are “more disposed to dismiss the idea of truth as the object of our enquiries altogether” and therefore to deny its intrinsic value; subscribers to the latter, instead, content themselves with “rehabilitat[ing] truth in some of its everyday roles” (such as the role it plays in our agreement that it is true that what you are reading is a PhD thesis) and leave untouched the most genuine part of the deniers’ critique: “the suspicions about historical narrative, about social representations, about self-understanding, about psychological and political interpretation”. Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 5.

Needless to say, the debates generated around the problem of truth in politics in contemporary political philosophy are many more than a PhD thesis could account for, especially since the “post-truth”-induced acceleration in the production of knowledge on this topic. There are two debates that, although only tangentially, I touch upon in Chapters II and VI respectively and that are worth mentioning here. One is the all-important debate concerned with the controversy between proceduralist and epistemic or instrumentalist views of democracy. The other is a debate taking place at the crossroad between philosophical and sociological strands of social epistemology and science and technology studies, a debate more explicitly concerned with certain features of the present state of affairs, such as the peculiar types of untruth circulating these days in our systems of communication or the status of science and expertise in contemporary democracies.

2. The second body of knowledge I engaged with is narrower than the first – not least because the ideas and practices it looks at have a more recent history – and it includes a set of debates in democratic theory concerned with the concept of representation and its place in the history, theory and practice of democracy. Here, contrary to what the generally Arendtian approach to politics that I adopt in this thesis could suggest,<sup>7</sup> I firmly embrace the so-called “representative turn” in democratic theory: the reaffirmation and the defence of the irreplaceable value of representation to contemporary democracy in the face of an ever-growing list of rather discouraging performances by representative governments across the globe. On this issue, this means, I am convinced that the responses to the challenges that democracy faces today, as it proceeds on the difficult path towards the open-ended realization of its principles, remain within the bounds of representative democracy and not beyond it. This is the case also for the specifically truth-related issues that my research is concerned with. A similar conviction makes it all the more necessary to engage in conceptual and normative analysis to establish what should count as legitimate democratic representation. Here I broadly subscribe to the so-called “constructivist turn” in theories of democratic representation and engage in a close dialogue with a number of key issues in this area.

## **Contribution to Knowledge**

As the theoretical ground briefly outlined above suggests, the substantive concern here is with the field of political theory broadly understood. The approach of this thesis crosses nonetheless

---

<sup>7</sup> Arendt was famously reticent in praising representative democracy. This thesis, however, assumes that her political theory makes more room for the appreciation of democratic representation than Arendt herself recognised. For a discussion of this matter see George Kateb, ‘Arendt and Representative Democracy’, *Salmagundi*, 60, 1983, 20–59.



a number of different regions in the field, trespassing at times over the borders of the discipline. The following contributions may therefore be of interest to a broad audience of political and democratic theorists, theorists of representation, virtue ethicists and social epistemologists, as well as sociologists and scholars in science and technology studies.

1. The thesis contributes to a variety of long-standing discussions within political theory around the place of truth in politics. Whilst these debates have traditionally revolved around past and present-oriented conceptions of truth, I suggest that a specifically democratic standard of truthfulness requires us instead to adopt an “extended notion of truth”, one that includes a future-regarding component. In arguing this, I make explicit in a more systematic way than is to be found in existing literature the crucial role freedom plays in any understanding of the relationship between truth and politics.

2. The concept of generativity has significant currency in psychological and sociological literature but has not yet received any sustained scrutiny within political theory, with the exception of the rare references to be found in some anarchist literature.<sup>8</sup> In conceptualizing generativity as a virtue – and particularly as a virtue of truth – I add to the existing literature on virtue ethics and to debates around civic virtue in particular. Moreover, by undertaking a deeper exploration of generativity as a virtue, I extend interdisciplinary discussion around the concept more broadly. Finally, my proposal that generativity can be understood as an essential element, together with accuracy and sincerity, of the threefold virtue of democratic truthfulness, has significant implications for the areas of political theory that have addressed in various ways the question of truth in democracy.

3. In introducing what I term the “representative standpoint”, I make a contribution to the existing understanding of political representation. Indeed, by uncovering what seems to be a neglected epistemological perspective in theories of democratic representation – that of the representative themselves – I bring to light underexplored aspects of the mechanics governing both institutional and informal representative processes. Considered from this perspective, as the experience of representing others, representation is presented as a powerful source of ethical transformation, the functioning of which I discuss in some detail. In doing so, I explore an important but neglected set of questions concerning how the ethical change brought about by the experience of representing others can contribute to the thriving of democracy.

---

<sup>8</sup> Uri Gordon, ‘Prefigurative Politics between Ethical Practice and Absent Promise’, *Political Studies*, 66.2 (2018), 521.

4. In providing an alternative understanding of what ought to be expected of truthful democratic citizens, the thesis also adds to the current interpretation of the so-called “post-truth politics” era, suggesting reconfiguring the problem rather as one of what I term “post-politics truth”. Bringing to bear my threefold concept of the virtue of democratic truthfulness on this debate, current democracies appear as being characterized by the worrying indisposition of its members to turn what they know to be true into something politically significant, i.e. by the generalized deficit among democratic citizens of the virtue of generativity. In saying this I am not undermining the importance of sincerity and accuracy and the accompanying significance of scientific truth. Rather, I argue that the work of these virtues must be complemented by a distinct effort to turn the truth to which accuracy and sincerity appeal into the raw material from which present and future political reality is actually collectively constructed.

## Architecture and Chapter Outline

I like picturing the conceptual path designed in this thesis as the project of a roman archway,<sup>9</sup> looking through which the reader is invited to reframe the landscape of the truth-related demands democracy places on its members and of the opportunities it simultaneously gives



them to live up to those demands. Let me suggest, thus, that we think of the first five chapters of the thesis as five blocks constructing our archway, and of the last, Chapter VI, as a rendering of the vision that the archway’s frame offers to the viewer. One pillar of the archway – Chapters I and II-

builds on the first of the two insights that, we have seen, inspired this research, that concerning the entanglement of freedom and the “problem of the new” in all matters of truth in politics. The other pillar – Chapters IV and V– refers instead to the second insight, that concerning the potential for ethical transformation that is to be found in the experience of representing others. The arch bridging the two parallel elements of the construction – Chapter III – corresponds to the notion of democratic truthfulness, which culminates in turn with the virtue of generativity: the keystone holding together the entire argumentative architecture. As the argument proceeds across the figure – from the ground up towards the highest point of the arch, and back down to the ground, through the other side of the structure – the focus of the discussion simultaneously moves across a similar parabolic trajectory. Indeed, from the “internal-

---

<sup>9</sup> I borrow this idea from Leonardo Paris, who presents the conceptual itinerary developed throughout one of his books using the metaphor of a gothic arch. Leonardo Paris, *Sulla libertà. Prospettive di teologia trinitaria tra neuroscienze e filosofia* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2012).

reflective”<sup>10</sup> dimension of the experience of politics, where the focus is placed initially, the discussion is brought out to the “external-collective” dimension of the political and finally directed back, from there, to the inner space where all virtue ultimately resides. It is this image and this trajectory that I invite the reader to keep in mind as I briefly outline the content of the six chapters that make this thesis.

**Chapter I**’s function is to locate the question of truth and politics within the broader context of what I see as an inescapably trilateral relationship which connects the concepts of “truth” and “politics” to that of “freedom”. It does so by establishing a correspondence between this relationship and the complex interplay of the three spiritual activities Arendt discusses in her unfinished exploration of *The Life of the Mind*. Truth, freedom and politics, I suggest, are the three ideally convergent “projects” of the mental activities of Thinking, Willing and Judging respectively. The discussion focuses on the faculty of judgment in particular, the function of which in the realization of the mind’s projects depends crucially on the development of our imaginative capacity to make others present in our minds – our capacity for representative thinking. The chapter then discusses the specifically Arendtian notion of freedom underpinning this view, one which foregrounds the capacity to begin a new series of events: what Arendt called the “problem of the new”. I further link this understanding of freedom to a notion borrowed from a sociological literature – that of “generative freedom” – which escapes the strictures of Berlin’s well-entrenched dichotomy of negative and positive liberty.

Building on the assumption – hinted at in Chapter I – that truth in politics matters less for what it is than for what it makes people do, **Chapter II** begins with a ground-clearing review of some of the debates dealing with the question of truth in politics and in democracy in particular. The chapter discusses the distinction between rational and factual truth and following Arendt it argues that, due to its contingent character and its consequent entanglement with freedom, that of factual truth is the notion to be preferred in discussions over the place of truth in politics. Indeed, based on the etymological understanding of a “fact” as the outcome of action, I suggest the need to extend the temporal scope of “factual truth” by adding to traditional past-regarding concerns for the facts that already are a future-oriented concern for the facts yet to be made.

**Chapter III** then bends the discussion towards the keystone of our archway. Recalling the premise that truth in politics matters for what it makes people do, the chapter turns to the “things” people do with truth and to the virtues they display in so doing. I introduce Williams’s

---

<sup>10</sup> As I mention in Chapter I, in talking of the distinction between ‘internal-reflective’ and ‘external-collective’ realms of politics, I adopt Robert Goodin’s language. Robert E. Goodin, ‘Democratic Deliberation Within’, in *Reflective Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

discussion of truthfulness and the two virtues of truth that, in his account, constitute it: sincerity and accuracy. I further suggest that a future-regarding understanding of factual truth calls for an extension of the range of the truth-related practices that should be subjected to moral scrutiny. In addition to Williams' "wanting to know", "finding out" and "telling" the truth to others (activities in carrying out which people display the virtues of accuracy and sincerity), I identify three further and more peculiarly political activities associated with the truth: the activities of "imagining", "performing" and "negotiating" the truth with others. It is in carrying out this latter set of truth-related activities that people – the chapter crucially claims – show a third virtue of truth: the virtue of generativity. Only when brought together do accuracy, sincerity and generativity constitute what I call a specifically democratic notion of truthfulness.

With **Chapter IV** we enter the second pillar of the thesis architecture. The chapter is both a defence of the value of representation to democracy and an attempt to conceptualize representation as the experience of representing others, looking at it, that is, from an underexplored epistemological perspective which I call "the representative standpoint". Borrowing from the toolkit of the constructivist literature in the field, I carry out a detailed descriptive analysis of institutional and informal representation as the perpetual going back and forth of the representative between two real and ideal spaces: Space A, where the representative meets his constituents; and space B, where the representative meets other representatives, i.e. the representatives of other constituencies. In covering back and forth the distance between A and B, the representative undergoes a process of ethical transformation which eventually leads to generativity. It is in exposing individuals to a set of experiences that have the potential to produce such transformation that representation becomes crucial to the making of truthful democratic citizens, and it is also for this reason, I claim, that representation should be considered an irreplaceable feature of modern democracy.

Taking us back to the inner space of the mind, **Chapter V** attempts a phenomenology – so to speak – of the ethical transformation triggered by the experience of representing others. Appealing to Michel Foucault's notion of ethopoietic knowledge (knowledge that produces ethos), I describe how, by representing others, one is presented with an opportunity to master the virtue of generativity. I identify three pieces of ethopoietic knowledge – three "prescriptive facts" – to which the representative is exposed on its path from A to B and back. These are the fact of finitude, which prescribes the practice of imagination, the fact of solitude, which prescribes the practice of performance, and the fact of mutability, which prescribes the practice of negotiation. In demanding of the citizens who undertake it to engage in these truth-related

practices, the experience of representing others prompts them in turn to cultivate the virtue of generativity.

**Chapter VI** turns at last to the extensive and fast-growing literature that deals with the set of contemporary phenomena referred to as post-truth politics. Here I propose an alternative reading of these phenomena, based on the overarching argument advanced in the five preceding chapters of the thesis: in judging the truth-related conduct of democratic citizens and of their representatives we should be guided by a specifically democratic notion of truthfulness, one which demands the simultaneous display of the virtues of accuracy, sincerity and generativity – the last being the most properly political of the virtues of truth. From this perspective, I suggest that the era we are in may be better understood as an era of worrying infertility of the truth, in which truth loses traction due to a generalized inability to turn what is known to be true it into something politically significant. In this sense I put forward an alternative label for it, that of “post-politics truth”, a condition that democracies can heal by reinterpreting, reviving and popularizing the experience of representing others.

Finally, I leave to the **Conclusions** two sets of questions, one concerning the premises of the thesis overarching argument and the other concerning its implications. The first set addresses briefly the normative ground of my claims, and the extent to which these interlock with a broader theory of social justice. The second set of questions addresses instead two implications of my arguments. One concerns the application of a generativity-centred view of the place of truth in politics to the problem of scientific knowledge and scepticism towards expertise. The other concerns the practical implications of the view of representation defended in the thesis, and in particular of the consequent claim that “more representation” would help us meet the truth-related demands of democracy.

# I. Truth, Freedom, Politics

As anticipated in the Introduction, this thesis looks at the place that truth occupies in the realm of politics to investigate the truth-related demands that democracy places on its members. Since the earliest stages of my inquiry, however, I have had the intuition that central to the conceptual relation between truth and politics, and therefore to its moral and material implications, was the notion of freedom. I mean this more literally than one might initially think. Indeed, freedom

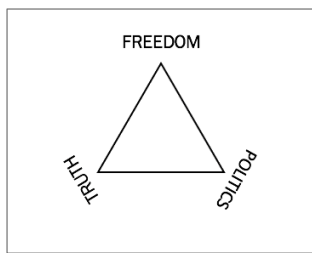


Figure 1: *Truth, Freedom, Politics*

occupies the actual centre of the conceptual configuration I picture in my mind when invited to think about truth and politics: a trilateral relationship among mutually essential terms. This chapter dwells on this relationship, since it constitutes the broader conceptual context within which the reflection around truth in politics that unfolds in the following chapters of this thesis is situated. The assumption I make is that any view of the relationship

between truth and politics always implicitly evokes a corresponding specific view of freedom and of its relations, in turn, to truth and to politics. The chapter, therefore, aims to render explicit the specific conception of freedom that underpins the view of truth in politics I defend in this thesis, a conception of freedom that foregrounds what we shall call, with Hannah Arendt, the “problem of the new.”<sup>11</sup>

My intuition concerning the trilateral relationship linking truth, freedom and politics is far from being an original one. If it is true that this is rarely a matter of explicit interest, in fact, that is not because the connections between the concepts of truth, politics and freedom are especially difficult to acknowledge. Rather the opposite: it is the obviousness of the various bilateral connections between these concepts that may explain the relative scarcity of express investigation around their trilateral interplay. I believe I state the obvious, for instance, when I say that politics and freedom are related concepts and practices. The nature of the relationship between the two is certainly contested: some think, for instance, that the practice of freedom

---

<sup>11</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, A Harvest Book, One volume edition (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1978), vol. II, p. 28.

begins where that of politics ends, others, on the contrary, that the two practices and the two concepts overlap just as the two sides of the same coin and that one is the reason for being of the other. What remains unvaried throughout these and other views, however, is the implicit recognition of the irreducible tension that runs between the two concepts: politics can be hardly mentioned without evoking its relation to freedom, and freedom, in turn, can be hardly evoked without the mention of politics.

Similarly obvious, and particularly so today, in the aftermath of the “post-truth” uproar, is the statement (to use one of the lately most fashionable quotes by Arendt) that “truth and politics are on rather bad terms with each other.”<sup>12</sup> How bad the terms on which truth and politics are, and which of the two “projects” should be sacrificed in case of irreconcilable conflict have been matters of open debate ever since Plato. And yet, despite the very disparate responses these questions have yielded over the time, that some irreducible tension between truth and politics does exist seems to be a point beyond contention, a “commonplace”, as Arendt wrote, that “[n]o one has ever doubted.”<sup>13</sup>

Finally, also the relation of freedom and truth has its share of obviousness. The idea that truth and freedom are elements of a tension that seeks reconciliation is recurrent throughout the entire history of western thought. The claim that “the Truth will set you free”, for instance, kept Christian theologians and philosophers of free will busy for centuries, while turning to political theory we find the tension between freedom and truth famously evoked by John Stuart Mill. Anybody who was exposed to his thought indeed will be familiar with the view that freedom of expression leads eventually to the affirmation of truth. More recently, it was Richard Rorty who dwelled explicitly on this same relationship, and his ideas on the matter were crystallized in the controversial title of a collection of his interviews: *Take care of freedom and truth will take care of itself*.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the abundance and variety of reflections concerning each of the three relationships, little explicit attention is paid instead to their interaction. In this chapter I suggest that the conceptual and practical complexity of such interaction can be best grasped when considered in light of the continuity between two fundamental realms of human experience. Borrowing from Robert Goodin we can call these “internal-reflective” – the invisible realm unfolding within the mind of each person – and “external-collective” – the visible realm which springs

---

<sup>12</sup> Hannah Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 227.

<sup>13</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 227.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Rorty, *Take Care of Freedom and Truth Will Take Care of Itself: Interviews with Richard Rorty*, ed. by Eduardo Mendieta (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

out of the shared practices and discourses of a plurality of individuals.<sup>15</sup> Retracing Arendt's account of the life of the mind, in the first two sections of the chapter I put forward the idea that truth, freedom and politics can be understood as the "projects", respectively, of the three fundamental mental or "spiritual"<sup>16</sup> activities of Thinking, Willing and Judging. Looking at the interplay between the invisible activities of the mind, I suggest, we learn to recognize the entanglement of the projects of truth, freedom and politics and to reflect on their interplay in the external-collective realm of the human experience.

The third and last section of this chapter looks instead at the specific conception of freedom that informs this thesis and on its co-constitutive relation to politics. Such a conception, expressed in the converging views of Hannah Arendt and Cornelius Castoriadis, foregrounds what in Arendt's terms is the "problem of beginning" or the "problem of new", and in Castoriadis' the "project of autonomy": the project of "a genesis that is not a mere [...] engendering of the same by the same [...]", but "something bringing itself into being as new or as other and not simply as a consequence or as a different exemplar of the same."<sup>17</sup> It is precisely due to such peculiar emphasis placed on *genesis*, or *beginning*, that this conception of freedom, I argue, escapes Berlin's classic categories of negative and positive liberty. I finally suggest that such a conception of freedom is instead better captured by a third, alternative category, what a recent sociological literature calls *generative freedom*.

## **Arendt on Thinking, Willing and Judging**

The idea at the core of these first two sections is that the conceptual relation between truth, freedom and politics is linked, through a mysterious yet glaring synchrony, to what we shall call, following Arendt, "the life of the mind." This is not simply because concepts are by definition the mind's job. We could say that for every modification of the balance between the elements of our trilateral conceptual configuration, there is a corresponding proportional modification in the working balance between the activities of the mind. By "activities of the mind" I refer specifically to the activities of Thinking, Willing and Judging, the three psychic

---

<sup>15</sup> Goodin, 'Democratic Deliberation Within', p. 169. Goodin uses the terms 'external-collective' and 'internal-reflective' to indicate specifically two 'aspects' of democratic deliberation, the latter of which – he suggests – is as crucial as the former yet underexplored in political theory. Here I borrow Goodin's terms to refer more broadly to the two dimensions of the human experience. In other parts of the thesis, however, I use these also to refer to the two dimensions of the experience of politics more specifically.

<sup>16</sup> Arendt uses the words 'mental' and 'spiritual' interchangeably, and so will I in the context of this discussion.

<sup>17</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p. 185.



experiences that, retracing Kant's work, Arendt planned to discuss in her unfinished book, *The Life of the Mind*.

To anticipate my argument: Truth, Freedom and Politics constitute, respectively, the horizons of the activities of Thinking, Willing and Judging – their projections, so to speak, or the projects these activities work to realize. For any specific balance, in the internal-reflective realm, between the inputs of the three activities, there is a correspondent specific balance, in the external-collective realm, between the desired outputs of the three projects. As we shall see, the matter is more complex than this initial formulation seems to promise. These sections only try to light up a small corner of such complexity, and this is an ambition that, in turn, they only partially fulfil. And yet, without at least some effort to make explicit the entanglement of truth and politics with freedom and with the activities of the mind, I am convinced that the normative claims I will advance in the following chapters of this thesis would too often seem lacking in foundations. This first section is dedicated to summarizing Arendt's view of the mind's activities and their place in her political theory. In the following section, instead, I discuss a potential problem such a view could pose for my argument, suggesting nonetheless one way to reconcile Arendt's insight with the scope of this discussion.

The first edition of *The Life of the Mind* has an uncommon genesis, the interesting story of which is told in more or less detail by many of the scholars who have engaged with it.<sup>18</sup> Here I will only recall that Arendt's last book is in fact an unfinished book. She lived to write only two of the book's intended three parts (*Thinking* and *Willing*), leaving the title of the last one, *Judging*, on a sheet of paper, otherwise white, found in her typewriter after her death. Its unfinishedness, together with Arendt's peculiarly narrative style of elucidation and with the necessary "invisibility" of the matter it discusses (i.e. the activities of the mind), makes of this book a field of much contention. One thing, however, that seems reasonably uncontroversial is the place this occupies in Arendt's life work. The book indeed returns, tying them all together, to the most important questions that had occupied Arendt's attention since the dawn of her career: the meaninglessness of evil (its "banality"); the continuity between action and contemplation (or *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*); and "the problem of the new", that is the question of political freedom as "the faculty to begin".

---

<sup>18</sup> Jean Yarbrough and Peter Stern, 'Vita Activa and Vita Contemplativa: Reflections on Hannah Arendt's Political Thought in "The Life of the Mind"', *The Review of Politics*, 43.3 (1981), 323–54; Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, 'Reflections on Hannah Arendt's the Life of the Mind', *Political Theory*, 10.2 (1982), 277–305; Irving Louis Horowitz, 'Open Societies and Free Minds: The Last Testament of Hannah Arendt', *Contemporary Sociology*, 8.1 (1979), 15.

As Arendt herself states in the introduction to *Thinking*, the “immediate impulse” for her preoccupation with these mental activities came from her attending the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. The thoughtlessness she had discovered in the defendant had struck her to the point that she found it “impossible to trace the incontestable evil of his deeds to any deeper level of roots or motives.”<sup>19</sup> At that point,

the question that imposed itself was: Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of result and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually “condition” them against it?<sup>20</sup>

The positive answer yielded by this question confirmed to Arendt the crucial need to rebut the unacceptable view that thinking is a business for philosophers and thus a practice for the few, a view that – with the important exception of Kant, who, so she thought, had resisted it – pervaded the western philosophical tradition since Socrates’s death. Accepting that thinking was attainable only by few would have meant accepting that indulging in evil-doing was inexorably the disposition of the most. This, in turn, would have eventually justified the “enmity against all politics in most philosophers”<sup>21</sup> an enemy that Arendt always stubbornly refused to have a part in.

In the previous investigation that had been the focus of *The Human Condition*,<sup>22</sup> Arendt had sought to expose the differences between the three fundamental human activities – Labour, Work, and Action – that the expression *vita activa* was intended to designate, each “correspond[ing] to one of the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man.”<sup>23</sup> On her account, Labour is the practical answer to the vital necessities dictated by the biological process of the human body, and the human condition corresponding to it is “life itself”; Work, instead, is the activity that corresponds to the human condition of “worldliness”, answering the need to provide an unnatural world meant to outlast man’s biological life; whereas Labour and Work always involve the “intermediary of things or matter”, Action is carried on directly between people, and for this reason it corresponds to the most peculiarly political of the human conditions, “plurality.”<sup>24</sup> Such all-important differences between the various activities engaging in which human beings appear in the world, had been obscured,

---

<sup>19</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Hannah Arendt, “What Remains? The Language Remains”: A Conversation with Gunter Gaus’, in *Essays In Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, And Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Second edition (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Arendt returns innumerable times to the idea that plurality – “the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world”- is “the condition – not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* – of all political life.” *The Human Condition*, p.7

Arendt found, by the one “overwhelming” difference between the frenzy of all *praxis* and the “stillness”, the “complete quietness” of contemplation. In order to explain those distinctions within *praxis* Arendt had asked herself a simple question that could be put more or less in these terms: what is it that we are thinking when we “do”? The reason why this matter to us is that *The Life of the Mind* can be understood to seek an answer to the obverse of this question: what is it that “[we are] ‘doing’ when we do nothing but think?”<sup>25</sup> It is worth noticing and retaining, indeed, this continuity in her approach to the investigation of *praxis* and thought, one which mirrors precisely the continuity that Arendt seeks to establish between the invisible activities of the mind and their realizations in the world of appearances, between the interior and the exterior dimensions of the experiences of freedom and politics, between what we have been calling with Goodin the internal-reflective and the external-collective realms of human experience. Let us therefore keep this in mind, as we now enter the heart of the matter we are here to discuss.

The task of understanding the relationship between Thinking, Willing and Judging is a difficult one. Indeed, as her critics have often pointed out, Arendt herself does not manage to provide a clear view of this intricate relation.<sup>26</sup> In order to arrive at some comprehension of their interplay, I will put forward – although only summarily – what I take to be the most crucial differences between these three mental activities. I suggest that the various distinctions Arendt makes can be effectively outlined by answering for each of the activities the *when?*, the *with whom?* and the *where?* of their taking place. For the time being, I also suggest we refer to the meanings that the concepts at hand assume in common use, since it will be in analysing their differences that I will be able to delineate a specific definition of each.

Three preliminary clarifications nonetheless shall be made. The first concerns the use of the word “thinking”. The word is used here, as in Arendt, in to two different senses: 1) to refer generally to the work of the mind (*thinking*); 2) to indicate the first of the three distinct mental activities at stake in the discussion, in which case the word is capitalised (*Thinking*).<sup>27</sup> For a matter of consistency, the words “willing” and “judging” are also capitalized when indicating the mental activities, and so are the word “truth”, “freedom” and “politics” when indicating their respective projects. The second clarification concerns the word “judgment”. The type of judgments that this discussion engages with are evaluative, or reflective judgments. Like

---

<sup>25</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p.8.

<sup>26</sup> Yarbrough and Stern, for instance, observed that “[a]lthough Arendt makes a number of suggestive remarks throughout the text [...] the precise relation between the faculties is not spelled out.” Yarbrough and Stern, p. 344; see also Young-Bruehl.

<sup>27</sup> Although not in a particularly systematic fashion, this is how Arendt seems to use the word in *The Life of the Mind*. I consequently apply the same scheme to my discussion.

determinative judgments, e.g. cognitive, empirical and logical judgments, reflective judgments are aimed at “eliciting the agreement of others,”<sup>28</sup> but unlike the former they do “so in terms that remain, of necessity, subjective,”<sup>29</sup> appealing not, that is, to objective validity but to subjective validity.<sup>30</sup> Finally, it should be noted that, following Arendt, in speaking of Thinking, Willing and Judging we refer to the activities presided over respectively by the three basic

<b>FACULTY</b>	REASON	WILL	JUDGMENT
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	THINKING	WILLING	JUDGING
<b>PROJECT</b>	TRUTH	FREEDOM	POLITICS

Table 1: *Faculties, activities and projects of the mind*

faculties of the mind: *Reason, Will and Judgment*.<sup>31</sup>

Arendt, though, uses the word “faculty” – as shall I – also to refer to other powers of the mind, such as memory and imagination. This obviously raises the question of how useful it is to regard the mind – as, following Kant, many philosophers in the past have

done – as divided in faculties, and how accurately the identification of the three basic faculties captures the complexity of the mind. Here, however, I will not engage with questions of this sort, assuming instead the appropriateness of Arendt’s analytical framework to our purpose.

Asking the question of *when?* in referring to the mind’s activities yields two equally relevant considerations. One is chronological, the other temporal. The former, that is to say, concerns the order in which the activities of the mind come into play, the latter, instead, concerns the time regions in which they operate. In the former sense, Thinking (Arendt on this point is absolutely clear) must take place *first*. Although she believes that trying to “establish a hierarchical order among the mind’s activities” would be a mistake, she clearly also finds it “hardly deniable that an order of priorities exists.”<sup>32</sup> Thinking, in fact, “though unable to move the [W]ill or provide [J]udgment with general rules, must prepare the particulars given to the senses in such a way that the mind is able to handle them in their absence; it must, in brief, *de-sense* them.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, and so we come to the latter consideration, Thinking takes place in the presence of those particulars which are saved from oblivion by the memory’s power to store

<sup>28</sup> Aletta J. Norval, ‘A Democratic Politics of Acknowledgement: Political Judgment, Imagination, and Exemplarity’, *Diacritics*, 38.4 (2008), 59–76 (p. 61).

<sup>29</sup> Norval, p. 61.

<sup>30</sup> Theories of judgment have long discussed Kant’s distinction between determinative and reflective judgment, a complex matter in itself that this thesis does not intend to engage with directly. For an accessible discussion of the matter see for instance P. Faggiotto, ‘Note on the Kantian Distinction Between Natural Judgment (Reflecting) and Transcendental Judgment (Determining)’, *Verifiche: Rivista Trimestrale Di Scienze Umane*, 19.1–2 (1990), 3–11; and Angelica Nuzzo, ‘Reflective Judgment, Determinative Judgment, and the Problem of Particularity’, *Washington University Jurisprudence Review*, 6.1 (2013), 7–25.

<sup>31</sup> These are “basic” insofar as they cannot be reduced to each other, and although inextricably entangled, they are autonomous and independent. Our knowledge of these faculties is under continuous evolution. This is why Arendt can talk of “the discovery” of the Will by Christian thinkers, and the discovery of Judgment by Kant. Arendt, though, seems also to believe in the co-constitutive relation between the evolution of our knowledge of the mental faculties and the evolution of their activities.

<sup>32</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 76.

<sup>33</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 77. Emphasis in original.

and recall them. “This salvage takes place in the Present of the thinking ego,”<sup>34</sup> a permanent *now*, “a kind of lasting ‘todayness,’”<sup>35</sup> or “the gap between past and future” as Arendt, quoting Kafka, famously and recurrently says.<sup>36</sup> Now, “as obviously [...] as memory is our mental organ for the past,” Will, instead, is our mental organ for the future.<sup>37</sup> While Thinking deals with objects that are absent from the senses either because they are no longer available to them or because, like God, they are not given to the senses at all, Willing deals with objects whose absence from the senses is due to the fact that they have never yet existed. In fact, as Arendt explains, it is not *objects* but *projects* that the Will more properly handles.<sup>38</sup>

We could say, to record Arendt’s insight on this point,<sup>39</sup> that whereas Reason administers the “hitherto”, the Will operates in the “henceforth”, a formula that gives us also an occasion to reaffirm the chronological priority of Thinking over Willing and Judging pointed out above. About Judging, in fact, we know from Arendt that, like Willing, it takes place *after*, but unfortunately this is also pretty much all we are explicitly told in this regard. As Yarborough and Stern observed, however, “[a]ll Arendt’s examples of [J]udgment in *The Life of the Mind* describe this faculty operating in the past as “after thought.””<sup>40</sup> And yet, if, as the reading of her lectures on Kant’s political philosophy suggests, Arendt distances herself from Kant precisely in that she includes moral questions “within [J]udgment’s province”, we are left wondering how it is that Judging insures us against evildoing if we judge events only after they have happened.<sup>41</sup> In fact, “[i]f [J]udgment is to condition us against doing evil [...] then clearly [J]udgment must also be directed towards the future.”<sup>42</sup> Yarborough and Stern find an indication in this sense in an earlier essay, *What is Freedom?*, pointing at a passage where Arendt explicitly suggests that “judgment grasps the desirability of a future aim” before the Will wills it.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. II, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. II, p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 7; Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 202.

<sup>37</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. II, p. 13. Arendt adds in parenthesis that ‘the strange ambivalence of the English language, in which “will” as an auxiliary designates the future whereas the verb “to will” indicates volitions, properly speaking, testifies to our uncertainties in these matters.’

<sup>38</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. II, p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> While making available these important insights, Arendt leaves us nevertheless with several doubts. One, for instance, concerns the exact relation between memory and reason. Is the former part of the latter? Or is it another, non-basic (i.e. non-autonomous) yet separate mental faculty? This question, and other similar ones, are not questions we intend to address here. I shall reformulate Arendt’s insights, then, in a way that allows us to focus on the parts of her argument that matters most to our purpose.

<sup>40</sup> Yarborough and Stern, p. 343.

<sup>41</sup> Yarborough and Stern, p. 343.

<sup>42</sup> Yarborough and Stern, p. 343.

<sup>43</sup> Hannah Arendt, ‘What Is Freedom’, in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 151.

Even clearer than the passage Yarborough and Stern quote is Arendt's observation, in the same essay, that "to recognize the aim is not a matter of freedom, but of right or wrong judgment. Will [...] follows judgment, i.e., cognition of the right aim, and then commands its execution."<sup>44</sup> Reference to such earlier work is obviously to be taken with caution, since Arendt's position on these issues was subject to important evolutions during the years. Yet, missing the third volume of the *Life of the Mind*, earlier comments on judgment become of great relevance. It seems then, that if the Reason acts first, Judgment comes into play second to "pass the ball" to the Will which, at last, commands action. As we read in the notes for the Kant lectures published in appendix to *Willing*, "[t]he chief difficulty in judgment is that it is "the faculty of thinking the particular"; but to think means to generalise, hence it is the faculty of mysteriously combining the particular with the general."<sup>45</sup>

Sticking to the reformulation I proposed above, I would say then that Judging – as Arendt presents it – is the activity of *negotiating between the hitherto and the henceforth*, of moving back and forth from one region to the other, reconciling the need to understand by generalising, with the freedom of each future particular to escape generalisation and be altogether new, reconciling, as we shall see, continuity and beginning. In so doing, it prevents the "hitherto" from invading and determining the "henceforth" – which would correspond to the loss of the horizon of Freedom (the violation of the Will's autonomy by the Reason)– while warding off the submission of the former to the latter – which would correspond to the loss of the horizon of Truth (the arbitrary rule of the Will over the Reason).

Let us now move to the second question. Even though it is evident (and this incidentally may be the only "visible" thing about them) that all the spiritual activities take place in solitude, a matter we shall return to in Chapter V, the question *with whom?* is far from being redundant if we are trying to understand the dynamics of the mind's activities as Arendt sees them. In fact, Arendt is clear that the activity of Thinking always actualizes a *duality*, it is always, that is to say, a dialogue between me and myself. Crucially, it is precisely by virtue of this dialogue that thinking disposes one to avoiding evildoing. As Arendt explains through Socrates,

[t]he partner who comes to life when you are alert and alone is the only one from whom you can never get away – except by ceasing to think. It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong, because you can remain the friend of a sufferer; who would want to be friend of and have to live together with a murderer?<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Arendt, 'What Is Freedom', p. 152.

<sup>45</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. II, p.271.

<sup>46</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 188.

Hence for Thinking – which can be defined precisely as “the two-in-one of the soundless dialogue”<sup>47</sup> or the “actualization of the difference given in consciousness”<sup>48</sup>– the answer to the question *with whom?* is definitely *with myself*.<sup>49</sup>

The matter is more complicated, instead, when it comes to Willing. Arendt defines the Will, through Kant, as the “power of *spontaneously* beginning a series of successive things or states.”<sup>50</sup> So understood, the Will, which she often refers to as “the spring of action”, is the faculty in which the individuality of each man manifests itself,<sup>51</sup> a realization that, together with the all-important question of the beginning, Arendt inherited from Saint Augustine. As she writes in the Introduction to Willing:

No doubt every man, by virtue of his birth, is a new beginning, and his power of beginning may well correspond to this fact of the human condition. It is in line with these Augustinian reflections that the Will has sometimes, and not only by Augustine, been considered to be the actualization of the *principium individuationis*. The question is how this faculty of being able to bring about something new and hence to “change the world” can function in the world of appearances, namely, in an environment of factuality which is old by definition and which relentlessly transforms all the spontaneity of its newcomers into the “has been” of facts *-fieri; factus sum*.<sup>52</sup>

We will return several times, throughout the thesis, to this which Arendt often calls “the problem of the new”, and which can be said to be for her the very essence of the problem of politics. For the time being though, let us only keep in mind that the Will is for Arendt the seat of one’s singularity. This is the case despite the fact (or maybe because of the fact) that “the I-will is inevitably countered by an I-nill.”<sup>53</sup> This seeming duality, however, is different from the actual duality that characterizes Thinking: a duality of company, in which I am *with* myself. The apparent duality of Willing is in fact a duality of conflict, a fight to death “between *velle* and *nelle*,”<sup>54</sup> a duel that only admits a singular winner. Willing, then, takes place *against* myself, but *with* nobody.

Now, if Thinking is a dialogue and Willing, so to speak, is a monologue, Judging – “which one may call with some reason the most political of men's mental abilities”<sup>55</sup>– is instead a parliament, a “concert”. As noticed by Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, of all the mental activities “judging withdraws least: It remains close to the particulars. And the judging person *stays in the company*

---

<sup>47</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. II, p. 193.

<sup>48</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 191.

<sup>49</sup> This is why, understood in its “non-cognitive, non-specialized sense”, Thinking is for Arendt “a natural need of human life” and an “ever-present faculty in everybody” rather a “prerogative of the few”. In the same way, “inability to think is not a failing of the many who lack brain power but an ever-present possibility for everybody – scientists, scholars, and other specialist in mental enterprises not excluded.” Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 191.

<sup>50</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. II, p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. II, p. 109.

<sup>52</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. II, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. II, p. 69.

<sup>54</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. II, p. 69.

<sup>55</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 192.

*of others*, a spectator among spectators.”<sup>56</sup> In fact, although ultimately unwritten, Arendt’s theory of judgment is an essential, if not ironically *the* essential element of her theory of politics and democracy. Arendt arrives at her understanding of judgment reading and originally appropriating Kant’s third Critique. There she discovers the “crucial role” that “the enlargement of the mind” plays in Kant. This, she says in her Lectures

[...] is accomplished by “comparing our judgment with the possible rather than the actual judgment of others, and by putting ourselves in the place of any other man.” The faculty which makes this possible is called imagination. . .Critical thinking is possible only where the standpoints of all others are open to inspection. Hence, critical thinking while still a solitary business has not cut itself off from “all others”. . .[By] force of imagination it makes the others present and thus moves potentially in a space which is public, open to all sides; [...] To think with the enlarged mentality – that means you train your imagination to go visiting [...].<sup>57</sup>

Chapter V will be concerned closely with imagination and its “going visiting”. What matters here, instead, is that the way imagination is used in Judging, provides the person engaged in this mode of thinking with the presence of others (virtually “all others”) realising so the “human condition” without which no judgment, no action and no politics is possible: that of plurality.

Finally, let us briefly, and by way of summary, turn to the last question, the question of *where?*. While asking it openly – “where are we when we think? To what do we withdraw when we withdraw from the world of appearances?”<sup>58</sup> – Arendt is less clear in answering this question. In fact, after calling the space to which we withdraw when we withdraw from the world of appearances the “nowhere”, she even acknowledges the inappropriateness of spatial categories to the issue of thinking, suggesting that it is truly the “time experience of the thinking ego” that – in the terms summarised above – we should be investigating. I believe, however, that Arendt, if inexplicitly, does in fact make some use of spatial categories, at least in a positional sense. In other words, if *where* is not a question that she thinks can be answered concerning the mind’s activities, *how far* may be: if there is a threshold dividing (and uniting) the world of appearances from the invisible world of the mind, how far is Thinking from it? I believe we find in Arendt elements of an answer that, however only relative, is quite clear: further than Willing, further than Judging.

If the “nowhere” to which we withdraw during the mind’s activities could be localized, the inner dialogue of Thinking would take place in its remotest corner, at the maximum possible distance from action and all else that is visible. The Will, the direct spring of action, operates on the contrary the closest to the threshold between the two worlds and, possibly by virtue of

---

<sup>56</sup> Young-Bruehl, p. 281. Emphasis mine.

<sup>57</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. II, p. 257.

<sup>58</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. II, p. 11.



the singularity it achieves, it is in fact the only mind's faculty capable of breaking through it. But if it is the Will that finally moves us to action, it is the Judgment that provides it with the springboard from which to move. As "the by-product of the liberating effect of [T]hinking", Judging "*realizes* [T]hinking, makes it manifest in the world of appearances."<sup>59</sup> It is Judging that prepares action for the material plurality by which, once landed in the external-collective realm, it will be by definition surrounded.

In this redesigned role for judgment lies one of Arendt's most innovative contribution. As Linda Zerilli suggests, such innovation,

amounts to a virtual Copernican revolution in political theorizing – namely, an unprecedented break with the philosophy of the will in the history of political thought. This break is Copernican in spirit because it reveals that the claim to free action that the [W]ill arrogates to itself depends on the power of [J]udgment.<sup>60</sup>

In other words, the distinctively pluralistic nature of Judgment that Arendt points out, suddenly threatens the special place that in understanding democratic sovereignty classical political theory assigns to the "general will". We will return to the shift from voluntaristic to judgment-centred theories of the political in Chapter IV. In the context of Nadia Urbinati's intellectual historical account of the birth of representative democracy, in fact, we will notice that the emergence of democratic representation coincides precisely with a redefinition of popular sovereignty: no longer understood as monopoly of the Will but as a diarchy (so Urbinati defines it) of Will and Judgment.<sup>61</sup>

For the time being, let us only suggest that Arendt's reassessment of the mind's activities should be read as challenging the very idea that the aim of democratic politics is "*rational* will-formation" and with it "the notion that political actions can and need to be justified in the strict cognitive sense demanded, for instance, by Habermas".<sup>62</sup> It should be clearer at this point, then, why by looking at the mind's activities, we may discover something important concerning the relation between truth and politics and understand better why central to it is the problem of freedom. In approaching this issue more closely, the following subsection will also mark a partial departure of my view of the matter from Arendt's, a departure I take with a certain

---

<sup>59</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 193. Emphasis mine.

<sup>60</sup> Linda Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, p. 190.

<sup>61</sup> Nadia Urbinati, 'Representative Democracy and Its Critics', in *The Future of Representative Democracy*, ed. by Sonia Alonso and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 26.

<sup>62</sup> Linda Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, p. 190. As we will have the opportunity to say in the following chapter, Habermas' critique of Arendt's conception of politics rests on what Zerilli identifies precisely as a mistaken understanding of her theory of judgment.

anxiety and with the hope that, as important as it may nominally appear, it will not lead me to reject substantially any of her fundamental insights.

## The Mind's Projects

As suggested in the introduction to the previous section, the argument I make is that truth, freedom and politics – the three elements of the conceptual triangle within which my investigation of truth and politics takes place – can be thought of as the three projects towards which the activities of Thinking, Willing and Judging respectively tend. It is Arendt herself who suggests, in a number of instances, that this may be the case. In the introduction to *Willing*, anticipating her conceptual history of the Will, Arendt writes that “prior to the rise of Christianity we nowhere find any notion of a mental faculty corresponding to the “idea” of Freedom, as the faculty of the Intellect corresponds to [T]ruth and the faculty of Reason to things beyond human knowledge, or, as we said here, to Meaning.”<sup>63</sup> In this and other instances, Arendt explicitly mentions the links between Will and Freedom, between Reason and Meaning, and between the Intellect and Truth. At this point, however, it is necessary to clarify the new notions this quote introduces, and to expose, simultaneously, what I consider to be the limit of Arendt’s account in the context of our investigation. This, in fact, pertains precisely to the sharp distinction Arendt traces between Reason and Intellect, and between the respective corresponding ideas of Truth and Meaning – a distinction she deems “crucial” for her “enterprise”.<sup>64</sup>

<b>FACULTY</b>	INTELLECT	REASON	WILL	JUDGMENT
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	KNOWING (cognition)	THINKING (underst.)	WILLING	JUDGING
<b>PROJECT</b>	TRUTH	MEANING	FREEDOM	POLITICS

Table 2: *Faculties, activities and the projects of the mind: the place of meaning*

knowledge regarding matters and questions [God, freedom and immortality] that it nevertheless cannot help thinking about”.<sup>66</sup> What Kant had understood, says Arendt, was “that “the urgent need” of Reason is both different from and “more than mere quest and desire for

To be clear, it is Kant who first drew the distinction between Reason and Intellect,<sup>65</sup> and he did so in the wake of his discovery of “the scandal of reason”, the fact that the human mind is incapable of “certain and verifiable

<sup>63</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. II, p. 6.

<sup>64</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 13.

<sup>65</sup> Kant distinguished the faculty of speculative thought (Vernunft) and the ability to know (Verstand). Arendt insists that the common translation of the latter as “Understanding” is mistaken, and stubbornly proposes “Intellect” instead.

<sup>66</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 14.

knowledge.”<sup>67</sup> Distinguishing between the two faculties of Intellect and Reason means, thus, distinguishing also between the two activities these preside over, i.e. Knowing and Thinking: the former is concerned with “grasp[ing] what is given to the senses”, the latter with “understand[ing] its *meaning*”<sup>68</sup>. Knowing is about achieving cognition, Thinking about achieving understanding, and whereas in cognizing we answer the question *what is it?* in understanding we answer the question *what does it mean for it to be?*, or as I would preferably put it, what does it signify: what does it have to say. In this sense are Truth and Meaning the separate aims, respectively, of the activities of Knowing and Thinking.

The difference is clearly of fundamental importance. It is very helpful, for example, in making sense of rather common instances, such as the existence of people who know a lot and understand very little (if anything at all), and of others who know very little but understand all of it. Now, Arendt is clear that, by insisting on the importance of such distinction, she does not “wish to deny that [T]hinking’s quest for [M]eaning and knowledge’s quest for [T]ruth are connected.”<sup>69</sup> Yet, she is determined to avoid falling into the temptation induced by the obvious connection between the two: the same temptation most philosophers, she believed, had been drawn into by “accept[ing] the criterion of [T]ruth – so valid for science and everyday life- as applicable to their own rather extraordinary business as well”,<sup>70</sup> precisely the business of Thinking. Admittedly, the consequences of Kant’s distinction were more far-reaching than he himself recognized.<sup>71</sup> In fact, pursuing them beyond Kant’s own conclusions to expose the fallaciousness of “interpret[ing] meaning on the model of truth”,<sup>72</sup> was an explicit and essential part of Arendt’s intellectual enterprise.

While crucial, this distinction is nevertheless problematic. This is the case not only because, as her critics have noticed,<sup>73</sup> Arendt’s discussion of the separation of truth and meaning raises in itself a number of important doubts, but also because if we excluded truth altogether from the domain of Thinking, we would have to draw a rather questionable conclusion: that for none of the basic faculties of the mind and their relative activities is truth a matter of concern. This would imply that, had the distinction between truth and meaning been so self-evident to require no elucidation, in telling the story of the mind’s life Arendt could have got away without ever

---

<sup>67</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p.14.

<sup>68</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 57.

<sup>69</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 62.

<sup>70</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 62.

<sup>71</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 63.

<sup>72</sup> Yarbrough and Stern, p. 331.

<sup>73</sup> Irving Louis Horowitz, p. 18; Yarbrough and Stern, p. 332.

having to mention the words “truth”, “knowledge” or “cognition” – something I would consider highly implausible.

I am unequipped and in fact unwilling to suggest stepping forward to move beyond Arendt’s distinction. What I suggest instead is rather the opposite: stepping a few steps back from the

<b>FACULTY</b>	REASON	WILL	JUDGMENT
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	THINKING	WILLING	JUDGING
	COGNITION	UNDERST.	
<b>PROJECT</b>	TRUTH	FREEDOM	POLITICS
	REFERENT	MEANING	

Table 3: *Faculties, activities and the projects: bringing truth back in*

degree of complexity this discussion involves. I will do so by postulating the following: the distinction between cognition and understanding is undeniable and crucial, but rather than indicating a separation *of* Thinking from another activity, we should take it to indicate a separation *in* Thinking between

two phases of the same project; rather than taking it to indicate the separation *of* truth from meaning, we should take it to indicate a separation *in* truth between the referent given to the senses and its meaning. In other words, we do not need to leave the province of Reason to be able to account for the duality of cognition and understanding, nor we need to leave the province of Truth to account for the distinctiveness of meaning. I will not follow Arendt, then, when she says that “the need of [R]eason is not inspired by the quest for [T]ruth but by the quest for [M]eaning. And truth and meaning are not the same.”<sup>74</sup>

In fact, failing to acknowledge that truth and meaning are not the same would undermine our, and indeed any, investigation around truth in politics. However, failing, on the other hand, to acknowledge and account for their indissoluble connection would undermine an important assumption of this work, namely that truth matters in politics to the extent that it yields some meaning, to the extent that it *signifies* something: that it has something to say. This assumption, appropriately reformulated (“truth matters less for what it is than it matters for what it makes us do”) will be the starting point for our discussion of truth in Chapter II, as well as the ground, in Chapter III, for our considerations on the “virtues of truth” that democracies should wish to see flourishing in their members. Indeed, the virtue of generativity, which I will argue is constitutive, together with sincerity and accuracy, of a specifically democratic notion of truthfulness, will be defined, precisely, as the disposition and the ability to turn what one knows to be true into something politically *significant*.

<sup>74</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. I, p. 15.

Having marked this partial departure from Arendt's view, I shall now reformulate the passage quoted at the beginning of this section and say that the faculty of the Will corresponds to the idea of Freedom, as the faculty of Reason corresponds to the idea of Truth. What about Judgment? We have already mentioned Arendt's comment on Judgment being "the most political of man's mental abilities", one comment among many other similar indications. Although Arendt is never explicit about this, I want to suggest that in the same way as the Will (and the activity of Willing) and Reason (and the activity of Thinking) correspond respectively to Freedom and Truth, the faculty of Judgment and the activity of Judging correspond instead to Politics.<sup>75</sup> The key to understanding why Politics is in this sense the project of Judging, is in the equation Arendt establishes between political and aesthetic judgments.

For Arendt, both aesthetic and political judgments make claims to subjective validity, "a special kind of validity that does not appeal to truth or knowledge."<sup>76</sup> In fact, both kind of judgments take place – as mentioned above – amidst a plurality of standpoints, in a "public space" that the imagination makes present right at the heart of one's solitude. Judgment is for Arendt "a different way of thinking, for which it would not be enough to be in agreement with one's own self [...]."<sup>77</sup> In fact,

the thinking process which is active in [J]udging 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.<sup>78</sup>

Saying that a particular judgment is "political", then, means not that it judges something related to politics, but that it is arrived at in a political way: that is to say by thinking in a representative way, "think[ing] in the place of everybody else."<sup>79</sup> A judgment concerning the stand to take in a referendum, for instance, is not a political judgment because a referendum is clearly to do with politics, it is a political judgment because (and only if) it is formulated representatively, by "being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not."<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> I prefer refraining from introducing the lexical difference between the word 'politics' and the noun 'political', since different authors referenced in this thesis use the distinction in perfectly opposite ways (as do Cornelius Casotriadis and Pierre Rosanvallon). What – particularly in this context – I mean by 'politics', however, is what for Rosanvallon is 'the Political': "a modality of existence of life in common as a form of collective action that is implicitly distinct from the functioning of politics [...] [e]verything that constitutes political life beyond the immediate field of partisan competition for political power, everyday governmental action, and the ordinary function of institutions." Pierre Rosanvallon, *Democracy Past and Future*, ed. by Samuel Moyn, Columbia Studies in Political Thought/Political History (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 36.

<sup>76</sup> Norval, p. 65.

<sup>77</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'The Crisis in Culture', in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 220.

<sup>78</sup> Arendt, 'The Crisis in Culture', p. 220. Emphasis mine.

<sup>79</sup> Arendt, 'The Crisis in Culture', p. 220.

<sup>80</sup> Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', p. 241.

Representative thinking, and judging “as a specifically political ability” will be discussed further throughout the thesis, particularly in Chapter V. For the time being let us retain simply that Judging, for Arendt, is itself always “a form of collective action” and that for this reason conceiving of Politics as its project, in the same way in which Truth is the project of Reason and Freedom that of the Will, is plausible and definitely compatible with the Arendtian perspective. What I have argued so far, then, is that the distribution of mental labour between the faculties of Reason, Will and Judgment sees them addressing respectively the projects of Truth, Freedom and Politics. We mentioned above, however, that Arendt’s political theory breaks with the established ways of understanding the Will in philosophy, by revealing precisely “that the claim to free action that the [W]ill arrogates to itself depends on the power of [J]udgment.”<sup>81</sup> Contrary to the secular Christian tradition which had located freedom under the exclusive rule of the Will, Arendt tells us that Judgment too plays a crucial part in realising the project of freedom. What is at stake here, in other words, is the tension between free will and political freedom, an all-important distinction, both in analytical and historical conceptual terms, in the classic debate over conflicting notions of freedom and their adequacy to the political.

We shall review this debate in some detail in the next section. Here, instead, we only need to observe that, in spite of the argument she had made in earlier work, maintaining the absolute inappropriateness of “inner freedom” (freedom as free will) to political life, *The Life of the Mind* shows how Arendt’s ideas on the matter had in fact changed. As Yarbrough and Stern suggest, here “political freedom and freedom of the will are [...] seen as complementary, though they never occur at the same time. The [W]ill is free only until it resolves to act, then the [W]ill’s activity ceases and freedom becomes manifest in the world through action.”<sup>82</sup> Therefore, if saying that Freedom is the Will’s project is correct, accuracy requires we add that in breaking through the threshold of appearances, in moving, that is, from the internal-reflective to the external-collective dimension of the human experience, the Will’s and the Judgment’s projects – i.e. Freedom and Politics – converge and are realized through action.

The aim in the next section will be precisely to qualify the conception of freedom that this claim is appealing to, positioning it in the broader classic debate around the type of freedom that should be the aim and the fuel of democratic politics. Concluding this section, instead, I shall reinvokethe trilateral conceptual relationship between truth, freedom and politics, and reformulate the question leading our inquiry in the terms that follow: what is the relationship

---

<sup>81</sup> Linda Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, p. 190.

<sup>82</sup> Yarbrough and Stern, p. 346.

between truth and politics *if* freedom and politics converge? And what, at the crossroad of freedom and politics, does democracy demand its members do with truth? This reformulation, I hope, helps us make explicit the “entanglement of the question of freedom in any talk of truth”<sup>83</sup> which, as Zerilli suggests, Hannah Arendt’s political thought is an invitation to recognize and always to bear in mind.

## Freedom as Beginning

What can be said about the conception of freedom that accounts for the convergence of freedom and politics? This section tries to answer this question turning to the work of another European thinker, Cornelius Castoriadis, and inscribing his and Arendt’s view of freedom – which on my reading are complementary – within the canonical debate generated by Isaiah Berlin’s distinction between positive and negative liberty. There are several common aspects in Arendt’s and Castoriadis’ conceptions of freedom and politics, and these plausibly arise from the authors’ shared “deep fascination for the notion of politics that first emerged [in ancient Greece] with the ‘twin birth’ of politics and philosophy around the 5th century BCE”<sup>84</sup> and from the fundamental finding this fascination entailed: precisely that “above all, politics signifies freedom.”<sup>85</sup>

Castoriadis is clear about this when, for instance, he writes that when Athenian democracy was born, “at that [same] moment politics [was] born; that is to say, freedom [was] born *as social-historically effective freedom*.”<sup>86</sup> In the already mentioned early essay *What is Freedom*, Arendt writes, in remarkably similar terms, that “freedom *as a demonstrable fact* and politics coincide and are related to each other like two sides of the same matter.”<sup>87</sup> In fact, elsewhere she goes as far as to say that freedom is “the meaning of politics”<sup>88</sup> and that politics is the “experience in which being free and the capacity to begin something new coincide.”<sup>89</sup> Such a “simple” and “conclusive” statement, Arendt acknowledges, is today “neither self-evident nor immediately plausible.”<sup>90</sup> On the contrary, today we ask ourselves rather frequently “whether politics and

---

<sup>83</sup> Linda Zerilli, ‘Truth and Politics’, in *Truth and Democracy*, ed. by Jeremy Elkins and Andrew Norris (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 70.

<sup>84</sup> Ingerid S. Straume, ‘A Common World? Arendt, Castoriadis and Political Creation’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 15.3 (2012), 367–83 (p. 369).

<sup>85</sup> Straume, ‘A Common World?’, p. 369.

<sup>86</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, ed. by David Ames Curtis, Odéon (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 164. (Italics mine).

<sup>87</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 149. (Italics mine).

<sup>88</sup> Hannah Arendt, ‘Introduction into Politics’, in *The Promise of Politics*, ed. by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), p. 108.

<sup>89</sup> Hannah Arendt, ‘Freedom and Politics: A Lecture’, *Chicago Review*, 14.1 (1960), 28–46 (p. 40).

<sup>90</sup> Arendt, ‘Introduction into Politics’, p. 108.

freedom are at all compatible, whether freedom does not first begin precisely where politics ends, so that freedom cannot exist wherever politics has not yet found its limit and its end.”<sup>91</sup> This is plausibly what libertarians, for instance, would think the relationship between freedom and politics should be when properly understood.

Castoriadis’ and Arendt’s common conviction regarding the coincidence of freedom and politics rests on a specific qualification of the notion of freedom: “freedom *as* a demonstrable fact”, “freedom *as* social-historically effective freedom” – as something, this means, that materially and visibly marks the history and the institutions of human societies. Both authors, then, refer to freedom as a visible phenomenon, something that is “demonstrable” and “effective”, and such visibility is a function of “the new” that freedom, so conceived, brings about. Due to the centrality of this aspect, for the purpose of this discussion I will call this conception *freedom as beginning*. It may be intuitive that a similar conception of freedom is different from Berlin’s category of negative liberty, within which freedom is the mere enjoyment of a sphere of non-interference,<sup>92</sup> but there are reasons why this is not captured by the category of positive liberty either. Before introducing an altogether alternative category, that of generative freedom, better suited to encompass our view, we shall review the reasons why reducing freedom as beginning to positive liberty would fail to account for its most distinctive character: its emphasis on the new, or on “radical otherness”<sup>93</sup> – to put it in the words of Castoriadis.<sup>94</sup>

Like Berlin, both Arendt and Castoriadis found their discussions on the distinction between inner freedom on the one hand, and freedom as social phenomenon, on the other. The former, which Castoriadis calls individual autonomy, has its birthplace in the internal-reflective realm of the human experience; the latter, collective autonomy, in the external-collective one – the space arising among peers acting together, “in concert”. This distinction between “internal” and “external” freedom may be reminiscent indeed of the distinction Berlin points out between internal and external constraints to freedom. The external/internal divide was used by Berlin to mark an important difference between negative and positive liberty: whereas the latter ceases when the agent is subjected to *internal* constraints, the former is concerned exclusively with the

---

<sup>91</sup> Arendt, ‘Introduction into Politics’, p. 109.

<sup>92</sup> For an explicit and detailed account of Berlin’s and Arendt’s different views on freedom see Kei Hiruta, ‘The Meaning and Value of Freedom: Berlin Contra Arendt’, *European Legacy*, 19.7 (2014), 854–68.

<sup>93</sup> Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 185.

<sup>94</sup> Before proceeding, let me make a lexical clarification which may ease the discussion that follows. In talking of social-historically effective freedom Castoriadis uses prevalently the term “autonomy”. Where not specified otherwise, then, in the following discussion the word “autonomy” can be considered synonymous with the conception of freedom as beginning.



imposition on one's agency of *external* constraints. For Berlin, in other words, "constraints on negative liberty are always inflicted by somebody *external* to the liberty-holder."<sup>95</sup>

Given Berlin's conclusion that only negative freedom should be considered a legitimate concern for politics, this would mean, for example, that a person – let us call him Mr Gambler – who is willing to overcome his addiction to gambling but fails to do so, is not to be judged unfree unless it is an external will, the will of another who (say, holding a gun to Mr Gambler's head) prevents him from achieving its goal. This way of looking at the question leads sometimes to the notorious simplification according to which the difference between negative and positive freedom is no more than the difference between being free *from* (constraints) and being free *to* (do what one wants). And yet, its semantic resemblance notwithstanding, Berlin's external/internal divide hardly corresponds to the distinction we are making here between internal and external freedom, since this distinction is not meant to separate political freedom from some other, non-political, type of freedom, but, as we shall see, it concerns two indivisible dimensions of the experience of political freedom.

In a classic critique of Berlin's argument, Gerald MacCallum advanced the successful idea of freedom as a triadic relation: freedom is always the freedom of an agent (x), *from* a given constraint (y), *to* pursue a given action (z).<sup>96</sup> As Adam Swift explains in his introduction to political philosophy, "[o]n this view, if we want to think about the differences between conceptions of freedom, we should focus on how they regard the agent, what they regard as constraints on that agent and what they regard as that agent's goals or ends."<sup>97</sup> Using the lens of MacCallum's triad, thus, Swift identifies three pairs of opposed conceptions of freedom that Berlin's positive/negative liberty divide encompasses but fails to discern: effective vs. formal freedom; freedom as autonomy vs. freedom to do what one wants; freedom as political participation vs. freedom beginning where politics ends. Swift's aim is to convey that only the second of the three pairs truly lends itself to be interpreted in ways that justify Berlin's rejection of positive liberty as a pathway to totalitarian degenerations. Here instead I will refer to Swift's distinctions to try and explicate how "effective freedom", "autonomy" and "political participation," the three nuances of positive liberty, may intersect but fail to exhaust the meaning of freedom as beginning, since none of these captures our conception's entanglement with the problem of the new.

---

<sup>95</sup> Hiruta, p. 856.

<sup>96</sup> Gerald C. MacCallum, 'Negative and Positive Freedom', *The Philosophical Review*, 76.3 (1967), 312–34 (p. 314).

<sup>97</sup> Adam Swift, *Political Philosophy*, 3rd edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 101.

To begin with let us recall that, as mentioned above, Castoriadis uses explicitly the word “autonomy” to refer to “effective freedom,”<sup>98</sup> something that could be taken to signal a conflation in Castoriadis of the first two nuances of positive liberty we distinguished above. This would only be nominal however, since by both effective freedom and autonomy Castoriadis and Swift mean in fact quite different things. As for the phrase “effective freedom”, Swift uses it to distinguish between the effective freedom that comes with the actual “power or capacity to act in a certain way” and the formal one coming from “the mere absence of interference.”<sup>99</sup> Let us imagine that there is no formal interference (y) with me (x) travelling abroad (z) – no law, say, that forbids people shorter than 1.5 meters to leave the Country. This would mean that I am free from external legal constraints to my liberty to travel, i.e. I am formally free. Moreover, let us imagine that I live in a Country which provides accessible public transport to destinations abroad. This would mean that I have the means and the capacity to travel abroad, i.e. that in Swift’s sense I am also effectively free.

Neither for Castoriadis nor for Arendt is effective freedom in this sense a matter of direct concern. Instead, what Castoriadis means by “effective freedom”, and Arendt by “freedom as a demonstrable fact”, is nothing less than the actual power of an individual to act in such a way as to interrupt a causal series of events and begin a new one, the capacity to make a visible intervention in the history and the institutions of society: the power – as Castoriadis would say – to institute society anew. Recalling MacCallum’s triad, we could say that this is the freedom of an actor (x), from the constraints of causality or repetition (y), to begin something entirely new (z). To “see” freedom on this account, then, requires considering the action at stake in the light of the meaning or signification of such action for the world, judging it from the point of view of the future. Being somebody who believes that a change in the ways in which our species inhabits the planet is urgently needed, for instance, in order to be free on this account I may have to respond to the will to travel abroad by an action that signifies the change that I want for the world and potentially initiates a new series of events: I may invent a solar-powered car, travel by feet or even give up travelling abroad altogether. In this sense, the first way of understanding what is at stake in Berlin’s two concepts of liberty – as formal v. effective freedom – does not encompass the meaning of freedom as beginning.

---

<sup>98</sup> Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*.

<sup>99</sup> Swift, p. 102.

The conception of freedom as beginning preserves its distinctiveness also when expressed by Castoriadis in the language of autonomy. As Swift explains, the concept of autonomy that concerns Berlin

needs to be related to the idea – most systematically developed by Kant – that we can think of each person as divided into two distinct ‘selves’. An ‘ideal’, or ‘inner’, or ‘higher’, or ‘rational’, or ‘true’, or ‘transcendental’, or ‘noumenal’ or ‘moral’ self, and an ‘empirical’, or ‘lower’, or ‘irrational’, or ‘emotional’, or ‘phenomenal’ or ‘base’ self. Autonomy is achieved when the first of these selves [the ‘higher self’] is in control of the ‘lower self’.<sup>100</sup>

On this account, to be clear, our Mr Gambler would be considered free if the rational law (“don’t gamble!”) was enforced against the internal constraint of the law of his unconscious (“do gamble”). As Avital Simhony points out, Berlin took the idea of a divided self to be the “vehicle of manipulation” that “lai[d] at the core of positive freedom”<sup>101</sup> and the reason to deem the latter politically dangerous (the danger lying “with the possibility of manipulating positive freedom, understood as rational self-mastery, into a political tool of tyranny, coercing individuals to be free”<sup>102</sup>). Berlin’s reaction to the tyrannical threat implicit in the assumed superiority of the rational part of the divided self – which an organic metaphor extends from the individual to the entire society – corresponded, says Simhony, to a rejection *tout court* of the idea that freedom could be related to the psychic instances at play in the complexity of the self. In other words, for Berlin, and more in general for the liberal subscribers to negative freedom, “the person – the complex set of functioning capacities and the forces that condition them – is not to be counted in the calculation of the freedom of [the] agent,”<sup>103</sup> in that calculation in fact, the person or the self is not a variable, like in MacCullam’s “x”, but is instead “a constant, so to speak.”<sup>104</sup>

Castoriadis’ notion of autonomy and Arendt’s idea of freedom diverge from this idea of autonomy that concerned Berlin. In the first place, Castoriadis is as aware as Berlin of the tyrannical element implicit in the assumed superiority of the rational instances, and – just like Arendt – he is “clearly and forcefully”<sup>105</sup> critical of the idea of freedom as sovereignty, the idea of freedom as the consciousness’s rule over the unconscious “which ha[d] been the programme proposed by philosophical reflection on the individual for the past 25 centuries.”<sup>106</sup> Unlike Berlin, however, Castoriadis understands autonomy not as the absolute rule of reason over the

---

<sup>100</sup> Swift, p. 111.

<sup>101</sup> Avital Simhony, ‘Berlin and Bosanquet: True Self and Positive Freedom’, *European Journal of Political Theory*, 15.1 (2016), 3–21 (p. 4).

<sup>102</sup> Simhony, p. 4.

<sup>103</sup> John Christman, ‘Liberalism and Individual Positive Freedom’, *Ethics*, 101.2 (1991), 343–59 (p. 343).

<sup>104</sup> Christman, p. 343.

<sup>105</sup> Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 107.

<sup>106</sup> Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 102.

life of the psyche, but as what he calls “the establishment of another relation between the discourse of the Other and the subject’s discourse”<sup>107</sup> – the “discourse of the Other” being his Lacanian way to refer to the unconscious elements of mind’s life. Freedom as beginning, then, is not the total absorption of the unconscious under the “inward domain of consciousness,”<sup>108</sup> nor “the total elimination of the discourse of the Other unrecognised as such,”<sup>109</sup> in fact:

How can we conceive of a subject that would have entirely ‘absorbed’ the imaginative function, how could we dry up this spring in the depths of ourselves from which flow both alienating phantasies and free creation truer than truth, unreal deliria and surreal poems, this *eternally new beginning* and ground of all things, without which nothing would have a ground, how can we eliminate what is at the base of, or in any case what is inextricably bound up with what makes us human beings – our symbolic function, which presupposes our capacity to see and to think in a thing something that is not?<sup>110</sup>

It is in such “profound modification of the activity-passivity mix,”<sup>111</sup> in the establishment of another relation (other than tyrannical, other than hierarchical, other than pre-established, other than permanent) “between lucidity and the function of the imaginary”, that lays the possibility of the new and with it the possibility – as we shall see later in this thesis – of a generative relation to truth.

Moreover, both Castoriadis and Arendt – although the former more explicitly and less controversially than the latter – establish an indissoluble continuity between the internal-reflective and the external-collective experiences of freedom. As Straume points out, Castoriadis “refut[es] the characteristically liberal assumption that individual and collective concerns must be ‘balanced’ or ‘weighted.’”<sup>112</sup> Indeed, the idea of autonomy Castoriadis defends “individual-based independence from others [...]: autonomy is always individual and collective; it cannot be practiced by individuals unless it is collectively instituted, which means that there is a collective awareness that society posits and creates its own laws.”<sup>113</sup> In other words, what Castoriadis calls “the project of autonomy” is the project aiming “at bringing light to society’s instituting power and at rendering it explicit in reflection [...].”<sup>114</sup> As we saw in the previous section, Arendt is less clear on the relation between inner and political freedom and probably, so suggests Young-Bruehl, had her theory of judgment been written, the practical connection between the two would have been clearer. “Conceptually”, however, “it is obvious what

---

<sup>107</sup> Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 104.

<sup>108</sup> This a phrase Arendt borrows from Mill and uses recurrently throughout her discussions of freedom, e.g. in her Arendt, ‘What Is Freedom’, p. 147.

<sup>109</sup> Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 104.

<sup>110</sup> Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 104. Emphasis mine.

<sup>111</sup> Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 104.

<sup>112</sup> Ingerid S. Straume, ‘Democracy’, in *Cornelius Castoriadis: Key Concepts*, by Suzi Adams (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 194.

<sup>113</sup> Straume, ‘A Common World?’, p. 370.

<sup>114</sup> Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, p. 174.

[Arendt's] two freedoms have in common: spontaneity and plurality [...]."<sup>115</sup> Indeed, the presence of the other *in* me – which both Castoriadis' and Arendt's theories of the self characteristically emphasise – is a constant reminder of the irreducibly plural dimension of any experience of freedom, and therefore of the irreducible political element any experience of freedom entails. Although making an example in this case can only partially contribute to explicate the meaning of freedom as beginning (such is the relevance of “real” reality and “real” imagination to it) we could say that to be free on this account, our Mr Gambler, for instance, would have to obey a law that is his own inasmuch as it is the result of the spontaneous negotiation between the plurality of his mental instances: he might gamble once a month or within a cost ceiling, or accompanied by a friend, and do so until other circumstances arise that allow a new compromise. Also when understood in this second sense then, as autonomy, the classic category of positive liberty still fails to capture the specificity of freedom as beginning.

The third and last way in which Swift suggests Berlin's positive liberty can be understood is in the republican sense of political participation. This understanding does indeed intersect our conception of freedom as beginning, but it fails nonetheless to exhaust its meaning. Holding a view of freedom as political participation means believing that in one way or another true freedom is achieved through “being involved in making the laws under which one lives.”<sup>116</sup> Swift's summary suggests that there are at least three ways in which this statement is understood. One sees political participation as essential for a good life and therefore freedom as “self-realization through politics”; another, points instead at the idea of freedom as non-domination and understands participation as “living under laws you've made for yourself”; the last one regards participation not as a means to achieve freedom but as the most effective means to ensure its protection.

In this last sense, participation is not intrinsic to freedom but instrumental, and freedom itself is nothing more than the formal freedom from external constraints discussed above – something that freedom as beginning, we have seen, is certainly not. The first two understandings of freedom as political participation, instead, overlap with the idea of autonomy: autonomy as the realisation of a collective higher self, and autonomy in the more literal sense of self-rule – as the opposite of heteronomy, the rule of the other. We have already seen, though, how such ideas of autonomy differ from our conception of freedom. Whereas, then, in many empirical instances freedom as beginning and positive freedom as political participation may overlap and realize in practice the coincidence of freedom and politics so

---

<sup>115</sup> Young-Bruehl, p. 302.

<sup>116</sup> Swift, p. 115.

crucial in our discourse, the conceptual emphasis on freedom's role in bringing the new about, in "restart[ing] time within an inexorable time continuum" and establishing another relationship "between the present and the history which made the individual such as it is"<sup>117</sup> that is distinctive of our conception still remains unmatched. Although freedom as beginning may involve political participation, it should not be understood as coinciding with it and for this reason this last meaning of positive liberty too fails to fully encompass the meaning of freedom as beginning.

If, as I have suggested, this idea cannot be adequately understood under the classic categories of negative and positive liberty, it can instead be traced back to what a recent debate in sociology has termed *generative freedom*. Chapter III will engage in a more detailed discussion of the notion of generativity, conceptualizing it specifically as a virtue of truth: the virtue to turn what one knows to be true into something politically significant. Here instead we shall limit the discussion to the more general meaning generativity acquires in the context of contemporary discourses and practices of social innovation. Mauro Magatti refers indeed to the trait such practices of innovation have in common as "social generativity".<sup>118</sup> Magatti's idea, which "emerges within the context of a critical reading of contemporary capitalism and consumeristic culture,"<sup>119</sup> is that rebalancing the excess of consumerism requires the "search for an anthropological characteristic that is comparable, in its depth and breath, to consumption."<sup>120</sup> Like consumption, generativity is a core element of the human material and psychological experience. It is indeed in the field of developmental psychology, and particularly in the "ground-breaking" work of Erik Erikson<sup>121</sup> that we find "[t]he *locus classicus* of the notion of generativity."<sup>122</sup> Here generativity is first and foremost a way of "giving forth,"<sup>123</sup> "the desire to invest one's substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self."<sup>124</sup> Such a desire corresponds to a specific stage in life (the seventh of Erikson's nine),<sup>125</sup> constituting a crucial step in one's process of individuation and actually a defining feature of adulthood.

Magatti's argument is that "the consumeristic culture has been effective in equating *individuation* – the long-term and always uncertain process of personal development – with *individualization*,

---

<sup>117</sup> Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, p. 165.

<sup>118</sup> Mauro Magatti, *Social Generativity: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2017).

<sup>119</sup> Magatti, p. 1.

<sup>120</sup> Magatti, p. 2.

<sup>121</sup> E. H. Erikson, *Childhood And Society* (London: Vintage, 1995).

<sup>122</sup> Nancy Snow, 'Generativity and Flourishing', *Journal of Moral Education*, 44.3 (2015), 263–77 (p. 264).

<sup>123</sup> Snow, 'Generativity and Flourishing', p. 264.

<sup>124</sup> Janet Husband and others, 'Review of "Outliving the Self" by John Kotre', *Library Journal*, 110.5 (1985), 63.

<sup>125</sup> It was Erik Erikson's wife Joan who, in writing the extended version of "The Life Cycle Completed", added a ninth stage to the previous eight. Erik H. Erikson and Joan M. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, Extended version (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998).

a social condition that seeks to maximize individual liberty,”<sup>126</sup> obscuring altogether, in so doing, the specific nuance generativity could bring to conceptions of freedom. This is not the place to engage with the particular critique of consumerism in the context of which the idea of generative freedom is advanced. What is relevant for us is that generative freedom, the freedom that leads individuals to perform “generative social actions” is distinctive in that it crucially “entails the decision and responsibility to bring something new into the world [...]”<sup>127</sup> This concern for the new is precisely what Arendt’s and Castoriadis’ views of freedom have in common and what both liberal and republican conceptions of positive liberty instead lack or at least do not emphasise as distinctive.

For Arendt and Castoriadis, it is in dwelling and acting in the gap between what is given and what is to give, in the gap between the past and the future, where we can attain the awareness that “human action is always conditioned but by no means determined,”<sup>128</sup> that freedom is realized as a demonstrable fact, as social-historically effective freedom. It is in this sense that such freedom is *generative*: in the sense that like any generation it is the act of making with what is given something entirely new, the act of extracting indeterminacy out of given conditions, of turning the past into the future. Moreover, besides the act of “giving birth”, the process of generation also includes taking care of what has been generated, i.e. “protecting, nurturing and improving the world for the benefit of present and future generations.”<sup>129</sup> In this sense, “choosing is but the first (and not even the most important) step of a more complex process that also involves creativity, affection, projection towards the future, engagement and activation.”<sup>130</sup> What Arendt called the “awesome responsibility” of freedom, then, is implicit in the bond the generative relation establishes between the effectively free, autonomous individual and “the new” they bring about, a bond which, however, “far from imposing an oppressive constraint, empowers the subject by fully connecting him or her to the surrounding reality and its challenges.”<sup>131</sup>

A true story comes to my mind, which could count as a genuine example of generative freedom.<sup>132</sup> It’s the story of a group of five hardcore football fans whose team had disappointed them following a football betting scandal. In 2004, finding themselves with a dead-end passion, they decided to “end repetition and begin something new”: support the team ranked last in the

---

<sup>126</sup> Magatti, p. 2.

<sup>127</sup> Magatti, p. 13.

<sup>128</sup> Linda Zerilli, ‘Castoriadis, Arendt, and the Problem of the New’, *Constellations*, 9.4 (2002), 540–53 (p. 543).

<sup>129</sup> Magatti, p. 13.

<sup>130</sup> Magatti, p. 13.

<sup>131</sup> Magatti, p. 13.

<sup>132</sup> I am indebted to Miriam Curci, my cousin and often my partner in thinking, who first exposed me to this story and shared in this reflection.

lowest category, a team based in a disadvantaged area outside Florence. They began to travel out of town, every Sunday, to sit in a crumbling empty stadium and shout their support to their new team. Initially the players thought the fans were mocking them, but they would soon discover this wasn't the case. In fact, within few years something happened that those boys could not have predicted. The supporters grew in number day after day and decided to buy what is today the C. S. Lebowski Football Club, a self-funded team that climbs the league tables, known in the whole country, and which bears witness to another, truer way to support and play football, and that most importantly became a social transformation pole for the whole area. Curiously enough, in a picture featuring in an article in *The Guardian*<sup>133</sup> a banner held by the fans during a match is shown and there one reads: *the memory of the past, the tenacity of the present, the charge to the future.*

## Conclusion

The theory of truth in politics that will be outlined in the following chapters of this thesis is situated within the trilateral conceptual context that this chapter sought to introduce. Any view of the relation between truth and politics, so goes the argument I have put forward, should be read in a broader conceptual context which always inextricably links truth and politics to a third notion, that of freedom. I posited that the relation between truth, freedom and politics is best grasped in light of the indissoluble continuity and mutual influence between the internal-reflective and the external-collective dimensions of the human experience.

Building on Arendt, I have argued indeed that truth, freedom and politics can be understood as the ideal “projects”, respectively, of the three fundamental mental activities of Thinking, Willing and Judging. As such, the discursive and material outputs in the external-collective realm of the projects of truth, freedom and politics are mutually and synchronically linked to the interplay of activities of mind. As we shall see, by sketching this view of the continuity and mutual influence between the reflective and the collective realms, this chapter also provides the ground for the argument that Chapter V will put forward, one concerning the truth-related ethical transformation induced in the representative by the experience of representing others.

Finally, the chapter dwelled on the specific conception of freedom that informs the view of truth in politics defended in this thesis and which I found best expressed in Arendt's and Castoriadis' work – what I have called “freedom as beginning”. Due to the peculiar emphasis

---

<sup>133</sup> Chloe Beresford, ‘How CS Lebowski Fans Set up Their Own Football Club ... and Honoured The Dude’, *The Guardian*, 2015.



this conception places on “genesis” and “the new”, I have argued that freedom as beginning escapes Berlin’s classic categories of negative and positive liberty and suggested that its distinctiveness is instead better captured by a third, alternative category, that of generative freedom.

## II. Truth, Contingency, Future

Chapter I presented the broader conceptual context within which the reflection on truth and politics this thesis proposes is situated. I argued that given the inextricable entanglement of truth, freedom and politics, any particular claim concerning the relation between truth and politics always necessarily involves a corresponding claim concerning freedom. Having specified that informing the thesis' overarching reflection is a generative conception of freedom, one which foregrounds the "faculty of beginning", in this second chapter I turn to the core of my preoccupation: the problem of truth in its relationship to politics. The argument I introduce here is that in order to expose the full spectrum of politically relevant truth-related activities – something Chapter III will discuss in detail – one needs to refer to an *extended notion of factual truth*: a notion which stretches the temporal scope of conventional understandings of factual truth by adding to the common past-regarding concern for the facts that have already happened a future-regarding concern for the facts yet to come.

As anticipated in the previous chapter, the ideas I am setting out to expose here rest on the assumption that truth in politics matters less for what it *is* than it matters for what it *does* or, better, for what it *makes* people *do*.<sup>134</sup> From a political perspective, this means, truth is never "an object to be contemplated disinterestedly"<sup>135</sup> but always something that is of concern to the extent that it appeals to freedom and informs action. For instance, whether or not men are "truly" born equal counts less for the epistemic soundness of statements about men's equality at birth than it counts for the ethical consequences of its signification, for its meaning, that is, and its influence on my behaviour towards myself and others. This assumption has a first convenient implication in that it allows us to let go of the hefty and certainly fascinating body of knowledge concerned with the ontology of truth, with its nature (or with its lack of nature), with its relationship to *being* and with all sorts of other metaphysical questions. We will not delve, thus, into the disputes over "nominal" definitions – which tell about the meaning of the

---

<sup>134</sup> Antonella Besussi, 'Introduzione', in *Filosofia, verità e politica. Questioni classiche*, ed. by Antonella Besussi (Roma, Italy: Carocci, 2015), p. 12.

<sup>135</sup> Besussi, 'Introduzione', p. 12. Translation mine.

word “truth” – or “real” definitions of truth – which tell about the essence of the *thing* “truth”<sup>136</sup> – nor will we discuss competing neo-classical theories of truth and their contemporary evolutions, which Burgess and Burgess synthetically and respectively indicate as the “traditional three-cornered realist-idealist-pragmatist debate” and the contemporary “three-cornered realist-antirealist-deflationist one.”<sup>137</sup>

An exception, however, will be made with reference to certain pieces of pragmatist literature. Such exception is justified by the fact that, while uninterested and unequipped for judging the controversy on its merits, I agree with Richard Rorty when he insists that a theory of truth is not what pragmatism aims at providing:

[T]he pragmatist does not have a theory of truth [...]. As a partisan of solidarity, his account of the value of cooperative human inquiry has only an ethical base, not an epistemological or metaphysical one.<sup>138</sup>

My point of departure (that truth matters for what it does) shares indeed with pragmatist views of truth the inclination to foreground the ethical aspect of the matter over the epistemological and metaphysical ones. Such an inclination, besides, is not exclusively pragmatist but common also to thinkers as diverse as Bernard Williams, Hanna Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Ronald Dworkin.<sup>139</sup> It seems perfectly possible, thus, to appeal to certain pragmatist intuitions without running too high a risk to subscribe to its alleged theory of truth or to slip into the metaphysical discussion we are avoiding.

---

<sup>136</sup> Alexis Burgess and John P. Burgess, *Truth*, Princeton Foundations of Contemporary Philosophy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 12.

<sup>137</sup> The reference here is respectively to the Correspondence, Coherence and Utility theories of truth. These emerged from the debate that took place among interpreters of the modern definition of truth – inherited from medieval Aristotelianism – according to which “truth is agreement between thought and object.” According to Burgess and Burgess, the three interpretations fundamentally diverged over the location of the objects of thought (respectively taken to be located in an external world, in the mind along with thought itself, or in the interaction between the two), and therefore also over the nature of the agreement between thought and its objects. Somewhat oversimplifying, we could then say that for realist or correspondence theorists a belief is true if it agrees with reality (or corresponds to it); for idealist or coherence theorists a belief is true if it agrees with other ideas (or coheres with them); for pragmatists or utility theorists a belief is true if it is in agreement with practice (or useful in it). Since the notions of reality, idea and practice evoke respectively the fields of metaphysics, epistemology and ethics, the three theories can be said to refer to truth in turn as to a metaphysical, epistemological or ethical notion. Burgess and Burgess, p. 12.

<sup>138</sup> Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 22.

<sup>139</sup> Besussi suggests that the various contemporary reflections elicited by the complexity of the relation between truth and politics can be broadly regarded as responding to either a strategy of dramatization or to a strategy of banalization of the concept of truth. In the first case, truth is understood as a “thick” concept, whose property of independence makes it unavailable for a “coherent systematization either in politics or in political theory”. In the second case, truth is understood instead as a “thin” concept which can acquire importance in politics and in political theory due to the fact that “its normative benefits are considered separable from the philosophy of truth that tends to dramatize its achievement.” Antonella Besussi, ‘Introduzione’, in *Verità e politica. Filosofie contemporanee*, ed. by Antonella Besussi (Roma: Carocci, 2013), p. 12. It is worth noticing that Besussi mentions Arendt among the subscribers to the dramatization strategy, while regarding Williams, Foucault and Dworkin as “banalizers”. Contra Besussi, and in line with a reading of Arendt’s theory of truth that sees her ultimately defending the legitimate place of truth in politics, I believe Arendt firmly belongs with thinkers of the second category.

The starting point for our discussion, then, is not the conflict between divergent theories of truth but another crowded debate elicited by this concept – that which opposes, to put it crudely, universalist and pluralist views of truth’s role in democracy. For ground-clearing purposes, the first of the following three sections will survey some of the most recent expressions of this classic controversy, concluding that this thesis’ approach to the problem of truth in politics foregrounds questions that are ultimately independent from the matter at stake in these debates. A second section focuses therefore on the difference between rational and factual truth and on the reasons why the contingent character of the latter makes it best suited to our investigation. Finally, the third and last section dwell on what I have been calling an “extended notion of factual truth” and on its ‘future-regarding end’ in particular. In doing so it expounds the specificity of what such future-orientation adds to traditional ways of looking at truth in politics, preparing the ground for the exploration of the truth-related activities and virtues demanded of democratic citizens which will be the focus of Chapter III.

## Truth in Democracy

I have said that answering the question “what is truth?” is not the aim of this discussion. This section, nonetheless, touches upon a matter that is somewhat related to this question of the nature of truth. The problem we shall briefly overview touches upon the ways in which certain understandings of the nature of truth influence truth-related political behaviour, or how – picking up again our assumption – certain perceived attributes of the truth impact on what truth makes people do. The fundamental controversy at stake here is well-known and it may be framed in the following terms. On the one hand, there is the view that understandings of truth that attribute to it characters of absoluteness, objectivity and universality have beneficial effects on the public sphere, since they equip it with an external normative standard that can claim independent authority. As Besussi explains, “intertwining in different ways with various values characterizing modern civil and political life (freedom, tolerance, utility, trust),” what in this case is *the* truth “acquires practical value inasmuch as it offers epistemic and moral answers to a number of fundamental problems: the insufficiency of criteria of political legitimacy depending exclusively on choice and consensus[,]the need to judge if and when individual interests are right or wrong[,]”<sup>140</sup> the necessity “to describe those authoritative forms of persuasion that are legitimated under the title of ‘education’”<sup>141</sup> and – more generally – the

---

<sup>140</sup> Besussi, ‘Introduzione’, p. 13. Translation mine.

<sup>141</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 147.

problem of assessing the quality of the outcomes of different decisional procedures. Referring back to our assumption we could say that from this perspective it is precisely by virtue of its perceived objectivity that truth makes people do things that are beneficial for the health of democracy.

On the other hand, there is the view that *the* truth always “carries within itself an element of coercion”<sup>142</sup> and that “every claim in the sphere of human affairs to an absolute truth, whose validity needs no support from the side of opinion, strikes at the very roots all politics and all governments.”<sup>143</sup> From this perspective, referring to truth as an independent standard for the assessment of competing validity claims produces “a field of tensions within the logic of democracy”<sup>144</sup> in quite obvious ways. Such “despotic character of truth” indeed undermines criteria of democratic legitimacy: as a standard of political legitimacy which has “its source outside the political realm” truth would be “independent of the wishes and desires of the citizens as is the will of the worst tyrant.”<sup>145</sup> Moreover, *the* truth might be thought to be incompatible with the very idea of democratic equality, which on popular accounts maintains that all members of a democratic polity are equally entitled to have their opinions influence political outcomes. From this perspective, then, unless reconceived as a relative standard, dependent, that it, on the situatedness of a plurality of subjective standpoints, truth is not only detrimental to democracy, but altogether incompatible with it: what *the* truth makes people do defies the very principles of democracy.

The question I briefly outlined can be also traced back to “the familiar dilemma [...] of the reconciliation of universalism and pluralism.”<sup>146</sup> The decades-long, cross-tradition debate that developed around this dilemma, indeed, can be said to take place between two stereotypical polarized attitudes which broadly correspond to the two perspectives introduced above. On one side there is an attitude, typically post-modern, to celebrate the impossibility of grounding objectivity beyond socially constructed practices of truth-acquisition, one that gives way to the wildly relativistic view that all opinions – including today’s profusion of “alternative facts” – could claim equal legitimacy. On the other side an opposing attitude, defensive of a notion “of objectivity [...] based on an ideal of reason that requires the elimination of “any admixture of subjectivity” [and] that can only be hostile to plurality.”<sup>147</sup> A rendition of this controversy which recently gained significant currency in contemporary democratic theory is the one revived by

---

<sup>142</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 239.

<sup>143</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 233.

<sup>144</sup> Besussi, ‘Introduzione’, p. 14. Translation mine.

<sup>145</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 240.

<sup>146</sup> Norval, p. 59.

<sup>147</sup> Linda Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, p. 5.

what Hélène Landemore and others term the “epistemic turn”<sup>148</sup> in deliberative democracy, namely by the growing effort, among democratic theorists, to defend the plausibility of an epistemic interpretation of democracy.

Epistemic democracy is a rich and varied theoretical tradition, which crosses both aggregative and deliberative accounts of democracy as well as different versions of deliberative proceduralism. As Fabienne Peter writes, “[v]ery generally”, what is distinctive of the epistemic interpretation of democracy, across its various strands, is that here “democratic decision-making processes are valued at least in part for their knowledge-producing potential and defended in relation to this.”<sup>149</sup> Similar concerns for the truth-content of political outcomes are by no means recent: it is since Plato, after all, that “‘most lovers of truth [have found elections] rather hard to stomach’ [...] and have tried to envisage decision-making procedures that can approximate rationality and reconcile democracy with goals superior to the mere achieving of a political victory, whatever the competing opinions might be, sound or biased.”<sup>150</sup>

Indeed, “the fact of pluralism”, that is the acknowledged coexistence in our societies of an irreducible plurality of conflicting comprehensive doctrines, generated a variety of responses among deliberative democrats, ranging from Berlin’s strong rejection of value monism to the more moderate “Rawlsian epistemological position of agnosticism with respect to the truth-value of moral and political claims.”<sup>151</sup> Rawls’s view, in particular, widely informed the mainstream deliberative models of democratic legitimacy according to which, in justifying political views, participants in the deliberative process should abstain from referring to the truth or correctness of their justifications. On this view democracy demands precisely that opinions and arguments be exchanged refraining from appeals to the concept of truth, which is seen as “unnecessarily divisive and intolerant.”<sup>152</sup>

Indeed, as Nadia Urbinati points out, “the criterion of competence is intrinsically inegalitarian” and therefore “once *episteme* enters the domain of politics” so does the possibility that political equality gets questioned.<sup>153</sup> There are nonetheless obvious objections that could be moved against the exclusion of criteria of an epistemic nature from the domain of politics. In a different context, for instance, commenting on Arendt’s claim that “to specify a cognitive foundation

---

<sup>148</sup> Hélène Landemore, ‘Beyond the Fact of Disagreement? The Epistemic Turn in Deliberative Democracy’, *Social Epistemology*, 31.3 (2017), 277–295; Nadia Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth, and the People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>149</sup> Fabienne Peter, *Democratic Legitimacy*, 59 (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 110.

<sup>150</sup> Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured*, p. 85.

<sup>151</sup> Landemore, ‘Beyond the Fact of Disagreement?’, p. 277.

<sup>152</sup> Landemore, ‘Beyond the Fact of Disagreement?’, p. 277.

<sup>153</sup> Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured*, p. 83.

for political beliefs (which Habermas seems to do) would compromise the integrity of opinion”. Ronald Beiner reminds us of the practical limits of similar views observing that it stays unclear “why we should be expected to take seriously opinions that assert no claims to truth (or do not at least claim *more* truth than is claimed by available alternative opinions).”<sup>154</sup> Landemore too, similarly, sees the troublesome consequences that a persistent use of epistemic abstinence as a “method of avoidance” of the truth would induce. Ultimately, in her view, the epistemic turn that various branches of deliberative democracy undertook<sup>155</sup> is “taking the field beyond the fact of disagreement, not by denying its reality, but by showing that the fact of disagreement does not in itself defeat the plausibility of political objectivism and cognitivism.”<sup>156</sup> And thus, downsizing the illiberal by-products of the epistemic interpretation of democracy, she concludes that yes, “we have to welcome in the ‘truth’ again.”<sup>157</sup>

Like Urbinati, who ultimately places the epistemic turn among the “disfigurements of democracy” that she describes, I believe that “democracy is a government by means of opinions, not truth.”<sup>158</sup> Or, to use Arendt’s words, I am persuaded that “opinion and not truth belongs among the indispensable prerequisites of all power.”<sup>159</sup> This is because, as Arendt explains, in the shift from truth to opinion lays the shift “from man in the singular to men in the plural, [...] from a domain where, Madison says, nothing counts except the “solid reasoning” of one mind to a realm where the “strength of opinion” is determined by the individual’s reliance upon “the number which he supposes to have entertained the same opinions.””<sup>160</sup><sup>161</sup> And yet, Landemore’s preoccupation about the sustainability of a public sphere in which appeals to truth must be avoided (and in which, thus, it may occur that explicit appeals to truth may be regarded as equally vicious behaviours as explicit appeals to non-truth) cannot

---

<sup>154</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, ed. by Ronald Beiner (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), p. 137.

<sup>155</sup> Landemore lists these as follows: “First, the Habermasian branch of the deliberative democracy literature has become more and more explicit about its epistemic dimension over the years (see Habermas 2006; Jörke 2010; Buchstein and Jörke 2012; and Jörke in Fischer and Gottweis 2012, 277; see also Chambers 2017). Second, Rawlsians themselves have started questioning the necessity for political liberalism of doing without the truth, any kind of truth, at all (e.g. Raz 1990; Estlund 1998; Cohen 2009). Other authors have similarly suggested that a complete justification for democracy, perhaps even a full legitimation of its authority, could not do without epistemic elements (Anderson 2006; Marti 2006; Landemore 2013) and a growing number of authors are defending the knowledge-aggregating and truth-tracking properties of various democratic procedures, or even of democracy as a cognitive system as a whole.” Landemore, ‘Beyond the Fact of Disagreement?’, p. 278.

<sup>156</sup> Landemore, ‘Beyond the Fact of Disagreement?’, p. 290.

<sup>157</sup> Landemore, ‘Beyond the Fact of Disagreement?’, p. 290.

<sup>158</sup> Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured*, p. 87.

<sup>159</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 233.

<sup>160</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 235.

<sup>161</sup> Recalling the question discussed in the previous chapter, we could say that the shift from rational truth to opinion, from man in the singular to men in plural, corresponds to a shift in the ideal distribution of mental labour: from an arrangement which privileged the interplay of Will and Reason, governed by the latter, to one which now emphasises also the interplay (or the diarchy, as Urbinati calls it) of Will and Judgment. A shift from the singularity of the activity of Willing to the plurality of Judging. Historically, as Chapter IV will briefly tell, such shift coincides. For Urbinati with the birth of representative democracy.

be dismissed without a feeling of culpable complicity – for instance, in the contemporary collective performance of opacity that early observers have called “post-truth politics.”

As relevant as it is to the broad theme of truth in politics, this is not a controversy in which this thesis intends to intervene. All I would say is that although I remain strongly concerned for the anti-egalitarian risk that comes with judging democratic procedures against their truth-tracking properties, I find it difficult to share Urbinati’s conclusion that “politics has nothing to do with the achievement of truth and should not be judged from this perspective.”<sup>162</sup> In fact, the question we look at, which asks what truth requires of citizens and their representatives in a democracy, does regard politics as having “something to do” with the achievement of truth. As I will suggest in the following sections, however, the answer to such a question can be sought without partaking in the important controversy just outlined. The achievement of truth, indeed, need not be a mere matter of truth-tracking. It will be argued that when truth is considered in its factual dimension, its achievement is also as much a matter of “truth-making”, something that leads to the normative implication that democratic procedures should be also judged against their ability to lead to the collective making of the facts to come.

There is indeed another distinction – transversal to the distinction between objective and subjective features of the truth which stands at the core of the debates we overviewed – focusing on which we can think of truth in politics in relation to a temporal region rarely evoked in truth-related matters, namely the future. This is the distinction between necessity and contingency, a distinction which informs in turn the difference between rational and factual notions of truth. It is by dwelling on what is at stake in such a difference that we are invited to explore the tie between truth and politics in relation to the future. It is from such a future-oriented perspective that I firmly reject the idea of a political realm that has nothing to do with the achievement of truth and claim that the achievement of truth through action – that is its making by men acting together – is, in fact, pretty much all that politics has to do with.

## Rational and Factual Truth

Hanna Arendt’s argument in *Truth and Politics*, possibly her most cited essay recently, builds on the crucial difference between two distinct “species” of truth: “the common species” of *rational truth* which subtends “mathematical, scientific and philosophical truths”<sup>163</sup> on the one hand, and the species of *factual truth* on the other. For Arendt it is the latter that one should be concerned

---

<sup>162</sup> Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured*, p. 87.

<sup>163</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 231.



with in approaching the problem of truth in politics. Since the kind of things that truth makes us do and the virtues that should be displayed in doing them can vary importantly whether we refer to one species or the other, the distinction between the two is clearly of considerable relevance to our discussion.

This section tries to justify why, like Arendt's, our analysis will privilege the notion of factual truth. Before entering in the thick of the discussion, however, I will clarify an important lexical aspect. By her own admission, Arendt uses the distinction between rational and factual truth, which she takes to be a legacy of the modern age, "for the sake of convenience [and] without discussing its intrinsic legitimacy."<sup>164</sup> While it is not my intention here to undertake the discussion Arendt purposely avoids, it is necessary nonetheless to explicate the particular way in which she understands this distinction, and which is in turn the view my analysis will adopt. Arendt's understanding of the difference between rational and factual truth, indeed, does not align perfectly with the common distinction made, for instance, by William James and many other empiricists between "relations among ideas" and "matters of fact."<sup>165</sup> The empiricist view of these two "sphere[s] where true and false beliefs obtain,"<sup>166</sup> indeed, emphasises the difference between truths that can be achieved by reasoning alone, independently of experience, and truths that are discovered instead through experience. The truths of logics, such as mathematical and philosophical truths, are of the first sort, while the truths of science, which are justified by experimentation (that is by "staged experience") belong instead to the second category. For Arendt, on the contrary, logical and scientific truths both belong to the species of rational truth. Admittedly, Arendt is not especially consistent on this point, in fact we read her sometimes distinguishing factual from "scientific *or* rational truths."<sup>167</sup> Such inconsistency, though, is due to the fact that Arendt's most urgent need is not so much to work out the exact extent of what should count as rational truth but rather to isolate a very specific meaning of the word "fact", one which only partially matches the use we make of it in everyday talk.

Currently, as the relevant entry in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) clearly shows, the most common use of the word "fact" refers indeed to the second category of meanings the OED signals: "senses related primarily to truth".<sup>168</sup> Here, by "fact" (often in the plural) one can variously mean "items of information used or usable as *evidence*", "truth attested by direct *observation* or authentic *testimony*", "a thing *certainly known* to be a real occurrence", a "datum of

---

<sup>164</sup> Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', p. 231.

<sup>165</sup> William James, 'Pragmatism's Conception of Truth', *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, 4.6 (1907), 141–55 (p. 145).

<sup>166</sup> James, p. 145.

<sup>167</sup> Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', p. 249.

<sup>168</sup> 'Fact, n., Int., and Adv.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://0.www.oed.com/view/Entry/67478>>.

*experience*, as distinguished from the conclusions that may be based on it.” Let us notice how all these meanings hold that a thing that occurs is not a fact unless it occurs before the eyes of a witness: a fact is a thing that is *seen to occur*. In this sense facts can be said to be “established”, events that, so to speak, have become the object of accomplished or successful cognition. This notion of fact, it goes without saying, immediately appeals to questions of an epistemic nature, such as the standards of knowledge by which the cognition at stake can be judged to be successful. And this, broadly speaking, is the meaning of the word that the empiricist distinction refers to: unlike rational truth, “matters of fact” are precisely truths that in order to be cognized demand to be witnessed with the senses as material phenomena of the real world, and that therefore reason alone cannot grasp.

In Arendt’s notion of factual truth, instead, what is distinctive of a fact is not its being the object of accomplished cognition. For her, what is most peculiar about a fact has more to do with what the OED reports as the first category of uses of the word: “senses relating primarily to action.” Closer to the well-known etymology of the word (which descends from the Latin *factum*, past participle of the verb *facere*: to do, to make), the uses belonging to this category include meanings of “fact” as “an action, a deed, a course of conduct”, “an effect, a result”, “the act or process of making, doing or performing something”. Indeed, although rare, where not obsolete, such uses match rather accurately Arendt’s understanding of facts as “the invariable outcome of men living and acting together.”<sup>169</sup> In this sense, what makes a thing a “fact” is not primarily whether or not such thing is the object of certain knowledge but whether or not it is the result of action. This explains, at least partially, Arendt’s choice, otherwise admittedly odd, to exclude scientific truths from the category of factual truths. Indeed, while the circumstance of their discovery is a fact – the result of the action, say, of measuring the speed of a weight falling from a tower – their referent is not the contingent result of an action but a necessary principle, a natural law governing it.

One may legitimately ask, here, where would social sciences belong in Arendt’s scheme. To pursue this and other questions of this sort, however, would require an investigation that goes far beyond the scope of this thesis, with necessary diversions in the history and philosophy of science and in the philosophy of history. It would require engaging with those traditions which, within these bodies of knowledge, casts doubts on the hermetic isolation of scientific truth from a broader set of societal norms, values and practices, such as the continental tradition which runs through Gaston Bachelard, George Canguilhem and Michel Foucault, or what could

---

<sup>169</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 231.

be (crudely) called the corresponding Anglo-American debate running through Karl Popper's, Imre Lakatos', Paul Feyerabend's and Thomas Kuhn's works. The extent to which rational and scientific truth overlap, as these debates clearly reveal, is a far more complex question than we can address here, and so is the related question of the extent to which rational and factual truth can be thought of as totally distinct. And yet, there is an intuitive validity to our distinction which survives the doubts that can be raised around it, and, despite the many questions that remain unsolved, it reveals an important analytical tool for the purpose of our investigation. More shall be said on this issue in the following pages, all that matters for the time being is that the reader be warned against the confusion that Arendt's peculiar understanding of what counts as a "fact" may cause.

Having clarified the terms of the distinction at stake, we can turn to the ways in which this manifests itself. There are three ways in which, Arendt suggests, rational and factual truth are different. The first of these is, I may say, a difference in strength: it concerns the uneven resistance that the two kinds of truth oppose to "the onslaught of power". As the totalitarian experience had dramatically shown, the truth of facts easily and irremediably succumbs to a strong enough will to erase it. "Facts and events" – Arendt observed – "are infinitely more fragile things than axioms, discoveries, theories – even the most wildly speculative ones – produced by the human mind; they occur in the ever-changing affairs of men [...] once they are lost no rational effort will ever bring them back."<sup>170</sup> Although not for the sake of pointing out this distinction,<sup>171</sup> in his *1984* George Orwell gives us an unforgettable picture of the different effort that is required of power to subjugate the two species of truth. Winston Smith's job at the Ministry of Truth consists in the meticulous, regular, material destruction of any trace of the facts that did not please The Party. Orwell describes the detail of the simplicity of Winston's task, an effortless and perfectly efficient procedure the image of which testifies vividly to power's capacity of erasing forever the knowledge of inconvenient facts and, thus, to the fragility, precisely, of factual truth. Forcing into Winston's mind the conviction that  $2+2=5$ , instead, is not as easy a job. In fact, it takes O'Brien days of one-to-one, personally performed physical and psychological torture to bend Winston's belief, and what The Party eventually achieves by those means is not an irremediable loss of the knowledge of truth itself, but the annihilation of Winston Smith's freedom to believe what he knows. This superior fragility of

---

<sup>170</sup> Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', p. 231.

<sup>171</sup> In fact, Orwell often mentions instances of both kinds without ever pointing out their difference: "If the Leader says of such and such an event, "It never happened" – well, it never happened. If he says that two and two are five – well, two and two are five." In George Orwell and George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia: And, Looking Back on the Spanish War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).

factual truth – I agree with Arendt – constitutes a first good reason to consider its place in the political realm a more proper, or at least more urgent concern than the place in it of rational truth.

The second way in which rational and factual truth differ brings us back to the etymological meaning of “fact” discussed above: factual truth, unlike rational truth, belongs to the realm of politics by virtue of its own fabric. We know, indeed, that “facts” for Arendt are always the result of human action, and inasmuch as they are – we have said – “the invariable outcome of men leaving and acting together” they are also themselves the “very texture of the political realm.”<sup>172</sup> On the other hand, because of their necessity, of their being neither dependent nor conditioned by action, rational truths instead belong resolutely outside the political because this, for Arendt, is by definition the realm of contingency and freedom. This second difference between factual and rational truth is thus a second reason for Arendt to claim that it is towards the former that one should turn one’s interest when puzzled by the relation of truth with politics, and this despite the occurrence that, as Plato’s myth of the cave clearly indicates, it was with respect to rational truth that “the conflict between truth and politics was first discovered and articulated.”<sup>173</sup> Indeed, because factual truth deals with questions of immediate political relevance, at stake in the relation between politics and this particular type of truth is more than “the perhaps inevitable tension between two ways of life within the framework of a common and commonly recognized reality [i.e. the way of life of the philosopher and that of the citizen]. *What is at stake here is this common and factual reality itself.*”<sup>174</sup> The suggestion then – something which is of crucial importance for us – is that we regard politics itself as the process through which facts are made: the process itself of the making of factual truth. It is when politics is understood in this way that the peculiarity of its relation to factual truth can be fully grasped.

We will be able to say more about this crucial question after considering the third and last difference between rational and factual truth explicitly mentioned in Arendt’s analysis. This – the least straightforward of the three – concerns the ways in which the two species of truth are, so says Arendt, “disobeyed”. The opposite of rational truth, Arendt tells us, is error or ignorance (in science) and illusion or opinion (in philosophy). I shall note that error, ignorance and opinion (in the Platonic sense) are all instances of failure, they all pertain to the fallibility of man’s rational faculties and their existence is always ultimately a reminder of the limits of our reason. To be clear, the epistemic strand in democratic theory we surveyed above is

---

<sup>172</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 231.

<sup>173</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 232.

<sup>174</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 237. Emphasis mine.

concerned with the problems that this kind of “disobedience” brings to democracy. The opposite of factual truth, instead, is not error but “deliberate falsehood”, pure mendacity, plain lie. Recalling what was said in the previous chapter concerning the life of the mind, we could say now that unlike error and ignorance, mendacity does not signal an objective shortcoming of reason, but a questionable act of the will, or at best an arguable malfunction in the joint effort of will and judgment in leading action. What the existence of lies bears witness to, then, is not the limit of our capacity to cognize but rather the extent of our capacity to act unconditionally. There is an “undeniable affinity”, observes Arendt, between “our capacity for action, for changing reality” and “this mysterious faculty of ours that enables us to say, “The sun is shining”, when it is raining cats and dogs”.<sup>175</sup> Arendt, in fact, takes our ability to “accomplish this little miracle” as the evidence that we are not as “thoroughly conditioned in our behaviour as some philosophies have wished us to be”. “[O]ur ability to lie – but not necessarily our ability to tell the truth – belongs among the few obvious, demonstrable data that confirm human freedom.”<sup>176</sup>

Now, it is obviously possible, and indeed not an infrequent occurrence, to err with respect to factual truth. What matters though is that the reverse, i.e. lying about rational truth, is instead not an option – so thinks Arendt. In his comment of a passage from Primo Levi’s *The Periodic Table*, Bernard Williams too puts his finger on this third declination of the difference between what we are calling rational and factual truth. Levi, Williams recalls, pointed out ““the new dignity and majesty” that the study of chemistry and physics had acquired [in the 30’s][as] an antidote to “the filth of fascism which polluted the sky,” because “they were clear and distinct and verifiable at every step, and not a tissue of lies and emptiness, like the radio and newspapers.””<sup>177</sup> For Williams, the point of such “majesty” lay not,

in the fact that natural science dealt with what was more, or less, than human, but in the fact that it embodied honesty in a peculiarly robust form. The answers were hidden, the virtues of truth were called upon all the time. So long as you were really doing science, you could not fudge the results: you had to get it right.<sup>178</sup>

Of course, it is not unheard of that scientists do sometimes fabricate results, that they technically lie. Williams admits indeed that “the spirit of much research” is a spirit often also made of desire for fame and prestige. Nonetheless, he adds, “to make a lot of the fact that scientists’ individual motives are more worldly than the Platonic myth suggested is significantly to miss the point. Their goal is fame and prestige in the scientific community itself, and that

---

<sup>175</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 250.

<sup>176</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 250.

<sup>177</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 144.

<sup>178</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 144.

will come from the recognition that they have done good science. [...] A desire for fame does not corrupt or undermine the search for truth, if what one wills to be famous for (if all goes well) is having found the truth”<sup>179</sup>

The intuition behind Arendt’s and Williams’ view that rational truth cannot be lied about is one I strongly share, but also one that is not easy justified. Admittedly, neither Arendt nor Williams seem particularly committed to provide such justification, and my ambition here is certainly not to fill a gap of this magnitude. I shall suggest nonetheless one way of looking at the matter which may support our intuition or at least further clarify what is at stake in it: observing it from the point of view of the potential consequences that lying about one or the other kind of truth may involve. These seem indeed to be different in an important way. We hinted at this above, when we mentioned the different degrees of resistance that rational and factual truth oppose to the onslaught of power and the superior fragility of the latter. The point I want to make here is that whereas, in the right circumstances, a lie concerning a piece of factual truth could succeed in its project of substituting the truth in a causal series of events (that is in the project of preventing the truth from causing its consequences by having falsehood, instead, do so), lying about a piece of rational truth has no chance to be successful in erasing the referent of that truth and its consequences for reality.

Were all the maths books ever written be lost, and the deliberately false statement that  $2+2=3$  made popular and believed all over the world, the content of two jars of two litres each would still not fit in a three litre bottle. If as a former political representative I lied, instead, about being the author of a given successful policy, and managed to have everybody believe me, I would probably then have enough credit to run for the role of mayor of Noci and maybe be elected, and despite the untruth which begun the series of events that led to my election I would find absolutely no trouble fitting into the mayor’s three-color sash. At that point, indeed, I would have inexorably succeeded in kneading falsehood, instead of truth, into the material fabric of reality. No part of our earthly reality, instead, will ever conform to the lie that  $2+2=3$ . It is in this sense, I believe, that we can understand and accept the claim that being a potential object of “successful” mendacity is an exclusive privilege of factual truth. Once again, in the contingency of factual truth lays its kinship to freedom and in turn, for the reasons Chapter I exposed, its “right to citizenship” in the realm of politics.

Before moving to the next section, where I will introduce a fourth difference between rational and factual truth, let me just briefly anticipate an argument that Chapter III will discuss at length

---

<sup>179</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 142.

but which concerns an issue that mendacity immediately calls into question: that of truthfulness. Arendt's view of truthfulness follows indeed precisely from the affinity just discussed between freedom and mendacity. Truthfulness, writes Arendt,

has never been counted among the political virtues, because it has little indeed to contribute to that change of the world and of circumstances which is among the most legitimate political activities. Only where a community has embarked upon organized lying on principle, and not only with respect to particulars, can truthfulness as such, unsupported by the distorting forces of power and interest, become a political factor of the first order. Where everybody lies about everything of importance, the truth-teller, whether he knows it or not, has begun to act; he, too, has engaged himself in political business, for, in the unlikely event that he survives, he has made a start toward changing the world.<sup>180</sup>

As we shall see, a central element of this thesis' overarching argument rests on the idea that truthfulness is more than what Arendt seems to mean by it in this extract: a matter of mere sincerity, synonymous with veridiction. In fact, especially when the context of its practice is democratic society, truthfulness, I will argue, is a far more complex virtue. Firstly, as Bernard Williams showed with formidable clarity, truthfulness is as much a matter of sincerity as it is a matter of accuracy; and besides, as I hope to show, a specifically democratic notion of truthfulness is also, equally, a matter of generativity, i.e. of disposition and ability to turn what one knows to be true into something politically significant. Accuracy, sincerity and generativity, simultaneously displayed, constitute what I think truthfulness ought to be in a democracy. For the time being though, let us simply record that saying what it means to lie does not alone suffice to specify also what it means to tell the truth. Clarifying this latter and more complex question, indeed, is something we will explicitly tackle in the following chapter.

## **An Extended Notion of Factual Truth**

We have identified three ways in which rational and factual truth differ and we have taken them to suggest that factual truth is a better suited notion for the investigation of truth in politics we want to pursue. In this last section I put forward yet another way of understanding the difference between rational and factual truth, one which eventually leads us to configure what I call an "extended notion of factual truth" and to look in particular at its future-regarding side. This specific qualification of factual truth and the orientation to the future it imparts to the discussion best matches the generative view of freedom endorsed in Chapter I and the corresponding emphasis on the problem of the new, and it prepares the ground, in turn, for the exploration of democratic truthfulness that will be the focus of Chapter III.

---

<sup>180</sup> Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', p. 251.

In spite of the three differences outlined above between factual and rational truth, all truths – we shall be reminded – are equally coercive, “they all have in common that they are beyond agreement, dispute, opinion, or consent.”<sup>181</sup> In the words of William James, “we can no more play fast and loose with [relations among ideas] than we can do so with our sense-experiences. They coerce us; we must treat them consistently, whether or not we like the results.”<sup>182</sup> Despite the entanglement with freedom that rational truth instead lacks, then, factual truth is no less independent from our will nor less despotic. From this perspective, for instance, one could say that restricting our focus to the notion of factual truth does not shield us against the preoccupation that haunts epistemic democratic theorists and their critics, namely the reconciliation of democracy with the indifference of truth to opinion. There is a fourth way, though, of putting the difference between rational and factual truth which Arendt did not explicitly mention but certainly considers, one that may add a further piece to our puzzle. I refer to the different relation of rational and factual truth to time.

Engaging with the relation of truth to time requires making a preliminary clarification which concerns the notion of reality. Indeed, I have so far neglected to specify that the notion of factual truth we have been outlining should be taken to respond to what Bernard Williams calls “a specifically *realist* idea of truth.”<sup>183</sup> As Williams tells us, what is generally meant by *reality* is “an independent order of things to which our thought is answerable.” The idea of a reality that is independent of us, observes Williams, always has “an implication of resistance, resistance to the will.”<sup>184</sup> However, as Williams notices, if resistance to will was to be deemed a sufficient element for a realistic interpretation of truth, then we would have to conclude that “any case of necessity” implies reality, and that therefore truths of the rational species too shall be thought to respond to Williams’ specifically realist idea of truth. Arendt’s quote of Grotius’ famous remark that “even God cannot cause two times two not to make four,”<sup>185</sup> for instance, is a good image of the necessity of rational truth: truths so necessary that God himself could not stand in the way of them being what they are. Indeed, as William acknowledges, the necessity of the truths of mathematics in particular “may seem a paradigm of unchangeability.”<sup>186</sup>

The issue of realism is at the core of huge debates in the philosophy of mathematics as well as in moral philosophy, and Williams, who is perfectly aware of the breadth and complexity of such debates, explicitly refrains from engaging with them. It goes without saying that if

---

<sup>181</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 240.

<sup>182</sup> James, p. 146.

<sup>183</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 136.

<sup>184</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 136.

<sup>185</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 240.

<sup>186</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 137.



Williams' aim is not to address the issue at that level, much less so is mine. And yet, despite his proposition, there is something Williams says he "should [nevertheless] like to suggest", and which is for us an insight of extraordinary importance. "Inasmuch as there is a connection between our conceptions of reality and the idea of resistance to our will," he writes, "what can be expected to present us with the idea of an independent reality is *a state of affairs to which there is a conceivable alternative.*"<sup>187</sup> What this implies, crucially, is that there are two equally necessary conditions for a realistic interpretation of truth, the first being the already mentioned impossibility to change it at will, the other being the possibility of a conceivable alternative to it. In other words – this is how I suggest we understand Williams point – a specifically realist idea of truth regards truth as something that while now, *at present* resistant to our will to change it, did once, at some point *in the past*, have a conceivable chance to be otherwise. If we accept this view, then we also appreciate why the truths of mathematics cannot be interpreted in a realistic sense. These indeed fulfil the first of the two conditions of reality (its resistance to will) but miss the contingent element that permits conceiving of an alternative to them.

Here, as the introduction to the previous section anticipated, Arendt's unorthodox choice to place scientific truths together with the truths of logic in the category of rational truth, exposes its inconsistency. For instance, that the moon revolves around the earth while this revolves around the sun is something that is as totally resistant to will as it is shockingly haphazard. It took such a tremendously contingent series of concomitant cosmic circumstances for the solar system we know to come into existence that we find it far easier to conceive of its infinite alternatives than to conceive of the possibility of it coming into existence again in exactly the same way. And yet, in the highly unlikely case that those cosmic circumstances could occur again in the same exact order in which they occurred, one after the other, over the past billions of years, we could only conceive of ending up with the same exact solar system we live in today, and this is because there is no conceivable alternative to gravitational interaction, whether we describe it as a force or as a property of space and time. The problem of determining the reality of scientific truths, then, suffers in turn, again, from the problem of demarcating pure from applied, hard from soft sciences, a problem the complexity of which abundantly exceeds the purposes of our discussion. After all, we have already said that we are less concerned with science than we are with action, and that therefore it is not exactness in telling what counts as rational truth that we are after but the possibility to focus on what counts as factual truth in the particular sense isolated above, i.e. factual truth as the outcome of action. What we shall retain

---

<sup>187</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 137. Emphasis mine.

here, then, is that when understood in this sense factual truth definitely possesses that character of contingency that allows a realistic interpretation of truth. Indeed, Arendt writes,

Facts have no conclusive reason whatever for being what they are; they could always have been otherwise, and this annoying contingency is literally unlimited. It is because of the haphazardness of facts that pre-modern philosophy refused to take seriously the realm of human affairs, which is permeated by factuality, or to believe that any meaningful truth could ever be discovered in the “melancholy haphazardness” (Kant) of a sequence of events which constitutes the course of this world. Nor has any modern philosophy of history been able to make its peace with the intractable, unreasonable stubbornness of sheer factuality; modern philosophers have conjured up all kinds of necessity, from the dialectical necessity of a world spirit or of material conditions to the necessities of an allegedly unchangeable and known human nature, in order to cleanse the last vestiges of that apparently arbitrary “it might have been otherwise” (which is the price of freedom) from the only realm where men are truly free. It is true that in retrospective – that is, in historical perspective – every sequence of events looks as though it could not have happened otherwise, but this is an optical, or rather, an existential, illusion: *nothing could have happened if reality did not kill, by definition, all the other potentialities originally inherent in any given situation.*<sup>188</sup>

Having dwelled on such ‘annoying’ contingency that is absent in rational truth and constitutive instead of facts, making the latter, unlike the former, part of reality, we can finally turn to the anticipated last difference between the two species of truth, namely their relation to time. The difference is in many ways obvious. On the one hand, indeed, we know of the untimeliness of rational truths: the referent of such truths is never something that happens but always something that simply *is*. The square of the hypotenuse *is* equal to the sum of the squares of the *catheti*; *it is* better to suffer wrong than to do wrong; the electron *is* the smallest possible unit of electrical charge. Nobody would ever ask “when?” or “under what conditions?” are these things true. A reference to such untimeliness of rational truth is found again in James. He says of beliefs concerning relations among ideas that they are “absolute” or “unconditional”. When such beliefs are true,

they bear the name either of definitions or of principles. It is either a principle or a definition that 1 and 1 make 2, that 2 and 1 make 3, and so on; [...] The objects here are mental objects. [...] Moreover, once true, always true, of those same mental objects. Truth here has an 'eternal' character.<sup>189</sup>

It goes without saying that the discovery of a piece of rational truth, instead, does happen at a certain precise point in time, it clearly is itself a fact of some sort, the sort of fact historians of science or ideas would be interested in turn to ascertain. The content of any such discoveries though can only be present and such for the eternity.

On the other hand, we find that factual truth is a definitely temporal notion. Matters of fact must happen: their existence has a beginning in time, a duration, an end. For instance, it is a piece of unchangeable truth that on 9/11/2001, between 8:46 and 10:28 a.m. (EST), two planes

---

<sup>188</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 243. Emphasis mine.

<sup>189</sup> James, p. 145.

crashed into the World Trade Centre. This, as well as all pieces of the type of factual truth we have considered so far and the fragility of which we should rightly be concerned about, are invariably matters of historical record, all truths *about the past*. It is at this point specifically that I wish to intervene by introducing what I have called an “extended notion of factual truth”. What I suggest, in doing so, is that a past-oriented concern is not the only possible politically relevant concern that factual truth can and should elicit. There is a whole other temporal region to which the notion of factual truth can extend but that we tend to overlook, one that having foregrounded the contingency of factual truth and its kinship to action we are now in a better position to consider: the future. A future-oriented concern for the truth is a concern for the facts that are not yet past, those facts we are co-authoring right at this moment, by acting together in the present we share. When we look at it from the point of view of the future, indeed, the truth about the past is happening now, it is right now that reality is “killing all the other potentialities” inherent in the present and, crucially, it is doing so with our complicity. From the point of view of the future, then, the notoriously laughable (and chilling) idea of so-called “alternative facts” appears instead an utterly plausible and in fact serious concept. To be clear, on 8/11/2001 many of the conceivable alternatives to the famous facts that did eventually happen were still legitimate competing candidates, running the race for realization.

Our concerns with the ways in which the future may alter, or at least challenge, our intellectual and moral relation to truth are far from being unprecedented. So many questions have been elicited, in fact, by the more or less explicit juxtaposition of the ideas of truth and future. I shall say something about what is probably the most ancient of these, the “splendid problem”<sup>190</sup> that none other than Aristotle articulated. The famous question “about tomorrow's sea battle”, posed in the ninth chapter of *On Interpretation*, deals with the interpretation of pairs of statements of the likes of the following: “tomorrow there will be a sea-battle”, “tomorrow there will not be a sea-battle.”<sup>191</sup> As Michael Perloff and Nuel Belnap explicate, in Aristotle's idea, “if one man affirms that an event of a given character will take place and another denies it, it is plain that the statement of one will correspond to reality while the other will not.”<sup>192</sup> There being different choices potentially available, out of which only one will be actually made tomorrow, does a truth already exist today about that one choice that will be made? “If ‘yes’, on what grounds can something which is still open, nevertheless be true already now? If ‘no’,

---

<sup>190</sup> Michael Perloff and Nuel Belnap, ‘Future Contingents and The Battle Tomorrow’, *The Review of Metaphysics*, 64.3 (2011), 581–602 (p. 581).

<sup>191</sup> Aristotle, ‘On interpretation’, in *Aristotle: in twenty-three volumes. 1: The categories; On interpretation*, trans. by Harold P. Cooke and Hugh Tredennick, no. 325 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938).

<sup>192</sup> Aristotle, quoted in Perloff and Belnap, p. 581.

can we in fact hold that all logically exclusive possibilities must be untrue without denying that one of the possible outcomes must turn out to be the chosen one?”<sup>193</sup> How then – the problem goes – can one ascribe truth-value to similar statements? This is what today is referred to as the problem of *future contingents*, a problem that bothered philosophers for thousands of years and that is still debated, particularly in the fields of logic and linguistics. Future contingents are statements about the future that qualify as contingent inasmuch as they refer to states, events, or actions that are neither unavoidable (tomorrow the sun will rise) nor impossible (tomorrow I will ride a unicorn). The problem of future contingents, thus, deals with the potentiality of the future and its openness, trying to work its way through the temptation of deterministic solutions and the discomfort of indeterministic suspensions. In the words of Perloff and Belnap, it deals with the idea of “a *future of possibilities*, where each among several incompatible possibilities has the potential to eventuate—though of course only at the expense of cancelling the other outcomes that were formerly possible.”<sup>194</sup>

It is in the context of this debate that we encounter also ideas as fascinating as the ‘Thin Red Line’, the name by which the ‘single, privileged future’ that does eventually happen is referred to in temporal logic, or as intriguing as Prior’s idea of branching-time. Prior’s conception of time as ‘a tree-like, branching structure’ provides a useful visual support to the “natural intuition that the possibilities available at different moments change.” Branching -explains Jacek Wawer- “proceeds into the future and never into the past; the single “trunk” of any given moment represents its unique past and each “branch” represents a possible future continuation of this moment.”<sup>195</sup> It seems, then, that what we share with scholars committed to the problem of future contingents is the crucial concern for the same particular point in time in which reality – to return to Arendt – kills all the other potentialities originally inherent in the future, cuts all the branches off the tree of possible futures leaving nothing behind but a single “trunk”, a Thin Red Line.

Now, my understanding of the logical problem at stake here is very limited, and my intuitive inclination to share the pragmatist solution of the dilemma (believing with the Peirceans “that every future contingent is simply false”)<sup>196</sup> all the more perfectly irrelevant. What is relevant, instead, is understanding that, as nominally close as it is to the question our extended notion of factual truth tries to expound (dealing as it does with the relationship between truth,

---

<sup>193</sup> Peter Øhrstrøm and Per Hasle, ‘Future Contingents’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2020 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020).

<sup>194</sup> Perloff and Belnap, p. 582.

<sup>195</sup> Jacek Wawer, ‘The Truth About the Future’, *Erkenntnis*, 79 (2014), 365–401 (p. 365).

<sup>196</sup> Wawer, p. 366.

contingency and the future), the problem of future contingents is posed for very different reasons and the relevance of the debate it generates, however fascinating, stays confined to temporal propositional logic. In fact, none of the possible logical solutions of the problem really appeals to moral or political faculties. Logicians are interested in how future events affect the truth value of statements made in the present. We, instead, are interested in how to take responsibility for them, in how to claim authorship of the thin red line we draw by acting in concert.

Above all, indeed, our extended notion of factual truth is an invitation to regard truth as a continuous process of realization,<sup>197</sup> *the most politically relevant part of which is still to come*. Having situated the problem of truth in politics within a trilateral conceptual relation which inexorably includes freedom, what matters most for us is that, to some significant extent, what will be true tomorrow will become true *through* us. By means of our spiritual and material activities (and especially, as Chapter I showed, by means of judgment and action), we are inescapably the authors, with all other living agents and together with the laws of nature, of the new truth to come: the world, as James put it,

stands ready, malleable, waiting to receive the final touches at our hands. [...] Man *engenders* truth upon it.

From this perspective we should be able to see why it can be argued that the problems of error, ignorance and mendacity do not exhaust the list of pressing truth-related issues democracies ought to face, since these are not the only forms of ‘disobedience’ to the truth that risk to undermine democratic politics. Central to the argument that next chapter will develop, indeed, is the view that democracy also demands that in realizing itself through the lives of its members, truth encounters the generative filter of their freedom. It will take most of Chapter III to qualify the specific demands that the future-regarding side of factual truth places on democratic citizens, to discuss the ways in which these are met or betrayed, and to justify the claim that truth is disobeyed also by lack of generativity. For the time being, let us only anticipate that this third type of disobedience to truth is no less common than the first two, but whereas error and mendacity signal – respectively – the limitedness of our capacity to reason and the extent of

---

<sup>197</sup> That truth can be thought of as a process of realization is something that clearly permeates the pragmatist literature. In the same lecture on pragmatism’s conception of truth previously cited, James, for instance, marks the distance from rationalistic accounts by insisting on the idea of truth realizing itself in rebus, rather than ante rem. “The great assumption of the intellectualists” – he writes- “is that truth means essentially an inert static relation. When you’ve got your true idea of anything, there’s an end of the matter. [...] you know; you’ve fulfilled your thinking destiny [...] and nothing more need follow on that climax of your rational destiny. Epistemologically you are in equilibrium. Pragmatism, on the other hand, asks its usual question. ‘Grant an idea or belief to be true,’ it says, ‘what concrete difference will its being true make in any one’s actual life? How will the truth be realized? [...]’ [...] The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact [...] a process, the process, namely, of its verifying itself, its verification. Its validity is the process of its valid-ation.” James, p. 142.

our capacity to will, lacking generativity signals the unfulfillment of our capacity to judge politically.

## Conclusion

I have argued that the problem of truth in politics, and its implications for the understanding of the truth-related demands democracy places on its members can be pitched in ways that only partially overlap the matters at stake in the relevant debates familiar to democratic theorists. In particular, I have explained that our focus is not on the question that preoccupies epistemic scholars and their critics – namely the problem of ensuring that democratic procedures lead to epistemically sound outcomes without undermining the egalitarian mission that is at the heart of democracy. I have suggested instead another approach to the the question of truth in politics, one that is opened up by what I have called an “extended notion of factual truth”. Dwelling on the distinction between rational and factual truth, I isolated a notion of factual truth that refers not to the empiricist understanding of a “fact” as a datum of experience, but rather to the Latin etymology of the word “fact” as the past participle of the verb “to do”, i.e. as the outcome of action.

Indeed, I put forward the notion that factual truth can be extended to a broader temporal spectrum, one which adds to the past-regarding concern for the facts that have already been made a future-regarding concern for the facts yet to be made. What is peculiar to the future-oriented view of truth in politics that derives form focusing on this understanding of factual truth, is that – capturing a snapshot of truth in the most contingent moment of its process of realization – it explicitly exposes the entanglement of freedom with truth and politics that we discussed in Chapter I. The shift of emphasis towards the future-regarding side of factual truth, then, shows why the tension between “the fact of pluralism” and the need for an independent standard of judgment – the dominant concern in many philosophical approaches to truth and politics – is not the set course to which any investigation into truth in politics must adhere. In fact, as the next chapter will show, turning the attention to the truth yet to be made exposes a richer range of politically relevant truth-related activities than we commonly consider, and a correspondent richer set of virtues that democratic citizens ought to learn and mobilize.

### III. Accuracy, Sincerity, Generativity

Truth in politics, we assumed, matters more for what it does and makes people do than it matters for what it is. This premise, together with the orientation to the future that – I have claimed – it ingrains in the question of truth, has been the focus of Chapter II. The present chapter addresses two problems following from this premise. The first, descriptive, concerns the actual kind of things that people do with truth. The second, normative, questions the kind of qualities that people should be expected to display in doing such things. The truth-related activities people engage with, as well as the normative standards by which we judge people engaged with such activities clearly depend on the notion of truth one considers. The argument I put forward in this chapter is that our future-regarding notion of truth casts light on the ways in which certain things that people do, commonly seen as unrelated to the truth, can in fact be regarded as things that people do with the truth or to it. Consequently, the personal qualities displayed (or not) in doing such things should be regarded as falling legitimately within the focus of truth-related normative analysis.

As the emphasis on “personal qualities” may suggest, the normative approach I adopt is one that, broadly, speaking falls within the remit of virtue ethics. Indeed, I build on Bernard Williams’s discussion of truthfulness and the two “virtues of truth” that, in his account, constitute it: sincerity and accuracy. I will suggest, in particular, that the set of truth-related “states and activities” that should be subjected to moral scrutiny, should extend beyond Williams’ “wanting to know”, “finding out” and “telling” the truth to others, the activities through which people display the virtues of accuracy and sincerity. In fact, I identify three further and, in my view, more peculiarly political activities associated with the truth that such a set should include: imagining, performing and negotiating the truth with others. It is in carrying out this latter set of truth-related activities that people, I crucially claim, show a third virtue of truth, the virtue of generativity. Only when brought together do accuracy, sincerity and generativity constitute what I term a specifically democratic notion of truthfulness.

It is useful to recall, at this point, that I pitched the main question leading this investigation as a question concerning the truth-related demands that representative democracy places on its

members, the normative standard, in other words, that should be used to assess the truth-related behaviour of democratic citizens and of their representatives. The argument advanced in this chapter, then, can also be formulated as a first tentative answer to this question: democracy demands that its members engage in the full range of truth-related activities and that they do so as accurate, sincere and generative citizens – that they are truthful, that is to say, in a specifically democratic sense. Failing to comply with the normative standard inherent in democratic truthfulness, is to be an unfulfilled democratic citizen and/or unfulfilled democratic representative, at least as far as truth is concerned. This formulation anticipates with sufficient clarity that at stake here is also importantly a matter of civic character. It can be said, indeed, that accuracy, sincerity, and generativity are to be intended as constitutive elements of the civic character that should be expected of, and therefore encouraged in, democratic citizens. This part of the thesis' overarching argument will later lead us to the second pillar of our "archway", namely the claim that, conceptualized as the experience of representing others, representative democracy itself provides an invaluable training field for citizens to be educated in the third virtue of truth – a claim which will be the focus of Chapters IV and V.

The first section of this chapter dwells on Williams's notion of truthfulness as sincerity and accuracy which, I shall suggest, can be said to undergird many of the normative claims we commonly make in matters of truth in politics. I then introduce the idea of a specifically democratic conception of truthfulness, one which includes the virtue of generativity among its essential components. I move therefore to the chapter's central section – the keystone of the thesis' argumentative architecture – where the virtue of generativity is explicated in more detailed terms. Finally, there is a question, implicitly raised by the appeal to virtue and character education, that the context of this chapter offers a good opportunity to clarify. In fact, given the central role that autonomy as generative freedom occupies in the thesis' conceptual foundations, prior to discussing the ways in which the experience of representing others is conducive to the acquisition of generativity, I confront a classic problem in talk of civic virtue, namely the dispute over the compatibility of character education with individual autonomy. In the last section of this chapter, thus, I briefly linger on this issue and on the specific implications of a formative project aiming at generative citizenship.

## **Williams' Truthfulness: Sincerity and Accuracy**

Let me begin this discussion with a preliminary clarification. Truthfulness, the quality of something or somebody who is "truthful", is in my understanding a "complex" virtue: a virtue



that is in turn constituted by what, in contrast, we may call “simple” virtues. Such complexity may escape consideration if we only look at the most common use of the word. In fact, as the Oxford English Dictionary indicates, in its most current sense “truthful” is used to describe “an utterance or a statement” conforming to the truth, or a person “telling, or disposed to tell the truth.”<sup>198</sup> In this sense, then, truthfulness, the “disposition to tell the truth,”<sup>199</sup> is a quality displayed in distinctively verbal practices (frank speech, veridiction, speech acts) and simply synonymous with sincerity. To be clear, this is what Arendt means by it when she writes (as we saw in Chapter II) that there are no good reasons, under normal circumstances, to consider truthfulness a political virtue.

In a less common sense, however, the adjective “truthful” has a more general meaning, that of conformity to the truth. In this sense the word can be used in reference to “an idea, an artistic representation, etc. [...] corresponding with fact or reality.”<sup>200</sup> According to the OED, synonyms of this sense of “truthfulness” include “sincerity” but are not limited to it. “Accuracy”, for instance, is another synonym for truthfulness when its sense is more broadly that of “conformity with fact or reality.”<sup>201</sup> Indeed, we can well say of a truthful performance that it is sincere, or of a truthful portrait that it is accurate. This latter meaning is also closer to the etymology of the word, i.e. “full of, having, characterized by” truth.<sup>202</sup> There is no indication in this meaning and in this etymology that truthfulness is meant to qualify exclusively verbal activities, the mere telling of the truth. Accuracy, as we shall see, qualifies indeed the act of believing the truth rather than the act of telling it: it is the virtue of the knower more than it is the virtue of the truth-teller. To be clear then, in proposing an understanding of truthfulness as a complex virtue, it is on this broader and more original meaning of the word that I build, one which already encompasses both an epistemic and a moral dimension in a person’s relation to truth.

The suggestion I make here is the following: in order to be truthful one needs to express the disposition to comply with the truth not only in some but in all the various activities, verbal and otherwise, through which the truth is expressed.<sup>203</sup> Each of these activities has a standard

---

<sup>198</sup> ‘Truthful, Adj.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://0.www.oed.com/view/Entry/207029>>.

<sup>199</sup> ‘Truthfulness, n.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://0.www.oed.com/view/Entry/207031>>.

<sup>200</sup> ‘Truthful, Adj.’

<sup>201</sup> ‘Truthfulness, n.’

<sup>202</sup> ‘-ful, Suffix.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://0.www.oed.com/view/Entry/75279>>.

<sup>203</sup> I have considered an alternative road to qualifying truthfulness in this non-necessarily verbal sense, one which required resorting to the notion of “alethurgy”, manifestation of truth, a “fictional word” Michel Foucault created in 1980, and returned to in 1984, for his series of lectures at the Collège de France. By alethurgy we should understand “the set of possible procedures, verbal or otherwise, by which one brings to light what is posited as true, as opposed to the false, the hidden, the unspeakable, the unforeseeable, or the forgotten.” The need for the new word emerged from Foucault’s intention to distinguish “the analysis

of excellence it aims at, and therefore a corresponding specific virtue. In my understanding then, the complex virtue of truthfulness manifests itself as the synergic actions of the simple virtues corresponding to such activities, which therefore are each a necessary but not sufficient condition of truthfulness. With reference to the epistemic and the moral aspects mentioned above, for instance, this means that I could not be truthful without also being sincere, but also that I could be sincere without being truthful. I could see through a satellite telescope that the earth is round but lie about what I see, or I could be sincere in telling people that the earth is flat because that is all I see looking at the horizon. In neither of these cases I would be deemed truthful in the sense I suggest.

One evident implication of this view, however, is that we will not go beyond this generic notion of truthfulness unless we determine the actual range of activities which should count as truth related as well as their corresponding virtues. This, in turn, will depend on the notion of truth we refer to and on the context to which this applies. If we take the restricted context, say, of a biology lab, where the truth that matters is the empirical “facts” observed through a microscope, then, as Williams will help us see with clarity, the verbal practice of telling the truth (with sincerity), is no less important than the non-verbal practice of finding it out in the first place (with accuracy). To be truthful in a strictly scientific sense means then to be simultaneously sincere and accurate. Now, the context of our reflection is that of politics, and liberal democracy in particular, in which, as we established in Chapter II, the truth that matters

---

of the specific structures of those discourses which claim to be and are accepted as true discourse” which had been the focus of his interest till that time and that “broadly speaking, we could call [...] an epistemological analysis,” from the analysis of “the conditions and forms of the type of act by which the subject manifests himself when speaking the truth, by which I mean, thinks of himself and is recognized by others as speaking the truth.” The analysis of alethurgic forms – thus – turns the attention away from “the forms by which a discourse is recognized as true” to address it to “the forms in which, in his act of telling the truth, the individual constitutes himself and is constituted by others as a subject of a discourse of truth, the form in which he presents himself to himself and to others as someone who tells the truth, the form of the subject telling the truth.” Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, ed. by Frédéric Gros, trans. by Graham Burchell and Arnold I. Davidson (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011), pp. 2–3. The distinction between epistemological and alethurgic analysis, the “theoretical shift,” as Foucault otherwise calls it, “from acquired knowledge to veridiction”, captures well that difference between truth-in-itself and truth-in-ourselves that is so crucial to my project and that I have so far called “truth that matters for what it is” versus “truth that matters for what it makes us do.” After all, the departure, in the analysis of “collaborative human inquiry”, from metaphysical and epistemological basis in favour of ethical ones is also what my premise shares with the pragmatist tradition – as acknowledged in Chapter II. As opposed to “episteme”, the idea of “alethurgy” could have been an interesting alternative conceptual hub for our normative claims concerning the truth-driven moral commitments that it is legitimate to expect from citizens and their representatives. ; There is another notion mobilized in the context of Foucault’s alethurgic analysis, that of “modalities of veridiction” or “modalities of truth-telling”, which future research may well take into account. Four such modalities can be identified in the discourses of the antiquity, the study of which was famously a fundamental part of Foucault’s method in his last years. Beside the veridiction of the parrhesiast, we find the veridiction of the prophet, the veridiction of the wise, the veridiction of the expert. Each mode of veridiction a) involves different characters, embodying different social roles; b) it calls for different modes of speech (intermediation in prophecy, structural silence in wisdom); c] it relates to different domains (fate, being, tekhnē-, ethos]; d) different teller-listener relationships; e] different virtues, both on the teller and on the listener’s side (Foucault is not explicit about these last two points but I believe these can be easily extracted from his reflection). While in ancient Greek and Roman literature the four different forms are indeed “fairly clearly distinguished and embodied, formulated, and almost institutionalized”, Foucault warns us that – more often than not – we find the modalities of veridiction combined together, we find “forms of discourse, types of institutions, and social characters which mix the modes of veridiction with each other.” We should, thus, think of them as ideal-typical ways of telling the truth that together, although in variable formulas and combinations, concur to describe the actual activity of a truth-teller. Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, p. 25.

is not only past-regarding (such as the pieces of past factual truth that condition our actions) but also future-regarding (such as the facts that our actions will in turn determine). In what follows I will seek to establish what are the truth-related activities and the correspondent virtues that define the context of democracy, and what it means, therefore, to be truthful in a specifically democratic sense. As anticipated already on a number of occasions, I will argue that beyond accuracy and sincerity democratic truthfulness has a third essential and more properly political component, the virtue of generativity.

“In a very strict sense”, says Williams, “to speak of the ‘value of truth’ is no doubt a category mistake.”<sup>204</sup> Indeed, from the first pages of *Truth and Truthfulness*, Williams warns his readers that the phrase, which features often in his book, is intended as “a shorthand for the value of *various states and activities associated with the truth.*”<sup>205</sup> Let us notice, to begin with, that this elucidation has some resonance with the assumption we anticipated in Chapter I, discussed in Chapter II and recalled in the introduction to this chapter, namely that truth in politics matters less for what it is than it matters for what it makes people do. I lack both the capacity and the intention to engage with Williams’s claim that by talking of the “value of truth” one makes a category mistake. Nonetheless, Williams’ interest in the value of various states and activities associated with the truth can be said to match our interest in the (political) value of those things that truth makes us do, things – we may otherwise say – that people do to the truth and with it. Indeed, from here on I will borrow from Williams’s vocabulary and refer to such things as, precisely, activities associated with the truth, or truth-related practices.<sup>206</sup> Besides this important elucidation concerning the value of truth, Williams provides a second crucial notion, that of “virtues of truth”, which he defines as those “qualities of people that are displayed in *wanting to know the truth, in finding it out, and in telling it to the people.*”<sup>207</sup> As anticipated, in his “account of truthfulness and its value,”<sup>208</sup> Williams identifies two such virtues: *accuracy*, displayed in “doing the best one can to acquire true beliefs;” and *sincerity*, displayed when “what one says reveals what one believes.”<sup>209</sup> Although he never explicitly says so, it also seems that “wanting to know, finding out, and telling the truth to others” are for Williams nothing but the “states and activities associated with the truth” the value of which he really refers to when speaking of the value of truth and the excellence in performing which he calls accuracy and sincerity.

---

<sup>204</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 7.

<sup>205</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 7. Emphasis mine. .

<sup>206</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 272.

<sup>207</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 7. Emphasis mine.

<sup>208</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 39.

<sup>209</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 11.

To be clear, in Williams's account accuracy and sincerity are the two components of the "complex" virtue of truthfulness, and in fact the only two virtues of truth. It could be observed at this point that there are other important qualities that may be displayed in wanting to know, finding out, and telling the truth to others, and that would possibly deserve the status of virtues of truth. I could mention curiosity, inquisitiveness, intuitiveness, expertise, honesty, authenticity, frankness and others. These qualities, however, could all be regarded as accessory or complementary forms of "doing the best one can to acquire true beliefs" and of "revealing, by what one says, what is believed to be true". In Williams's scheme some of these are discussed as different conceptions of the same qualities, which may have prevailed in a different historical context (this is the case of authenticity, to which Williams dedicates a whole chapter).<sup>210</sup> In general, without denying their pertinence to the truth or discussing their comparative moral or epistemic relevance, I would suggest we think of these, here, as either corollaries or specific declinations of the two fundamental virtues of sincerity and accuracy, qualities, in other words, somehow encompassed within these two "families of virtues".

What I have just briefly outlined are only the initial premises of Williams's genealogical account of the "particular conceptions associated with the virtues of truth."<sup>211</sup> Yet, these are sufficiently indicative for us to derive some useful considerations regarding our problem. It could be observed, indeed, that a common way of framing the seemingly-blatant evidence that "truth and politics are on rather bad terms with each other"<sup>212</sup> is precisely as a scarcity of willingness to know the truth, inability or disinterest in finding it out, and/or indisposition towards telling it to others – as a shortfall, that is, of sincerity and accuracy in citizens and, especially, in their representatives. In this respect, I will mention, in passing, an instance which appears to reveal a similar understanding of the conflict between truth and politics, and this is the contemporary truth-related institutional discourse. It seems to me that until recently, at various levels of political jurisdiction – from local municipalities to international organizations – truth-related expectations for democratic institutions were prominently expressed in terms of accountability and transparency,<sup>213214</sup> two notions as encompassing as those of accuracy and sincerity. Indeed, with the exception of the judicial sphere (where truth occupies an altogether different place

---

<sup>210</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 172.

<sup>211</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 271.

<sup>212</sup> Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', p. 227.

<sup>213</sup> *Transparency in Politics and the Media: Accountability and Open Government*, ed. by Nigel Bowles, James T. Hamilton, and David A. L. Levy (London: I. B. Tauris & Company, 2013).

<sup>214</sup> For some evidence of this see the extended literature on the role of accountability and transparency in various institutional settings. See for instance *Election Watchdogs: Transparency, Accountability and Integrity*, ed. by Pippa Norris and Alessandro Nai (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Thomas N. Hale, 'Transparency, Accountability, and Global Governance', *Global Governance*, 14.1 (2008), 73–94; Peride K. Blind, *Policy-Driven Democratization: Geometrical Perspectives on Transparency, Accountability, and Corruption* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

that this thesis is deliberately not committed to explore), accountability and transparency have been the only truth-related normative standards explicitly featuring in liberal policy making – only recently, in response to the so-called fake-news phenomenon, is their prominence in legislative discourse being challenged.

It is evident that the two pairs of qualities (accuracy/sincerity and accountability/transparency) are not perfectly reducible to each other, not least because the virtues of accuracy and sincerity refer to personal dispositions whereas accountability and transparency indicate institutional standards which become personal features only when persons and institutions coincide (e.g. democratic representatives). Moreover, the two pairs of qualities express different activity-passivity mixes: accountability and transparency express a virtue-consumer expectation rather than the virtue-holder qualities or performances expressed by accuracy and sincerity. Despite these evident discrepancies, there is nonetheless a kinship between accuracy and accountability, and between sincerity and transparency.

We could notice, indeed, that accuracy and accountability share a common indication of the capacity and responsibility to give an account of something, while sincerity and transparency both indicate the availability and the willingness to do so. Furthermore, both accuracy and accountability are mobilized in pre-verbal (or pro-verbal) truth-related practices, whereas sincerity and transparency are necessarily displayed in written or spoken verbal activities. Finally, like accuracy and sincerity, accountability and transparency are similarly used as complementary notions. I think of the hilarious episode – one of many in the genre – concerning former Italian Minister of Internal Affairs, Claudio Scajola, who “did not know” about the 1.1 million euros paid on his behalf to buy a flat facing the Colosseum. Failure to notice the presence in his assets of such a generous gift was unsurprisingly deemed to signal a spectacular lack of accuracy on the part of Mr Scajola, who was incapable to account for his conduct and ultimately forced to resign. Obviously (and somewhat more plausibly), the same episode can be interpreted as an instance of lacking sincerity and as a consequent failure to meet standards of transparency. With the necessary caution, then, it could be said that the prominent place occupied by accountability and transparency at all levels of western truth-related institutional discourse, seems to confirm Williams’s suggestion that what we value about the truth is always expressed in terms that can be traced back to some conceptions of accuracy and sincerity.

In fact, a sincerity/accuracy-centred view of the antagonism between truth and politics is consistent also with certain aspects of Arendt’s account of truth in politics, an account to which

we partially committed in Chapter II. For Arendt, let us recall, such antagonism is best made sense of with reference to factual truth, and this is because of the space that the contingency of factual truth reserves for freedom, something to which our ability to lie about it bears witness. She notices however that the conflict between truth and politics initially emerged, instead, with reference to rational truth and was understood as the conflict between “two diametrically opposed ways of life,”<sup>215</sup> the life of the philosopher – who seeks *the* (rational) Truth – and that of the citizen – who dwells in error and illusion. “Pure mendacity” became a concern only “with the rise of Puritan morality, coinciding with the rise of organized science, whose progress had to be assured on the firm ground of the *absolute veracity* and *reliability* of every scientist”, it was only from that moment that lies were “considered serious offences.”<sup>216</sup>

It is interesting to notice that Arendt’s reference to “absolute veracity” and “reliability” recalls in many ways William’s sincerity and accuracy. It would be even more interesting to try and reconcile Arendt’s summary suggestion that the two qualities acquired their current status only in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with the birth of modern science, with Williams’s detailed genealogy which traces the origin of sincerity and accuracy back to a fictional “state of nature” and defends their enduring status as virtues of truth across the entire following real human history. This, however, is more properly a project for intellectual historians, and one that I would be unequipped to undertake. Luckily, more than the historical aspect, what matters to us in this context is the indication that, although indirectly, Arendt acknowledges that mendacity is not necessarily only a matter of being a bad truth-teller, but also a question of being an unreliable truth-finder, so to speak. If we take mendacity to be the polar opposite of truthfulness, this also suggests that, in spite of her use of the word as coterminous with mere sincerity, Arendt did in fact distinguish a moral and an epistemic component in the virtue of truthfulness.

Let us recollect that, for Arendt, truthfulness could never be considered a political virtue because by prescribing (mere) truth-telling, that is “subjugation” to the coerciveness of all truth, it also banishes the affirmation of freedom (of which the possibility to lie is a rare proof) and, with it, politics’ reason for being. Thinking of truthfulness as the complex virtue I described in the opening paragraphs of this section, however, allows us to compound this complexity by adding to its epistemic and moral components a political one, explicitly in charge of the affirming of freedom. My intention here, to be clear, is neither to question the crucial role that accuracy and sincerity play in conveying what we value of certain truth-related practices nor to deny that lack of these virtues in citizens and their representatives is a problem of primary

---

<sup>215</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 232.

<sup>216</sup> Arendt, ‘Truth and Politics’, p. 232. Emphasis mine.

importance, describing correctly some aspects of the ways in which the conflict between truth and politics manifests itself in everyday life. What I want to point out instead is the incompleteness of such description. Indeed, an accuracy/sincerity-centred account of the antagonism between truth and politics leaves unaddressed a common intuition: that displays of sincere and accurate behaviour often fail to evoke the feeling that the person engaging in such behaviour should be judged truthful. Sincerity and accuracy, in other words, are not sufficient evidence of virtuousness in undertaking truth-related practices. As Linda Zerilli notices in her original re-reading of Arendt's *Truth and Politics*, "there is a difference between determining the truth content of statements made by those who claim to speak in our name and *turning our knowledge of what is true into something politically significant*."<sup>217</sup>

There is something else, then, that ought to be done with truth, besides wanting to know it, finding it out and telling it to others, something that is often overlooked in our descriptions and evaluations of truth-related behaviour and its consequences for truth in politics. Uncovering a new terrain of truth-related practices and of potential related excellence, the future-regarding side of our extended notion of truth helps us see what this is. It suggests, indeed, that the step of drawing the political consequences of an acquired piece of truth and acting upon them is a separate and independent part of what it means to be truthful in a specifically democratic sense. Finding the truth out and telling it to others do not necessarily entail this second step: a different willingness and a specific virtue are needed to accomplish this future-regarding, freedom-affirming and most peculiarly political part of the process of committing to the truth. Generativity is what I call this virtue, the excellence in taking responsibility for the doable that truth discloses, a virtue mobilized in *imagining* the truth, in *performing* it and in *negotiating* it with others: the disposition and the ability to turn what one knows to be true into something politically significant. More will be said about the elements of this definition in the next section, although it is in Chapter V that we will tackle the task of specifying what the activities of imagining, performing and negotiating the truth more properly are about.

## Generativity

We first encountered the notion of generativity in Chapter I, as an element of our conception of freedom. In the field of developmental psychology and moral education, we have seen, the idea of understanding generativity as a virtue is not unheard of. It was first hinted at by John

---

<sup>217</sup> Linda Zerilli, 'Truth and Politics', p. 58.

Kotre<sup>218</sup> and more recently revived by Nancy Snow and her interlocutors.<sup>219</sup> Linking generativity to Aristotelian flourishing, Snow argued in favour of its status as a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for “a life of virtuous activity in the *polis*,”<sup>220</sup> an argument which in this general formulation fits broadly the purpose of our investigation. More than the generic idea of generativity as virtue, however, what here is in need of substantial justification is the idea that generativity can be considered a virtue of truth in Williams’ sense, a personal quality, that is, mobilized in carrying out activities specifically related to the truth. In order to explain and justify this view, which is what this section intends to do, I will first return to what we already know about generativity, adding to it some further elements that become relevant for the present purposes.

Let us begin by recalling the first approximation of the idea of generativity as “a way or ways of ‘giving forth,’ of sharing or bequeathing what one has to others.”<sup>221</sup> As mentioned in Chapter II, the idea of generativity was first developed by Erik and Joan Erikson to indicate a particular and long-lasting stage of a person’s life cycle, occurring during adulthood and characterized by the desire to bring about something new, to create, to “engage in the sequence of generations.”<sup>222</sup> It is worth noticing that in this orientation to the new lies an immediate element of political significance. So understood, in fact, generativity addresses directly the question that in Chapter I, following Arendt and Castoriadis, we placed at the heart of our understanding of politics and freedom, and which we have indicated as “the problem of the new” or the question of beginning – something that in Arendtian scholarship is also known as the question of natality.<sup>223</sup> Although expressed in the psychosociological terms in which the notion was originally conceptualized – terms we will eventually move away from – Snow’s working definition of generativity captures well the notion the Eriksons developed over several decades while providing at the same time a useful summary of the aspects of it that are most relevant to our analysis. In her formulation, generativity,

is an other-regarding desire to *invest one’s substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self*. It is ideally reinforced by a belief in the goodness or worthwhileness of the human enterprise. It is

---

<sup>218</sup> John N. Kotre, *Outliving the Self: How We Live on in Future Generations* (John Kotre, 1996).

<sup>219</sup> Snow, ‘Generativity and Flourishing’; Rachana Kamtekar, ‘Comments on Nancy Snow, “Generativity and Flourishing”’, *Journal of Moral Education*, 44.3 (2015), 278–83; John Snarey, ‘Reflections on Generativity and Flourishing: A Response to Snow’s Kohlberg Memorial Lecture’, *Journal of Moral Education*, 44.3 (2015), 284–90; Nancy Snow, ‘Response to My Commentators’, *Journal of Moral Education*, 44.3 (2015), 325–27.

<sup>220</sup> Snow, ‘Generativity and Flourishing’, p. 273.

<sup>221</sup> Snow, ‘Generativity and Flourishing’, p. 264.

<sup>222</sup> Erikson uses this phrase in *Insight and Responsibility*, where the idea of generativity is already evoked, as Snow notices, even though not explicitly. Erik H. Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility* (W. W. Norton, 1994).

<sup>223</sup> Wolfhart Totschnig, ‘Arendt’s Notion of Natality. An Attempt at Clarification’, *Ideas y Valores*, 66.165 (2017), 327–46.



typically expressed by a concern for and *commitment to future generations*. It includes, but is not limited to, *productivity and creativity*.<sup>224</sup>

The italics are mine, and I have used them to highlight the elements that an understating of generativity as a virtue of truth (that is, to recall, the disposition to turn what one knows to be true into something politically significant) should in one form or another retain: the investment of one's substance beyond the self, a commitment to the future, the production and creation of something new.

Discussing generativity as a virtue of truth, however, requires first agreeing on the sense in which is generativity a virtue at all. As Rachana Kamtekar's observed,<sup>225</sup> Snow's definition reflects a "neutrality" between the competing interpretations of generativity inherited from the above-mentioned psychological literature – such as "life stage", "urge", "instinct" – which is unhelpful if we want to conceptualize it as a virtue. For the sake of clarity then, I will assume here a dispositional definition of virtue<sup>226</sup> and take for granted that this involves assuming an equally dispositional definition of vice. Indeed, in her virtue-account of generativity, Snow proposes we think of generativity as an "Aristotelian-type virtue."<sup>227</sup> This implies, among other things,<sup>228</sup> configuring it as the mean state between a vice of excess and one of deficiency. In order to better qualify what is virtuous about the specific ways in which generativity brings about the new, I shall say something in the coming paragraphs about the viciousness of its excess and its deficiency.

Across Erikson's work we find generativity contrasted with various conditions that would emerge in its absence. Here I will have to neglect "rejection", a form of failed generativity which Erikson introduces in later work ("the exclusion of some people or groups from the scope of one's care and concern")<sup>229</sup> and focus instead on two other such forms which Snow more explicitly configures as vices. These are *self-absorption* and *stagnation*. There are at least two ways, Snow notices, of understanding stagnation. In one case stagnation manifests itself as complete "shut down, and float[ing] through life in a state of lethargy or ennui", in the other it could be produced by "remain[ing] active, but in aimless, non-productive ways in which we

---

<sup>224</sup> Snow, 'Generativity and Flourishing', p. 268.

<sup>225</sup> Kamtekar.

<sup>226</sup> For a detailed discussion of motivational, dispositional and cognitive definitions of civic virtue see Jordi Tena, 'Una Propuesta de Definición Del Concepto de Virtud Cívica / A Proposed Definition of the Concept of Civic Virtue', *Reis*, 128, 2009, 89–121.

<sup>227</sup> Snow, 'Generativity and Flourishing', p. 270.

<sup>228</sup> Kamtekar usefully commented on the extent to which Snow achieves conceptualizing generativity as an Aristotelian virtue, that is as 'a disposition to respond to certain facts in the world as reasons for acting, guided by a practical wisdom that ensures the appropriateness of these actions to the circumstances'. Kamtekar, p. 278.

<sup>229</sup> Snow, 'Generativity and Flourishing', p. 264.

‘spin our wheels.’”<sup>230</sup> In this second case stagnation may coincide with self-absorption. Snow gives a good example of possible coincidence,

think of someone absorbed in writing the ‘great American novel,’ but who hasn’t gotten beyond a sentence or two of the first chapter. Perhaps”, writes Snow “this person ruminates endlessly on the best opening line, but is unable to get past it. Completely absorbed in being the greatest American novelist, she is unable to make progress with her work. In such a case, self-absorption [...] could be the cause of stagnation.”<sup>231</sup>

Surrounding Snow’s account of such instances of failed generativity, however, there is some analytical confusion that needs clarification. Both stagnation and self-absorption are regarded by Snow as vices, and vices of deficiency in particular. While not proposing a particular term for it, Snow also acknowledges a vice of excessive generativity. She exemplifies this as the vice that would lead, for instance, overly anxious parents to “give too much” and in “ways that can stunt independence and development.”<sup>232</sup> It is unclear, however, how “stagnation” and “self-absorption” might count as vices, especially under the assumption we made that vices and virtue should be understood as dispositions. In fact, stagnation and self-absorption indicate non-dynamic states that certainly signal failed generativity, but rather as outcomes of non-generative dispositions than as non-generative dispositions themselves. Rather than vices, I would say, these are states that vices lead to: failing to be generative leads to stagnation, or, to self-absorption, or to both. If we accept the above, we might also agree that when generativity is failed by excess rather than by deficiency, the correspondent vice could lead to states that are the exact opposite of stagnation and self-absorption, states that, remaining in the semantic field of fluid dynamics, we could call respectively *overflow* and *self-dispersion*. Like stagnation and self-absorption, overflow and self-dispersion too are consequences of the failure to mobilize a generative disposition towards the surrounding reality, rather than wrong dispositions themselves.

Wanting to understand the virtue of generativity through the Aristotelian template of virtue as a mean between deficiency and excess, then, what should we identify as the actual vices of deficient and excessive generativity, the dispositions that lead to the states just mentioned? My suggestion is that these are respectively what we could call *sterility* and *hyper-prolificity*. A microbiological metaphor reveals quite effectively the viciousness of similar dispositions. Referred to cellular processes, indeed, sterility and hyper-prolificity lead to equally life-defeating conditions such as pathological cellular senescence, on one hand, and all forms of tumoral pathologies on the other. The comprehensive picture, therefore, of the vicious dispositions

---

<sup>230</sup> Snow, ‘Generativity and Flourishing’, p. 265.

<sup>231</sup> Snow, ‘Generativity and Flourishing’, p. 265.

<sup>232</sup> Snow, ‘Generativity and Flourishing’, p. 272.

and correspondent undesirable outcomes that surround generativity could be summarized as follows: we shall call “sterility” the vice of deficient generativity, a disposition which leads to a state of stagnation and self-absorption; we shall call instead “hyper-prolificity” the vice of excessive generativity, a disposition which leads to a state of overflow and self-dispersion. Unlike its related vicious dispositions, all eventually life-defeating, a generative disposition leads instead to the continuation of life beyond the individual, to the perpetuation of the process of life across generation.

In order to introduce an explicit discussion of generativity as a virtue of truth, I shall add now a further suggestion. We could think of the trajectory linking generativity to its two lateral vices as the same trajectory that separates (and ties) the two competing classical ideals of self-abnegation and self-affirmation. Without claiming to be doing “serious intellectual history” (in fact he calls these “conjectures”) Ronald Dworkin offers a very suggestive short story of western moral and ethical thought.<sup>233</sup> Here self-abnegation and self-affirmation are acknowledged as crucial themes in moral history, and in particular, as principles inspiring the two opposed traditions that emerged in western philosophy from a dominant post-Enlightenment reconfiguration of the relationship between ethics (“the study of how to live well”) and morality (“the study of how we must treat others”).<sup>234</sup> One tradition sees morality and self-interest as rivals, prescribing the subordination of the latter to the former. Here, morality “requires taking up a distinct objective perspective that counts the agent’s own interests as in no way more important than anyone else’s.”<sup>235</sup> This is the morality of self-abnegation which “spawned the moral philosophy of impersonal consequentialism” of thinkers of the likes of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, and which in the nineteenth century “came to dominate substantive moral philosophy in Britain and America.”<sup>236</sup> The other tradition, popular in continental Europe and of which Friedrich Nietzsche is the leading figure, emphasized instead “the underlying freedom of human beings to struggle against custom and biology”. This is the morality of self-affirmation, and in this view “we are responsible for making our nature and then for living authentically up to what we have made”. Here, therefore, “[t]he only real imperative of life is *living* – the creation and affirmation of a human life as a singular and wonderful creative act.”<sup>237</sup>

---

<sup>233</sup> Ronald Dworkin, *Justice for Hedgehogs* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011), p. 17.

<sup>234</sup> The distinction between ethics (the study of how to live well), and morality (the study of how we must treat others) is crucial in Dworkin’s interpretive architecture. Dworkin, p. 13.

<sup>235</sup> Dworkin, p. 18.

<sup>236</sup> Dworkin, p. 18.

<sup>237</sup> Dworkin, p. 18.

When regarded from the perspective disclosed by Dworkin's short story, then, the virtue of generativity can be configured in new terms, as the disposition to seek a balance between the suffocating requirement of self-abnegation and the incendiary invitation – so to speak – of self-affirmation. The ambition to reconcile these two poles is by no means a novelty. In fact, Dworkin's notion of dignity as self-respect and authenticity<sup>238</sup> is meant precisely to provide the ground for an integration of moral values and ethical responsibilities in which the moralities of self-abnegation and self-affirmation are reharmonized. Moreover, Dworkin's effort is in turn rooted in his reading of Kant, whom he takes to have provided a template for such unification – in spite of the paradigm of self-abnegation that the categorical imperative seemingly represents. What matters most for us, indeed, is not so much to affirm the need to appease two conflicting ideals of moral and ethical responsibility, nor to say that generativity as a virtue of truth can be one tool to address such a well-acknowledged need. What matters instead is that these two ideals can be regarded as describing ultimately two polar modes of relation of the subject to truth, the virtuous mean between which I am calling generativity. While, clearly, the truths at stake in Dworkin's conjectural history are non-factual truths, specifically of a moral and ethical kind, the referent of our reflection shall remain the extended notion of factual truth defined in Chapter II.

We shall recall, then, that on this account of truth, the “truth” is the whole process of fact-making: it is both the already-happened facts that condition action and the new facts that action makes happen in turn. To use William James's words, “[t]ruths emerge from facts; but they dip forward into facts again and add to them; which facts again create or reveal new truth (the word is indifferent) and so on ad infinitum.”<sup>239</sup> In light of the above, we could now understand generativity as a measured input of “self” into such ongoing processes of collective truth-making. Mobilizing the virtue of generativity in our relations to the truth means therefore conceiving ourselves not only as recipients and issuers of necessary principles of logics and inescapable laws of nature, or as discoverer and conveyors of information concerning past events, but also, as importantly, as constitutive elements, ourselves, of the truth that is right now in the process of being made. It means finding the balance between an attitude of sterile acceptance of the things that are and a hyper-prolific pretence to be the exclusive maker of the things that can be, two opposed modes that respectively have the utterly antipolitical consequences of either resigning from freedom or forestalling equality by precluding the generativity of others. Mobilizing generativity as a virtue of truth, then, means being aware *co-*

---

<sup>238</sup> Dworkin, p. 203.

<sup>239</sup> James, p. 151.

authors of the ever-evolving reality we share, or, as we would say borrowing Castoriadis' suggestive image, imaginary institutors of our societies.

It is necessary now to reconcile this picture of generativity as a virtue of truth with the idea presented earlier of a specifically democratic notion of truthfulness. This, then, is a matter of matching generativity with William's definition of virtues of truth as qualities displayed in carrying out truth-related practices. I have said that whereas accuracy and sincerity are the virtues presiding over the activities of wanting to know the truth, of finding it out, and of and telling it to others, generativity is mobilised in a set of activities related more explicitly to the future-regarding end of our extended notion of truth: the activities of *imagining* the truth, *performing* it, and *negotiating* it with others. As Chapters IV and V will help us see with more clarity, these are distinctively democratic practices, at least if, as I believe, democracy ought to be the open-ended cooperative project of free and equal individuals. Moreover, whereas accuracy and sincerity have been defined respectively as the dispositions to do what can be done to acquire true beliefs and to say what is believed to be true, we have defined generativity as the disposition to turn what is believed to be true into something politically significant – a formulation, we said, which was borrowed from Zerilli's reading of Arendt's *Truth and Politics*. An important part of Arendt's argument here is that since “facts are beyond agreement and consent”, then

all talk about them – all exchanges of opinion based on correct information – will contribute nothing to their establishment. [...] The modes of thought and communication that deal with truth [...] don't take into account other people's opinions, and taking these into account is the hallmark of all strictly political thinking.<sup>240</sup>

These words, I want to suggest, acquire nonetheless their full meaning only when understood in light of the last pages of Arendt's essay. There we read:

I have dealt with politics as though I, too, believed that all public affairs were ruled by interest and power, that there would be no political realm at all if we were not bound to take care of life's necessities. The reason for this deformation is that factual truth clashes with the political only on this lowest level of human affairs [...]. From this perspective, we remain unaware of the actual content of political life – of the joy and the gratification that arise *out of being in company with our peers*, out of *acting together and appearing in public*, out of inserting ourselves into the world by word and deed, thus acquiring and sustaining our personal identity and *beginning something entirely new*.<sup>241</sup>

Arendt's suggestion here is that there is a “higher level of human affairs”, where the “actual content of political” life can be fully enjoyed. At such a higher level, the “modes of thought and communication that deal with truth” (which we can assume correspond to what we have

---

<sup>240</sup> Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', p. 241.

<sup>241</sup> Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', p. 263.

been calling truth-related practices or activities) do not clash with the political as they do at the lowest level.

Leaving aside the reference to a hierarchy of levels of human affairs that is not central to our interest, we can retain from Arendt's suggestion the idea that we can think, indeed, of truth-related practices that, far from clashing with the political, do, on the contrary, constitute it. Such – this is my claim – are the practices engaging in which one displays generativity, and that make therefore of generativity a peculiarly political disposition towards the truth. Indeed, imagination – more than willingness to know – is required to begin something entirely new; performance – more than discovery – is the mode of appearing in public; and negotiation – more than the “exchange of opinion based on correct information” – is the price for the company of one's peers. As Chapter V will discuss at length, imagining, performing and negotiating are all practices by which or in which we take other's people opinions into account, and this is “the hallmark”, we have said, of all strictly political activity. Together with the faculty of lying, indeed, these activities are among the few human faculties that testify to the existence of freedom, and also for this reason they can be regarded as the most distinctively political among the practices associated with the truth. Turning what one knows to be true into something politically significant, then, means turning what one knows to be true into something that taking plurality into account sanctions the beginning of a new course of events. It means entrusting the knowledge of things that are to the mediating work of the imagination, of performance and of negotiation.

Clearly, as the definition of generativity we formulated suggests, none of these activities can be carried out if the modes of knowledge acquisition and communication are not informed by the standards of accuracy and sincerity. In fact, one needs to know that something is true to turn it into anything politically significant: mine – to be sure – is not an attempt to diminish the value of certain truth related practices, nor to establish a hierarchy between them. All I am doing for the moment, is questioning the sufficiency of accuracy and sincerity when it comes to judging truthful political actors, be these citizens or citizen-representatives. In other words, it is also – and as importantly – by the excellence displayed in imagining, performing and negotiating the truth that the quality of the relationship between truth and politics is determined.

## Creating (Generative) Citizens

Having configured generativity as an essential component of a specifically democratic conception of truthfulness, I have also implicitly suggested that this particular disposition is a character trait that democracies should find desirable and should aim at encouraging in their members. If I have been able to persuade the reader of the peculiarly political nature of this third virtue of truth, however, that was on the assumption, advanced since Chapter I, that the realm of politics coincides with the realm of freedom. This raises a legitimate suspicion – namely that by promoting the compliance of citizens to the unifying standard of truth-related behaviour that generativity codifies, we may in fact undermine the very freedom this virtue is intended to signify. We may be putting forward, that is, an argument which defeats its own premises. Suspicions of a similar sort, however, have been harboured for centuries, at least ever since Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s oxymoron about forcing citizens to be free provided perfect lexical evidence of the risk of circularity involved in wishing too vividly the freedom of others. In fact, to this day, when it comes to democratic civic education these suspicions are near unavoidable and certainly contribute to a seemingly obvious antagonism between a demand for public virtue and basic liberal values.<sup>242</sup> Putting our worry in terms more familiar to the relevant literature on political liberalism, we could say that cultivating in citizens the disposition to turn what they know to be true into something politically significant, risks to involve cultivating in them a particular comprehensive moral doctrine, one committed to a certain kind of political participation.

This section wishes to clear the ground from worries of this sort by recalling the important debate that developed two decades ago around citizenship theories and civic virtue in particular, and by subscribing firstly to the conclusion, today largely accepted, that no matter how just its basic institutions, the performance of a liberal democracy also crucially depends on the character of its citizens, and consequently on a non-minimalist view of the extent to which a democracy can intervene in the formation of the civic character of its member. Among the most influential contributions to that debate is arguably Eamonn Callan’s *Creating Citizens*, a defence of liberal politics as a politics of virtue. “[C]reating virtuous citizens” is for Callan “as necessary an undertaking in a liberal democracy as it is under any other constitution.”<sup>243</sup> As its title suggests, this section tries to weave the broad outline of Callan’s effort to reconcile the dilemma outlined above together with the specificity of our concern for the virtue of

---

<sup>242</sup> Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy*, *Creating Citizens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 4.

<sup>243</sup> Callan, p. 3.

generativity. At the same time, it will steer the discussion towards the second pillar of our archway by introducing the claim that liberal democracy has in democratic representation an inbuilt mechanism to instil generative dispositions in its members. In claiming so, it also finally hints at one important implication, namely that committing civic education to generativity requires both more and less than an agreement on extent and content of public schooling. More in the sense that it requires an important recalibration of the institution of representation as a powerful experience of ethical transformation, and a consequent rescuing of representative politics from its demise;<sup>244</sup> less in the sense that we invest in the formative project encoded in representative democracy and learn to tweak democratic institutions to liberate their full educational potential.

Callan's book begins with an invitation to consider what would be lost if common education was to abide by a minimalist view, the view that the only legitimate base for liberal civic education is one that does not exceed the "minimum denominator" common to the diverse ethical communities composing a plural society. In order to shed light on what this loss would entail he proposes a thought experiment that I find worth here quoting at length:

Imagine an enviably wealthy and peaceful society that has descended, through a couple of generations, from the society to which you or I belong. Imagine also that the society exhibits whatever distribution of wealth you think best. The particular rights we require of any liberal democracy—rights to political participation, freedom of expression, religious practice, equality before the courts and the like—continue to have the force of law. But when elections are held, scarcely anyone bothers to vote. The mass media ignore politics because the consumers to whom they cater do not care. The parties who vie for power are sponsored by more or less the same political elites, and so virtually nothing separates one party from another. Freedom of speech has been reduced to a spectral existence because speech is no longer commonly used to defend a distinctive vision of the good and the right or to say anything that might initiate serious ethical dialogue with another. That is so because citizens are either indifferent to questions of good and evil, seeing the point of their lives simply as the satisfaction of their desires, or else they commit themselves so rigidly to a particular doctrine that dialogue with those who are not like-minded is thought to be repellent or futile. This Brave New World, as I shall unimaginatively call it, still contains much of the religious, racial, and ethnic diversity of the society that preceded it. But although citizens respect each other's legal rights, they shun contact with those who are different so far as possible because they despise them. When transactions across cultural divisions are unavoidable, everyone tries to extract as much benefit from the other (or cause as much harm as possible) within the limits imposed by law.<sup>245</sup>

Free and equal citizenship, this means, is not exclusively a matter of securing freedom of expression and a just distribution of wealth, it is also and as much "about the kind of people we become, and the kind of people we encourage or allow our children to become."<sup>246</sup> In fact, what would be ultimately lost in the Brave New World – a world that is unfortunately less dystopian than one would like to believe – are the very same liberal values of freedom and

---

<sup>244</sup> Simon Tormey, *The End of Representative Politics* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2015).

<sup>245</sup> Callan, p. 2.

<sup>246</sup> Callan, p. 3.



equality that the containment of common education within the strict limits of a “consensual core of liberal democracy”<sup>247</sup> is thought to protect.

A common error in this respect, indeed, is to confound, as Callan notes, “the characteristic openness to pluralism of liberal virtue with the supposed irrelevance of virtue to liberal politics.”<sup>248</sup> A liberal theorist committed to this fallacious belief is Stephen Holmes. Liberals, according to Holmes, “do not want citizens transfixed on an overpowering common purpose. They reject virtue-based politics for a looser, less all-engaging, more procedural and discussion stimulating sort of common framework.” For them,

it would be positively undesirable to build political stability on the basis of collective virtue or an unflinching uniform will. This would overburden individual conscience, force a character standardization on citizens, and deprive society of an extra-political variety of selves. Discussion would be pointless in such a pre-harmonized society.<sup>249</sup>

We have already seen, though, how discussion could be pointless in the de-harmonized Brave New World, and “not because the state has forced a ‘character standardization on citizens’, but because the virtues that enable morally competent discussion have been extinguished.”<sup>250</sup> Moreover, agreeing that “liberal democracy requires a distinctive education for virtue leaves much room for disagreement about what that education rightly includes.”<sup>251</sup> Admittedly, on the liberal side of the dispute Holmes’s voice on this particular issue is rather isolated. Indeed, misrepresenting the dissent around how to interpret the virtues common education should promote as a dissent around the “more basic issue of whether a politics of virtue is possible or desirable at all under a liberal dispensation”<sup>252</sup> is a fallacy that Callan attributes in much greater measure to the other side of the dispute, the communitarian one.

In this respect, it is interesting to dwell on the exchange that took place, as part of the same debate addressed by Callan’s book, across the boundary between liberal and communitarian traditions, between Richard Dagger and Michael Sandel. Dagger’s *Republican Liberalism* is an attempt – in many ways in tune with Callan’s – to combine a defence of autonomy with the need for a formative project, and to maintain, in fact, the complementarity of the two.<sup>253</sup> As for Callan, who tells us that “the core of the dispute lies in competing understandings of the sense

---

<sup>247</sup> Callan, p. 5.

<sup>248</sup> Callan, p. 6.

<sup>249</sup> Stephen Holmes, *Passions and Constraint: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 175.

<sup>250</sup> Callan, p. 6.

<sup>251</sup> Callan, p. 7.

<sup>252</sup> Callan, p. 5.

<sup>253</sup> Richard Dagger, *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism*, Oxford Political Theory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

in which equal citizens are free,”<sup>254</sup> for Dagger too what is at stake is our interpretation of freedom. For Dagger, “autonomy and civic virtue are often taken to be at odds with each other because one has to do with individual liberty, the other with collective responsibility. But they appear to be incompatible only to those who conceive of autonomy as a purely individualistic notion and civic virtue as a strictly collectivist or communitarian ideal.”<sup>255</sup> Instead, we should turn “to the union of autonomy and civic virtue as part of what Charles Taylor has called holist individualism: ‘a trend of thought that is fully aware of the (ontological) social embedding of human agents, but at the same time prizes liberty and individual differences very highly.’”<sup>256</sup>

In response to Dagger’s book, Sandel distinguishes between what he crudely calls a “procedural” liberalism (well represented by Holmes) which denies the desirability of civic virtue, and a “perfectionist” liberalism which acknowledges instead the need to affirm in law a conception of the good, and which poses the question, “what conception – or range of conceptions – is most desirable?”<sup>257</sup> It is this latter kind of liberalism that Callan and Dagger can be said to embody. Leaving aside the perhaps contestable use of the labels “procedural” and “perfectionist,” it is interesting to notice that, by his own admission, one reason why Sandel puts the distinction between liberalism and republicanism in such stark terms is to force liberals to choose between the two impulses he identifies, since “once character formation for the sake of substantive moral and civic ideals is accorded legitimacy, citizens can debate which virtues their political community should cultivate and prize.”<sup>258</sup> Liberal and republicans, in other words, may well disagree on which virtues should be fostered, “but they share the notion that political arrangements should be judged by the kind of citizens they produce.”<sup>259</sup>

The spirit in which I have talked of the virtue of generativity intends to match this overlapping consensus between liberal and republican views of common education. Ultimately, as Dagger suggests, one important thing that is at stake here is the degree of social embeddedness of the self that different conceptions of autonomy either require or tolerate.<sup>260</sup> In Chapter I, we

---

<sup>254</sup> Callan, p. 10.

<sup>255</sup> Dagger, p. 17.

<sup>256</sup> Dagger, p. 17.

<sup>257</sup> Michael J. Sandel, ‘Liberalism and Republicanism: Friends or Foes? A Reply to Richard Dagger’, *The Review of Politics*, 61.2 (1999), 209–14 (p. 211).

<sup>258</sup> Sandel, p. 212.

<sup>259</sup> Sandel, p. 212.

<sup>260</sup> Ann Mongoven suggests an appealing ideal of the social self, alternative to Sandel’s encumbered self and more likely to please also perfectionist liberal writers. This is the disciplined vulnerable citizen: “the citizen who is willing to bear the shock of the untranslatable marks a significant departure from the bifurcated foci of liberalism and communitarianism. [...] Liberalism defines the citizen as chooser, and communitarianism defines the citizen as moulded. In contrast, disciplined vulnerability describes the virtue of a citizen who is not completely free to choose her ends because she is open to having her ends transformed by the moral pressures of others. at the same time, she is not simply passive before traditions of communal authority, but rather she negotiates among multiple sources of authority (the friction between them often generates the shock

borrowed from Castoriadis our conception of autonomy as effective freedom, a necessary condition for which is the exercise of radical imagination. Returning now to his *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, we find explicit indication that a similar conception of autonomy involves a “complex view of socially formed selves.”<sup>261</sup> For Castoriadis, indeed, “it is only insofar as the radical imagination of the psyche seeps through the successive layers of the social armor – which cover and penetrate it up to an unfathomable limit-point, and which constitute the individual – that the singular human being can have, in return, an independent action on society.”<sup>262</sup> The proper aim of society is then to “create the institutions which, by being internalized by individuals, most facilitate their accession to their individual autonomy and their effective participation in all forms of explicit power existing in society.”<sup>263</sup> This formulation, explicitly investing institutions with the responsibility to lead individuals in the achievement of full autonomy, “will appear paradoxical only to those who believe in thunder-like freedom”<sup>264</sup> and in a notion of the self as disconnected from its own history and social context. Autonomy, therefore,

is a *project* that aims: in the broad sense, at bringing to light society's instituting power and at rendering it explicit in reflection; and in the narrow sense, at re-absorbing the political, as explicit power, into politics, as the lucid and deliberate activity whose object is the explicit institution of society [...] and its working [...] in view of the common ends and the public endeavours.<sup>265</sup>

It is in this sense that, for Castoriadis, “*paideia*, education from birth to death, is a central dimension of any politics of autonomy”. From this perspective, it would seem, the project of creating generative citizens is in some ways a “special” form of what Sandel calls a formative project. Indeed, as we said in the previous section, generativity describes a measured input of “self” into a continuous process of truth-making. Creating generative citizens, in this sense, is the explicit project of teaching individuals to seek a balance between the two inescapable conditions of our social existence, that of products of an education imparted on us and that of authors, ourselves, of the education to be imparted on the generations to come. It is, we could say, the “project to project together”. The Brave New World, in this sense, is a world in which

---

of untranslatability). Ultimately, she draws upon her disciplined vulnerability to make moral choices and negotiate trade-offs. The disciplined vulnerable citizen becomes comfortable being neither autonomous chooser nor moulded product of identifiable moral traditions. In this way, too, the cultivation of disciplined vulnerability marks a mean between extremes. In general, disciplined vulnerability grants to other citizens a (rebuttable) presumption of political friendship.” Ann Mongoven, *Just Love: Transforming Civic Virtue* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 281.

<sup>261</sup> Mongoven, p. 58.

<sup>262</sup> Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, p. 146.

<sup>263</sup> Here Castoriadis is reformulating Rousseau’s famous phrase, “some form of association must be found as a result of which the whole strength of the community will be enlisted for the protection of the person and property of each constituent member, in such a way that each, when united to his fellows, renders obedience to his own will, and remains as free as he was before”. Quoted in Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, p. 173.

<sup>264</sup> Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, p. 173.

<sup>265</sup> Castoriadis, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, p. 174. Let us recall that Castoriadis uses the terms “political” and “politics” very differently from Rosanvallon, whose use of the words we have adopted earlier in the thesis.

what is lost in giving up on the endeavour to negotiate and compromise in a common formative project is precisely the collective disposition to turn what we have learnt to be true into something politically significant: something new, achieved in concert with others.

There is a second perspective from which creating generative citizens is a special formative project in a liberal democracy, which the following two chapters will discuss in detail and which in concluding I shall briefly introduce. As anticipated in the introduction to this chapter and repeated at the beginning of this section, I believe that learning to turn what one knows to be true into something politically significant – that is, displaying excellence in the truth-related practices of imagination, performance and negotiation – is a character trait that liberal democracies should foster, but also a disposition that is acquired through a pattern of experiences that representative democracy makes available to its members. Indeed, I will argue that the formative project that aims at generative citizenship is encoded in the process of democratic representation, when this is understood as the experience of representing others. In this sense, advocating for a common education in the virtue of generativity is therefore a less ambitious call and a less demanding transformation of one's character than it seems. Its acquisition in fact can be entrusted to an experience that – as the recalibration of representation undertaken in Chapter IV will demonstrate – could be made a common experience in everybody's democratic life.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter introduced the idea of a specifically democratic notion of truthfulness, a complex virtue which I suggest as a normative standard for the evaluation of the truth-related behaviour of democracy citizens and of their representatives. Truthfulness, in this particular qualification, is the simultaneous display of the kind of basic virtues which borrowing from Williams we have called “virtues of truth”. Besides accuracy and sincerity, the two virtues identified by Williams, I have argued that at the heart of democratic truthfulness is a third, equally essential disposition that ought to be displayed in carrying out activities associated with the truth, the virtue of generativity. Indeed, building on the extended notion of factual truth put forward earlier in the thesis, I have claimed that there is more to be done “with” or “to” the truth than wanting to know it, find it out and telling it to others: when factual truth is understood as encompassing the facts yet to be made, truth also requires that we imagine, perform and negotiate it with others. It is in undertaking these more properly political practices that generativity is mobilized.

Finally, I have suggested that “creating generative citizens” is a legitimate aim for public education in liberal democracies, one which does not clash with their aiming at promoting the autonomy of their members, but that is rather functional to it. In doing so, I anticipated the main argument the second “jamb” of our archway will be concerned with developing. Encoded in democratic representation – so goes the argument – is a pattern of experiences which lead to the acquisition of the virtue of generativity. Conceived as the experience of representing others, democratic representation can be seen to provide the opportunity for a rigorous training in the disposition to turn what one knows to be true into something politically significant, and therefore an irreplaceable element of the democratic project.

## IV. Representing Others

I noted in the Introduction that there are two questions leading our investigation. The first concerns the truth-related demands that democracy places on its members, the second the resources available in democratic societies to ensure that such demands are fulfilled. In seeking an answer to these questions, I have advanced two arguments, both culminating in the idea of generativity as a virtue of truth that Chapter III attempted to explicate. Chapters I and II – the first pillar of our Roman archway – tackled the first question and aimed at grounding and justifying the corresponding first argument: democracy demands that its members display a specifically democratic form of truthfulness, one which requires mobilizing, besides accuracy and sincerity, also the virtue of generativity, the virtue of turning what one knows to be true into something politically significant. This chapter and the next – the second pillar of the thesis architecture – aim now at grounding and justifying the argument by which I answer the second of our questions: when regarded as the experience of representing others, democratic representation constitutes an invaluable training in the practices of imagining, performing and negotiating the future-regarding end of factual truth with others – a thorough training in the virtue of generativity. When understood in these terms, then, representation can be said to provide liberal democratic societies with an in-built device of civic ethical transformation, which teaches their members to live up to the truth-related demands democracy places on them.

This is the angle from which in this chapter we look at the concept and the practice of democratic representation. As the following pages will clarify, our understanding of representation and of its place in democracy shares the basic view disclosed by the so-called “democratic rediscovery of representation”<sup>266</sup> and in particular by the “constructivist turn”.<sup>267</sup> This entailed the view, in Lisa Disch’s words, that “political representation in mass democracies functions more creatively, *generatively* and dynamically – as theories of representation in culture, literature, and the arts would predict – than statically and “unidirectionally” as the prevailing

---

<sup>266</sup> Nadia Urbinati, *Representative Democracy: Principles and Genealogy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 5.

<sup>267</sup> Lisa Disch, “The “Constructivist Turn” in Democratic Representation: A Normative Dead-End?”, *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical & Democratic Theory*, 22.4 (2015), 487.

normative theory of representative democracy prescribes.”<sup>268</sup> The debates generated around these theoretical developments touch upon a number of historical, conceptual, epistemological and normative questions, and the two labels, admittedly, span across views and approaches often very different from each other.

As far as I have been able to observe, however, the implicit concern behind the questions that, from various perspectives, come under scrutiny in such discussions is invariably that elicited by a “passive” image of representation: representation as the phenomenon, ultimately, of being represented by others. Even Michael Saward’s concept of representation as claim-making, which explicitly foregrounds the active role of the “maker” of representations, does so in the context of a reflection which defends “the citizen standpoint” as the perspective from which democratic theory should preferably operate.<sup>269</sup> In fact, nowhere in this debate is the focus explicitly on the experience itself of representing others, the experience of engaging in the creative, generative and dynamic practice of standing, acting, speaking and listening for others.

In this chapter I attempt a recalibration of current constructivist accounts of representation by introducing what I term “the representative standpoint”, an underexplored epistemological perspective which discloses what in Chapter V we call the *ethopoietic function* of the experience of representing others: its capacity to induce the ethical self-transformation of the citizens engaging in it. From the representative standpoint, I argue, we are able to explicate more clearly than has been done so far in what sense it can be said – as Jane Mansbridge has recently – that representation is *recursive*,<sup>270</sup> namely that it “requires a movement back and forth between consultations with constituents and deliberations with other legislators.”<sup>271</sup> Here, indeed, I configure such recursiveness as the periodic motion between two real and ideal spaces, *Space A*, where the representative meets with their constituents, and *Space B*, where the representative meets with the representatives of other constituencies. This constant moving back and forth between the two spaces, I will claim, is the hallmark of all democratic representation and the essence of the experience of representing others. Indeed, as Chapter V later shows, on the path from A to B and back the representative is exposed to the pattern of experiences that shapes their civic character towards matching the ideal of generativity.

---

<sup>268</sup> Disch, ‘The “Constructivist Turn” in Democratic Representation’, p. 488. Emphasis mine.

<sup>269</sup> Michael Saward, *The Representative Claim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>270</sup> Jane Mansbridge, ‘Recursive Representation’, in *Creating Political Presence: The New Politics of Democratic Representation*, ed. by Dario Castiglione and Johannes Pollak (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

<sup>271</sup> Melissa S. Williams, *Voice, Trust, and Memory: Marginalized Groups and the Failings of Liberal Representation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 231.

As Mansbridge observes, “addressing the norms appropriate to a system of representation assumes that representation is, and is normatively intended to be, something more than a defective substitute for direct democracy.”<sup>272</sup> The chapter begins with a discussion of this “assumption.” In the first of four sections, I introduce the core themes in the democratic rediscovery and the constructivist view of representation. In the second section, I then summarise the changes undergone by the standard account of representation in light of these theoretical developments, arguing that the concept of representation endured a process of progressive spatial, temporal and agential “liberation” which importantly emancipated it from what had been the prevailing conceptual and normative frameworks. The following two sections are intended to provide an original contribution to the debate. The third section is a brief epistemological interlude. Here, borrowing from feminist standpoint theories I introduce the distinctive epistemological perspective adopted in this reflection, the above-mentioned representative standpoint. Finally, building on Saward’s notions of audience and constituency, in the last section I carry out a descriptive analysis of the process of representation as it appears from the representative standpoint, as the periodic motion between Space A and Space B.

## Representation and Democracy

The question of what representation is to democracy has become crucial in the last couple of decades, both in the everyday political life of democratic citizens and political leaders and for the development of contemporary democratic theory. This is unsurprising given that at the heart of this question is no less than the nature of “the very subject of this democracy.”<sup>273</sup> In fact, as I hope to make clear in the following pages, what is puzzling about the juxtaposition of representation and democracy is that whereas the former necessarily presumes and preserves a division within the people (the division between the represented and representatives), the latter must be able to appeal to the people’s unity for its defining claim to make sense: that it is with the people that supreme authority ultimately belongs. This puzzle has its roots in the early experiences of liberal parliamentarism, and clearly lends itself to be approached as a matter of historical investigation. Indeed, as Frank Ankersmit points out, “no less than any other political system” representative democracy is “a product of a quite unique and specifiable set of historical circumstances and should be assessed accordingly.”<sup>274</sup>

---

<sup>272</sup> Jane Mansbridge, ‘Rethinking Representation’, *American Political Science Review*, 97.4 (2003), 515–28 (p. 515).

<sup>273</sup> Rosanvallon, p. 37.

<sup>274</sup> Frank R. Ankersmit, ‘Representational Democracy: An Aesthetic Approach to Conflict and Compromise’, *Common Knowledge*, 8.1 (2002), 24–46 (p. 25).



Nadia Urbinati recalls an eighteenth-century study by Stefano Maffei, according to whom the containing and unifying functions of representation could be traced back to the Roman Empire.<sup>275</sup> Ever since the Roman Empire, according to Maffei, political representation had continued to evolve through the centuries into the form of government we know today. In spite of its suggestiveness though, the continuity view does not attract much agreement today. Instead, the most popular view among scholars places the origin of political representation as we know it today in the Middle Ages, emphasising its specifically modern, and therefore discontinuous character. Unlike the ambassadors from the provinces of the empire who appeared before the Roman Senate but were not intended as decision-makers, the representatives in medieval Europe were endowed with the power to bind the communities who appointed them, deciding on their behalf before the court of the kings. By merging a unifying function with the function of subjecting the population to decisions made by appointed delegates, the modern institution of representation was born.<sup>276</sup> This is the model which was later put on trial in France, during the eighteenth century, “when representation became the bone of contention in the struggle for the control of sovereign power between a newly born civil society and the king.”<sup>277</sup> “[T]he miracle of representative democracy”, then, which combining two concepts that bear no intrinsic link to each other “succeeded in marrying Athens to medieval Europe,”<sup>278</sup> is commonly believed to have arisen at this time and to have developed through to the achievement of universal suffrage in the western world after World War Two.

Illuminating as it is, the historical development of representative democracy is not in itself the concern leading our discussion. It is nonetheless useful to notice that the idea of representation that emerges from historical investigations contributed, in turn, to shaping the non-historical side of an academic debate which thrived with particular energy during the first decade of this century. Of these investigations, Pierre Rosanvallon’s “history of the political”<sup>279</sup> stands out as one among the most influential. In particular, Rosanvallon’s invitation to think of democracy not simply as something that “*has* a history” but more radically as something that “*is* a

---

<sup>275</sup> Urbinati, *Representative Democracy*, p. 251; Urbinati, ‘Representative Democracy and Its Critics’, p. 29.

<sup>276</sup> Urbinati, ‘Representative Democracy and Its Critics’, p. 29.

<sup>277</sup> Urbinati, ‘Representative Democracy and Its Critics’, p. 30, paraphrasing Robert Derathé.

<sup>278</sup> Ankersmit, ‘Representational Democracy: An Aesthetic Approach to Conflict and Compromise’, p. 32.

<sup>279</sup> Rosanvallon’s concept of ‘the political’ has been mentioned in passing in Chapter I. Here it is worth quoting him at length on the issue: “[a]s I understand it, “the political” is at once a field and a project. As a field, it designates the site where the multiple threads of the lives of men and women come together, what allows all of their activities and discourses to be understood in an overall framework. It exists in virtue of the fact that there exists a “society” acknowledged by its members as a whole that affords meaningfulness to its constituent parts. As a project, the political means the process whereby a human collectivity, which is never to be understood as a simple “population,” progressively takes on the face of an actual community. It is, rather, constituted by an always contentious process whereby the explicit or implicit rules of what they can share and accomplish in common— rules which give a form to the life of the polity— are elaborated.” Rosanvallon, p. 34.

history,”<sup>280</sup> succeeded in presenting the relationship between representation and democracy as an open, contemporary concern. Representative democracy looms, thus, as a conceptual and practical challenge to be undertaken – from various perspectives – with the aim of sustaining the continuous work of exploration and experimentation that democracy itself consists of, coming to the aid of our political system “in its attempt to understand and elaborate itself.”<sup>281</sup> This understanding, on its own, constitutes a fundamental achievement. In fact, the “uneasy alliance”<sup>282</sup> between representation and democracy hasn’t always been looked at in this critical spirit. It is emblematic that Hanna Pitkin’s seminal *The Concept of Representation*<sup>283</sup> which continues to inform the relevant discussion to the present day – leaves the relationship of representation to democracy completely unquestioned. It is Pitkin herself, forty years later, who acknowledges so. The relationship between representation and democracy, she writes, was,

a topic never raised in my earlier study because at the time I took that relationship for granted as unproblematic. [...] I more or less equated democracy with representation, or at least with representative government. It seemed axiomatic that under modern conditions only representation can make democracy possible. That assumption is not exactly false, but it is profoundly misleading, in ways that remain hidden if one treats it as an axiom and asks only technical rather than fundamental theoretical questions.<sup>284</sup>

We could say, then, that if the relationship between representation and democracy approached the end of the century in the guise of an axiom, it certainly crossed the threshold of the millennium looking instead very much like a problem. The metamorphosis was in large part due to the intellectual effort spent in posing those “fundamental theoretical questions” Pitkin hints at. The impulse to pose them, however, was certainly also powered by the radical transformation undergone, in the meantime, by the material circumstances in which real representative democracies were operating: the “lessening of the significance of national borders,”<sup>285</sup> the crises of party politics and, most relevantly for us, the fast-paced innovations in media technologies. As a matter of fact, the last couple of decades have witnessed an unprecedented technological acceleration, such that there are “variants of direct democracy that might now seem within the reach of what can practically be realized.”<sup>286</sup> For instance, we are already at a point where “opinion polls could be perfected in such a way that each instant it will be possible to ascertain what percentage of the electorate either is for or against a certain

---

<sup>280</sup> Rosanvallon, p. 38.

<sup>281</sup> Rosanvallon, p. 38.

<sup>282</sup> Hanna F. Pitkin, ‘Representation and Democracy: Uneasy Alliance’, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 27.3 (2004), 335–42.

<sup>283</sup> Hanna F. Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967).

<sup>284</sup> Pitkin, ‘Representation and Democracy: Uneasy Alliance’, p. 336.

<sup>285</sup> Michael Saward, ‘Authorisation and Authenticity: Representation and the Unelected’, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 17.1 (2009), 1–22 (p. 1).

<sup>286</sup> Frank R. Ankersmit, ‘Representative Democracy’, *Antiteses*, 6.12 (2013), 456–67 (p. 466). Admittedly, in the light of recent opinion polls, Ankersmit is probably over-optimistic here.

policy”, allowing a *de facto* “continuous monitoring of what the opinions of the electorate are about any set of issues.”<sup>287</sup> In other words: replacing democratic representation with the use of technologies that would allow the direct institutionalisation of public opinion is by now a realistically achievable aim. Admittedly, among scholars, almost none of the advocates of such new devices thinks these could replace representation altogether. But if, once, comparative evaluations between representative and direct democracy were ultimately limited by an acknowledged actual impossibility of the latter (precisely by Pitkin’s early assumption that “under modern conditions only representation can make democracy possible”), this is different today: the choice we have no longer seems an exclusively ideal one, it appears as an actual choice between two options equally possible in reality.<sup>288</sup>

This, then, is the intellectual and material context surrounding the democratic rediscovery of representation – or “representative turn” in democratic theory, as Disch also calls it<sup>289</sup> – and the constructivist turn this entailed. Crucial to these theoretical developments in empirical and normative democratic scholarship is precisely a “break from abstract normative theorizing that idealizes participatory and so called “direct” forms of democratic practice”<sup>290</sup> and the consequent recognition that representation is, in fact, an intrinsic element of what makes democracy possible. At stake in such a break is nothing less than “the very valence of “representative democracy,”<sup>291</sup> a phrase, as Disch observed, that “once struck participatory democrats as an “oxymoron””<sup>292</sup> but that today strikes some as “in fact a tautology.”<sup>293</sup> The core belief behind the normative claim that political representation is intrinsic to democratic government – the claim, in other words, that democracy, without representation, is simply not democracy – brings us back to the “puzzle” described above, when we said that what representative democracy threatens to tear apart is the personality, so to speak, of the people and, as a consequence, its capacity to will and be sovereign. As a matter of fact, what the proponents of the representative turn put into question is precisely whether the people – “democracy’s political subject”<sup>294</sup> – exists at all prior to being “brought into presence,” that is, prior to being represented. In fact, to put it in the explicit words of Rosanvallon,

---

<sup>287</sup> Ankersmit, ‘Representative Democracy’, p. 466.

<sup>288</sup> Arguably deliberative democrats may object that there are more than options to choose between, deliberative democracy being a third one. While here I do not have space to expand on this question, I make some comments on the direct/representative democracy versus deliberative democracy in the Conclusions.

<sup>289</sup> Disch, ‘The “Constructivist Turn” in Democratic Representation’, p. 488.

<sup>290</sup> Disch, ‘The “Constructivist Turn” in Democratic Representation’, p. 489.

<sup>291</sup> Lisa Disch, ‘Toward a Mobilization Conception of Democratic Representation’, *The American Political Science Review*, 105.1 (2011), 100–114 (p. 104).

<sup>292</sup> Urbinati, *Representative Democracy*, p. 4.

<sup>293</sup> Sofia Näsström, ‘Representative Democracy as Tautology: Ankersmit and Lefort on Representation’, *European Journal of Political Theory*, 5.3 (2006), 321 (p. 330).

<sup>294</sup> Disch, ‘Toward a Mobilization Conception of Democratic Representation’, p. 104.

the people do[es] not exist except through approximate successive representations of itself. The people is a master at once imperious and impossible to find. “We the people” can take only debatable form. *Its definition is at once a problem and a challenge.*<sup>295</sup>

The people, this means, needs to be created, represented into existence. It is with the acknowledgment of such essential unifying-creative function it fulfils in making the political subject of a democracy, thus, that representation comes to be regarded as neither supplementary nor compensatory but as nothing less than “the essence” itself of democracy.<sup>296</sup>

It has been noticed that the “challenge” of defining the people underwent various interpretations throughout the history of representative government, and that the creative element that democratic theorists of the representative turn foreground only features in the most recent of such interpretations and coincides with a redefinition of popular sovereignty: sovereignty is no longer regarded as the monopoly of the will but understood as a diarchy – in Urbinati’s terms – of will and judgment.<sup>297</sup><sup>298</sup> Urbinati identifies, across the history of representation, three “perspectives” or “theories” presupposing different relationship between state and society and thus different interpretation of the challenge of defining the people. The first two she calls the *juridical* and the *institutional* theories of representation, both “grounded in a State-Person analogy and a voluntaristic conception of sovereignty.”<sup>299</sup> In both, representation is treated “like a private contract of commission,” which grants “license to perform an action by some person or persons who must possess the right to perform the given action themselves.”<sup>300</sup> It is within this framework, to be clear, that the well know opposition between the delegate and the trustee models takes place, opposing to an ideal of “delegation with binding instructions” one of “alienation with unbounded trust.”<sup>301</sup><sup>302</sup>

---

<sup>295</sup> Rosanvallon, p. 37.

<sup>296</sup> Näsström, p. 330.

<sup>297</sup> Urbinati, ‘Representative Democracy and Its Critics’, p. 26.

<sup>298</sup> For Urbinati, it is the Kantian revision of Rousseau’s doctrine of sovereignty that makes “the difference between representative and nonrepresentative regimes [become] synonymous with the difference between judgment (the general will) and capriciousness (arbitrary will).” Urbinati, *Representative Democracy*, p. 102. In this sense, it is no longer inasmuch as it wills that the people is sovereign, but also in as much as it judges, inasmuch as it deploys the necessarily representational faculty of judgment. It is thus by enabling the people to judge that representation brings the democratic sovereign into being, and it is in this sense that democracy is essentially representative. This certainly resonates with the continuity we established in Chapter I between the internal-reflective and the external-collective dimension of the human experience, and in particular to the role that our Arendtian approach to the question of truth, freedom and politics assigns to the faculty of judgment. Whilst offering a fruitful potential path for further exploration, this resonance is not one that I have space to explore further here.

<sup>299</sup> Urbinati, *Representative Democracy*, p. 21.

<sup>300</sup> Urbinati, *Representative Democracy*, p. 21.

<sup>301</sup> Urbinati, *Representative Democracy*, p. 22.

<sup>302</sup> Andrew Rehfeld has recently defended the analytical currency of this classic distinction. Whilst arguing that “the casting of the ‘trustee/delegate’ problem as particular to political representation [...] constitutes a substantive error that fails to distinguish the tension between citizen preferences and normative ideals from professional obligations that any decision maker [...] takes on when he or she takes on the role of making law or other decisions,” Rehfeld does not dismiss the distinction but suggests unpacking it into three components that make the categories at stake still very relevant to the study of representation. Andrew Rehfeld, ‘Beyond trustees and delegates’, in *Political Representation: Roles, representatives and the represented*, ed. by Marc Bühlmann and Jan Fivaz (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 30.

From both the juridical and the institutional perspectives, two theories linked by a fundamental conceptual and normative continuity, the people is assumed as an entity which precedes its representation, an entity which representation makes visible by transcending social differences. It is only with the third, the *political* theory of representation that a radical break is introduced which transforms representation from a static category into a dynamic one. From this perspective, “representation is not meant to make a preexisting entity— i.e., the unity of the state or the people or the nation— visible; rather, it is a form of political existence created by the actors themselves (the constituency and the representative).”<sup>303</sup> Whereas juridical and institutional representation unify the people by transcending social differences, political representation unifies it by adhering to them. Only the political theory, thus, “makes representation an institution that is consonant with a pluralistic democratic society.”<sup>304</sup> Indeed, says Urbinati, whereas the juridical perspective on representation can be said to tend to the ideal horizon of direct democracy, and institutional one to the ideal of electoral democracy, it is only the political theory of representation that fully establishes representative democracy as a legitimate form of democratic government in its own right.

The question of “the making of the represented” is the central theme also in the other theoretical development we are considering, intimately related to the democratic rediscovery of representation although generally based more distinctively on phenomenological rather than historical observation. This, we have mentioned, is known in theories of representation as “the constructivist turn.” As Disch points out, “a key to the constructivist approach [is] to conceptualize representative and represented as linked not by a static “correspondence” but in a dynamic process of mutual constitution.”<sup>305</sup> Such a way of conceptualizing representation clashes with the prevailing normative view that accompanies the so-called “standard account” of representation. This, found in (early) Pitkin and narrow interpretations of her work as well as in comparative democratic politics research, views representation in much more strictly contractualist terms than scholars of the rediscovery would concede. A typical expression, for instance, of the standard account or “traditional model”, as it is otherwise referred to, is well captured by Mansbridge’s category of “promissory representation.” Here constituents authorize representatives on the basis of certain promises these make prior to the elections, promises for which after the elections they hold representatives accountable.<sup>306</sup>

---

<sup>303</sup> Urbinati, *Representative Democracy*, p. 24.

<sup>304</sup> Urbinati, *Representative Democracy*, p. 21.

<sup>305</sup> Disch, “The “Constructivist Turn” in Democratic Representation”, p. 489.

<sup>306</sup> Mansbridge, ‘Rethinking Representation’, p. 515.

I will return briefly to Mansbridge analysis in the following section, and to other forms of contemporary democratic representation acknowledged in empirical studies she discusses and which instead challenge the validity of the standard view. What matters at this stage, though, is observing how the normative theory projected by promissory representation loses traction when it comes to judging representation as the political practice that, to paraphrase Rosanvallon, “narrates the people into being.”<sup>307</sup> In fact, in both its delegate and trustee versions, promissory representation responds to a principal-agent logic, where a principal – a particular pre-existent constituency – keeps control over an agent – the representative. As Ankersmit puts it,

constructivist’s scepticism about the ready accessibility of the “real,”<sup>308</sup> questions the validity of the standard account precisely on this point, with the argument that “the represented (the voter) is not an objective given. He may change his mind about himself and his own political opinions because of what his representative [...] has been doing with his mandate since the last election. Interaction between represented and representative transforms the represented, the voter, from a hard and unchanging given into something more fuzzy and continuous with his representative.”<sup>309</sup>

In this sense, confronted with similar constructivist arguments about the plasticity of constituencies and the endogeneity of their preferences to the representative process,<sup>310</sup> notions such as congruence<sup>311</sup> and accountability,<sup>312</sup> central to the prescriptive apparatus associated with the traditional model of representation, appear increasingly inadequate. Moreover, at the same time as it dismantles the old normative standard, the constructivist view also threatens to dismantle the ground for a new one, as the complicity of the representatives in the construction of the standpoint from which they should be judged – the circularity, we could say, it establishes between the subject and the object of the normative activity – risks resulting in a “normative dead-end.”<sup>313</sup>

I will say something more of the problematic normative implications of the constructivist picture we have been outlining in the third section of this chapter, with particular reference to the epistemological questions these in turn elicit. First, though, I shall briefly outline the idea

---

<sup>307</sup> It is worth noticing, however, that Gregory Conti and William Selinger recently put forward a meticulous argument that questions the constructivist interpretation of Rosanvallon’s work, maintained by Disch, Urbinati and other scholars – including myself in this context. Gregory Conti and William Selinger, ‘The Other Side of Representation: The History and Theory of Representative Government in Pierre Rosanvallon’, *Constellations*, 23.4 (2016), 548–62.

<sup>308</sup> Seward, *The Representative Claim*, p. 69.

<sup>309</sup> Ankersmit, ‘Representational Democracy: An Aesthetic Approach to Conflict and Compromise’, p. 35.

<sup>310</sup> Cass R. Sunstein, ‘Preferences and Politics’, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 20.1 (1991), 3–34 (p. 10); Disch, ‘The “Constructivist Turn” in Democratic Representation’, p. 495.

<sup>311</sup> Lisa Disch, ‘Beyond Congruence’, in *Political Representation: Roles, representatives and the represented*, ed. by Marc Bühlmann and Jan Fivaz (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>312</sup> Mansbridge puts forward a detailed discussion of accountability, distinguishing between narrative/vertical accountability as a normative standard mobilized in ‘sanction models’ of representation, and deliberative/horizontal accountability, more adequate to assess what she terms a ‘selection model’ of representation. Jane Mansbridge, ‘A “Selection Model” of Political Representation’, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 17.4 (2009), 369.

<sup>313</sup> Disch, ‘The “Constructivist Turn” in Democratic Representation’; Eline Severs and Suzanne Dovi, ‘Why We Need to Return to the Ethics of Political Representation’, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 51.2 (2018), 309–13.

of democratic representation as it emerges from such picture. Indeed, it is true that from the perspective disclosed by the historicist literature that inaugurated the representative turn the standard model is “outdated,” whereas for the theorists of the constructivist turn that model was “misconceived from the very beginning.”<sup>314</sup> It can be also said, nonetheless, that the critiques of the standard model these two theoretical developments brought about do converge and are in fact complementary (democracy can be said to be essentially representative *because* representation is to some extent a constructive practice), and that they, together, succeeded in informing a “new conventional wisdom”<sup>315</sup> about the practice and the meaning of representation in contemporary democracies.

## The “New Conventional Wisdom”

Urbinati writes of her political notion of representation that it “helps us in two respects: from a theoretical point of view, it illuminates the place and role of judgment in politics; from a phenomenological point of view, it changes the perspective of time and space in politics.”<sup>316</sup> This is all the more true if applied to the new understanding of representation, or the new conventional wisdom, as I am calling it borrowing Saward’s phrase, that results more generally from the developments outlined in the previous sections. In this section I briefly summarize the conceptual and normative “liberation” – so to speak – the standard account of representation underwent following the theoretical advancement we reviewed. I do so by suggesting three trajectories along which this liberation operates, precisely: a spatial trajectory, a temporal one, and an agential one.

With regard to space, representation used to be thought of as an irremediably territorial notion, a “topographical category.”<sup>317</sup> This is no longer the case, as the new conventional wisdom now accounts for the many ways in which political and democratic representation transgress territorial boundaries. Mansbridge’s model of “surrogate representation” is an instance of this sort. Indeed, surrogate representation is a legitimate form of democratic representation that “occurs when legislators represent constituents outside their own districts”<sup>318</sup> and that “plays the normatively critical role of providing representation to voters who lose in their own

---

<sup>314</sup> Disch, ‘The “Constructivist Turn” in Democratic Representation’, p. 489.

<sup>315</sup> Michael Saward, ‘Shape-Shifting Representation’, *American Political Science Review*, 108.4 (2014), 723–36 (p. 732).

<sup>316</sup> Urbinati, *Representative Democracy*, p. 225.

<sup>317</sup> Lisa Disch, ‘Radical Democracy: The Silent Partner in Political Representation’s Constructivist Turn’, in *Creating Political Presence: The New Politics of Democratic Representation*, ed. by Dario Castiglione and Johannes Pollak (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019), p. 165.

<sup>318</sup> Mansbridge, ‘Rethinking Representation’, p. 515.

district.”<sup>319</sup> The example Mansbridge uses is that of Barney Frank, former Democratic member of the US House of Representatives from Massachusetts, who – being himself openly gay – represented the interests of gay and lesbian citizens throughout the whole nation. With its focus on transnational institutional representation, Andrew Rehfeld’s “general theory of political representation”<sup>320</sup> constitutes another step in this direction, contributing in particular, as Saward observes, to free our understanding of representation “from confinement to the national context.”<sup>321</sup> The most radical account in this sense is probably Saward’s own. His notion of the representative claim indeed reveals the in fact ubiquitous character of democratic representation, inviting us to address spatial concerns away from the idea of territory and towards the notion of “situation” and “context.”<sup>322</sup>

Moving to the temporal dimension, representation used to be a primarily past-oriented notion. Timewise, it could be said, the past provided the only instance of the non-present: it was the past time that representation was expected to and judged for making present *again*. Also in this case, of crucial importance in shaping the new wisdom is Mansbridge’s work. Her “anticipatory representation” is a model – again legitimately present in contemporary democratic practice – in which the representative addresses their responsiveness and accountability to future electors. As Mansbridge explains, “representatives focus on what they think their constituents will approve at the next election, not on what they promised to do at the last election.”<sup>323</sup>

Anticipatory representation thus focuses on the prudential incentive to please the voter in the next election [...], replaces the constituent’s transmission of will with the representative’s desire to please, and shifts normative scrutiny from the process of accountability to the quality of deliberation throughout the representative’s term in office.<sup>324</sup>

The orientation to the future that underpins anticipatory representation is indeed a common element across constructivist scholarship. The emphasis this places on the “inescapably figurative moment in the emergence of a democratic constituency”<sup>325</sup> and the rejection of the idea that that representation “simply reproduce[s] [...] a fullness preceding it,”<sup>326</sup> are clear appeals to the future time as a legitimate referent of democratic representation. We could say, then, that the new conventional wisdom accounts for a future-oriented dimension of democratic representation that the traditional model instead lacked: the future too provides

---

<sup>319</sup> Mansbridge, ‘Rethinking Representation’, p. 523.

<sup>320</sup> Andrew Rehfeld, ‘Towards a General Theory of Political Representation’, *The Journal of Politics*, 68.1 (2006), 1–21.

<sup>321</sup> Saward, *The Representative Claim*, p. 26.

<sup>322</sup> Saward, ‘Shape-Shifting Representation’, p. 725.

<sup>323</sup> Mansbridge, ‘Rethinking Representation’, p. 515.

<sup>324</sup> Mansbridge, ‘Rethinking Representation’, p. 520.

<sup>325</sup> Disch, ‘Toward a Mobilization Conception of Democratic Representation’, p. 108.

<sup>326</sup> Ernesto Laclau, quoted in Disch, ‘Toward a Mobilization Conception of Democratic Representation’, p. 108.



now a possible instance of the non-present, and it is also future time that representation should be judged for making present, we shall say, *anew*.

Finally, before its constructivist revision, the study of democratic representation was rigorously restricted to institutional agents, that is to elected representatives. The new wisdom, instead, succeeded in “register[ing] the proliferation of “lay” and “informal” representatives who operate beyond the parameters of electoral institutions and their accountability mechanisms.”<sup>327</sup> Saward, for example, explicitly engaged with a “reassessment of non-elective representative claims”<sup>328</sup> concluding not only that “a wide array of other, non-elective representative claims in complex contemporary democratic politics”<sup>329</sup> is inevitable but also that “there is a case for saying that the value to democracy of electoral and non-electoral representation is positive-sum.”<sup>330</sup> Laura Montanaro’s argument for the democratic legitimacy of self-appointed representation is another instance of the effort to acknowledge and account for informal representation.<sup>331</sup>

These and similar approaches led to a progressive reconsideration of the centrality of elections to representative democracy. As Urbinati observed, “if elections alone qualify representative government as democratic then it is hard to find good arguments against the critics of contemporary democracy who, from the left and the right, set out from time to time to unmask the role of the people as a ‘mere myth’.”<sup>332</sup> At the same time, I could say, if elections alone qualify democracy as representative then it is hard to account for the “myriad actors [who] make claims to speak for others,”<sup>333</sup> especially when these are heard, accepted and acted upon, as it is often the case in contemporary democracies. Moreover, as it expands the understanding of who is a democratic representative, the new wisdom simultaneously “disclose[s] representation’s capacity [...] to create as subjects of representation previously excluded groups or entities that can only be imagined, such as future generations, microscopic species, and ecological processes,”<sup>334</sup> expanding so our understanding also of who is the democratic represented. It is in this sense that it can be said that the new conventional wisdom brings to the foreground representation as “a multi-actor system,”<sup>335</sup> as “an overall process of what might

---

<sup>327</sup> Disch, ‘The “Constructivist Turn” in Democratic Representation’, p. 489.

<sup>328</sup> Saward, ‘Authorisation and Authenticity’, p. 1.

<sup>329</sup> Saward, ‘Authorisation and Authenticity’, p. 22.

<sup>330</sup> Saward, ‘Authorisation and Authenticity’, p. 21.

<sup>331</sup> Laura Montanaro, ‘The Democratic Legitimacy of Self-Appointed Representatives’, *The Journal of Politics*, 74.4 (2012), 1094–1107.

<sup>332</sup> Urbinati, ‘Representative Democracy and Its Critics’, p. 25.

<sup>333</sup> Saward, ‘Shape-Shifting Representation’, p. 725.

<sup>334</sup> Disch, ‘Radical Democracy: The Silent Partner in Political Representation’s Constructivist Turn’, p. 178; Michael Saward, ‘Representation’, in *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge*, ed. by Andrew Dobson and Robyn Eckersley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 185.

<sup>335</sup> Mansbridge, ‘Rethinking Representation’, p. 519.

be called “continuing representation,””<sup>336</sup> addressing growing attention to the systemic features of the phenomenon – which Pitkin herself had signalled – and a less exclusive concern to the quality of the dyadic relationship between the representative and their constituents.

Let us now return to the point at which this chapter intervenes more directly in the overarching argument of this thesis. In saying that the experience of representing others exposes the citizens engaging with it to a set of practices eventually leading to generativity, I have had in mind an understanding of democratic representation that corresponds in large part to the picture just drawn. Indeed, I too, in broad terms, understand democratic representation as a ubiquitous, dynamic, multi-actor process by which a common reality is made present again and present anew. This means, among other things, that what in my view counts as the experience of representing others is much more than the mere experience of being a member of an elected representative body – as I shall specify in the coming sections and in the next chapter. It also means that, given the emphasis put on the creative act of making the represented, in my view representation clearly prescribes a continuous effort of imagination and performance on the part of the citizen who represents others and in ways that Chapter V will discuss in detail.

What is now in more urgent need of clarification, instead, is the shift in perspective that is required in order to bring the focus on *the experience of representing others*, as well as the extent to which this shift could further transform the new conventional understanding of the whole process of representation and the normative puzzle that surrounds it. In particular, I shall claim, such shift in perspective is a necessary step if we are to grasp the full pedagogical value of democratic representation.

We have said the new conventional wisdom raises a number of normative concerns. As Disch recently noticed, there are critics, among scholars of deliberative democracy, who worry about the loss of normative capacity involved by a constructivist account of representation. In the context of her discussion of the matter, indicating a possible way out of the “manipulation impasse” in which she argues “the preoccupation with legitimacy lands deliberative critics of constructivism,”<sup>337</sup> Disch finds that what ultimately “holds the wheels of [their] adjudicatory project”<sup>338</sup> lays in the distinction between education and manipulation. Indeed, she observes, “because it defines democratically legitimate representation by its *educative* function, deliberative legitimacy puts the representative in a “pedagogical” relation to the constituency.”<sup>339</sup> My

---

<sup>336</sup> Mansbridge, ‘Rethinking Representation’, p. 521.

<sup>337</sup> Disch, ‘Radical Democracy: The Silent Partner in Political Representation’s Constructivist Turn’, p. 163.

<sup>338</sup> Disch, ‘Radical Democracy: The Silent Partner in Political Representation’s Constructivist Turn’, p. 163.

<sup>339</sup> Disch, ‘Radical Democracy: The Silent Partner in Political Representation’s Constructivist Turn’, p. 164.

argument that the experience of representing others betters the character of the citizen engaging with it rests implicitly on the acknowledgment of the educative function of democratic representation. At the same time, however, it qualifies it in two important respects. First, it emphasises the ethical over the epistemic contents of the education at stake. For us, this means, the educative function of representation is not exhausted by the effective mutual exchange of “factually accurate”<sup>340</sup> relevant information between parties, or by the “mutually educative communication”<sup>341</sup> that certifies virtuous deliberative processes, but more importantly by the ethical transformation of the civic character of those involved in the representative relationship. Second, it reverses the terms of the pedagogical relation binding the representative to their constituency. Although constrained by the “deliberative injunction to mutuality,”<sup>342</sup> the educative function of representation is generally thought as being directed towards the represented citizen as the intended beneficiary of this education. What I will try to show, instead, in the following pages, is that the pedagogical value of democratic representation is also importantly expressed in a form of education the beneficiary of which is primarily the representative himself. It is the representative, first and foremost, who is in the position to learn and it is also importantly by their readiness to learn that we should judge our representatives.

### **Epistemological Interlude: The *Representative Standpoint***

The question I intend to raise in this section is of an epistemological character. Trivial as it might sound, our knowledge, understanding and normative evaluations of any phenomenon are importantly dependent on the perspective we adopt in observing it. To my knowledge, epistemological questions of this sort have not been the object of much explicit concern in the body of literature reviewed above, with one important exception. I refer to the discussion – instigated by Saward<sup>343</sup> and developed by Disch<sup>344</sup> – around the political theorist’s fitness to make valid “first-order judgments about democratic legitimacy of representative claims.”<sup>345</sup> In asking whether “the political theorist, armed with special tools, is in a superior position to the ordinary citizen in the making of such assessments,”<sup>346</sup> Saward puts forward the *citizen standpoint* as the adequate perspective from which to judge the legitimacy of instances of democratic

---

<sup>340</sup> Mansbridge, ‘Rethinking Representation’, p. 519.

<sup>341</sup> Mansbridge, ‘Rethinking Representation’, p. 519.

<sup>342</sup> Disch, ‘Radical Democracy: The Silent Partner in Political Representation’s Constructivist Turn’, p. 164.

<sup>343</sup> Saward, *The Representative Claim*.

<sup>344</sup> Disch, ‘The “Constructivist Turn” in Democratic Representation?’; Disch, ‘Radical Democracy: The Silent Partner in Political Representation’s Constructivist Turn’.

<sup>345</sup> Saward, *The Representative Claim*, p. 146.

<sup>346</sup> Saward, *The Representative Claim*, p. 145.

representation. The notion of the citizen standpoint has ever since gained traction in the literature, but, it seems, exclusively in the context of the thorny question of the normative impoverishment that constructivist theories of representation are charged with having determined. It is in this context that Disch turns to and builds on the citizen standpoint, and that we find it mentioned – although less explicitly and more critically – also by Susan Dovi and Eline Severs.<sup>347</sup> For Disch, indeed, the relevance of Saward’s notion lays in its suggestion of a “shift from a normative to critical assessment of representative claims.” Indeed, she notices how “the theorist who takes up the citizen standpoint does not aim to rule on constituencies’ judgments but to examine the “conditions that have enabled” them,”<sup>348</sup> or, as in a more recent articulation, that “the citizen standpoint confronts theorists not with the problem of legitimacy but with that of hegemony.”<sup>349</sup>

Yet, when disentangled from strictly normative concerns, the idea of the citizen standpoint frees, I suggest, the full theoretical potential of the standpoint epistemology the notion invokes. There could be more, in other words, than a precious insight into the legitimacy of the theorist’s ambition to make normative claims that the notion can offer to ours and similar investigations. As Sandra Harding explains,

standpoint theories argue that the social world in effect provides a kind of laboratory for ‘experiments’ that can enable one to *observe* and *explain* patterns in the relations between social power and the production of knowledge claims. [...] Standpoint theorists use the ‘naturally occurring’ relations of class, gender, race, or imperialism in the world around us to observe how different ‘locations’ in such relations tend to generate distinctive accounts of nature and social relations. [...] Thus, the kinds of daily life activities socially assigned to different genders or classes or races within local social systems can provide illuminating possibilities for, observing and explaining systemic relations between ‘what one does’ and ‘what one can know.’<sup>350</sup>

In its feminist formulation, it thus seems, prior to being a privileged socially situated perspective from which to cast authoritative normative claims, a “standpoint” is a privileged site of *observation* and *explanation*. This is to say that because knowledge is socially situated, different locations allow more or less advantageous perspectives for the observation and the explanation of a particular phenomenon. There is, in other words, a descriptive phase – which necessarily precedes prescriptive analysis – in carrying out which it is crucial to be aware of the standpoint acquired in observing. My impression is that democratic representation, though rarely with an explicit intention, has long been gazed upon precisely from a citizen standpoint, and described from such perspective. This might have been the case not only because, with very few

---

<sup>347</sup> Severs and Dovi, ‘Why We Need to Return to the Ethics of Political Representation’, p. 310.

<sup>348</sup> Disch, ‘The “Constructivist Turn” in Democratic Representation’, p. 488.

<sup>349</sup> Disch, ‘Radical Democracy: The Silent Partner in Political Representation’s Constructivist Turn’, p. 164.

<sup>350</sup> Sandra Harding, ‘Comment on Hekman’s “Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited”’: Whose Standpoint Needs the Regimes of Truth and Reality?, *Signs*, 22.2 (1997), 382–91 (p. 384). Emphasis mine.

exceptions (Arendt being famously one), all political theorists are also citizens themselves and their default perspective is therefore that of the citizen, but this is also possibly due to the unacknowledged assumption that citizens – as major stakeholders – experience representation from a privileged epistemic position. This assumption may indeed be correct, and questioning it is not the purpose of this discussion. What I do wish to question, instead, is the default conflation of the citizen standpoint with the standpoint of the represented, that seems to accompany this assumption, and indeed informs a significant part of the public discourse on democratic representation.

Despite the unsolvable puzzle discussed in the previous section about the breach that representation rends (and bridges) in the unity of the people and the consequent ambiguity around the representative belonging or being alien to the people,<sup>351</sup> both the represented and the representatives are always unquestionably also citizens in the “broad political sense [of] democratic actors, not passport-carrying nationals.”<sup>352</sup> I suggest then that it would be accurate to understand the citizen standpoint as comprising in fact two distinct standpoints: the standpoint of the citizen-represented and that of the citizen-representative. Reconfigured in this sense, indeed, the idea of the citizen standpoint is all the more an insightful tool as it allows us to question the epistemological position from which we theorize about representation by uncovering the tension at its core between the perspective of the represented and that of the representative. I call the latter of these the *representative standpoint*. It is when considered from the representative standpoint, I want to suggest, that the value of what we have been calling “the experience of representing others” can fully be grasped, and it is indeed from this perspective that the next section will dwell on describing the mechanic and dynamic aspects, so to speak, that qualify such experience.

Before moving on, though, I shall briefly discuss one of the (certainly many) problematic implications that applying standpoint methodology, as roughly as I did, to theories of representation may involve. Having its roots in Marxist and Feminist epistemology, standpoint theories rely unsurprisingly on the categories of domination, exploitation, oppression and on the core-claim that in acquiring the standpoint of dominated, exploited and oppressed social groups, an observer experiences reality in ways that challenge the common understanding of social relations and are therefore epistemically advantageous.<sup>353</sup> One important risk in relating

---

<sup>351</sup> Alessandro Pizzorno, ‘Prefazione’, in *Il concetto di rappresentanza*, by Hanna F. Pitkin, trans. by E. Zaru (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2017), p. xv.

<sup>352</sup> Disch, ‘Radical Democracy: The Silent Partner in Political Representation’s Constructivist Turn’, p. 164.

<sup>353</sup> Alison Wylie, ‘Why Standpoint Matters’, in *Science and Other Cultures: Issues in Philosophies of Science and Technology*, ed. by Robert Figueroa and Sandra G. Harding (Routledge, 2003), pp. 26–48.

standpoint theories to political representation, then, is that of an automatic situation of represented and representatives within the categories of domination and oppression respectively – something that would most probably lead to understand the former as being dominated and oppressed by the latter. Since the value of any standpoint is considered to be directly proportional to its marginality, a similar automatic inference would preserve the meaningfulness of the represented standpoint intact but result in an a priori disqualification of the epistemic value of the representative standpoint.<sup>354</sup> Indeed, if marginality is understood as distance from power, the representative standpoint would hardly strike anybody as marginal.

It is true, as we said, that the new conventional wisdom emancipated representation from the formalistic constraints the traditional approach had limited it to, in doing so debunking the necessary correspondence between roles of representation and formal positions of power. As Dovi acknowledged,

our representatives often are legislators, senators, and members of parliament, but they also are leaders of social movements, party members, journalists, and citizens who publicly speak out against injustices. One of the most important advancements in the literature on representation is its recognition of the need to study political behaviour beyond formal representation.<sup>355</sup>

It is also true, though, and Dovi herself shows so in recent work, that the temptation to depict representatives as “powerful” and the represented as “vulnerable” is still strong and still orients research towards the “different ways of being vulnerable to representation.”<sup>356</sup>

My argument, on the contrary, assumes that being vulnerable to representation is not an exclusive “privilege” of the represented: political representatives too are potentially vulnerable to representation, both as individuals and as members of social groups. Many representatives – journalists, activists, mayors, municipal councillors, etc. – have been persecuted and even killed *because* of their commitments to represent others. Southern Italy, in the last decades of the past century, has known a great number of these stories and an even greater number sadly fills the daily chronicles in Mexico, just to mention a couple of well-known examples. Moreover, in an era of media hyper-exposure we see representatives constantly exposed to less brutal, but equally unjust forms of persecution. Representatives, in fact, often endure undue intrusions in their private lives and intimate networks and not seldom they are the target of outright public shaming. In a post-truth scenario, their words and their actions are to an unprecedented degree mystified and their political and civic credibility materially damaged often

---

<sup>354</sup> Wylie, however, argued that as fractious as the debate is, in none of its forms does standpoint theory align with “the thesis of an automatic epistemic privilege”. Wylie, p. 28.

<sup>355</sup> Eline Severs and Suzanne Dovi, ‘Why We Need to Return to the Ethics of Political Representation’, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 51.2 (2018), 309–13 (p. 309).

<sup>356</sup> Severs and Dovi, ‘Why We Need to Return to the Ethics of Political Representation’, p. 311.

for no actual reason. As a result of this, representatives often experience a condition that in the next chapter I term of “civic solitude,” one in which, among other things, they are disbelieved by default, victims of epistemic injustice. As Chapter V will discuss in more detail, indeed, the experience of representing others comes with the potential gain of an invaluable ethical self-transformation but also with the certain and irremediable loss of a part of the privileges held as citizens prior to engaging in the representation of others. With the necessary caution then, I believe it could be said that there is a case for looking at representatives not only as an elite, but also, at least in certain circumstances, as a minority potentially exposed to oppression. The representative standpoint, this means, may be indeed a plausible and potentially important tool of investigation in ways that can be justified within the framework of standpoint epistemology.

There is much more to be said on this point in future work, what matter in this context however is that, in light of the few considerations just identified, the representative standpoint will be the standpoint we adopt here, at least for the purpose of disclosing what it means to represent others. As Bühlmann and Fivaz have noticed, “research about democratic representation is still guided by questions on the characteristics of the relationship between representatives and represented: is there or should there be some sort of relationship between representatives and represented, what should it look like and how does it actually work?”<sup>357</sup> In fact, one important way in which the representative standpoint can enrich our knowledge of democratic representation is by helping us put into question the centrality of the relationship between representative and represented in the study field. Looking from the representative standpoint, indeed, we realize that this is not the only crucial relationship involved in the processes of democratic representation. There is a second fundamental relationship that should guide our inquiries, and this is the relationship *among* representatives. The following section brings to the foreground this second relationship, which together with the first is at the heart of democratic representing, trying to show that what chiefly constitute the experience of representing others is ultimately the path the representative ought to cover, back and forth, to attend to both.

## **Audience, Constituency and Space B**

In his introduction to the collection of Patrice Lumumba’s speeches and writings, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote about the father of Congolese independence:

He has been accused of playing a double and even a triple game. When addressed an audience made up only of Congolese, he spoke with the greatest passion; if he saw that there were whites in the

---

<sup>357</sup> Marc Bühlmann and Jan Fivaz, ‘Introduction’, in *Political Representation: Roles, representatives and the represented*, ed. by Marc Bühlmann and Jan Fivaz (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 1.

audience, he mastered his emotions and cleverly blew both hot and cold; in Brussels, speaking to Belgian audiences, he was prudent and deliberately charming, and his first concern was to reassure his listeners. [...] Is this the same man speaking? Of course it is. Is he lying? Of course he is not. [...] though the style of his speeches varies from one to the other, the content always remains the same.<sup>358</sup>

While it could be argued that representatives of the struggles against colonial domination constitute rather specific instances of representation, it is anything but usual to hear the same questions – *is this the same man speaking? Is he lying?* – asked about representatives in western liberal democracies. Saward termed the phenomenon that inspires these questions the *shape-shifting* representative: “a political actor who claims (or is claimed) to represent by shaping (or having shaped) strategically his persona and policy positions for certain constituencies and audiences.”<sup>359</sup> The question of shapeshifting is interesting in its own right, particularly considering the implications of Saward’s argument in countering the normative prejudice that burdens shape-shifting representatives. I will say a little more on this issue as the discussion proceeds. The reason for mentioning this now, however, is that the practice of shapeshifting is at the core of what I believe the representative standpoint helps us see, i.e. that the representative sits at the centre of a double relationship. On the one hand, this relationship binds the representative to the constituents they represent, on the other hand it binds them, with equal necessity, to other representatives (who, to be clear, are in turn bound to their constituents).

We saw, in sections I and II of this chapter, that the democratic rediscovery of representation and the constructivist turn it entailed emphasise the irreducible distance, or gap, that representation presupposes and preserves between the representative and the represented – a breach in the unity of the people, we said, that representation rends and bridges at one time. We could now say that what the representative standpoint helps us see is that there are in fact two distinct such gaps that the process of representation preserves by bridging: one is the gap separating the representative from the constituents they represents, the other separates them instead from the representatives of other constituencies. These gaps correspond in turn to two conceptual and actual spaces, the significance of which is distilled respectively in the most distinctive institutions of a representative democracy – namely in elections and in parliaments of all sorts. For the purpose of our analysis, I call these spaces *Space A*, where representatives meet with their constituents, and *Space B*, where representatives meet with other representatives. These, let me clarify, are here intended both as conceptual spaces and as real, institutional ones.

---

<sup>358</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Introduction’, in *Lumumba Speaks: The Speeches and Writings of Patrice Lumumba, 1958-1961*, ed. by Jean van Lierde, trans. by Helen R. Lane (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1972), pp. 5–6.

<sup>359</sup> Saward, ‘Shape-Shifting Representation’, p. 723.



I call Space A any town square, any party local branch, any visit paid to constituents, any Skype call: literally any virtual or actual place where a representative meet with the “others” they represent. By contrast I call Space B any council, assembly, parliament, summit, commission, WhatsApp group: any place, virtual or material, where citizens representing others meet other citizens representing in turn *other* “others.” At the heart of the mission of a representative, and thus at the heart of what I understand to be the experience of representing others, is a perpetual movement between these two spaces.

A similar conception of democratic representation is found in Melissa Williams’ early work.<sup>360</sup> Back in 1998 Williams noticed that it makes sense, indeed,

to characterize the role of the representative as requiring deliberation on two levels. Within the legislature, she must attempt to persuade other representatives to reconceive the public interest in way that takes account of the perspective and interests of her constituents. But because deliberation requires that she also be open to revisiting her judgments in the light of others’ arguments, in those cases where her judgments on the merits of an issue have changed or she has judged that her constituents’ best interests lie in trading off certain claims in order to secure others, she must also engage in a project of persuading her constituents of the reasons for her judgments. At the same time, she must be open to the possibility that because of the pressures of legislative deliberation and its distance from the lives of her constituents, she should further revise her judgments in the light of her discussions with them.<sup>361</sup>

More recently, the normative implication of Williams’ view, namely the that “the representative’s accountability requires a movement back and forth between consultations with constituents and deliberations with other legislators,”<sup>362</sup> was taken up by Mansbridge in her account of what she terms a *recursive* ideal of representation. Distinctive of recursive representation is a communicative ideal demanding that “both citizens and individual representatives or political parties should hear one another, communicate well with one another, and change one another for the better through their interaction”<sup>363</sup> and “based on an aspiration for iterative, ongoing communication between constituents and their representatives.”<sup>364</sup> Indeed, despite the explicit attention paid here to the “second level of deliberation” implicated by the role of the representative – uncommon, to my knowledge, in the literature – the crucial aim for Mansbridge, as it had been for Williams, is to bring to the foreground yet further aspects of “the representative-constituent connection.”<sup>365</sup> Even when the recursiveness of the representative’s role is acknowledged, and the two levels of deliberation involved in it brought to the foreground, it is still only what goes on in Space A that remains

---

<sup>360</sup> Melissa S. Williams, *Voice, Trust, and Memory*.

<sup>361</sup> Melissa S. Williams, *Voice, Trust, and Memory*, p. 232.

<sup>362</sup> Melissa S. Williams, *Voice, Trust, and Memory*, p. 231.

<sup>363</sup> Mansbridge, ‘Recursive Representation’, p. 305.

<sup>364</sup> Mansbridge, ‘Recursive Representation’, p. 299.

<sup>365</sup> Mansbridge, ‘Recursive Representation’, p. 299.

ultimately the focus of the theorist's attention. Virtually no interest is explicitly addressed to Space B and to the representative-representative connection that takes place in it – something that, instead, from the representative standpoint is hardly possible to overlook.

Symptomatic of such oversight, for instance, is the theoretical neglect suffered precisely by the figure of the shape-shifting representative. Saward notes, indeed, that “[t]his figure is present in classical, theoretical and empirical studies of representation, but only as a somewhat unnerving figure in the shadows.”<sup>366</sup> As the following discussion will clarify, one thing the representative standpoint reveals is that shapeshifting is in fact a necessary (indeed desirable) part of the process of representing others when this is understood as a periodic motion between A and B and the corresponding relationships. What I attempt in the following pages is a graphic explanation of A, B and the motion bridging them, building on Saward's distinction between *audience* and *constituency*, a distinction that Disch identifies as a fundamental piece of the constructivist toolkit.<sup>367</sup> The complex relationship between audience and constituency is in fact crucial in Saward's conceptualization of the representative claim. As he writes, “[a]ll claim-makers offer a construction of constituency to an audience”<sup>368</sup> and,

representative claims can only work, or even exist, if audiences acknowledge them in some way, and are able to absorb, reject, or accept them, or otherwise engage with them. There is little political point in a claim that does not seek to address a specified audience.<sup>369</sup>

What is especially interesting for our purpose is that audience-constituency links can configure very different scenarios. Before taking a closer look at the four configurations of such links that Saward identifies, I shall briefly dwell on a clarificatory digression.

Two are the things in need of clarification. The first is what is to be intended here by *constituency*, since this may diverge significantly from common uses of the word. As section two showed, recent developments in the theory took democratic representation beyond the institutional and territorial constraints where the traditional view had located it. One aspect of this “liberation” involved questioning the centrality of elections in discerning between democratic and non-democratic forms of representation. Elections, nevertheless, remained crucial to the definition of other accessory concepts, such as the concept, precisely, of constituency. Andrew Rehfeld's *The Concept of Constituency*, for instance, distinguishes between electoral and non-electoral constituencies but leaves the latter aside as irrelevant in representation analysis and “focus[es] only on electoral constituencies because of their formal institutional role to structure political

---

<sup>366</sup> Saward, ‘Shape-Shifting Representation’, p. 723.

<sup>367</sup> Disch, ‘The “Constructivist Turn” in Democratic Representation’, p. 492.

<sup>368</sup> Saward, *The Representative Claim*, p. 49.

<sup>369</sup> Saward, *The Representative Claim*, p. 48.

representation.”<sup>370</sup> Before subscribing to a formalistic definition of constituency though, Rehfeld signals that the electoral and non-electoral use of the term are captured by two different senses in which the OED defines the word “constituency”. In one sense a constituency is “the body of voters who elect a representative member of a legislative or other public body”, in another sense a constituency is “a body of supporters, customers, subscribers”. This latter, looser meaning is closer to what I mean here by constituency. About this looser meaning Rehfeld writes that it “denotes a group of people whose interests are “looked after” by a representative whether or not they could vote for him.”<sup>371</sup> This is not exactly what I want the term to denote in this context. In fact, while he emphasises, correctly, that here the casting of a vote is not the determining element, Rehfeld also seems to regard the constituents not as active agents who support, purchase and subscribe (to a representative claim) but as passive subjects whose interests are looked after by their representative. Instead, a non-electoral understanding of constituency, I believe, does not require renouncing also the voluntaristic element on the part of the constituents,<sup>372</sup> or at least this is not how I will use this looser meaning of constituency in what follows.

Here, then, I use the word constituency to indicate the body of citizens – by no means reducible to the enfranchised population of a given territory – who actively entrust a representative with their support and their subscription without necessarily having cast a vote for him. Supportiveness, not the right to vote in a given district, is what I take to be the distinctive character of a constituency. This means that the constituency of On. Paolo Lattanzio – elected MP for the Five Star Movement in the district of Bari (where I belong), whom I did not vote for and whom I do not support – does not include me. On the other hand, I could be included in the constituency of Gianni Cuperlo, who run (and lost) for the Democratic Party in the district of Friuli Venezia Giulia (where I do not belong), but whom I do support. This understanding of constituency, I believe, suits better post-promissory models of representation, which accounting also for non-elected representatives should aim to account for non-elective constituencies too. Linking this back to Saward’s representative claim framework and to the way in which he uses the categories of audience and constituency, I could say that the constituency I conceive of corresponds to what Saward calls *actual constituency*: “[t]he group whose members recognize the claim as being for and about them, who see their interests as

---

<sup>370</sup> Andrew Rehfeld, *The Concept of Constituency: Political Representation, Democratic Legitimacy, and Institutional Design* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 36.

<sup>371</sup> Rehfeld, *The Concept of Constituency*, p. 35.

<sup>372</sup> In this regard, Rehfeld refers to Thomas Hare’s “voluntary constituencies”, these however are again understood in a strictly electoral sense, as “electoral constituencies in which voters would join at the moment they cast their vote for a candidate (or party).” Rehfeld, *The Concept of Constituency*, p. 31.

being implicated in their claim.”<sup>373</sup> Saward distinguishes this notion from that of *intended constituency*: “[t]he group the claimant claims to speak for.”<sup>374</sup> The distinction between actual and intended also applies to the notion of audience: an *intended audience* in “[t]he group to which the claim is addressed”, whereas an *actual audience* is “[t]he group whose members are conscious of receiving the claim.”

This leads us to the second questions that needs clarification. In spite of the fact that the model I wish to outline here builds on Saward’s work, we should not understand it as strictly corresponding to the framework of the representative claim, and this for two reasons. One is that the focus on the representative claim – the claim to speak *for* and *about* a constituency – leaves in the shadow the speaking *to* and the speaking *with* it. In fact, the act of speaking *to* actually seems to be relegated the to the representative’s interaction with the audience. The other is that, while hinting at it, the framework of the representative claim does not cast sufficient light on the processes through which audiences may be transformed into constituency and vice versa. Both these questions are instead crucial to an account of representation, such as the one I hope to provide, that sees negotiation – beside imagination and performance– as an essential part of what it means to represent others.

Having clarified the above, let us now return to Saward’s four configurations of the links between the constituency and the audience of a representative. All four illustrate links between *one* constituency and the audience its construction is addressed to and, as we shall see, can tell us something about Space B inasmuch as they cast light on its absence. These are described as follows: (1) the constituency is entirely contained by the audience; (2) audience and constituency partially overlap; (3) the audience is entirely contained by the constituency; (4) audience and constituency fully overlap.

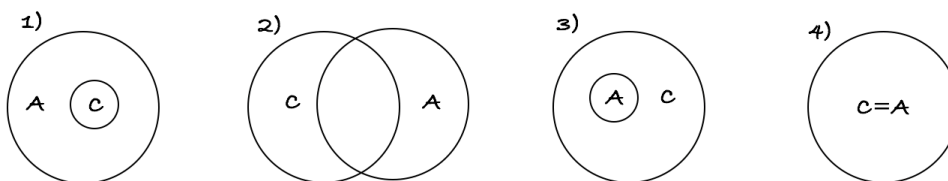


Figure 2: Saward’s’ four audience/constituency configurations

In (1) a representative addresses an audience which contains its constituency. This is the case – for instance – of Greta Thunberg, the teenage environmental activist who claims to represent her generation but addresses such claim to an audience which includes her generation while

<sup>373</sup> Saward, *The Representative Claim*, p. 50.

<sup>374</sup> Saward, *The Representative Claim*, p. 50.

extending also to her generation's parents and virtually to everybody. Configuration (2) captures the case of a constituency and an audience that partially overlap. That, for instance, is the case of Patrice Lumumba, whom I referred to above. As the leader of Congolese delegations to Brussel he often happened to talk to audiences made up of Belgians but also of the other Congolese members of the delegation he was leading, who were members, in turn, of his constituency. In (3) we have instead the case of an audience which is only a part of a constituency. To understand this configuration, we could think of an instance in which a representative addresses a claim to a selected group or a particular category of his supporters. He may talk to the most engaged or passionate or to elderly, the rich, the youth etc.. Finally, figure (4) illustrates fully overlapping audience and constituency. This is a more and more recurrent configuration nowadays, the rally case. This happens every year, for instance, in the Italian town of Pontida, where the Northern League Party (today only "the League") holds its annual gathering and where Matteo Salvini addresses an audience which virtually coincides with its constituency.

Having defined Space B as the space where the relationship among two or more representatives takes place, it is clear that none of the four configurations above is really about Space B since all of them deal with *one*, singular representative only and the ways in which *its* performance links *its* constituency to *its* audience. All these configurations, in other words, tell about possible forms of the representative-represented connection – all tell a story set in Space A. And yet we can gain from their observation some useful insight about the conditions that may not be sufficient but are necessary for Space B to be produced. We see for instance that in (4) Space B has no chance to emerge, since one necessary condition for B is that at least part of the audience of a given representative is not also its constituency. Indeed, in an audience fully exhausted by a single constituency there is no room for *another* constituency and for its representative and thus no potential for a relationship among two or more representatives of different constituencies.<sup>375</sup> For the same reasons as in (4), Space B cannot be found in (3) either, since no part of the audience is reserved for the representatives of other constituencies. It is only in configurations (2) and (1) that Space B could potentially be created, because in both cases, being not exhausted by a single constituency, the audience could potentially overlap with

---

<sup>375</sup> I could go as far as saying that when (4) happens democratic representation in fact ceases. The only form of democracy that could be configured as in (4) is indeed direct democracy, a form of government in which each individual represents nothing but itself and where multiple one-man-constituencies – so to speak – are audience to each other. Everybody here is represented, and every claim is listened to. Direct democracy, though, is not what we witness in reality when (4) occurs. In fact, the conflation of audience and constituency is distinctive of a phenomenon we observe rather frequently in these days, a phenomenon that recent literature on post-truth calls echo-chambers: environments in which people encounter only beliefs or opinions that coincide with their own, in which existing views are constantly reinforced and alternative ideas are unheard of, in which all claims are inward-oriented and immune to any change.

other constituencies and “absorb, reject, accept or engage” (in a word: negotiate) with claims made by other representatives who could, at that point, initiate a relationship with each other.

In order to help us visualize the conditions for the emergence of Space B, I have developed a further set of possible audience/constituency links, four extra configurations illustrating, this time, links between an audience and multiple constituencies with their own representative: links that result explicitly from the performances of multiple representatives. In fact, with the exception of cases (3) and (4), it is actually very plausible, if not certain, that the same audience is addressed, even successfully and/or legitimately, by more than one representative. I suggest this may happen in the following ways: (5) the audience may partially overlap multiple non-overlapping constituencies; (6) the audience may fully overlap multiple non-overlapping constituencies; (7) the audience may entirely contain multiple overlapping constituencies; (8) the audience may coincide with the intersection of multiple overlapping constituencies.

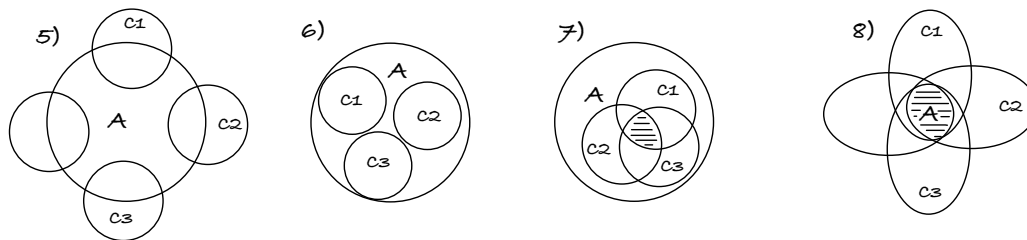


Figure 3: Four further audience/constituency configurations featuring multiple constituencies

Figure (5) and (6) may illustrate the typical case of an electoral campaign. Here representatives of different constituencies address the same audience in the hope of attracting spectators into their constituencies. While they all talk to the same audience – which may (6) or may not (5) contain the totality of the intended constituents – and while in doing so they may talk *of* each other, in these configuration representatives do not talk *to* each other. In (7) multiple constituencies do overlap and share an audience which contains their intersection but is not exhausted by it. This is the case, for instance, of an open-door summit, council or debate among representatives of different constituencies, talking *to* each other *for* and *about* their constituencies, in *front of* a shared audience made up also of constituents from all represented constituencies. Finally, (8) illustrates the case in which the audience fully coincides with and is exhausted by the intersection of multiple constituencies. This would be the case of any representative council taking place behind closed doors, in which multiple representatives talk *to* each other, speaking *for* and *about* their constituencies, in front of an audience made up exclusively of representatives of multiple constituencies.

Having defined Space B as the space emerging from the relationship among representatives, we can exclude its actual presence in figure (5) and (6), where multiple constituencies coexist but do not yet overlap. It is instead in (7) and (8) that Space B is finally visible, corresponding to the dark areas in the figures. In this space, which we could now configure as a particular kind of audience containing or coinciding with the intersection of multiple constituencies, representatives of different constituencies engage with each other's claims. It is only when representatives talk to each other, in fact, that the intersection of different constituencies is realized. In this sense, we could say that Space B, the space that is born out of these interactions, helps us to account, visually, for what we saw is a crucial function representation is intended to fulfil, that of unifying the people, and to make material sense of Ankersmit's assertion that "[r]epresentative democracy [is] the political system best suited for achieving compromise."<sup>376</sup>

The overemphasis that theory still places on the relationship between representatives and represented obscures, instead, this important part of the representative process and has so far drawn focus away from the way in which the relationship among representative operates and from the normative scrutiny it requires. An immediate normative consequence of this view, for instance, is that in order to fulfil their unifying function, the representative should make their constituents present in Space B not only by lending them their voice, but also by lending them their ears. Space B, in other words, is certainly where the representative speaks *for* their constituency, but as importantly, it is where they also *listen* on its behalf to other representatives, who speak and listen in turn for their respective constituencies. Only if sufficient importance is attributed to this part of the process can we make full sense of Urbinati's claim that, "in democratic representation two rights converge: the right to an equal voice and the equal right to be heard, or the electoral right and the right to be represented."<sup>377</sup> In fact, the demand that representatives must make their constituents voice heard, presupposes the demand that they also listen to other representatives and hear, in doing so, the voices of the constituents these in turn make present. This obligation to listen on the part of the representative is simultaneously also an obligation to be ready to have their mind changed and their shape shifted, to ensure that the representative's function "to advocate on behalf of their constituents" is carried out "in ways that allow for the fair and peaceful resolution of political disagreements within a pluralist society."<sup>378</sup>

---

<sup>376</sup> Ankersmit, 'Representational Democracy: An Aesthetic Approach to Conflict and Compromise', p. 27.

<sup>377</sup> Urbinati, *Representative Democracy*, p. 41.

<sup>378</sup> Suzanne Dovi, *The Good Representative* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 7.

We have so far considered the four extra configurations I developed as static snapshots, talking of each as sites of potential or actual appearance of Space B. I said, however, that what matters most in the experience of representing others is the dynamics of it, the periodic motion between Space A and Space B that the role of the representative requires. I shall then ask the reader to invest their imagination now in “animating” the sequence of snapshots just describes. In doing so, we discover indeed that Space B results from the progressive approaching of constituencies to each other across a common audience, through a process that leads from (5) to (8). As importantly, though, for representation to fulfil its democratic function the process must be one that also leads back from (8) to (5). If we look at the return leg of the journey, we see a representative who, having been exposed to claims made by representatives of other constituencies, goes back to Space A and to the relationship with their constituents. Only, they now no longer speaks *for* them, he speaks *to* them and *about* other constituencies. He now makes the potential unity of the people present to his constituency.

However, as Urbinati observes, “it is [...] important to make clear that representation is a process of seeking unity not an act of unification,” it is in this sense that “[t]he process of representation puts an end to the sovereign as an ontological collective entity that proclaims its will (by an act of authorisation) and makes room for sovereignty as an inherently plural unifying process.”<sup>379</sup> In fact, it is crucial to stress that a key feature of Space B is its provisionality. Although instituted as a permanent space – a fact witnessed by the architectonic solidity of national parliaments and local legislative councils – Space B must indeed undergo a continuous process of formation and dissolution. Representatives meet with each other, then return to Space A where they meet with their constituencies, then meet again and so on and so forth. In this sense it is true, as writes Urbinati, that “a political representative [...] needs to be constantly recreated and dynamically in tune with society in order to pass legitimate laws.”<sup>380</sup>

Regarded from the representative standpoint, thus, the practice of democratic representation can be said to prescribe two distinct movements. One: from A to B; two: from B back to A. One: from a constituency provisionally unified by a successful representative claim to an audience of representatives of other constituencies that seek unification; two: from an audience of representatives now provisionally unified through negotiation back to a constituency to be re-unified creatively. And so on, again and again, as the in the continuous, systemic process the new conventional wisdom discusses but somehow neglects to describe. It is in this harmonic motion occurring between A and B that lays the essence of the experience of representing

---

<sup>379</sup> Urbinati, ‘Representative Democracy and Its Critics’, p. 45.

<sup>380</sup> Urbinati, *Representative Democracy*, p. 225.



others. As the next chapter will show, it is indeed the path from A to B and back that demands of the representative to imagine, perform and negotiate with others what we have called the future-regarded end of truth, the outcome of our acting together in concert. It is finally in doing so that they learn in turn the virtue of generativity.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter aimed at outlining the understanding of democratic representation that should be intended to run through the second leg of the thesis's overarching argument, namely the claim that providing their members with the experience of representing others, representative democracies also provide them with the opportunity to learn and practice the virtue of generativity, the virtue of turning what is known to be true into something politically significant. Having first subscribed to the developments brought to democratic theory by what have been termed the representative and the constructivist turns, in the second half of the chapter I introduced "the representative standpoint" – the epistemological perspective I adopted in describing the mechanics and the dynamics of the experience of representing others.

From the representative standpoint, I finally attempted to describe the role of the representative and to configure the practice of democratic representation as the experience of representing others. In doing so I suggested that such practice crucially consists in the periodic motion between Space A, where the representative meets with their constituents, and Space B, where the representative meets with the representatives of other constituencies. It is essentially the commitment to cover the double trajectory between A and B, back and forth, again and again, that the expedience of representing others demands of the representative, and it is in that commitment that sits the transformative potential that changes the citizens who represents others into a generative citizen. How this transformation operates will be the explicit focus of the next chapter.

## V. Imagination, Performance, Negotiation

I have suggested that democratic representation should be regarded as an irreplaceable civic experience, key to the formation of certain essential features of the democratic civic character. Leading to the second leg of my discussion, in particular, has been the claim that democratic representation plays a crucial role in shaping the civic relation to truth to match the standards specifically required of citizens in liberal democracies. The present chapter unpacks this claim in order to look more closely at the actual process through which this change in the citizen's attitude towards the truth is achieved. In doing so, it brings together the final elements of the thesis's central normative argument: that responding to the truth-related demands of democracy requires engaging with a broad set of activities associated with the truth and mobilizing, in this exercise, the complex virtue of democratic truthfulness.

To begin with, it is important to clarify what it means to say that the experience of representation shapes the civic relation to truth to match the specific demands of democracy. In order to do so, we need to recall here two points made earlier in this thesis. The first is the point concerning the ideal features of a specifically democratic notion of truthfulness, the standard of excellence for a specifically democratic civic relation to truth. Such a relation – this was the main argument of Chapter III – is characterized by the deployment, along with sincerity and accuracy, of a third virtue of truth: the virtue of generativity. Defined as the disposition and ability to turn what one knows to be true into something politically significant, generativity is the virtue displayed in carrying out three peculiarly political truth-related activities: imagining, performing and negotiating the truth with others. In this sense then, to say that the experience of representation shapes one's relation to truth in ways that match the demands of democracy, is to mean that the experience of representation provides democratic citizens with an opportunity to experiment with the truth-related practices of *imagination*, *performance* and *negotiation*, an opportunity to master and display the virtue of generativity by acquiring respectively what here I call the *perspective*, the *affirmative* and the *positional* elements of it.

The second point to recall concerns instead the mechanics and dynamics underlying democratic processes of representation. Chapter IV brought such mechanics to the foreground and

attempted to describe it from what I termed the representative standpoint, shifting away from the more conventional emphasis on the concerns raised by the experience of being represented by others to the opportunities harboured in the experience of representing others. Looked at from such perspective, the process of representation, I argued, appears as a continuous periodic movement between real and ideal Spaces A (where the representative meets his constituency) and Spaces B (where the representative meets representatives of other constituencies). To say, then, that, in structuring practices and opportunities for moving between Spaces A and B, representative democracy provides citizens with a chance to master the virtue of generativity means, more precisely, that the experience of representing others invites whoever lives it relentlessly to imagine, perform and negotiate his way in and out of A and B.

Building on this broad understanding of how representing others changes one's relation to truth, then, what this chapter attempts is a civic phenomenology, so to speak, of the experience of representing others – a description of the ethical transformation that representative citizens undergo and of the means by which such transformation takes place. The argument I put forward is that the experience of representing others exposes the individual who undertakes it to three “prescriptive facts” – three pieces of what Michel Foucault calls “ethopoietic knowledge”, knowledge that produces a change in the subject's mode of being bringing about his ethical transformation – and that these in turn prescribe three associated activities related to the truth. These are the fact of finitude, which prescribes the activity of imagination; the fact of solitude, which prescribes performance; and the fact of mutability, which prescribes negotiation. Together, the three activities prescribed by the facts confronting the representative on his journeys between A and B, constitute a thorough training in the virtue of generativity: they slowly teach their discoverer to turn what they know to be true into something politically significant. It is in this sense that democratic representation can be understood as a codified pattern of experiences, as valuable for the ethical transformation it produces in those who live it as for the logistic facilitation of participative and deliberative processes it provides.

The first of four sections introduces the notion of ethopoietic knowledge, clarifying the terms of the discussion that follows. In section two I take a close look at the prescriptive fact of finitude: what it is, why it prescribes imagination, and how, in turn, it directs one's relation to truth towards generativity. In sections three and four I do the same respectively for the other two fact-knowledge pairs, solitude-performance and mutability-negotiation.

## “Prescriptive Facts”

I have suggested that beside allowing the indirect participation of many in democratic deliberation, the experience of representing others forges a sense of democratic truthfulness in those who live it and for this reason, regardless of its effectiveness in achieving the inclusion of everybody in decision-making processes, should be deemed a valuable feature of modern democracies. In this section I look more closely at the means by which such improvement of the representative’s civic character takes place, and argue that representation betters the civic character of those experiencing it by exposing them to a number of pieces of “ethopoietic knowledge”. I borrow the notion of ethopoietic knowledge from Michel Foucault,<sup>381</sup> who introduces it in his lecture series *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* to clarify the distinction between two types of knowledge which he found was crucial in the thought of Demetrius the Cynic.<sup>382</sup> Demetrius, Foucault tells us, distinguished between knowledge which, as true as it may be, leaves its knower unchanged and is therefore “pointless”, and knowledge which instead changes the mode of being of the subject who acquires it and is for this reason “useful”. Pieces of knowledge of the former type lack any “prescriptive relevance”, they are mere “cultural embellishment.” In contrast “while establishing themselves and expressing themselves as principles of truth,” pieces of knowledge of the latter type,

are given at the same time, jointly, with no distance or mediation, as prescriptions. They are prescriptive facts. They are principles in both senses of the word: in the sense that they are statements of fundamental truth from which others can be deduced, and in the sense that they are the expression of precepts of conduct to which we should, anyway, submit. What are at stake here are prescriptive truths.<sup>383</sup>

It is important to clarify that in Foucault’s account, the distinction Demetrius makes between pointless and useful knowledge is not content-related. It is not a matter of there being more or less useful things to know. In fact, Foucault very clearly tells us that the distinction between pointless and useful knowledge is a distinction in the *mode* of knowing, in the way in which one

---

<sup>381</sup> Foucault’s discussion of ethopoietic knowledge takes place in the context of a broader investigation that, although posed in very different and probably irreconcilable terms, is interestingly close to ours. The lecture during which the idea of ethopoietic knowledge is put forward, in fact, is intended as a discussion of “what it means to ‘turn one’s gaze away from the world in order to shift it towards the self.’” This, writes Foucault, “is a difficult, complex question [...] [that] is right at the heart of the problem I want to pose [...] which basically is: [...] how are truth-telling and governing (governing oneself and others) linked and connected to each other?” While ultimately persuaded that the problem I am looking at is indeed closely related to the one Foucault was concerned with in his last years, exploring the radical differences in method, motivation, intended outcomes and audiences, – undertaking, that is, an actual work of translation of the two very different approaches into one other – requires an effort that would exceed the scope of this thesis. I prefer, then, to treat this correspondence between the context in which Foucault uses the notion of ethopoiein and the context in which I mean to apply it as a coincidence, sacrificing the robustness a rational explanation would add to my argument but retaining and sharing with the reader the joy and the suggestiveness that coincidences bring to those who notice them. Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros, trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 229.

<sup>382</sup> Demetrius of Corinth lived in Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. He was a friend of Seneca, who often cited him in his work. In fact, it is to Demetrius words as cited by Seneca that Foucault refers in this discussion.

<sup>383</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 236.

knows. Whereas pointless knowledge is knowledge “through causes” and namely a direct mode of knowledge, useful knowledge is “a relational mode of knowledge,” that is knowledge acquired “taking into account the relation between the gods, men, the world and things of the world, on one hand, and ourselves, on the other.”<sup>384</sup> In fact, “it is by making us appear to ourselves as the recurrent and constant term of all these relations that our gaze should be directed on the things of the world, the gods, and men. It is in this field of the relation between all these things and oneself that knowledge [...] can and must be deployed.”<sup>385</sup> The distinction being made then is a distinction “in the way in which what one knows [...] about the gods, men, and the world can have an effect on [...] the subject's way of doing things, on his ethos.”<sup>386</sup> Only knowledge of the second kind “asserts and prescribes at the same time and is capable of producing a change in the subject's mode of being”, and it is only inasmuch as it can produce ethos that this knowledge is useful. We see then why, in order to define this type of knowledge, Foucault resorts to the notion of *ethopoiein*, a word he finds in Plutarch and Denys of Helicarnassus. Indeed, “ethopoiein” means precisely making, producing, changing, transforming ethos. Ethopoietic knowledge, then, is useful knowledge: “knowledge of a kind which, considering all the things of the world [...] in their relation to us, we will be able to translate immediately into prescriptions, and these will change what we are.”<sup>387</sup>

This brief summary of Foucault’s use of the notion of *ethopoiein*, should have clarified to some extent what it means to say that representing others is an ethopoietic experience. What needs to be accounted for now is how exactly this is so, and in what ways the ethical transformation undergone by representative citizens matches the truth-related moral demands democracy places on its members. In other words, we need now to unpack the process through which representation exposes one to knowledge prescriptive of the effort to turn what one knows to be true into something politically significant, i.e. knowledge that eventually fosters generativity. Let me recall and rephrase our understanding of democratic representation – the periodic motion between A and B. We could say that the process of representation places the representative at the centre of a triadic relation between a constituency, its representative and an assembly of representatives of other constituencies. The representative moves therefore on a trajectory which they must cover repeatedly, and in both directions: from A to B, and from B back to A. First, as we said, from a provisionally unified constituency to an audience of representatives of other constituencies that seeks unification; then from a provisionally unified

---

<sup>384</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 235.

<sup>385</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 235.

<sup>386</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 237.

<sup>387</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 237.

audience of representatives back to a constituency to be unified anew. Back and forth. Such is the mechanics underpinning institutional forms of democratic representation, a mechanics which codifies – this is my argument – a set of ethopoietic experiences leading to civic virtue.

It is worth recalling that strictly institutional representation shares this mechanics with non-institutional and other informal instances of democratic representation in civil society. Although regulated with variable rigour and in ways that may or may not involve electoral processes, the many forms of representation in which democratic societies are often rich always involve a triadic relation and the continuous re-bridging, by a representative, of two poles. I think, for instance, of student committees (not only in higher education) and of the representative processes these involve; of trade unions representation in the work place and of their internal representative structures; of the representative “game” the scouting movement’s patrol system invites children to play;<sup>388</sup> and of the spontaneous, informal representative processes that more often than one would guess develop at the margins of our societies.<sup>389</sup> As different as they may be from each other, all these instances, I find, have in common the type of path and the mode of knowledge with which they confront representative – a path and a

---

<sup>388</sup> The “patrols”, in the context of the scouting movements, are small teams of 4 to 8 participants, in which the “troop” is in turn organized. As Riccardo Massa explains “[t]he concept of patrol system implies, in Baden Powell, its co-essentiality with that of troop [...] which indicates the educational collectivity within which the educator acts and the scout method is realized. Therefore, the patrol system, in as much as it is an articulation of the troop, cannot and should not exhaust, in the patrol’s life, the interpersonal dynamic of the scout method. This is the case not only in the sense that the patrols engage a relationship with each other, but also because each member of a patrol must feel at the same time, and with equal strength, a participant in the troop’s community [...]. To operate [within such community], the educator makes use of a fundamental organ: the patrol’s leader council, through which the necessary centripetal force of the troop towards the patrol is enacted, ensuring so the adequate pedagogical use of the concepts of troop and patrol system.” Riccardo Massa, *L’educazione extrascolastica* (Florence, Italy: La Nuova Italia, 1977), p. 96. In the scheme Massa outlines then, Space A can be seen to emerge within the single patrol, in the relationship between the patrol’s chief and the other members of the group, whereas Space B emerges instead with the institution of the patrol’s leader council. Having to move continuously between the life of the patrol and the life of the council, the patrol’s leader is invited precisely to undertake the experience of representing others, in the sense that we are describing.

<sup>389</sup> I refer in particular to spontaneous representative systems that emerge within peculiarly marginalised communities, such as refugee camps and prisons. I have been exposed in particular to two instances of this sort. One is the case of the Idomeni refugee camp, in Greece, which hosted at its peak more than 15000 people. Although made up of people that join and leave on a daily basis, who speak different languages, profess different faiths, lack by definition any shared perspective on a common future, the migrant community of Idomeni developed an informal representative structure. Representatives of various areas of the camp and/or various cultural groups (some elected, some appointed, some self-proclaimed) gathered in an informal “proto-council”, which in turn became the informal interlocutor of many governmental and non-governmental institutions operating on the camp (UN, Greek police, NGOs etc.) None of this, unfortunately, has been systematically documented and studied, and the little knowledge I have results from a series of dialogues personally entertained with few remaining members of the informal council, in the days immediately preceding the infamous evacuation of the camp. The second case is that of the women’s prison of Santa Monica, in Lima, “a co-governed prison characterised as being a porous and permeable negotiatory space between prison staff and prisoners.” Lucia Bracco Bruce, ‘Living Behind Symbolic and Concrete Barriers of Total Institutions: Reflections on the Transition Between a Domestic Symbolic Patriarchal Imprisonment and a Co-Governed, State-Sponsored Incarceration in Perú’, *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, 2020, p. 2 <<https://www.crimejusticejournal.com/article/view>> [accessed 25 November 2020]; in Santa Monica and in similar environments, scholars have observed the emergence of spontaneous representative structures among inmates. Such structures haven’t yet been systematically described qua representative structures, but a general understanding of the representative relations behind prisons’ collective self-organization systems can be gained from a growing literature on Latin American prisons. For a general introduction to the matter see David Skarbek and Courtney Michaluk, ‘When Inmates Make the Rules: Self-Governing Prisons in Latin America and beyond | LSE Latin America and Caribbean’, *LSE Latin America and Caribbean Blog*, 2017 <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/latamcaribbean/2017/05/25/when-inmates-make-the-rules-self-governing-prisons-in-latin-america-and-beyond/>>.

mode that equally trigger the transformation of the representative's ethos. In all these instances representatives learn to consider "all the things of the world in their relation to [themselves]", they learn a relation to truth that makes them do things in a new way.

Needless to say, the actual path one ends up covering is unique and unrepeatably, especially given the wide range of experiences that I am taking to count as instances of democratic representation and thus as "training exercises" in the virtue of generativity. Moreover, such a path may well exceed in duration the necessarily limited length of a representative mandate. It may well be, this means, that the ethical transformation prescribed by the experience of representing others only begins, for some, after the expiration of their (more or less) formal mandate. Yet, I have identified a pattern of three prescriptive facts that any representative – whether a member of Parliament, an inmate at Lima's women's prison, or a young chief of a scout patrol– will necessarily be exposed to along their paths from A to B and back. These facts are finitude, solitude and mutability, and each prescribes the corresponding truth-related activity, respectively, of imagination, performance and negotiation. Whether the transformation of the citizen who represents others into a generative citizen eventually succeeds, ultimately depends on their capacity to maintain the trajectory from A to B, withstanding the spiritual challenges it presents.

Before proceeding, I shall add a last important clarification. I assume that a purely self-interested representative is always a bad representative and an untruthful democrat, and that such is the case whatever view of democracy one holds and whatever normative theory of democratic representation one subscribes to. A non-purely self-interested representative, on the contrary, is not always a good representative nor necessarily a truthful democrat. For this reason, the considerations that follow do not apply to the uncontroversial case of the purely self-interested representative: this type of individual will most probably evade the trajectory from A to B remaining untouched by the transformative power of the experience of representing others, and even in a democracy fully aimed at truthfulness the existence of individuals of this sort would be a manageable but ultimately irreducible fact. Instead, we want to provide a framework to understand the behaviour of those citizens who in representing others are genuinely motivated by an idea of the common good and do act in the interest of the many, but who may nonetheless fail to withstand the facts of finitude, solitude and mutability, falling short, at least in part, of fulfilling the function with which democracy entrusts them.

## Finitude and Imagination

Finding the right word to refer to the first of the three pieces of ethopoietic knowledge I identified required some thinking. Before settling on the word *finitude*, in fact, I considered other plausible candidates from the same semantic field, such as *impossibility* and *limit*. However, unlike impossibility, the word “finitude” possesses the important quality of conveying its meaning without evoking the absence or the negation of another meaning. Finitude, I found, tells us about the presence of something, about the positive existence of a particular attribute common, most of us would agree, to “all the things of the world.” I also found that the word “finitude”, for longer than does the word “limit”, allows one to suspend the question about the object (the limit of what?) and to dwell longer on the attribute of finitude itself and on the notion that all the things of the world possess it. “Finitude”, moreover, unlike “impossibility” and “limit”, evokes another notion that is central to this discussion, that of beginning: it is the finitude of the old that guarantees the possibility of the new. For these reasons, then, I concluded that this word has a connotation that is broader and yet more precise and that it would thus fit best the purpose of this discussion. To be clear, I am obviously not suggesting that non-representative citizens are condemned to ignore the fact of finitude, since knowing about it is famously an inexorable feature of the human condition. Instead, what I am suggesting is that through the experience of representing others one learns about finitude in a way which transforms him ethically, one learns, that is, the prescriptive relevance of the fact of finitude: since nothing can be done *about* it, something must be done *with* it. Three things shall be discussed in the following pages. First (1), how finitude matters and is learned of in the experience of representing others; second (2), how finitude prescribes imagination; third (3) how imagination in turn alters one’s relation to truth.

**(1).** At the beginning of their mandate, the (non-bad) representative is in all likelihood determined to satisfy the ambitions of their constituents, to find solutions to their problems, to obtain consensus around their views – to change things for (what they deem) the better. Such was my determination, for instance, when I embarked on my mission as a representative. Yet, it did not take long before I was confronted with the fact of finitude. The fact presented itself to me for the first time as a rather material issue. I had to realize very soon, to begin with, that the material resources I could draw on were finite, in fact insufficient. Then, I was forced to see that also the time available to find the solutions I had promised and to reach the consensus I had envisaged was indeed finite. Later on, I had to discover what earlier in the thesis has been referred to as the fact of disagreement, and which is itself a facet – possibly the



most relevant for our discussion – of what we are calling finitude: no matter how reasonable were the arguments I offered to the representatives of other constituencies in B and to my constituents in A, the malleability of their will to change was finite too. Indeed, finite also was the trust my constituents placed in me, and, ultimately, my own will power.

From the standpoint of the newcomer-representative these are unexpected and potentially disconcerting discoveries, but that politics is also (maybe mostly) about dealing with the fact of finitude is something political actors and thinkers have been aware of for a long time. Just think of one of the most popular definitions of politics, the one famously attributed to Otto von Bismarck according to which “politics is the art of the possible.” Implicit in this view, for instance, is clearly that telling the possible from the impossible is a skill the political artist cannot do without. Robert Goodin’s discussion of “the impossible and the inevitable”<sup>390</sup> – which are two faces of what we are calling the fact of finitude – also suggests a view of this sort. “The inevitable and the impossible must be taken as given”, he writes, and “what lies in between constitutes the appropriate scope for choice and effort at change.”<sup>391</sup> The problem, however, is that “the impossible and the inevitable do not come prelabelled in our social world,”<sup>392</sup> and establishing the actual scope of one’s field of action is not exactly child’s play: it is something to be learnt.

This insight on the challenge to appreciate the exact extent of the fact of finitude is of great importance, but there is more in Goodin’s reflection on the inevitable and the impossible that could help us in our purpose, and that lies in what he identifies as the politicians ability to “expand[] the notions of the feasible.”<sup>393394</sup> To be clear, the context of Goodin’s general reflection is different from ours. Goodin’s concern is impossibility as “an excuse for inaction,” the fact that “manipulative politicians [would] do their best to blur the distinction” between “*real* constraints, which are objective and unalterable, and which we must respect” and “self-imposed and political constraints, which merely reflect a failure of will or planning to create future opportunities.”<sup>395</sup> And yet, discussing the means by which political leaders expand the

---

<sup>390</sup> Robert E. Goodin, *Political Theory and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>391</sup> Goodin, *Political Theory and Public Policy*, p. 127.

<sup>392</sup> Goodin, *Political Theory and Public Policy*, p. 126.

<sup>393</sup> Goodin, *Political Theory and Public Policy*, p. 134.

<sup>394</sup> The question of ‘political feasibility’ and its contested normative elements has been at the centre of an interesting debate. For an oft-cited contribution to this debate see Holly Lawford-Smith, ‘Understanding Political Feasibility’, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 21.3 (2013), 243–59. It is worth noticing however, that my focus here is not on how interested should political theorist be in what is feasible or on how feasibility is measured – important themes in such debate – but on the more specific question of how the discovery of the non-feasible alters the ethical status of the politician.

<sup>395</sup> Goodin, *Political Theory and Public Policy*, p. 131. It would be interesting to understand what “political constraints” are exactly in Goodin’s view, since I suspect I would be less inclined than he is to question their reality. This, though, would take us too far away from our focus, which shall remain the ethical transformation that, by virtue of its prescriptive relevance, the fact of finitude offers to the democratic representative.

notions of the feasible, Goodin too leaves aside his concern for bad representatives who blur the distinction between real and non-real constraints to avoid taking responsibility for their inaction, to turn his attention closer to what is also our focus: the representative who, having made that distinction, are good precisely *because* they figure out how to expand the scope of what can be done.

(2). It is at this point that imagination enters our picture. Indeed, “discovering neglected possibilities,” Goodin writes, involves politicians exercising a “fanciful imagination.”<sup>396</sup> Goodin borrows the phrase from David Novitz, who defines “fanciful imagination” as “the power of the mind to fabricate or invent by combining ideas, images, beliefs or objects.”<sup>397</sup> Novitz deploys this idea in order to distinguish between this imagination and a different type of imagination which he calls constructive or, in Kant’s term, reproductive imagination. This latter, indeed, is the type of imagination that Hume and Kant deemed crucial to the “acquisition and growth of empirical knowledge.”<sup>398</sup> Fanciful imagination, on the contrary, was seen by both these authors as unfit to perform epistemic functions, since in “combin[ing] appearances in whatever way it chooses” it prevents us from accessing “the actual or objective appearances of things in the world.”<sup>399</sup> As we shall see shortly, *contra* Hume and Kant, Novitz argues that fanciful imagination too plays a crucial role in the acquisition of knowledge. For now, we shall keep instead to Goodin’s path and notice, as he does aptly, that fanciful imagination is at the core of James March’s intuition that the “technology of reason” needs to be supplemented with a “technology of foolishness.”<sup>400</sup> Such a technology of foolishness is what March recognizes in “playfulness”.

Playfulness is the deliberate, temporary relaxation of rules in order to explore the possibilities of alternative rules. When we are playful, we challenge the necessity of consistency. In effect, we announce –in advance– our rejection of the usual objections to behaviour that does not fit the standard model of intelligence. Playfulness allows experimentation. At the same time, it acknowledges reason. It accepts an obligation that at some point either the playful behavior will be stopped or it will be integrated into the structure of intelligence in some way that makes sense. The suspension of the rules is temporary.<sup>401</sup>

It should be clear then, that, although less explicitly than we might hope, Goodin does acknowledge a relation between finitude and imagination. He sees that recognising what we have called the fact of finitude is a prerequisite for the use of imagination or that, to use March’s language, a playful suspension of the rules requires a prior acknowledgement of the rules

---

<sup>396</sup> Goodin, *Political Theory and Public Policy*, p. 134.

<sup>397</sup> David Novitz, ‘Of Fact and Fancy’, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 17.2 (1980), 143–49 (p. 144).

<sup>398</sup> Novitz, p. 143.

<sup>399</sup> Novitz, p. 144.

<sup>400</sup> James G. March, ‘Model Bias in Social Action’, *Review of Educational Research*, 42.4 (1972), 413–29 (p. 423).

<sup>401</sup> March, p. 425.

themselves and of their constraining nature. That lacking the knowledge of limits prevents imagination, after all, is also a recurrent theme in literature. I like recalling the image of the pianist Novecento, the main character of Alessandro Baricco's eponymous theatre monologue,<sup>402</sup> who could play infinite melodies on his finite keyboard but not a single note on a keyboard whose end he could not see. This capacity to turn the acceptance of the impossible into an opportunity to explore the possible, in this case referred to as "the virtue of non-elusion," is also George Bataille's main concern in *Le Rire de Nietzsche*: "he who is oppressed by the preoccupation of eliminating the impossible from the earth will never jump."<sup>403</sup> It is also in this sense, indeed, that finitude prescribes imagination. By freeing one from the ambition of eliminating the impossible, indeed, it enables what in Chapter I we called *freedom as beginning*: the radically imaginative escape from repetition envisaged by Castoriadis, the generative reshuffling of the old deck of cards that begins a new match, a new game, a new series of events. Failing to obey this injunction to imagine that comes attached to the fact of finitude, corresponds, after all, to an imbalance in the activity of the mental faculties as discussed in Chapter I. It corresponds, precisely, to the subjugation of Will and Judgment to the coercion of Reason, and to the subjugation of Freedom and Politics to the coercion of Truth.

**(3).** We have seen how the fact of finitude features in the experience of representing others, and that, once acknowledged, it frees the representative's imagination and its ability to expand the notion of the feasible. We shall now try to understand how the imagination deployed by the representative in this process alters their relation to truth and why it does so in ways that match the demands of democracy. As mentioned above, Kant distinguished between a type of imagination he called "reproductive", and another type of imagination which by contrast he called "productive." It is this latter that is termed "fanciful" by Novitz, "radical" by Castoriadis, and "spontaneous" or "generative"<sup>404</sup> by Zerilli. According to Novitz, Kant regarded this type of imagination as an unreliable faculty, disruptive of the rational effort to subsume particular instances under general rules. Novitz's Kant, however, is the Kant of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, committed to the task of isolating and describing the cognitive aspect of the human psychic experience, interested, thus, in the crucial role reproductive imagination plays in the process of knowing while also plausibly suspicious of the effects of productive imagination on the same

---

<sup>402</sup> Alessandro Baricco, *Novecento: Un Monologo*, 8088, 62. ed (Milano, Italy: Feltrinelli, 2015).

<sup>403</sup> Georges Bataille, *L'Amicizia*, Piccola Enciclopedia (Milano, Italy: SE, 2011), p. 59.

<sup>404</sup> Linda Zerilli, "'We Feel Our Freedom': Imagination and Judgment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt", *Political Theory*, 33.2 (2005), 158–88 (p. 163).

process.<sup>405</sup> After all, it is not too difficult to grasp the tension between such a form of the imagination and the aiming at truth which is distinctive of cognition. Invoking the perspective of the virtues of truth, for instance, we could easily observe that in “doing what I can to acquire true beliefs” and in “saying what I believe is true”, I should always beware of the suggestions of a fanciful imagination. Both accuracy and sincerity, that is to say, command abstinence from the use of such imagination (the same type of imagination – to be clear – that enables us to lie).

In Chapter I, however, we have seen that Arendt’s and Zerilli’s focus is on a different part of Kant’s work, the part, elaborated in the *Critique of Judgment*, addressing not the cognitive realm of the psyche but the aesthetic one. It is in tracing over Kant’s aesthetics, in fact, that Arendt discovers the structural resemblance between aesthetic and political judgments. For Arendt, I get to believe that “men are all equal” in the same way in which I get to believe that “this rose is beautiful”, namely by “being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not.” As George Kateb explains, summarising Arendt’s view,

I know how another would judge when I know how I would judge if I occupied his place. [...] It is too easy to refuse to imagine oneself differently situated, and to think that [...] I could [...] always be only what I am now in my present place. The imagination must unfreeze such a delusion. [...] The attempt to possess an enlarged mentality is really the attempt to realize how susceptible to judging differently I would be if I were literally moved from place to place, and also how comprehensively similar we are to one another, dependent for our differences on the place we occupy.<sup>406</sup>

Such an “enlarged mentality” that for Kant is the site of all aesthetic judgments and source of their intersubjective universal validity is what, in turn, Arendt calls “representative thinking” or the “going visiting” of the imagination – the hallmark of all political thinking. As Zerilli helps us understand,

what we hold to in aesthetic judgments and political judgments alike [...] is not necessarily something that is irreducibly nonconceptual [...]. Rather, we hold to an imaginative extension of a concept beyond its ordinary use in cognitive judgments and affirm freedom.<sup>407</sup>

“Every extension of a political concept”, Zerilli explains further,

always involves an imaginative opening up of the world that allows us to see and articulate relations between things that have none (in any necessary, logical sense), to create relations that are external to their terms. Political relations are always external to their terms: they involve not so much the

---

<sup>405</sup> The question of the role of imagination in Kant’s first critique is in itself interesting and very complex. Kant discusses imagination in the Deduction of the Pure Concepts of Understanding, a section which he later almost entirely removes from the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The vicissitudes of such section add further complexity to the task of figuring out Kant’s view of imagination. An accessible discussion of the issue can be found in Tugba Ayas Onol, ‘Reflections on Kant’s View of the Imagination’, *Ideas y Valores*, 64.157 (2015), 53–69.

<sup>406</sup> George Kateb, ‘The Judgement of Arendt’, in *Judgment, Imagination, and Politics: Themes from Kant and Arendt*, ed. by Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), p. 135.

<sup>407</sup> Linda Zerilli, “We Feel Our Freedom”, p. 171.

ability to subsume particulars under concepts, but an imaginative element, the ability to see or to forge new connections.<sup>408</sup>

According to this reading then, the function Kant assigns to imagination in the third critique is resolutely different from the merely reproductive function assigned to it in the first critique. As Tugba Ayas Onol observes, the third critique reports “a considerable shift in the status of the imagination in the hierarchy of the faculties of the mind,” and hence, “it is not wrong to say that the imagination is in charge in aesthetic judgments.”<sup>409</sup> Unlike the reproductive imagination at play in determinant judgments, imagination here is “considered in its freedom” – that is, it “is not bound to the law of causality, but is productive and spontaneous, not merely reproductive of what is already known, but *generative* of new forms and figures.”<sup>410</sup>

It is worth mentioning that, as curious as it sounds, Arendt may actually have failed to appreciate fully this shift and thus to explicitly reflect on the productive role of imagination. This is what Zerilli suggests in saying that in her account of judgment Arendt does not acknowledge Kant's account of “imagination *as a generative force* [...]”<sup>411</sup> Nevertheless – and this is what is most relevant for us – she certainly recognizes the crucial role of imagination in “breaking the boundaries of identity-based experience: taking account of plurality and affirming freedom.”<sup>412</sup> Indeed, it is precisely in breaking the boundaries of identity-based experience and in taking account of plurality that lies the imagination's power to enhance democratic truthfulness: in “train[ing the] imagination to go visiting”<sup>413</sup> the standpoints of others and in “making [them] present”<sup>414</sup> I enable myself to turn what I believe to be true into something politically significant. That is to say, I enable myself to display the virtue of generativity which, by allowing plurality into the relation of the individual with the truth, complements the work of the virtues of sincerity and accuracy.

As we shall see in the next two sections, mobilizing imagination is a necessary precondition for generativity but not a sufficient one, taken on its own. Turning what I believe is true into something politically significant requires kneading the life of the mind into the material reality in which we exist together. It requires bridging, through action, the internal-reflective and the external-collective realms of human experience. It requires, then, engaging with the other activities related to the truth carrying out which one displays the virtue of generativity:

---

<sup>408</sup> Linda Zerilli, “We Feel Our Freedom”, p. 181.

<sup>409</sup> Onol, p. 60.

<sup>410</sup> Linda Zerilli, “We Feel Our Freedom”, p. 163.

<sup>411</sup> Linda Zerilli, “We Feel Our Freedom”, p. 173. Emphasis mine.

<sup>412</sup> Linda Zerilli, “We Feel Our Freedom”, p. 173.

<sup>413</sup> Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 43.

<sup>414</sup> Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 43.

performing it and negotiating it with others. At the same time, it is crucial to acknowledge that the image I see in judging politically – in expanding the notion of the feasible, in watching from the point of view of the world – is the indispensable referent of my performance and the starting point of my negotiation. It is as a referent of this sort, for example, that I understand Martin Luther King’s famous dream. Whereas in talking about it he had already engaged in the performance of its realization, the making of that dream required in the first place the type of imagination that the fact of finitude prescribes to the representative. Without such an imaginary referent, indeed, truth could be repeated or reproduced with the greatest accuracy and the purest sincerity, but it could not be authored, in concert, anew, as the open-endedness of democracy promises and demands. Imagination, we could then say, provides generativity with its *perspective* element, with a specifically political outlook, the first step to turn what one knows to be true into something politically significant. We will now move on to discuss performance and negotiation, which can respectively be considered the *affirmative* and the *positional* elements of generativity.

## Solitude and Performance

We have seen how the experience of representation exposes those who live it to the fact of finitude and how this, in turn, prescribes imagination and with it the “perspective element” of generativity. We have also seen, indeed, that by temporarily suspending the rules that constrain identity-based experience in the narrowness of singular perspectives, imagination allows one to acquire the point of view of the world and, through it, to judge politically. In this sense, by allowing them to take account of plurality, this trained imagination alters the representative’s relation to truth in a direction that matches the demands of democracy inasmuch as it credits every standpoint for its equal, free contribution to the making of an ever-evolving *sensus communis*.<sup>415</sup> Now, the periodic renewal of this imaginary referent is the vital first phase of the work of generativity. In this section we move on to discuss the following phase, exploring precisely the second truth-related activity carrying out which generativity is displayed: that of performance. In the same way that imagination is prescribed by finitude, the activity of performance too is understood as the prescriptive content of a piece of ethopoietic knowledge. I call this the fact of *solitude*.

---

<sup>415</sup> Understood in the Arendtian sense, not as “the unreflective prudence that every sane adult exercises continuously but, rather, as Kant put it, [as] “a sense common to all . . . a faculty of judgment which, in its reflection, takes account . . . of the mode of representation of all other men”. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, p. 70.

Like with the choice of the word “finitude”, also identifying the word “solitude” involved some hesitation. The availability of Arendt’s extensive reflections on the difference between “solitude” and “loneliness”, and her qualification of the latter as conducive to the thoughtlessness of totalitarianism and of the former as – instead – a barrier against it, convinced me almost instantly of the inadequacy to my purpose of words such as “isolation” and “loneliness”. I had more trouble, instead, when it came to consider the words “individuality” and “individualism”, which conveyed crucial tenets of a tradition of democratic thought that seemed to resonate best with my intuitions, the tradition developed in particular by those thinkers now recognised as American transcendentalists and pragmatists. Eventually though, I chose the word “solitude”, both because, as we shall see, it occupies its own legitimate place in democratic thinking and because talking of individualism would have necessitated a longer digression from what shall instead remain the focus of our discussion: the path through which the experience of representation modifies one’s relation to truth in ways that approach the ideal of democratic truthfulness. Tracing over the structure of the previous section, this section too attempts to clarify three questions. The first (1) is how the experience of representing others leads one to solitude and how this matters to democracy; the second (2) is how solitude prescribes performance; the last (3) is how performing alters one’s civic relation to truth.

**(1).** To begin with, let us think again of a representative at the beginning of his mandate. Whether the representative is elected, appointed or acknowledged through informal procedures, the experience of representing others always begins for them with an intense, inebriating sentiment of companionship. Of *centrality* in companionship, to be precise. This is a rather unsurprising finding and, from the representative standpoint, an extremely pleasant one. What is surprising, instead, is discovering that this sentiment of companionship never survives the hour of proclamation by so much as a minute:<sup>416</sup> it abandons the representative the very same moment he sets out to start his journey away from A, towards B. I return very often with my memory, for instance, to the exact moment in which the sentiment of companionship abandoned me for the first time, the day I learned I had been elected a municipal councillor. I remember the companions of my party whom I was chosen to represent, lifting me from the ground and throwing me up in the air, to celebrate the victory. And then, as I went up and down, I remember a bitterness invading my joy, but leaving theirs unsullied. When I touched the floor again, I felt I was ten times heavier and suddenly shockingly alone.

---

<sup>416</sup> Here I am misquoting Arendt, “[t]he humanity of the insulated and injured has never yet survived the hour of liberation by so much as a minute.” Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, Pelican Books (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 16.

This was only my first, imperfect encounter with the second prescriptive fact that the experience of representing others periodically invites one to contemplate and to put to use, the fact of solitude, as we are calling it here. In fact, the representative is confronted with their solitude a great number of times across their experience, precisely at every reversion in the movement between A and B. As discussed in Chapter IV, the representative is entrusted by his constituents, in A, to make their voice heard in B. In B, though, they are in turn entrusted, by other representatives, to make the voices of their constituencies heard, back in A. Throughout the whole duration of their mandate, then, the representative repeatedly returns to A, carrying the burden of disagreement handed over to him in B. In this going back and forth the representative discovers the indivisibility of that burden, the impossibility to share it with others, and in walking knowingly always on the edge of potential enmity he lives the “audienceless” experience of solitude.

Now, that solitude belongs with the political is far from being a new discovery. In fact, a number of political thinkers have dwelled on the many ways in which solitude is relevant to politics, in general, and to democracy in particular. In his utterly controversial *Dialogue on Power and on Access to the Holder of Power*,<sup>417</sup> Carl Schmitt proposes a particularly vivid depiction of the fact of solitude as it initially presents itself to the representative. Although narrated in the language of power, a language I have deliberately refrained from using throughout this thesis, Schmitt’s description captures well what I could call the “dark side” of the relation between the individuation of the holder of power and its condition of solitude. He writes:

The human individual, in whose hand the great political decisions lie for an instant, can only form his will under given presuppositions and with given means. Even the most absolute prince is reliant on reports and information and dependent on his councillors. A plethora of facts and communications, recommendations and suggestions presses in upon him day by day [...]. Out of this flowing, infinite sea of truth and lies, realities and possibilities even the cleverest and most powerful human can at most ladle out a few droplets. [...] In front of every chamber of direct power an antechamber of indirect influences and powers constructs itself, a path of access to the ear, a corridor to the soul of the holder to power. [...] *The holder of power himself becomes ever more isolated the more that direct power concentrates itself in his individual person. The corridor uproots him from the ground and elevates him as if into a stratosphere, in which he is only able to reach those who rule him indirectly, while he can no longer reach all remaining humans over whom he exercises power, and they, in turn, can no longer reach him.*<sup>418 419</sup>

Although Schmitt’s emphasis on power and domination probably clashes with the liberal democratic context within which our reflection is willingly constrained, there is still something

---

<sup>417</sup> As notices Giorgio Grimaldi, “[t]he birth of the Dialogue is connected with the interrogations Schmitt was subjected to in Nuremberg, therefore it is somehow also a defensive strategy to avoid the accusation of involvement in National Socialism.” Giorgio Grimaldi, “The Solitude of Power. A Reflection on the Political”, *Cambio. Rivista Sulle Trasformazioni Sociali*, 9.17 (2019), p. 42.

<sup>418</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Dialogues on Power and Space*, ed. by Andreas Kalyvas and Federico Finchelstein, trans. by Samuel Garrett Zeitlin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), p. 34,35.

<sup>419</sup> Schmitt, p. 37.



that holds true for us, I find, in this description of the process of isolation the powerful person experiences, and in the enmity by which he feels surrounded as power concentrates in his hands. After all, as Giorgio Grimaldi observes in his paper on solitude in Schmitt's *Dialogue*, the condition of solitude is a necessary aspect of the moment of decision-making itself, a moment which can be understood as a kind of vertex, a singular outcome which distils a plurality of possibilities. In his words, "neither democracy (conceived as the political regime where members acknowledge each other as equal), nor the separation of powers (that loosens the tendency to the concentration of power that characterises domination) escape the main problem of power: *the decision*, that necessarily implies a vertex. Once again: solitude."<sup>420</sup> This is something that Chapter I already exposed, in contrasting the dual nature of Thinking and the plural nature of Judging with the singularity affirmed in Willing. If there is a specificity, in fact, in the way in which democracy deals with solitude, this concerns not a special resistance to it or a special ambition to contain it, it rather concerns the special value and brighter status that is reserved for solitude in democratic thought and practice.

Guy Paltiel recently contributed to explicating, for instance, the role of solitude in classic liberal democratic theory, looking in particular at the work of Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill. Contrary to an established line of thought which in reading Tocqueville equates solitude with individualism, Paltiel argues that unlike individualism (which eventually leads to the despotic decline of democracy) solitude was regarded by Tocqueville as a precondition for any intellectual work and therefore "important for democracy because it allows an invisible sphere of action which keeps challenging the political structure."<sup>421</sup> Similarly, Paltiel also offers a reading of Mill that "challenges contemporary appropriations of [his] thought by participatory, deliberative and epistemic theories of democracy"<sup>422</sup> by acknowledging and emphasising precisely the positive role Mill, inspired in turn by de Tocqueville, assigned to solitude in the achievement of a non-self-defeating democracy. It is outside this narrower classic canon of liberal thought, however, that we find more explicitly elaborated accounts of the place of solitude in democracy.

I mentioned earlier, for example, the view of solitude underpinning Arendt's account of totalitarianism,<sup>423</sup> and which in fact is recognizable throughout her entire oeuvre. This is

---

<sup>420</sup> Grimaldi, p. 47.

<sup>421</sup> Guy Paltiel, "'Solitude De Son Propre Cœur': Tocqueville and the Transformation of Democratic Solitude", *Tocqueville Review -- La Revue Tocqueville*, 37.1 (2016), 183–206 (p. 184).

<sup>422</sup> Guy Paltiel, 'Mill's Closet: J.S. Mill on Solitude and the Imperfect Democracy', *History of European Ideas*, 45.1 (2019), 47–63 (p. 48).

<sup>423</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Penguin Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2017).

captured well in Roger Berkowitz's essay *Solitude and the activity of thinking*.<sup>424</sup> Berkowitz notices how for Arendt – who, we know, regarded “the public” as the condition for judging politically and the site for action – “the private” is neither necessarily “the realm of loneliness that is opposed to politics and action” nor “an economic realm concerned with the pursuit of individual interests.”<sup>425</sup> Rather,

the private can be a space of solitude that is the necessary prerequisite for the activity of thinking. Indeed, it is solitude that nurtures and fosters thoughtfulness and thus prepares individuals for the possibility of political action. [...] In dark and lonely times we must not seek only the company of others in public; just as importantly, we must be vigilant in protecting the sanctuaries of solitude from which the activity of thinking is born. To combat the loneliness of the modern world [...] requires solitude, [...] as the cradle of thinking.<sup>426</sup>

Whereas “loneliness”, the loss of the experience of being with others which could strike one even and especially in the midst of a crowd, leads eventually to the dismantlement of that *sensus communis* that is the ground and the horizon of judging politically (taking plurality into account), “solitude” is when one is in fact the least alone: it is “amid the plurality that attains in solitude” that the activity of thinking has a chance at “interrupt[ing] totalitarianism and foster[ing] political action.”<sup>427</sup> It is evident that the tension between these two modalities of “being alone” – one that participates in the production of the common world and another that instead destroys it – links back to the discussion we briefly dwelled on in Chapter III, concerning the seeming mutual exclusivity of the values of autonomy and community. And after all, in one form or another this is a tension that stubbornly haunts the peripheries of liberal thought.<sup>428</sup> Here, however, it is not this tension that we are interested in examining, but the role that solitude, in the Arendtian sense we have specified, can play in fostering the truth-related practice of performance and, through it, the virtue of generativity. To my knowledge, nowhere is such role addressed in terms more suitable to our purpose than in the American transcendentalist and pragmatist tradition.

**(2).** At the heart of this tradition is a peculiarly “singular landscape,”<sup>429</sup> as Nadia Urbinati has observed, one whose contour is defined by a notion of democratic individualism which sees the individual less as an element of disaggregation and more as a subject of responsibility. This

---

<sup>424</sup> in *Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics*, ed. by Roger Berkowitz, Jeffrey Katz, and Thomas Keenan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 237.

<sup>425</sup> Berkowitz, Katz, and Keenan, p. 239.

<sup>426</sup> Berkowitz, Katz, and Keenan, p. 239.

<sup>427</sup> Berkowitz, Katz, and Keenan, p. 239.

<sup>428</sup> Relevant overviews and important contributions to this discussion can be found in George Kateb, ‘Democratic Individualism and Its Critics’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6.1 (2003), 275–305; as well as in Larry D. Nachman, ‘The Solitude of the Heart: Personality and Democratic Culture’, *Salmagundi*, 46, 1979, 173–85.

<sup>429</sup> Nadia Urbinati, *Individualismo Democratico* (Rome: Donzelli, 2009).

is resonant, indeed, with George Kateb's suggestion that what is so unsettling in reading Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau, and Walt Whitman,

is the sense that unless democratic individualism reformed itself, it could turn hideous in its predatory and boundless egomania. But if reformed in the spirit of its best possibilities, democratic individualism would be a brighter page in human history, all the brighter for being rare and perhaps precarious.<sup>430</sup>

It is Emerson, in particular, who expresses this view more explicitly in the language of solitude. Besides the explicit reflection he famously offers in *Society and Solitude*,<sup>431</sup> the question of solitude pervades Emerson's whole thought, and in particular his discussion of self-reliance: "the readiness to treat with sympathetic understanding ideas and values that have no sympathy for one another."<sup>432</sup> In his *Emerson and Self-Reliance*, Kateb explicates the connection between solitude and self-reliance in the following terms:

Solitude is necessary for self-acquaintance, which, in turn, matters most as the indispensable preparation for self-reliant thinking about the world, the reality that encloses one's solitude. [...] Emerson thinks that the most immediate knowledge of experienced reality often comes not during immersion in it but afterwards. The closest encounter is retrospective. [...] Emerson regularly maintains that we most truly know, we get nearest to reality— whether our own experiences or the life around us— after the fact, and, for the most part, in solitary contemplation. That is the great work of solitude [...].<sup>433</sup>

It is when understood in this sense, as the site of a retrospective contemplation of reality, that solitude best captures the feature of the experience of representing others we are interested in understanding. The distance between A and B is an audienceless desert that the representative crosses in the sole company of himself, carrying out a compulsory and recursive exercise of retrospective appreciation of reality.<sup>434</sup> It is the permanence in such a desert, to which the representative is regularly invited to return, that certifies the authenticity of their political judgment, its passage, that is to say, through the autonomous scrutiny of their unique singularity. Upon this solitary revision, a judgment, we could otherwise say, becomes an autograph judgement: a judgment that comes with its author's readiness to take responsibility for the material consequences of its appearance in the world. It is in this sense, I suggest, that Emerson's solitude can be understood, in the words of Urbinati, as "the refusal of any mediation between oneself and the truth."<sup>435</sup>

---

<sup>430</sup> Kateb, 'Democratic Individualism and Its Critics', p. 301.

<sup>431</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library, 2013).

<sup>432</sup> George Kateb, *Emerson and Self-Reliance* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

<sup>433</sup> Kateb, *Emerson and Self-Reliance*, p. 115.

<sup>434</sup> Discuss how undertaking this 'retrospective appreciation of reality' one display a particular model of accuracy

<sup>435</sup> Urbinati, *Individualismo Democratico*, p. 90.

How, then, is it that solitude prescribes performance? What I am taking to be an injunction to perform, first presents itself to the citizen representative as the injunction to subject themselves to the norm implicit in their own judgment. This is an injunction to affirm it and to *verify* it: to knead its claim to truth into its surrounding material reality. In the context of this discussion then, a “performance” is not any public exhibition of the self, aimed at influencing others and vaguely related to political issues. To be clear, the many forms of embarrassing public self-exhibition we witness today on the part of a number of political representatives – ranging from the abundant instances of obvious social media addiction to more rare pearls, such as Boris Johnson dangling from a zip line in 2002 – are not the kind of performances prescribed by solitude. In fact these rather exemplify the behaviour of the representative who failed to embrace the fact of solitude and therefore to grasp its normative significance. The kind of performance I am talking about, indeed, is always necessarily an *appearing in public out of solitude*, an *acting after solitude*: it is an affirmative act, verbal or otherwise, performed in compliance with the normativity of a judgment attained in solitude – an instance of fulfilled autonomy, in its most literal sense of obeyed self-given law.<sup>436</sup> Such a performance is the necessary practical extension, in the external-collective realm, of the activity of judging politically that in the internal-reflective realm is the job of the imagination.<sup>437</sup>

3). Now, in what sense does performing, as the acting after solitude that I have described, brings about a change in the subject’s relation to truth? In Erving Goffman’s classical account, “performance” is defined as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants.”<sup>438</sup> Let us notice that there are other ways, beside its generic aim of influencing others, in which the “acting after solitude” of the representative is performing. One, for instance, follows from the fact that, whether verbal or not, these acts are all instances of “showing-doing.” As Richard Schechner clarifies since the first pages of his introduction to performance studies, if “[d]oing” is the activity of all that

---

<sup>436</sup> This point is less uncontroversial than I am admitting here. In particular it raises the interesting question, well-known to social epistemologists, of the non-normativity of testimony in aesthetic judgments. See for instance Jon Robson, ‘A Social Epistemology of Aesthetics: Belief Polarization, Echo Chambers and Aesthetic Judgement’, *Synthese*, 191.11 (2014), 2513–28. This matters for us since testimony is a form performance, in the meaning we are attributing to the word here.

<sup>437</sup> Such continuity between political imagination and political praxis may also be what Arendt’s controversial conflation of Kantian judgment and Aristotelian phronesis, practical wisdom, was intended to signal. Less controversially, this seems to be also explicitly the case with the “praxis” (as Zerilli calls it) of rhetoric: “i.e., concrete individuals talking to each other in specific contexts.” As Zerilli notices, “the ability to persuade depends upon the capacity to elicit criteria that speak to the particular case at hand and in relation to particular interlocutors. It is a rhetorical ability, fundamentally creative and imaginative, to project a word like beautiful or a phrase like created equal into a new context in ways that others can accept, not because they (necessarily) already agree with the projection (or would have to agree if they are thinking properly), but because they are brought to see something new, a different way of framing their responses to certain objects and events.” Linda Zerilli, “We Feel Our Freedom”, p. 171.

<sup>438</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956), p. 8.

exists, from quarks to sentient beings to supergalactic strings” then “[s]howing doing” is performing: pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing.”<sup>439</sup> Let us recall that, for Arendt, persuading in the political realm is not about proof-giving but about rendering accounts, “be[ing] able to say *how* one came to an opinion, and for what reasons one formed it.”<sup>440</sup> In this sense, acting after solitude is performing also inasmuch as it is persuading by what we could call “showing judging”: pointing to, underlining and displaying the doing of representative thinking.

A second way in which acting after solitude is performing relates instead to the notion of performance as prepared, rehearsed behaviour.<sup>441</sup> Unless and until its validity is limited by a negotiated compromise – as we shall see in the next section – or exceeded by a supervened revision of the judgment itself, a judgment autographed in solitude binds its author to conform to its normativity in all circumstances, indeterminately. Performing, in this sense, is also a matter of repetition, preparation, adaptation. These particular features of a performance expose a tension between the acting after solitude and common understandings of truthfulness. Indeed, like speaking from a scripted play, the fact of complying to a norm pre-inscribed in one’s judgment stabilizes performances in ways that clash with truthfulness-related notions, such as spontaneity and authenticity.

This is not something that would have escaped Bernard Williams’ analysis of truthfulness and returning to his insights will help us clarify the question. In fact, a whole chapter of his genealogy is dedicated to the turn from sincerity to authenticity, in discussing which he points out the antagonism between a particular model of “sincerity as uninhibited spontaneity,”<sup>442</sup> in this sense synonymous with authenticity, and the need for “an unchanging dispositional state, steadily ready to be activated in declaration or actions.”<sup>443</sup> As a matter of course, social cooperation requires such steadiness to insure against “the weather of the mind.”<sup>444</sup> “[T]here are others who need to rely on our dispositions, and we want them to be able to rely on our dispositions because we, up to a point, want to rely on theirs”, and this is why, writes Williams, “[w]e learn to present ourselves to others, and consequently to ourselves, as people who have moderately steady outlooks or beliefs.”<sup>445</sup> This presentation of a steady-self cannot but require rehearsed, multiple-times-behaved or patterned behaviour. It is, in this sense, a performance,

---

<sup>439</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 28.

<sup>440</sup> Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, p. 41.

<sup>441</sup> Schechner, p. 28.

<sup>442</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 191.

<sup>443</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 192.

<sup>444</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 191.

<sup>445</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 192.

and, for the same reasons, such is also the acting after solitude and its presentation of a steady outlook on the world.

Despite the loss of spontaneity it demands, therefore, performing signals an engagement aimed at turning what one knows to be true into something politically significant, bending the demands of sincerity towards those of generativity. In fact, the same plurality that a generative use of imagination allows to take into account when judging, is now – through the performance prepared in solitude – affirmed in public, delivered to an audience. Before this audience, the representative presents himself as what *one* by definition could not be: plural. In this sense performing realizes the political significance of what is known to be true. Understood as a normative implication of the fact of solitude, performance is not simply one option among others – and much less an option to be discarded as inauthentic – rather, it is an essential truth-related activity that the experience of representing others invites to carry out. Turning what one knows to be true into something politically significant, then, involves first what I termed at the end of the previous section a *perspective* element, the “seeing politically” of imagination, and later an *affirmative* element, the “saying politically”, precisely, of performance. Without these, it would be virtually impossible to make sense of the essential last element of generativity, the *positional* element, the “moving politically” of negotiation that the next section will discuss.

## Mutability and Negotiation

This final section illustrates the last prescriptive fact revealed by the experience of representing others and the injunction to negotiate which comes attached to its discovery, the fact of mutability. As is the case with finitude and solitude, mutability too is a fact inherent to the human condition and indeed to the condition of anything that exists. By “mutability”, indeed, I refer to the quality of being subject to change. In the case of mutability, like in the previous two, my claim, to be clear, is not that representing others discloses something that could not be discovered otherwise, but rather that representing others channels the ethical transformation that accompanies such discoveries in ways that match the demands of democracy. Once again, the discussion will be articulated keeping in mind three questions: (1) how the experience of representing others exposes the fact of mutability and why this matters to democracy; (2) how the discovery of one’s own mutability prescribes negotiation; (3) in what sense is negotiation a truth-related practice and how it leads to generativity.

**(1).** Let us return to our newcomer representative and to his experience. We have seen that (in space A) the representative is entrusted with the task of making his constituents present (in

space B) by lending their singular identity to a new, provisionally unified, plural subject. As the semantics may suggest, the process through which a representative is *identified* (for instance in an electoral campaign followed by successful elections) leaves them with an augmented feeling of identity: at the eve of their first journey to B the new representative knows exactly who they are. The point that current available understandings of representation seem to neglect though – this has been my argument in Chapter IV – is that the constructive element at play in the relationship between a representative and its constituency, which informs the co-constitutive nature of this relationship, is similarly at play in Space B, in the relation among representatives. Indeed, here too the representative is entrusted with a task, the task, this time, to make multiple constituencies present back in A. And here too this involves the representative lending their singular identity to a provisionally unified plural subject. Leaving B for the first time, at the outset of his return to A, the representative may still know who they are, only, maybe, less exactly. It is only returning to A, when confronted by the mirror of their constituency, that “mutability” – of their own identities and of others’ – appears to them as a matter of fact.<sup>446</sup>

Among the three facts we are discussing, the discovery of mutability was in my experience the most unsettling. I remember very clearly the day I was told, by a constituent, something that struck me as absolutely and irreversibly true: “You have changed – you are no longer the same.” Troublingly, the utterance had a severe moral judgment attached to it. Having changed – this was the claim – I had betrayed my constituency and cast retrospective doubts on the truthfulness of our co-constitutive representative-represented relationship established at the beginning of the mandate. Ought implies can though, and so accusations of “having changed” which representatives (see our discussion on shape-shifting in Chapter IV) often face, must open up the question of how possible it is – if possible at all – to prevent such mutations.

---

<sup>446</sup> An interesting account of the transformation that political leaders are deemed to undergo qua political leaders, in many ways resonant with my understanding of the matter, is undoubtedly Robert Michels’ classic study of the oligarchical tendency of group life. Michels explored in depth the “profound psychological transformation” (Michels, p.169) undergone by political leaders throughout their time as leaders and saw in its inevitability a concurrent cause of the notorious “iron law of oligarchy”: “oligarchy derives, that is to say, from the psychical transformations which the leading personalities in the parties undergo in the course of their lives” (Michels, p. 241). As Peter La Venia recently stressed, however, Michels’ theory of democracy was explicitly influenced by Rousseau, whose critique of parliamentarism he referenced repeatedly throughout its work. According to Hugo Drochon, in fact “the concept of representation was foreign to him” (Drochon, p. 187) and this is the case all the more if we understand the concept as scholars of the democratic and constructivist rediscovery of representation have recently. Michels indeed saw “any separation between leaders and followers as ipso facto a negation of democracy” (Martin, 34) and therefore had no faith in the possibility of democracy within a larger polity. Due to an irreconcilable distance of premises then, his analysis of the metamorphosis of political leaders is not easily translated in the understanding of the transformation of the democratic representatives we are instead seeking to grasp. Despite the evident and interesting connections with Michels and more broadly with elite theories, I shall postpone this promising comparison to future work Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (Kitchener, Canada: Batoche Books, 2000); Peter A. LaVenía Jr., ‘Rethinking Robert Michels’, *History of Political Thought*, 40.1 (2019), 111–37; Hugo Drochon, ‘Robert Michels, the Iron Law of Oligarchy and Dynamic Democracy’, *Constellations*, 27.2 (2020), 185–98; Lipset Seymour Martin, ‘Introduction’, in *Political Parties* (Simon and Schuster, 1968).

The idea that “all beings are affected by an incessant mutation that concerns all of their aspects”,<sup>447</sup> famously attributed to Heraclitus,<sup>448</sup> has been around for over twenty-five centuries, and ever since it has been found plausible by many. I certainly do not feel alone, then, in believing that the question of whether it is possible to prevent mutation has a negative answer: change cannot be prevented and so nobody should be asked not to change or blamed for changing. A much more complex question, however, arises from this answer, one concerning what exactly such inexorable mutation does to the identity of he who undergoes it. An instance of this complexity can be grasped looking briefly at the literature on the pre-Socratic doctrine of universal flux. An important issue at stake here, is the degree to which “the theory of radical flux makes identity over time impossible.”<sup>449</sup>

In this regard, for instance, Miroslav Markovich 1967 edition of Heraclitus initiates a break with an established interpretative tradition according to which what the theory of flux suggests is that, since all that exists constantly changes, we cannot encounter the same thing twice. Instead, as Daniel Graham notes, the remits of Markovich’s interpretation is that “Heraclitus balances flux with constancy,”<sup>450</sup> with the seemingly paradoxical implication that it is precisely inasmuch as things change that they can retain their identity. Mutability, in this view, is the condition of identity, not its enemy. This reconciliation and mutual redefinition of mutability and identity is also what underlies Nietzsche’s doctrine of self-creation,<sup>451</sup> the doctrine famously distilled in the *Gay Science* with the formula “you should become who you are”<sup>452</sup> and very probably inspired by Nietzsche’s reading of Emerson’s *Self-reliance*.<sup>453</sup> In particular, what may have inspired Nietzsche’s ethics are Emerson’s reflections on “consistency”. Together with conformity, consistency is indeed for Emerson the great enemy of self-trust<sup>454</sup> – “the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen” and with which “a great soul has simply nothing to do.”<sup>455</sup> Regardless of Emerson’s passionate rejection of it, consistency retains great currency as

---

<sup>447</sup> Edoardo Benati, ‘La Teoria Del Flusso Nel Cratilo e Nel Timeo Di Platone: Il Problema Di Un Mondo in Divenire e Il Rapporto Con Eraclito’, *Studi Classici e Orientali*, 63 (2017), 73–90 (p. 73).

<sup>448</sup> The decades-long debate around Heraclitus’s dubious paternity of the doctrine of universal flux is as fascinating as it is difficult to access for non-experts of the likes of myself, and so I shall avoid stepping on controversial grounds by attributing to Heraclitus thoughts he might have not had. The debate revolves in large part around a small group of fragments by Heraclitus, the ‘river’ fragments. None of these fragments would seem to justify Cratylus’ interpretation, reported by Plato and subscribed to later by Aristoteles, to whom we owe the famous phrase – commonly attributed to Heraclitus – that it is impossible for a man to step twice in the same river.

<sup>449</sup> Daniel W. Graham, ‘Review of “Heraclitus: Greek Text with a Short Commentary” by Miroslav Marcovich’, *Aestimatio: Critical Reviews in the History of Science*, 1 (2004), 80–85 (p. 82).

<sup>450</sup> Graham, p. 82.

<sup>451</sup> Paul Franco, ‘Becoming Who You Are: Nietzsche on Self-Creation’, 49.1 (2018), 52–77.

<sup>452</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *La Gaia Scienza e Idilli di Messina* (Milano: Adelphi, 2008), p. III.271, 197.

<sup>453</sup> Isabelle Alfandary, ‘Unfounding an American Tradition: Or the Performative Invention of Self in Ralph Waldo Emerson’, *Textual Practice*, 33.10 (2019), 1739 (p. 1748).

<sup>454</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance and Other Essays* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), p. 44.

<sup>455</sup> Emerson, *Self-Reliance and Other Essays*, p. 45.



a virtue, and particularly so in the political realm. In fact, consistency is a much appreciated and often invoked political virtue, the display of which is unanimously deemed a token of truthfulness. This is especially the case in the context of standard promissory models of democratic representation, the normative implications of which, as we saw in Chapter IV, assigns to consistency a high, positive moral value. After all, as writes Remo Bodei, consistency, “[f]aithfulness to oneself – *constantia* or *firmitas* – constitutes [...] the genuine cornerstone of classical ethics.”<sup>456</sup>

I place this contested virtue of consistency at one end of the political significance of the fact of mutability, at the opposite end of which I place instead another contested virtue; that of prudence. Prudence, indeed, is another notion Emerson discussed at length, distinguishing a “true” or “legitimate” prudence which “unfolds the beauty of laws within the narrow scope of the senses”, and which he praises generously, from a “spurious” or “base” one which is a mere “devotion to matter” and which he deems “the god of sots and cowards.”<sup>457</sup> More importantly though, prudence could be said to be the political virtue *par excellence*, mobilized, albeit often with divergent meanings, by political thinkers of all eras, from Aristotle and Cicero to Niccolò Machiavelli and Edmund Burke.<sup>458</sup>

In more recent times, R. L. Nichols and D. M. White have written of prudence that, “without it political actors will be either thoughtlessly complacent, purely self-interested or inhuman, merely irrelevant to the ongoing life of their society, or the cause of mindless or groundlessly hopeful destruction or violence”<sup>459</sup> and they presented it for this reason as a “political desideratum.” They admit, nevertheless, that the various ways in which prudence has been conceptualized over the centuries may have very little in common “beyond a concern about how to proceed in political action.”<sup>460</sup> Here, I suggest we understand consistency and prudence as two competing mutability-management strategies, their function being the management of the effects of mutability within the political realm, and in particular within representative democracy.

---

<sup>456</sup> Remo Bodei, ‘Consistency and Constancy’, in *Geometry of the Passions: Fear, Hope, Happiness: Philosophy and Political Use* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2018), p. 167.

<sup>457</sup> ‘Prudence’ in Emerson, *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*.

<sup>458</sup> Despite certain flaws that David Depew convincingly identifies, such as, for instance, the overreliance on the alleged continuity between the Greek notion of *phronesis* and the Latin *prudencia*, a rich account (and ultimately a defence) of this controversial virtue can be found in a collection of essays, edited by Robert Haniman. The book explores the development of notions of prudence across a wide array of uses, from Aristotle, Cicero and Macchiavelli to Burke, Gadamer and Lyotard. Robert Haniman, *Prudence: Classical Virtue, Postmodern Practice* (Penn State Press, 2003); David J. Depew, ‘Prudence: Classical Virtue, Postmodern Practice (Review)’, 37.2 (2004), 167–75.

<sup>459</sup> R. L. Nichols and D. M. White, ‘Politics Proper: On Action and Prudence’, *Ethics*, 89.4 (1979), 372–84 (p. 374).

<sup>460</sup> Nichols and White, p. 375.

The crucial differences between the two strategies are the adoption of opposite temporal framings and, consequently, the different degrees of toleration of the fact of mutability they admit. In the Emersonian sense we are considering, consistency refers to the past: it aims at constraining the fact of mutability by anchoring present behaviour to the standard of past performances. Prudence instead refers to the future: it aims at accounting in advance for the fact of mutability, preventing the normativity of present performances from foreclosing the justification of future ones. An extraordinary example of failed mutability-management, of abuse and misuse of the virtues of constituency and prudence, is to be found in the political performances of many representatives of the Italian Five Star Movement. Their deliberate exhibition, at particular moments, of flawless consistency – exhibitions accompanied with strident accusations of inconsistency addressed to the representatives of all other political forces – have on a number of occasions been subsequently revealed as embarrassing shows of imprudence. In dismissing as wrong any compromise and as incoherent with electoral promises any willingness to seek one, they foreclosed the possibility of appealing to their own normative standards to justify what would have been their future performance as parties in the most controversial of the possible political alliances: two consecutive government coalitions which saw them governing first with the far-right and only months later with the democratic left. Consistency, in this sense, is the virtue of the imprudent. After all, as Nichols and White notice, the Latin etymology of prudence, indicates “limited foresight” as an original meaning of the word, where the limitation of the foreseeing of prudence was opposed to the fullness of the foreseeing of providence, a divine virtue beyond human aspiration.<sup>461</sup>

That the representative is torn between these two ideals should be an uncontroversial fact, as the classic delegate/trustee dichotomy indicates. It could be said, in fact, that whereas consistency is the ideal virtue of the delegate, prudence is that of the trustee, or that at least this is one plausible way of understanding the difference between the two models. I would also suggest that the fact of mutability and the representatives’ contested right to become, are among the most problematic aspects of democratic representation and yet – with few exceptions, among which can be included Saward’s abovementioned work on the shape-shifting representative – also among the least explored. This is all the more so if I am right in saying that the growth, the evolution, and the ethical transformation of the subject who represents others are not undesirable side effects of democratic representation, but rather its most valuable and durable outcome. In the end, to use Foucault’s words, “[m]y way of no longer being the

---

<sup>461</sup> Nichols and White, p. 376.

same is, by definition, the most singular part of what I am,”<sup>462</sup> and we have seen in the previous section how precious the unique singularity of its members is to democracy.

(2). Whereas the theory of representation, I have claimed, struggles to account for the fact of mutability in its critical importance, the practice of representing others definitely offers to the representative an opportunity to take ownership of it. The fact of being subject to change, which the representative discovers in confronting the mirrors of others in A and in B, produces in turn a further transformation by prescribing what I have termed the activity of negotiation.

Negotiation is a response to pluralism, a model of liberal democratic politics. Richard Bellamy and Martin Hollis have compared three such models, in their words, “distinguish[ing] the mutual acceptance and accommodation sought by *negotiators* both from a bargain struck by *traders* for mutual advantage and from an agreement among *trimmers* to avoid contentious issues.”<sup>463</sup> In his subsequent book on the matter, Bellamy adds to these three a fourth model, that of *segregation* which responds to pluralism suggesting that different groups live as separate from each other as is possible. In Bellamy’s view, trading, trimming and segregating – which can be broadly associated respectively with libertarian, constitutional and communitarian political vocations – are equally ineffective attempts to address pluralism insofar as, in aiming at consensus, they all fail to satisfy truly the condition of reciprocity that democratic pluralism demands. As writes Bellamy, summarizing Amy Gutmann’s and Dennis Thompson’s argument, “[a]ptly described as lying mid-way between prudence and ethical universalism, reciprocity encourages compromise through the search for mutually acceptable solutions.”<sup>464</sup> What really marks the difference between the model of negotiation and the three others, in fact, is its aiming not at consensus, but precisely at compromise. “Compromise,” writes Bellamy,

finds the complexity of particular ties and sources of plurality an aid rather than a hindrance, since it allows incommensurable demands to be brought together. Value conflicts need not be avoided or confronted through radical choices, but are susceptible to reasonable negotiation.<sup>465</sup>

So, whereas “[t]raders look for a mutual advantage or concession which will leave each party better off; and trimmers try to keep the ship of state on an even keel by steering clear of the winds of controversy...”

...*Negotiators* practice reciprocal accommodation as part of a search for conditions of mutual acceptability that reach toward a compromise that *constructs* a common good. Unlike the trader, they seek a mutually satisfying solution, rather than one that simply satisfies their own concerns. Instead of viewing a conflict as a battle to be won or lost, the parties see it as a collective problem to be

---

<sup>462</sup> ‘For and Ethics of Discomfort’ Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), p. 137.

<sup>463</sup> Richard Bellamy and Martin Hollis, ‘Consensus, Neutrality and Compromise’, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 1.3 (1998), 54–78 (p. 55).

<sup>464</sup> Richard Bellamy, *Liberalism and Pluralism: Towards a Politics of Compromise* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 105.

<sup>465</sup> Bellamy, p. 12.

solved. *The aim is an integrative as opposed to a distributive compromise, with the interests and values of others being matters to be met, rather than constraints to be overcome through minimal, tactical concessions.*<sup>466</sup>

Compromise too, however, is a contentious notion. In public discourse it is very often associated with moral decay and loss of values, yet its indispensable function in politics and, in fact, in everyday life is hardly deniable. Avishai Margalit wrote extensively about the difference between “compromise”, a mutual concession for the sake of peace, and what he calls “rotten compromise,” an “agreement to establish or maintain an inhuman regime.”<sup>467</sup> Here, to be sure, we are certainly concerned with the former. More precisely, the compromise Bellamy advocates is what in distinguishing further between “varieties of compromise” Margalit calls “sanguine compromise.” Unlike “anemic compromise,” this requires the reciprocal recognition of the parties involved, which means, as Frank Ankersmit says in a comment on Margalit’s book, “that each must be willing and capable of picturing what the world looks like when seen from the perspective of the other.”<sup>468</sup> This is clearly reminiscent of the going visiting of the imagination, that “seeing politically” that, as we saw earlier in this chapter, is an essential first lesson the experience of representing others teaches to those who undertake it and, simultaneously, a vehicle of generativity.

In fact, in a piece he himself defines a “hymn to compromise”, Ankersmit is clear about the close tie between compromise and representation. Not only does he make the historical argument that “[r]epresentative democracy was the political system best suited for achieving compromise”,<sup>469</sup> but he also suggests a conceptual alignment of the two notions.

Compromise, like representation itself, organizes knowledge rather than discovers or defends it. To the degree that representation is itself creative, so is compromise, and the politician who formulates the most satisfactory and lasting compromise in a political conflict is the political artist par excellence.<sup>470</sup>

Here lies, for Ankersmit, the reason for holding that compromise is a more adequate horizon for democracy than is consensus, since “whereas compromise stimulates political creativity, consensus kills it.”<sup>471</sup> So, “the art of compromise”, as Bellamy calls the activity of negotiation, is an essential element of the experience of representing others, and possibly its culmination, and nowhere have I found this view better summarised than in the following quote by Ankersmit,

---

<sup>466</sup> Bellamy and Hollis, p. 63. Emphasis mine.

<sup>467</sup> Avishai Margalit, *On Compromise and Rotten Compromises* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 11.

<sup>468</sup> Frank R. Ankersmit, ‘On Compromise and Rotten Compromises (Review)’, *Common Knowledge*, 18.2 (2012), 367–69 (p. 368).

<sup>469</sup> Ankersmit, ‘Representational Democracy: An Aesthetic Approach to Conflict and Compromise’, p. 27.

<sup>470</sup> Ankersmit, ‘Representational Democracy: An Aesthetic Approach to Conflict and Compromise’, p. 39.

<sup>471</sup> Ankersmit, ‘Representational Democracy: An Aesthetic Approach to Conflict and Compromise’, p. 39.

the more innovative and creative a compromise, the more strongly it will be supported by all the parties involved. In political compromise, each party needs, as much as possible, to include in its final position as little as possible of what was in its original position. This description prescribes not betrayal but *metamorphosis*. Through the creative process that we call compromise, *a new political world may come into being*.<sup>472</sup>

(3). In what sense is negotiation a truth-related activity carrying out which one displays generativity? In what sense, that is to say, does one, in negotiating, turn what is known to be true into something politically significant? In the first place, due to its special concern for reciprocity, negotiation is an effective response to plurality: it answers to it without diminishing its scope, securing, that is, the very condition for politics. Secondly, and more importantly, as the art of innovative and creative compromise, negotiation preserves the open-endedness of democracy and, with it, freedom as the possibility to begin something new. In one of the interviews collected by Elisabeth Rottenberg in *Negotiations*, Jacques Derrida gives a definition – or better an image – of negotiation that it is worth repeating at length:

Whether one wants it or not, one is always working in the mobility between several positions, stations, places, between which a shuttle is needed. The first image that comes to me when one speaks of negotiation is that of a shuttle, *la navette*, and what the word conveys of to-and-for between two positions, two places, two choices. One must always go from one to the other, and for me negotiation is the impossibility of establishing oneself anywhere. And even if in certain situations one thinks one must not negotiate, that there is a nonnegotiable, say, the categorical imperative, one must nonetheless negotiate the relationship between the categorical imperative and the hypothetical imperative.<sup>473</sup>

There are two things that this image helps us see. One is that, negotiation, the art of compromise, is indeed conceptually intimately bound to democratic representation, as the endless moving between A and B that I discussed in Chapter IV. Derrida's shuttle, in this sense, is nothing but our representative. The other is that negotiation alters peoples' relation to truth by adding to it, beyond the perspective and the affirmative elements of imagination and performance, what I have called at the end of the previous sections a *positional* element. Derrida himself hints at the positional nature of negotiation when, in the same interview, he says that,

[a]ffirmation requires a position. It requires that one move to action and that one do something, even if it is imperfect.<sup>474</sup>

As Drucilla Cornell suggests in her elucidation of Derrida's notion of negotiation, the fact that affirmation requires a position means that “[i]t is not simply enough to affirm [for instance] the horrific reality of antiblack racism” – which is what, in my account, is achieved through performance – we also, “need to take a position,” a position that “will inevitably refer back to

---

<sup>472</sup> Ankersmit, 'Representational Democracy: An Aesthetic Approach to Conflict and Compromise', p. 45.

<sup>473</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, ed. by Elisabeth Rottenberg, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 12.

<sup>474</sup> Derrida, p. 26.

our location in a particular time and place,”<sup>475</sup> and from which we are called to negotiate, to move to action.

In *What is meant by telling the truth*,<sup>476</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer explains the necessary positionality of truthfulness in terms that help us guide the discussion towards its conclusion. Telling the truth, he writes, “means something different according to the particular situation in which one stands.”<sup>477</sup> In telling the truth, this means, it is crucial to take account of the situatedness of one’s relationships at each particular time since “our speech must be truthful - not in principle but concretely.”<sup>478</sup> Telling the truth, in this sense, is also a matter of appreciating correctly the reality of one’s situations: “[t]he more complex the actual situation of a man’s life, the more responsible and the more difficult will be his task of ‘telling the truth.’”<sup>479</sup> This positional appreciation of reality and the reflection upon it, are, of the constitutive tasks of truthfulness, those that I have hoped to capture with the notion of generativity, and in particular with the notion of negotiation as a truth-related practice.

We have said in Chapter III that truthfulness is not a virtue displayed in merely verbal activities. In fact, as we have seen, democratic truthfulness is manifested in wanting to know the truth and in finding it out, in imagining and performing it, in telling it to and negotiating it with others. It is true, however, that there is an irreducible expressive function in the activities of performing, telling and negotiating the truth and that the truthful individual is ultimately judged by his capacity to express the complexity of the real. Having in mind a purely verbal idea of truthfulness, Bonhoeffer writes that “the real is to be expressed in words”, that “an individual utterance is always part of a total reality which seeks expression in this utterance,” and that truthful speech “is a question of knowing the right word on each occasion.”<sup>480</sup>

I can speak flatteringly, or presumptuously or hypocritically without uttering a material untruth; yet my words are nevertheless untrue, because I am disrupting and destroying the reality of the relationship between myself and another man.<sup>481</sup>

We can add that, similarly, in our broader and specifically democratic understanding, truthfulness is a matter of finding the right word, but also the right gesture, the right

---

<sup>475</sup> Drucilla Cornell, ‘Derrida’s Negotiations as a Technique of Liberation’, *Discourse*, 39.2 (2017), 195–215 (p. 197).

<sup>476</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ‘What Is Meant by Telling the Truth’, in *Ethics*, trans. by Eberhard Bethge, The Library [of] Philosophy and Theology (London: SCM, 1955).

<sup>477</sup> Bonhoeffer, p. 326.

<sup>478</sup> Bonhoeffer, p. 326.

<sup>479</sup> It is interesting to notice how Bonhoeffer’s insistence on the need to accord the truth to its particular echoes the pragmatist views outlined in Chapter II. “When Clerk-Maxwell was a child it is written that he had a mania for having everything explained to him, and that when people put him off with vague verbal accounts of any phenomenon he would interrupt them impatiently by saying, ‘Yes; but I want you to tell me the particular go of it!’ Had his question been about truth, only a pragmatist could have told him the particular go of it.” James, p. 141.

<sup>480</sup> Bonhoeffer, p. 328.

<sup>481</sup> Bonhoeffer, p. 328.

demeanour, maybe the right silence. Delivering truth in democracy, in other words, is a matter of preserving the reality of the relationship between myself and another citizen. Finding such a gesture or word, though, “is a matter of long, earnest and ever more advanced effort on the basis of experience and knowledge of the real.”<sup>482</sup> It is this effort, I shall say in concluding, that negotiation and compromise add to generativity and to truthfulness. Negotiation, in this sense, is the final act of generativity, the “moving politically” that proceeds from the “saying” of performance and the “seeing” of imagination. As Cornell writes “[t]o negotiate, we also need “aesthetic ideas,” which is to say visions of justice that can be judged to do better or worse in terms of the struggle to create a better world.”<sup>483</sup> In answering to the affirmations and the perspectives of others, in responding to the visions of their imaginations and to the statements of their performances, negotiation ensures that generativity is not failed by excess, by the hyperprolific invasion of the generativity of others. In doing so it simultaneously verifies that the reality so expressed, the truth so brought to light, carries the signature of everybody.

## Conclusion

The experience of representing others, the periodic transit of the representative from the relation with their constituents to the relation with other representatives, transforms the civic character of the citizen who undertakes it in ways that match the truth-related demands of democracy. It does so by exposing them to three pieces of ethopoietic knowledge – three prescriptive facts which, once learnt, produce a modification in the normative horizon of the knower introducing within it the virtue of generativity. I have called the first of these facts, the fact of finitude. In learning that their field of action is irremediably constrained between what is impossible and what is inevitable, the representative is invited to engage in the imaginative effort to expand the notion of the feasible, and to do so primarily by “training the imagination to go visiting” the standpoints of others and acquiring, in this effort, the point of view of the world. This “seeing politically” of the imagination constitutes what I have called the *perspective* element of the virtue of generativity, which provides the representative with the referent of their performances and the starting point of their negotiations.

I have subsequently introduced what I have called the fact of solitude. In his journey back and forth between spaces A and B, the representative is forced into a condition of civic solitude. Unlike loneliness, this is a condition that, if embraced, ensures the self-reliant retrospective

---

<sup>482</sup> Bonhoeffer, p. 328.

<sup>483</sup> Cornell, p. 202.

contemplation of reality, prescribing at the same time the preparation of an authentic performance once returned in the company of others. The performance prepared in solitude constitutes the *affirmative* element of generativity – the “saying politically” of what it is that the imagination sees. We have finally discussed the fact of mutability. The metamorphosis undergone by the representative who has learnt to “see” and to “say” politically, becomes in turn, once acknowledged, the spring for further transformation. In being confronted with the inexorability of change and the necessity to govern it, the representative learns the *positional* element of generativity, the “moving politically” of negotiation. It is in negotiating that the citizen representative learns not to trample on the generativity of others, to be spectator of their imagination and their performance and equal co-author with them of the facts to be made.



## VI. Post-Politics Truth

I have argued that representation plays a crucial role in shaping the civic relation to truth in liberal democracy. It is in the experience of representing others, indeed, that citizens find an opportunity to learn the virtue of generativity, a virtue which, together with sincerity and accuracy, defines the quality of democratic truthfulness. In this chapter I use this framework to put forward an interpretation of the current situation, one in which truth and politics appear, so to speak, to be on worse terms than usual.

In the introduction I said that it was in 2013, during my own experience as a representative in the town of Noci, that I was first forced to acknowledge the phenomenon everybody would soon start calling “post-truth”. At that time, in fact, I found myself compelled to deal with a very tangible manifestation of that phenomenon: the fact that, as hard as I tried to act truthfully, nobody believed me. An instance of “testimonial injustice”, as social epistemologists would say.<sup>484</sup> Thus, even before the political events we all witnessed in 2016 on a global scale, political life on a local scale betrayed the signs of a shift in the relationship citizens and their representatives entertain with truth, and in the social norms governing such a relationship. This formulation obviously raises a series of questions. One among these, for instance, would certainly ask which comes first between the shift in the norms and that in the behaviours. This and many other questions, unfortunately, fall out of the limited scope of this chapter. Three questions, instead, will be crucial to the discussion I undertake in the following pages. One concerns the nature of the shift at stake: is it a shift in the way people acquire knowledge of the truth, in the way they value the truth, or in the way they understand the truth’s nature? Another, the question of the causes, asks why this shift came about and whose responsibility (if anybody’s) that is. The last question interrogates the government of the consequences, so to speak: what we should do about all this and how.

---

<sup>484</sup> Testimonial injustice is a form of epistemic injustice. This notion, famously introduced by Miranda Fricker, refers to a wrong done to someone in their capacity as knower or transmitter. Fricker originally identified two forms of epistemic injustice: “hermeneutical injustice, occurring when a subject is put to disadvantage as an interpreter of their own experiences due to a lack in society’s hermeneutical resources, and “testimonial injustice”, which occurs when a speaker is unfairly assigned lower credibility due to prejudice against elements of their identity. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, Oxford Bibliographies. Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Now, besides these open questions, what I will take to be beyond doubt is the widespread perception that some shift has taken place and that it demands to be understood. Indeed, when the word “post-truth” appeared (and in non-English-speaking countries this happened literally overnight, since nobody ever heard of it before the Oxford dictionary made it the word of the year in 2016), many of us – inside and outside academia – were already struggling with the phenomenon this was meant to capture.

On one side, the new word seemed a very good thing to have at hand since it finally allowed us to initiate a much-needed discussion: many at that time were craving a word to name the phenomenon they were observing. This is probably why, within a couple of days after the term was officially acknowledged, people from the most diverse social, political and professional backgrounds started using it. Everybody seemed to be thinking: “Post-truth! Here we go, that is exactly what I meant!” We saw for instance angry citizens on social media suddenly calling “#post-truth” the picture of dog waste in a street their local politicians had promised to clean. At the same time, two weeks after the word had been made available, we saw Italian former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, in his resignation speech, appealing to “post-truth” to justify the failure of the constitutional reform to which he had attached his political destiny. Finally, we saw academic literature on post-truth multiplying at impressive rates. Typing “post-truth politics” on Google Scholar one finds 119 results in 2015, 301 results in 2016, 2400 in 2017, 5810 in 2018.

On the other side, instead, it now becomes clearer that while enabling a necessary discussion, the new word burdens it at the same time. Any inquiry on truth in politics which aspires to speak meaningfully to our present interests must be put in terms of post-truth or must be ready to justify its non-compliance with that language. In this sense, one may say, the discourse about post-truth resembles more a symptom of the phenomenon it claims to capture than a tool to understand it: a meta-echo-chamber (to use another term from the post-truth dictionary) in which the compulsion to say outweighs the commitment to understand. Ironically enough, no better image than that of a bubble (very often evoked as a symbol of the post-truth era) can represent the trend in scholarship about post-truth. In fact, I feel the need to admit to my reader that it is with a certain reluctance that I undertake the task of addressing this matter, since attached to such a mission comes the feeling of being caught in the same bubble one would hope to burst. Indeed, a point certainly to be made concerning this phenomenon is the point about *noise*, “the familiar point that messages compete for attention and cancel each other out” which, as Bernard Williams observed, “would be a serious problem even if the messages were

each true.”<sup>485</sup> It is with slight discomfort, then, that I add yet another voice to those already jamming the debate, since this involves ignoring the strong intuition that there is an appropriate response to such noise, and that is silence.

This chapter, then, wishes to offer a rendering of the current state of affairs concerning truth in politics as it appears through the “archway” of the thesis’ argument. It begins with an overview, necessarily partial, of the current debate on post-truth. In particular, I refer to Quassim Cassam’s distinction between epistemological, normative and metaphysical conceptions of post-truth. I argue that none of these is sufficient, alone, to capture the complex nature of the phenomenon and what is most importantly at stake in the crisis we live. In a second section I move on to discuss the relationship between truth and time and to suggest that it is by observing this relationship that we are more likely to identify the specific characters of the current status of truth in politics and what causes it. I argue that this is to be found in the acceleration of truth-related processes brought about by the information era, and that democratic representation constitutes the safest bulwark to oppose to the dangers of such widespread craving for immediacy. Finally, in a third and last section, I explicate how, appealing to an extended notion of factual truth and to its future-regarding end in particular, the virtue of generativity (or its lack) can be mobilized to open up an alternative perspective on the phenomenon. I suggest, concluding, that it may be time to withdraw from the overcrowded endeavour of understanding “post-truth politics” to venture into the less frequented attempt to make sense of what I call “post-politics truth.”

## Conceptions of “Post-Truth”

Post-truth has inspired an astonishing number of publications in the last few years. Besides the numerous journalistic accounts<sup>486</sup> and the accounts from media and communication studies,<sup>487</sup> post-truth has become a crucial interest in various fields of the academic research that intersect political theory’s horizon of concern. It is the debate developed within these fields that I refer to in what follows. In particular, I allude broadly to the work done in the fields of political and social epistemology. It is worth noting that the field of social epistemology is a contested one. Indeed, the terrain called “social epistemology” is approached from two quite different

---

<sup>485</sup> Bernard Williams, ‘Truth, Politics, and Self-Deception’, *Social Research*, 63.3 (1966), 603–17 (p. 610).

<sup>486</sup> Matthew D’Ancona, *Post-Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back* (London: Ebury Press, 2017); Michiko Kakutani, *The Death of Truth* (London: William Collins, 2018); James Ball, *Post-Truth: How Bullshit Conquered the World* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2017).

<sup>487</sup> Giovanni Maddalena and Guido Gili, *The History and Theory of Post-Truth Communication* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Gabriele Cosentino, *Social Media and the Post-Truth World Order: The Global Dynamics of Disinformation* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

directions. As the name of the field suggests, on the one hand epistemologists have identified a specifically social field of epistemological studies,<sup>488</sup> on the other hand sociologists have identified a specifically epistemological field of social studies.<sup>489</sup> Although the fields of analysis are in both cases referred to as social epistemology, the approaches taken by these scholars are divergent and sadly not in dialogue. We could describe this difference as, ultimately, the difference between the normative approach characterizing the philosophical branch of social epistemology and the descriptive/empirical approach deployed instead by its sociological branch.<sup>490</sup>

There is a third area of studies that contributes to the debate on post-truth in ways that political theorists should appreciate, and which, in turn, could be understood as yet another form of social epistemology. I refer to what are known as Science and Technology Studies (STS). Sheila Jasanoff and Hilton Simmet have recently commented on the important contribution that STS can make in the era of post-truth, due to the fact that – despite “best known for destabilizing easy demarcations of facts into black and white binaries of true or false” – STS scholarship never submitted to the idea of “an inevitable or linear enlightenment”, while simultaneously resisting Bruno Latour’s “judgment that the Enlightenment has been abruptly overthrown.”<sup>491</sup> Occupying a middle ground between these two views (and, for similar reasons, also between the philosophical and the sociological traditions of social epistemology), STS scholars assert indeed that “moral panics about the status of knowledge in the public sphere are as old as knowledge itself” and that the challenge we face today “is to discern what makes this panic seem so special, and what that in turn might mean for the future of democracy and social progress.”<sup>492</sup>

This section addresses the challenge of singling out what is special about the “panic” we are experiencing today, by interrogating, through the lenses of democratic truthfulness and generativity, three conceptions of “post-truth” identified by Quassim Cassam: an epistemological, a normative and a metaphysical conception.<sup>493</sup> Before briefly describing each, however, I shall say something about the broader discussion within which these belong. Cassam

---

<sup>488</sup> Alvin I. Goldman, ‘The Need for Social Epistemology’, in *The Future for Philosophy*, ed. by Brian Leiter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004). See also work by Elisabeth Anderson, Quassim Cassam, Jennifer Lackey, Fabienne Peter.

<sup>489</sup> Steve Fuller, *Social Epistemology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002). See also work by Raphael Sassower, Sergio Sismondo.

<sup>490</sup> Steve Fuller, ‘Descriptive vs Revisionary Social Epistemology: The Former as Seen by the Latter’, *Episteme*, 1 (2004), 23–34. As Fuller suggests, however, the distinction between these two approaches seems to be in turn rather blurred, and purposely so. In fact, the blurriness of this distinction is a characteristic both sides of the field claim to be defining of their methods.

<sup>491</sup> Sheila Jasanoff and Hilton R Simmet, ‘No Funeral Bells: Public Reason in a “Post-Truth” Age’, *Social Studies of Science*, 47.5 (2017), 751–70 (p. 755).

<sup>492</sup> Jasanoff and Hilton R Simmet, ‘No Funeral Bells’, p. 755.

<sup>493</sup> Quassim Cassam, ‘Post-Truth, Lies, and Strategic Bullshit’ (presented at the Epistemic Norms for the New Public Sphere Workshop, University of Warwick, 2019).

uses these conceptions to map, succinctly but convincingly, current understandings of post-truth in political philosophy. Each of them captures relevant aspects of the phenomenon of post-truth and relevant insights from the debate surrounding it. There are views, nonetheless, that escape this framework, one of which is the view that we do not need a conception of post-truth, because there is no “post-truth” to worry about in the first place. Indeed, as Lee McIntyre has recently noticed, “[t]he “other side” of the post-truth debate does not consist of people who defend it—or think that post-truth is a good thing—but those who deny that a problem even exists.”<sup>494</sup>

Contra McIntyre, I must point out that, within the sociological social epistemology literature, the side of those who see post-truth as a good thing does in fact exist – Steve Fuller’s *Post-Truth*, for instance. As Raphael Sassower has observed, reading Fuller’s book,

we are dazzled by a range of topics [...] that explain how we got to Brexit and Trump—yet Fuller’s analyses of them don’t ring alarm bells. There is almost a hidden glee that indeed the privileged scientific establishment, insular scientific discourse, and some of its experts who pontificate authoritative consensus claims are all bound to be undone by the rebellion of mavericks and iconoclasts that include intelligent design promoters and neoliberal freedom fighters.<sup>495496</sup>

It is worth adding to this that Fuller’s hope that a more inclusive knowledge economy will emerge from the ashes of the Enlightenment seems also to be unfortunately misplaced – in the words of Jasanoff and Simmet, “this alleged post-truth moment is proving to be neither a democratic renaissance for left alternatives nor a digital breakthrough for oppressed groups who now have an outlet for asserting their political voice.”<sup>497</sup>

Post-truth, then, does have its fan-club. McIntyre is right, instead, in pointing out the side of those who deny the existence of the problem. Julian Baggiani, for instance, has observed that “[we] wouldn’t even be talking about post-truth if we didn’t think truth mattered. The world is neither ready nor willing to say goodbye to truth, even in politics, where it sometimes seems as though it has already taken its leave” and that therefore “talk of a “post-truth” society is misguided.”<sup>498</sup> We should distinguish, then, “the question of the ‘post-ness’ of ‘post-truth,’”<sup>499</sup> which asks whether or not this thing is new, from the question of the badness of “post-truth”, which asks whether or not this new thing is a problem. In other words: the former question

---

<sup>494</sup> Lee C. McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018), p. 8.

<sup>495</sup> Raphael Sassower, ‘Post-Truths and Inconvenient Facts’, *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* <<https://social-epistemology.com/2018/08/28/post-truths-and-inconvenient-facts-raphael-sassower/>>.

<sup>496</sup> The reader may recognize the resemblance between Fuller’s view and those of Paul Feyerabend’s late work, and indeed Fuller draws explicitly on Feyerabend’s ideas. See, Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 2010).

<sup>497</sup> Jasanoff and Hilton R Simmet, ‘No Funeral Bells’, p. 761.

<sup>498</sup> Julian Baggiani, ‘Truth? It’s Not Just about the Facts’, *The Times Literary Supplement* <<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/post-truth-philosophers/>>.

<sup>499</sup> Ignas Kalpokas, *A Political Theory of Post-Truth* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

focuses on whether there is anything really distinctive about our present relationship to truth or instead what we experience is yet another edition of the same old problem that philosophers have tried to get their heads around; the latter, acknowledged the distinctiveness of what we experience today, asks what such distinctiveness is about and whether it is something to fight or to welcome and embrace as progress. Cassam's conceptions map the views generated by the debate around the second of these questions, and in particular by scholars who do think that something is definitely wrong with the current relation between truth and politics.

The first of the three conceptions of post-truth Cassam identifies is an *epistemological conception*. In this case, the term "post-truth" does not refer to "truth" itself but to a particular "epistemological posture towards perfectly objective truths." As an epistemologist, Cassam's own conception of post-truth is unsurprisingly of this sort. On his account, the epistemological posture characterising post-truth is "the posture of not wanting to know the truth", what is often known more broadly as "wilful ignorance." Cassam calls this posture *epistemic insouciance*, an epistemic vice which, among others, he discusses at length in his *Vices of the Mind*.<sup>500</sup> From this epistemological perspective, what is distinctive about the current state of things concerning truth in politics is precisely a widespread display of epistemic insouciance, particularly (this view seems to suggest) on the part of our politicians. In fact, one thing the epistemological conception of post-truth Cassam proposes certainly does (and definitely aims at doing) is accounting for the truth-related behaviour of characters of the likes of Boris Johnson, Matteo Salvini and Donald Trump, just to mention the most spectacular instances of epistemic insouciance contemporary politics supplies.

The second conception Cassam identifies is what he calls a *normative conception* of post-truth. Here, again, the term "post-truth" does not qualify truth itself, but rather it refers to an attitude towards truth that reflects "a view of its value or importance." This, according to Cassam, "is the attitude of not valuing or caring about the truth." From this point of view, what is distinctive and new about the era of post-truth is a drop in the value attached to the truth. What this perspective would suggest, in other words, is that Johnson's, Salvini's and Trump's epistemic postures are perfectly functional: what fuels their behaviour is to be ascribed instead to their moral faculties which fail to recognize truth as a valuable good, whether for intrinsic or instrumental reasons.

---

<sup>500</sup> Quassim Cassam, *Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political*, First edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 79.

The last conception of post-truth Cassam mentions is the metaphysical one. Here, the term “post-truth” applies to truth itself, it says something about the nature of truth. According to Cassam this is “the view that what is true is what is felt or believed true.”<sup>501</sup> As the previous two, this category captures existing ways of conceiving of post-truth. Some further clarification, however, may be needed in this case, since it is one thing to conceive of post-truth as a condition in which truth *is* what is felt or believed true, and a different thing is to conceive of post-truth as a condition in which people treat truth *as if it was* what is felt or believed true. In the first case, a metaphysical conception of post-truth would simply coincide with some version of a relativist conception of truth. It is worth noticing that, understood in this sense, such a conception could hardly be deployed to account for a new phenomenon, since what it does is provide ultimately a theory about what truth is and has always been. An account that seems to reflect a metaphysical conception of post-truth in this first sense is probably again Steve Fuller’s. As I shall discuss in some further detail later, in his view what is new about our era is the declining popularity of the mistaken modern belief that truth exists independently from our experiences of it. In the second case, instead, what is at stake in a metaphysical conception of post-truth is not the theorist’s perspective on truth but rather the perspectives of all members of a polity. This is how I believe Cassam intends the phrase. In this sense, a metaphysical conception of post-truth can indeed account for a new phenomenon since it may refer to a shift in the metaphysical conceptions of truth of a critical number of people, a large-scale loss of faith – we could say – in the possibility of objective knowledge.

With reference to these three current conceptions I have briefly illustrated, I shall now raise four sets of considerations – inspired variously by the understanding of truth and politics that I attempted to convey in the five substantive chapters of this thesis – with the aim of bringing to light some weaknesses in each of these approaches.

1. The first set of considerations springs out of juxtaposing Cassam’s conceptions with the notion of truthfulness developed by Williams. Looked at through the lens of Williams’ truthfulness, the three conceptions of post-truth could be said to work better, in fact, as conceptions of “post-truthfulness.” Let us recall (as we saw in chapter III) that, according to Williams, “wanting to know” the truth is indeed one of the truth-related states and activities in which the virtues of truth – sincerity and accuracy – are displayed. If in its epistemological

---

<sup>501</sup> It might be useful to notice that Cassam’s general categories could be disentangled from the specific qualifications he provides for each. An epistemological conception of post-truth might ascribe post-truth to epistemic vices, postures or attitudes other than insouciance (close-mindedness would be an alternative candidate). Similarly, a normative conception of post-truth could plausibly impute post-truth to an excessive attribution of value to the truth rather than a deficiency of it. Finally, a metaphysical conception of post-truth may maintain that people conceive of truth not as what they feel or believe but as what they make or construct.

conception post-truth is defined by the posture of “not wanting to know the truth”, then we could also look at the phenomenon as a withdrawal from the ground on which the virtues of truth operate: a withdrawal from those truth-related practices the standard of excellence in performing which we have called accuracy and sincerity. Now, if I was an excellent athlete but withdrew from the practice of my athletic discipline, it would be inadequate or even irrelevant to describe my behaviour as lacking in virtue, since it would be the absence of my performance, not its quality, to be at stake. Similarly, from the perspective of an epistemological conception, the notions of sincerity and accuracy (as well as those of lie and error) are irrelevant or inadequate to discussions of post-truth. In this sense, at least according to the framework adopted in this thesis, a condition in which a great number of people display the posture of not wanting to know is technically a condition of post-accuracy and post-sincerity, i.e. a condition of post-truthfulness rather than one of post-truth. This may also explain the otherwise uncanny academic fortune, in this context, of the word *bullshit* (sic!) – famously mobilised by Harry Frankfurt to account precisely for shoddy reasoning and the uttering of untruths other than lies or errors.<sup>502</sup>

Moving on, we have seen that speaking of the “value of truth” is for Williams, in a strict sense, “a category mistake.”<sup>503</sup> Indeed, we have said, the phrase can be more accurately understood as “a shorthand for the value of various states and activities associated with the truth.”<sup>504</sup> i.e. wanting to know, finding out and telling the truth to others. Also in the context of the second of Cassam’s conceptions of post-truth, the normative one, we see that William’s framework has something to add to the analysis of the phenomenon. Indeed, the “attitude of not valuing the truth” that a normative conception suggests is distinctive of post-truth is possibly better understood as the attitude of not valuing or not caring about the states and activities associated with the truth that are so central in Williams’s account of truthfulness and in my own. Under post-truth, it could then be said, what undergoes a process of devaluation is not truth itself but rather the willingness to know it, the ability to find it out and the disposition to tell it to others. In other words, the post-truth condition would be one in which sincerity and accuracy have lost their ancient status of virtues, the long and continuous genealogy of which Williams so carefully reconstructed. Again, and this time from the perspective of a normative conception, what characterizes “post-truth” justifies suggesting that it is a condition of “post-truthfulness”, more properly, that lays under our eyes.

---

<sup>502</sup> Harry G. Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>503</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 7.

<sup>504</sup> Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 7.



Unlike the epistemological and the normative conceptions of post-truth, the metaphysical one does not describe a condition in which Williams' truth-associated states and activities and the related virtues of sincerity and accuracy are necessarily excluded. Knowing that people view truth as what is felt or believed true does not tell us anything concerning the value they attribute to it or their willingness to acquire knowledge about it. Since it is not uncommon to experience confusion concerning one's own feelings and beliefs, and to need introspective inquiry to clear it, I could think that truth is what I feel true and still be willing to know it, to find it out, to tell it to others and to do so sincerely (saying what I believe to be true) and accurately (doing what I can to acquire true beliefs). Sincerity and accuracy are not bound strictly to any particular metaphysical notion of truth. In fact, if we accept William's genealogy, their value as virtues survived the course of their long history despite shifts in the prevailing metaphysical conceptions of truth that must have taken place between "The State of Nature"<sup>505</sup> and the Enlightenment, through to the present putative crises of Enlightenment rationalities. From the perspective disclosed by this last conception, post-truth is a condition in which a sincere and accurate behaviour on the part of politicians and citizens is not unconceivable, and therefore, talking of post-truthfulness rather than post-truth would not be more appropriate. Whilst not unconceivable, however, here too the virtues of truth can be seen to lose significance: they remain conceivable but become uninteresting. In other words, here the virtues of sincerity and accuracy are not disqualified because the practices in which they are displayed have ceased, but because their use fails to reflect the changes taking place in people's relation to truth: they lose their purchase as analytical tools.

2. A second set of considerations arises from the concern that it may be difficult, and in fact undesirable, to fully disentangle from each other the epistemological, normative and metaphysical aspects of the question. This is more clearly the case when it comes to the epistemological and the normative conceptions of post-truth. It is intuitively hard, in fact, to be insouciant towards something we deem important or attach value to. After all, this is anything but a new concern. As Jennifer Lackey and Alvin Goldman have written

at some point in the distant past, ethics and epistemology were positioned in opposite corners of the philosophical establishment. One was the epitome of "theoretical" philosophy and the other the epitome of "practical" philosophy. Relatively little contact was made between them. Today, however, analogies abound between ethics and epistemology. It is widely accepted, for example, that epistemology has a strong strand of normativity and should therefore be viewed (at least in certain respects) as a legitimate cousin of ethics.<sup>506</sup>

---

<sup>505</sup> Let us recall that Williams genealogy begins with the 'birth' of the virtues of truth in a fictional 'state of nature'. Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, p. 41.

<sup>506</sup> Jennifer Lackey and Alvin I. Goldman, 'Reliabilism, Veritism, and Epistemic Consequentialism', *Episteme* (Cambridge University Press), 12.2 (2015), 131–43 (p. 131).

Indeed, if there is a question that witnesses the kinship between epistemology and ethics, belonging by right to the intersection between the two fields of study, that is precisely the question concerning truth in politics. When it comes to post-truth, this is all the more visible and in ways that are problematic. As Jasanoff and Simmet have observed, “[t]here are hints in the written records of this moment that the turmoil we are witnessing has a profoundly moral valence, even connotations of temptation and sin.”<sup>507</sup> Similarly, on Fuller’s account the general consensus on post-truth holds that “no matter their sophistication, creationists, climate change sceptics and various New Agers are not merely wrong, but they are also ‘bad’ in a sense that allows epistemic failure to bleed into moral failure.”<sup>508</sup>

When it comes to post-truth, though, also the boundary between epistemological/normative concerns and metaphysical ones become blurred. Fuller, for instance, adds to the sentence just quoted that “[t]hus, whenever dissenters claim to be weighting the evidence differently, they are denounced as liars for not upholding the orthodoxy.”<sup>509</sup> Likewise, Jasanoff and Simmet conclude the quotation above by observing that “[y]et, as references to sin and sacrality may remind us, the road to knowledge was never so straight nor straightforward.”<sup>510</sup> Although in different ways, both these statements appeal to the metaphysical question, Fuller’s by betraying the author’s own relativist views, Jasanoff and Simmet’s by hinting at the unsettledness of truth’s metaphysical status. It seems, then, that whilst capturing usefully different dimensions of the post-truth phenomenon, the three conceptions we are considering can hardly be kept separate. Indeed they should not be separated, not if we want to move beyond the examination of the symptoms and towards the search for the causes, nor ultimately if we are to advance in the management of the consequences. To put it in the words of Jasanoff and Simmet,

[t]his forward path [...] calls on us first and foremost to distinguish [...] between the ‘worthy’ and ‘unworthy’: in choosing approaches to truth-seeking as much as in deciding who should be the American president. The act of diagnosis, a prerequisite for knowing how to proceed, requires us to fully embrace the discussion of values and purposes as integral to the project of making epistemic truth.<sup>511</sup>

3. This leads us to the third set of considerations to be raised, which consist precisely in the thought that while inviting us to dwell on descriptive and normative analysis of the phenomenon, the three conceptions of post-truth foreclose the discussion around its causes.

---

<sup>507</sup> “The Economist’s (2016) special issue on ‘post-truth’ politics shows on its cover the forked tongue of the lying serpent, alluding to a loss of Edenic purity (though one may note that the sin here was precisely the flouting of a moral limit on the acquisition of knowledge!). In the New York Times, Professor William Davies (2016) of Goldsmith’s writes, ‘Facts hold a sacred place in Western liberal democracies ... when voters are manipulated or politicians are ducking questions, we turn to fact for salvation’ (our emphasis).” Jasanoff and Hilton R Simmet, ‘No Funeral Bells’, p. 755.

<sup>508</sup> Steve Fuller, *Post-Truth: Knowledge as a Power Game* (London: Anthem Press, 2018), p. 5.

<sup>509</sup> Fuller, *Post-Truth*, p. 5.

<sup>510</sup> Jasanoff and Hilton R Simmet, ‘No Funeral Bells’, p. 755.

<sup>511</sup> Jasanoff and Hilton R Simmet, ‘No Funeral Bells’, p. 756.

All, indeed, have in common that they explain the phenomenon of post-truth by resorting, ultimately, to a shift in people's attitudes (epistemic, moral or metaphysical) towards the truth. What should immediately follow, however, is the question concerning the reasons for such shifts. Surprisingly though, whilst this question is sometimes evoked, it is generally postponed and rarely answered. One exception to this trend is a popular view of what lays behind the shift in people's attitude towards the truth, a view which is originally linked to metaphysical conceptions of post-truth. According to this view, which McIntyre, for instance, shares,<sup>512</sup> the large-scale change in people's conceptions of truth is due in part to many decades of sustained scholarly critique of notions of scientific objectivity, broadly referred to as postmodern or poststructural.

As Raphael Sassower recently acknowledged, "we, the community of sociologists (and some straggling philosophers and anthropologists and perhaps some poststructuralists) may seem to someone who isn't reading our critiques carefully to be partially responsible for legitimating the dismissal of empirical data, evidence-based statements, and the means by which scientific claims can be deemed not only credible but true."<sup>513</sup> And indeed, interviewed by *The Guardian*, Daniel Dennett expresses the rather harsh judgment that,

[...] what the postmodernists did was truly evil. They are responsible for the intellectual fad that made it respectable to be cynical about truth and facts.<sup>514</sup>

Here we see again at work the entanglement of the metaphysical dimension of the phenomenon with the normative and the epistemological ones. We see indeed how this type of answer moves from a metaphysical conception but extends to explain the moral devaluation of truth and the epidemic of vicious epistemic practices this might have caused in turn. In its pop and most radical versions, this argument leads to bold claims, such as that identified (and rejected) by Sergei Prozorov that Michel Foucault's thought should be held "directly or indirectly responsible for the onset of the post-truth disposition, because of his anti-foundationalist approach that undermines both the truth claims of modern science and the legitimacy of liberal-democratic regimes [...]."<sup>515</sup> Despite its popularity, though, this more radical position seems to

---

<sup>512</sup> McIntyre.

<sup>513</sup> Sassower.

<sup>514</sup> Carole Cadwalladr, 'Daniel Dennett: "I Begudge Every Hour I Have to Spend Worrying about Politics"', *The Observer*, section Science <<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/feb/12/daniel-dennett-politics-bacteria-bach-back-dawkins-trump-interview>>.

<sup>515</sup> Sergei Prozorov, 'Why Is There Truth? Foucault in the Age of Post-Truth Politics', *Constellations*, 26.1 (2019), 18–30 (p. 18).

have few identifiable advocates among scholars and its very often gestured towards but very rarely held (as far as I could see) as an actual view.<sup>516</sup>

Apart from some influential newspaper articles,<sup>517</sup> in fact, I could not single out any academic source for this. It is more common, rather, to read scholars writing against it<sup>518</sup> and arguing not only that poststructuralists are not “evil” but also that “[p]oststructuralism presents a host of conceptual and methodological tools helpful for uncovering the conditions of possibility which have allowed the politics of ‘post-truth’ to thrive.”<sup>519</sup> This quarrel aside, the question of the causes is largely left unanswered and somewhat under-investigated. Overly attached to an analytical commitment, it seems, the literature I came across focussed on the phenomenology of post-truth at the expense of an investigation of its history and its causes.

4. There is a last concern that I believe should be briefly signalled. This arises from the thought that prevailing conceptions of post-truth seem to be biased by an excessive focus on the defectiveness of politicians’ behaviour and by the corresponding tendency to relegate common citizens to the role of passive spectators of vicious epistemic and moral practices, or holders of dangerous metaphysical beliefs about truth. Indeed, compared to the effort put in the normative analysis of the truth-related conduct of political representatives, and in the meticulous attempts to label adequately the untruths they utter, the interest paid to the assessment of citizens’ truth-related performances is relatively minor, especially when these are not judged merely for their performances as voters.

Moreover, while justified by the dramatic consequences of their admittedly sensational conduct, excessive academic focus on public figures of the likes of Boris Johnson, Donald Trump, Matteo Salvini and Jair Bolsonaro feeds in turn the popular belief that the challenge post-truth poses to liberal democracy is ultimately to be ascribed to (or even coincides with) the authoritarian/illiberal agendas “truly” hidden behind the post-truth performances of far-right politicians. Indeed, it is not unusual to chance upon talk of “post-liberalism”<sup>520</sup> associated with

---

<sup>516</sup> More common among analytic philosophers, although less relevant to our discussion, is instead the claim that postmodernism/post-structuralism has had a somewhat corrupting influence on academic scholarship. Among advocates of such a view is for instance Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

<sup>517</sup> Casey Williams, ‘Opinion | Has Trump Stolen Philosophy’s Critical Tools?’, *The New York Times*, 2017, section Opinion <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/17/opinion/has-trump-stolen-philosophys-critical-tools.html>>; Kurt Andersen, ‘How the U.S. Lost Its Mind’, *The Atlantic* <<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/how-america-lost-its-mind/534231/>>; Andrew Calcutt, ‘The Surprising Origins of “post-Truth” – and How It Was Spawned by the Liberal Left’, *The Conversation*, 2016 <<http://theconversation.com/the-surprising-origins-of-post-truth-and-how-it-was-spawned-by-the-liberal-left-68929>>; Cadwalladr.

<sup>518</sup> John Clark, ‘“Post-Truth”: Political Death of the Expert’, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 50.14 (2018), 1350–51; Prozorov; Rhys Crilley and Precious Chatterje-Doody, ‘Security Studies in the Age of “Post-Truth” Politics: In Defence of Poststructuralism’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 0.0 (2018), 1–5.

<sup>519</sup> Crilley and Chatterje-Doody, p. 1.

<sup>520</sup> Stuart Sim, *Post-Truth, Scepticism & Power* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 139.

post-truth, evidence both of the trend just mentioned and of the (related) fashion to attach the prefix *post-* to any word that calls for laborious and time-consuming rethinking.

## Veritas Filia Temporis

*Time reveals the Truth* is the English translation of the title of a 17<sup>th</sup> century painting by Flemish artist Theodor Van Thuden.<sup>521</sup> In the painting is the Truth, a naked young woman, rescued from the aggression of Envy, Stupidity and Hypocrisy by her father, Time, depicted as a winged old man. The canvas stands out for its beauty and for the scope for interpretation that it provides. Van Thuden's, however, is only one of the various works of art picturing this scene, the titles of which were translated variously (and indifferently) as "Time reveals the truth" or "Time *rescues* the Truth." In fact, the artwork reproduces an allegory popular at that time: *Veritas filia Temporis*, "Truth is the daughter of Time." The origin and uses of the renowned sentence have been the object of a rich debate pioneered by the work of Friz Saxl.<sup>522</sup> As Francesco Bausi<sup>523</sup> reports, the sentence, attributed to roman author Aulus Gellius, experienced great diffusion and passed into proverb. Indeed, it is found in Leonardo da Vinci's work and, in more than one instance, in Macchiavelli's. Dawn Massey noticed that the idea behind the proverb is also "integral to the allegorical structure of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (c. 1609-10)."<sup>524</sup> In fact, he adds that, as Saxl had suggested, in sixteenth-century England "Veritas filia Temporis held a prominent place in an intense religious-political dispute by virtue of the distinct providential implications which gradually came to be associated with the motto's use."<sup>525</sup> It is sufficient to mention in this respect that Queen Mary Stuart adopted the motto as "a personal device for the legend on her crest, the state seal of her reign, and the imprint of her coins [...]."<sup>526</sup>

Besides (and despite) its religious political significance though, more or less at the same time the motto gained a specific philosophical meaning, coming to represent "the resolution of the modern philosopher, anxious to hasten the end of prejudice and the coming of a renewal."<sup>527</sup> This is the case with the astronomer Johannes Kepler's use of the motto in his *Narratio de Jovis*

---

<sup>521</sup> I am indebted to my sister, Maria Luigia Gentile Fusillo, who first exposed me to this work of art and who engaged with me in the reflection it inspired. Theodor van Thuden, *Time Reveals the Truth. The Allegory*, 1657, The State Hermitage Museum <<https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/01.+Paintings/48369/?lng=en>>.

<sup>522</sup> Fritz Saxl, *Veritas Filia Temporis* (London: R. Klibansky et H. J. Paton, 1943).

<sup>523</sup> Francesco Bausi, "Veritas Filia Temporis". Machiavelli e Le Citazioni a Chilometro Zero', *Parole Rubate : Rivista Internazionale Di Studi Sulla Citazione*, 13, 2016, 77–87 (p. 78).

<sup>524</sup> Dawn Massey, 'Veritas Filia Temporis: Apocalyptic Polemics in the Drama of the English Reformation', *Comparative Drama*, 32.1 (1998), 146–75 (p. 146).

<sup>525</sup> Massey, p. 146.

<sup>526</sup> Massey, p. 151.

<sup>527</sup> Isabelle Pantin, 'Faire Accoucher Le Temps: Le Philosophe et Les Dernières Arcanes de La Création, de Paracelse à Kepler', *Seizième Siècle*, 1, 2006, 195–214 (p. 198). Translation mine.

*Satellitibus*: “Truth is the daughter of time, and I feel no shame in being her midwife.”<sup>528</sup> As Isabelle Pantin has pointed out, then, the proverb came to be used to express “the end of the respect due to consecrated authorities” and more specifically it supported “the need for an epistemological renewal.”<sup>529</sup> It is unsurprising, then, that still today the phrase is often used in talk of scientific progress and modern inquiry. This is for instance the case in a recent article by Novo Przulj and others, which uses the motto to frame its defence of the posthumous recognition of Gregor Mendel as the father of genetics,<sup>530</sup> as well as in Brendan Dooley’s account of experience and belief in early modern culture,<sup>531</sup> and in Daniel Špelda’s discussion of the origins of the idea of scientific progress.<sup>532</sup> Nevertheless, apart from its declining but ongoing currency as a proverb, the motto today has lost most of its conceptual traction.

Granted that the meaning traditionally conveyed by the proverb – the providential view that “truth will out”, however caught it may be in the clutches of stupidity, hypocrisy and envy – is unfit to make sense of the present, asking what it would mean, today, to say that time is the father of truth (that it rescues, reveals the truth) is anything but a rhetorical exercise. On the contrary, dwelling on the conceptual challenge posed by the relationship between time and truth, we may actually get closer to answer what in the chapter’s introduction I called the question of the causes of the post-truth phenomenon. As I observed earlier, and recalled in section one, one undeniable feature of our era is its acceleration. Half-jokingly, I could suggest that “fast-truth” may be a candidate alternative brand for the phenomenon we are discussing. In fact, we register an unprecedented acceleration in truth-related processes, such that it would not be incorrect to speak of a mass compulsion to engage in states and activities associated with truth, of a voracious consumption of poor-quality knowledge. From this perspective we could even think of an alternative epistemological conception of post-truth: far from being unwilling to know, to find out and to tell the truth, we have developed an obsession with the performance of these activities.

As a matter of fact, many of us are constantly engaged, through one electronic device or another, in some form of loud, greedy truth-seeking and truth-sharing, to the point that – borrowing Cassams’s vice epistemology language – we could call the particular “epistemological

---

<sup>528</sup> Quoted in Pantin, p. 197. Translation mine.

<sup>529</sup> Pantin, p. 199. Translation mine.

<sup>530</sup> Novo Przulj and others, ‘Veritas Temporis Filia Est: Truth Is the Daughter of Time’, *Selekcija i Seminarsvo*, 22.1 (2016), 53–62.

<sup>531</sup> Brendan Dooley, ‘Veritas Filia Temporis: Experience and Belief in Early Modern Culture’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60.3 (1999), 487–584.

<sup>532</sup> Daniel Špelda, ‘Veritas Filia Temporis: The Origins of the Idea of Scientific Progress’, *Annals Of Science*, 73.4 (2016), 375–91.

posture towards perfectly objective truths” characterizing this time a posture of epistemic *haste* rather than one of *insouciance*. The current growth in the production and consumption of conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed in response to it, are testimony, for instance, to an epistemic posture of this kind. Unfortunately, the saying goes, “haste makes waste”— a big problem when it comes to knowledge, since knowing is an inescapably time-consuming process, all the more if it is about knowing-as-democrats that we are talking about: that is, knowing together. In fact, as Jasanoff and Simmet point out,

[i]n democratic societies, public truths are precious collective commodities, arrived at, just as good laws are, through *painstaking deliberation* on values and *slow sifting of alternative interpretations* based on relevant observations and arguments. Such deliberation includes questions of what is worthy or unworthy of collective attention, and which realities should or should not be fought for, as much as what is true or false in the view of qualified experts. Such deliberation does not take progress in science or society for granted, and [...] it is not resigned to ‘witless’ cycles of chaos or imposing absolute penalties on the losers in political debates.<sup>533</sup>

To put it in simpler words, truth needs a more generous investment of time than we seem disposed to grant it: it demands of the individual a forthright engagement in a societal process of truth-negotiation. This is what it would mean, today, to say that Truth is the daughter of Time.

We have already commented on the difficulty of disentangling epistemological and normative perspectives (a question reiterated just above by reference to “worthy and unworthy objects of knowledge”). It is worth adding, in this respect, that also from a normative perspective haste provides a possible key to think the causes of the phenomenon at stake. A normative conception, we have said, takes post-truth to signal a drop in the value attached to the truth. According to the logic of supply and demand, the over-production of a given good, indeed, always leads to a drop in its perceived value. This can happen not only as a consequence of the good’s decreased quality (which in some cases accompanies its increased quantity) but also as a result of its augmented availability, that is: the diminished amount of time needed to procure it. The value of truth (i.e. the value of the various states and activities associated with it) is a function of the time invested in performing them. What, illusorily, may appear as the longed-for acceleration of collective cognitive processes, therefore, risks instead to be a degenerative path leading to a condition of absolute noise, and in turn to the end of the possibility of social cooperation altogether. It would be interesting to ask what Van Thuden’s canvas would look like had it been painted today, but this is a job that I will leave to the imagination of the reader. I will limit myself to suggest that, together with Hypocrisy, Falsehood and Stupidity, we would

---

<sup>533</sup> Sheila Jasanoff and Hilton R Simmet, ‘No Funeral Bells: Public Reason in a “Post-Truth” Age’, *Social Studies of Science*, 47.5 (2017), 751–70 (p. 763) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0306312717731936>>.

probably see Haste featuring among the enemies of Truth, and that possibly Haste would not be represented in the act of assaulting Truth, but rather in the act of preventing Time from rescuing her.

It is haste, a craving for immediacy, that more distinctively than mendacity, error or “bullshit”, threatens the truth today, and it is haste that shall lead our discussion back to representative democracy and its truth-oriented function. With its intrinsic slowness, with its in-built and permanent requirement of time input and mediation, representative democracy is in fact the best available force to oppose to the pressure of widespread haste and craving for immediacy.<sup>534</sup> Ensuring that the friction of disagreement is not eluded, democratic representation forces on truth-related activity a rhythm compatible with the safeguard of the conditions that allow social cooperation. As Jasanoff and Simmet suggest, in the “tragic display” put on by the post-truth moment,

a center achieved through exclusion of dissent cannot hold, even if embraced in the name of demonstrably good science. It is partly the fault of our practices of public deliberation that so many feel themselves disenfranchised and disillusioned by those practices of fact-finding, enough to reject them wholesale. A more inclusive culture of deliberation leaves the door open for those who are not satisfied with the facts of the day to return with more persuasive arguments some other time. This ongoing dialectic would strengthen both science and democracy.<sup>535</sup>

After all, a suggestive image encouraging this view comes right from the word by which we indicate one of the most common expressions of the institution of representation, the word “council.” Conventional accounts suggest the word derives from the Latin *con-calāre* – “call together”, “convene”<sup>536</sup> and therefore this would commonly be thought to invoke the idea of individuals gathered to speak to each other. Ottorino Pianigiani tells instead of an etymology of the word, fallen into disuse but that I prefer, according to which the word may have evolved from the verb *con-silēre*: “to be silent together, as does he who *waits* for the word of the other.”<sup>537</sup> If we understand a council of representatives – an instance of what we have called Space B – in the sense indicated by Pianigiani’s etymology, then we see why an echo-chamber, as suggested in Chapter IV, is a site of absolute lack of representation, and, simultaneously, a serious threat to the truth. In an echo-chamber, indeed, there is no point in being silent to wait for the word of the other, since the word of the other is expected to reproduce the exact sound of my own word – an echo, precisely. In fact, the time spent in echo-chambers is time spent in a condition of absolute agreement with others, of absolute lack of friction and therefore,

---

<sup>534</sup> John Tomlinson provides a useful discussion of “immediacy”, presenting this as an emergent cultural principle of contemporary globalized and telemediated societies, one which evolved from the earlier modern culture of speed but in distinct and discontinuous ways. See, John Tomlinson, *The Culture of Speed: The Coming of Immediacy* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2007).

<sup>535</sup> Jasanoff and Hilton R Simmet, ‘No Funeral Bells’, p. 763.

<sup>536</sup> ‘Council’, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>537</sup> Ottorino Pianigiani, ‘Consiglio’, *Vocabolario Etimologico Della Lingua Italiana* (Milan, Italy: Ulan Press, 2012). Emphasis mine.



again, of frenetic acceleration of all of Williams' truth-related practices: wanting it, finding it, telling it to others.

It is only amongst a plurality of different views that the silent wait for the word of the other gives *Time* the time to rescue *Truth*. Engaging the brake of disagreement, in other words, is essential to meet the truth-related demands of liberal democracy.<sup>538</sup> Obviously, for disagreement to perform its speed-regulation function, so to speak, citizens need to have a host of liberal virtues other than accuracy and sincerity. Indeed, citizens need to be respectful of others, disposed to treat others as equals and to listen attentively to what they have to say – virtues that generativity, particularly in its positional element (“the moving politically of negotiation”) invites us to contemplate. However, when disagreement is eluded, the truth-related activities of wanting to know, finding out and telling the truth to others may well be carried out and even fulfil standards of accuracy and sincerity, but the very ground for the truth-related practices of imagining, performing and negotiating the truth with others is instead interrupted, and with it the slow making of the new that is the mission of generativity.

## Post-Politics Truth

“If one looks at the Oxford definition”, writes Lee McIntyre, “and how all of this has played out in recent public debate, one gets the sense that post-truth is not so much a claim that truth does not exist as that *facts are subordinate to our political point of view*.”<sup>539</sup> McIntyre's statement is not straightforward. It is unclear, in fact, whether the “claim” he refers to is a normative claim or a descriptive one: whether he means to say that the notion of post-truth has been deployed to describe a condition in which facts *are* subordinate to our political point of views or whether his view is that post-truth is about maintaining that facts *should be* subordinate to people's political points of view. What matters to us, however, is that in both cases facts being subordinate to our political point of view is presented as the bulk of the problem.

In this last section I wish to argue against this view. From the perspective adopted in this thesis, one that binds the problem of truth in politics inextricably to the question of freedom and that is informed by an extended notion of factual truth, what is problematic today is indeed exactly the opposite: that facts *are not* – or at least not sufficiently – subordinate to our political point of view. Clearly, at stake here are the two very different notions of facts discussed in Chapter

---

<sup>538</sup> For a discussion of the threat that social acceleration poses to democracy see Michael Saward, ‘Agency, Design and “Slow Democracy”’, *Time & Society*, 26.3 (2017), 362–83.

<sup>539</sup> McIntyre, p. 11.

II: 1) the empiricist notion of facts as evidence, or datum of experience, which matches McIntyre's use of the word; 2) the etymological notion of a fact as the outcome of action, suggested by Arendt and which I instead refer to in using the word. Recall, also, in this respect, that our extended notion of factual truth was meant to emphasise the present time as the time at which such facts, the facts about the future, are made.

The crux of my argument, elaborated most fully in Chapter III, has been that, beside the set identified by Williams (wanting to know, finding out and telling the truth to others), there is another whole set of activities associated with truth that the emphasis on the future-regarding component of factual truth helps to expose: imagining, performing and negotiating the truth with others. Addressed to the plasticity of the truth about the world *as it could be* rather than to the inescapability of the truth about the world *as it is*, these last, I have argued, are the most properly political among the activities associated with truth. As argued in Chapter V, this is so since engaging in each of these activities requires the taking into account of the fact of plurality. It is in carrying out these activities that people display the third virtue of truth: the virtue of generativity, the disposition and the ability to turn what one knows to be true into something politically significant. Mobilized together, accuracy, sincerity and generativity constitute what we have called a specifically democratic notion of truthfulness.

Applying this theoretical apparatus, I suggest now that the phenomenon currently labelled as "post-truth" may be more properly be understood as a crisis in the strictly political process of *making* the truth, rather than a decline in the willingness to know, find out and tell the truth to others. If anything, in fact, I have argued that we witness an excess of commitment – if not an addiction – to these activities, a compulsive production and trading of information. In other words, what most distinctively threatens the truth today are not the new lows in sincerity and accuracy, nor in citizens' and politicians' epistemic or moral virtues. These indeed are great challenges, but ones that, in variable degrees, have been posed to democracy ever since its dawn. What more distinctively threatens the truth today, is that together with the resurgence of these ancient challenges we also witness a mass retreat from the willingness to imagine, the ability to perform and – most importantly – the readiness to negotiate it with others.

What does it mean, then, to say that facts, in such contexts, are not sufficiently subordinate to our political point of view? In Chapter I, I established that the ground for our reflection on truth and politics would be a broader conceptual space enclosed within the notion of truth, politics and freedom. My argument, there, was largely a restatement of Arendt's conception of politics as freedom. Such a conception, in a nutshell, is found in Arendt's commentaries on the

vice of *philopsychia*, and it is looking at these that I shall recall it here. For Arendt, freedom and politics share indeed a common origin in the overcoming of *philopsychia*, which the Greeks saw as a disgraceful trait of the slave's soul: the clinging to life, the love of one's own existence.<sup>540</sup> It is by leaving the private house that an individual became free and initiated their political life. In the private house every action was devoted towards the satisfaction of vital needs, every action, we could say, was oriented to *spare the time* of one's life. Free, then, were those who had instead the audacity to risk their own life: to *spend the time* of their lives in order to enact a new beginning, in order to build, together with peers, "a common world". What makes a point of view "political", therefore, is its collocation in this second space, where, as Arendt often writes, not life but the world is at stake. In other words, it is the disposition, on the part of its holder, to input lifetime in the building of the world that makes of a given point of view a political one. And it is in this sense that Zerilli concludes her democratic theory of judgment, cited in previous chapters of this thesis, talking of judgment as a "democratic world-building practice."<sup>541</sup>

From this perspective, then, to say that facts are not sufficiently subordinate to our political point of view means that facts are not the result of actions undertaken and judgments arrived at politically. For facts to be subordinate to our political point of view, the factual truth being made in the present, from moment to moment, ought to be the outcome of a civic relation to truth that fulfils the demands of democracy, i.e. that not only abides by the standards of sincerity and accuracy, but also by those of generativity. Indeed, it is also in the present making of what future historians will call "the truth" about our present time that we ought to be truthful in the specifically democratic sense defined in Chapter III. Failing in this respect, democratic citizens abdicate authorship of the facts resulting from their living and acting together, and of the building of the world. If I had to choose an image to describe the "factory", so to speak, of contemporary facts, I would say this resembles not the quiet Agora of democracy, but a loud market square, where the concern for truth is fully absorbed by the trading of past facts and pieces of rational and scientific truth, and where all action is replaced by transaction, and all plurality by crowdedness.

In other words, facts that are not subordinate to our political point of view are not the outcome of an aware making of the truth through politics: they are the unimagined, unperformed, unnegotiated (and therefore non-political) side-product of a compulsive exchange and consumption – perhaps useless, all in all – of chronicles of the past. Of such non-political facts,

---

<sup>540</sup> Arendt, 'Introduction into Politics'.

<sup>541</sup> Linda Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, p. 262.

mostly, is made the present of our current era, the factual truth about the world we live in right now. Through the lens of our theory of democratic truthfulness, indeed, facts of the like of Brexit, or the election of President Trump in 2016, appear less as the triumph of lies, deception and ignorance (wilful or not) and more as the desertion of politics – of negotiation, imagination and performance. These last two, let us recall, are qualified as in Chapter V: not as fantasy and show (which indeed abound in the present era) but as the exercise, respectively, of representative thinking and effective autonomy. This desertion, I claim, is the most alarming aspect of the phenomenon we are discussing, and it is in light of this claim that in turn I suggest labelling the current predicament not as post-truth politics but as *post-politics truth*.

In commenting on the “lack of shared imaginations about the future of [...] society” that characterizes the current political climate, Jasanoff and Simmet gesture definitely in a similar direction. For them, ours is “a climate in which fundamental disagreements over values are treated as if they can be simply overridden and destroyed by *facts* rather than listened to and reasoned with to create a knowledge base that feels truly shared.”<sup>542</sup> Let us clarify again that, in this quote and through the end of next paragraph, “facts” respond to the empiricist notion – not the Arendtian one I subscribe to. Indeed, the emphasis on the desertion of world-building practices that the label of *post-politics truth* tries to convey, forces us also to question current answers to the call for the rescuing of truth, all seemingly aiming at rehabilitating the social status of facts. Sergio Sismondo reminds us of the view, which Bruno Latour’s work famously helped to make legible,<sup>543</sup> that “the *fact* as we know it is often a *modern* fact, arising out of particular configurations of practices, discourses, epistemic politics and institutions [...]”<sup>544</sup> That is to say, what we today commonly refer to as a “fact” is not a trans-historical given, but rather something subject to a specific historical development, one that imparted the conviction that a fact is something that exists independently from the subject interpreting reality.<sup>545</sup> In the *post-truth politics* panic, the overwhelming tendency on the part of those who are worried and willing to rescue the truth has simply been to try to reaffirm such a modernist conception of the fact.<sup>546</sup>

One thing, nonetheless, that certainly follows if we adopt instead the *post-politics truth* framework, is that the way out of the crisis cannot be built exclusively on the restoration of the

---

<sup>542</sup> Jasanoff and Hilton R Simmet, ‘No Funeral Bells’, p. 767. Emphasis mine.

<sup>543</sup> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harvard University Press, 2012); Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

<sup>544</sup> Sergio Sismondo, ‘Post-Truth?’, *Social Studies of Science*, 47.1 (2017), 3–6 (p. 3).

<sup>545</sup> Antonella Besussi, ‘Le verità fattuali come cosa pubblica’, in *Fake news, post-verità e politica*, ed. by Corrado Fumagalli and Giulia Bistagnino (Milano, Italy: Feltrinelli, 2018), p. 17.

<sup>546</sup> Besussi, ‘Le verità fattuali come cosa pubblica’; Franca D’Agostini, ‘Diritti Aletici’, *Biblioteca Della Libertà*, LII.218 (2017), 5–42.

fading currency of this modernist notion of a fact. On the one hand, this may not be a particularly successful strategy. Talking about the political context in the US, for instance, Jasnoff and Simmet write that “[t]here is little indication that by holding on to *their* truths, Democrats will regain the political ground lost to those who wanted to break out of the iron cages of expert rationality at any cost, including even through the election of a president manifestly unqualified to govern.”<sup>547</sup> On the other hand, this strategy may not be particularly just either. Indeed,

[t]hese reassertions of singular reality and plain fact miss the deeper truth that the moment requires more a robust engagement with competing political visions than a facile call for trusting ‘the science’. To say that facts speak for themselves is to live in a ‘post-value’ world [...].[...] Avoiding negotiation between facts and values will only result in the blind subjugation of some values over others, with those whose values are left out rejecting the other side’s ‘truth’ as merely politics by another name.<sup>548</sup>

Now, if not aiming at restoring the authority of experts by reasserting the status of the modernist notion of facts, what is it that we shall do to rescue the truth? At an individual level the answer lays in the effort to engage in the full range of truth-related practices we have discussed, aiming, in so doing, at the standards of excellence encoded by the virtues of truth. This means aiming at accuracy and sincerity in willing to know, in finding out and in telling the truth, while simultaneously aiming at generativity in imagining, performing and negotiating the truth with others. At a societal level, the answer lays instead in the effort to commit civic education to the cultivation, in citizens, of these truth-related character traits. If the model of democratic representation presented in Chapter IV is viable, and if the experience of representing others really harbours the ethopoietic potential I described in Chapter V, then such effort must clearly also be directed towards popularizing, multiplying and fostering opportunities for citizens to be exposed to the experience of representing others. How exactly this may be achieved is a question I do not have space to pursue in this work, and in this respect, I will limit myself to suggest a few directions for development in the thesis Conclusions. All I will say here, in bringing the discussion to a close, is that the perspective I have suggested in no way is to downplay the seriousness of the phenomenon and the urgency to take responsibility for it. In the post-politics truth era, to be clear, truth still needs saving, but *through* politics, rather than *from* it.

---

<sup>547</sup> Jasnoff and Hilton R Simmet, ‘No Funeral Bells’, p. 760.

<sup>548</sup> Jasnoff and Hilton R Simmet, ‘No Funeral Bells’, p. 763.

## Conclusion

Looking through the theoretical archway outlined by the five substantive chapters of the thesis, this chapter provided a reinterpretation of the contemporary phenomenon known in public discourse as “post-truth.” I rejected mainstream understandings of such a state of affairs, arguing that prevailing epistemological, normative and metaphysical conceptions of post-truth fail ultimately to follow up the description of the phenomenon with an explanation of its causes and an agenda for the management of its consequences. In fact, examining the analytical implications of these conceptions through the lens of Williams’ virtues of truth, I suggested the condition they describe matches a diagnosis of “post-truthfulness” better than one of “post-truth”.

However, reflecting on the meaning of the Latin motto *Veritas filia Temporis* – Truth is the daughter of Time – I also argued that distinctive of the current societal relationship to truth is rather the obsession with and acceleration of the truth-related practices of wanting to know, finding out and telling the truth to others. In fact, what most distinctively is missing in the era we live is a widespread commitment to the other set of truth-related practices, the ones that I have argued are disclosed by a notion of factual truth extended to the future. These are the inherently political activities of imagining, performing and negotiating the truth with others, and what is lost with them is the orientation towards the virtue of generativity they encode.

The factual truth in the process of being made today, then, is not the outcome of truthful collective action – that is, action compliant with the three-cornered model of truthfulness that democracy demands. In this sense, I concluded, what we see through our archway is not the drama of “post-truth politics”, but that of “post-politics truth”, the way out of which is to be sought in the valorisation of the experience of representing others and in the appreciation of the ethical lesson it teaches: the lesson of generativity.

# Conclusions

I said in the Introduction that the structure of this thesis matches the shape of a roman archway. Chapter I to V, I suggested, constitute the blocks of which the structure is built, with the exploration of generativity in Chapter III acting as its keystone. Chapter VI, instead, is a



rendering of the contemporary landscape that the archway's frame offers to the viewer. In summarizing my arguments, I will start from this rendering and then cover the archway's figure backward: from the base of its right pillar to the base of its left. This is not out of an acrobatic impulse, nor to

put the structure of the argument to the test. Rather, this is because retracing our steps in this way helps us in recalling the path that has been taken during this investigation while also signalling the possible alternative paths that were not. In doing so it best prepares us to draw the final conclusions and to indicate some avenues for future exploration.

In **Chapter VI**, I argued that, standing under the keystone of generativity, what we see is not the landscape of “post-truth politics” but rather that of “post-politics truth”. I have argued so based on the observation that distinctive of the current societal relationship to truth is not a sudden or unprecedentedly radical withdrawal from the truth-related practices of wanting to know, finding out and telling the truth to others – as it is often held to be – but an obsession with and acceleration of these practices. Indeed, I noted that the extensive and fast-growing literature on so-called post-truth politics pays insufficient attention to the quality of the factual truth that is currently in the process of being made, i.e. the truth future historians will be willing to know, discover and write about. This truth, I have claimed, is today the outcome of an insufficiently political process of truth-making, one that does not engage the imagination, the performance and the negotiation of democratic citizens and the mobilization of generativity inherent in these activities. The era we are in, in other words, may be better understood as an era of worrying infertility of scientific, rational and past factual truth, in which truth loses traction due to a generalized inability to turn what we know to be true it into something politically significant, i.e. a generalized lack of generativity. The landscape of post-politics truth, I concluded, calls therefore for an urgent reinterpretation, revival and popularization of the

experience of representing others and for the injection of generativity that more representation would bring to democratic polity.

Indeed, one leg of our archway's frame rests precisely on the argument that the experience of representing others constitutes a thoroughgoing training in the virtue of generativity. **Chapter V** looked at the internal-reflective dimension of democratic representation, what I have called "the experience of representing others". Such an experience, I have argued, necessarily confronts the representative with a set of three pieces of "ethopoietic" knowledge – three prescriptive facts which, once learnt, produce an ethical transformation within the knower. These facts are finitude (the limitedness of the possible), solitude (the condition of individual responsibility), and mutability (the ever-changing nature of one's own identity and of others). Being exposed to these facts entails that the representative is invited to engage in three corresponding truth-related activities – those of imagination ("seeing politically"), performance ("saying politically"), and negotiation ("moving politically"). It is in carrying out these activities that one eventually learns to display the virtue of generativity.

In making these claims, I have had in mind a particular view of democratic representation as this appears from an underexplored epistemological perspective. In **Chapter IV**, I termed this the "representative standpoint". Looked at from this perspective, democratic representation appears indeed as the process of moving back and forth between two real and ideal spaces: Space A, where the representative meets his constituents; and Space B, where the representative meets other representatives, i.e. the representatives of other constituencies. In repeatedly covering the distance between A and B lays, I argued, the very essence of the experience of representing others. Indeed, it is on this same recursive journey that the representative finds a chance to acquire the virtue of generativity and, in turn, to abide by the standard of a "specifically democratic" notion of truthfulness.

Such a notion was the main focus of **Chapter III**. Truthfulness, this assumed, is a "complex" virtue requiring the simultaneous display of "simple" virtues. These are "virtues of truth" – qualities that people display in carrying out activities associated with the truth. In his account of truthfulness, Bernard Williams had identified three such activities, "wanting to know", "finding out" and "telling" the truth to others, and consequently he defined truthfulness as the combined display of the two virtues of truth mobilized in such activities: accuracy (doing what one can to acquire true beliefs), and sincerity (saying what one believes is true). Building on William's account, however, I identified in "imagining", "performing" and "negotiating" the truth with others, three additional and peculiarly political activities associated with the truth. It



is in carrying these out, I argued, that one displays a third virtue of truth: the virtue of generativity, the virtue of turning what one knows to be true into something politically significant. In a specifically democratic sense, then, truthfulness is not only a matter of accuracy and sincerity, but also, crucially, a matter of generativity.

In identifying imagination, performance and negotiation as truth-related practices, I referred to what in **Chapter II** we called an “extended notion of factual truth”. Chapter II indeed sat at the top of the left jamb of our argument, the one addressing the relationship between truth and politics. After briefly reviewing a range of well-established debates around the relationship between truth and politics, here I focussed the attention on the notion of “fact”. Following Hannah Arendt, I identified a necessary distinction between factual (contingent, human-made) truth and rational (purely logical and scientific) truth, suggesting that due to its entanglement with freedom the former notion more than the latter should be the direct focus of a consideration of the relationship between truth and politics. I further suggested, however, that “factual truth” is not only about the past but also about the future. Extending the temporal scope of common understandings of factual truth, I observed that beside the past-regarding concerns for the facts that have been made already, reference to factual truth should also entail a future-regarding concern for the facts yet to be made: truths that democracy asks us to imagine, perform and negotiate with others.

The entanglement of freedom with the question of truth in politics was at the heart of the investigation of **Chapter I**. Addressing the broadest conceptual field of the thesis and acting as the foundation of the left jamb of our archway, this chapter suggested that any consideration of the relationship between truth and politics has to be understood in the broader context of what is a necessarily and irreducibly trilateral conceptual relationship linking truth, politics, and freedom. It explored this trilateral relationship in particular through a reading of Arendt’s unfinished consideration of the interplay of three spiritual activities in *The Life of the Mind*. Truth, freedom and politics, I suggested, are the three ideally convergent “projects” of the mental activities of Thinking, Willing and Judging respectively. Borrowing from recent sociological literature, I called “generative freedom” the specific notion of freedom underpinning this view, a notion that in foregrounding the problem of the new – that is the capacity to begin a new series of events – goes beyond the well-entrenched dichotomies marked by Isaiah Berlin’s distinction between negative and positive freedom.

## Normativity and Justice

As far as I am able to tell at this stage, the thesis leaves unattended four main issues that only thorough further research can hope to address convincingly: two general issues pertaining to the premises of my arguments, and two particular issues that pertain instead to its consequences. In this section I will briefly discuss the former. The latter, instead, will be the focus of the next section, which gesture more explicitly towards two paths for future developments.

The first issue to be discussed here (1) concerns the extent to (and the sense in) which the theory outlined in this thesis is a normative theory. To the extent that a “normative theory” is one that is not purely descriptive but also evaluative, claiming that is to recommend/prescribe correct moral conduct, then a theory like mine, which foregrounds the argument that in their truth-related conduct democratic citizens should aim at a certain standard of excellence, is clearly a normative one. In contemporary ethics, however, it is more common to understand by “normative” a theory which tries to deduce particular duties from general principles. It is much less obvious, in this sense, why the theory I advanced be would “normative” since, as the reader will have found, I have neither explicitly postulated first principles, nor I have delivered specific guidelines or particular rules of conduct. This is partly because I have approached the problem of the truth-related demands that democracy places on its members within the broad framework of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. Unlike teleological and deontological forms of ethical reasoning, which generally derive their ethical systems from some conceptions of what is “Good” or what is “Right” respectively, virtue ethics has traditionally attracted scepticism about the normativity of its claims. This is due precisely to the critique of abstraction and universality regarded as implicit in an understanding of virtues “as the time- and context-bound excellences of particular communities or lives.”<sup>549</sup>

Having treated a virtue-ethical framework as a premise, a starting point for the analysis rather than itself an object of analytical scrutiny, I have not engaged directly the question of its normativity. In assuming the adequacy of this framework, however, I have had in mind less impermeable boundaries between this and other traditions in normative ethics than the distinction identified above may suggest. I think for instance of Onora O’Neill’s well-known rejection of the stark antagonism between the particularity of virtue-based approaches to ethics and the abstraction of ethical systems based on universal principles of justice. O’Neill’s

---

<sup>549</sup> Onora O’Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 2.

constructive critical account of practical reasoning – one “constructed from the demand that anything that is to count as reasoning must be followable by all relevant others”<sup>550</sup> and the focus of which are “universal principles of action”<sup>551</sup> – is indeed the avenue I plan to follow in future research to assess systematically the normative ground of the claims I have made.

This leads us straight to the second general issue the thesis did not attend to (2): an issue concerning justice. A question that I did not address, indeed, is how the ideas I put forward interlock with liberal theories of justice. One way to expose what is at stake in such a question is to ask about the extent to which the virtues of truth can also be intended as virtues of justice: virtues required to sustain liberal institutions. This is a particularly relevant question with regard to the virtue of generativity. I have defined generativity as the disposition to turn what one knows to be true into something politically significant, i.e. something that taking *plurality* into account sanctions the *beginning* of a new course of events. In doing so I have admittedly invited the reader to wonder about the reasons that justify the value of a new beginning springing from the force of plurality. In fact, gazing retrospectively upon the set of arguments I have made, it appears obvious to me that my account of “political significance” could be further developed into an account of justice, with the value of “beginning” and “plurality” being aligned respectively with principles of liberty and equality.<sup>552</sup> In this sense, it could be argued that generativity may be understood simultaneously as a virtue of truth and a virtue of justice: a quality displayed in carrying out activities associated with truth, and that is in turn required to sustain liberal institutions. In other words, I have meant to suggest that one cannot be generative without also being just. While it is clear, then, that the democratic virtues of truth could interlock with a broader theory of social justice, making this claim or developing such a theory was never an ambition this work set up to pursue. It certainly is, instead, an appealing area for future explorations.

Having said something about the question of normativity and the question of justice, two open questions concerning the premises of this thesis, I shall now move to comment on some of the implications of my arguments that the discussion so far left unexplored.

---

<sup>550</sup> O’Neill, p. 3.

<sup>551</sup> O’Neill, p. 4.

<sup>552</sup> While, in Chapter I, I did spell out, to an extent, the entanglement of generativity/beginning and freedom, the conceptual relationship between generativity/plurality and equality remains to be explored. In seeking a starting point for this further exploration, however, I would certainly look back to the content of Chapter III, and in particular to the discussion of generativity as a means between a vice of deficiency and one of excess. Indeed, in saying that insofar as it precludes the generativity of others, excessive generativity (or ‘hyperprolificity’) is a vice, what I have ultimately sought to show is that regarding others as equals is an essential element of what it means to be generative.

## Two Paths for Future Research

The arguments I made have a number of implications that could not receive explicit attention in the main body of the thesis. In the hope to illuminate retrospectively some of the corners of my work which the reader may have found obscure, I have chosen to address here the most urgent and the most direct of these implications and to indicate the paths for future research that these in turn open up. These implications come in two sets. The first (a), a response towards which I can only tentatively gesture, results from the effort to apply the framework of the virtues of truth to a particular contemporary issue that goes beyond the scope of the broader discussion undertaken in Chapter VI, something that the COVID-19 pandemic exposes with unforgiving clarity: a growing scepticism towards the claims of science. The second set of implications (b), that which I am more able to elaborate at the moment, results instead from the effort to push my account of democratic representation to its logical conclusions, and to acknowledge in particular the course of action that the things I have argued point towards.

(a) The first issue I want to touch on briefly, concerns how we might mobilize the framework of the virtue of truth to think about the more and more frequent manifestations of scepticism towards the claims of science. The outbreak of the COVID19 pandemic exposed to an unprecedented degree the potentially deleterious consequences of a mass rejection of the kind of truths that are the object of scientific claims – a kind of truth which the thesis placed under the categories of rational and scientific truth. With its focus on “factual truth” as the outcome of action, my discussion throughout the thesis, and particularly in my re-diagnosis of the current era as one of post-politics truth, has deliberately and necessarily bracketed out, to an extent, the question of the place of science in democratic politics. We have mentioned, however, that in the modern era (taking this term broadly), the claims of science have come to be recognized as a gold standard of a conception of truthfulness as simultaneous display of accuracy and sincerity. In specializing in these particular virtues, scientists have indeed gained a privileged role in a societal division of truth-related labour.

Now, this privilege reserved to scientific practice has come increasingly under attack, particularly by those who regard scientists as members of a community that often seems detached from a broader civic discourse. Confronting individuals with a range of scientific claims – i.e. about the efficacy of mask wearing, social distancing, and vaccines – the consequences of which impinge in very tangible ways on their day-to-day experience, the COVID-19 pandemic has cast this contestation into stark relief. The starting point for future research that reads this particular problem through the lens of democratic truthfulness, is to

notice that it is not simply the case that there is something wrong in the relation to truth on the part of the science sceptics, but that in fact both sides of this controversy fall short of truthfulness, if we understand it in the specifically democratic sense we have constructed.

On one side we have a community – let us call them “the truthers” – which may well be sincere in saying what they believe to be true, but that demonstrates a significant shortfall when it comes to accuracy, that is in doing what they can to acquire true beliefs. On the other side of the controversy, we have a community of scientists and believers in science who might have an excellent mastery of the virtues of sincerity and accuracy, but who often proved to be unable to turn what they know to be true into something politically significant. Rather, what members of this latter community have tended to do is simply to demand that their claims to truth are to be believed, a strategy that proves unsuccessful. I think, for instance, of the 2018 astonishing political achievement of the anti-vax mobilization in Italy, which *de facto* led to the removal of mandatory vaccination for schoolchildren.<sup>553</sup> To be clear, the point here is not to undermine the validity of scientific claims but to suggest that the reason for the widespread resistance to believe such claims may lay in their own “imperfect” compliance to the standard of democratic truthfulness, namely in their lack of generativity.

(b) The second set of implications concerns representation. The core argument I made in Chapters IV and V is that, by exposing the representative to an opportunity of ethical transformation leading eventually to generativity and, thus, to democratic truthfulness, representation encodes a potential path for civic education that is currently underexploited in democratic societies. I also suggested, in Chapter VI, that the way out of the predicament of “post-politics truth” requires extracting and putting to use the educational potential of representation: by popularizing, multiplying and fostering the experience of representing others we have a chance to effect a breakthrough in our individual and societal civic relation to truth.

These arguments have one direct and obvious implication that calls for development, namely that acting upon the recommendation they entail requires identifying concrete strategies. I see fundamentally two complementary strategies by which the experience of representing others can be “multiplied.” The first (1) consists in increasing materially the number of citizens-representatives, that is of citizens put in the position of having to cover, back and forth and for a given amount of time, the journey between some Space A and some Space B. The second (2) consists in increasing the readiness, on the part of current or imminent representatives, to seize

---

<sup>553</sup> Jason Horowitz, ‘Italy Loosens Vaccine Law Just as Children Return to School (Published 2018)’, *The New York Times*, 21 September 2018, section World <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/20/world/europe/italy-vaccines-five-star-movement.html>>.

the opportunity for ethical change offered by the experience of representing others. I will suggest, then, that the mission of popularizing the experience of representing others certainly begins with the acknowledgment, in public discourse, of the potential civic ethical transformation it encodes, since both such strategies hinge on such recognition.

If it is true that embracing this transformation pertains ultimately to the free choice of the individual who engages with the experience of representing others, it is also true that much could be done in the public sphere to encourage such choice. With reference to strategy (2), then, I will limit myself to signal two possible tactics that may inform the agenda for action. One is a normative tactic addressing directly the standards by which we judge our democratic representatives – something that Chapter IV did not discuss in detail but towards which it gestured. As controversial as it admittedly sounds in the rough formulation I am able to propose here, I have in mind a normative theory of representation able, somehow, to account not only for the behaviour of democratic representatives in what we have called the external-collective realm but also for their “behaviour” in the internal-reflective one – a normative theory, in other words, able to account also for the value of the transformative path offered to the representative and to “measure” their capacity to take advantage of it.

How exactly this measurement may be achieved certainly requires explicit and careful analysis. One possible starting point for such an analysis could be identifying and stigmatizing attitudes suggesting that a representative is evading the experiences of finitude, solitude and mutability and therefore failing to grasp their normative content. I think for instance of excessive “vanity” as a possible indicator of a lack of commitment in this sense. Regardless of how exactly it may be developed, I believe a normative theory of this sort would have the potential to provide a powerful incentive for the representative to seize the ethopoietic opportunity with which they are presented, and to aim specifically at ending their mandate as more truthful citizens than they were at the beginning.

The second tactic is formative, and it would consist in ensuring that people who undertake the experience of representing others, in particular when this happens in their youth, are prepared to be exposed to the set of prescriptive facts discussed in Chapter V and supported in facing the ethical challenges attached to them. This tactic in turn could be pursued in a number of ways. For example, by providing the representative with specialized psychological guidance, or, generally, by institutionalising opportunities for the representatives to share the intimacy of their experience and make its educative action explicit in reflection. In light of the recent public debate around the mental health of Donald Trump, this seems intuitively an important path

for research, pursuing which would require incursions in the fields of moral and political psychology as well as a more general openness to interdisciplinary contexts.

Developing strategy (1) is instead more properly a job for institutional, democratic and public policy designers. A significant increase in the number of people directly engaged in democratic representation indeed could be achieved, in many cases, through relatively minor tweaking aimed at singling out and valorising the place of representation in existing democratic practices. I think for instance to the long-standing practices of democratic representation in educational and work institutions, but also to the many experimental practices developed particularly within theory of deliberative democracy, participatory devices of the likes of deliberative polls, citizens juries, mini-publics. Although the relation between deliberative democracies and ideals of direct versus representative democracy remain contested, I firmly believe that latent within each of these practices are instances of democratic representation.<sup>554</sup> An effort to bring these to light would instantly expand the pool of citizens consciously engaged in democratic representation, and with it the opportunity for these citizens to acquire generativity and the kind of truthfulness that democracy demands of them.

## A Final Thought

Despite what I felt had been an uncompromised commitment to the truth on my part, at the end of my mandate as Municipal Councillor in the town of Noci, I had to face a political community which judged me as yet another untruthful political representative. With the wisdom of hindsight, I know such a judgment was correct in its conclusion. Its justification, on the contrary, was mistaken. Indeed, what the people I represented put forward to justify their judgment was mostly their perception of a lack of transparency and accountability in my political conduct. This is to this date a justification I contest. Instead, what I find does justify the conclusion that my conduct was untruthful is the fact that this conduct failed to fulfil the complex virtue of democratic truthfulness by not abiding to the standard of generativity.

What I understand today, indeed, is that the ethical transformation triggered by the experience of representing others, which – so I argued – leads to the acquisition of generativity, only begun for me the day of my resignation. The encounter with the facts of finitude, solitude and

---

<sup>554</sup> For a very recent relevant discussion see Hélène Landemore, *Open Democracy: Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020). Besides offering a reflection on the relation between deliberative democracy and the question of direct versus representative democracy, Landemore also puts forward the model of ‘open mini-publics’ which potentially lends itself to be examined as a site of latent representation; see also Michael A. Neblo, Kevin M. Esterling, and David Lazer, *Politics with the People: Building a Directly Representative Democracy*, 555 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

mutability, that happened in my many journeys from A to B and back, only bore fruit in the years following that day. The twofold result today is that I am both a *more truthful democratic citizen* than I was at the eve of my election, and a *better democratic representative* than I was at the eve of my resignation. In fact, it was not until the symptoms of withdrawal from “power” and visibility were healed and the exaltation of vanity contained, that practicing with imagination, performance and negotiation I was able to orient my relation to truth towards the virtue of generativity. Simultaneously, it was not until the shell of formal duties and the constraints of legal accountability had fallen away, that representing others appeared to me as a civic responsibility of each and every citizen rather than a privilege for an elected few. This is something that the theoretical ground provided in this thesis aimed at being able to explain. At the same time, however, the full implications of these insights extend beyond the scope of what it has been possible to say here, and therefore remain as fuel for future exploration, and a landmark orienting journeys to come.



## List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1: <i>Truth, Freedom, Politics</i> .....	11
Table 1: <i>Faculties, activities and projects of the mind</i> .....	17
Table 2: <i>Faculties, activities and the projects of the mind: the place of meaning</i> .....	23
Table 3: <i>Faculties, activities and the projects: bringing truth back in</i> .....	25
Figure 2: <i>Saward's' four audience/ constituency configurations</i> .....	106
Figure 3: <i>Four further audience/ constituency configurations featuring multiple constituencies</i> .....	107

# Bibliography

- Alfandary, Isabelle, 'Unfounding an American Tradition: Or the Performative Invention of Self in Ralph Waldo Emerson', *Textual Practice*, 33.10 (2019), 1739
- Andersen, Kurt, 'How the U.S. Lost Its Mind', *The Atlantic*  
<<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/how-america-lost-its-mind/534231/>>
- Ankersmit, Frank R., 'On Compromise and Rotten Compromises (Review)', *Common Knowledge*, 18.2 (2012), 367–69
- , 'Representational Democracy: An Aesthetic Approach to Conflict and Compromise', *Common Knowledge*, 8.1 (2002), 24–46
- , 'Representative Democracy', *Antíteses*, 6.12 (2013), 456–67
- Arendt, Hannah, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977)
- , 'Freedom and Politics: A Lecture', *Chicago Review*, 14.1 (1960), 28–46
- , 'Introduction into Politics', in *The Promise of Politics*, ed. by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005)
- , *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. by Ronald Beiner (Brighton: Harvester, 1982)
- , *Men in Dark Times*, Pelican Books (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973)
- , 'The Crisis in Culture', in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977)
- , *The Human Condition*, Second edition (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018)
- , *The Life of the Mind*, A Harvest Book, One volume edition (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1978)
- , *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Penguin Modern Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2017)

- , ‘Truth and Politics’, in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977)
- , ‘What Is Freedom’, in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977)
- , ‘“What Remains? The Language Remains”: A Conversation with Gunter Gaus’, in *Essays In Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, And Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994)
- Aristotle, ‘On interpretation’, in *Aristotle: in twenty-three volumes. 1: The categories; On interpretation*, trans. by Harold P. Cooke and Hugh Tredennick, no. 325 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938)
- Baggiani, Julian, ‘Truth? It’s Not Just about the Facts’, *The Times Literary Supplement* <<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/post-truth-philosophers/>>
- Ball, James, *Post-Truth: How Bullshit Conquered the World* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2017)
- Baricco, Alessandro, *Novecento: Un Monologo*, 8088, 62. ed (Milano, Italy: Feltrinelli, 2015)
- Bataille, Georges, *L’ Amicizia*, Piccola Enciclopedia (Milano, Italy: SE, 2011)
- Bausi, Francesco, ‘“Veritas Filia Temporis”. Machiavelli e Le Citazioni a Chilometro Zero’, *Parole Rubate : Rivista Internazionale Di Studi Sulla Citazione*, 13, 2016, 77–87
- Bellamy, Richard, *Liberalism and Pluralism: Towards a Politics of Compromise* (London: Routledge, 1999)
- Bellamy, Richard, and Martin Hollis, ‘Consensus, Neutrality and Compromise’, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 1.3 (1998), 54–78
- Benati, Edoardo, ‘La Teoria Del Flusso Nel Cratilo e Nel Timeo Di Platone: Il Problema Di Un Mondo in Divenire e Il Rapporto Con Eraclito’, *Studi Classici e Orientali*, 63 (2017), 73–90
- Beresford, Chloe, ‘How CS Lebowski Fans Set up Their Own Football Club ... and Honoured The Dude’, *The Guardian*, 2015
- Berkowitz, Roger, Jeffrey Katz, and Thomas Keenan, eds., *Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010)
- Besussi, Antonella, ‘Introduzione’, in *Filosofia, verità e politica. Questioni classiche*, ed. by Antonella Besussi (Roma, Italy: Carocci, 2015)
- , ‘Introduzione’, in *Verità e politica. Filosofie contemporanee*, ed. by Antonella Besussi (Roma: Carocci, 2013)

- — —, 'Le verità fattuali come cosa pubblica', in *Fake news, post-verità e politica*, ed. by Corrado Fumagalli and Giulia Bistagnino (Milano, Italy: Feltrinelli, 2018)
- Blind, Peride K., *Policy-Driven Democratization: Geometrical Perspectives on Transparency, Accountability, and Corruption* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)
- Bodei, Remo, 'Consistency and Constancy', in *Geometry of the Passions: Fear, Hope, Happiness: Philosophy and Political Use* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2018)
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, 'What Is Meant by Telling the Truth', in *Ethics*, trans. by Eberhard Bethge, The Library [of] Philosophy and Theology (London: SCM, 1955)
- Bowles, Nigel, James T. Hamilton, and David A. L. Levy, eds., *Transparency in Politics and the Media: Accountability and Open Government* (London: I. B. Tauris & Company, 2013)
- Bruce, Lucia Bracco, 'Living Behind Symbolic and Concrete Barriers of Total Institutions: Reflections on the Transition Between a Domestic Symbolic Patriarchal Imprisonment and a Co-Governed, State-Sponsored Incarceration in Perú', *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, 2020 <<https://www.crimejusticejournal.com/article/view>> [accessed 25 November 2020]
- Bühlmann, Marc, and Jan Fivaz, 'Introduction', in *Political Representation: Roles, representatives and the represented*, ed. by Marc Bühlmann and Jan Fivaz (London: Routledge, 2016)
- Burgess, Alexis, and John P. Burgess, *Truth*, Princeton Foundations of Contemporary Philosophy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010)
- Cadwalladr, Carole, 'Daniel Dennett: "I Begrudge Every Hour I Have to Spend Worrying about Politics"', *The Observer*, section Science <<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/feb/12/daniel-dennett-politics-bacteria-bach-back-dawkins-trump-interview>>
- Calcutt, Andrew, 'The Surprising Origins of "post-Truth" – and How It Was Spawned by the Liberal Left', *The Conversation*, 2016 <<http://theconversation.com/the-surprising-origins-of-post-truth-and-how-it-was-spawned-by-the-liberal-left-68929>>
- Callan, Eamonn, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy, Creating Citizens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004)
- Cassam, Quassim, 'Post-Truth, Lies, and Strategic Bullshit' (presented at the Epistemic Norms for the New Public Sphere Workshop, University of Warwick, 2019)

- , *Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political*, First edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)
- Castoriadis, Cornelius, *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, ed. by David Ames Curtis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991)
- , *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997)
- Christman, John, 'Liberalism and Individual Positive Freedom', *Ethics*, 101.2 (1991), 343–59
- Clark, John, "'Post-Truth": Political Death of the Expert', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 50.14 (2018), 1350–51
- Conti, Gregory, and William Selinger, 'The Other Side of Representation: The History and Theory of Representative Government in Pierre Rosanvallon', *Constellations*, 23.4 (2016), 548–62
- Cornell, Drucilla, 'Derrida's Negotiations as a Technique of Liberation', *Discourse*, 39.2 (2017), 195–215
- Cosentino, Gabriele, *Social Media and the Post-Truth World Order: The Global Dynamics of Disinformation* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)
- 'Council', *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford University Press, 2003)
- Crilley, Rhys, and Precious Chatterje-Doody, 'Security Studies in the Age of "Post-Truth" Politics: In Defence of Poststructuralism', *Critical Studies on Security*, 0.0 (2018), 1–5
- Dagger, Richard, *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism*, Oxford Political Theory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)
- D'Agostini, Franca, 'Diritti Aletici', *Biblioteca Della Libertà*, LII.218 (2017), 5–42
- D'Ancona, Matthew, *Post-Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back* (London: Ebury Press, 2017)
- Depew, David J., 'Prudence: Classical Virtue, Postmodern Practice (Review)', 37.2 (2004), 167–75
- Derrida, Jacques, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, ed. by Elizabeth Rottenberg, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002)
- Disch, Lisa, 'Beyond Congruence', in *Political Representation: Roles, representatives and the represented*, ed. by Marc Bühlmann and Jan Fivaz (London: Routledge, 2016)

- , ‘Radical Democracy: The Silent Partner in Political Representation’s Constructivist Turn’, in *Creating Political Presence: The New Politics of Democratic Representation*, ed. by Dario Castiglione and Johannes Pollak (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019)
- , ‘The “Constructivist Turn” in Democratic Representation: A Normative Dead-End?’, *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical & Democratic Theory*, 22.4 (2015), 487
- , ‘Toward a Mobilization Conception of Democratic Representation’, *The American Political Science Review*, 105.1 (2011), 100–114
- Dooley, Brendan, ‘Veritas Filia Temporis: Experience and Belief in Early Modern Culture’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 60.3 (1999), 487–584
- Dovi, Suzanne, *The Good Representative* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007)
- Drochon, Hugo, ‘Robert Michels, the Iron Law of Oligarchy and Dynamic Democracy’, *Constellations*, 27.2 (2020), 185–98
- Dworkin, Ronald, *Justice for Hedgehogs* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011)
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo, *Self-Reliance and Other Essays* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994)
- , *The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Brooks Atkinson (New York: Modern Library, 2013)
- Erikson, E. H., *Childhood And Society* (London: Vintage, 1995)
- Erikson, Erik H., *Insight and Responsibility* (W. W. Norton, 1994)
- Erikson, Erik H., and Joan M. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, Extended version (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998)
- ‘Fact, n., Int., and Adv.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press)  
<<http://0.www.oed.com/view/Entry/67478>>
- Faggiotto, P., ‘Note on the Kantian Distinction Between Natural Judgment (Reflecting) and Transcendental Judgment (Determining)’, *Verifiche: Rivista Trimestrale Di Scienze Umane*, 19.1–2 (1990), 3–11
- Feyerabend, Paul, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 2010)
- Foucault, Michel, *The Courage of Truth*, ed. by Frédéric Gros, trans. by Graham Burchell and Arnold I. Davidson (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011)
- , *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981-1982*, ed. by Frédéric Gros, trans. by Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

- , *The Politics of Truth* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997)
- Frankfurt, Harry G., *On Bullshit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005)
- Fricker, Miranda, *Epistemic Injustice*, Oxford Bibliographies. Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015)
- ‘-ful, Suffix.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press)  
<<http://0.www.oed.com/view/Entry/75279>>
- Fuller, Steve, ‘Descriptive vs Revisionary Social Epistemology: The Former as Seen by the Latter’, *Episteme*, 1 (2004), 23–34
- , *Post-Truth: Knowledge as a Power Game* (London: Anthem Press, 2018)
- , *Social Epistemology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002)
- Goffman, Erving, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956)
- Goldman, Alvin I., ‘The Need for Social Epistemology’, in *The Future for Philosophy*, ed. by Brian Leiter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004)
- Goodin, Robert E., ‘Democratic Deliberation Within’, in *Reflective Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- , *Political Theory and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982)
- Gordon, Uri, ‘Prefigurative Politics between Ethical Practice and Absent Promise’, *Political Studies*, 66.2 (2018), 521
- Graham, Daniel W., ‘Review of “Heraclitus: Greek Text with a Short Commentary” by Miroslav Marcovich’, *Aestimatio: Critical Reviews in the History of Science*, 1 (2004), 80–85
- Grimaldi, Giorgio, ‘The Solitude of Power. A Reflection on the Political’, *Cambio. Rivista Sulle Trasformazioni Sociali*, 9.17 (2019)
- Habermas, Jürgen, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007)
- Hale, Thomas N., ‘Transparency, Accountability, and Global Governance’, *Global Governance*, 14.1 (2008), 73–94
- Harding, Sandra, ‘Comment on Hekman’s “Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited”’: Whose Standpoint Needs the Regimes of Truth and Reality?’, *Signs*, 22.2 (1997), 382–91
- Hariman, Robert, *Prudence: Classical Virtue, Postmodern Practice* (Penn State Press, 2003)

- Hinchman, Lewis P., and Sandra K. Hinchman, *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994)
- Hiruta, Kei, 'The Meaning and Value of Freedom: Berlin Contra Arendt', *European Legacy*, 19.7 (2014), 854–68
- Holmes, Stephen, *Passions and Constraint: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997)
- Horowitz, Irving Louis, 'Open Societies and Free Minds: The Last Testament of Hannah Arendt', *Contemporary Sociology*, 8.1 (1979), 15
- Horowitz, Jason, 'Italy Loosens Vaccine Law Just as Children Return to School (Published 2018)', *The New York Times*, 21 September 2018, section World  
<<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/20/world/europe/italy-vaccines-five-star-movement.html>>
- Husband, Janet, Crane, Francine Fialkoff, Anneliese Schwarzer, Judith Sutton, and Janet Cameron, 'Review of "Outliving the Self" by John Kotre', *Library Journal*, 110.5 (1985), 63
- James, William, 'Pragmatism's Conception of Truth', *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, 4.6 (1907), 141–55
- Jasanoff, Sheila, and Hilton R Simmet, 'No Funeral Bells: Public Reason in a "Post-Truth" Age', *Social Studies of Science*, 47.5 (2017), 751–70
- , 'No Funeral Bells: Public Reason in a "Post-Truth" Age', *Social Studies of Science*, 47.5 (2017), 751–70 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0306312717731936>>
- Kakutani, Michiko, *The Death of Truth* (London: William Collins, 2018)
- Kalpokas, Ignas, *A Political Theory of Post-Truth* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)
- Kamtekar, Rachana, 'Comments on Nancy Snow, "Generativity and Flourishing"', *Journal of Moral Education*, 44.3 (2015), 278–83
- Kateb, George, 'Arendt and Representative Democracy', *Salmagundi*, 60, 1983, 20–59
- , 'Democratic Individualism and Its Critics', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6.1 (2003), 275–305
- , *Emerson and Self-Reliance* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002)
- , 'The Judgement of Arendt', in *Judgment, Imagination, and Politics: Themes from Kant and Arendt*, ed. by Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001)



- Kotre, John N., *Outliving the Self: How We Live on in Future Generations* (John Kotre, 1996)
- Lackey, Jennifer, and Alvin I. Goldman, 'Reliabilism, Veritism, and Epistemic Consequentialism', *Episteme* (Cambridge University Press), 12.2 (2015), 131–43
- Landemore, H el ene, 'Beyond the Fact of Disagreement? The Epistemic Turn in Deliberative Democracy', *Social Epistemology*, 31.3 (2017), 277–295
- — —, *Open Democracy: Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020)
- Latour, Bruno, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harvard University Press, 2012)
- Latour, Bruno, and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013)
- LaVenja Jr., Peter A., 'Rethinking Robert Michels', *History of Political Thought*, 40.1 (2019), 111–37
- Lawfordsmith, Holly, 'Understanding Political Feasibility', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 21.3 (2013), 243–59
- MacCallum, Gerald C., 'Negative and Positive Freedom', *The Philosophical Review*, 76.3 (1967), 312–34
- Maddalena, Giovanni, and Guido Gili, *The History and Theory of Post-Truth Communication* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)
- Magatti, Mauro, *Social Generativity: An Introduction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017)
- Mansbridge, Jane, 'A "Selection Model" of Political Representation', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 17.4 (2009), 369
- — —, 'Recursive Representation', in *Creating Political Presence: The New Politics of Democratic Representation*, ed. by Dario Castiglione and Johannes Pollak (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019)
- — —, 'Rethinking Representation', *American Political Science Review*, 97.4 (2003), 515–28
- March, James G., 'Model Bias in Social Action', *Review of Educational Research*, 42.4 (1972), 413–29
- Margalit, Avishai, *On Compromise and Rotten Compromises* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009)
- Massa, Riccardo, *L'educazione extrascolastica* (Florence, Italy: La Nuova Italia, 1977)

- Massey, Dawn, 'Veritas Filia Temporis: Apocalyptic Polemics in the Drama of the English Reformation', *Comparative Drama*, 32.1 (1998), 146–75
- McIntyre, Lee C., *Post-Truth* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018)
- Michels, Robert, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (Kitchener, Canada: Batoche Books, 2000)
- Mongoven, Ann, *Just Love: Transforming Civic Virtue* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009)
- Montanaro, Laura, 'The Democratic Legitimacy of Self-Appointed Representatives', *The Journal of Politics*, 74.4 (2012), 1094–1107
- Nachman, Larry D., 'The Solitude of the Heart: Personality and Democratic Culture', *Salmagundi*, 46, 1979, 173–85
- Näsström, Sofia, 'Representative Democracy as Tautology: Ankersmit and Lefort on Representation', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 5.3 (2006), 321
- Neblo, Michael A., Kevin M. Esterling, and David Lazer, *Politics with the People: Building a Directly Representative Democracy*, 555 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)
- Nichols, R. L., and D. M. White, 'Politics Proper: On Action and Prudence', *Ethics*, 89.4 (1979), 372–84
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *La Gaia Scienza e Idilli di Messina* (Milano: Adelphi, 2008)
- Norris, Pippa, and Alessandro Nai, eds., *Election Watchdogs: Transparency, Accountability and Integrity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017)
- Norval, Aletta J., 'A Democratic Politics of Acknowledgement: Political Judgment, Imagination, and Exemplarity', *Diacritics*, 38.4 (2008), 59–76
- Novitz, David, 'Of Fact and Fancy', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 17.2 (1980), 143–49
- Nuzzo, Angelica, 'Reflective Judgment, Determinative Judgment, and the Problem of Particularity', *Washington University Jurisprudence Review*, 6.1 (2013), 7–25
- Øhrstrøm, Peter, and Per Hasle, 'Future Contingents', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2020 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020)
- O'Neill, Onora, *Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)
- Onol, Tugba Ayas, 'Reflections on Kant's View of the Imagination', *Ideas y Valores*, 64.157 (2015), 53–69

- Orwell, George, and George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia: And, Looking Back on the Spanish War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966)
- Paltieli, Guy, 'Mill's Closet: J.S. Mill on Solitude and the Imperfect Democracy', *History of European Ideas*, 45.1 (2019), 47–63
- , "'Solitude De Son Propre Cœur": Tocqueville and the Transformation of Democratic Solitude', *Tocqueville Review -- La Revue Tocqueville*, 37.1 (2016), 183–206
- Pantin, Isabelle, 'Faire Accoucher Le Temps: Le Philosophe et Les Dernières Arcanes de La Création, de Paracelse à Kepler', *Seizième Siècle*, 1, 2006, 195–214
- Paris, Leonardo, *Sulla libertà. Prospettive di teologia trinitaria tra neuroscienze e filosofia* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2012)
- Pasquali, Francesca, 'Richard Rorty, L'Inconcludenza della Verità', in *Verità e politica. Filosofie contemporanee*, ed. by Antonella Besussi (Roma: Carocci, 2013)
- Paul Franco, 'Becoming Who You Are: Nietzsche on Self-Creation', 49.1 (2018), 52–77
- Perloff, Michael, and Nuel Belnap, 'Future Contingents and The Battle Tomorrow', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 64.3 (2011), 581–602
- Peter, Fabienne, *Democratic Legitimacy*, 59 (New York: Routledge, 2009)
- Pianigiani, Ottorino, 'Consiglio', *Vocabolario Etimologico Della Lingua Italiana* (Milan, Italy: Ulan Press, 2012)
- Pitkin, Hanna F., 'Representation and Democracy: Uneasy Alliance', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 27.3 (2004), 335–42
- , *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967)
- Pizzorno, Alessandro, 'Prefazione', in *Il concetto di rappresentanza*, by Hanna F. Pitkin, trans. by E. Zaru (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2017)
- Prozorov, Sergei, 'Why Is There Truth? Foucault in the Age of Post-Truth Politics', *Constellations*, 26.1 (2019), 18–30
- Przulj, Novo, Dragan Perovic, Milan Mirosavljevic, and Milos Nozinic, 'Veritas Temporis Filia Est: Truth Is the Daughter of Time', *Selekcija i Semearstvo*, 22.1 (2016), 53–62
- Rehfeld, Andrew, 'Beyond trustees and delegates', in *Political Representation: Roles, representatives and the represented*, ed. by Marc Bühlmann and Jan Fivaz (London: Routledge, 2016)
- , *The Concept of Constituency: Political Representation, Democratic Legitimacy, and Institutional Design* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

- , 'Towards a General Theory of Political Representation', *The Journal of Politics*, 68.1 (2006), 1–21
- Robson, Jon, 'A Social Epistemology of Aesthetics: Belief Polarization, Echo Chambers and Aesthetic Judgement', *Synthese*, 191.11 (2014), 2513–28
- Rorty, Richard, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)
- , *Take Care of Freedom and Truth Will Take Care of Itself: Interviews with Richard Rorty*, ed. by Eduardo Mendieta (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006)
- , 'Universality and Truth', in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. by Robert Brandom, *Philosophers and Their Critics*, 9 (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2000)
- Rosanvallon, Pierre, *Democracy Past and Future*, ed. by Samuel Moyn, *Columbia Studies in Political Thought/Political History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006)
- Sandel, Michael J., 'Liberalism and Republicanism: Friends or Foes? A Reply to Richard Dagger', *The Review of Politics*, 61.2 (1999), 209–14
- Sartre, Jean-Paul, 'Introduction', in *Lumumba Speaks: The Speeches and Writings of Patrice Lumumba, 1958-1961*, ed. by Jean van Lierde, trans. by Helen R. Lane (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1972)
- Sassower, Raphael, 'Post-Truths and Inconvenient Facts', *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* <<https://social-epistemology.com/2018/08/28/post-truths-and-inconvenient-facts-raphael-sassower/>>
- Saward, Michael, 'Agency, Design and "Slow Democracy"', *Time & Society*, 26.3 (2017), 362–83
- , 'Authorisation and Authenticity: Representation and the Unelected', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 17.1 (2009), 1–22
- , 'Representation', in *Political Theory and the Ecological Challenge*, ed. by Andrew Dobson and Robyn Eckersley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)
- , 'Shape-Shifting Representation', *American Political Science Review*, 108.4 (2014), 723–36
- , *The Representative Claim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)
- Saxl, Fritz, *Veritas Filia Temporis* (London: R. Klibansky et H. J. Paton, 1943)
- Schechner, Richard, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2013)
- Schmitt, Carl, *Dialogues on Power and Space*, ed. by Andreas Kalyvas and Federico Finchelstein, trans. by Samuel Garrett Zeitlin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015)

- Severs, Eline, and Suzanne Dovi, 'Why We Need to Return to the Ethics of Political Representation', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 51.2 (2018), 309–13
- , 'Why We Need to Return to the Ethics of Political Representation', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 51.2 (2018), 309–13  
<<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517002414>>
- Seymour Martin Lipset, 'Introduction', in *Political Parties* (Simon and Schuster, 1968)
- Sim, Stuart, *Post-Truth, Scepticism & Power* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)
- Simhony, Avital, 'Berlin and Bosanquet: True Self and Positive Freedom', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 15.1 (2016), 3–21
- Sismondo, Sergio, 'Post-Truth?', *Social Studies of Science*, 47.1 (2017), 3–6
- Skarbek, David, and Courtney Michaluk, 'When Inmates Make the Rules: Self-Governing Prisons in Latin America and beyond | LSE Latin America and Caribbean', *LSE Latin America and Caribbean Blog*, 2017  
<<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/latamcaribbean/2017/05/25/when-inmates-make-the-rules-self-governing-prisons-in-latin-america-and-beyond/>>
- Snarey, John, 'Reflections on Generativity and Flourishing: A Response to Snow's Kohlberg Memorial Lecture', *Journal of Moral Education*, 44.3 (2015), 284–90
- Snow, Nancy, 'Generativity and Flourishing', *Journal of Moral Education*, 44.3 (2015), 263–77
- , 'Response to My Commentators', *Journal of Moral Education*, 44.3 (2015), 325–27
- Špelda, Daniel, 'Veritas Filia Temporis: The Origins of the Idea of Scientific Progress', *Annals Of Science*, 73.4 (2016), 375–91
- Straume, Ingerid S., 'A Common World? Arendt, Castoriadis and Political Creation', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 15.3 (2012), 367–83
- , 'Democracy', in *Cornelius Castoriadis: Key Concepts*, by Suzi Adams (London: Bloomsbury, 2014)
- Sunstein, Cass R., 'Preferences and Politics', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 20.1 (1991), 3–34
- Swift, Adam, *Political Philosophy*, 3rd edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013)
- Tena, Jordi, 'Una Propuesta de Definición Del Concepto de Virtud Cívica / A Proposed Definition of the Concept of Civic Virtue', *Reis*, 128, 2009, 89–121

- Thulden, Theodor van, *Time Reveals the Truth. The Allegory, 1657*, The State Hermitage Museum <<https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/01.+Paintings/48369/?lng=en>>
- Tomlinson, John, *The Culture of Speed: The Coming of Immediacy* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2007)
- Tormey, Simon, *The End of Representative Politics* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2015)
- ‘Truthful, Adj.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press)  
<<http://0.www.oed.com/view/Entry/207029>>
- ‘Truthfulness, n.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press)  
<<http://0.www.oed.com/view/Entry/207031>>
- Urbinati, Nadia, *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth, and the People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014)
- , *Individualismo Democratico* (Rome: Donzelli, 2009)
- , ‘Representative Democracy and Its Critics’, in *The Future of Representative Democracy*, ed. by Sonia Alonso, John Keane, Wolfgang Merkel, and Maria Fotou (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)
- , *Representative Democracy: Principles and Genealogy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006)
- Wawer, Jacek, ‘The Truth About the Future’, *Erkenntnis*, 79 (2014), 365–401
- Williams, Bernard, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010)
- , ‘Truth, Politics, and Self-Deception’, *Social Research*, 63.3 (1966), 603–17
- Williams, Casey, ‘Opinion | Has Trump Stolen Philosophy’s Critical Tools?’, *The New York Times*, 2017, section Opinion  
<<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/17/opinion/has-trump-stolen-philosophys-critical-tools.html>>
- Williams, Melissa S., *Voice, Trust, and Memory: Marginalized Groups and the Failings of Liberal Representation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000)
- Wolfhart Totschnig, ‘Arendt’s Notion of Natality. An Attempt at Clarification’, *Ideas y Valores*, 66.165 (2017), 327–46
- Wylie, Alison, ‘Why Standpoint Matters’, in *Science and Other Cultures: Issues in Philosophies of Science and Technology*, ed. by Robert Figueroa and Sandra G. Harding (Routledge, 2003), pp. 26–48

- Yarbrough, Jean, and Peter Stern, 'Vita Activa and Vita Contemplativa: Reflections on Hannah Arendt's Political Thought in "The Life of the Mind"', *The Review of Politics*, 43.3 (1981), 323–54
- Young-Bruehl, Elizabeth, 'Reflections on Hannah Arendt's the Life of the Mind', *Political Theory*, 10.2 (1982), 277–305
- Zerilli, Linda, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016)
- , 'Castoriadis, Arendt, and the Problem of the New', *Constellations*, 9.4 (2002), 540–53
- , 'Truth and Politics', in *Truth and Democracy*, ed. by Jeremy Elkins and Andrew Norris (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012)
- , "'We Feel Our Freedom": Imagination and Judgment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt', *Political Theory*, 33.2 (2005), 158–88