Arendt and Political Realism: Towards a Realist Account of Political Judgement

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Abstract

This article argues that Hannah Arendt's thought can offer significant insights on political judgement for realism in political theory. We identify a realist position which emphasises the need to account for how humans judge politically, *contra* moralist tendencies to limit its exercise to rational standards, but which fails to provide a sufficient conception of its structure and potential. Limited appeals to political judgement render the realist defence of the political elusive, and compromise the endeavour to offer a meaningful alternative to the moralist tendency to displace politics. The potential and limitations of realist discussions on judgement are made visible in relation to proto-realists Judith Shklar and Isaiah Berlin. In seeking to enrich the realist conception of the political, the article introduces the displacement critique found in the neglected Arendtian 'realism'. It also provides the foundations for a distinctly realist account of political judgement which, we argue, requires elaboration along two dimensions: the social coding of political judgement and the political capacities that help judgement build a suitable political sphere.

Keywords

Political Realism, Hannah Arendt, Political Judgement, Judith Shklar, Isaiah Berlin

Introduction

The charge that political theory is detached from the realities of politics is hardly uncommon – it is voiced by those more sympathetic to the empirical study of politics, and/or those who possess a predominately practical mind-set. Whilst that charge might suggest a failure to appreciate how political theory as such could be purposeful (Horton 2010), criticisms of this sort – long-standing in the history of political thought[1] – have been recently revived and loudly rehearsed by proponents of an 'alternative' approach to political theorising captured by the loose term of 'political realism' (Galston 2010, p. 386). What animates the realist charge against 'political moralism' (Williams 2002), 'high-liberalism' (Galston 2010, Horton 2017), 'the ethics first' or 'applied ethics' approach (Geuss 2008, Rossi & Sleat 2014), is a loosely shared conviction that political theorising should be sensitive to the distinctiveness and grubbiness of politics, the conflicts and idiosyncrasies of human life (Philp 2007). A corresponding realist demand entails that political theorists account for the real characteristics of political judgement – an injunction which lies at the heart of the kind of politics and of political theorising realists wish to safeguard from, and offer as an antidote to, moralism. As realist accounts of this human capacity remain suggestive, and largely negative in nature, emphasising, for example, that political judgement should not be conceptualised as ideal dialogue (Geuss 2009, p.32), the two demands lead to a lacuna in realist thought that *prima facie* undermines a core realist commitment: the endeavour to offer an affirmative, distinctly realist alternative to moralism.[2]

Though seemingly incompatible (Owens 2008, Sleat 2013), Arendt's thought and political realism share several core anti-moralist commitments. Yet, amidst controversies about her idiosyncratic Kantianism, the proto-realist flavours of her thought on judgement have remained obscure. While some commentators have deemed Arendt's thought as hindrance to renewed attempts at conceptualising political judgement (Weidenfeld 2013), others, notably

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[1] Whilst realist sources of anti-moralism are manifold, exploring these is beyond the paper's scope. We focus on its more contemporary proponents who are understood as resisting 'the authority of moral philosophy in the discipline of politics' (Philp 2012, p.3).

[2] That contemporary realism remains largely negative in nature, is a well-worn concession made by realists. As Andy Sabl and Rahul Sagar (2017, p. 270) write: 'realists spent more time explaining what was wrong with "ideal theory" than they spent doing "realist theory"'. See also Galston (2010), Horton (2010), Hall (2015).

Albena Azmanova, and Linda Zerilli, have begun the difficult task of projecting it onto the context of modern democratic theory. This article suggests, that political realists can profit from locating and exploring Arendt's account within the context of contemporary realist thought – a connection neglected by Arendtian and realist scholars.[3]

The discussion proceeds as follows. In the first section, we briefly outline the realist critique of moralism – specifically, the tendency of contemporary political thought to displace pluralism and conflict, and to put forward a form of political theory which dislodges, or sanitises the political. In the second section, we turn to realist perspectives on political judgement. In particular, we explore the work of two theorists in which one can find emblematic, and largely neglected, attempts at capturing political judgement from a realist perspective: Isaiah Berlin and Judith Shklar. In doing so, we unearth the existence of a lacuna in the realist approach to political judgement. Berlin's and Shklar's thought enriches our understanding of the affinity between moralism and judgements' failure, and echoes the contemporary realist emphasis on the need for a more 'grounded' account of political judgement, but their alternative theories remain ambivalent and opaque raising more questions than they answer. In the third section, we highlight Arendt's critique of moralist displacement of politics and her response through reflective judgement. In the final section, we move to Azmanova's and Zerilli's extension of her judgement as starting points for thinking further what a suitable theory of realist political judgement might entail. Specifically, we emphasise two dimensions along which Arendtian and realist scholarship can together fruitfully enrich their conception of the political: how to conceive of the critical potential of political judgement in relation to its socially conditioned character and, how to think further the political capacities that help judgement build a distinctly political sphere.

Political Realism and the Displacement of Real Politics

Given the diverse ways the label "realism" is employed, a certain amount of work seems necessary if one is to speak of "a realist philosophical tradition", or "the realist critique". The "realist critique" and the sense of 'realism' intended here, is understood in its more 'ordinary meaning' (Horton 2017, p.489) – not as a metaphysical account of reality or of nature, or in the

[3] See, however, Nardin (2017).

manner in which the label is utilised in international relations theory[4]. Nor, does realism entail an obsessiveness with facts which might preclude normative theorising *in toto*. Political realism, so understood, constitutes 'an intellectual moment of resistance to established ways of thinking' (Philp 2012, p.3); it denotes a dissenting countermovement to the moralism which descends from Plato and Kant upon most contemporary political thought – a moralism often associated with, though not restricted to, the high-liberalism of John Rawls and his heirs – which is unified under the general injunction that political philosophising should begin from *within* politics (Galston 2010, Geuss 2008, 2015, Rossi & Sleat 2014). As such, realism in political theory is orthogonal to the ideal/non-deal theory debate; it does not merely constitute a corrective to the apparent lack of adequate fact-sensitivity which characterises much of contemporary political thought, and does not merely invite political theorists 'to undertake a kind of due diligence' (Sabl & Sagar 2015, p.270), by being more attentive to feasibility constraints – constraints which affect the *implementation* or *realisation* of their general, abstract theories.

To be sure, realism resembles 'a kind of community stew where everyone throws something different into the pot'; yet, William Galston emphasises, there is 'a theme or sentiment that unites realists at the threshold – a belief that high liberalism represents a desire to evade, displace, or escape from politics' (Galston 2010, p.386). There are, Sleat (2011, p.471) similarly notes, 'several family resemblances', common concerns and arguments' which 'allow us to speak meaningfully of there being a realist countermovement'. Hence, whilst it is not our aim to offer a comprehensive review or to resolve the diversity and complexity of political realism (if such diversity and complexity can be resolved), we wish to begin by offering a sketch of two intertwined and principal objections to the character of contemporary political theory that realists typically advance – objections which are broadly consistent with Arendt's thought and which are fuelled by an implicit acknowledgement of the importance of attending to the concrete realities of politics and of political judgement. In doing so, we put forward a modest, albeit significant, claim: given the realist emphasis on the importance of

[4] The "realism" discussed here follows more canonical conceptualisations of that term which distinguish between realism in political theory and realism in international relations (Sleat 2011, Horton 2017) and/or which are critical of the latter. Yet, we do not wish to suggest that these two traditions are incompatible *in toto*. For an attempt to bridge the gulf between these two traditions, see Scheuerman (2013).

attending to the realities of politics and of political judgement on the one hand, and the realist endeavour to offer a meaningful alternative to moralism on the other, realism requires first-of-all a more explicit and sustained engagement with political judgement.

To cut a long story short, realists contend that moralism (including most forms of ideal and non-ideal theory), sets off from the wrong premises. At the core of that theory lies the conviction that political philosophizing should start from an external, abstract moral standpoint – comprehensive, unitary and all-inclusive conceptions of the good and/or justice, captured by a set of principles to which rational individuals can ascend. Politics, on this account, is thus problematically reduced to the 'matter of knowing the ethical truth about the world'; and 'to have this knowledge' requires one 'to have a grasp of eternal verities, which, in order to be understood … need to be first stripped' of the superficial 'accidents of empirical existence and of history' (Guess, 2015, 4f.). This leads to displacement or effacement of the moral messiness of politics in at least two ways.

First, moralism is said to displace pluralism and conflict at *the level of the polis*. A desire for perfect, permanent closure under the aegis of rational harmony, to 'get politics right once-and-for-all', displaces politics by underestimating how, even under the most ideal of circumstances, agreement on a substantive conception of the good and/or justice should not be expected. For, our world is bound to comprise of agents who espouse a plurality of different, antagonistic, and irreconcilable substantive principles, values and interests *and* of different, antagonistic, and irreconcilable conceptions of those principles and values (Berlin 1990, Geuss 2008, Horton 2010, Sleat 2011, 2013, 2014, Rossi & Sleat 2014). Hence, rather than seeking to offer substantive accounts of justice to which rational agents should ascend – accounts which distort and displace the radical particularity and peculiarity of politics – political realists urge us to attend to questions of political power, legality, stability, and expediency.

Secondly, moralism displaces conflict and pluralism *at the level of the individual*; it shies away from the peculiar demands of politics, the paradoxes inherent in individual morality – the recognition that there exists an irreconcilable rift between the qualities and standards of excellence one might hope to observe in a morally admirable life and those conducive to a virtuous political life (Bellamy 2010, Shklar 1984, Williams 1978). As Galston and Philp write:

> [T]he integrity of the good life in which ethics and politics are effortlessly linked seems a utopian aspiration ... [P]olitical virtue is not only not rooted in the good life, it is in its nature exposed to demands that may compromise some of our most cherished commitments (Galston, 2010, p.392, Philp, 2007, p.89, p.94).

By virtue of its erroneous conceptualisation of politics, moralism displaces the difficult choices and irresolvable conflicts public agents face – choices and conflicts which are part and parcel of politics.

What animates the realist charge then, is the conviction that moralism is sustained by an 'ethics first' or 'applied ethics' approach to politics which is, in fact, apolitical. The realist charge is, in part, fuelled by an appreciation of the importance of *political* judgement – and, the corresponding moralist tendency to displace that capacity. The juxtaposition of realism and moralism unearths what Azmanova terms the paradox of judgement – a paradox which confronts most accounts of moral and political philosophy which aspire to be 'politically realistic', 'morally rigorous', and to 'enable social criticism':

> The more we weaken our normative criteria, the more we enhance judgement's political relevance at the expense of critical power; however, the higher we set the normative standards, the more we lose our grip on political reality – again at the expense of judgments critical power (Azmanova 2012, p.239).

The moralist solution to the paradoxical nature of judgement, however, constitutes an *a priori*, frozen account of judgement whereby 'the concept of judging is eliminated and the just enjoys a pyrrhic victory – freed from the limitations of the politically particular, it becomes politically futile' (Azmanova 2012, p.120). At best, moralism undermines the crucial place which judgement occupies in political life: by virtue of its tendency to supplant judgement, pluralism and conflict, moralism cannot grapple with the recognition that securing certain distinctively political goods, such as a modicum of order and security amidst the conflict-ridden context of politics, is impossible without the exercise of political judgement (Levy 2011). At worst, because – as realists emphasise – the moralist vision of perfection and harmony is implausible, its practical manifestation bespeaks of the failure of political judgement. For instance, to seek to 'let justice be done, though the heavens fall' – the endeavour to keep one's hands clean by steadfastly upholding certain abstract rules and principles, or the dictates of conscience (whatever these may be) – though morally admirable, is not a political virtue. Attitudes of this sort bespeak of 'innocence', the lack of experience or of 'informed prudence' (Philp 2012, p.10); they are symptomatic of one's endeavour to shut one's eyes to the complexity, peculiarity, and distinctive demands of politics (without abolishing these), and might imperil the aforementioned political goods – goods which, for realists, a responsible politics should shelter. Whether we agree with this presentation of moralism or not, the point here is that, from a realist standpoint, political judgement is underdetermined by economic, moral, and legal

principles, and is irreducible to other forms of judgement or to any other sphere of human activity.

Realist Perspectives on Political Judgement

In their endeavour to give politics its due, contemporary realists routinely emphasise the importance of attending to the realities of political practice, action, and *judgement* (Galston 2010, p.391f, Nardin 2017, Philp 2010). Realists' sensitivity to the context in which judgement is exercised aside though, their account of judgement remains underdeveloped. For example, Enzo Rossi's and Matt Sleat's (2014) review of realist thought captures the complexity of judgement but says little on its mechanisms and processes. This is also apparent in the few realist works explicitly dedicated to that capacity: Richard Bourke's and Raymond Geuss's introduction to *Political Judgement: Essays for John Dunn* and Geuss's contribution to that volume, titled *What is political judgement*? Both works reiterate the realist charge: they take issue with the moralist tendency to sanitise politics by subsuming 'individual cases under explanatory and predictive general laws, or under principles of reason and rationality' (Bourke & Geuss 2009, p.4, p.8), and emphasise that attentiveness to the realities of politics entails leaving behind the extra-terrestrial, glassy realm of explicitly formulated propositions to establish a new, realist foundation for theorising political judgement. However, they say little on the alternative practice of political judgement that they have in mind.

We articulate the problems that come with this realist attitude to judgement through a turn to the works of Berlin and Shklar, which – though identified with the recent realist turn – are somewhat neglected by contemporary realists.[5] Berlin's and Shklar's thought which was, like Arendt's, influenced by the horrors of the 20th century, shows an acute awareness of the connection between moralism, cruelty, and a displacement of political judgement, and each ends up with a unique conception of political judgement. They show that realists can say more about judgement, and indeed

[5] Though realists are not dismissive of these thinkers, there exists considerable discrepancy between the amount of ink spilled on Williams's and Geuss's thought *vis-à-vis* Shklar's, and Berlin's.

that they have something very concrete in mind, but their engagements with judgement remained fragmentary and negative still, taking us only so far.[6]

Shklar on political judgement in a world of injustice and vices

Shklar's comments on political judgement, though scarce, show an acute awareness of its importance for her project. In the concluding chapter of *Ordinary Vices*, for instance, she states that her aim is to offer an appropriate account of vices in politics by 'putting cruelty first', and to 'review critically the judgments we ordinarily make and the possibilities we usually see' (Shklar 1984, p.226). Shklar (1984, p.234) tries to give human beings, with all their imperfections, 'their due' and to avoid the moralist temptation of reducing virtues to the avoidance of vices *tout court*. As liberals, she notes, we should abandon 'certainty and agreement as goals worthy of free people'; for, 'liberalism imposes extraordinary ethical difficulties on us: to live with contradictions, unresolvable conflicts, and a balancing between public and private imperatives which are neither opposed to nor at one with each other' (Shklar 1984, p.249).

The Faces of Injustice challenges more directly such a moralist quest for certainty and agreement, which lurks in the background of political theorists' obsessiveness with what Shklar (1990, p. 17) terms the normal model of justice: the search for substantive principles of justice, which subsequently reduces injustice 'to a prelude to or rejection and breakdown of justice' and which mistreats it as 'a surprising abnormality'[7]. The normal model fails to offer 'a serious

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[6] This dovetails with Edward Hall's (2015, p.284) observation that whilst commentators construe realism as, a 'negative creed which fails to offer a positive, alternative way of thinking normatively about politics', this 'focus has obscured the more constructive elements of realist political thinking'. The possible objection that there can never be such a comprehensive theory of political judgement – an objection which seemingly conceives of judgement as the capacity of evaluation without set standards – only reproduces a problematic dichotomy between purely practical intuitive processes and intellectualist formalism, reflective and determinate judgement.

[7] See also Shklar's *Legalism* which develops this challenge against legalism - an ideology obsessed with obedience to allegedly universal, monolithic rules which erroneously seek to subdue politics. Legalism, Shklar (1964, p. 75) maintains 'hides the facts of moral life in the interests of false comfort'. At best, by virtue of its belief in certain rules on which rational

understanding of injustice as a personal and political experience' and has 'severe difficulties in coming to terms with victims. It limits itself to matching their situation against the rules, which is inadequate as a way of recognizing victims' (Shklar 1990, p. 17, p.37). The voices of the victims of injustice tend to be silenced or not heard and the sense of injustice, which possesses a deeply, irreducibly subjective component, tends similarly to be ignored. Far from 'reducing our cruelties', Shklar (1990, pp.26 – 27) emphasises, substantive, universal 'rules simply redirect and formalize our ferocity': 'when we trust the rules, when we tend to become too sure of our competence' that 'makes us arrogant, cruel and tyrannical'.

What seems to fuel that rejection, is not an *a priori* theory of justice, but rather, an account of judgement (cf. Salaverria 2014, p.709). Shklar (1990, p.27) rejects the normal model of justice by appeal to the recognition that we are too 'ignorant and too diverse to be fit into any single normative scheme. We are strangers to one another and we are too ignorant to judge each other'. Our experiences, she notes, are too 'various and incommunicable' to serve as the foundations for 'general rules of conduct', such that any attempt to impose them tends to backfire and constitutes a manifestation of the lack of judgement (Shklar 1990, p.26). Shklar (1990, p.27) builds on psychological research to emphasise that humans rarely use statistical information and make simple calculations of probability when making judgements. Being less judgemental, Shklar surmises, is therefore necessary if we are to tether cruelty and injustice. Scepticism, for Shklar (1990, p.28), thus gives injustice 'its due because it recognizes that our judgments are made in the dark and doubts that they are right'.

Despite the ambivalence of her claims, in positive terms, Shklar can be read as orientating an alternative conception of judgement through a balanced melange of attentiveness to our sense of injustice, the dangers of moralism, the need to avoid cruelty and attend to the voices of the victims, combined with a radical scepticism that embraces the uncertainty of our judgements. However, Shklar's engagement with psychological literature threatens to undermine these insights. It turns judgement too easily into a breakdown from correct, possibly

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individuals can agree and its tendency to 'seal off' law 'from the world of conflict', 'legalism, in practice, can make people uncompromising' and ignore 'those who feel offended or injured' by a decision which appears '"unjust" because it does not conform to their system of moral rules' (Shklar 1964, pp.104 -107). At worst, it might spell disaster: 'it ought to be remembered that, in any society where moral diversity exists, agreement-as-an-end-in-itself can only be achieved by totalitarian methods' (Shklar 1964, p.100).

rational, judgement – a positive, but nonetheless substantive, account of right judgment which remains unspecified. Shklar's thought thus appears to retain elements of the moralist account of political judgement. Her reflection on the 'dark context' of judgement, her adoption of psychological insights as starting point for the realist conception, seem to be undermined by a rather mysterious account of judgment which fuels her objection to standard, moralist models.

Berlin's sense of reality

Berlin's work is replete with allusions to the connection between moralism, or what he terms 'monism' – the innocent belief in individual and societal perfection, under the aegis of a final harmony –, and judgement's failure (Berlin 1976, 1998, 1999). For Berlin, totalitarian imagination and governmentality constitute radical, though pervasive and logical, manifestations of moralism. They are fuelled by a blind acceptance of the truth of the '*philosophia perennis*':

> If a final solution is possible, no cost would be too high to obtain it: to make mankind just and harmonious for ever – what could be too high a price to pay? … What choice have we, who have the knowledge, but to be willing to sacrifice them all? (Berlin 1990, p.16).

Moralism does not just entail the displacement of the messiness of politics at a philosophical level, by supplanting it with visions of a harmonious 'world which is beyond our ken' (Berlin 1990, p.13, see also Berlin 2002). Nor does innocence, or the lack of political judgement, merely manifest themselves in a steadfast refusal to soil one's purity when exposed to the grubbiness of politics. Such qualities possess a more active sense: they are often directly responsible for political disaster. The practical manifestation of the moralist quest for perfection – the dislodging of pluralism, diversity and conflict at a philosophical level – might entail a declaration of war against society *en masse* – the dislodging of pluralism, diversity and conflict at a practical level. Adherents of moralism, the 'victims of forms of self-induced myopia' (Berlin 1990, p.14), might seek to '*bend* … reality into conformity with their own wills' (Hausheer 1979, pp. xix – xx) – to radically reorganise or purify society, by reducing the plurality of different individuals into 'a Procrustean bed of some rigid dogma' (Berlin 1998, p.77), and sacrificing 'living human beings on the altars of abstractions' (Berlin 1990, p.16).

Berlin's more positive project – the connection between reality and political judgement – is more explicitly developed in *The Sense of Reality*, in which he identifies an ordered reality, accessible in a methodical manner, divested from the classical notion of progression and perfection. Berlin's account, heavily influenced by Vico's theory of knowledge, distinguishes

between two attributes or levels of reality: i) a surface reality, 'an upper, public, illuminated, easily noticed, clearly describable, surface from which similarities are capable of being profitably abstracted and condensed into laws'; and ii) a lower level, a depth, which entails a 'path into less and less obvious yet more and more intimate and pervasive characteristics, too closely mixed with feelings and activities to be distinguished from them' (Berlin 1997, p.20, see also Berlin 1976).

Of particular interest is the lower level – with its 'half-articulate habits, unexamined assumptions, and ways of thought, semi-instinctive reactions, models of life so deeply embedded as not to be consciously felt at all' (Berlin 1997, p.20). This is inaccessible for any universal, scientific key or *a priori* judgement, which, once adopted and implemented in practice, brings about numerous unaccounted, often unpalatable effects caused by the non-conforming diversity and richness which comprise the depth of reality – effects which continuously break up the system and which cannot be displaced in a lasting manner. The judging political agent, like the judging historian, Berlin emphasised, should grasp what is specific and particular in a peculiar context, to understand the 'unique pattern of experience' of an event, 'the unique combination of characteristics that constitute this particular situation – this and no other' (Berlin 1998, p.45). This understanding cannot be reduced to scientific knowledge, as it requires 'too much data that we are not even aware of how we take them in' (Berlin 1997, p.23). Nor, by implication, is the capacity to judge politically based on 'laws to be discovered, rules to be learnt' (Berlin 1997, p.40), which is not to suggest that there are *no* facts or historical truths, as muddled as they may be – *ergo* Berlin's (1997, pp.26 – 33) emphasis on the importance of having a sense of reality. To judge well requires a degree of improvisation and experience, informed by an appreciation of the complexity of reality, the risks of conflating 'surface' and 'depth' and of displacing the complexity, and richness of the lower levels comprising the latter.

To judge well in a political sphere without substantive laws to guide one, is analogous to 'deep-sea diving', and is seen as a gift equal to that of creative imagination of artists, historians, and writers such as Pascal, Dostoyevsky, and Proust, amongst others, who have 'penetrated more deeply' underlying patterns or unique events by delving beneath the surface reality with 'great patience, industry, assiduity' (Berlin 1997, p.45) – individuals who possess, what Berlin terms elsewhere following Vico, *fantasia:* an intuitive process of imaginative reconstruction; a 'capacity for understanding people's characters, knowledge of ways in which they are likely to react to one another, ability to enter into their motives, their principles, the movement of their thought and feelings' (Berlin 1999, p.135). Political judgement thus becomes a 'semi-

intuitive skill – like the ability to read without simultaneous awareness of the rules of the language' (Berlin 1997, p.45).

As we elaborate later on, unlike Berlin's conception of judgement – a conception which seems to rest on quasi-Aristotelian foundations and is intimately intertwined with a conception of prudence (Hanley 2004, p.330), Arendt finds in Kant's reflective judgement standards for this reading without awareness of the language rules (Schwartz 2015, p.5). Thus, while Berlin and Arendt share an emphasis on a sense or 'ethic of reality' (Owens 2008, p.105) and the conviction that the capacity to judge without reliance on universal standards is integral to a *polis* characterized by pluralism, they differ significantly in the way in which they conceive of the process of judgement (Zerilli 2014). This recognition will become clearer later on, as we explore the pluralist dimensions to Arendt's judgement. For now, we wish to highlight that, Berlin's account – by virtue of its anti-moralist nature – emphasises the connection between having a sense of reality and good judgement; or, in reverse, the affinities between displacing reality and bad judgement. For, 'things are as they are, and we do well not to analyse away what makes them *uniquely* themselves … Men should never be blinded by the distorting spectacles of theory to what they know immediately to be true of themselves' (Hausheer 1979, pp. xix - xx, p. xl, see also Berlin 1990, 1998). Yet, despite Berlin's acknowledgement that the 'distorting spectacles of [moralist] theory' (Hausheer 1979, p. xl) might lead to 'a cruel mockery of all that men hold dear' (Berlin 1990, p.17), the absence of a more systematic account of political judgement renders the relationship between the sense of reality and good (or bad) judgement rather unclear.

Berlin and Shklar provide concrete insights on a realist alternative conception of political judgment that are, however, only fragmentary and raise more questions than they answer. They provide extensive theories on the limitations of moralism (and its abstract, rationalist conception of judgement) and the dangers of displacing the political. They also explicitly highlight the need for a different realist form of political judgement, *without* elaborating fully on the alternative they have in mind. Thus, without denying their important insights, we conclude from this brief overview that they, as does political realism more generally, create a tension at the very heart of their anti-moralist project between the demands for attentiveness to the political and the neglect of one of its central features, political judgement. As we will show in the following sections using Arendtian scholarship, it is possible to combine a displacement critique with a positive exploration of political judgement, without denying its difficult context and the unique qualities of the political sphere or falling back into moralism guided by *a priori* moral principles.

Arendt's Realist Approach to Political Judgement

At the heart of Arendt's thought lies an anti-moralist emphasis on 'the independence and dignity of the political realm', and a recognition that 'theory is no substitute for practice' (Canovan 1983, p.287, p.298). Her work is framed by the need to recuperate a meaningful human existence in the context of totalitarianism and in light of a dissolution of stable standards for judgment through a break in tradition (Arendt 1958, 2006). In search of new ways to come to terms with the past and the atrocities of her time, Arendt (1998, p.9) noted the importance of the fact that 'men, not man, live on the earth and inhabit the world', and dedicated her writing to conceiving a form of politics that is attentive to the potential of a pluralist, public sphere.

To be sure, Arendt does not endorse the 'conflict-fetishism' which characterises much of realist thought: she focuses on the common world between equal citizens which has led some to identify a 'sociologically naïve conception of the social' (Azmanova 2012, p.132). The tendency to disassociate pluralism from deep conflict seems to suggest that her thought cannot account for the centrality of antagonism and hegemonic struggle to politics (Mouffe 2007, p.4). However, her pluralist convictions also suggest that her account stands similarly opposed to the Rawlsian, liberal project – a point which is exemplified in Arendt's rejection of Rousseau's moralism. Rousseau's conception of the general will, Arendt suggested, departs from an abstract standpoint: it seeks to articulate a substantive conception of the good shared by all citizens against all that is specific and particular to each individual and thereby reduces 'a multitude' into 'a single person' (Arendt 1963, p.72f.). What emerges from Arendt's rejection of Rousseau's moralism, Canovan surmises, is a criticism of high liberalism which echoes political realism – that, Rawls like Rousseau:

> does not take serious account of human plurality, of the fact that men and women are not clones of a single original plus or minus the effects of different social positions, but are instead rival centres of the world, each capable of thought, speech and action (Canovan 1983, pp.299 – 301).

These commitments led her to reject central features of Kantianism – specifically Kant's earlier *Critiques* – by virtue of their anti-political, world-less nature (Marshall 2010, p.368).

Arendt's critique of moralism is more encompassing in that she highlights the tendency of realists and moralists – through their shared concern with will-formation – to connect freedom with the faculty of willing, which introduces a notion of individual sovereignty as mastery into the political sphere and makes their normative projects potentially a- or even anti-political. Free will provides 'essentially a passionate superiority toward a someone who must

obey' (Arendt 1978, p.161) and becomes entangled in a desire for command and rule over others (Arendt 2006, p.145). In response, Arendt completed a 'virtual Copernican Revolution' (Zerilli 2016, p.190) in locating freedom in political action and a non-sovereign form of judgement that draws its strength from enriching a community's sense of reality. She only adopted Kant's third Critique *idiosyncratically* to emphasise the possibility and need to build and protect the shared public sphere amidst an 'activist democratic politics of contest, resistance, and amendment' (Honig 1993, p.77, Lafer 1998).

Arendt's insights on the dangers of moralist quests for the discovery and assertion of a single, comprehensive, universal account of the rational ethical truth unearths a second important point of convergence with realism: her acknowledgement of an insurmountable rift between a morally admirable and a virtuous political life – the tendency of philosophers to conflate moral and political virtue and approach the latter from an extra-terrestrial standpoint. Absolute morality, moral goodness, moral virtue and innocence (or, the self-deluded belief that one possesses these qualities), Arendt emphasised, are historically embodied in Plato's Socratic moral injunctions, in the maxims of Christianity, in Robespierre's 'terror of virtue' – the public manifestation of Rousseau's moralism – and, in the characters of Prince Myshkin and Billy Budd from Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and Melville's *Billy Budd* respectively (Arendt 1963, p.82). These examples reveal the limits of perfectibility and the tragic recognition that the qualities one might hope to observe in a morally admirable life are antagonistic to and displace worldliness and politics– that, they are dangerous to the public space which diverse humans share (Arendt 1998, 2006).

To recap, Arendt's thought seems to depart from realism through its stronger focus on the possibility of consensus, although she lacks any interest in prescribing criteria for adjudicating between world-views, but similarly holds that moralism is likely to lead to an intolerable world (Terada 2008, p.103). To be sure, Arendt's distinctions of violence and power, of the private and the public, and of the social and the political, her regulative attempts to protect various spheres from each other, raises the question of whether she undermines the unique qualities of politics she identifies (Honig 1993, p.118ff.). Nonetheless, Arendt's work echoes and anticipates a set of core realist concerns: it emphasises that the 'unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality – whatever it may be' (Arendt 1958, p. viii) serves as a foundation for good politics. It challenges the prioritization of 'ethics over politics' and advances this by an appeal to an 'ethic of reality' which is intertwined with a particular community's plural perception of appearance; for, despite the resilience of factual truths, the shared sense of reality is thought as the only stable means of accounting for reality (Arendt

1998, p.199, Owens 2008). Judgement is key to this 'ethic of reality'; thus, instead of exploring the various nuances of Arendt's thought, and realist or moralist positions further, it is to Arendtian insights on this human capacity that we now turn.

Arendt's reflective judgement

Though unfinished, Arendt's work serves as a central point of reference and contention in the contemporary scholarship on the elusive phenomenon of political judgement (see Beiner 1983, Benhabib 1988, Zerilli 2016). Arendt's account of judgement[8] has been subject to radically different interpretations and caught between central polarisations of political thought in the late 20th and early 21st century. Following debates on its modern and postmodern affinities, Canovan (1992) and Bernstein (1996) helped clarify how Arendt's thought is fuelled by a concern for the political catastrophes of her time. This interpretation connects with our earlier suggestion that, at the core of Arendt's account of political judgement lie a set of realist themes: an emphasis on an 'ethic of reality', the need to face and come to terms with 20th century's dark times through political practices, and a critique of the prioritisation of applied ethics over politics, which displaces the need to engage with the implications of pluralism. Throughout her work, Arendt captured the devastating effect of this displacement on judgement, and the dangers of a breakdown in political judgement for human's capacity to live meaningfully together.

We cannot delve at great length into the much rehearsed tensions and innovations of Arendt's writing on judgement, especially her (1982) idiosyncratic reading of Kant's third *Critique*. In brief terms, Arendt drew on his account of aesthetic judgement in light of the challenges posed by a break in tradition in modernity – the separation of tradition, religion, and authority – which required judging particulars 'without a banister' (Arendt 1979, p.336), without sufficient guidance by universals. To that end, she singled out reflective judgement and its reliance, in her reading, on a strong public sphere as the suitable response to this modern problem: for, reflective judgement does not rely on universal principles and must, instead, build on a combination of community sense, disinterestedness, representative thought, and the pro-

[8] Judgement, for Arendt (1978, p.193), is 'the ability to say "this is wrong", "this is beautiful," and so on', and the 'by-product of the liberating effect of thinking, [which] realizes thinking, makes it manifest in the world of appearances, where I am never alone and always too busy to think'.

and retrospective dimension to judgement. Reflective judgement is thus political in a procedural rather than substantive sense (cf. Zerilli 2016, p.8).

Given that Arendt never wrote her final book on judgement and the discussion of her theory largely draws on her lectures *on Kant*, what might we gain from Arendt's thought that adds to the insights by Shklar and Berlin on a realist alternative conception of political judgement? We argue that her account moves realist political thought on judgement forward in two important ways. Firstly, Arendt identified in totalitarianism, mass society, and philosophy a tendency to isolate people from their common world, causing the 'bankruptcy of common sense in the modern world' (Arendt 1994, p.314) as a guide for coming to terms with reality. The loss of a 'common and factual reality' became 'a political problem of the first order' (Arendt 2006, p.232). In response, she formulated a community sense that is simultaneously the product and pre-condition of an ongoing, open-ended practice of action and judgement aimed at strengthening and expanding a sense of reality. Secondly, Arendt criticised the thirst for an Archimedean standpoint and replaced the 'objectivity' of a detached observer with the judgement of a plurality of spectators. Arendt's spectator remains closely connected to political action and brings to the political sphere a capacity for 'representative thinking' (Arendt 2006, p.237) that is open for contestation and renegotiation. Political judgement emerges out of a back and forth between actors and spectators that enables judgement to gain a form of 'situated impartiality' (Disch 1993, p.666).

We turn first to common sense.[9] Arendt's engagement with common sense was informed by the capacity of totalitarianism and mass society to isolate people from their common world (Arendt 1958: 475, 1998: 248ff., 2006: 89f.). In an effort to rekindle that relationship, she formulated two conceptions of common sense that share a reliance on the commonality of reality. Firstly, common sense, which refers to the worldly context of perception and 'a feeling of realness' (Arendt 1978, p.51, 2006, p.218). The 'sixth sense' reveals the communality of an object to different senses and different people, thus opening up the 'it-seems-to-me' to public contestation (Arendt 1978, p.50). Secondly, community sense, which emerges out of human

[9] There exist numerous different interpretations of Arendt's common or community sense. Recent commentators fruitfully move beyond worries about the Kantian legacy to her account of judgement, to identify in Arendt a notion of common sense tied to an open-ended, circulatory practice of action and judgement that together give meaning to events and build a world in common (Borren 2013, Schwartz 2015).

beings' need to refer to, and together make sense of, a world in common – to '"woo" or "court" the agreement of everyone else' as one 'can never compel anyone to agree with one's judgments' (Arendt 1982, p.72). It entails a feeling of sharing a world and its ethico-political implications. Community sense is constitutive of judgement as judgement always relies on limited, imperfect information and requires continuous confirmation and potential acknowledgement of one's perspective by other community members.

Arendt provided us with three important qualifications. Firstly, her understanding of community sense is concerned with how to bring together different perspectives on a shared object, rather than reducing difference to an overlapping consensus. Although Arendt referred repeatedly to the issue of validity in relation to Kant's aesthetic judgement, hers is not primarily an 'epistemological problem' (Zerilli 2005, p.166), how to ensure that judgements are reasonable and valid and not merely subjective, but the problem of the new – how to 'judge without the set of customary rules which is morality' (Arendt 1994, p.321) so that humans can 'come to terms with what irrevocably happened' and be 'reconciled with what unavoidably exists' (Arendt 1994, p.322) in a way that *understands* new issues and perspectives 'as a beginning' (Arendt 1994, p.319). For this reason, community sense must be understood as a process that while context-dependent is also malleable and a creative force that through persuasion and imagination gains purchase on new appearances without falling back on determinate judgements. Secondly, community sense is a product of concrete practices of judgement and action with specific members of a community. It is tied to a community of political spectators and actors who engage with a political problem, those 'in whose place the judging person has put himself for his considerations' (Arendt 2006, p.221) and the community of peers to whom one refers in making one's judgement and to whom 'the objects of judgment appear' (Arendt 2006, p.221). Thirdly, the community sense that a person refers to is coded by – but never limited to – the past experiences and interactions with other people's perspectives. The quality of judgement, Arendt (2006, p.226) therefore concluded, is dependent on our capacity to choose one's 'company among men, among things, among thoughts, in the present as well as in the past'.

Arendt's project of strengthening a community sense was inevitably faced with two significant hurdles. Firstly, how can political judgement restore a shared framework of reference from which to engage with reality, if judgement depends on a community sense to function in the first place? Secondly, how can political practices of persuasion produce a suitable sense of community from which to judge political problems, if politics is faced by the kind of systematic failure of community sense and judgement (and the denial of that failure)

that Arendt experienced during Nazi Germany? For a response to these questions, Arendt re-formulated the actor-spectator binary at the heart of judgement, by reading a thick notion of plurality into Kant's aesthetic judgement and in particular the concept of enlarged mentality.

Arendt in her later writing was concerned with the negative link between thought and judgement through a form of thoughtfulness associated with the Platonic philosopher, or thoughtlessness, a feature of Arendt's Eichmann (Arendt 1978, Schiff 2012). Both, in different ways, lead to a devastating lack of a moral or political compass – that is community sense – and, consequently to political disaster. In response, Arendt sought to re-embed the detached spectator, familiar from philosophy and logical positivism, in political practices, without losing sight of the potential of spectatorship to gain critical purchase on ongoing events through critical distance and enlargement of one's mind. The spectator 'does not leave the world of appearances but retires from active involvement in it to a privileged position in order to contemplate the whole' (Arendt 1978, p.94, cf. 1982, p.65). Arendt emphasised that politics always needs *both* agents that act and appear *and* spectators that, *in relation to each other*, give action meaning and relevance: 'the very novelty of the actor' depends on 'making himself understood by those who are not' acting (Arendt 1982, p.63). She also highlighted that everybody takes up the positions of a spectator or an actor from time to time. Arendt's later emphasis on the spectator thus complements and completes her focus on the actor in the *Human Condition* (Arendt 1998, p.199, 1982, p.63).

Arendt pointed her readers towards how the spectator's judgement might be able to connect critical distance and political action and rely on plurality to make political judgments. She re-interpreted Kant's disinterestedness, the capacity to move beyond the immediate effect of an object on a person, and enlarged mentality, as a practice of representative thinking that entails the possibility to train 'one's imagination to go visiting' (Arendt 1982, p.43). This form of critical thinking, which sits well with Berlin's notion of *fantasia* and imagination, allows humans to imagine alternative perspectives on an issue without adopting these and without losing sight of the 'it seems to me'. This 'process of representation does not blindly adopt the actual views of those who stand somewhere else, and hence look upon the world from a different perspective; this is a question neither of empathy, […] but of being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not'; the 'better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinion' (Arendt 2006, p.237). Disinterestedness and representative thought are constitutive of political judgement; in their absence, sharing a

meaningful world would be impossible as they ensure *both* the distance and connection between people.[10]

We conclude that although Arendt remained at odds with strands of realist political thought, because of her rejection of a focus on sovereignty, domination, and conflict, the two contributions on common sense and the actor-spectator binary help embed judgement firmly in the murky context of politics. The contributions also reveal how political realists can enrich their critique of displacement tendencies through an alternative conception of political judgement that foregrounds a situated form of impartiality in the place of transcendental standards. Alongside Berlin and Shklar, Arendt identified the urgent challenge of establishing a strong sense of reality, but draws our attention to the unique potential for judgement found in the political practices that strengthen human plurality. Thus understood, Arendt adds to the conceptualisation of political judgement, by formulating judgement as situated without remaining fully dependent on cultural standards, and transcendent without turning to *a priori* principles that displace politics and political judgement, and without relying entirely on the unique qualities of singular 'good' judges. Arendt's common sense, representative thought, and the interrelation between actor and spectator capture an important positive tendency which could serve as the starting point for a more comprehensive realist account of politics and of judgement; that, in a political sphere riven by conflict and disagreement, they offer the foundation of stable, good, and to some extent valid politics – a politics directed at enabling a complex, comprehensive understanding of reality, without reliance on frozen moral principles.

Arendtian Political Judgement: From Exemplarity to Radical Imagination

We now wish to move beyond scholars that elaborated the dangers of moralism to judgement in the context of 20th century's totalitarianism towards current debates on Arendt's theory of political judgement. In recent years, her account has been extended in reaction to the burdens

[10] This need not entail that all judgements are only adequate if they follow a process of disinterestedness and enlarged mentality. Further, the adequacy of these processes depends on the context and person, as quick judgements often tend to be more accurate and successful. However, as Arendt sought to show using Eichmann, the failure to think representatively, to engage politically the perspectives of other people and to build a common world, can have devastating consequences for politics and humanity.

of judgement identified by Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls at the end of the 20th century (see Azmanova 2012, Ferrara 1999, 2008, Zerilli 2016). In dialogue with this diverse literature, we wish to highlight two directions in which political realists could extend Arendt to strengthen their conception of political judgement even further: i) by introducing a concern with social conditioning and power into the practice of judgement and ii) by identifying further ways to protect and build a distinctly political sphere. Azmanova and Zerilli are singled out as each capturing one of the dimensions and we provide a brief sketch of their arguments.

In discussing the realist themes in Arendt's thought, we noted the divide along the axis conflict-consensus between political realist concerns with questions of power struggle, legitimacy, and interests, and Arendt's emphasis on recuperating a political sphere that is irreducible to means-ends thinking. Azmanova (2012), offers a middle ground between realism and moralism, and possibly a way to reconcile Arendt with political realists' particular concern with power. She seeks to develop a critical theory of judgement as public reason that is freed from Habermas' transcendental turn towards Kantian moral universalism *and* moves beyond Arendt's concern with the meaningfulness of the particular. Neither is sufficiently equipped to account for the encoding of structurally produced injustice into the phonetic – experience-based – structure of public reason. The pre-discursive structuring of judgement through a plurality of spectators that Arendt identified is embedded in power asymmetries and social injustice that shape the web of shared notions regarding what is relevant and open to significant disagreement. To be both politically salient and normatively critical, a theory of political judgement thus needs to disclose this pre-structuring, or patterning of judgement, i.e. the matrix of relevance (Azmanova 2012, p.157). In doing so, Azmanova claims, one might be better able to maintain the critical potential of reflective judgement to evaluate social injustice, without neglecting the codes of social (re-)production and social origins of identity stratification inscribed in its formulation.

This shift of focus – from a quest for harmony and agreement on justice to feelings of injustice – seems innately valuable for political realism and sits neatly with Shklar's and Berlin's thought. However, Azmanova does not resolve the problems of neo-Kantian theorising on judgement altogether. As Mihaela Mihai (2014) notes, Azmanova holds on to a belief that the matrix of relevance is sufficiently flexible and unstable to be transformed through the power of discursive confrontation. Reified patterns of signification and articulation, Azmanova argues, can be challenged by the engagement with others' truth assertions, which, even if unacknowledged, leads to the de-stabilisation of the reference points and the formulation of new links (Azmanova 2012, p.215f.). This reveals once more a tendency towards displacing

the political, and it is at this point that political realists should take up the conceptual space opened up by Azmanova for theorising realist political judgement and its relationship to power, interests, and legitimacy. At the level of the polis, realists may seek to articulate how issues of injustice, violence, and power are *coded* into judgement and require our attention. At the level of the individual, a realist theory of political judgement may consider the way political judgement warrants a sustained engagement with the conflicts and choices facing those engaged in a political life to avoid the displacement of judgement in politics.

Alongside this first dimension, a political realist conception of judgement should explain what a 'politics first' – as opposed to 'ethics first'/applied ethics – approach entails. A focus on a matrix of relevance concerned with systemic injustice and power goes some way towards answering this question. But it does not explain the depth to displacement critique offered by both Arendt and political realism that seems to suggest a radically different conception of politics. To that end, we consider one of the most prominent judgement scholars, Zerilli (2005, 2012, 2016). Democratic theorists, Zerilli argues, should turn to the difficult task of protecting politics, or the common world, which is threatened by a moralist desire to turn to the 'true world'. The problem of applied ethics for politics is not only the abstraction from how humans really are, as realists would have it, but that ideal theory 'starts with what Arendt called "man" rather than "the world" (Zerilli 2006, p.278). A truly political response to these failures must therefore not only highlight the importance of attending to the real conditions of politics, but seek to re-build the world in common, which requires us 'to recognise common objects as candidates for judgement, objects on which our considered opinions may very well diverge' (Zerilli 2016, p.267).

Judgement, as a political process, is first of all a 'practice through which citizens can enlarge their sense of what belongs in the common world' (Zerilli 2016, p.279). One of the key activities to facilitate this process of generating a distinctly political sphere is imagination. Arendt and Berlin share this concern with imagination, but Zerilli turns it into a particularly important *political* capacity –an ability to open up the public sphere to 'values that have not yet found expression in the sense of a determinate concept' (Zerilli 2005, p.171). By this she describes how humans affirm freedom by holding on to an imaginative extension of a concept beyond its ordinary uses in cognitive judgement. The aim is to 'gain critical purchase on what each takes for granted' (Zerilli 2012, p.19) and to acknowledge the political, transformative force of 'a form of speaking and judging that unsettles how we understand those principles and the apparent coherence of the "we" that denies its contingent and exclusionary character' (Zerilli 2012, p.19). Thus, whether realists wish to follow Zerilli's particular understanding of

politics or not, her democratic theory of judgement sheds new light on ways in which the realist political sphere *could be filled up*. She shows how we can disentangle the particularly political character of human activities as part of a realist theory of political judgement that replaces the displacement strategies found in various forms of moralism.

Conclusion – Towards a Realist Account of Political Judgement

Sunnil Khilnani (2009) captures an important point about political judgement: it is made under complex circumstances and can have disastrous effects. It is this messy context and direct impact of our choices upon a polis that realists are concerned with; and, it is precisely for these reasons why they highlight the importance of taking real judgements seriously. Our analysis of Berlin and Shklar showed how their important contributions on this capacity remain underdeveloped. Berlin considers the connection between a complex deep reality and judgements but leaves the capacity semi-intuitive and its standards and procedure mysterious. Shklar accounts for a dark and complex world and introduces psychological evidence but rejects the inherent quality of human's judgement in light of what might seem a 'correct' judgement ideal. Therefore, although these theorists reject moralism, by virtue of its tendency to displace politics, and emphasise the problem real judgements face, they seem unable to capture its potential or actual exercise. They succumb to an important problem for political realism: its proponents seem unable to move beyond a critical stance to moralism and offer a more affirmative realist alternative.

Despite significant differences between the two, we argued that Arendt's thought – by virtue of its critique of moralism, her ethic of reality, and the belief in the importance of real political judgement – dovetails with contemporary realism. Realists may incorporate her insights on community sense, representative thought, and the actor-spectator dichotomy. A realist conception of political judgement could, however, also say more along two extensions in judgement scholarship: how judgements can focus on the encoding of injustice and violence into the judging practice, put forward through Azmanova's matrix of relevance, and the ways in which different political capacities can help judgement contribute to engendering a distinctly political sphere, visible in Linda Zerilli's democratic theory of judgement. To be sure, developing a realist account of political judgment by drawing on Arendt's work is merely a starting point. Political realism requires a continuous engagement with the complexities of political judgement.

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