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Arendt Corrections: Judith Shklar's Critique of Hannah Arendt

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Abstract: Judith Shklar wrote about Hannah Arendt throughout her career. However, her nuanced readings are often ignored by scholars who prefer to depict both philosophers as stark counter-images. In this paper, I offer a more complex comparison on the basis of all of Shklar's writings about Arendt. Shklar's critique is grounded in what she sees as the Romantic strand in Arendt's thought, which she identifies with a metaphysical, elitist, and aestheticizing stance towards politics, a distaste for modernity, and a nostalgia for Greek antiquity. For Shklar, this position comes to the fore both in what she believes to be Arendt's purely therapeutic notion of revolution as well as the rejection of her own Jewish identity. Nevertheless, Shklar also admired Arendt's insights about exile and her appreciation of Kant. Through her sustained critique of Arendt, Shklar developed her own conception of a realist, rights-affirming, and anti-metaphysical liberalism.

Keywords: Arendt, Shklar, political Romanticism, liberalism, republicanism

Seyla Benhabib once wrote that Judith Shklar read Hannah Arendt "against the grain on so many issues" that the former's relationship to the latter warrants its own study.[1] This essay is not such a study, which

This essay is a version of two texts that have appeared in German: Hannes Bajohr, "Arendt-Korrekturen: Judith Shklars kritische Perspektive auf Hannah Arendt," *HannahArendt.net* 8, no. 1 (2016): 149–65, which was reworked into the afterword

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may require a whole book, but it tries to provide a lay of the land. It is motivated not only by Benhabib's observation but also by my own impression that most any text dealing with Shklar will inevitably turn to a comparison with Arendt. Yet this is rarely to develop Shklar's reading of Arendt, but rather to construct both thinkers either as biographical twins or as philosophical counter-images. In this essay, I will first demonstrate this tendency by example of Dana Villa's pitting Shklar against Arendt in the two philosophers' assessments of a highest evil. Against what I believe is a reductionist reading, I suggest that Shklar was not simply Arendt's counter-image, but that similarities persist, and that she made alterations and corrections to some of what appeared to her the more egregious of Arendt's shortcomings. In the second section, I turn to Shklar's intellectual socialization in the shadow of one of Arendt's most important concepts, totalitarianism, which Shklar soon began to reject. I discuss Shklar's first and already fundamental attack on Arendt in her debut *After Utopia*, where Arendt is grouped with her teachers Heidegger and Jaspers as belonging to an apolitical, snobbish, and aestheticizing "romanticism of defeat." That Arendt was not very fussy when it came to historical facts but more interested in heroizing the past, Shklar noted more than once; in the fourth section, I look at her critique of Arendt's moral taste for classical antiquity, and in the fifth at her incomplete and, in Shklar's eyes, in the end purely therapeutic, but not political, view of revolution. The sixth section is devoted to Shklar's strong, and at times excessive, reaction to *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that saw in it a self-renunciation of Jewish identity. I conclude with a look at the last text Shklar wrote on Arendt, a short but relatively conciliatory review of Arendt's *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*.

I. Highest and Lesser Evils

For the most part, it is the biographical-sociological perspective which, despite an age difference of 22 years, determines the comparison between Shklar and Arendt.[2] While such a link inevitably suggests itself, it is often

for the German edition of Shklar's collected texts on Arendt, Hannes Bajohr, "Arendt-Korrekturen: Judith Shklars Kritik an Hannah Arendt," in Judith N. Shklar, *Über Hannah Arendt*, ed. Hannes Bajohr (Berlin: Matthes and Seitz, 2020), 123–161. I am grateful for helpful comments from Thomas Meyer, Ingeborg Nordmann, Samuel Moyn, Julia Pelta Feldman, and one anonymous reviewer for *Arendt Studies*.

[1]Seyla Benhabib, "Judith Shklar's Dystopic Liberalism," in *Liberalism without Illusions: Essays on Liberal Theory and the Political Vision of Judith N. Shklar*, ed. Bernard Yack (Chicago, 1996), 63.

[2]Benhabib, "Judith Shklar's Dystopic Liberalism"; Axel Honneth, "Flucht in die Peripherie," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 56, no. 6 (2008): 982–86; Axel Honneth, "Vorwort," in Judith N. Shklar, *Der Liberalismus der Furcht*, ed. Hannes Bajohr (Berlin: Matthes and Seitz, 2013), 7–25; Seyla Benhabib, "Remembering Dita Alone with the

exhausted in superficial parallels—both are women, both Jewish refugees, and both succeeded in American universities against all systemic obstacles. But mapping their biographies, which are parallel in some respects only, onto their thought is not helpful if their life stories are then turned into the only determining factor of their work.[3]

Only rarely do such comparisons lead to an emphasis on philosophical differences.[4] If they do, the contrasts are drawn especially starkly, as in the case of Dana Villa, who asserts an "enormous gap between Arendt's political philosophy and Judith Shklar's," which amounts to a basic opposition between an 'arch-liberal' and an 'arch-republican.' Villa insists that Arendt's philosophy transcends liberalism as it "does far more than just 'avoid the worst' (to use Judith Shklar's phrase)."[5] In her "Liberalism of Fear," Shklar had indeed identified cruelty and fear as the highest evils, which a liberal policy must seek to inhibit. [6] Arendt, by contrast, wrote in "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy" that

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Trees in Harvard Yard," in *Memorial Tributes to Judith Nisse Shklar, 1928–1992* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 27–31; Andreas Hess, *The Political Theory of Judith N. Shklar: Exile from Exile* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Samantha Ashenden and Andreas Hess, "Totalitarianism and Justice: Hannah Arendt's and Judith N. Shklar's Political Reflections in Historical and Theoretical Perspective," *Economy and Society* 45, no. 3–4 (2016): 505–29.

[3]See for example Hess, *The Political Theory of Judith N. Shklar*; Honneth, "Vorwort."

[4]See for example Benjamin R. Barber, review of *American Citizenship*, by Judith N. Shklar, *Political Theory* 21, no. 1 (1993): 146–53; Corey Robin, "Liberalism at Bay, Conservatism at Play: Fear in the Contemporary Imagination," *Social Research* 74, no. 4 (2004): 927–962. Likewise in the juxtaposition found in Andreas Hess, *American Social and Political Thought: A Concise Introduction* (New York, 2000), chap. 3 and 4; Dana R. Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton, 1999), 180–203.

[5]Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*, 200. In a somewhat related manner, Giunia Gatta sees a difference between Shklar and Arendt "that could not be starker" without using the terms republicanism and liberalism: "Shklar's awareness of the inescapability of politics does not amount to a celebration of participation, or a glorification of certain political institutions. Rather, she delivers a very different translation of the experience of the political refugee, of the victim of power unbounded." She also notes "Shklar's sarcasm for the republican tradition" in *American Citizenship*. Giunia Gatta, *Rethinking Liberalism for the 21st Century: The Skeptical Radicalism of Judith Shklar* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 13, 134. Nevertheless, Gatta foregoes an in-depth comparison between the two.

[6]Judith N. Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, ed. Stanley Hoffmann (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3–20.

> to establish life as the highest good is actually, so far as ethics are concerned, [is] question-begging, since all ethics, Christian or non-Christian, presuppose that life is *not* the highest good for mortal men and that there is always more at stake in life than the sustenance and procreation of individual living organisms.[7]

Villa claims that it makes all the difference "if one builds one's political theory on the experience of terror and loneliness or the experience of fear and cruelty."[8] For Arendt, it is not fear or cruelty that is the *summum malum*, but "the totalitarian attempt to deprive human beings not only of their freedom and dignity, but of their *world*," outside of which a life worth living—and that always means: a republican life—cannot take place at all.[9] For Villa, the contrast between liberalism and republicanism is reflected in the contrast between securing life and securing the world—with Shklar and Arendt as their purest archetypical representatives, respectively.

This interpretation is questionable. One might point out that seeing life as the highest good is by no means the same as seeing fear and cruelty as the highest evils; that there are indeed republican elements in Shklar's work;[10] or that Arendt's "procreation of individual living organisms" as the *zoé* of the species has little to do with Shklar's notion of life in the sense of security from fear as the precondition of any liberal polity. But what is more, Arendt herself wrote in the fifties about the secondary dangers of totalitarianism, the dangers that originate from the way its opponents dealt with it. Arendt had in mind the "ex-communists" who were now especially bitter towards their earlier allegiances and saw the threat of totalitarianism everywhere. If this most extreme form of domination, Arendt warned, becomes the *non plus ultra* of evil, the absolute maximum of all reprehensibility and the negative goal of all political action, then there is a danger of overlooking all the lesser evils, even of accepting them complacently in the fight against the greatest evil. Exclusively turning toward the worst evil, then, meant pursuing an oppressive politics in an anti-totalitarian spirit. For Arendt, the ex-communists' concentration on totalitarianism abroad also implied averting one's eyes from the evils at home. After all, it was "easier to be an enemy of Stalin in Moscow than a foe of Joseph McCarthy in Washington." It may be true that all "other evils, to be sure, are lesser evils if compared with totalitarian-

[7]Hannah Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2003), 51.

[8]Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*, 201; similarly Katrina Forrester, "Hope and Memory in the Thought of Judith Shklar," *Modern Intellectual History* 8, no. 3 (2011): 617.

[9]Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*, 202.

[10]Samantha Ashenden and Andreas Hess, "Republican Elements in the Liberalism of Fear," *Zeitschrift für Politische Theorie* 9, no. 2–2018 (2020): 209–21.

ism." However, "The trouble begins whenever one comes to the conclusion that no other 'lesser evil' is worth fighting. Some anti-totalitarians have already started even to praise certain 'lesser evils' because the not-so-far-away time when these evils ruled in a world still ignorant of the worst of all evils looks like the good old days by comparison."[11] Beyond the final evil, there would not be any evil left and the catalogue of the damnable would lose all proportion, all adequacy, and thus finally all legitimacy by being absolute:

> The natural conclusion from true insight into a century so fraught with danger of the greatest evil should be a radical negation of the whole concept of the lesser evil in politics, because far from protecting us against the greater ones, the lesser evils have invariably led us into them. The greatest danger of recognizing totalitarianism as the curse of the century would be an obsession with it to the extent of becoming blind to the numerous small and not so small evils with which the road to hell is paved.[12]

It may be surprising to see Arendt commit to fighting the lesser evils here. Not only because she, as a theoretician of totalitarianism, seems to play down her own object of research, but also because there is no such preoccupation with the small evils to be found anywhere in Arendt's work. Instead, one discovers this analysis in Judith Shklar's book *Ordinary Vices*. There appears the very catalogue of evils—their relation to each other and the order among them—that Arendt had insisted one not surrender to the supreme evil. Curiously, Shklar seems to implement an Arendtian program. Further, Arendt may have agreed with Shklar's assessment of cruelty as the highest evil. A passage from Arendt's "Some Questions on Moral Philosophy," in which she emphasizes the underrecognized menace of sadism, would not be out of place in Shklar's *Ordinary Vices* or "The Liberalism of Fear":

> To be sure, the catalogue of human vices is old and rich, and in an enumeration where neither gluttony nor sloth (minor matters after all) are missing, sadism, the sheer pleasure in causing and contemplating pain and suffering, is curiously missing; that is, the one vice which we have reason to call the vice of all vices, that for untold centuries has been known only in pornographic literature and paintings of the perverse. It may always have been common enough but was usually restricted to the bedroom and only seldom dragged into the courtroom.[13]

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[11]Hannah Arendt, "The Eggs Speak Up," in *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 1994), 271.

[12]Ibid., 271–272.

[13]Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," 72–73.

Although Shklar is careful not to equate cruelty with sadism—which for her meant pathologizing and thus neutralizing what is to be understood[14]—the idea of considering "causing and contemplating pain and suffering" the "vice of all vices" is enough to bring Arendt close to Shklar's line of argument.[15]

No matter, then, whether one turns to the question of an evil relativizing all other evils or to determining the nevertheless highest evil: Villa's heavy-handed differentiation between Arendt and Shklar does not bear out. The issue of the highest evil is not the central distinction between them, and if it were, the answers would probably not differ much. Rather than asserting grand dichotomies, it is more fruitful to address the small objections that Shklar raised against Arendt, which cannot be categorized completely under "liberalism" and "republicanism."[16] Rather than fundamentally critiquing or ideologically attacking Arendt, Shklar aimed to correct her, and threw Arendt's supposed weaknesses into sharp relief: her metaphysical foundations, her understanding of history, her obliviousness to power relations, the questionable status she accorded to the victims, her idealization of the American Revolution, and the reality of her Jewish self-image.

II. In the Shadow of Totalitarianism

Among the topics that remain constant in Judith Shklar's work, Hannah Arendt's thought takes up an important place. On the one hand, explicitly, as the subject of three reviews, one journal article, and an obituary,[17] and on the

[14]Judith N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1984), 20, 43–44, 213.

[15]The same could be said of Arendt's methodological note on literature as the heuristically most important source for understanding evil: "We might be a bit better off if we would permit ourselves to turn to literature, to Shakespeare or Melville or Dostoevsky, where we find the great villains. They also may not be able to tell us anything specific about the nature of evil, but at least they don't dodge it." Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," 44. A similar sentiment can be found in Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, 7, 251–255. This is why Richard H. King groups Arendt together with Shklar (and, among others, Stanley Cavell, Richard Rorty, and Judith Butler) as thinkers who "understand that poems, novels, and plays may help us understand how politics works and what it is for, what political experience is *like*." Richard H. King, "Hannah Arendt and The Uses of Literature," *Raritan* 36, no. 4 (2017): 123–124; see also Tracy B. Strong, "Literature and the Imagination," in *Between Utopia and Realism: The Political Thought of Judith N. Shklar*, ed. Samantha Ashenden and Andreas Hess (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 101–115.

[16]Especially not if one takes Shklar's late work into account, Benhabib, "Judith Shklar's Dystopic Liberalism."

[17]Judith N. Shklar, review of *Between Past and Future*, by Hannah Arendt, *History and Theory* 2, no. 3 (1963): 286–292; Judith N. Shklar, "Hannah Arendt's Triumph,"

other implicitly, in the broad lines of her books. Shklar's monographs often represent—while they are also much more than that—a correction of one of Arendt's: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) finds an answer in parts of Shklar's *After Utopia* (1957) as an examination of the ideological conditions of and reactions to totalitarianism; Shklar's *Legalism* (1964), an investigation of the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes trials, appeared almost simultaneously with Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) and the two books should be read alongside each other; and *American Citizenship* (1991) is a true complement to *On Revolution* (1963), with which Shklar contradicts Arendt on her reading of the American Revolution and her conception of citizenship.[18] To be sure, there are lines of thought that are completely independent from Arendt—especially Shklar's interest in the history of liberalism and the intricacies of the rule of law—as does the respective literary canon differ a great deal, of which Shklar's was without a doubt broader. But there is nevertheless a certain parallelism in topics and concerns that made Shklar a natural interlocutor of Arendt, both affirmatively, which was rare, and critically, which was much more often the case.

A lot of these interventions have their origins in the first encounters between Arendt and Shklar, both personally and intellectually,[19] which took place in the shadow of the theory of totalitarianism. Shklar met Arendt at the Harvard seminars by Carl Joachim Friedrich, a German-born political scien-

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New Republic 173 (1975): 8–10; Judith N. Shklar, "Rethinking the Past," in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers,* 353–361; Judith N. Shklar, "Hannah Arendt as Pariah," in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, 362–375; Judith N. Shklar, review of *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, by Hannah Arendt, *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 9 (1984): 42–44.

[18]This correction has been well researched by Andreas Hess and Samantha Ashenden: Andreas Hess, "'The Social' and 'The Political': A Comparison of the Writings of Judith N. Shklar and Hannah Arendt on America," *Atlantic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2005): 219–233; Ashenden and Hess, "Totalitarianism and Justice."

[19]There were personal meetings between the two, but not many, as Shklar herself once wrote to the *Amerikanist* Friedrich Georg Friedmann: "I did not know Hannah Arendt well at all. Indeed, I think I cannot have met her more than half a dozen times, always at conferences or seminars." Letter to Friedrich Georg Friedmann, September 28, 1981, Papers of Judith N. Shklar, Series: Correspondence, 1959–1992, HUGFP 118, Box 2. This may only have referred to personal encounters, for she told another correspondent: "You were right in supposing that I admire Miss Arendt's work a great deal and that I try to be present on any occasion where she is likely to speak." Letter to Melvyn A. Hill, June 28, 1972, ibid. A short correspondence between Shklar and Arendt can also be found in the Hannah Arendt Papers, which is mainly about organizational matters. Shklar also sent a copy of her book *Legalism*, to which Arendt seems not to have replied, Letter to Hannah Arendt, May 25, 1964, Hannah Arendt Papers, Correspondence: 1938–1976, Library of Congress, Washington. I thank Michael Shklar for the kind permission to quote from Judith Shklar's papers.

tist who had emigrated to the USA between the wars. Friedrich was Shklar's doctoral supervisor at Harvard from 1951 to 1955 and, after she began teaching there, her colleague at the Department of Government. In the context of "totalitarianism" as one of Friedrich's favored explanatory approaches, Franz Neumann and Arnold Brecht were guests in his colloquium, and so was Arendt, in December 1951, immediately after the publication of her *Origins of Totalitarianism.* At the dinners that followed, students and teachers were able to exchange ideas.[20] Friedrich and Arendt felt a certain complicity against the left and the right, and Arendt visited his seminars several more times, as well as a totalitarianism conference Friedrich organized in 1953 (also present: Isaiah Berlin). It is almost certain that Shklar, as a de-facto assistant to Friedrich, was involved each time.

Friedrich and Arendt approached their common topic of 'totalitarianism' differently. Arendt chose a philosophical approach, which she articulated—as a much more detailed explanation than the hurried allusions of *Origins*'s last chapter—in *The Human Condition*, her phenomenology of human action.[21] Friedrich's method, elaborated with his student Zbigniew Brzeziński in *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*,[22] was more analytical and positivist when it came to the theorization of totalitarianism. Friedrich and Brzeziński established six basic categories that apply to totalitarian dictatorships—a political ideology, a monopoly party, a secret police, a centralized economy, and a monopoly of information and weapons—with which they identified Stalinism and National Socialism as two species of the same genus. It may have been because of this levelling that the doctrine of totalitarianism disappeared from the curricula in the 1980s at the latest, while Arendt's *Origins*, which was not received historically-analytically but philosophically, enjoys the status of a continually read classic.

Although Shklar was intellectually socialized in such an environment, she soon came to question the category of totalitarianism. The positivist approach seemed to her, as she later wrote, cleansed of the reality of the Nazi regime and "sanitized and integrated into the cold war context."[23] She was equally skeptical of the philosophical approach. In 1961, in a review of Karl Jaspers' *Future of Mankind*, she wrote that his "analysis of totalitarianism is explicitly based on Miss Arendt's work. That is, totalitarianism is treated

[20]Hess, *The Political Theory of Judith N. Shklar*, 49.

[21]Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[22]Carl Joachim Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzeziński, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956).

[23]Judith N. Shklar, "A Life of Learning," in *Liberalism without Illusions,* ed. Yack, 267.

as a static 'essence,' not subject to change or variation."[24] In doing so, she attacked a demonstrable tendency towards unity in Arendt's concept of totalitarianism, but overlooked the fact that a model based on movements and masses can hardly be thought of as completely monolithic. Rather, her criticism seemed to apply to Friedrich/Brzeziński's model again, whose six characteristics make it heuristically rigid, while Arendt—whose elements of totalitarianism include atomization, loss of reality, and making people superfluous—operated with much less tangible and thus fixable categories.

But Shklar also took exception to such grand categories. Behind them, she suspected an out-of-touch metaphysics and a dubious genealogy: For Shklar, Arendt was an epigone of German existentialism and thus of the Romantic tradition. While Friedrich/Brzeziński classified totalitarian dictatorship merely as an extreme form of autocracy, for Arendt there was a qualitative leap to totalitarianism, a totally new type of political rule.[25] Shklar, who was more skeptical about this claim (which Samantha Ashenden and Andreas Hess see as the main difference between the two[26]), suspected an unforgivable inclination towards metaphysics in it; making totalitarianism a result of modernity was part of the romanticism she soon came to criticize.[27] Her first book, *After Utopia*, formulated the beginning of this skepticism, which, to a large extent, set the tone of her relationship with Arendt. From this point on, Shklar never abandoned a tendency towards polemics and harsh judgments.

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[24]Judith N. Shklar, review of *The Future of Mankind*, by Karl Jaspers, *Political Science Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (1961): 437–39.

[25]Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd ed. (Cleveland: Meridian, 1958), 460. Shklar instead saw only a pluralization of intellectual approaches, which she felt must be faced without any sentimentality instead of a nostalgic longing for the sunken city of Athens: Judith N. Shklar, "Facing up to Intellectual Pluralism," in *Political Theory and Social Change*, ed. David Spitz (New York: Aherton Press, 1967), 276.

[26]See Ashenden and Hess, "Totalitarianism and Justice," 508–509. In other respects, they see more similarities between Arendt and Shklar, despite the rather stark differences pointed out here.

[27]Seyla Benhabib has condensed Shklar's anti-metaphysical affect, which in *After Utopia* is expressed above all against Heidegger, in an anecdote: "Shklar was not a snob. During a memorable lunch at the Harvard Faculty Club with the well-known critic and thinker George Steiner, at which I was present and which centered on and off on the Arendt-Heidegger affair, Shklar simply said à propos of Heideggerian abstractions, 'But my dear George, somebody has to clean the kitchen tiles without worrying about *Dasein*!'" Seyla Benhabib, "Judith Nisse Shklar," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 148, no. 4 (2004): 533.

III. The Unhappy Consciousness of the Present

After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith was not Shklar's answer to the question of what had made 'totalitarianism' (a term she still used here) possible. Rather, she was concerned with showing how the traditional political ideologies and theories had failed to provide any guidance whatsoever after "years of instability, war, and totalitarianism."[28] The title of the book is misleading.[29] Her concern was not the possibility or impossibility of utopian thought, but of political thinking relevant to the present in general. For Shklar, political philosophy had not contributed anything to understanding the catastrophe of World War II, but consisted of "an incantation of clichés which seem to have no relation to social experiences whose character is more sensed than expressed."[30] Shklar recognized such clichés above all in the cultural-critical apocalypticism that set the tone of political theory in the post-war period; there was nothing new or productive about these jeremiads on the failure of Enlightenment to Shklar, whose lines of descent she traced in her book.

After Utopia was a revised version of her dissertation, completed two years earlier in 1955, whose original title reflects the content much more precisely: *Fate and Futility*: *Two Themes in Contemporary Political Theory*.[31] Under the heading of "fate," she discussed Christian political thought, while "futility" was the basic tenor of what she called the "romanticism of defeat."[32] She treated Christian fatalism and Romantic defeatism, metonymically, as "the clearest expression of a contemporary mood," which saw itself in opposition to the Enlightenment and its optimism of progress, ideal of self-determination, and postulate of reason.[33] What they had in common, according to Shklar, was to articulate the "unhappy consciousness," that feeling of alienation in modernity as the incompatibility of subject and society that Hegel

[28]Judith N. Shklar, *After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), vii.

[29]Later she wrote that it had been chosen by her publisher. Shklar, "A Life of Learning," 274.

[30]Judith N. Shklar, "The Political Theory of Utopia: From Melancholy to Nostalgia," in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, 172.

[31]Judith N. Shklar, "Fate and Futility: Two Themes in Contemporary Political Theory," (PhD diss., Radcliffe College, 1955). See for more about the thesis Samuel Moyn's illuminating "Before—and Beyond—the Liberalism of Fear," in *Between Utopia and Realism*, ed. Ashenden/Hess, 24–46.

[32]In the dissertation, this term only appears twice, at the beginning and end of the thesis. Shklar, "Fate and Futility," 17, 420; in the reworked book, it is turned into a chapter heading and figures as its *leitmotif*. Shklar, *After Utopia*, chap. 4.

[33]Ibid., ix.

had described in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[34] While Christian fatalism (she mentions for instance Arendt's teacher Romano Guardini's *End of the Modern World*) could be traced back to the counter-enlightenment tradition of figures like Joseph de Maistre, the aestheticism of the German Romantics and their separation of self and world, genius and average person, had given rise to the Romanticism of defeat. Contributions to the understanding of the war or the Shoah or to a new conception of political theory could not be expected from either of them.

As far as the Romantics were concerned, Shklar counted José Ortega y Gasset, Aldous Huxley, and Gabriel Marcel among their representatives. But the most legitimate heir to the Romantic movement was existentialism. Alongside Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, whose purely situational, ahistorical "politics of 'extreme situations'" she rejected as reductive, she repeatedly named Karl Jaspers ("the most moderate, by far") and Martin Heidegger ("the most genuine Romantic of all").[35] Shklar's main criticism was aimed at their "account of the alienated soul" in modernity taken over from Hegel.[36] She wrote, in perfect application of the "art of interpretation as restatement" typical of her,[37] that they all combined contempt for science and technology with the elitism of the Romantic cult of genius:

> The outer world is crushing the unique individual. Society is depriving us of our selfhood. The entire social universe today is totalitarian, not just some political movements and some states. Technology and the masses are the conditions of life everywhere today, and these, forming the very essence of totalitarianism, are the epitome of all the forces in society that have always threatened the individual personality.[38]

This diagnosis of totalitarianism is, to Shklar, little more than a metaphysically pompous, philosophically hollow, and politically conservative Romantic cultural critique, which explains nothing at all. Shklar rejected the attested general crisis of modernity as purely speculative and insufficiently argued. Moreover, this romanticism thwarts development of a genuine political philosophy. Romanticism is anti- or apolitical, and Heidegger was her case in point. About his concept of "being," Shklar wrote that it "has nothing to do with the actual presence or absence of others. . . . Potentially 'the other' is, however, a danger to us in our quest for 'being.'" For her, he embodied the "core of all existentialist ethics," which amounts to authentic selfhood

[34]Ibid., 65; see in general for Shklar's reading of Hegel: Judith N. Shklar, *Freedom and Independence* (Cambridge u.a.: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

[35]Shklar, *After Utopia*, 149, 119, 116.

[36]Ibid., 108.

[37]George Kateb, "Foreword," in Shklar, *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, xiv.

[38]Shklar, *After Utopia*, 18.

as the only relevant value. "In no case is 'the other' an absolute end in himself."[39] The concern for existence is aestheticism; no political theory can be derived from such a solipsistic ethics.

Shklar seemed to agree with the harsh criticism of Heidegger that Arendt expressed in "What is Existential Philosophy?" In this 1946 essay, Arendt had not only castigated Heidegger's ingratiation towards the Nazi regime, but located this "failure of character"[40] in the solipsism of his philosophy, which was incapable of political judgment.[41] He was concerned only with his own self, and the "essential character of the Self is its absolute Self-ness [*Selbstischkeit*], its radical separation from all its fellows."[42] She, too, saw a parallel to German Romanticism: "Heidegger is really (let us hope) the last Romantic."[43]

But while Arendt contrasted Heidegger's self-centered with Jaspers's good existentialism—which was political because it was based on "communication"[44]—Shklar saw only a gradual difference between the two. Jaspers, to her, was also a romantic of defeat, who preferred to formulate a great metaphysical disappointment rather than articulating specificities. He spoke of the "'metaphysical guilt' which, according to Jaspers, we incur simply by being alive,"[45] rather than turning to the real victims and taking their perspective. As far as Jaspers was concerned, he did indeed, unlike Heidegger, see the self in connection with other selves—but only as enmeshed in an equally aestheticist relationship of "exceptional man" and "masses."[46]

In *After Utopia*, Shklar was not only concerned with the critique of political romanticism. As in almost all her writings, her strongest volleys were aimed against her own side. In her analysis of the Romanticism of defeat, she drew a negative heuristic that served to counter the "conservative liberalism" of her time, which "owes more to Burke than to Locke,"[47] with a liberalism that avoids these tendencies. Liberalism, she wrote, is in fact

[39]Ibid, 136.

[40]Hannah Arendt, "What is Existential Philosophy?," in *Essays in Understanding*, 187.

[41]Interestingly, Shklar exempts Heidegger from this reproach: "The entire romantic spirit of Heidegger's philosophy is apolitical, and especially remote from the life of a totalitarian state or party." Shklar, *After Utopia*, 148.

[42]Hannah Arendt, "What is Existential Philosophy?," 181.

[43]Ibid., 187. Admittedly, Arendt did not stick to this assessment and prohibited the translation of this text into German.

[44]Hannah Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts About Lessing," in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harvest, 1968), 3–32.

[45]Shklar, *After Utopia*, 123.

[46]Ibid., 133.

[47]Ibid., 221.

quite compatible with romanticism.[48] "Liberalism is a political philosophy, romanticism a *Weltanschauung*, a state of mind which can adapt itself to the most divergent types of political thought."[49] To drive romanticism out of liberalism, she drew out the contrasts between the two as sharply as possible: If the "basic problem of liberalism is the creation of an enlightened public opinion to secure the civil rights of individuals and to encourage the spontaneous forces of order in society itself," the "romantic makes a virtue of self-expression as an end in itself, and sees individuality as necessarily involving an opposition to prevailing social standards." If the "liberal fears majorities, because they may be too powerful to be just, and too ignorant to be wise," the "romantic is revolted by their docility, their indifference to genius, their undistinguished emotional life." In sum,

> The liberal sees only the dangers of power abused. That the state may not interfere with society is a concept of an entirely different order than the idea that a man's first duty is to develop an original personality. Majority rule and minority rights are the two central themes of liberal thought; the unique individual and his enemies, the masses, need never enter its considerations. The romantic does not offer society anything but his defiance. Liberalism, on the other hand, attempts to regulate the relations of the individual to society and the state, and of these two to each other, by law.[50]

In Shklar's analysis, the contrasts between liberalism and romanticism—equality versus exceptional existence, state power versus convention, personal freedom versus unique individuality—can be reduced to one: that of the majority as political and the masses as aesthetic quantity. In this larger project of a corrective critique of liberalism, Shklar now also took aim at Arendt. For it was precisely her talk of the "masses" that led Shklar to count Arendt among the romantic defeatists, at least by inclination.[51] Shklar bristled at Arendt's analysis of the "mob" in *Origins*, and she recognized in it the same romantic rejection of "the they" that Heidegger had formulated in *Being and Time*.[52] What the philistine was to the nineteenth-century romantic, the masses were to the romantic of the twentieth century:

> In romantic minds, the average and the Philistine have always been more or less identical. Today the masses are recognized as the new Phi-

[48]This thought is kept alive in her later writings: Judith N. Shklar, "Rights in the Liberal Tradition," in *The Bill of Rights and the Liberal Tradition*, ed. Timothy Fuller (Colorado Springs: Colorado College, 1992), 28.

[49]Shklar, *After Utopia*, 231.

[50]Ibid., 231–232.

[51]For a similar reading, see Gatta, *Rethinking Liberalism*, 54.

[52]Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 163–164.

> listia. Thus Hannah Arendt speaks of the totalitarian society as "the masses of co-ordinated Philistines" come together from every corner of society.[53]

But Shklar did not only sense elitist snobbery here, which she considered one of the greatest dangers of a liberal polity.[54] She considered Arendt's contempt for the "mob" to be an outgrowth of a sociological genealogy that could be traced back to Gustave Le Bon's racist mass psychology, but also expressed a political disappointment: Arendt, according to Shklar, was trying to "revise Marx with the help of Le Bon"[55] by replacing the category of class, which had proved untenable, with that of the masses. For Arendt, Shklar wrote,

> the impossibility of believing in the proletariat has led to a view that relegates the majority of men to a life of reasonless ferocity, which only some artificial restraint, such as class bonds, can control. With the end of Marxian certainties society has become strange, irrational, and unmanageable, and a new form of "unhappy consciousness" has been created, which again feels that the "world" is beyond salvation.[56]

Shklar found the conviction that one must reject the history of the West due to a "sense of cultural disaster"[57] no less in "Jaspers's disciple"[58] than in Jaspers himself or even in Heidegger, and she quoted the "Concluding Remarks" of *Origins*'s first edition to drive this point home:

> "Today we consider both history and nature to be alien to the essence of man. Neither any longer offers us that comprehensive whole in which we feel spiritually at home." Though we must now build our own nature and history without the aid of any eternal verities, our failures and successes are nothing to an indifferent nature and to a dead God. Whether we achieve or fail, we act "in the bitter realization that nothing has been promised us, no Messianic Age, no classless society, no paradise after death."[59]

For Shklar, the inevitable consequence of this disappointment was a turning away from concrete politics, towards an existentialist idea of political actors as romantic geniuses. Heroism and irrationalism become categories of politics that, much like the contempt of the "masses," had no sense of

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[53]Shklar, *After Utopia*, 159. Shklar here quotes Arendt, *Origins*, 337.

[54]Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, chap. 3.

[55]Shklar, *After Utopia*, 161.

[56]Ibid. 162.

[57]Ibid., viii.

[58]Ibid., 110.

[59]Ibid., 110–111; Shklar here quotes Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1st ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1951), 435–436.

the victims' perspective, which is simply ignored. But even worse than this, "victimhood has become a metaphysical category today."[60] The real victims—of politics, of violence, of discrimination—are left by the wayside because they have no meaning for the status of the heroic individual. At the end of her career, in *Ordinary Vices* and *The Faces of Injustice*, Shklar discussed the way victims are often talked about, which oscillates between heroization and incapacitation, condemnation and appropriation.[61] But already in *After Utopia* she pointed out how the assessment of violence and cruelty depends on the assessment of the victims' status. For the consequence of a metaphysical concept of the victim is to reject not 'mere' violence, "but 'comfortable' violence, violence from a distance, above all, reasoned violence."[62] Just like victimhood, violence is metaphysically relativized if instead of confronting its phenomenality from the perspective of the victim, one sees it as a transindividual event expressing the pathology of the present. Shklar considered Arendt's talk of violence's rationalization in totalitarianism to be mistaken if it is theoretically hypertrophied. For Arendt, "the 'logicality' of totalitarian ideology is so important a factor that she would call totalitarian government 'logocracy.' Abstract logic never appealed to a romantic."[63]

Like few other points, this assessment of victimhood and violence shows the "difference in metaphysical heat" that Axel Honneth identified between Shklar and Arendt.[64] What in Arendt's eyes was absolutely new, and what had ruptured the thread that connects us with the tradition,[65] was for Shklar a concrete, a political and moral-psychological problem. Neither in *After Utopia* nor in any other work did Shklar explicitly speak of the Shoah from which she escaped. Arendt's insistence on the profound break with history appeared to Shklar as a will to metaphysics, which she rejected much more radically than Arendt, who occasionally also called herself an anti-metaphysician.[66] What is more, as Katrina Forrester writes, for Shklar, "Arendt's were the musings of a mind obsessed with totalitarianism that

[60]Shklar, *After Utopia*, 112.

[61]Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, 23–32; Judith N. Shklar, *The Faces of Injustice* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1990).

[62]Shklar, *After Utopia*, 151. Such displacement of actual violence is still common, for instance in Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008); for a discussion of Shklar's impatience with arguments of that sort, see Hannes Bajohr, "The Sources of Liberal Normativity," in *Between Utopia and Realism,* ed. Ashenden/Hess, 158–178.

[63]Shklar, *After Utopia*, 151.

[64]Honneth, "Vorwort," 12.

[65]Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking, 1961), 14.

[66]Hannah Arendt, *Thinking*, vol. 1, The Life of the Mind (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 212; of course, Arendt followed Heidegger's project of

neglected to see that in the aftermath of evil we must return to a normal polity."[67] Arendt appears in this reading not only as one of those commentators who, in contemplating the greatest evil, forgets the lesser ones and, for fear of totalitarianism, threatens to become oppressive herself; she also runs the risk of losing sight of the necessity of concrete politics in general.

After surveying just one chapter of *After Utopia*, it should be clearer what Benhabib meant by Shklar reading Arendt "against the grain." Shklar interpreted Arendt as an existentialist romantic, an elitist snob, an oracular metaphysician, and a disappointed Marxist whose ideal is the heroic individual, and who does not see violence or cruelty as the ultimate evil, but rather the loss of individuality in modernity. That is, indeed, quite a lot. It was above all the heroic conception of politics that was a thorn in Shklar's side; for her, Arendt's celebration of action, especially as an expression of irreducible individuality as it is presented in *The Human Condition*, always runs the risk of paying less attention to its consequences than to the mere and empty fact of this action itself. Shklar's skepticism as to whether Arendt gave the necessary consideration to violence already indicates the difference in fundamental analytic categories.[68]

As much as Shklar spoke out against a defeatism in post-war political philosophy that responded to the experience of 'totalitarianism' with perplexity or nostalgia, she admitted that she herself could not offer a positive counter-model:

> The author shares in the spirit of the age to the extent of being neither able nor willing to build an original theory of politics. The fact is that it is next to impossible to believe strongly that the power of human reason expressing itself in political action is capable of achieving its ends. . . . That more adequate explanations may well be impossible at the present time is one of the uncomfortable conclusions that emerge from this analysis.[69]

If Arendt and Shklar shared a deep pessimism about the future of political theory—for both of them there is "no Messianic Age, no classless society, no paradise after death"—the main difference is how to respond to this dis-

"overcoming metaphysics," and for Shklar, Heidegger is the greatest metaphysician of all, Arendt, 9.

[67]Forrester, "Hope and Memory," 617. That this may be an overstatement, I have shown in part I of this essay.

[68]Curiously, Shklar nowhere speaks of Arendt's book *On Violence* (San Diego et al.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), in which she draws a rather subtle distinction between violence, force, and power.

[69]Shklar, *After Utopia*, ix.

appointment. Shklar took a politically skeptical stance,[70] though without abandoning her belief in the project of the Enlightenment, "its humanitarianism, its very profound sense of justice,"[71] even if she saw at this point in time only the possibility to pursue it negatively, correcting its deviations. Arendt, on the other hand, according to Shklar, turned completely away from modernity and toward "the only age which she really admires; that is, the intellectual era that begins with Plato and ends with St. Augustine."[72]

IV. The Glory of Antiquity

In *After Utopia*, Shklar had refused to develop a positive vision of political theory, but on the basis of her criticism of Arendt and other Romantics, she at least developed the minimal conditions for such a non-romantic theory: it should be liberal and anti-metaphysical, attach importance to defensive rights and the protection of the individual, convey a democratic-proceduralist rather than a heroic-aesthetic understanding of politics, and it must be essentially centered around the perspective of the victim. Above all, however, it should turn to the world as it is today and as it once was, in the sense of political realism, in order to form norms of political action for the present and to test these norms against history. Shklar also developed this realistic imperative in her engagement with Arendt. To accuse Arendt, for whom the *amor mundi* was the basic motivation of politics,[73] of a lack of interest in the world was once again a reading against the grain.

In Shklar's interpretation, Arendt strives for an ideal she knows to be unattainable, the value of which consists only in belittling the present, instead of showing it a viable path into the future. She finds such an ideal in antiquity, and *The Human Condition* in particular shows a deep respect for the Graeco-Roman tradition of political thought. Shklar saw here the basis of a systematic Manichaeism that marks Arendt's entire philosophy, so that there are actually "two Miss Arendts at work here."[74] One is the accomplished, nuanced intellectual historian of ancient philosophy, the other

[70]Shklar is a *political*, not an *epistemic* skeptic—she does not doubt the possibility of knowledge as such, but the resilience of political institutions—which allows her to maintain strong normative assumptions, see Bajohr, "The Sources of Liberal Normativity."

[71]Shklar, *After Utopia*, 11.

[72]Shklar, review of *Between Past and Future*, 286.

[73]Hannah Arendt, letter to Karl Jaspers dated August 6, 1955, in: Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Correspondence, 1926–1969* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 264.

[74]Shklar, review of *Between Past and Future*, 286.

is the broad-brush cultural critic of the present. The latter tends "to deal only in absolute contrasts, never in differences or nuances."[75]

Shklar articulated this double position in a 1963 review of Arendt's collection of essays *Between Past and Future*. In addition to her "appreciative and subtle concern for the philosophers of classical antiquity," Arendt expressed "an intense distaste for the present age and all that has contributed to it." This "contrast between the ancient and the modern is the unifying element" in her work and furnishes them "with a single structure: the brighter the glory of antiquity, the darker the failings of modernity."[76] There is always the danger that the knowledgeable interpretation of antiquity might be subordinated to the "condemnation of the present." Shklar insinuated here a rhetorical tactic of gearing the conceptual-historical analyses toward "demonstrating the novelty of this state of affairs in general, and especially the 'uniqueness' of its epitome, totalitarianism."[77]

Shklar, the critic of this epitome, was apprehensive. She held that Arendt's hidden agenda compelled her to overlook alternative, less heroic-aristocratic genealogies that offer more egalitarian interpretations better fit for the present. Shklar made this argument with reference to Arendt's essay "What is Authority?," in which she insists that "effective authority requires a hierarchical social order"—the trinity of religion, tradition and authority that Arendt recognized in the Roman Republic.[78] The danger of such an orientation towards Rome, according to Shklar, consists in "ignoring the possibilities of a traditionalism that is in no way authoritarian" and overlooking "the possibility of a non-hierarchical form of authority." Shklar contrasted Arendt's Roman leanings with Aristotle's "idea of a citizenry that ruled and was ruled in turn," which in this change of majorities could nevertheless honor the authority of the founding figure, in this case that of Solon.[79]

But Athens, too, had only limited normative validity for Shklar. Wherever Arendt praised Greece instead of Rome (and she often did), Shklar was also ready to object. She repeatedly identified blind spots in Arendt's Hellas worship, centrally in *American Citizenship*. In addition to disregarding the slavery that allowed the Athenian upper class to engage in politics in the first place, Arendt constructed her ideal participants in politics as heroic actors on the Agora. They, Shklar held, constituted a politically extreme position that equated "good citizenship" with political activity in general.

[75]Ibid., 288.

[76]Ibid., 286.

[77]Ibid., 292.

[78]Ibid. 290; Hannah Arendt, "What is Authority?," in *Between Past and Future*, 93.

[79]Shklar, review of *Between Past and Future*, 290.

These actors had "no serious interests apart from public activity,"[80] were not men *and* citizens (as Shklar had entitled her book about the republican Rousseau),[81] but humans only *insofar* as they were citizens.

Like Arendt, Shklar always emphasized the distinction between the spheres of the public and the private, championed in *The Human Condition*, as an essential criterion of the political.[82] But unlike Arendt—who Bonnie Honig has accused of "ontologizing" these realms, a move that is questionable from a feminist perspective[83]—Shklar insisted that the line between the public and the private is historically contingent and politically negotiable.[84] Whereas Arendt limited politics to the active involvement in the public sphere and wanted to keep it free from all interference by private or social interests, Shklar recognized this depoliticization of the private sphere as itself a source of potential injustice.[85] This blindness to the forms of injustice that occur beyond the public's view, makes it impossible to create the fundamental conditions for the exercise of freedom in the first place. This was Shklar's main argument for the welfare state. Arendt, who regarded the "social question" in *On Revolution* as a political aberration,[86] was much more lukewarm about it. For the same reason, Shklar reacted almost with disgust to the lack of understanding for the civil rights movement that emanated from Arendt's essay on Little Rock.[87] One may thus conclude: With her nuanced sense of the political status of the private, which is also expressed in her late preoccupation with the power of personal conscience,[88] Shklar is a more inspiring source for feminist theory and progressive politics than Arendt.[89]

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[80]Judith N. Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 11.

[81]Judith N. Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau's Social Theory*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[82]Arendt, *Human Condition*, chap. 1.

[83]Bonnie Honig, "Towards an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity," in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 144.

[84]Shklar, "Liberalism of Fear," 6; the same argument is at the basis of Shklar's claim that the line between misfortune and injustice is historically moveable, see Shklar, *Faces of Injustice*.

[85]Shklar, *Faces of Injustice*, 66.

[86]Hannah Arendt, "On Revolution" (London: Penguin, 1990), chap. 2.

[87]Hannah Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, 193–213; Shklar, "Arendt as Pariah," 373.

[88]Judith N. Shklar, "Conscience and Liberty," in *On Political Obligation*, ed. Samantha Ashenden and Andreas Hess (Yale University Press, 2019), 1–14.

[89]That Shklar's greater sensitivity on questions of power makes her a good reference for emancipatory politics should not deny the fact that for a long time she

Arendt's republicanism, built on a demanding concept of virtue, seemed to Shklar too ambitious a model of citizenship for modern liberal polities—"Ordinary active or good citizens are certainly not ideal or perfect citizens; they just try to live up to the recognized demands of a representative democracy"[90]—but the demand for the always deliberative, radically democratic polity implied therein was itself problematic, overlooking its dangers in addition to the questions of its practicability. This "citizenship for members of a master-class" presupposed a state so homogeneous, exclusive, pedagogical, and antiegalitarian in its obligation to coherence between "well-bred gentlemen" that it was ultimately just as unsuitable for modern pluralistic and liberal democracies as the Roman belief in authority.[91] For Axel Honneth, "in the sum of Shklar's purely interpretative objections, a political-moral alternative emerges underneath the surface, which amounts to the defense of democratic egalitarianism against an aristocratically-inflected republicanism."[92]

Again, Shklar criticized Arendt's romantic inclinations, which she felt had no sense for those political institutions and procedures that protect the individual from exposure to the public and its dangers. These are not mere philological but rather substantial corrections, which are wrapped in a critique that was directed against Arendt's use of history. For Shklar, the concentration on a venerable past pushed into the far distance the possibility that, as Honneth puts it, "a vital public sphere and a civil democracy can also be established on the grounds of a modern work-oriented society."[93]

V. Radical Traditionalism

For Shklar, this normative consequence for political theory with regard to the present grew directly from Arendt's use of history. Shklar expressed this idea in an essay she originally presented in 1976 at the commemora-

remained deeply skeptical about feminist issues, since, as she put it in her only autobiographical text, "It is not particularly flattering to be constantly exhibited as the 'first' woman to have done this or that, just like a prize pig at a country fair. . . . Which is one of the reasons why I am not a real feminist. But it is not the only one. The idea of joining a movement and submitting to a collective belief system strikes me as a betrayal of intellectual values." Shklar, "A Life of Learning," 271. Shklar's individualism made her skeptical towards any type of solidarity, even that between women. But she also had something of a change of heart on this matter. In *The Faces of Injustice* (66–68), published three years later, she seems to affirm the techno-feminism of Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, New York: Bantam, 1970.

[90]Shklar, *American Citizenship*, 11.

[91]Ibid., 29–30.

[92]Honneth, "Flucht," 985.

[93]Ibid.

tion of the first anniversary of Arendt's death.[94] It belongs—along with the reverent and respectful obituary "The Triumph of Hannah Arendt," which she wrote for *The New Republic in* 1975[95]—to one of her more positive texts on Arendt, even if Shklar presented here as a virtue what she had described in her review as a shortcoming. With recourse to Nietzsche, Shklar counted Arendt among the "monumental historians" who, at their best, remind us "that great deeds were performed by notable men and that what was once feasible is at least possible again."[96]

As much as Shklar appreciated this optimistic aspect, she also saw the problem of trying to reconcile the monumental historiography with the critical one. According to Nietzsche, critical historiography—the scholarly engagement with history, concerned with the verification of sources and facts—hedges monumental historiography, and serves "to shatter and dissolve" the past; this destruction of the burden of tradition is necessary "to live" and not to be weighed down by history.[97] For Shklar, this critical, hedging function seemed rather a matter of credibility. Arendt's attack on the alleged value-freedom of professional historiography is well known.[98] Without critical historiography, however, Shklar considered the invocation of the past to be mere rhetoric that has no relevance to the present. But since Arendt believed tradition and the authority legitimizing a community to be irretrievably lost, only a completely new foundation would do. In fact, this is the program in Arendt's *On Revolution*—this time inspired less by Athens than Philadelphia.

Shklar called it at once "radical and traditional" to hope for a new reality in the normative ideal of the past.[99] But she did not quite seem to believe that Arendt really wanted to see her enthusiasm for the revolution transformed into the present. Without expressing it in so many words, Shklar doubted that Arendt's interest in the Hungarian uprising, which she followed with "a wishful participation that borders closely on enthusiasm" (Kant), was

[94]Arendt's close friend Hans Jonas had asked her to contribute; in addition, Sheldon Wolin and Hans Morgenthau spoke at the memorial service which was held at the New School of Social Research. The speeches appeared in *Social Research* 44, no. 1 (1977).

[95]Shklar, "Hannah Arendt's Triumph."

[96]Shklar, "Rethinking the Past," 353.

[97]Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 21.

[98]See her response to Eric Voeglin's critique of *Origins*, where she explains her skepticism of the *sina ire et studio*: Such historiography always tends toward preservation, whereas in the case of totalitarianism historians "had to write in a destructive way and to write history for purposes of destruction is somehow a contradiction in terms." Hannah Arendt, "A Reply to Eric Voegelin," in *Essays in Understanding*, 402.

[99]Shklar, "Rethinking the Past," 356.

indeed a practical one. Instead, Shklar saw Arendt's theory of revolution simply as a new slight against the present. Despite her interest in the events of 1956, Arendt's idea of revolution, too, was a monumentalist notion. It referred solely to the past, Shklar argues, since it had been implemented properly only once, in the American Revolution, without a real chance of being restored anytime soon.

Once again, Shklar, who since the mid-1970s had dealt intensively with the political history of the United States,[100] called for the mediation of critical historiography, which should be balanced against Arendt's "eccentric" interpretation of the facts.[101] In Arendt's reading of the revolutionary events from 1776 and onward, Shklar saw these facts presented in an almost amateurishly abridged form. Only half of the story is told in *On Revolution*. It refers to the promise of freedom but ignores its implementation. For Shklar, the American Revolution did not end with the wars against the British or the founding of the state, but was only brought to an end with the Civil War, in which slavery, the greatest contradiction to the freedom proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, was at least nominally overcome.[102] The idealization of the American Revolution, Shklar held, amounted to a suppression of this revolution's original sin and, once again, lacked critical historiography.

For this reason, Shklar did not consider revolution—understood as the permanent possibility of re-foundation as Arendt saw it—to be relevant to current politics. For Arendt, if "constitutions, laws and institutions that [people] establish are viable for as long as the power of living action, once generated, persists in them,"[103] this was already too demanding and almost utopian a claim for Shklar. For her, it was less an instruction for the present than an idea "to nourish us in a very dry season."[104] Shklar thus cast Arendt's normative project in *On Revolution*, especially its use of history, as primarily *therapeutic*; political it was not. In her longest and most acerbic essay on Arendt, Shklar called it simply an "awful book."[105] This text does

[100]See Hannes Bajohr, "Judith N. Shklar, 1928–1992: Eine werkbiografische Skizze," in Shklar, *Ganz normale Laster*, 311–317. Some of Shklar's essays on American political theory are collected in Judith N. Shklar, *Redeeming Americal Political Thought*, ed. Stanley Hoffmann and Dennis F. Thompson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[101]Shklar, "Rethinking the Past," 357.

[102]Shklar, *American Citizenship*.

[103]Hannah Arendt, *Über die Revolution* (Munich: Piper, 1986), 227. Curiously, this sentence only appears in the German translation of *On Revolution*, which Arendt prepared herself; it immediately precedes the sentence "There is an element of the world-building capacity of man in the human faculty of making and keeping promises" in the American version, Arendt, "On Revolution," 176.

[104]Shklar, "Rethinking the Past," 356.

[105]Shklar, "Arendt as Pariah," 374.

not only address intellectual matters. As Shklar's apparent last word on Arendt, it ends in a psychological profile.

VI. Pariahdom as Self-Deception

The review essay "Hannah Arendt as Pariah," which Shklar wrote in 1983 about the first major biography of Arendt by the latter's student Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, is hardly to be surpassed in its polemic fervor. Here, the constructive correction became a devastating fundamental critique. For Shklar, it was also an opportunity to list the accusations against Arendt that she had collected over a quarter of a century in a concentrated manner: Again, she faulted the instrumentalization of history, the theory of the masses and the mob, the tendency toward romanticism, and finally the closeness to Marx, which Young-Bruehl attributed to the Spartacist past of Arendt's husband Heinrich Blücher. Now, however, the look back onto a life told in great detail allowed Shklar to bring forward a psychological explanation for these attitudes. The title puts it succinctly: Arendt always wanted to be a pariah, never a parvenu.[106]

The distinction between pariah and parvenu stems of course from Arendt's book *Rahel Varnhagen,* begun as a habilitation thesis before her flight from Germany but only published in 1957.[107] Against the perpetual failure of Jewish assimilation, which she recognized in Rahel's efforts to gain acceptance, Arendt consciously chose an outsider existence—pariahdom as a way of life.[108] From the perspective of Jewish identity, Shklar respected the basic motivation of not wanting to be a passive victim. But the resulting demand for personal heroism and a "post-Nietzschean philosophizing"[109] reflected in a fashionable existentialism pointed the way to an attitude whose pride, snobbery, and injustice Shklar saw scandalously reflected in *Eichmann in Jerusalem.*

After the publication of this book, many found it impossible to approach Arendt neutrally, be it intellectually or personally. In addition to the book's sarcastic tone and thin factual basis, which mostly relied on Raul

[106]For a discussion of this essay that pays particular attention to the legal aspects of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in comparison to Shklar's own *Legalism*, see Seyla Benhabib, "Legalism and Its Paradoxes in Judith Shklar's Work," in *Exile, Statelessness, and Migration: Playing Chess with History from Hannah Arendt to Isaiah Berlin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 125–144.

[107]Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

[108]The best discussion of Arendt's take on Rahel remains that found in Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt: New Edition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

[109]Shklar, "Arendt as Pariah," 368.

Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Arendt's readers objected to her accusation that the *Judenräte* had willingly assisted in the organization of the Shoah. "A sour anti-Zionism nourished by resentment" was Manès Sperber's verdict on the book's motivation, proving "how far she had distanced herself from her people."[110] Arendt's formerly close friend Gershom Scholem also accused her of a lack of "ahavat Yisrael," love for the Jewish people.[111] Shklar offered a more complex explanation: The root of Arendt's analysis was not lack of love—despite accusations to the contrary, the book was not anti-Semitic, Shklar says—but an insurmountably high moral standard, which even transposed the struggle between parvenu and pariah into the extermination camps. This was close to Hans Blumenberg's judgment that a "moral rigorism" was at work here.[112] Arendt's need to see the Jews as more than victims turned into contempt for them, Shklar believed: "Why, she asked, had the East European Jews not behaved like Homeric heroes? . . . Why had they left no gallant myth for us?"[113]

For Shklar, Arendt wanted to be a "representative woman."[114] Just as Goethe was, in Emerson's eyes, the ideal type of "The Writer,"[115] Arendt had resolved, she seemed to say, to be "The Jew." But, as Shklar pointed out, she represented only a small minority of the American Jewish population, that is, the German Jews who emigrated before or during the Second World War. Perhaps this is the essay's harshest accusation: that of identity-based self-deception. Shklar spoke with honest admiration of Arendt's *Bildung*, but it was also a testimony of her assimilation into German society, which belied the self-image of the pariah. Further, Shklar held, Arendt had no connection to the lived experience of Jews in the USA—unlike Shklar, who also spoke Yiddish and Hebrew—and understood Jewishness as an "act of personal defiance and not a matter of actively maintaining a cultural and religious tradition with its own rites and patterns of speech."[116] Therefore, she saw no contradiction between her self-identification as Jewish and her contempt

[110]Manés Sperber, "Churban oder Die unfaßbare Gewißheit," in *Die Kontroverse: Hannah Arendt, Eichmann und die Juden* (Munich: Nymphenburger, 1964), 21, 30.

[111]Gershom Scholem, Letter to Hannah Arendt, June 23, 1963, in *The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem*, ed. Marie Luise Knott and Anthony David (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 202.

[112]Hans Blumenberg, *Rigorism of Truth: "Moses the Egyptian" and Other Writings on Freud and Arendt*, trans. Joe Paul Kroll (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018). In contrast to Blumenberg, who also describes rigorism as a personal attitude, namely love of truth, Shklar held: "Truth was not her object." Shklar, "Arendt as Pariah," 373.

[113]Shklar, "Arendt as Pariah," 372.

[114]Ibid., 362.

[115]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Representative Men: Seven Lectures," in *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 611–762.

[116]Shklar, "Arendt as Pariah," 364.

for the Eastern European Jews. Herein lies Shklar's unspoken suspicion that Arendt was so absorbed in her pariah ethos that she even wanted to be a pariah against Judaism. This culminated in the almost grotesque insinuation that she was actually a crypto-Catholic, a conclusion Shklar drew from Arendt's interest in Augustine, her proximity to some Catholic institutions and journals, and a "cloying and sentimental essay on John XIII."[117] Such judgments have lead commentators to read this essay as the "most drastic example of the deep resentment in the Jewish community" towards *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.[118]

Shklar also criticized Arendt's ignorance when it came to legal thought. Arendt had little new to say about the essential questions of political theory in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, "where they are discussed in a derivative and amateurish way. Legal theory was not her forte."[119] Shklar's own book *Legalism*, published too early to deal directly with Arendt's report, was based on the Nuremberg and Tokyo War Crimes Trials, and provided just this discussion about legal theory she saw missing in the *Eichmann* book. *Legalism* was a critique of the juridical class's belief in an isolated realm of law, considering law, morals, and politics as strictly separate spheres, instead of assuming a continuum between them. Shklar thus refuted the common defense that Nazi criminals merely obeyed valid laws. But this interpretation also allowed her to make the political, especially liberal, benefit of such trials the criterion of their expediency. In this way she could forgo the dramatic, but from a skeptical perspective questionable invocation of an "order of mankind," which Arendt formulated in her fictitious judgment of Eichmann at the end of her book.[120]

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[117]Ibid., 369–370; Shklar refers to Hannah Arendt, "Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli: A Christian on St. Peter's Chair from 1958 to 1963," in *Men in Dark Times*, 57–69.

[118]Bethania Assy, "Eichmann in Jerusalem," in *Arendt-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. Wolfgang Heuer, Bernd Heiter, and Stefanie Rosenmüller (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2011), 94.

[119]Shklar, "Arendt as Pariah," 372.

[120]See for a discussion of *Legalism*, which in the last decade has become somewhat of a rediscovered classic, Samuel Moyn, "Judith Shklar versus the International Criminal Court," *Humanity* 4, no. 3 (2013): 473–500; Kamila Stullerova, "Rethinking Human Rights," *International Politics* 50, no. 5 (2013): 686–705; Tiphaine Dickson, "Shklar's Legalism and the Liberal Paradox," *Constellations* 22, no. 2 (2015): 188–198; Seyla Benhabib and Paul Linden-Retek, "Judith Shklar's Critique of Legalism," SSRN, 2018; Christof Royer, "International Criminal Justice Between Scylla and Charybdis," *Human Rights Review* 18, no. 4 (2017): 395–416. A helpful discussion of Shklar's in contrast to Arendt's work is to be found in Benhabib, "Legalism and Its Paradoxes in Judith Shklar's Work."

VII. Returning to Kant

Even in so withering an appraisal as "Hannah Arendt as Pariah," Shklar demonstrated a basic respect for her elder. The harsh moral judgment was not, in fact, Shklar's final word on Arendt. Besides Arendt's many genuine innovations for political theory,[121] Shklar especially appreciated her analysis of exile, which fed into Shklar own theorization of the matter. In "Obligation, Loyalty, Exile," Shklar's late meditation on the ties of exiles to their countries of arrival and origin, she derived from Arendt's "right to have rights" the necessity of offering citizenship to refugees.[122] Nevertheless, it remains questionable whether, as some have suggested, the shared biographical experience of exile created more than just a contingent proximity. For although both fled from the Nazis as German-speaking Jewish women, and although both had successful academic careers in the US, they were born a generation apart, and experienced these circumstances very differently. Together with her family, Shklar managed to escape from Riga via the Soviet Union and Japan to Canada in 1939 at the age of eleven, while Arendt, when she went to Paris in 1933 at the age of twenty-seven, was already in possession of a doctorate and a *Bildung* Shklar praised often (and always in German). That Arendt, unlike other exiles, did identify with her new country, Shklar saw as a sign of intellectual honesty, even if it sometimes resulted in overidentification.[123] Maybe this base respect was behind Shklar's conciliatory tone in the final text she wrote about Arendt. It was a return to a topic important to both of them: Immanuel Kant.

There is probably no author whom Shklar and Arendt both admired so much, though for different reasons: While Shklar drew from Kant's "Doctrine of Virtue" in the *Metaphysics of Morals* the best "account of what a perfect liberal would look like,"[124] Arendt believed she could find a theory of political judgment in his *Critique of Judgment*.[125] It is this belief, expressed in Arendt's posthumously published *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, that Shklar scrutinized in a short review she wrote for the *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* in 1984.[126] Like many readers of Arendt's lecture, Shklar expressed surprise at her statement that Kant did not develop a

[121]Shklar, "Rethinking the Past," 355.

[122]Judith N. Shklar, "Obligation, Loyalty, Exile," in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, 54.

[123]In contrast to Shklar, Arendt is often seen as somewhat of a proponent of American exceptionalism. See Hess, *American Social and Political Thought*, 12–13.

[124]Shklar, "Liberalism of Fear," 15; see for Shklar's Kantianism: Bajohr, "The Sources of Liberal Normativity," 170–172.

[125]Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[126]Shklar, review of *Lectures*.

political theory, and points to the *Critique of Practical Reason* as the obvious candidate. "In fairness to Arendt," Shklar was however quick to point out, "one ought at once say that this view depends upon her idiosyncratic notion of political activity, which is indeed remote from Kant's concerns."[127] And instead of venting her usual annoyance at this unusual concept of action—albeit without suppressing a nod to Arendt's "catastrophic view of history" and her notion of modernity as "post-Nietzschean desert of the heart and of the mind"—she proceeded to a rather philological critique of Arendt's interpretation of Kant's historical thought as too deterministic.

Arendt's interpretive fault was to read Kant as precursor to Hegel—with his "Idea for a Universal History With a Cosmopolitan Purpose" as a half-baked version of the argument put forward in Hegel's *Philosophy of History*—rather than as a decidedly non-teleological proponent of the rational belief that one cannot know about the course of history, but can only hope that it leads to a better future. For Shklar, such a view focused too exclusively on an aesthetic notion of judgment and the belief that "retrospective historical judging is like spectatorship. . . . It thus, in Arendt's view, redeems the slaughter of the ages. Hegel may have said something like that, but not Kant." Instead of believing "Periods of happiness are empty pages in history" for "the antithesis is missing,"[128] the essence of Kant's political theory was much more practical—and, one may say, Shklarian:

> We should impute progress to the species because it is psychologically important for us not to despair, and because the hypotheses of decline and immobility are even less plausible. There is no reason to assume that nature prevents us from becoming more civilized at least; on the contrary, one can recognize encouraging tendencies to its course. War, the awful instrument of our advance, may even have become so destructive that we may cease to practice it. Certainly this is likely enough to make it obligatory for a moral statesman to work for peace, federalism and republican freedom. The latter are what Kant's politics are all about. There are no remedies for present evil in a future absolution. We can imagine a natural or historical teleology but we cannot know it. What we can and should indeed dare to know, is our limitations. It is this knowledge that Kant hoped would free us enough to begin the real work of enlightenment, a project which Arendt regarded as a disaster.[129]

Against Arendt's belief in the broken thread of history, Shklar insisted on the unfinished project of the Enlightenment. Against Arendt's aestheticized

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[127]Ibid., 43.

[128]Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosoph of History*, trans. Leo Rauch (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988), 29.

[129]Shklar, review of *Lectures*, 44.

notion of political judgment, Shklar pitted her version of freedom—exemplified not in the heroic agent on the Agora, but the vigilant citizen who uses procedural means to fight for his rights and the rights of others.[130] Yet to Shklar, Arendt's return to Kant "ensured the sanity of her enterprise" and allowed her to once again engage in an intellectual rather than a psychological level of discourse. And so, the short review of Arendt's lectures on Kant operates in a mode of engagement that is critical in substance but collegial in tone.

Throughout her career, Shklar's relationship with Arendt was ambivalent, oscillating between harsh criticism, gentle correction, and honest admiration. There is no doubt that Arendt was important to Shklar—so important that she did not write about any of her contemporaries more often, whetting her own ideas against Arendt's. It was not least in opposition to Arendt—reading her against the grain—that Shklar developed her own conception of a realistic, anti-metaphysical liberalism which relies on a historically informed defensive proceduralism that does not champion hero actors, but citizens demanding their rights, and listens to the voice of the victims first.

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[130]Shklar, *Faces of Injustice*, 112–113; see also Benhabib, "Judith Shklar's Dystopic Liberalism." Following the "liberalism of rights" (as the most natural counterpart to her "liberalism of fear"), Shklar arguably saw demanding and fighting for one's rights and the rights of others as the basic and most effective type of political action. See Shklar, "Rights in the Liberal Tradition"; Judith N. Shklar, "Injustice, Injury, and Inequality: An Introduction," in *Justice and Equality Here and Now*, ed. Frank S. Lucash (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 13–33.

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