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Kant's Politics? An analysis of two modern interpretations of Kant's political philosophy

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Abstract

This paper critically examines two interpretations of Kant's political philosophy. The first presented by Ellis (2005) argues that Kant's politics is a theory for political change held together by a 'provisional right' through the notion of publicity and the judging public. In contrast, Arendt (1992) presents an interpretation of Kant's political philosophy in which the notion of publicity places the emphasis on the disinterested judging spectator, removed from politics. Arendt claims that Kant's politics are removed from the true realm of political action, and argues that Kant's notion of freedom relies upon freedom from coercion, rather than freedom in a particular political sense. This paper will show the manner in which Arendt's political theory exposes the limitations Kant's philosophy imposes upon the concept of political freedom, and hence more adequately assesses the application of Kant's philosophy to politics.

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Introduction

In *Kant's Politics* Ellis provides a new and insightful look at Kant's political philosophy in light of the contemporary debate surrounding deliberative democracy and its critics. Ellis argues that Kant's work contains 'a priori' concepts, which remain relevant to this day, and using an empirical contextual analysis - in the vein of Skinner's recent work on Hobbes - she examines what it was Kant wanted to achieve with his work (Karolis 2008, 111). In order to contrast Ellis' interpretation of Kant's political philosophy this paper will focus on Arendt's interpretation of Kant's politics. Arendt examines Kant's political philosophy in a series of lectures entitled *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. This work was published after her untimely death in order to shed light on her conception of judging that she would have written as the third part of her work *The Life of the Mind*, following 'Thinking' and 'Willing'. By firstly exploring Ellis' interpretation of Kant's Politics, and then critically exploring Arendt's interpretation of Kant's political philosophy. This paper will show that Arendt's superior political theory exposes the limitations Kant's philosophy imposes upon the concept of political freedom, and that Arendt more adequately assesses the application of Kant's philosophy to politics.

I

A new politics? - Ellis' interpretation of Kant's politics

Ellis claims that through his political publications Kant developed a novel theory of 'political transition', this political transition highlights the way change occurs in a political system over an extended period of time; with the driving force a common set of judgments, that is, "common political ideals" (Ellis 2005, x). The space in which the common ideals manifest themselves, is within the Kantian notion of publicity and public judgment residing in the 'republic of letters'; the reading public represented the scholarly debate of letters in Prussia in the late 18th Century. This republic of letters, Ellis claims, forms a public sphere in which the politics of change occurs. Ellis goes on to argue that Kant "is uniquely comfortable with the provisional and uncertain politics of transition" (Ellis 2005, 1). Ellis' notion of transition comes through her reading of Kant's political works, and the manner in which Kant concerned himself politically with the way in which states may progress through this public sphere; that is, from monarchical absolutism to republican self-rule.

For Ellis, in today's political climate - particularly with regard to the theoretical debates surrounding deliberative democracy - much of the world is in political transition, as indeed it was during the period in which Kant published; and as her reading of Kant places his theory in the "provisional nature of political institutions...[thus] focusing less on ideal outcomes than on the places where citizens gain the capacities needed to bring the promise of democratic freedom closer to reality" (Ellis 2005, 2), it is ideally suited to the concept of transition. The places in which citizens gain the capacity to bring about change, in Kant's life-time, was within the republic of letters. This public sphere was separate from the political machinations of monarchical system under which he lived, it was a scholarly debate, one which focused on the merits or otherwise of the French Revolution. Arendt

argues that Kant's conception of action comes from the political situation within the country he was living at the time. Action, in Kant's mind, could only conceivably be actions of the government; any other action would simply be a conspiracy to overthrow the government (Arendt 1992, 60). There simply was no political interaction between the government and its subjects in East Prussia at that time.

While Ellis rightly argues that any understanding of Kant's political theory must be held to account by his critical method; she goes on to claim "[that] Kant's political works bridge the gap left by his critical philosophy between freedom and nature" (Ellis 2005, 3). This, she argues, is through the idea of provisional right, in which institutions that may promote progress towards human justice are more important than the 'strictures of ideal justice'. Thus Kant's 'politics of transition' to a more free and democratic system, occurs through the "mediation between the norms that express Kantian freedom and the practices that exemplify human nature", rather than through the imposition of some ideal, as was the case during the French Revolution which he witnessed second hand (Ellis 2005, 3). These norms are debated and decided upon in Kant's public sphere by the interaction of the judging spectators, who must operate as a community (Kant 2006, 85-6).

Like Arendt, Ellis agrees that Kant did not write a definitive work of political theory (Ellis 2005, 5; Arendt 1992, 7; Jaspers 1957, 101); and so, Ellis takes an expositional approach to Kant's political philosophy examining a number of his key political works published later in his life. Three themes dominate Ellis' conception of Kant's political theory; publicity, the judging public and provisional right. These themes all attempt to elucidate Kant's politics as containing a 'worldly and pragmatic' commitment to human freedom. Ellis argues that Kant's publicity is a mechanism of change, an evolutionary tool that drives change in politics towards the ideal state. For Ellis, "Kant's concept of publicity as a motor of progress toward an ideal state is among his most important contributions to modern political theory" (Ellis 2005, 13). Ellis appears to be arguing that Kant's political theory lies in the means rather than the ends. That is, Kant's politics rests on his account of transition via the mechanism of publicity, rather than his theory of an ideal state. The other key concept is Kant's protest against any form of violence as a means of change. The consummate pacifist, Kant is against revolution in any form, and this influenced the way in which he judged human action (Ellis 2005; Arendt 1992). Kant argued that publicity should reveal the gaps between theory and practice, and this gap should never incite revolutionary change. Here the guiding principle for change resides in gradual reform, measured change as a means of political progress, with publicity acting as the catalyst for change (Ellis 2005, 15).

Part of this mechanism of publicity is the notion of the disinterested spectator; as Ellis elaborates, "Kant argues that...by publicizing the conclusions of reasonable and...disinterested observers, the free public sphere should contribute to gradual, state-led reform" (Ellis 2005, 15). The disinterested observer is a key concept to Kant's idea of judgment, and one that is heavily critiqued by modern philosophers such as Bourdieu (1998). This concept of disinterest is also connected to Kant's conception of freedom. In fact freedom provides the essential ingredient to the strength of disinterested publicity and its use of reasoned thought. As Kant himself states; "the public use of man's reason must

always be free, and it alone can bring enlightenment among men" (Kant 2006, 55). Thus freedom in the Kantian ideal of publicity, is the freedom given by the ruler(s) to their subjects, "to make public use of their reason" (Ellis 2005, 16).

Ellis' argument relies on Kant's political publications to solve a fundamental "incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature...and the domain of the concept of freedom" (Kant 2000, §II), confronted by Kant in the *Critique of Judgment*, and answered by the "recognition that our *practical* autonomy can only be achieved and sustained by our *free adoption* of the moral law" (Guyer 2006, 5). Man must thus create his own personal freedom, his autonomy, through willing and free acceptance of morality; this is Kant's moral philosophy. "In other words, man does not start out as what he *is*, but must make himself into what he *ought to be*" (Jaspers 1957, 102). Rather than set out to create the ideal state, Ellis argues that Kant creates the ideal space for public judgment through publicity. This publicity then establishes the 'provisional right', a pragmatic principle that allows for imperfect principles within a political system, in order to allow the movement toward a more ideal democratic state (Ellis 2005, 113-5). Kant's concept of 'provisional right' creates a system in which a standard of justice is maintained throughout the transition, a transition that "for Kant is an extremely long one" (Ellis 2005, 114). Due to the standard of justice, maintained by the 'provisional right', it is unnecessary to endure a Hobbesian state of nature during the transition (Ellis 2005, 114). A key concept within 'provisional right' is the free use of reason among spectators, that is, the aforementioned notion of publicity. Freedom, as Kant describes it, ties the a priori principles for the possibility of knowledge with the world of nature, in this way freedom gives purpose to our humanity.

"The concept of freedom is meant to actualise in the world of sense the purpose proposed by its laws, and consequentially nature must be so thought that the conformity to law of its form, at least harmonises with the possibility of the purposes to be effected in it according to laws of freedom" (Kant 2000, §II).

Ellis uses the argument that Kantian notions of freedom create their own political theory through Kant's political commentary in works such as *Perpetual Peace* and *Rechtstlehre*. While the antinomy of freedom and determinism formed a central part of Kant's Transcendental Dialectic in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, his work in *Judgment* bridged the gap between freedom and nature. While Ellis' central concern is "the problem of the transition to more perfect governance", that she describes as "a sub issue of the fundamental Kantian concern about bridging the gap between freedom and nature" (Ellis 2005, 7). Arendt's Lectures on Kant's political philosophy focus far more upon the concepts of freedom and judgment found within *The Critique of Judgment*. Before turning to Arendt's Lectures, there are a number of issues raised by Ellis that need to be addressed.

II

Kant's freedom – freedom from politics

It is important to explore Kant's notion of the disinterested spectator, that is freedom from

politics. Is Ellis right in asserting that freedom in Kant is more than freedom from political influence for the purpose of reasoned thought? That is, does it form an integral part of his political philosophy, as it does in his political philosophy in general? Ellis definitively states Kant's argument for freedom as the suggestion that "intellectual life, to be fully free, must be walled off from the practice of politics" (Ellis 2005, 23). It is in this realm, for Kant and so it would seem for Ellis, that arguments are to be judged by the universal principles of reason. And it is this universal application of reason that supplies the definitive legitimisation of the arguments within this realm. A key principle to be explored lies in the notion that this is freedom from politics, not freedom for politics. Consider the following summary of Ellis' position,

"In Kantian political theory, provisional right provides the standard by which existing political institutions may be judged; the public sphere provides the mechanism by which actual institutions may be improved" (Ellis 2005, 155).

One problem with Kant's concept of freedom resides in the following conceptual argument; "the human judges of right need to be isolated from all but the interests of reason, not only to ensure their freedom to reason from a possibly punishing government but also to prevent the corruption of their reason by the temptations of power itself" (Ellis 2005, 13). Ellis highlights Kant's political notion of freedom as freedom from power; freedom is, in Kantian terms, freedom from power, freedom from politics, and freedom from influence except in a socially long-term scale. The public realm in this definition is only that in which all are equal and are free from necessity and coercion (Ellis 2005, 17). The "mediating institution of the public sphere" is freedom; the long-term political effects are in nature (Ellis 2005, 24). This notion of freedom is one that stands in stark contrast to many others in political theory. For example Nietzsche argues against the social, justice or ethics as a basis for politics; "he denies that morality can serve as the basis for building a society" (Magnus & Higgins 1996, 120). Kant's politics inspires what Nietzsche would describe as a slave morality, which misappropriates on the Hellenic conception of freedom to inspire a man that "would rather will *nothingness* than *not will*" (Nietzsche 2000, §28).

Kant's social contract, as outlined in *Rechtslehre*² (Kant 1996), is an ideal of reason that provides the parameters for individual assessment and judgment, and the framework for obedience to the collective power. Political judgment is thus only provisional, and when combined with the normative ideals of the social contract, provides Kant's transitional theory of politics (Ellis 2005, 52). Ellis does not find any answer to Kant's politics in his *Critique of Pure Judgment* that attempts to bind the phenomena and noumena with the aesthetic appreciation of beauty in nature. Instead Ellis - in her reading of Kant's *Rechtslehre* - argues that "politics, and especially Kant's dynamic account of political transition, is about bridging the realm of freedom, represented by normative political principles grounded in ethics, and the realm of nature, represented by the pragmatic arena of actual political institutions" (Ellis 2005, 49). Is this notion of freedom one that we may directly attribute to Kant's political philosophy?

What we have discussed shows the way in which Ellis argues that for Kant, politics resides

² Part One of Kant's work *The Metaphysics of Morals*

in a collision of nature and freedom; she states that politics is "about the concrete effects of freely willed human action" (Ellis 2005, 63). Though this statement may be agreeable to a more pragmatic political theorist, it is hardly one that may be attributed to Kant; unless we divide the concrete effects from the freely willed human action with Kant's moral philosophy. Kantian ethics and arguments for human reason stand between this claim by Ellis of a direct link between effect and freely willed action. The closest Kant comes to bridging this divide is the, "Freely willed action, such as public judgment in favour of French revolutionary ideals expressed by Prussians at some personal risk, [as] the motive force behind substantial political progress" (Ellis 2005, 66). As shall be argued below, according to Arendt, this creates an anti-political theory of freedom.

It is useful here to further elaborate on what Ellis is describing in her concept of provisional right and how she attributes this to Kant. Furthermore, we may question how useful the concept of provisional right is to normative political change. "Kant's principle of provisional right recommends that existing institutions be judged according to whether they are consistent with the continued possibility of progress, rather than by direct comparison with some set of ideal norms" (Ellis 2005, 9). Or put another way; "Provisional right calls for judgment according to the maxim of preserving the possibility of progress toward the just state" (Ellis 2005, 70). This politically normative ideal is certainly useful to some degree when examining politics in an empirical fashion; it fails conclusively however in theoretically explaining violence, war and revolution. Provisional right is an ideal in itself, and like all ideals, may be challenged by conflict and agonism. Once again Ellis relies upon Kant's gradual progression - his notion of teleological progress - as carrying the flag of freedom and the cause of political right. Kant's public sphere provides the guidance while "provisional right provides the standard of justice applicable during the transition" (Ellis 2005, 114).

It would seem that freedom is a noumenal concept beyond the limits of particular experience in Kant's concept of provisional right, as readily as it was in his antinomy between freedom and nature. It is "Kant's attempt in the realm of law to achieve a connection, in Habermas's words, between facts and norms, analogous to the public sphere in politics or teleology in human history" (Ellis 2005, 116). The moral law becomes the only reasonable motivation behind human free will, the only factor that may stand the test of historical public judgment - in Kant's own words from *Critique of Practical Reason*; "the incentives of the human will (and the will of every created rational being) can never be anything other than the moral law" (Kant 1996, 5:72). This again demonstrates the undeniable connection between Kantian ethics and any theory of freedom in his politics. And so we confront the chasm of what we can know as representation, and what we may never know - noumena; Kant's theory of freedom resides in the noumenal realm - the unknown unknowable. Our knowledge of our world is reduced to our perspective, and thus so is our knowledge of freedom reduced to the representation of nature. As Ellis herself describes, "Kant would say that we can know freedom only indirectly, as the necessary condition of the moral law within us...knowledge of freedom's causality is clearly impossible" (Ellis 2005, 153).

What Ellis is arguing is that though Kant assigns historical determinism or teleology to the

phenomenal representation of freedom, "we must presume a causality for freedom that we can never know" (Ellis 2005, 177). In the words of Hegel; "According to Kant, the things that we know about are to us appearances only and we can never know their essential nature...[thus] the true statement of the case is rather as follows. The things of which we have direct consciousness are mere phenomena not for us, but in their own nature" (Hegel 1892, 93-4). This problematic of freedom ties Kant to the concept of the disinterested spectator as the protagonist of politics in Ellis' theory, rather than the actor as the protagonist of politics in Arendt's political theory.

Ellis makes a critical examination of Arendt's interpretation of Kant's political philosophy; admitting that, "in Kant's politics disinterestedness protects the power of public judgment from the corruption of power..[and] authoritative political judgment must be devoid of all but the most universal interest." Ellis attempts to wrest some semblance of influence from this divide of publicity and politics by claiming that, "once the judgments are made, they may well have concrete political effects" (Ellis 2005, 54-5). Ellis does not recognise Arendt's key concept in political theory - "The *raison d'etre* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action" (Arendt 1998, 143).

III

Arendt's analysis of Kant's Political Philosophy

Arendt, in her lectures on Kant's political philosophy, argues that he had formed politically significant theories during his work on the three critiques, particularly in *The Critique of Judgment* (Arendt 1992). She claims that Kant's 'political writings', written late in Kant's life, and which some theorists rely upon to attribute certain notions of political philosophy to Kant, are unreliable (Arendt 1992, 7-10). Arendt looks to notions developed in Kant's philosophy as a whole, rather than those labeled under the rubric of political philosophy, in order to establish a coherent doctrine of political philosophy (1992, 31). To begin her exposition, Arendt finds particular emphasis on the political aspects of man (sic)³ in Kant's third critique.

The first part of *The Critique of Judgment*, Arendt claims, deals with the necessary sociability of man, men rely upon others for not only their physical needs, but more importantly for the function of the mind itself (1992, 10). The second part of *The Critique of Judgment*, Arendt claims, focuses upon why it is necessary for man to exist at all; Kant answers this question with the notion of purposive or intentional being (1992, 13). The links within the third critique between these two central themes, Arendt argues, center on a notion of the particular; human judgment deals with particulars, and the way in which human reason cannot derive particulars from nature (1992, 13-14). Thus, as far as Arendt was concerned, the following topics, addressed by Kant in *The Critique of Judgment*, are "of eminent political significance" (1992, 14).

³ Arendt, throughout her life, referred to man and men, rather than woman, person or mankind. As we are discussing Arendtian concepts of political theory we will use her terminology throughout. I would like to stress that this is not an indication of any particular concept of the role of gender in politics.

“...the particular, whether a fact of nature or an event in history; the faculty of judgment as the faculty of man’s mind to deal with it; sociability of men as the condition of the functioning of this faculty, that is, the insight that men are dependent on their fellow men not only because of their having a body and their physical needs but precisely for their mental faculties” (1992, 14).

Arendt argues that Kant’s interest in “constitutional and institutional questions” occurred late in his life, that is around the time of the French Revolution, when he was sixty-five; and that in such works as *The Contest of the Faculties*, published in 1798 six years before his death, there is “clear evidence of his mind’s deterioration” (1992, 15). A key attitude that relates to this later interest is the notion that “the problem of setting up a state can be solved even by a nation of devils” (Kant 2006, 112), or as Arendt describes, “that a bad man can be a good citizen in a good state” (1992, 17). This is related to a belief that one could not challenge the common interest, that is the common sense of morality; publicly (Arendt 1992, 17). Arendt argues that Kant did not rely upon changing the morality of the individual to change society; rather there was simply a reliance on political institutions and publicity. Thus, Arendt argues, “‘Publicity’ is one of the key concepts of Kant’s political thinking, and it indicates his conviction that evil thoughts are secret by definition” (1992, 18). There is a fundamental distinction at work here between Arendt’s concept of Kantian publicity, and the concept attributed to him by Ellis.

Arendt points out that nowhere in Kant’s writings is there space for the Arendtian political ideal of action (1992, 19). Despite Kant’s reference to the necessity of the sociability of people, “he does not know either a faculty or a need for *action*” (Arendt 1992, 19). Rather Arendt claims that Kant has attributed three notions to the idea of man and the conception of the ‘affairs of men’, “human species and its progress...man as moral being and an end in himself...and men in the plural, whose true end is sociability” (1992, 26). It is this idea, or ideal, of sociability that Ellis attributes to ‘Kant’s Politics’, and it is here that Arendt finds a gap in Kant’s political philosophy, the distinction could not be more apparent. The Kantian aspect of sociability that Arendt distinguishes is the necessity for human reason to play a part in the plurality of man. Kant does not require Philosopher-Kings, however he requires his King to listen to his philosophers (Arendt 1992, 29).

The notion of ‘publicity’ highlighted by Arendt and many years later highlighted for different reasons by Ellis, comes from a central tenet of Kant’s philosophical thought, that critical thinking must be completely exposed to “the test of free and open examination” (Kant in Arendt 1992, 39). Arendt points out that the examination of critical thinking occurs in the realm of letters, again later re-established by Ellis; thus Arendt argues that Kant’s notion of political freedom remains ‘unequivocal and consistent’ in all Kant’s publications as the ability to use one’s reason in public (1992, 39). Arendt establishes this view of political freedom in Kant through a holistic reading of Kant’s philosophy, and again points to *The Critique of Judgment* as the point at which “Kant demanded...of judgments...[a] ‘general communicability’” (1992, 40). Arendt argues this is the view of the ‘philosopher or thinker’ not the ‘political man’, and that the notion of publicity was for critical examination of reason. Though Kant was alone among philosophers as believing that community was a prerequisite for thought,

“...we may safely say that the external power which deprives man of the freedom to communicate his thoughts publicly also takes away his freedom to think, the only treasure left to us in our civic life and through which alone there may be a remedy against all evils of the present state of affairs” (Kant 2006, 247)⁴.

Is this enlargement of reason through the publicity of critical thinking indicative of some notion of the accountability of political actors, such as modern notions of accountability today – that is, does it relate to Arendt’s (1998) notion of action in politics – or is it “merely the standpoint of the spectator?” (Arendt 1992, 44). To answer this question, Arendt examines Kant’s writings on the French Revolution, and finds contradictions in his views. As noted by Ellis, Arendt highlights Kant’s attitude that the importance of events such as the French Revolution is found in the attitude of the spectator; that is “their reaction to the event proves the moral character of mankind” (Arendt 1992, 46). However, Kant reviled against the very notion of revolution, which ‘at all times is unjust’. A point brought forth by Kant in *The Contest of the Faculties* (2006, 184) and *Perpetual Peace* (2006, 116-125). There is a clear difference between the manner in which one should apply the faculty of judgment and the way in which one should act.

The dichotomy at work here is between the morality of the self, and the politics of the community; Kant is bound to the morality of the self and thus cannot become involved in the action that describes the politics of the community. As Kant describes in *The Critique of Judgment*, judgments are a matter of taste not sight, and thus rely on the spectator not the actor. Thus the "disinterested delight (*uninteressiertes Wohlgefallen*)" becomes the judgment of the public spectator in his *Critique of Judgment* where Kant creates the Actor and the Spectator (Arendt 1992, 62). For Kant, the spectator has the faculty of taste in order to judge the spectacle. "The public realm is constituted by...the spectators...and the spectator creates the space without which no such objects would occur" (Arendt 1992, 63). There is a critical distinction at work here, one that goes to the heart of Kant’s political philosophy, firstly, Kant claims that the spectator and not the actor, has the overarching knowledge of what is truly happening, and what is at stake; secondly, rather than admit that evil must be resisted, even at the risk of doing some evil, Kant believes that evil is, in its nature, self-destructive (Arendt 1992, 51-5; Kant 2006, 89). Kant’s belief was that;

“War brings about progress...And war even brings about progress toward peace, war is so awful that, the more awful it gets, the more likely it is that men will become reasonable and work toward international agreements that will lead them eventually to peace” (Arendt 1992, 54).

Arendt’s familiar distinction of the spectator and actor are used to illustrate the manner in which she has interpreted Kant. In Kant’s philosophy, the spectator is privileged in their opinion of the action of those acting in the political arena; they are not swayed by the call of fame, and are impartial in their ability to judge the actor’s actions – in the same way the historian judges the actions of those past (Arendt 1992, 55; 1998, 192). In order to better understand Kant’s distinction between the spectator and actor, Arendt calls upon *The*

⁴ From Kant’s work *What is Orientation in Thinking?* First published in 1786

Critique of Judgment, in which Kant argues that in the production of art, taste (that is judgment) disciplines genius. In other words, Kant subordinates the act of genius to the judgment of the critic (Kant 2000, §50). In political terms, that is, in terms of theory and practice, Kant distinguishes the public realm as being “constituted by critics and spectators, not by the actors or makers...the spectator is not involved in the act, but he is always involved with fellow spectators” (Arendt 1992, 63).

Kant makes this distinction because he is concerned with the space in which we may make use of reason, and reason can only be used, according to Kant, under the conditions of impartiality. That is, impartiality in the sense of not being involved in the action (disinterested delight), and having a view of the whole; which the individual actor is incapable of doing. In passing judgment we still require others, and their possible judgment (a community of spectators), in order to give our own. “When one judges, one judges as a member of a community...[and] one’s community sense makes it possible to enlarge one’s mentality” (Arendt 1992, 72-3). Arendt interprets sociability as the ‘very essence’ of man in Kant’s Philosophy; this is, at the very least, true for the faculty of judgment (Arendt 1992, 74; Kant 2000, §41).

This is the crucial point in Kant’s philosophy that Arendt poses as the critical juncture in his political theory; that the community of mankind should be all encompassing, that the sociability of mankind, and commonality of mankind should strive for the one shared common sense. In this way the actor and the spectator can be united in a ‘cosmopolitan existence’; “the maxim of the actor and the maxim, the standard, according to which the spectator judges the spectacle of the world, become one” (Arendt 1992, 75). Kant’s pacifism inherent in *Perpetual Peace* contains the proviso that in war, nations must not do that, which would harm the eventual peace, because in peace, Kant sees the project of man to be a complete oneness of community.

“If we admit the impulse to society as natural to man, and his fitness for it, and his propension towards it, i.e. sociability, as a requisite for man as a being destined for society, and so as a property belonging to humanity, we cannot escape from regarding taste as a faculty for judging everything in respect of which we can communicate our feeling to all other men, and so as a means of furthering that which every one’s natural inclination desires” (Kant 2000, §41).

IV

Arendt’s freedom – freedom as politics,

By using Kant’s moral philosophy to provide justice and liberty, the spectator is removed from the action, and thus freedom is removed from politics and replaced with ethics. Kant has disrupted the true meaning of the word freedom in political philosophy. Freedom from slavery in the Hellenic meaning became freedom from politics in the Kantian meaning. Thus freedom becomes liberty, and man becomes the individualized commercial being; detached from the world and his own self, seeking inner freedom rather than freedom in

the world. This is in stark contrast to the political animal, who would never give up his freedom, and for whom life is the civic participation in the world of men (Aristotle 1998, 1253b25). As Arendt argues in *The Human Condition*;

“To labor meant to be enslaved by necessity, and this enslavement was inherent in the conditions of human life. Because men were dominated by the necessities of life, they could win their freedom only through the domination of those whom they subjected to necessity by force” (Arendt 1998, 83).

Free discussion is different from freedom; Kant's notion of freedom is in free discussion as that which is freely discussed "for the sake of ascertaining what truth there was" (St Augustine 1962, II, 21). Kant's theory of political freedom, which Arendt regards as completely unambiguous throughout his work, is "to make public use of one's reason at every point" (Arendt 1992, 39). This public use is the discussion free from politics in the scholarly realm of publicity. It is the "onlookers who proclaim their attitude in public...[and] their reaction to the event [that] proves the 'moral character' of mankind" (Arendt 1992, 46). In contrast, Arendt held that action occurs in the public realm, and must occur with others, judgment of the spectator is solitary, and not communicable with others in the moment of its occurrence, as it occurs in the mind (Arendt 1998, 188; Beiner 1992, 92). Action, by its very public and interactive nature is the true space of politics, and thus is the space in which political theory must centre itself.

The fact that Kant centered human sociability on the spectator, and then placed an emphasis on the faculty of reasoned common thought, that is judgment, in the space of the spectator, creates a disjuncture from Arendt's notion of politics. While philosophy and theology are based on man in the singular, politics is the product of men, that is, "politics is based on the fact of human plurality...politics deals with the coexistence and association of different men" (Arendt 2005, 93). Kant argues that the essence of man is found in his sociability, and that Ellis finds within this sociability a source of political enlightenment. However, as Arendt argued, this sociability came from the singular act of judgment, a reasoned thoughtful and singular approach of the judging spectator. And politics does not occur within the essence of man, it functions as the interaction between men, and it is only within this 'space of politics' that we find true freedom as particular humans (Arendt 2005, 95).

As has been discussed, Kant understood the sympathetic view held by the scholarly public in Prussia regarding the cause of the French revolution as proof positive of reason in the judging public due to their 'disinterest' – that is they have nothing to gain from giving their view. Ellis uses this point to explain Kant's politics. Arendt argues that this is the disinterest of the spectator, who thus has no bearing on politics.

“The spectator, because he is not involved, can perceive this design of providence or nature, which is hidden from the actor. So we have the spectacle and the spectator on one side, the actors and all single events and contingent, haphazard happenings on the other. In the context of the French Revolution, it seemed to Kant that the spectator's view carried the ultimate meaning of the event, although this view yielded no maxim for

acting” (Arendt 1992, 52).

Kant’s theory of freedom is tied to his conception of judgment as taste and as a characteristic of the disinterested spectator. This characteristic, to which Kant appeals is the notion of a universal, a community of taste, a common sense; the true appeal of the political, Arendt argues, must instead center on the particular, the actual examples, ‘the single events and contingent haphazard happenings’, that is, the ‘singularities’ (Arendt 1992, 52; Badiou 2005, 53).

Arendt makes a distinction in the question of *what is freedom*; between practical matters in which freedom is assumed as self-evident, and the theoretical/scientific (i.e. rational endeavors) in which even our own being is subject to causality (Arendt 1961, 143). For Arendt, human motives reside in what Kant would describe as the realm of thought. When action is taken by men in-the-world and reflected upon “it seems to come under the sway of two kinds of causality...the causality of inner motivation...and the causal principle which rules the outer world” (Arendt 1961, 144).

Arendt acknowledges Kant’s efforts to save freedom from this assault in the manner in which we have previously explored; that is by distinguishing between the natural law and the moral law. However, Kant “does little to eliminate the greatest and most dangerous difficulty, namely, that thought itself, in its theoretical as well as its pre-theoretical form, makes freedom disappear” (Arendt 1961, 145). Arendt argues this is because freedom as a phenomenon does not exist in the realm of thought at all – this is clearly an antithesis to Kant’s supposition that freedom exists but we can not know it. The danger and disservice the philosophical tradition has paid to freedom – and thus the way in which Kant has degenerated freedom – is to remove it from its original realm, that of politics and the affairs of men, to the inner realm of thought and will (Arendt 1961, 145). In Plato’s political philosophy – “one gets an absolute distinction between the one who knows what is best to do” and those who follow the rule and take the action; whereas in Kant “publicness is the ‘transcendental principle’ that should rule all action...[thus we have the public act] that combines politics and right.” The public that shone light on these political acts was for Kant was the reading public - that is the public realm of the spectator, divorced from action (Arendt 1992, 60).

Kant puts freedom in a dichotomous relationship with politics, the political becomes teleological and part of nature’s purpose, thus reasoned free discourse becomes the reasoned rational truth. As Arendt describes in her lectures on Kant, he claims that the philosopher has not risen from Plato’s cave but rather the “philosopher remains a man like you and me living among his fellow men” (Arendt 1992, 28). Kant also claims that “task of evaluating life with respect to pleasure and displeasure – which Plato and the others claimed for the philosopher alone” was now the providence of every man. Thus Kant agrees with Aristotle that the philosopher should not rule – contra Plato – but disagrees that the philosophical is highest form of life (Arendt 1992, 29).

Conclusion

Arendt argues that freedom exists in the realm of action and politics, the affairs of men in the world. This is freedom in politics, in action, in the affairs of men and is directly opposed to a thinking freedom or 'inner freedom'. It is this inner freedom that Ellis highlights as Kant's theory of freedom in politics. Perhaps unwittingly, Kant has dissolved freedom from the political, or at the very least diluted the conception of it. Certainly Ellis seems to argue that freedom exists in the effect of 'inner freedom' through ethical judgment and moral philosophies so-called 'concrete effects' in the political realm. The difference in the interpretation of Kant's political philosophy by Arendt and Ellis, highlights two competing notions of the political and the public sphere; political spectatorship and political action. Arendt's political theory, one which highlights the importance of political action, is better suited to the world of experience, and as such provides a more critical view of Kant's politics.

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