

Speculation and Judgment

Let me formulate at the very outset the question with which this essay will be dealing: Is there a link between the way philosophers approach the political realm and the way they consider the fine arts?

That there is indeed a link is suggested at the very beginning of our philosophical tradition by the fact that the earliest political philosophy as well as the earliest philosophy of art were both articulated in one and the same text, namely, Plato's *Republic*. Whatever their divergences, most interpreters admit that this simultaneous presence is no mere coincidence. In addition they often concede that the justification for taking up these two topics together is to be found in the most decisive pages of the dialogue, namely, the story of the cave, in which Plato sets forth in a metaphorical manner his concepts of truth and of being. Concerning Plato, I propose to express the link in one word: *speculation*.

To be sure, the origin of the word *speculation* is not Greek but Latin. It stems from *speculum*, which means "mirror." Moreover, the systematic use of the word only appeared in modern philosophy, and rather late at that, namely, in German idealism. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is probably the first major text in which words such as *speculation* and *speculative* are systematically and repeatedly used. But in Kant they convey a negative and derogatory connotation: They characterize ironically a way of philosophizing that trespasses the limits of the human mind. In a deliberate reaction against the Kantian emphasis on these limits, however, Hegel later grants to the same words the highest and most affirmative worth. In fact, my first intention was to focus this essay on the confrontation between Hegel and Kant regarding the political and the artistic realms, and to show that in Kant's stand toward

This paper was written in English by the author for the Dotterer Lecture given in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania, spring 1991.

these matters what is at stake is the predominance of judgment over speculation, whereas in Hegel it is the predominance of the latter over the former.

But since I just suggested that speculation already plays a decisive role in Plato's treatment of the political and the artistic, I would like to focus the first part of this essay on the nature of this decisive role, and what it involves for these two realms.

The Greek word for mirror—*katoptron*—is at the core of the analysis of the ontological status of artistic activity in the *Republic*, book 10. Just as a mirror can reflect and thereby imitate all the visible things that otherwise directly appear to us, likewise, says Plato, the artist can imitate all things. Such a person, however, does so by merely observing how they look, without paying attention to what they truly are. The artist never overcomes ordinary perception, he or she is attached to perceptual appearances. By contrast, the artisan, in whatever craft, tries at the outset of his productive activity—and at each step of the fabrication process—to behold the ideal pattern, the archetype, the pure form of the equipment the artisan wants to fabricate. Consequently, the artisan is in a true relationship with Ideas, whereas the artist cares only for appearances. Accordingly Plato always grants to the artisan a mediating position between those who are attached to the ordinary look of things and those who dedicate their lives to the pure *theoria*, to beholding what beings truly are, that is, to the contemplation of Ideas. This contemplation is what German idealism would later call “speculation.” Plato does not say that the contemplation of Ideas is a mirroring of them; rather, he reserves the metaphor of the mirror for the description of artistic activity. But if we agree to call speculation “the beholding of Ideas,” we might say that it is indeed by referring to speculation that Plato considers the artistic realm, and that it is the same reference that allows him to rank the artisan higher than the artist.

As far as the ontological structure of reality is concerned, the activity of the artist is misleading. Whereas the radiance of the realm of Ideas is what demands to be correctly seen, the artist leads us astray by making us believe that only appearances deserve contemplation. Whereas by paying attention to the activity of the artisan we are prompted to raise our seeing beyond the appearances, the artist enhances our attachment to them by glorifying them. One can even say that for Plato the true poet is the artisan. The Greek language used one and the same word to designate the productive activity of the artisan and the production of the painter, the sculptor, the epic poet, and the tragic poet. That word is *poiēsis*. Likewise one single word, *technē*, designated the “know-how” of both the artisan and the artist. Plato reacts against this linguistic use. The artisan, he claims, is the only one whose production

is truly a *poiēsis*, because such a person alone holds specific Ideas in view and imitates them. By contrast, the productions of the painter, the sculptor, and the author of epic poems or of tragedy are not really *poiēsis*, because instead of trying to hold Ideas in view, they stubbornly imitate appearances. Moreover it is because of this that they can imitate everything, whereas precisely because he has to behold specific patterns and forms, the true *technitēs*, the artisan, cannot be an expert in everything: A good shoemaker cannot be at the same time a good carpenter. Compared to the true *poiēsis* of the artisan, the production of the artist is a fake: At best he is a dilettante or an amateur.

If we agree to call speculation “the contemplation of Ideas,” then speculation obviously results in a privilege being given to fabrication over artistic creation. In Plato speculation acknowledges the craftsman and despises the artist.

It is extremely significant that Plato approaches the political domain in the same fashion. In other words, his view of public affairs is also ruled by the privileging of *poiēsis* as a fabrication carried out by an expert, this privileging itself depending on the supreme dignity of speculation.

But before considering how Plato looks at the political realm, let me notice that his assessment of the activity of the artisan runs against the way the Greek city-state, at the time of its blossoming—let us say at the time of Pericles—conceived of the activity and the mentality of the artisan, or of all experts. According to current scholarship, the Greek *polis*, of which Athens became the highest example, emerged as a peculiar regime or *politeia* (a word, by the way, that is in Greek the very title of Plato’s *Republic*) when government started to be publicly shared among individuals who were at the same time in a position of equality and of rivalry, through the unique medium of speech. At the dawn of the *polis*, therefore, there obtained a relatedness between speech, publicity, and equality. And this cooperation became more and more forceful as the oligarchic system was replaced by democracy. The kind of speech at stake was essentially dialogical. It consisted of an exchange of opinions in a public debate between equal speakers before an audience making up its mind about the persuasive force of all the discourses in competition. In addition to characterizing this type of speech, publicity ruled everywhere in the life of the city. Its laws were written and known to everybody; its temples, as well as the statues of its gods, were visible to all; its physical center was the *agora* where all citizens met; its theaters were also open to all, and there was a public competition for the best tragedy that was staged by the city. Evidently this publicity designated a common world of appearances. It meant that all citizens had the same right of expression, that they participated

equally in the sovereignty of the public assembly, and that everyone had his share in the public offices. At the time the Greeks invented many words to express all the aspects of this equality, such as *isonomia*, *isotimia*, *isēgoria*, *isocratia*, and so on. And they invented the verb *politeuein* to designate their political way of life, as a sharing of words and deeds, *lexis* and *praxis*.

Now, it is remarkable that in the political mode of being or *bios politikos* the activity and mentality of the artisan were held at a distance. The Greeks of the city were aware that the good *technitēs* is an expert, a specialist in a particular field. But in their view the good politician cannot and should not be an expert. In the isonomic regime, each citizen, not a limited group of professionals, must be in charge of public affairs. Those who invented the *bios politikos* were convinced that as soon as a professional mentality rules over public matters, the public realm runs the risk of losing its constitutive features: the sharing of words and deeds by all the members of the community. One does not debate with experts, one just listens to them. *Isēgoria* and expertise are not compatible. Accordingly, when the city really needed experts, such as experts in strategy, it elected them for short periods. This is why the city carefully avoided having professional civil servants, judges, tax collectors, and so on.

To be sure, the Greeks of the city knew that a continuous debate entails a good deal of unpredictability. This is why they conceived of human affairs as essentially fragile and ambiguous. In keeping with this awareness they conceived of the civic virtues not at all in terms of the strict observation of a clear rule, but as the ever-renewed search for a mean (a *mesotēs*) between extremes, midway between deficiency and excess. This sense of measure was at the heart of the Apollinian maxims in Delphi. It was also present in the background of the masterpieces of Greek tragedy, which were all created during the blossoming of Athens's democracy and staged at the cost of the city. These masterpieces were testimonies to the frailty and ambiguity of human interaction and *praxis*. If the citizens were paid by the city to attend them in the theater, it is because beholding all the ambiguities expressed by them was supposed to confirm and improve the type of knowledge specifically adjusted to human affairs, a kind of knowledge far removed indeed from the expertise of a technician. This kind of knowledge is *phronēsis*. No matter how the word is translated—as prudence, practical wisdom, judgment—what is at stake is the ability to make up one's mind about human affairs by searching again and again for a mean between extremes. The Greek word for theater, *theatron*, means a place for seeing. The Greek word for seeing is *theorein*. Prior to Plato, *theoria* meant beholding a spectacle, and the theorists par excellence were the spectators in the theater. Their contemplation included the *phronēsis* we just mentioned. Such theory did not leave the common world of appear-

ances; it was not solitary, but inserted in human plurality and essentially tied to what appears to each individual, that is, to *doxa*, individual opinion.

These sketchy remarks allow us to return to Plato's approach to the political realm in the *Republic*. The dialogue vindicates an entirely new idea of *theoria*, which is a solitary contemplation of Ideas beyond the common world of appearances. The dialogue is an apology of a theoretical mode of being or *bios theoretikos* that no longer has anything in common with the spectators of tragedies in the theater. Against the prior beholding, the new *bios theoretikos* claims to be self-sufficient instead of being inserted in human plurality. Its aim is to overcome once and for all the ambiguities that affected the previous contemplation inasmuch as it was tied to the world of appearances and to *doxa*. Borrowing from Kant's terminology, we might say that the point of this new kind of *theoria* is to speculate, in the sense of getting a clear insight into ultimate Ideas.

Because speculation is not interested in human plurality, in *doxa*, and in the ambiguities of *praxis*, but in the clear vision of Ideas, it is inclined, by the same token, to substitute *poiēsis* for *praxis* concerning the organization of the city. Whereas tragedy allowed the fellow citizens of Pericles, who was a close friend of Sophocles, to reflect upon the ambiguities of human affairs, Plato dismisses tragical poetry precisely because it is thoroughly ambiguous. Whereas the city of Pericles held all experts in suspicion, Plato glorifies the expert. Whereas the isonomic city conceived of the civic virtues in terms of a fragile mean between extremes, Plato characterizes virtue as the strict implementation of a clear principle. Because of the excellence of *poiēsis*, Plato's city is depicted as a sort of huge workshop ruled by the principle: one person, one job. That *poiēsis* operates as a paradigm in the *Republic* is made obvious, for example, by the concept of "professional guardians"—introduced in book 2—when Socrates insists "that it is impossible for one person to do a fine job in many arts," thereby objecting to the democratic principle that each citizen is able to be in charge of any public office. This paradigm is equally obvious in the way book 2 again defines the education of the guardians in terms of the making of a reliable product with adequate means. Another example of the overall preponderance of *poiēsis* is given by the way Socrates deals with the problem of virtue in book 4. There is, he says, a virtue or excellence of a tool when it is perfectly adjusted as a means to a specific and determined goal. Likewise, he says, the virtue of the artisan is his ability to imitate a preestablished model. In his view, the main virtue of the warriors, namely, courage, should match this pattern. For the city, courage was a mean between extremes, between rashness and cowardice; for Socrates it is simply the ignorance of fear. Moreover, whereas in city life virtue was tied up with competing for excellence within human plurality, it is

now taken to be self-sufficient: "A decent man is most of all sufficient unto himself for living well and, in contrast to others, has least need of another" (387d). Finally, the entire dialogue gravitates around the topic of the necessary overcoming of the common world of appearances, a topic that amounts to discarding as irrelevant an essential feature of *praxis*, since, in the public realm, *praxis* has to appear to others in relation to a common world of appearances. Everywhere the dialogue characterizes the best regime in terms of *poiēsis* against *praxis*. The very words of Socrates are evidence of this: "We made plain that each of the citizens must be brought to that which naturally suits him—one man, one job—so that each man, practicing his own, which is one, will not become many but one; and thus, you see, the whole city will naturally grow to be one and not many" (423d).

So in reference to speculation a claim is made for the substitution of the clarity of *poiēsis* for the ambiguities of *praxis* in both the political realm and the fine arts. In a good city the citizens should be like artisans, steady imitators of clear models. Likewise poetry would be tolerable if, and only if, the poet were to become, as Plato says, "the unmixed imitator of the decent." The trouble is that, since all the features of the Greek way of life—from which the very word *politics* derives—are opposed to Plato's claim, the latter implies a rejection of "politics." And since not a single masterpiece of Greek poetry ever did fit with Plato's request about poetry, his claim is tantamount to rejecting the fine arts as well.

It is well known that Aristotle reacted against Plato's views about political and artistic matters. It is no overstatement to say that he discarded the possibility of subordinating these two realms to speculation, and that he rehabilitated *phronēsis* in the philosophical treatment of them.

As far as the fine arts are concerned, his most significant text is his *Poetics*. Many interpreters agree that "the all-encompassing concept of Aristotle's *Poetics* is *mimēsis*."¹

This notion comes from Plato, of course. But it does not play in Aristotle the role it played in Plato's assessment of Greek tragedy. Whereas the metaphor of the mirror allowed Plato to consider the *mimēsis* carried out by the poet as a passive reflection, Aristotle defines it in relation to Greek tragedy as an active process of composition. For Plato the tragic *mimēsis* is subservient to sheer appearances. For Aristotle it brings together actions in order to compose a plot. In this composition the point is not to feature individuals such as they appear along with the qualities that constitute their specific char-

1. Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1983), vol. 1, p. 58.

acter. Instead the point is the other way around, to feature an action by which individuals achieve their character and consequently certain qualities (*Poetics* 50a15). Such emphasis on the plot (*mythos*) as the principle (*archē*), the goal (*telos*) and even the soul (*psychē*) of tragedy (50a38) indicates how far removed Aristotle is from Plato. By assigning to the plot an overwhelming importance, by claiming that it is by virtue of the plot that the dramatic heroes attain or fail to attain *eudaimonia*, or authentic individuation, Aristotle attests to his disagreement with Plato, who in the *Sophist* (242c) insisted that the first philosophical step is to discard plots, and who repeatedly in the *Republic* stressed that only in the intercourse of the soul with itself under the auspices of the Ideas can *eudaimonia* be attained. In addition, whereas no masterpiece of Greek tragedy won Plato's approval, it is as though all these masterpieces are acknowledged by Aristotle, who obviously rehabilitates the *mimēsis* that they effect. Whereas in Plato the existing artistic *mimēsis* was narrowly confined within the reflection of factual and merely particular appearances—which by nature are void of any philosophical import—Aristotle insists that the poet is concerned not with the factual but with the possible. This is why the poet, he says, is able to express universals whereas the historian tells particulars. Therefore the writing of poetry is a "philosophical activity," and one "to be taken seriously" (*Poetics* 51a36–b15).

What is at stake in this rehabilitation, in relation to Plato's views, is a new criterion—no longer speculation, but *phronēsis*. When Aristotle writes that "the plot, since it is an imitation of an action (*praxis*), should be an imitation of an action that is unified, and a whole as well, and the constituents of the plot should be so put together that, if one of them is placed elsewhere or removed, the whole is disjointed and dislocated" (51a30–35), reference is thereby made not to the pure beholding of an Idea, but to the sense of measure and proportion that was vindicated by the Apollinian maxims of Delphi and that underscored *phronēsis* as a civic virtue in the isonomic *polis*. In the same context Aristotle defines a whole as "that which has beginning, middle and end," and he indicates that these moments are not contingent events but meaningful ones. When he also suggests that the plot raises the particulars of life to a universal level, the same reference to *phronēsis* is again present, since it is one of the functions of *phronēsis* to look at the particulars of *praxis* in the light of universals, without separating in the least the latter from the former. The same reference is implicit when Aristotle characterizes the magnitude of the action in terms of an orderly arrangement and a not-accidental size. "Beauty," he says, "lies in size and arrangement, hence neither a very tiny animal can be beautiful, because our view (*theoria*) of it is blurred as it approaches that instant where perceptibility ceases, nor an enormously big

one, because then the perception does not take place all at once, and the sense of oneness and wholeness is gone from the viewers' vision'' (50b34ff.). Obviously this *theoria* is no longer speculation; it is the apprehension within the common world of appearances of a mean between extremes, a *mesotēs*. Beauty is now correlated to judgment. Accordingly, there is no longer any trace in this context of the privilege that Plato granted to the artisan in contrast to the poet. It could even be maintained, for that matter, that Aristotle's theory of the four causes results in some privilege being given to the artist over the artisan. The four causes indeed cooperate in all production, either natural or artificial, but only in the artistic production is the end of the product at the same time its form—a form that is there for its own sake and offered to contemplation—whereas in technical production the form is only contemplated at the start of fabrication but no longer at the end, since the product of a craft is offered to use and not to contemplation.

As far as the political realm is concerned, let me just highlight a few signs of Aristotle's resistance to Plato's views. Whereas Plato claims "that it will never be possible for a plurality of men to reasonably govern a City" and that the good regime should be in the hands of a small number because correctness belongs to the One, Aristotle insists that the city is by nature a *plēthos*, a plurality, and perishes by unifying itself in the manner of a family, and still more in the manner of a single individual, for it needs differences between its members and is resistant to being composed of identical individuals. This is why the *Nicomachean Ethics*—a sort of political treatise, says Aristotle—declines any pretension to raising political philosophy to the level of certainty of mathematics or first philosophy. It is, he says, unavoidably half way between geometry and rhetoric, which amounts to suggesting that speculation is irrelevant in the realm of human affairs.

The same text rehabilitates *phronēsis* against the monopolistic tendencies of Plato's *sophia*. Accordingly no attempt is made in it to reduce *praxis* to *poiēsis*, or to substitute the latter for the former. Instead Aristotle clearly ranks *praxis* higher than *poiēsis*. Action cannot be conflated with fabrication, and Aristotle makes clear that the disclosing aptitude relevant to the latter is irrelevant to the former. *Technē* and *phronēsis* are essentially different. To be sure, both are classified as dianoetic virtues, both include a deliberation, and they both refer to the perishable. But whereas *technē* deliberates only about the adequate means for predefined ends, *phronēsis* deliberates about its proper aim, well-doing in general, that is, the good life, which is not an intelligible Idea, but what is worth being done here and now, in relation to *kairos*. It is always in relation to a concrete situation that one has to decide about what is just or unjust, noble or vile, wise or mad, beautiful or ugly. Because it is tied to *kairos*, practical wisdom is fully temporal and concerns

the irreversible process and quality of particular existences, whereas a failure in matters of *technē* does not prevent the process of fabrication from starting all over again and does not affect the very existence of the artisan. Moreover, *phronēsis* is inserted within plurality and interaction, whereas it is in solitude that the artisan contemplates the patterns to be implemented. The withdrawal that is required in order to make up one's mind about particular human affairs is merely provisional. It is open to a renewed insertion within human networks, and this is why Aristotle includes discourse, mutual understanding, clemency, and even friendship among the characteristics of *phronēsis*. That is why it is for him the political virtue par excellence. Finally, in contradistinction to Plato's contempt for *doxa*, Aristotle says that *phronēsis* is a doxastic virtue. This does not mean that *phronēsis* is trapped in the appearances and strictly attaches to the particular perspectives of individuals. On the contrary, *phronēsis* is the aptitude of pondering *doxa*, which means the attitude of searching—while pondering the specifics of a particular situation—for the ever-potential universal that is the good and beautiful life. Because *phronēsis* is an effort to link particulars to universals that are forever potential and never fully given beforehand, it cannot be taught by simply teaching rules or ways of implementing them. Its teaching takes place in the consideration of examples, for instance, the memorable ones that the poet relates better than the historian. There is, therefore, an obvious convergence between the way Aristotle approaches the political realm and the way he considers the fine arts. In both cases judgment prevails over speculation.

At this juncture one could perhaps object that the use of such words as speculation and judgment is misleading, for there is no strict equivalent for them in Greek, neither in Plato nor in Aristotle. Indeed, as I suggested above, Kant was the first philosopher to examine the nature of speculation. He did so in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. He was also the first one to examine the nature of judgment. He did so in the *Critique of Judgment*, a book in which his philosophy of art is unfolded.

Kant writes in the introduction to the third *Critique*: "Judgment in general is the ability to think the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal is given, then the judgment that subsumes the particular under it is determinative. But if only the particular is given and judgment has to find the universal for it, then this power is merely reflective." In other words, the judgment by which we state that this particular thing of nature or this particular work of art is beautiful or not, is not the application of a pre-given rule, principle, or law, or of a pre-given concept of beauty. Consequently this judgment is neither epistemic nor technical. Right away one can notice a kinship between Kant's characterization of the reflective judgment and Aristotle's characterization of *phronēsis*. In both cases the point is to confront a

particular in a universal way without help of a predefined universal. The kinship is confirmed by Kant's analysis of the aesthetic judgment as a reflective judgment. Let me recall the main points of the analysis.

Kant proceeds by comparing the aesthetic judgment with three other types of judgment, which we will agree to call (1) the cognitive judgment, (2) the judgment expressing a sensuous satisfaction, and (3) the judgment about perfection. Aesthetic judgment is irreducible to any one of these three other forms of judgment. Should something we believe to be an example of a purely aesthetic judgment show signs of compromise with any one of the others, this is so only because it is affected by some impurity and is not yet strictly aesthetic.

First, let us turn to the difference between the aesthetic judgment and the cognitive one. The cognitive judgment admits of various levels, but, whatever the level, it is always characterized by a clear aim toward an objectivity. Thus the principles of pure understanding, which are a priori cognitive judgments, make objectivity possible. Likewise, when I observe empirically that this body before me is made of this material, I refer it to a general class whose properties are all the better known as the observer is more neutral and impersonal. Objectivity and impersonality go together. By contrast, aesthetic judgment requires a personal involvement on my part. To be able to admire something demands that I, as an irreplaceable individual, am affected by it. In this sense aesthetic judgment, says Kant, is subjective. So considered, aesthetic judgment brings me no science. This is not, however, to imply that my admiration is mindless. Quite to the contrary. It implies the use of my understanding along with my imagination, but in a manner such that my mind simply plays, and from such play derives a sense of satisfaction. It does so without in the least seeking to explain the thing that so captures my attention, without seeking to uncover its formula, to define it, or to gather a concept from it. What is beautiful, says Kant, is what pleases without concepts.

Notice next how the aesthetic judgment differs from the judgment expressing the ordinary pleasure of the senses. Without question, Kant claims, there is something common both to ordinary pleasure and to aesthetic satisfaction. In the one as in the other I am involved in my affective individuality. It is I, as a sensuous individual, who am affected in both cases. But here the resemblance ends. There are three major points of differentiation separating the two forms of judgment. In ordinary sensuous pleasure, it is my own interest that is fundamentally at stake, which is to say that I subordinate the thing enjoyed to the delight that it secures for me. In contrast, the aesthetic judgment is essentially disinterested. This means that, far from being swept up in the course of my enjoyment, the thing of beauty is recognized for just

how it appears. I consider it for its own sake, I contemplate it with favor, nothing more, nothing less. From this, two further points of differentiation follow. In the case of ordinary enjoyment, there occurs something like a fundamental egoism, which is well expressed by popular wisdom: To each person their own taste. But precisely because it is disinterested, aesthetic satisfaction avoids this selfish exclusiveness. In aesthetic satisfaction, instead of being locked away in my own individuality, I surpass myself toward an intersubjectivity of sorts. But there is still a third point of differentiation. It is Kant's claim that ordinary sense enjoyment finds its basis in the material realm, whereas aesthetic satisfaction is based in the formal. This means that the essential factor in ordinary pleasure is the organic state of delight in which I am immersed and to which I am subdued. In aesthetic perception, however, I am free at the very heart of the sensible, and I turn what I perceive into the occasion for a free play with sounds, colors, images, words, and so on.

There remains the demarcation of the aesthetic judgment from what I called "the judgment of perfection." This is the judgment by which I view something within the perspective of a goal or an end, and from which I derive a sense of satisfaction if I believe that the thing is perfectly adapted to the goal. This satisfaction is quite different from the aesthetic one. The satisfaction that can arise from relating something to a goal is necessarily connected to an interest, to the extent that I value the realization of the goal. Thus I am a long way from the disinterested contemplation that defines aesthetic judgment. Moreover, if I consider something from the perspective of a goal, I need some concept of this goal. But as we already know, the beautiful is without concepts. For this reason, by setting aesthetic judgment apart from the judgment about perfection, Kant stresses that the former is characterized by what he calls a "finality without end," and that the thing to which it refers manifests itself as a free beauty. A free beauty is freed of all subordination to ends, of all reference to sensuousness, and freed even of all identifiable inner rules of composition.

The aesthetic judgment is neither cognitive, nor sensuous, nor functional. We find again the traits emphasized by Aristotle, when he suggested that in order to contemplate the beautiful within the sensible realm, we have to overcome the biological cycle of pains and pleasures, as well as the utilitarian mentality, and when he insisted that *phronēsis* is not an epistemic power.

Kant was convinced that an a priori element is implied in the aesthetic judgment. This means that an element of universality and necessity is involved, not as a definable principle, of course, which would contradict the description that I summarized, but as a claim made by everyone while expe-

riencing aesthetic satisfaction, to find in everyone else recognition of his or her appreciation. This claim, Kant says, is justified and legitimated by what he calls a “*sensus communis*.” Kant insists in section 40 that the *sensus communis* is not to be confused with common understanding, which always conceptualizes. On the other hand, it is not common in the sense of being vulgar, but in the sense of being shared.² He then writes the following:

We must take *sensus communis* to mean the Idea of a sense shared by all of us, i.e., a power to judge, that, in reflecting takes account (a priori), in our own thought, of everyone else’s way of representing something. . . . We do this as follows: we compare our judgment not so much with the actual as rather with the merely possible judgments of others, and thus put ourselves in the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that may happen to attach to our own judging; and this in turn we accomplish by leaving out as much as possible whatever is matter, i.e., sensation, charm and emotion. (*CJ*, 160) [And he says further on:] We are talking here not about the power of cognition, but about an enlarged way of thinking (in which the one who judges) overrides the private subjective conditions of his judgment, into which so many are locked, as it were, and reflects on his own judgment from a universal standpoint (transferring himself to the standpoint of others). (*CJ*, 161)

In other words: “To think from the standpoint of everyone else is the maxim of judgment.”

This emphasis on the distinction between thinking and knowing demonstrates that Kant does not in the least approach the aesthetic realm in terms of speculation. To be sure, the power of thinking needs Ideas, but in contrast to Plato, Ideas in Kant’s sense of the word cannot be grasped in an ultimate insight, that is, lead to a knowledge. The *sensus communis* is in some measure already actual, which means that human beings are somehow all alike, but it is at the same time only a possibility again and again open to a future of thought. But this tension between the actual and the possible is what we have seen at work in Aristotle’s description of *phronēsis*. Moreover, Kant’s notion of a *sensus communis* (section 40) indicates both a likeness and a renewed differentiation between human beings. Such likeness and such differ-

2. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987). Hereafter cited as *CJ*.

entiation are again the very features of the plurality in which, as we have seen, Aristotle's *phronēsis* is inserted.

The same features are again insisted upon in the few paragraphs of the third *Critique* that focus on the work of art and the history of art. In sharp contrast to Plato's views about *poiēsis*, Kant argues that artistic creation cannot be based upon a pre-given rule of composition as the technical work of the craftsman. To be sure, for Kant as for Plato, there is a *mimēsis* relation between art and nature. But this relation acquires a new meaning. In Plato nature herself imitates Ideas. Not so for Kant, since we know nature not as *noumenon* but only as *phenomenon*. Moreover, when nature appears as beautiful, we may say that its very beauty points to an intelligible realm, but this realm preserves its secret. Likewise, the work of art is beautiful when it appears like nature, that is, when the origin of the work, its rule of composition, is a secret for the artist himself or herself. Regarding nature as well as art in the Kantian sense, Plato's concept of *poiēsis* is thus irrelevant. For Kant the artist is not an artist when he or she imitates preestablished rules. A true work of art is the work of a genius, who does not know beforehand the rule for his or her composition, but who receives it as an inspiration from nature. But creators are not only inspired by nature, they are also inspired by predecessors. As far as the history of art is concerned, Kant again demonstrates how far removed he is from Plato's views. Plato conceives of the historical arts as all falling away from the Ideas, and he projects an ideal art that would repeat worthy models. For Kant, by contrast, the history of art is neither a progress nor a decline, nor a repetition. For that matter, he argues not in terms of models, but in terms of inspiring examples: The creator finds inspiration in the works of the past, in that they give him or her the opportunity not merely to copy them, but to invent—with their help but beyond them—new examples. The history of art is thus, like human plurality itself, a combination of likeness and differentiation. Finally, we do find in this context a revival of sorts of Aristotle's *mesotēs*. As a work of genius, a real work of art innovates in a radical way, thereby running the risk of being meaningless or of meeting no reception whatsoever. Therefore a balance has to be found again and again between genius and taste, between the wildness of the former and the conformism of the latter. It is thanks to this balance that great works incite much thought, although they do not provide any knowledge.

About Kant's political philosophy I shall be very brief. It is well known that Kant reacted against the modern theory of natural right initiated by Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes believed that the new *mathesis universalis*, of which Galileo and Descartes were the heralds, could be transposed to human affairs. He conceived of *mathēsis* in terms of speculation, to the extent that

the new science of the motions of matter was for him the true *protē philosophia*. This is why Hobbes, although he was thoroughly opposed to Plato's idealism, nevertheless also understood the political realm in terms of *poiēsis*, or fabrication. To him the new method, *mathēsis*, as well as the political life, were matters of making: "Geometry," he says, "is demonstrable, for the lines and figures from which we reason are drawn and described by ourselves; and civil philosophy is demonstrable, we make the commonwealth ourselves."³ The pattern of *poiēsis* rules his entire political philosophy. This is particularly striking in his definition of language as reckoning. A reckoning, he says, implies full mastery over a sequence of defined terms, and he makes it clear that the predominant speech in public affairs should be the speech of either the scientist or the expert. The paradigm of *poiēsis* as a fully predictable process is implied as well in Hobbes's definition of the social covenant in terms of a reckoning of predictable effects, and in his characterization of the absolute monarch as a sort of ultimate social engineer. The same paradigm is obvious in his definition of the purpose of the state: not providing a space for a public sharing of words and deeds, but protecting the safety of the private production of artifacts.

Against Hobbes Kant argues that the social contract is a regulative Idea that emanates a priori from pure practical reason. While requiring, on the one hand, inner moral autonomy, practical reason also demands, on the other hand, the rule of right in the external interactions between human beings. In this transcendental framework the social contract and, consequently, the political realm are not a matter of reckoning or of calculative fabrication, in short, of *poiēsis*; they are a matter of thought. Our power of thinking, which extends beyond the limits of knowledge, demands that the state be based on three principles: (1) freedom of everyone as a human being in the pursuit of happiness, (2) equality of all under the same law, and (3) independence of everyone as a citizen, that is, as a legislator.

Here again it could be argued not only that Kant discards as a principle the poietic bias deriving from speculation, but also that he approaches the political realm in terms of judgment, that is, of a way of thinking based on a *sensus communis*, a sense according to which human beings are at the same time all alike and all different. It is because they are all different that they have to be allowed, against despotism, freedom in their search for happiness. It is because such differentiation would result in a chaotic dissemination, if it were not accompanied by a sense of likeness, that it requires, as a counter-

3. Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, preface, *English Works*, ed. W. Molesworth (London: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1839–1845).

part, that everyone be subject to the same law. And finally it is because they are all both different and alike that they must talk, express their views, and be colegislators as a result of such expression. But how could a colegislation be possible at all, without the ability of every citizen to demonstrate what the third *Critique* called "reflective judgment," that is, the ability to think from the standpoint of everyone else.

For Kant, judging is thus in every way at the core of both aesthetics and political philosophy.

It is now time to turn to Hegel. There is no need to demonstrate that his thought was speculative. He himself characterizes it with the word *speculation*, by which he means the operation through which the Absolute Spirit comes to recognize itself within all reality, a reality that encompasses the whole of nature as well as the entire history of human affairs. It is no exaggeration to claim that Hegel's concept of speculation, as the self-mirroring of Spirit, implies what I called above the "privileging of *poiēsis*." Indeed, this self-mirroring is not immediate; it demands a mediation, a process. And this active mediation is characterized by Hegel in terms of a production: the so-called work of the negative.

This intimate association of *poiēsis* and speculation that we observed in Plato shines forth in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in the description of the decisive transition from consciousness to self-consciousness. The transition occurs at the outcome of a life-and-death struggle, which in turn gives way to the master-slave relationship. Whereas the master merely enjoys, the slave works, thereby overcoming the immediacy of nature. The work of the slave, Hegel says, is the emergence of what he calls "the universal formative activity of the Absolute Notion."⁴ Accordingly, work is understood as in Plato's theory of *poiēsis*, as a shaping activity related to an ideal realm. In Hegel, work has a speculative function: "In fashioning the thing, the bondsman's own negativity, his being-for-self, becomes an object for him . . . ; in fashioning the thing, he becomes aware that being-for-self belongs to him. . . . The shape does not become something other than himself through being made external to him; for it is precisely this shape that is his pure being-for self, which in this externality is seen by him to be the truth" (*PhS.* section 196). This obviously means that working is a self-mirroring. Once again speculation and *poiēsis* are intimately related. The relation is stressed everywhere in Hegel, and it finds its last expression in the last paragraph of the *Encyclopedia*, where Hegel says that "the eternal Idea, existing in and for

4. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), Section 196, p. 119. Hereafter cited as *PhS.*

itself, actualizes itself by eternally producing itself and enjoying itself as Absolute Spirit" (section 577).

Not surprisingly the paradigm of *poiēsis* plays an equally decisive role in Hegel's speculative view of human affairs. As he characterizes the principle of development in the course of world history, Hegel explicitly refers to the Aristotelian concepts of *dynamis* and *energeia*, that is, to notions coined by Aristotle to account for the activity of fabrication. Since Hegel does not seem to pay attention to Aristotle's distinction between *poiēsis* and *praxis*, the transposition of a poietic scheme to history turns the latter into a process through which, with the help of specific means, a definable goal is pursued and produced, indeed a speculative goal, namely, the attainment by Spirit of its own self-awareness.

The same paradigm also governs Hegel's concept of politics. To be sure, as far as the political is concerned, a distinction should be made between his early writings and his mature thought, between his glorification of the Greek city in the former, and his celebration of the modern nation-state in the latter. However, in both cases neither the specific ambiguities of *praxis* nor the role of judgment in human affairs is really recognized by Hegel. When the early writings celebrate the ethical life of the Greek city, they define this life in terms of a living unification within differentiations, or in terms of a reconciliation between opposites. In the last writings of the Frankfurt period, this reconciliation is said to be a union of union and nonunion, or an identity of identity and not-identity, or even an *Aufhebung* of contraries. At first sight this seems to account for the Greek *mesotēs* as a balance between extremes. But in fact it does not, for Hegel's formula substitutes an ultimate sameness for what the Greeks of the city believed to be insuperable ambiguities. When he claims that the Greek citizens were united by the bond of love to the extent that everyone recognized himself in the others, he simply overlooks the essential link between *philia* and *eris* in the Greek city. Likewise, when he depicts the city as an harmonious body of which the citizens were the spontaneous and happy organs, he simply overlooks plurality and the permanent debate taking place therein. Already at this stage a speculative scheme is at work along with a poietic one, for Hegel claims that for the Greeks the city was a work of art in which they recognized the product as their own operation.

In his mature thought, Hegel no longer claimed that the Greek city was the highest political achievement. On the contrary, he claimed that the highest political achievement was the modern state, or his concept of what it should be. At this stage, the Greek city, compared to the modern state, is now said to be affected by fundamental flaws, which are summarized in one word:

immediacy. The Greek city, he says, achieved a merely "immediate unity of the universal and the singular,"⁵ whereas the modern state is a mediated unity. I just suggested above that in Hegel's early image of the Greek city as a harmonious living body or as a living work of art there was no real recognition of the specific features of the Greek *bios politikos*, such as ambiguity, plurality, debate, *mesotēs*, *phronēsis*. In his mature thought, Hegel goes a step further: These features, he now claims, were precisely the flaws of the Greek city. He argues indeed that an immediate unity of the universal and the singular is mainly contingent, to the extent (1) that the regime is based on *doxa*, the singular perspectives of contingent individuals; (2) that the political decisions made on the basis of the expressed opinions are the outcome of a vote, that is, something contingent; and finally (3) that such decisions are essentially concerned with particular situations, that is, with contingent events. In other words, *phronēsis*, or judgment, was the fundamental flaw of the Greek city life. The essence of the *polis* is not to be found in its way of coping with the ambiguities of plural interaction but in the transparency of a poetic intercourse of an organism with itself. Accordingly, it is not in the speeches of Pericles as they are related by Thucydides, but in Plato's *Republic*, that Hegel finds, as he insists in his *Philosophy of Right*, what he takes to be "the right interpretation of Greek Ethical Life."⁶ When he claims in section 185 of the *Philosophy of Right* that Plato was right in reacting against what he calls "the development of particularity . . . , a moment which appeared in the ancient world as an invasion of ethical corruption," it is almost as though *isonomia* were a disease instead of an accomplishment.

As to the modern state, it is supposed to attain a rational shape only if it succeeds in reviving, in a Christian framework and under the control of the universal class of the administrators, a hierarchic structure similar to the one described by Plato in his *Republic*. Its principle should not be as in Kant, "one person, one voice," but as in Plato's workshop, "one person, one job." We find the following in Hegel's *Philosophical Propaedeutic* (section 198): "The individuals are of more use to the State when they limit themselves to a single activity." As a matter of fact, it is possible to observe the recurrence of similar Platonic structures in Hegel's speculative concept of aesthetics. Two brief remarks will suffice to demonstrate this.

5. *Jenaer Systementwürfe III*, p. 262, in Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann (Hamburg: Meiner, 1976), vol. 8. Hereafter cited as *GW8*.

6. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 10.

The first remark concerns Hegel's extremely significant treatment of Kant's third *Critique*. He deals extensively with it in *Faith and Knowledge*,⁷ an early publication of the Jena period in which he discards Kant's distinction between thinking and knowing. In Hegel's view, the *Critique of Judgment* is the only book in which Kant proves to be almost a speculative thinker. Indeed, what Hegel calls "speculative reason" is at work in the book, inasmuch as in it Kant attempts to overcome the dualisms that were affecting his theory of knowledge as well as his practical philosophy. It is a book in which, Hegel says, Kant acknowledges an intermediary region between the empirical manifold of nature and the absolute but abstract unity of freedom (*F.K.* 86ff.), thereby recognizing that the true task of philosophy is to reach an insight into the "absolute identity of thought and being" (*F.K.*, 94). However, even in this book, Hegel says, Kant ultimately refuses to admit a science of the identity he talks about, and the most obvious symptom of such a contradictory refusal is to be found in the very title of the work. Instead of being referred to a speculative science of the Absolute (i.e., to speculative reason), the beautiful, as a realm of identity between opposites, is merely referred to reflective judgment, that is, to the strictly finite and subjective perspectives of individuals. As far as aesthetics is concerned, this reading of Kant by Hegel amounts to discarding the relevance of the activity of judging in matters of beauty. Beauty, therefore, has no essential link with human plurality and with the way individuals aim at a *sensus communis*. The true point of reference in these matters is the philosopher himself, mirroring the totality of beings.

My second and concluding remark concerns Hegel's *Aesthetics* as a philosophy of the history of fine arts. The principle upon which it is based is simple: Art is the sensible manifestation of the Idea. Because art manifests the Idea, it belongs to the sphere of the Absolute Spirit. Because such a manifestation is attached to sensibility, the fine arts are unable to express the Idea fully. Their highest accomplishment corresponds to a specific stage in the development of the Spirit, namely, ancient Greece. Afterward, Christian religion represents a higher stage of development, a stage in which artistic expression is no longer a need for the Spirit.

At first sight, these views seem to be far removed from Plato, for whom indeed the historical arts had no link whatsoever with the realm of Ideas. But upon closer inspection, it turns out that Plato is less rejected by Hegel than reappropriated in a new way. As a matter of fact the historical process, as it is depicted by Hegel, ultimately reproduces a Platonic structure. In Plato's

7. G. W. F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. W. Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977). Hereafter cited as *F.K.*

thought it was in the name of Beauty, as the highest Idea, that the sensuous beauties of works of art were depreciated. Hegel's speculation is also a contemplation of the highest Idea. To be sure, Hegel overcomes the two-worlds theory of Plato. The Idea in his sense of the word produces and accomplishes itself within nature and history. But in this new context, it is once again, just as in Plato, in the name of an intelligible beauty that the sensuous beauties of works of art are depreciated, which means relegated in the past of the Spirit. At the end of the *Realphilosophie*, which is an early version of the mature system, we find the following: "The self-knowing Spirit knows itself in its peaceful work of art, the existing universe, and the history of the world" (*GW* 8: 286–7). In other words, true Beauty is not to be found in the historical creations of the artists; these creations are not the true works of art. The true work of art is reality itself, both natural and historical, as it is understood and mirrored by the speculative thinker, and by him alone.