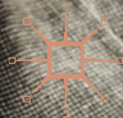
Edited by
Carlo Salzani
& Kristof K. P. Vanhoutte

Saramago's *Philosophical* Heritage



Saramago's Philosophical Heritage

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Saramago's Philosophical Heritage

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Abbreviations

References to the work of Saramago are made parenthetically in the text according to the following conventions:

	Portuguese	*English translation*
TP	*Terra do Pecado* (1947). Lisboa: Caminho, 1997	
PP	*Os Poemas Possíveis* (1966). Lisboa: Caminho, 1982	
BV	*A Bagagem do Viajante: crónicas* (1973). Lisboa: Caminho, 1986	
A	*Os Apontamentos: crónicas políticas* (1976). Lisboa: Caminho, 1990	
MPC	*Manual de Pintura e Caligrafia* (1977). Lisboa: Caminho, 1983	*Manual of Painting and Calligraphy: A Novel*. Translated by Giovanni Pontiero. Manchester: Carcanet, 1994
LT	*Objecto Quase* (1978). Lisboa: Caminho, 1984	*The Lives of Things: Short Stories.* Translated by Giovanni Pontiero. New York: Verso, 2012
RG	*Levantado do Chão*. Lisboa: Caminho, 1980	*Raised from the Ground*. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012
JP	*Viagem a Portugal.* (1981). Lisboa: Caminho, 1984	*Journey to Portugal: In Pursuit of Portugal's History and Culture*. Translated and with notes by Amanda Hopkinson and Nick Caistor. London: Harvill, 2000; New York: Harcourt, 2000

(*continued*)

(continued)

	Portuguese	*English translation*
BB	*Memorial do Convento*. Lisboa: Caminho, 1982	*Baltasar and Blimunda*. Translated by Giovanni Pontiero. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987; London: Cape, 1988
RR	*O Ano da Morte de Ricardo Reis.* Lisboa: Caminho, 1984	*The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis.* Translated by Giovanni Pontiero. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991; London: Harvill, 1992
SR	*A Jangada de Pedra*. Lisboa: Caminho, 1986	*The Stone Raft.* Translated by Giovanni Pontiero. London: Harvill, 1994; New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995
SFA	*A segunda vida de Francisco de Assis.* Lisboa: Caminho, 1987	
HSL	*História do Cerco de Lisboa*. Lisboa: Caminho, 1989	*The History of the Siege of Lisbon.* Translated by Giovanni Pontiero. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1996; London: Harvill, 1996
GJC	*O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo.* Lisboa: Caminho, 1991	*The Gospel According to Jesus Christ.* Translated by Giovanni Pontiero. London: Harvill, 1993; New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994
ND	*In nomine Dei*. Lisboa: Caminho, 1993	
B	*Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*. Lisboa: Caminho, 1995	*Blindness.* Translated by Giovanni Pontiero. London: Harvill, 1997; Thorndike, ME: Thorndike Press, 1999
AN	*Todos os Nomes.* Lisboa: Caminho, 1997	*All the Names.* Translated by Margaret Jull Costa. New York: Harcourt, 1999; London: Harvill, 1999
TUI	*O Conto da Ilha Desconhecida*. Lisboa:Assírio & Alvim, 1997	*The Tale of the Unknown Island*. Illustrated by Peter Sís; translated by Margaret Jull Costa. London: Harvill, 1999; New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999
CL	*Cadernos de Lanzarote: diário*. Vol. 1–5. Lisboa: Caminho, 1994–1998. 5 vol.	
FP	*Folhas políticas: 1976–1998*. Lisboa: Caminho, 1999	
CV	*A Caverna*. Lisboa: Caminho, 2000	*The Cave.* Translated by Margaret Jull Costa. London: Harvill, 2002; New York: Harcourt, 2002
D	*O Homem Duplicado*. Lisboa: Caminho, 2002	*The Double*. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa. London: Harvill, 2004; Orlando: Harcourt, 2004

(*continued*)

(continued)

	Portuguese	*English translation*
S	*Ensaio sobre a Lucidez*. Lisboa: Caminho, 2004	*Seeing*. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa. Orlando: Harcourt, 2006
DI	*As Intermitências da Morte*. Lisboa: Caminho, 2005	*Death at Intervals*. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa. London: Harvill Secker, 2008
SM	*As Pequenas Memórias*. Lisboa: Caminho, 2006	*Small Memories*. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa. London: Harvill Secker, 2009
EJ	*A Viagem do Elefante*. Lisboa: Caminho, 2008	*The Elephant's Journey*. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010
CA	*Caim*. Lisboa: Caminho, 2009	*Cain*. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011
CD	*O Caderno. Textos escritos para o blog, Setembro de 2008–Março de 2009*. Com prólogo de Umberto Eco. Lisboa: Caminho, 2009	*The Notebook*. Translated by Amanda Hopkinson and Daniel Hahn. With a Forward by Umberto Eco. New York: Verso, 2010
SK	*Claraboia*. Lisboa: Caminho, 2011	*Skylight*. Translated by Margaret Jull Costa. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Proteus the Philosopher, or Reading Saramago as a Lover of Wisdom

Carlo Salzani and Kristof K. P. Vanhoutte

1

Γνῶθι σεαυτόν (*gnō̃thi seautón*): with these two words Socrates demonstrated, through the usage of philosophical irony, his great philosophical wisdom. And this ironical denial has since Socrates made history. Without desiring to list all those who have taken recourse to the "Socratic irony," we find it very much present in the author that stands at the center of this volume: the Portuguese Nobel Prize laureate José Saramago.

In an entry on May 17, 1993, of his *Lanzarote Notebooks* (*Cadernos de Lanzarote*), Saramago—the future author of, ironically, a novel entitled *The Cave*, which opens with an epigraph from Plato's *Republic*—confesses: "I understand nothing of philosophy" (*CL* 1:42). He will repeat this so-called ignorance on several occasions, stating either that "I have nothing of the philosopher" (*CL* 2:197) or "I know very little of philosophy" (Gómez Aguilera 2010, p. 165). These "confessions" must not be taken

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at face value but, obviously, rather ironically. In fact, at the same time he proclaims to know nothing of philosophy, he repeats, in several talks and interviews, that "our present society needs philosophy" (ibid., p. 165) and calls for a "return to philosophy," in the sense of a return to "what we hope to find in philosophy, that is, reflection, analysis, a sensibility that be critical and free" (Saramago 2005). This "return to philosophy" is intended, therefore, as a "return to thinking," to a dimension fundamental to and "inseparable from [,] human nature" (Saramago 2005) which contemporary society seems to have lost or at least belittled. Philosophy means here, broadly, "a space, a place, a method of reflection," "simply a way of feeling life, of living life, which culminates, when it happens …, in peace of mind [*serenidade*]" (Gómez Aguilera 2010, pp. 165, 96–97). In this sense, Saramago even argues that "philosophy should be included in human rights, and everybody should be entitled to it" (ibid., p. 471).

This commonsense view of philosophy does not exclude, however, a more concrete interest in *actual* philosophy, in the "philosophy of philosophers." Notwithstanding his ironical confessions of his philosophical ignorance, in Saramago's diaries, talks and interviews, there appear sparse but regular references to philosophers and philosophies. For example—and leaving aside the already mentioned reinterpretation of Plato's allegory of the cave—and once more through an ironical confession of his ignorance in philosophy, in a diary entry on September 17, 1994, he avows never to have taken interest in the philosophy of Karl Popper (who had just died) and wonders whether he has thereby missed some important tools to understand the world. The answer is negative, though the real target of Saramago's ironical disinterest is Popper's political—(neo)liberal—views (*CL* 2:197–98). In the same vein, on the occasion of the publication of one of Gianni Vattimo's books in Spanish (*Philosophy, Politics, Religion: Beyond "Weak Thought,"* 1996), he confesses never to have understood Vattimo's "weak thought" and especially his many "reconsiderations" about it—whereby, again, Saramago's targets are the political impacts of these views (*CL* 4:229–30).

Not all of Saramago's direct confrontations with the philosophy of the philosophers are, however, relegated to the ambit of ironical confessions of ignorance. At times he also goes for a much more direct "showdown" with the professional lovers of wisdom. For example, he recurrently attacks Francis Fukuyama for his thesis of the "End of History" that triumphally sanctifies neoliberal democracy as the final stage of human evolution (Saramago 1999; Céu e Silva 2009, p. 384). Furthermore, he also criticizes

Jacques Derrida for reducing the world to a text or Roland Barthes for his thesis of the "The Death of the Author" (Céu e Silva 2009, p. 101).

Saramago's philosophical lineage goes back, rather, to those masters of refined and compassionate rationalism like Montaigne or Voltaire (Gómez Aguilera 2010, pp. 139, 219; Céu e Silva 2009, p. 254n85; Baptista-Bastos 1996, p. 33), to an anti- (or pre-)academic philosophy that explored the depths, lights and shadows of the human condition in forms that confound and blend literary genres and academic compartmentalization. It is precisely in this sense that his oeuvre is profoundly "philosophical" (Grossegesse 1999, p. 10; Amorim 2010, pp. 27, 274): like the old masters, his works exercise systematic doubt, iconoclasm and pessimism, recurring to an implacable reason and embracing universal compassion. And this feature of his work has not been overlooked by interpreters and even by some perceptive philosopher: the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, for example, has on multiple occasions taken recourse to Saramago's novel *Seeing* (Žižek 2009a, b)—albeit mistakenly[1] (Vanhoutte 2013)[2]—and even before Žižek, Peter Hallward, the author of one of the more interesting reflections on the philosophy of Alain Badiou, wrote as a side-thought (but we all know that short remarks and quick "by the way" comments in philosophy contain the most interesting thoughts) that "Saramago's story *The Unknown Island* (1997) might even be read, up to a point, as an allegory of Badiou's philosophy in general" (Hallward 2003, p. 385n11).[3]

2

The reference to Montaigne and Voltaire is not accidental and helps moreover illuminate a peculiar trait of Saramago's work, of which he was well aware. On many occasions he repeated that "probably I'm not a novelist; probably I'm an essayist who needs to write novels because he cannot write essays" (Reis 1998, p. 48); "in all my novels," he stated again, "there is an essayistic temptation," and so his books can be considered as "essays with fictional characters" (Gómez Aguilera 2010, pp. 223, 264). Saramago saw his novels as "the place of a reflection about certain aspects of life I care about. I invent stories in order to express my concerns, my questions…"; in fact, he emphasizes, "I don't write books to tell stories" (Gómez Aguilera 2010, p. 264). Importantly, this "essayistic temptation" dissolves the divisions and separations between literary genres and transforms the novel into what Saramago himself calls a "literary space" (*espaço literário*), which, as such, admits everything into his realm: essay, science,

historiography, poetry—and also philosophy (*CL* 4:212; Gómez Aguilera 2010, p. 199). Saramago's novel is "a total expression," a sort of summa, a "reunification of all genres, a place of wisdom. It accommodates epic, theatre, philosophical or philosophizing reflection" (ibid., p. 263). And perhaps philosophical reflection even takes a leading, unifying role:

> I think that here there are reasons to approach what I've done not merely from the point of view of literary studies, but also from another point of view, which I wouldn't know how to name, but that has to do with other kinds of inquiries. Is it worth here to name philosophy, or another research of this kind? (Reis 1998, p. 49)

This can be sensed already from the titles of his many books. In fact, as he himself notes (Saramago 2013, pp. 36–37), the titles of his novels are not "appropriate" to traditional novels and confound genre divisions. His first "mature" novel is titled *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* (1977), and the book that made him internationally famous is titled *Memorial do Convento* (literally, *The Monastery Memoir*, English translation *Baltasar and Blimunda*, 1982). Other titles include *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* (1989), *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (1991), *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira* and *Ensaio sobre a Lucidez* (literally *Essay on Blindness* and *Essay on Lucidity*, English translations *Blindness* and *Seeing*, 1995 and 2004). "Manual," "memoir," "history," "essay" and even a "gospel": Saramago's "literary space" combines and merges all genres in a critical analysis of the moral, social and political predicaments of our times, just like Montaigne's essays and Voltaire's stories and novellas. In the philosophical attempt to explore and understand human nature, its subject matter is the universal/atemporal themes of freedom, free will, identity, the human condition and the foundations of our morals, even when, as in *The Elephant's Journey* (2008), he talks about an elephant: "I need to show all possible connections, both the close as the distant ones, so that the reader understands that, when I talk about an elephant, for example, I'm talking about human life. This is the essayist's attitude. From this point of view, I don't see any contradiction between the novel and the essay" (Gómez Aguilera 2010, p. 334).

The choice to present these philosophical themes through fictional images and stories—again beyond his ironic confession that he writes novels because he cannot write essays—aims at proposing a different access to experience and knowledge. Albert Camus, who—together with Calvino and Montaigne—figures as one of Saramago's great literary friendships

(Baptista-Bastos 1996, p. 33), wrote that "[t]he great novelists are philosophical novelists," and their preference for "writing in images rather than in reasoned arguments" is grounded in the conviction "of the uselessness of any principle of explanation" and "of the educative message of perceptible appearance" (Camus 1991, p. 101).[4] This definition is a perfect fit for Saramago. Even if his books are not essays proper (Céu e Silva 2009, p. 254), and if he acknowledges that literature and philosophy are not the same thing,[5] his novels nonetheless pursue an artistic, fictional access to universal themes in which the author himself is—almost physically—immersed in what he writes and in the awareness of the fact of writing (Saramago 2005). Just as in Montaigne's essays, the author himself is the subject matter of the artistic-philosophical pursuit (Arias 1998, p. 36), whereby the subjective perspective is universalized into an "investigation into the human" as such, and art becomes the preferred vehicle of this research ("philosophy too is art" [Gómez Aguilera 2010, p. 198]).[6]

Saramago called this pursuit a "Homerization" of the novel, a totalizing, anti-postmodernist transformation whereby the "literary space" turns into a sea, an ocean, capable of receiving into itself the multifarious rivers of human experience, becoming, as such, expression of knowledge and wisdom, just like the great poems of classical antiquity (*CL* 4:212). And, to pursue further this maritime metaphor, this is perhaps why his art is so difficult to classify and escapes, like the sea-god Proteus, all attempts to get hold of it; as Harold Bloom tellingly writes: "Rereading Saramago, I always feel like Ulysses trying to keep my hold on Proteus, the metamorphic god of the ocean; he keeps slipping away" (Bloom 2005, p. ix).

3

An important mark of Saramago's "essayistic temptation" is his "didactic" penchant (Gómez Aguilera 2010, p. 226), which gives his novels almost a Brechtian flavor. Beyond his very outspoken and (intentionally) overstated public interventions (put forward, however, in his capacity of simple "citizen" and not of "professional writer"), his novels always carry an ethico-political charge, which constitutes more often than not the cornerstone of the narrative itself—and also of its philosophical scope. His inquiries into the human condition lead the author and the reader to a voyage—simultaneously ruthless and compassionate—through its miseries, barbarism, dehumanization and unreason, and always count as denunciation of all forms of dogmatism, authoritarianism, irrationality and neglect. In this sense, again,

Saramago follows the lead of the old masters (beginning with his model Montaigne), and, much unlike most postmodern "relativists," he ranks among the great "moralists" of our time—obviously not in the sense that his works try to tell people what to do or how to act, but because of what he calls the "necessity of an ethical content," which goes hand in hand with his critical attitude (Gómez Aguilera 2010, p. 369). This critical attitude and ethical charge translate, in turn, into a denunciation of (postmodernist) politically correct thinking and writing: "'correct thinking' is a contradiction," he once said, "because all thinking is incorrect" (ibid., p. 490).

For Saramago, the writer is a man of his time, and this entails that "what he writes is always either political action or omission" (ibid., p. 205).[7] His philosophical novels are therefore also, simultaneously, political novels—and here, again, not because they propose political theories or perspectives (they are not *romans à thèse*), but because they are interventions into society presenting and debating ethico-political questions and problems and as such are a form of "political action."

It is in this context that the very complex relationship between Saramago the author and Saramago the individual, with his political convictions and everything that these bring along (willingly or not)—and, in the peculiar case of Saramago, have effectively brought along for him—can be rendered somewhat more explicit.[8] To start with probably the most paradigmatic example of this paradox, was Saramago, as he was so frequently asked, a communist writer or a writer communist (cf. Baptista-Bastos 1996, p. 42)? That Saramago himself did not like either one of these definitions and preferred to declare himself a communist who was at the same time an author (and where authorship had chronological precedence) is rather saying. On the other hand, Saramago's answer does not obligatorily exclude the presence (maybe unaware and only at certain moments/passages?) of the communist/writer or writer/communist. It suffices to think about novels such as *Raised from the Ground* (1980), about a small working community embarking on its first embryonic unionist experiment in the midst of a totalitarian-style regime, or his *Baltasar and Blimunda* (1982) and *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* (1989), where it is not hard at all to find some affinity with Marxist historical determinism. These relationships are present, and easily made as well, but—and this is the paradox—they are not necessary and not fundamental either (in fact, considering them as such, as was and is still so often done, is detrimental).

Similar paradoxical affinities and relationships can be found regarding broader political issues as well. We already made reference to *Raised from*

the Ground and the presence of a fascist-like regime in this novel; similar regimes will be brought forth in *Blindness* and *Seeing*. All of these can obviously be brought back to Saramago's experience living (as a communist) under the Salazar regime, but they are also about much more. It would not be exaggerated here to consider these novels as paradigmatic, along the lines of the definition given to this concept by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (Agamben 2009). Two final examples: also *The Stone Raft* (1986) could be read with an eye on the adherence of the Iberian Peninsula (but without the Gibraltar "rock") to what was then known as the "European common market" which would (and did) take place only a couple of years later in 1992. And, to conclude this series of examples, one could also ask whether a book like *Journey to Portugal* (1981) could have been written by anybody who would end up going into voluntary (?) exile—although Saramago himself somewhat cynically defined it as a simple "relocation" (Baptista-Bastos 1996, p. 59).[9]

In a certain sense, we could, somewhat provocatively, claim that Saramago's novels, besides being similar to the Agambenian paradigm, can also be considered along the line of what Alain Badiou calls "evental sites" (Badiou 2005, pp. 173–77). Not itself (yet) an event, the "evental site," that is, the historical and "*local*" "abnormal multitude" that is "*foundational*" (ibid., pp. 175–76, italics in the original), is the absolutely necessary (but, for that same reason, not inevitable[10]) precondition of the event. Saramago's novels can thus be described similarly: works whose words refer to localizable and somewhat historical situations, which constitute more than anything multitudes and which contain all the necessary elements of braking open in favor of a possible event (still) to come.

4

If Saramago's oeuvre as a whole can be deemed "philosophical," it presents nonetheless a point (if not of "rupture," at least) of transformation which emphasizes and accentuates even more its philosophical tenor. With the publication of *Blindness* (which Saramago himself defined "a philosophical tale" along the classical model [*CL* 1:15–16, *CL* 2:101] or a "philosophical novel similar to the eighteenth century genre" [Baptista-Bastos 1996, p. 64]) begins in fact his so-called allegorical cycle, which, by departing from concrete spatiotemporal coordinates, digs even deeper, through allegory, into the dark depths of the human condition. Saramago was very conscious of this shift in his writing and, beginning with a famous

1997 conference in Turin, described it using the metaphor of the passage "from the statue to the stone" (*da estátua à pedra*). Here he writes:

> It is as if from *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* to *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, for fourteen years, I had devoted myself to describing a statue. What is a statue? A statue is the surface of the stone, the result of carving and chiseling the stone. A description of the exterior of the stone is, metaphorically, what we find in the novels mentioned above. When I finished *The Gospel* I did not yet know that until that moment I had described statues. I had to understand that a new world opened up to me when I abandoned the surface of the stone and delved into its interior, and that happened with *Blindness*. I sensed then that something had ended in my life as a writer and something different was just beginning. (Saramago 2013, p. 42)

Aiming at penetrating into the interior of the stone means attempting to go even deeper into the heart of the human. "[I]t is an attempt to inquiry what we really are," Saramago writes, and this inquiry brings even more to the forth the (always present) most intimate intention of Saramago's narrative. If the subject matter of his work has always been "the human being" (Saramago 2013, pp. 43, 45; cf. also Saramago 2005; Céu e Silva 2009, p. 123), from *Blindness* onward this pursuit becomes a metaphysical inquiry on the irrationality of the human condition (Baptista-Bastos 1996, p. 65).[11]

Allegory allows Saramago to do without definite historical and geographic settings and specific identities (most characters have no name, and their physical features are almost never defined and described) and to approach thereby the "essence" of a situation or of an experience, its "metaphysical" core, as it were: "I think that in my novels there is perhaps a metaphysics," he avowed to Carlos Reis (1998, p. 98), and this "metaphysical" intention was well recognized by perceptive readers, not last by one as acute and astute as Umberto Eco (*CD* 11). Moreover, allegory also allows Saramago to stretch this "metaphysical" core to its logical limits, to abandon the constraints of realism, mimesis and their "inertia" (Amorim 2010, p. 110), and thereby explore and decode—through a deforming mirror—the core of reality. The "allegorical" cycle in fact rests on "what-if" hypotheses: what if an epidemic of white blindness stroke a city? What if 83 percent of the voters casted a blank ballot? What if people suddenly stopped dying? What if one were to encounter one's *doppelgänger*?

Through allegory Saramago explores thus what he names "the possibility of the impossible": "My work deals with the possibility of the impossible.

I ask the reader to make a deal: even if the idea is absurd, the most important thing is to imagine its development. An idea is the point of departure, but the development is always rational and logic" (Gómez Aguilera 2010, p. 229).[12] Such an inquiry constitutes the core of any true philosophical research and even rests at the origins of philosophical wonder: "thinking the impossible" is not just the title of a recent work on contemporary French philosophy (Gutting 2013; cf. also Resta 2016) but is a mark of philosophical inquiry and of philosophy as such.[13]

And, in fact, Saramago's "possibility of the impossible" almost obviously and immediately makes one think, in contemporary French philosophy, of, for example, Jacques Derrida's notion of the "condition of possibility" that characterizes his "later" work—a condition of possibility that, in fact, can only "depart" or become possible starting from a contemporaneous and almost simultaneous condition of impossibility. Did not, for example, the "conditions of possibility of the gift … designate simultaneously the conditions of the impossibility of the gift" (Derrida 1994, p. 12)?[14] And wasn't the act of forgiving only possible because of its sheer impossibility, "that impossibility of forgiveness, of which we just said nevertheless that it was, paradoxically, the very element of all possible forgiveness" (Derrida 2001, p. 48)? But even before Derrida, did Michel Foucault's classic *The Order of Things* not begin with an attempt to put into words that something (Borges' famous classification of animals from a "certain Chinese encyclopedia") was impossible to think (Foucault 2002, p. xvi)? Derrida and Foucault are not the only ones whom could be listed here as examples of philosophers who, and of philosophies which, have made of "thinking the impossible" the cipher of their doing philosophy. In fact, as Gary Gutting quite acutely demonstrates, "French philosophy [and we could add, considering also the geographical width of this philosophical operation, "a large part of the continental tradition of doing philosophy"] since the 1960s has been primarily concerned with thinking the impossible" (Gutting 2013, p. 3) or, said differently, "with thinking what is conceptually impossible" (Gutting 2013, p. 184).

Saramago's thinking "the possibility of the impossible" might have had, however, its own *historical* conditions of possibility. It is possible, as João Marques Lopes argues, that Saramago's "allegorical turn" was *also* the outcome of the convergence of certain sociohistorical factors: from the "democratic normalization" (toward the political center) of the Carnation Revolution to Portugal's integration within the (then) European Economic Community (EEC); from the inglorious end of "real existing socialism" to

the triumph and universalization of neoliberalism and the replacement of emancipatory Enlightenment reason by the "postmodern," fragmentary perspective. This series of political and historical "defeats" might have pushed the elderly writer toward more abstract themes and situations and a more skeptical and pessimistic attitude, which produced his famous dystopias (Marques Lopes 2010, pp. 103–4). However, the "allegorical cycle" only accentuates some traits and tendencies present from the beginning in Saramago writing, and his oeuvre as a whole can be considered not only stylistically but also thematically and "philosophically" unitary. In every work, from the first "mature" experiments of the 1970s[15] to the final series of short novels at the end of his life, Saramago has been, lucidly and coherently, one of the great *chercheurs d'hommes* of our times.

6

Saramago bequeathed to us a rich and variegated philosophical heritage, and the purpose of the present volume is to begin to explore some of the possible philosophical issues and perspectives it has to offer. The lines of inquiry adopted by, and the philosophical topics explored in, the various chapters are many and diverse, ranging from Saramago's use of Plato's allegory of the cave to his theologico-political rereadings of Biblical stories, from his critique and "reinvention" of philosophy of history to his allegorical exploration of alternative histories, from his humorous approach to being-toward-death to the revolutionary political charge of his fiction. The philosophical perspectives adopted are also quite heterogeneous, which, in a very Saramaguean fashion, eschew sectorialization and specialization and give this collection the Saramaguean flavor of a "philosophical space."

The volume opens with two chapters analyzing Saramago's "philosophy of history," which thematically focus mainly on his "pre-allegorical" production of the 1970s and 1980s. Carlo Salzani's "Correcting History: Apocalypticism, Messianism and Saramago's Philosophy of History" countervails the widely accepted "postmodernist" readings of Saramago's so-called (but not by him) historical novels, emphasizing instead his "redemptive" perspective. Saramago's trajectory belongs to the Marxist tradition of an emancipative (re-)reading of history and shares some fundamental traits—the view of history as catastrophe, the anti-utopianism, the vindication of the history of the vanquished, the simultaneist perspective, the feeling of living on the verge of an epochal change—with a vision of history that spans from Walter Benjamin to Giorgio Agamben and is known

as "messianic." Against this background, Salzani reads the clash of different historical perspectives and visions in Saramago's play *In Nomine Dei* (1993), which allows for a questioning of the philosophies of history of our own time that counterpoises bourgeois history, Apocalypticism, Prophetism and Messianism. Similarly, Maria Pina Fersini's "The 'Dark Side' of History: Saramago, Foucault and Synchronic History" construes a parallel reading of, and a "dialogue" between, Saramago's oeuvre and Foucault's view of history. Fersini's reading shows how both the novelist and the philosopher lay the foundations for the transition from a diachronic historiography, understood as a sequence of events, to a synchronic historiography, attentive to the complexities of the internal relations which compose a historical epoch—including that between the observer and the object observed. Andre Santos Campos' "José Saramago's 'Magical' Historical Materialism" follows up as a sort of conclusion to the "historical" chapters. His chapter analyzes Saramago's Marxist historical materialism in relation to the "magic realism" structuring his narratives, sustaining that his usage of allegories is never fully immune to the deterministic conditions of societies that can be identified in the light of a materialist conception of history.

The following chapter focuses on Saramago's most explicitly "philosophical" work, *The Cave*. Giuseppe Menditto's "Some Remarks on a Phenomenological Interpretation of Saramago's *Cave*" compares Saramago's image with the most significant phenomenological interpretations of the Platonic allegory (i.e., Martin Heidegger, Jan Patočka, Eugen Fink and Jacques Derrida) to argue that, on the one hand, Saramago's narrative may be discussed within a broader phenomenological framework, whose main topics include the role of temporality and the "call from the future," the space for a tactile and bodily knowledge, the recognition of oneself through responsibility and the relation between reality and possibility of experience, and, on the other hand, that since Saramago overthrows and expands the original Platonic myth into a renewed imagination, these phenomenological reflections are forced to come back down into the cave by his narrative power. The following is a further reflection about the role of imagination and literature. Maria Aristodemou's "Death by Representation: In Law, in Literature, and in That Space Between" construes a parallel reading of Saramago's *All the Names* and *Death at Intervals* with Cornelia Vismann's *Files: Law and Media Technology* to suggest that, where the symbolic order fetishizes the signifier at the expense of the real, and the form of the law at the expense of its substance, works of art can resurrect inert signifiers and immobile corpses and turn them into living, breathing and grow-

ing bodies. The texts share a focus on the signifier and its activities of naming, law-recording and law-preserving. What allows them, however, to persist beyond the death wreaked by representation are two minor miracles that take place in the interstices of the signifiers: love and poetry. The loss, or death, inflicted by the signifier can be rejoined, pasted or united in a space between the symbolic and the real, a zone Lacan calls the space between two deaths and that is also the space between law and literature.

The two following chapters focus on Saramago's takes on religion. Federico Dal Bo's "A Contemporary Midrash: Saramago's Re-Telling of the 'Sacrifice of Isaac'" considers a precise Biblical episode: the sacrifice of Isaac as retold in Saramago's novel *Cain*. Dal Bo shows, on the one hand, how Saramago has filled some narratological blanks the Biblical "Sacrifice of Isaac" suffers from; and, on the other hand, he compares Saramago's expansion of the Scriptural "Sacrifice of Isaac" with the Jewish midrash (or "narrative interpretation") of this very Biblical passage, arguing that the Jewish midrash intends to provide many details that are lacking in the almost quite laconic Biblical text. The goal is to show what the "Sacrifice of Isaac" actually is from the perspective of neither the perpetrators (God and Abraham) nor the victim (Isaac) but rather from the perspective of humanity, here represented by Cain: the first murderer and the first founder of a city in the history of humanity. In "Female Representations in José Saramago: A Space for Oppositional Discourses from the Canonical Gospels to the Gospel According to Jesus Christ," Camila Carvalho Santiago focuses instead on *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* in order to emphasize the representation of Jesus' poignant humanity. To this end Carvalho analyzes the way Saramago shows Jesus' utmost weaknesses and strengths through the representation of the women who strongly affect his life, his mother Mary and Mary Magdalene. The focus on the body, sexuality and mortality reflects a certain degree of empathy with the female characters, who finally embody the only possible redemption in Saramago's reinvention of the evangelical characters and the message of Christ.

The representation of female characters in Saramago's work is also the topic of the following chapter, Ana Paula Ferreira's "Saramago's Axiology of Gender Difference." Ferreira argues for a contextual reading of female characters in relation to the resurgence of feminist activism in contemporary Portugal, from the late 1960s through the 1980s, informed as it was by broader currents of thought drawing from the avant-garde's engagement with Marxist poststructuralist perspectives informed by linguistics, anthropology and psychoanalysis. Focusing on the six novels constituting

Saramago's self-admitted first phase, from *Manual of Painting and Calligraphy* to *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, the chapter exposes the contradictions of the stereotypical roles assigned to women in revolutionary struggles and Saramago's engagement with embodied, sexualized feminine difference as the crux of his ongoing critique of masculine-normed Enlightenment reason. Ultimately, Ferreira explores how Saramago confronts the pervasively tyrannical, dehumanizing meanings attached to women in the Judeo-Christian Western tradition. In a similar way, Carlo Salzani and Kristof K. P. Vanhoutte's "Saramago's Dogs: For an Inclusive Humanism" focuses on Saramago's deconstruction of the Western humanistic tradition through an analysis of the dogs portrayed in his work. Saramago's privileged relationship with his dogs goes way beyond biographical trivia and was artistically sublimated into a highly symbolic function in his writings: dogs appear in many of his novels, and in some of them, they ascend to the rank of central characters. If the dogs always play a positive role, their presence is however charged with symbolism and their philosophical and artistic functions need to be unpacked. The chapter presents such a phenomenology of Saramago's dogs, arguing that they not only constitute a powerful and captivating artistic device but also endow his work with a strong political-philosophical charge that at times even transcends the author's intentions.

Finally, two chapters more explicitly emphasize the political significance and implications of Saramago's novels. David Jenkins' "Traumatic Counterfactuals" focuses on Saramago's novels after the "allegorical turn" to argue that the alternatives that are precipitated by imagined seismic change or catastrophe offer alternative perspectives by which to judge current, utterly non-fantastical crises and, more crucially, the means by which such catastrophes can be worked—or at least thought—through. They become exercises in a peculiar brand of radical consciousness-raising in which the familiar is made unfamiliar through redescription, only to be then used as a deeper reflection of what is actually going on. Through the technique of the "catastrophic counterfactual," Saramago offers his reader a partial corrective to his own diagnosis of present liberal optimism and complacency, replacing the sense that "we are always more or less blind, particularly for what is essential" with a clearer understanding of our collective predicaments. Kristof K. P. Vanhoutte's "Bye Bye *Bartleby* and Hello *Seeing*, or, On the Silence and the Actualization to Do… Not" closes the volume by finding in Saramago's *Seeing* a possible overcoming of an impasse Vanhoutte identifies in various political-philosophical uses of

the figure of Melville's *Bartleby*. The pure potentiality of a vocal Bartleby is overcome in the "positive negative," the silent actualization of the potentiality to do… not, of the mostly nameless and mainly quiet characters in Saramago's *Seeing*. The simple mute casting of an accountable blank ballot, which unveils the hidden totalitarian nature of the political, creates the perfect setting for a Paulinian-like fulfilling. The highly speculative and provocative challenge, speculative and provocative because of its heretical simplicity, brought forth in this novel by Saramago is to be considered as an actual possibility of political change. The strength of the message proposed by Saramago is to be found in the sheer normality of the "day after." In fact, contrary to what is shared by the defenders of the status quo and the theoreticians that turn to Bartleby and his Messianic intervention, "the worst is never certain," and it is this opening of a future that is almost identical as the present that is to be considered the fundamental political message of Saramago.

Notes

1. On the back of Žižek's (mis)reading of *Seeing* in *Violence*, Saul Newman has similarly mis-reinterpreted Saramago's novel (Newman 2010: pp. 180–81). Newman, however, adds a more personal note to this shared misreading when he interestingly continues his discussion of *Seeing* by referring to La Boétie's treatise *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*. According to Newman, La Boétie's "pamphlet" can be seen as a theoretical anticipation and elaboration of Saramago's fictional realization proposed in *Seeing*. Still more recently Daniele Giglioli, a new upcoming voice in Italian critical theory, has taken a closer look at *Seeing* in his *Stato di minorità* (*State of Minority*) while making, according to us, a similar misreading. For Giglioli, who claims, as we will also do in what follows, to find in *Seeing* a *roman philosophique* containing a political allegory, Saramago's essay is the quintessential story of impotence (Giglioli 2015, pp. 26, 24).
2. More recently, Žižek has referred to Saramago once more with a different interpretation still; cf. Žižek 2016.
3. It would have been interesting to discover what Zygmunt Bauman might have done with Saramago in a more structured and elaborated way. Alas, as he wrote in his diary/non-diary, Saramago has only been a late discovery, when he had already observed and accepted the fact that "a full-length study [of whatever] hoping to do justice to its object, is no longer on my cards" (Bauman 2012, p. 3). And so some, still quite cunning but small comments in his recent publications such as *This is not a Diary* or *On*

Education, where a small chapter is dedicated to Saramago (Bauman and Mazzeo 2012, pp. 7–10), are, unfortunately, all we have.

4. Silvia Amorim (2010) uses Camus' thesis as an epigraph for her book on Saramago, which, in the first part, emphasizes precisely the philosophical scope of Saramago's narrative. And she adds another, very fitting quote by Milan Kundera: "The novelist is neither historian nor prophet: he is an explorer of existence" (Kundera 2005, p. 44).
5. In a 2005 interview, Saramago affirmed, in fact, the following: "Literature shouldn't be philosophical, just like philosophy shouldn't be literary" (Saramago 2005).
6. Among the *romanciers philosophes* mentioned by Camus—Balzac, Sade, Melville, Stendhal, Dostoyevsky, Proust, Malraux and Kafka (Camus 1991, p. 101)—the latter takes here a particular relevance, both because Saramago himself always lists him among the great influences of his personal literary-philosophical lineage (together with Montaigne and Pessoa; Gómez Aguilera 2010, p. 223) and because of Kafka's *philosophical* relevance for many philosophers and philosophical interpretations, comparable for us to that of Saramago. In an interview, Saramago refers to Kafka when speaking about "art's mission in society": as for Kafka, for Saramago, too, art should be "the ax for the frozen sea within us" (Gómez Aguilera 2010, pp. 198–99; the Kafka quotation comes from a 1904 letter to Oskar Pollak, in Kafka 1977, p. 28).
7. Responding to a question by his friend Armando Baptista-Bastos, Saramago even affirmed that "in a broad sense all novels are political" (Baptista-Bastos 1996, p. 42).
8. We believe it is necessary to stress our phrasing of "rendering explicit" the paradoxical relationship between Saramago the author and Saramago the politically involved individual. We have no intention, nor believe it is necessary, to "resolve" this paradoxical relationship.
9. It might be interesting to underscore (and hope that someone will once dedicate himself to studying) the highly provocative (and/or fictive but for this reason not less real) similarity between José Saramago and Michel Houellebecq. Both authors, for one reason or another, experienced or decided to live in exile, and both authors situated, in reality or fiction, in Lanzarote a place of (ir)real repose.
10. An "evental site," as Badiou writes, is "[t]he site is only ever a *condition of being* for the event." The site "merely opens up the possibility of an event. It is always possible that no event actually occurs. Strictly speaking, a site is only 'evental' insofar as it is retroactively qualified as such by the occurrence of an event… there is no event save relative to a historical situation, even if a historical situation does not *necessarily* produce events" (Badiou 2005, p. 179; italics in original).