For Hilary and our Edinburgh friends
the other, a willingness to live through the consequences of the past in the present. In contrast to a sense of responsibility based on shame, which seeks to redeem an identity tainted by past wrongs, such political responsibility does not so much look to the wronged for forgiveness but invites them to join in the risky business of realising a shared polity. The question of intergenerational guilt for past wrongs is considered in relation to the debate over responsibility for wrongs perpetrated against indigenous peoples by the settler society in Australia.

In Chapter 9, I discuss the politics of remembrance in a society divided by past wrongs. Following Arendt, I argue that a reconciliatory politics requires respect for factual truth, of that which is simply because it was not otherwise. For, although the world-disclosing potential of politics is predicated on the fact that the world appears differently to each of us, it is only to the extent that we are aware of perceiving the same object in common that this world might become more common to us. Yet, it is only by being selected and ordered within a story that facts are meaningful. I discuss and problematise Arendt's account of the redemptive power of narrative in relation to the unspeakable truths associated with trauma. Furthermore, I examine Arendt's and Walter Benjamin's philosophies of history: their shared rejection of success as a criterion for historical significance and their different accounts of the importance of remembering the deeds of the defeated. I argue that, just as reconciliation seeks to realise a community that is always 'not yet', so the task of remembrance remains always unfinished because new aspects of old injustices will be revealed to the backward glance of future generations. The difficulties of remembrance and historical understanding are discussed in relation to the work of truth commissions.

1 Reconciliation and politics

In an important sense, reconciliation is at odds with politics. Whereas reconciliation tends towards closure, harmony, consensus and union, politics tends towards openness, agonism, conflict and plurality. Nevertheless, reconciliation has become a central term in the political discourse of many divided societies. In this context, a shared commitment to reconciliation enables politics between citizens divided by the violence of the past. Yet, insofar as unity is presupposed as its ultimate end, the logic of reconciliation inclines towards a final settlement that would bring this politics to a close. If we are to understand reconciliation as a political concept, then, we must consider not only how politics might be conciliatory but how reconciliation might be politicised. Throughout this book, I will argue that, while the aspiration to reconcile is an enabling condition of politics, politics must be invoked to resist the moment of closure that reconciliation might otherwise tend towards.

Following from this, to understand reconciliation politically, we need to reverse the order of our moral thinking. In moral terms, reconciliation refers to the restoration of a wrongdoer to community. By violating the shared norms that bind the moral community, a wrongdoer alienates himself from his co-members. The wrongdoer's return to community is initiated by his acknowledgement of the truth of his wrongdoing and is completed with his forgiveness by those he has wronged. If we are to conceive reconciliation politically, however, we cannot presuppose community but must recognise it as the contingent outcome of politics. Consequently, political reconciliation begins (rather than ends) with the invocation of a 'we'. Faith in the possibility of community enables a collective reckoning with the past in terms of which former enemies might eventually arrive at a shared understanding of what went before.

I begin to make a case for these claims in this chapter by examining the potentially contradictory logics of reconciliation and politics. I consider the legacy of grave state wrongs that political reconciliation must address. In such circumstances, it is not adequate to conceive reconciliation in terms of restoration because this makes an unwarranted presumption of community. In contrast, a political conception of reconciliation would be conditioned by an awareness of the risk of politics that Carl Schmitt draws our attention to: the ever-present possibility of
the friend–enemy relation. I show how this guiding distinction brings to light the politics of reconciliation, which tend to be obscured by the religious, therapeutic and economic discourses in which reconciliation is often represented. Yet, when the distinction between friend and enemy becomes an organising principle of politics, it seems to preclude the possibility of reconciliation altogether. Following from this, I suggest that the problem that political reconciliation must address is not how to overcome a relation of alienation between co-members of a moral community but, rather, how to transform a relation of enmity into one of civic friendship.

The legacy of grave state wrongs

If the crowning political achievement of modernity is the development of constitutional democracy, this also has its dark side. The innovation of the eighteenth-century revolutions was to combine the liberties of the moderns with those of the ancients by conjuring rule by the demos with the rule of law. On the one hand, the legitimacy of the state was established by divesting sovereignty from the monarch and investing it in ‘the people’. On the other hand, it was understood to depend on the state’s role in securing the private freedoms of individuals through the institution of rights. Yet, despite this achievement in principle, modern states have, in fact, been responsible for the most pervasive and systematic destruction of human life in history. State-organised killings are often described as acts of barbarism or madness, which suggests that they are an aberration of the fragile achievement of civilisation. Yet, on closer examination, the ethnic and political cleansing of certain categories of people from within a territory under the control of a state appears to be a distinctly ‘modern tradition’ (Mann 1999: 18).

The modernity of genocide is apparent not only in the technocratic means employed to bring it about but the end for which it is perpetrated. As Zygmunt Bauman (2000: 91) argues, traditional motives for mass extermination range from ‘cold-blooded calculation of competitive gain’ (‘there is no room for both of us’) to ‘disinterested hatred or heterophobia’ (‘the only good Indian is a dead one’). With modern genocide, in contrast, elimination of the other is not an end in itself but a means to realising a rational design for society. It is part of a plan to remake the world in the image of an ideal. Mass extermination is undertaken in order to bring about a ‘harmonious world, conflict-free, docile in the hands of [its] rulers, orderly, controlled’ (Bauman 2000: 93). Bauman shows modern genocide to be consistent with the ‘civilising process’ itself and, in particular, with the instrumental rationality in terms of which modern society is organised. In this context, law – which is supposed to restrain violence – becomes a means to regulate its systematic deployment.

Moreover, as Michael Mann (1999) suggests, genocide may be regarded as the ‘dark side of democracy’ as modern regimes typically justify their murderous projects in the name of ‘the people’. As every act of inclusion is predicated on one of exclusion, the invocation of the idea of ‘the people’ often functions not only to legitimise the state but to generate a sense of an alien other that threatens the integrity of the people from within. Because the claim to sovereignty is not only a claim to self-determination but a claim over territory, this may lead to these others being forcibly removed from the territory of the people. Various types and degrees of ‘cleansing’ have been applied by states in order to protect the sovereignty of a people from an alien form of life within the body politic. These have included cultural assimilation, biological assimilation, coerced emigration, murderous cleansing and, ultimately, genocide.

Both the rationalisation of mass murder as a means to a better social order and the undertaking of this act to secure the sovereignty of the people are motivated by a profoundly anti-political mentality, for they are driven by a resentment of the plurality of the human world, the unpredictability of action and the always unfinished character of community. Consequently, the memory of such offences undermines the possibility of politics in the present between those implicated in wrongdoing and those targeted for persecution. The knowledge that what has been could be again emasculates the conditions that enable social trust as it establishes a self-perpetuating legacy of hatred, fear, guilt and resentment.

Since the end of the cold war, many societies have been struggling to arrest and overcome the legacy of grave state wrongs. Attempts to reckon with a painful past are often associated with a transition to democracy during which a range of official responses are available to a new regime. These include amnesty and criminal trials, reparation and restitution, removal of collaborators from public office, official investigations into the causes and consequences of state wrongs and constitution making (see Kritz 1995; Minow 1998; Teitel 2000). Such measures are usually referred to as forms of transitional justice as they are associated with a period of rapid political change during which the demand for retributive justice must be balanced against the imperative to consolidate a democratic regime (see Huntington 1991: 208–79). Efforts to reckon with state wrongs, though, have not been confined to new democracies, which must tread lightly in their justice-seeking measures for fear of a military coup or return to civil war. In many well-established democracies, the memory of offence continues to be a source of grievance for a section of the population and presents a legitimacy crisis for the state.

Yet, legal remedies alone are insufficient to address the legacy of grave state wrongs. Important as they are, the goals of restoring the rule of law and promoting a culture of respect for human rights presume that state wrongs represent a temporary aberration of the moral–political order and thereby overlook the law’s historical role in sanctioning state violence. Moreover, such legal strategies do not allow for the possibility that the memory of offence might foreclose the possibility of political association in the present. This risk is real because those ‘ordinary citizens’ who were neither immediate perpetrators nor victims are invariably implicated in the modes of oppression or conflict that underpin political violence. Given the persistence of hard feelings between citizens, focusing on institutional reform and legal remedies might, at best, facilitate a more fundamental reckoning with the past. For, in such circumstances, ordinary citizens need to find good grounds to live together in the first place if they are to affirm the legitimacy of shared institutions. This fundamental reckoning is inherently political because
it centres on the possibility of invoking a ‘we’ that might meaningfully include both the perpetrators and the survivors – the oppressors and the oppressed – of the former regime.

In this context, the concept of reconciliation emerged in the political discourse of divided societies such as South Africa, Australia and Chile in the 1990s. In these countries, reconciliation was promoted by the state as a way of dealing with the legacy of grave wrongs perpetrated by a former regime. As Priscilla Hayner (2002: 161) observes, reconciliation ‘implies building or rebuilding relationships today that are not haunted by the conflicts and hatreds of yesterday’. In the reconciled polity, she argues, the wrongs of the past could be discussed openly and without bitterness in public. Relationships between former antagonists would be based on responding to present challenges rather than identifying each other in relation to past events. Moreover, there would be some common agreement on fundamental historical facts concerning what wrongs were perpetrated. However, as Hayner acknowledges, it remains unclear, beyond this minimal definition, what political reconciliation should amount to and how it should be achieved. Consequently, the meaning of reconciliation tends to be vigorously contested among citizens divided by past wrongs.

According to W. B. Gallie (1969: 123), an ‘essentially contested concept’ is one whose proper use ‘inevitably involves endless disputes about [its] proper [use] on the part of [its] users’. ‘Reconciliation’ is clearly such a concept. Actors may disagree over what form reconciliation should take or how it should be realised. However, even the most conservative supporter and the most radical opponent of the old regime are likely to agree that reconciliation is a desirable social good in the changed political circumstances in which they find themselves. Reconciliation is an internally complex concept because it refers to a cluster of practices that include (among other things) repenting, restoring, punishing, apologising, repairing, forgiving, redeeming, forgetting, remembering, promising and understanding. Moreover, it is a concept broadly open to interpretation so that actors are likely to differ significantly in their understanding of what ‘true’ reconciliation would entail. In South Africa, for instance, reconciliation was interpreted differently by various actors in terms of: a non-racial ideology that promotes unity in the form of the ‘rainbow nation’; an intercommunal understanding that would preserve the distinct identities of separate cultures; a religious ideology that demands repentance from wrongdoers; a human rights approach that calls for restoring the rule of law in order to prevent future abuses; and community building that would restore social trust in divided townships (Hamber and van der Merwe 1998).

This contestability shows reconciliation to be a fundamentally political concept. As Brandon Hamber and Hugo van der Merwe (1998) discuss, although the various interpretations of reconciliation they identify sometimes co-existed ‘quite comfortably’ within political institutions and discourses in South Africa, they are, in various ways, incompatible. Consequently, the different meanings assigned to reconciliation often emerged at the ‘core of the conflict between different groups’. This conceptual contestability should be affirmed because, as I will show, it creates a ‘space for political interaction’ (Connolly 1993: 6). As William Connolly (1993: 6) argues, politics typically entails an ‘ambiguous and relatively open-ended interaction of persons and groups who share a range of concepts but share them imperfectly and incompletely’. By accommodating multiple meanings, reconciliation provides a common vocabulary within which citizens may contest the terms and possibility of their political association. Political reconciliation depends on this contestability because it points to an ambiguity that counters a certain anti-political view of reconciliation, which forecloses political opportunity by privileging consensus as a regulative ideal.

The political inadequacy of the restorative conception of reconciliation

The contestability that is inherent to any conception of reconciliation tends to be occluded when reconciliation is construed in terms of restoration. According to advocates of restorative justice, reconciliation is central to the way we make sense of moral experience. Wrongdoing is understood, in this context, in relation to the ideal of union – that being joined together with others completes us (Morris 1976: 96). In transgressing a norm that mediates relations between members of a community, an individual not only causes injury to the person wronged but also demonstrates a lack of commitment to the values of the community to which he belongs. Through transgression, the wrongdoer alienates himself from a moral community. The retributive sentiments of resentment on the part of the injured party and indignation on the part of other members of the community express blame and communicate withdrawal of the usual solidarity extended towards a co-member of the community (Bennett 2002: 149–53).

Alienation brings the wrongdoer to recognise his transgression and, hence, to share the community’s moral disapproval of his act. In coming to recognise how he has damaged a valued relationship, he accepts blame and so feels guilty. The suffering associated with guilt arises both from recognition of the hurt inflicted on another for whom one cares and from the feeling of separation from others (Morris 1976: 99–100). The experience of guilt thus leads to repentance: acknowledgement that one has failed to live one’s life according to the values one shares with others and reaffirmation of one’s commitment to those values. In repenting, the wrongdoer distances himself from his act – he repudiates the wrong as incongruent with his identity as a member of the moral community – and so initiates ‘a rite of passage back to union’ (Morris 1976: 96). The end of atonement, as Perrin and Veitch (1998: 226) point out, is ‘at-one-ment’ with others.

The way to reconciliation involves attending to the negative consequences of one’s actions through apology, reparation and penance. By acknowledging responsibility, expressing sorrow and regret and reaffirming his commitment to the values of the community, the offender simultaneously recalls and is re-called to that which binds (Tavuchis 1991: 8). Through reparation, one seeks to set things right, to compensate those wronged for harm to person and property. Typically, though, some further extraordinary sacrifice or effort is required. Penance involves a willingness to suffer for what one has done and to go beyond the call of
duty to demonstrate one’s commitment to a relationship. Apology, reparation and pence are, in this way, all oriented to the ‘restoration of relationships damaged by past conflict’ (Morris 1976: 97).

This rite of passage back to union is completed by forgiveness: the relinquishment of resentment. Resentment (justly) holds the wrongdoer at arm’s length and so constitutes an obstacle to restoration. According to Jeffrie Murphy (1988a: 19), an offer of forgiveness should be conditional on satisfaction that the wrongdoer no longer holds us in contempt, that he has accepted responsibility for his actions and has reaffirmed his commitment to communal norms. Forgiveness then amounts to an acknowledgement of reconciliation – the restoration of a damaged relationship. While personal forgiveness restores the relationship between offender and victim, it does not necessarily preclude punishment. For, although the victim has exclusive authority over whether to forgive an injury, the question of punishment is a matter for a third party to decide – an authorised representative of the community whose norm has been violated.

This restorative conception of reconciliation provides a persuasive account of the moral psychology involved in the way we commonly respond to and seek to ameliorate wrongdoing. Yet, it is politically inadequate for at least three reasons. First, it suggests the prior existence of harmonious or friendly relations between groups. However, as Antye Krog (1998: 109) observes in relation to South Africa, in societies divided by state wrongs, there may be ‘nothing to go back to’. Indeed, the relationship between groups often originates in a wrong such as colonisation or slavery. State wrongs are typically perpetrated against categories of people who are not recognised as members of the moral–political community. Alternatively, violence is legitimised in the name of community; oppression of one part is justified for the sake of the whole. Yet, the restorative conception of reconciliation does not distinguish between wrongs perpetrated within a community of moral equals and wrongs that are legitimised by a political regime.

Following from this, the moral conception of reconciliation does not recognise that, within a polity divided by past wrongs, reconciliation would not involve the restoration of the moral–political order but rather would require a fundamental reconfiguring of that order. The notion of restoration suggests that a previous order has been violated by wrongdoing and that reconciliation requires thereafirmation of those norms that this wrong called into question. Yet, it is in the nature of state wrongs that they do not transgress a political order but are intended to uphold one. State violence is justified for the security of the political association. Rather than restoration, then, what seems to be required is revolution: a radical break with the past and the initiation of an entirely new order.

Third, the restorative conception of reconciliation does not distinguish between the political and the moral. It presupposes that the norms of the moral community are publicly known and bind all who belong. However, the plurality that attends public life means that there is likely to be conflict over the applicability of norms according to which wrongful acts should be judged. There may be agreement on brute facts: that a particular individual killed several people, for example. However, while members of one group may understand him to be a freedom fighter, members of another might consider him to be a terrorist. In such instances, conflict is of a second order; it concerns not the proper application of a norm but the validity of the norm itself.

An advocate of the restorative ideal might respond to these criticisms by pointing out that the moral relevance of the ideal of reconciliation does not depend on the coincidence of moral and political communities. Although an actually existing political community may have failed to recognise certain categories of people as members of the moral community, we should insist that it was wrong to do so. By excluding these others, the members of a political community failed to recognise a pre-existing structure of mutual obligations and responsibilities. Similarly, it would follow from this that we are right to presuppose a continuous moral order despite the messy reality of politics. Just as the bounds of the moral community remain the same despite those of an actually existing political community, so the moral order continues despite the temporary aberration of an immoral political order.2

It may well be true that we have moral obligations towards others that are universal and independent of actually existing political relations. However, it would be a political mistake to take for granted a shared set of moral norms according to which political relations should (or could) be ordered. For moral norms are politically relevant only to the extent that they are attested to and contested – upheld or rejected – by members of a political association. Just as we should resist the conclusion that what is at stake in morality is, in the end, a matter of politics, we should not assume that political concerns are ultimately reducible to the demands of morality. As we will see, politics is characterised by a clash of world views over relevant moral norms and the risk of enmity this gives rise to. Consequently, a political conception of reconciliation cannot take for granted a moral community that must be restored. Rather, it must recognise the community that it seeks to realise as a contingent, historical possibility.

The risk of politics

According to Carl Schmitt, politics is conditioned by the ever-present possibility of the friend–enemy relation. As such, politics is inherently conflictual and ultimately turns around the terms of association and dissociation among people. Schmitt’s concept of the political provides a challenge for thinking about reconciliation because he draws attention to the risk that a conflict about the significance of past wrongs may turn out to be irreconcilable. A politically adequate conception of reconciliation, then, would be predicated on an awareness of this risk.

Schmitt (1996: 26f.) distinguishes ‘the political’ from other modes of action and judgement (moral, aesthetic, economic) not in terms of its substantial concerns but its guiding distinction. Whereas the moral concerns the distinction between good and evil, the economic distinction between profitable and unprofitable and the aesthetic that between beautiful and ugly, the political significance of action and judgement can always be traced to the distinction between friend and enemy. The political is ‘autonomous’ from other modes of human interaction, then, not
because it describes a separate domain of intercourse or mode of human relation but a peculiar criterion of judgement. As the guiding distinction of politics, the friend–enemy relation cannot be reduced to moral, aesthetic or economic criteria. The political enemy is not necessarily ugly, evil or our competitor, although he might turn out to be. But our enemy is by definition ‘other’. As such, he constitutes an existential threat to our own form of life. To identify an enemy is thus to recognize the possibility of war: that we might have to fight in order to preserve our own form of existence.

For Schmitt, politics ultimately concerns the terms of association and dissociation among people. Fear of harm or domination by others is what leads people into political association. As the state is a sovereign entity that commands obedience in exchange for protection, Schmitt (1996: 52) insists (against liberal pluralism) that the state cannot be one association among a plurality of others to which its members may be loyal. Rather, the political association is the decisive association because it commands an allegiance for which its members must be prepared to stake their lives. The mark of sovereignty is the capacity to decide on the friend–enemy relation. In normal times of public security and order, the sovereignty of the political association is not apparent; public life appears to be governed by the normative order of law. However, a general norm can never encompass the exception, which by definition ‘cannot be codified’ in an existing legal order (Schmitt 1985: 6). Consequently, the arrival of the exception and the need to suspend law during the political emergency reveals the fallacy of the ‘rule of law’. The authority of the sovereign to decide the exception demonstrates that every legal order ultimately ‘rests on a decision and not on a norm’ (Schmitt 1985: 9–10).

The friend–enemy relation emerges, then, in the confrontation between groups. For the conviction, by members of various groups, that they ‘possess the truth, the good, and the just’ brings about the ‘worst enmities’ (Schmitt 1996: 65). The risk of war thus defines the circumstances within which politics is enacted. Yet the political ‘does not reside in the battle itself . . . but in the mode of behaviour which is determined by this possibility’ (Schmitt 1996: 38). As such, politics always entails antagonism – the clash between different forms of life – and every antagonism becomes more political the closer it approaches the extreme case of the friend–enemy grouping. This conflictual nature of politics is evident in the polemical aspect of all political discourse – the contestability of political concepts. For Schmitt (1996: 31), the political meaning of a concept, image or term can only be comprehended by considering who is ‘affected, combated, refuted or negated’ by it. Indeed, whether something is political or not is itself a political question. To claim that one is adopting a non-political stance, for instance, is typically to claim the higher moral ground – to present one’s opinion as incontestable moral truth. Conversely, to denounce an adversary’s point of view as political is to refute it by suggesting that it is biased and self-interested rather than impartial.

Schmitt (1996: 79) thus understands the ever-present possibility of enmity to be an inescapable feature of human association. In drawing attention to the guiding distinction of the friend–enemy relation, his intention is to bring the political to recognition against the liberal tendency to obscure it. Against a politics of consensus, Schmitt presents a politics of dissensus. In contrast to a certain liberal understanding of politics as the ‘historical unfolding and pacific expansion of a universal morality’, he presents a particularist account of politics that, while allowing that individual conflicts might be resolved, presupposes that ‘antagonism as a structure and reservoir of possible future conflict is never destroyed’ (Rasch 2000: 10). The risk of politics cannot be eliminated but only elided by pursuing politics through the discursive modes of law, economics or morality.

Yet, as Leo Strauss (1996: 111–13) points out, Schmitt not only recognises the political but affirms it. He attacks the liberal effort to subordinate politics to ethics and economics because the seriousness of life is at stake. Liberalism substitutes procedure for struggle, economic competition and interminable discussion for political antagonism (Schmitt 1996: 28, 71). But the liberal ideal of a depoliticised world could be realised only if human beings ceased asking ultimate questions. A world without politics might be interesting and entertaining, but there would be no beliefs or values for which people were prepared to stake their lives. For Schmitt, then, the ‘high points’ of politics occur in the moment in which the other is recognised as enemy because it is in this extreme situation that the significance of our life in common – what ‘we’ stand for – is affirmed (Schmitt 1996: 67).

With his concept of the political, then, Schmitt means to affirm plurality. The political world, he insists, is a ‘pluriverse not a universe’ (Schmitt 1996: 53). Yet this pluralism does not subist between individuals or the associations of civil society but between states. Schmitt rejects liberalism because it places pluralism in the service of a universal ideal. But this ideal of humanity is an unpolitical concept because it recognises no outside. In a ‘world among good people’ in which the humanitarian ideal had been realised, ‘only peace, security, and harmony [would] prevail’ (Schmitt 1996: 65). Yet when politics is enacted against the horizon of humanity, antagonism is not pacified but outlawed. By staking an absolute and incontestable ideal as its standard, liberal pluralism leaves no representational space – no ambiguity – in terms of which the regime it would institute could be contested. The ideal of humanity is absolute and incontestable because it incorporates all conflict within a single constituency in terms of which it could be resolved (Schmitt 1996: 53–54).

Schmitt is concerned by the difficulty of staging opposition in a liberal universe that does not recognise its own outside. He turns to the system of states to protect plurality among humankind because, in this system, there is no sovereign power to overawe all. Consequently, it guarantees a value-neutral pluralism in which there is no higher moral ground to claim. On this account, then, politics is not the means by which a universally acknowledged good is actualised. Instead, it is an activity through which disputes are negotiated and limited in the absence of any such good (see Rasch 2000: 11–14).

Schmitt rightly emphasises that politics is ultimately concerned with the creation of a ‘we’ and that the enabling condition of politics is contestability, the absence of a universal standpoint in terms of which conflict could potentially be resolved once and for all. Consequently, as Michael Dillon (1999: 161) observes, justice is always related to an allied regime of politics, ‘the frame within which it
is staged, legislated, and executed’. According to Schmitt, then, a political conception of reconciliation must attend to the risk of politics. It cannot presuppose a community that must be restored but must recognise community as a contingent outcome of political interaction.

The politics of reconciliation

Schmitt’s insistence on the friend–enemy relation as the guiding distinction of politics is important because it directs our attention to what the restorative conception of reconciliation elides. By taking harmony as a regulative ideal in terms of which contemporary divisions should be understood, restorative reconciliation outlaws conflict that might call into question the basis of this unity. Political grievances and disputes are disciplined by representing them as communal when they might otherwise have challenged the legitimacy of community. Just as liberalism obscures the politics of its own exclusions through non-political modes of discourse, so reconciliation is depoliticised when represented in theological, therapeutic and economic discourses. The metaphors of redemption, healing and settlement, with which reconciliation is often associated, all serve to elide the risk of politics by presupposing a single constituency (see Veitch 1999: 150–1). However, the guiding distinction of the friend–enemy relation brings the politics of reconciliation back into view.

Reconciliation is central to the Christian religion as it provides the narrative link between the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament. According to Paul, just ‘as by the offence of one judgement came upon all men’ so ‘by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life’ (Romans 5:18). Adam’s original sin brought about alienation both between humanity and God and among humankind. The sacrifice of Christ restores humanity to God through the gift of Grace. For God was in Christ ‘reconciling the world unto himself’ (Corinthians 5:19). God made Christ ‘to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him’ (Corinthians 5:21). Though sinners in the flesh, we are redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ when we accept the gift of Grace. Moreover, Grace makes way for peace between worldly enemies. Through Christ, those who were ‘strangers and foreigners’ are reconciled as ‘fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God’ (Ephesians 2:19).

The reconciliation of a divided society is often premised on the need to redeem a painful past for the sake of a common future. There is a sense that the sacrifice of the victims of state terror should not have been in vain but might have been for the good of a better society (see Veitch 1999; Humphrey 2000). This religious discourse was prominent, for instance, in the workings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa (see Graybill 1998). Ritualised public hearings began and ended with prayer and were presided over by Desmond Tutu dressed in his purple archbishop’s cassock. There would be a solemn atmosphere, with candle lighting ‘to commemorate those who had died in the struggle’ (Tutu 1999: 81). The significance of death by political violence was interpreted through the imagery of redemptive sacrifice. Moreover, central to Tutu’s (1999: 31) understanding of reconciliation was the notion that social harmony is the greatest good, and anything that undermines this must be steadfastly avoided. Tutu writes of a divine movement in the world to ‘reverse the awful centrifugal force of alienation, brokenness, division, hostility, and disharmony’. God has set in motion a movement ‘toward unity, harmony, goodness, peace’ and the removal of all barriers. In this vision of an ultimate reconciliation, none are outsiders as ‘all belong’ (Tutu 1999: 265).

Reconciliation is also often represented in terms of the metaphor of ‘healing . . . a traumatised, divided, wounded, polarised people’ (Tutu in Ignatieff 1996: 110). In imagery that recalls the myth of Oedipus, the body politic is understood to have been infected by internecine violence or a corrupt regime. In this context, the image of the wounded body becomes a template of collective memory, ‘both a map and moral charter’ (Scheper-Hughes 1998: 125). Social healing is associated with restoring a moral order that has been violated (e.g. Zalaquett 1995: 46–7; Milliken 2000: 125). Revelation of the truth of past wrongs is counselled on the basis that ‘what is not dealt with poisons the body politic’ (Asmal 1995: 29).

In neo-Freudian therapeutic discourse, healing from trauma depends on recalling, narrating and incorporating a traumatic experience that remains a silenced and unresolved memory (e.g. Herman 1992; see Prager 2001). As a single shattering blow, a traumatic event destroys the victim’s fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, positive value of the self and meaningful order of experience. The life experience of the individual becomes ‘dominated by a discontinuity in life so dramatic and profound that it overwhelms all other experience . . . In this way, trauma expresses itself as time standing still’ – a continual re-enactment of the past in the present as insecurity and fear overwhelm all trust and hope (Prager 2003: 176). Similarly, widespread state violence is often understood to result in collective trauma. The traumatic wounds inflicted on individuals can combine to manifest a pathological mood within a community that is more than the sum of private wounds.

In this context, social healing is understood to depend on incorporating the traumatic event into collective memory. Through public narration and acknowledgement of the stories of survivors, it is hoped that a catharsis might be brought about (e.g. Asmal 1995: 30). On an individual level, the dignity of survivors is supposed to be restored through public acknowledgement of their suffering. The individual is brought back from stigmatised isolation into social belonging through the public sharing of pain. Collectively, healing occurs by addressing the legacy of state violence. Through public story-telling and mourning, a sense of closure is achieved. The memory that redounds in the present as an inexplicable rupture is integrated into a narrative whole. Uncovering the secret of trauma is, in this way, supposed to bring social healing by allowing the past to take its place as past (Prager 2003: 178–80).

A third metaphor in terms of which reconciliation is often represented is that of settling accounts. Kader Asmal and others (1996: 47), for instance, suggest that reconciliation should be understood as ‘a closing of the ledger book of the past . . . like the accountant’s job of reconciling conflicting claims’. The metaphor of
settling accounts implies the idea both of being held to account (to repay a debt one has incurred) and of being called to account (to report, recount, set the record straight). In terms of this moral calculus, restoring the rule of law is understood to depend on perpetrators being held to account in a court of law. When amnesty is granted to perpetrators, this is sometimes presented as forgiving their debt to society in order to turn a new page in the nation’s history. Ordinary citizens are also called to account for their complicity with the regime and expected to acknowledge a debt to the victims. There is a need to settle accounts through the payment of reparations. Moreover, there is a call to set the record straight, to give a full and proper account of the wrongs perpetrated by the previous regime.

The guiding distinction of the friend–enemy relation reveals the depoliticisation of reconciliation when represented in these religious, therapeutic and economic modes of discourse. In each case, plurality is placed in the service of a higher unity: a nation to be redeemed, a society to be healed, a truth to be settled. In these terms, the reconcilability of political conflict is taken for granted. By promoting social harmony as an unconditional public good, the terms within which this unity is constituted are presented as unambiguous. Consequently, the representational space in which the terms of reconciliation itself might be contested is diminished.

For instance, as Claire Moon (2004) discusses, Tutu’s invocation of a ‘prelapsarian state’ – an Edenic state of harmony prior to the Fall – in his appeal for reconciliation in South Africa ‘subjects the nation to a seamless continuity of representation’. This metaphor elides the risk of politics by ‘constituting the nation as a timeless and originary form of community’ (Moon, 2004; see also Chandra-Shekaran 1998). As Scott Veitch (1999) argues, when the stakes of reconciliation are tied to the redemption of the nation in this way, the establishment of a collective memory on which community is supposed to depend requires a selective forgetting of that which might call into question the commonness of the past. Since political antagonism inevitably disrupts social harmony, a dissenting politics that challenges the terms in which a consensus would be realised must be avoided like the plague (Tutu 1999: 31).

The organic metaphor of a body politic in need of healing similarly tends to naturalise the historical community by representing continuing antagonisms as jeopardising the health of community. Ricardo Trumper (1999: 16f.) discusses how the Pinochet regime represented the nation of Chile as a sick body that needed shock treatment to eliminate the Marxist cancer. Following the transition to democracy, this imagery was retained but now the ‘body needed time and soothing medicine, a non-invasive cure. To heal. The politicians argued that “we” needed to (re)conciliate, allow the country’s wounds to close’ (Trumper 1999: 24). Yet, the unequal social relations that the Pinochet regime seized power to defend were left unchallenged because they were naturalised and depoliticised in terms of an idealised image of a healthy political body, ‘at peace with its self, with no contradictions’ (Trumper 1999: 24). Similarly, as Michael Humphrey (2000: 24) discusses, in South Africa, the fundamental and sometimes ambiguous social distinctions that shaped individuals’ experience of political violence were often covered over through the symbolic representation and appropriation of survivors’ testimonies in the name of healing divisions within the body politic. The focus on healing through sharing the pain of individuals often provided a ready escape from the difficult political questions arising from the context of continuing antagonism between social groups.

Likewise, the representation of reconciliation in economic terms renders all political claims calculable and, hence, reconcilable. To settle accounts is to establish certainty by resolving ambiguity in order to protect the debtor from further claims being raised against her or him. However, this glosses over the fact that state wrongs often inflict on survivors ‘a loss that is irrecoverable, incalculable, immemorial’ (Perrin and Veitch 1998: 231). As Colin Perrin and Scott Veitch (1998: 228–9) observe in their discussion of reconciliation in Australia, there is an injustice discernable in the presumption that it is possible to achieve a complete settlement. For this ignores the possibility that a debt may have been incurred that cannot be repaid and so must remain unsettling. Similarly, in his commentary on the politics of reconciliation in Argentina, Mario Di Paolantonio (1997: 454) observes that to claim that ‘past injustices have been finally explored, catalogued, and dealt with once and for all . . . is to “finish off” the past’s claims on the present’. Yet, it seems that such resolution can only be achieved by reduction; by representing the past in terms of a calculus that necessarily renders conflict reconcilable. In this way, economic discourse elides the risk that political conflict may turn out to be irreconcilable.

We are left, as Scott Veitch (1999: 58) observes, with the ‘political concern about reconciliation as recovery, as a covering over that “persisting anxiety” which lies at the core of political possibility’. When represented in terms of redemption, healing and settlement, it seems that reconciliation ‘merely acts to drive under – but for how long? – conflicts that are at the heart of agonistic politics’ (Veitch 1999: 58). The ideal of reconciliation, as we have seen, suggests harmonisation, restoration, redemption, healing. On the other hand, according to Schmitt, politics is characterised by interminable conflict, incommensurability, division, uncertainty. To reconcile is to resolve; to settle. To politicise is to open up; to call into question. As Schmitt reminds us, politics turns around the question of who ‘we’ are; the terms of inclusion and exclusion. The aspiration to reconcile becomes unpolitical then, when accompanied by a forgetfulness that the ‘we’ it seeks to realise is not a given but the contingent outcome of interaction. As I have shown, the therapeutic, religious and economic discourses in which reconciliation is often represented are complicit in such forgetting.

Against this tendency, a politically adequate conception of reconciliation would be conditioned by an awareness of the risk of politics; that community is not inevitable and that conflict may turn out to be irreconcilable. From this perspective, the ‘we’ that the restorative conception of reconciliation invokes as its predetermined end must be reconceived as a horizon of possibility that enables a reconciliatory politics in the present. As we shall see, if the ideal of reconciliation is to open up a space for politics between former enemies rather than cover over the conflicts that threaten their political association, reconciliation should be kept
in view for being a potentiality of action in the present, which depends upon accepting the risk of politics (and the opportunity it presents) rather than eliding it.

While acknowledging the risk of politics to which Schmitt draws our attention, we may nonetheless resist it as an inevitable outcome of human interaction. For, when the friend-enemy relation ceases to be a guiding distinction and becomes instead an organising principle of politics, it leads to a 'false radicalisation' of political life, which Slavoj Žižek (1999: 29) appropriately calls 'ultra-politics'. When politics is determined by enmity, this precludes the kind of symbolic interaction on which political reconciliation depends. If Schmitt's realist concept of the political provides an important challenge, then it is one that we must answer not only to formulate a more political concept of reconciliation but to develop a more ethical concept of the political.

In particular, we need an account of plurality that subsists between citizens and thus allows for the possibility of politics within the political association. Schmitt affirms the political because he senses that, through politics, humans confront and struggle with ultimate questions. While he affirms plurality as an enabling condition of politics between sovereign entities, plurality becomes a threat to sovereignty when it appears within the political association. In privileging politics between states over that between citizens, Schmitt fails to recognise the latter as a site in which shared meanings might be generated.

Following from this, it appears that a more robust account of political friendship will be required than Schmitt can provide if we are to imagine the possibility of reconciliation within a deeply divided society. For Schmitt, the association determined by the friend-enemy relation is always the decisive human grouping. This suggests that one comes to know one's political friends only by knowing one's enemies. However, it seems that the sense of fraternity based on a common enemy is too precarious to sustain community between members of a polity divided by past wrongs, especially when the political emergency recedes.

What I want to take from Schmitt, then, is a sense of the predicament in which a reconciliatory politics must be enacted. In this context, the problem that political reconciliation must address is not how to restore community between alienated co-members. Rather, it is, as Chantal Mouffe (1999: 755) suggests, how an antagonism between enemies might be transformed into an agonistic politics between adversaries. As Mouffe (2000: 102) points out, treating the other as an adversary rather than an antagonist does not eliminate the risk of politics as our adversary may remain our enemy. However, he becomes a 'legitimate enemy' because we share a commitment to the principle of reconciliation. Yet, because our shared understanding of reconciliation is imperfect and incomplete, the politics that arises between us is likely to be agonistic in the sense that our disagreement may not be resolvable by deliberation and rational discussion.

In Chapters 2 to 4, I therefore look to three political thinkers – John Locke, Charles Taylor and Hannah Arendt – who each suggest a political ethic that might provide a basis in terms of which to formulate a politically adequate conception of reconciliation. Each of these thinkers is concerned, in his or her own context, with how to accommodate plurality within a political association. Moreover, each offers an account of the political that is formulated, to some extent, against the realist tradition in which Schmitt is situated. Consequently, each advocates an ethic that suggests how a relation of enmity might be transformed into one of civic friendship. Locke's ethic of toleration seeks to contain the risk of politics by limiting the terms of political association to providing for the mutual interest that former enemies have in security. Taylor's ethic of recognition seeks to transform the risk of politics into an opportunity to realise community by recasting a relation of enmity into a reciprocal dialogue oriented towards a shared understanding. Arendt's ethic of worldliness takes this risk as the enabling condition of an agonistic politics in terms of which the commonness of the world that lies between former enemies might be disclosed.