

The Possibility of Politics: Hannah Arendt, The Public, and the  
Fragility of the Common World

by

John Ryan

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Political Science

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

© 2019, John Ryan

## **Abstract**

This thesis develops Arendt's concept of "the public" as the necessary condition for the practice of politics. Through an engagement with both the notion of plurality, which lies at the core of Arendt's thought, and her concepts of common sense and the world, it understands the Arendtian public realm as the combination of both public space and public spirit. This not only distinguishes Arendt's concern for politics from the Habermasian sociological-institutional model, but equally explains some of her more contentious arguments about modernity. In the 'dark times' of totalitarian rule, the public spirit is left without a public space. Conversely, the condition of 'the social' is better understood as public space without public spirit. This thesis, as an examination of the conditions of politics, clarifies a key strand of Arendt's work while laying the groundwork for an analysis of Arendt's thoughts on the practice of politics itself.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Province of Ontario, and Carleton University for their generous financial support.

This project would have equally been impossible without the guidance, support, and friendship of Dr. Farhang Rajaee, to whom I owe a great deal more than an acknowledgements page could ever convey.

Thanks are also due to my committee members, Dr. Hans-Martin Jaeger and Dr. Geoffrey Kellow, for their thoughtful questions. The germ of this thesis emerged as a paper for Dr. Jaeger, whose early feedback was invaluable.

To the Carleton political science faculty, especially Dr. Sophie Marcotte-Chénard and Dr. Marc Hanvelt for their encouragement, humour, and patience, and to Brookes, who makes things happen. I also owe a long-overdue thank you to the faculty of Carleton's College of the Humanities for nurturing my curiosity and love of learning.

To my friends, for putting up with the countless hours of ramblings and conversation – in particular, Steven Orr, who suffered through more than most.

To my family, for their unwavering support through the ups and downs of graduate education.

And to Isabel, for all the rest.

# Table of Contents

<u>Abstract</u> .....	ii
<u>Acknowledgements</u> .....	iii
<u>Table of Contents</u> .....	iv
<u>Abbreviations</u> .....	v
<u>Introduction</u> .....	1
<u>Literature Review</u> .....	5
<u>Methodology</u> .....	20
<u>Chapter One: Plurality and the Common World</u> .....	25
<u>Plurality</u> .....	30
<u>The Common</u> .....	40
<u>The World</u> .....	48
<u>The Public</u> .....	58
<u>Chapter 2: Loneliness and the Modern Condition</u> .....	65
<u>Loneliness and Totalitarianism</u> .....	69
<u>Mass Society</u> .....	80
<u>Conclusion</u> .....	93
<u>Bibliography</u> .....	103

## Abbreviations

- EJ                    *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin, 1963.
- HC                    *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- LotM-T              *The Life of the Mind, Vol. 1: Thinking*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.
- LotM-W              *The Life of the Mind, Vol 2: Willing*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.
- MDT                  *Men in Dark Times*. London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1970.
- OR                    *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin, 1965.
- OT                    *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968.
- PoP                    *The Promise of Politics*, edited by Jerome Kohn. New York: Schocken Books, 2005.

## Introduction

*I confine myself, on the one hand, to an analysis of those general capacities which grow out of the human condition and are permanent, that is, which cannot be irretrievably lost so long as the human condition itself is not changed.*

-- Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*<sup>1</sup>

*FAUSTUS: Come, I thinke hell's a fable.*

*MEPHISTOPHELES: [Ay], thinke so still, till experience change thy minde.*

-- Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*<sup>2</sup>

Hannah Arendt's thought, so carefully attuned to the tumultuous political experiences of the twentieth century, has much to offer us. Despite triumphant assurances that the end of the Cold War was ushering in the end of history and the ascendancy of liberal democracy, the tremors of the last twenty years have exposed the fragility of our political institutions, along with the vapidness of the late-century political prophets and their vacuous pronouncements. On the one hand, the resurgence of blood and soil politics in the Western world, fuelled by distrust and resentment towards existing political structures and institutions threatens both democratic and pluralistic norms. On the other, the epistemic fault lines opened by deliberate misinformation campaigns and the ideological self-segregation facilitated by social media have fractured our concepts of factuality and truth. All this, of course, alongside the metastasis of the technological that both reduces human complexities to algorithmically predictive trends and facilitates totalitarian trends

---

<sup>1</sup> HC 6.

<sup>2</sup> W. W. Greg, ed., *Marlowe's Doctor Faustus: 1604~1616* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), 194.

of surveillance and domination.<sup>3</sup> These developments are neither novel nor unheralded; Arendt's careful diagnosis of modernity and her phenomenological excavation of the conditions of human life in the world contain *in nuce* both the origins of and potential survival strategies for the crises of our time.

Arendt's thought, permeated with a deep and abiding concern for the common world, never loses sight of the precariousness of the human condition. Human beings, as both conditioned and conditioning creatures, have the extraordinary ability to shape their surroundings and alter the things that, in turn, shape them.<sup>4</sup> Her underlying optimism at the resilience and potentiality of human beings is tempered by the dangerous, disruptive idea that there could be a set of conditions imposed on human beings that alters – and perhaps might even preclude entirely – the possibility of politics. The experience of Nazi totalitarianism and the concentration camps, according to Arendt, demonstrated the vulnerability and malleability of human beings when their condition is so horrendously disfigured as to reduce them to “bundles of reactions.”<sup>5</sup> In our post-totalitarian world, politics – that concern for the common world and the activities that preserve it – can no longer be taken for granted.

Because of her astute recognition of the challenges facing modern political communities in the post-Holocaust and post-Hiroshima world, as well as her deep commitments to the political

---

<sup>3</sup> As I write this introduction, the world is slowly becoming aware of the internment camps in north-west China, in which up to a million ethnic Uighurs are being detained for ‘re-education.’ Despite the Chinese government’s repeated denials, satellite imagery and a slim paper trail (cf. Samuel 2018), as well as eyewitness accounts (cf. Kuo 2018, Regencia 2018) confirm the brutal conditions of the camps, where detainees are kept. The tools of mass surveillance, including biometrics and QR codes, are far beyond anything seen in Arendt’s life; while re-education camps are naturally not the same as concentration camps, the possibilities for surveillance and domination in the information age outstrip Arendt’s worst fears. See especially reports from Human Rights Watch (2018) and the UN’s Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2018).

<sup>4</sup> HC 9.

<sup>5</sup> OT 438.

and the preservation of human freedom and dignity in the face of catastrophe, Arendt's thought remains a powerful resource for theorists aiming to comprehend – to face up to and resist – the darkness of our time.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the debate over what, for Arendt, constitutes political activity – that is, *how* politics should be conducted – has often overlooked the desperate need to ensure that the necessary conditions for politics – *that* politics can be conducted at all – are met. Indeed, it is only through a clear understanding of these conditions that Arendt's often elliptical, tangential, or seemingly impractical remarks on the *practice* of politics start to clarify themselves. Any serious account of Arendtian politics, therefore, must recognize these conditions – which is what I propose to accomplish in this thesis. Behind political systems, practices, and institutions lies the phenomenon of the public realm which, insofar as it is the necessary condition for politics, has not been given sufficient focused attention. Therefore, I will uncover and develop her understanding of the public, that is, the common world of appearance and freedom accessible to all that situates, illuminates, and separates human beings in their uniqueness, a combination of space and spirit through which both identity and meaning are revealed and confirmed. The public realm, as the locus of both political plurality and commonality, grounds the human experience and condition and opens the possibility of politics; its collapse, either through the loss of public space, or through the death of the public spirit, would be (and, admittedly, has been) disastrous for not only our political well-being, but our categories of self-understanding as well.

After a review of the relevant literature and an explanation of my methodology, I will explore in chapter one the constitutive elements of Arendt's public realm, which is distinct from the sociological-institutional construction found in the works of Jürgen Habermas. First, what is

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. OT viii.

public is what is *common* to all, that is, appearances “seen and heard by everybody.”<sup>7</sup> Second, this commonality – or guaranteed reality – is situated in the *world*, which is the site and context in which the human condition is lived and acquires meaning. As we will see below, this unpacking of Arendt’s public – which is not the way it has been typically read in the literature - establishes the public as a common framework of difference that lies at the heart of a political community and which provides an ontological foundation for both identity and meaning. This common framework rests upon the condition of *plurality*, which, in its ontological, phenomenological, and epistemological forms, is the bedrock of the given human condition; as such, my analysis will begin with an explication of Arendt’s understanding of plurality, and constantly keep it in sight throughout the thesis. It also is sustained by the public spirit, or the recognition of both the worldly requirement of stability and the continual possibility of new beginnings. Understanding the public realm in this way, as both a space of individual disclosure and collective contextualization, and the spirit sensitive to the foundations of the space itself, allows us to read Arendt’s assessment of the challenges of modernity with clarity, which will be the task of chapter two. The disintegration of the common world, which is not only exploited by the totalitarian drive but also forms, in Arendt’s view, the basic condition of modern mass society, has dire implications for our sense of the world, of the self, and for the operation of our mental faculties. The risks of loneliness, thoughtlessness, and the temptation to embrace the restricting logic of ideology undermine the given conditions of plurality. If loneliness and the resulting disorientation has become a central phenomenon of modernity, and if it lies at the heart of the loss of the public realm, then any

---

<sup>7</sup> HC 50.

explication of both the public and the threats it faces must keep the challenges of loneliness in mind.

### *Literature Review*

How does this conception of the public differ from the treatment of the public realm in Arendt's work by other scholars? Since the late 1980s, Arendt's understanding of the public has often been read in conjunction with Habermas' concept of the public sphere. The English translation of Habermas' habilitation *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry in a Category of Bourgeois Society* appeared first in 1989, and quickly set the terms and conceptual vocabulary for investigations into the public sphere. Habermas' historical-sociological approach to the public sphere remains widely used today and has become somewhat of a launching pad for further discussions of publicity and public opinion.<sup>8</sup> Further, the English translation coincided with a renewed interest in Arendt's work; Arendt scholars in the nineties tended to make use of either Habermas' conceptual framework or his normative typology and regulative ideal of the public sphere when explicating and assessing Arendt's public realm. As a result, before we turn to scholarly appraisals of Arendt's work which rely on or respond to Habermas, we must first understand Habermas' own account of the public sphere, and how it both runs in parallel to and differs from Arendt's in several crucially important ways.

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. e.g. Nancy Fraser et al., *Transnationalizing the Public Sphere*, ed. Kate Nash (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014); Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004).

Despite later critical re-assessments, Habermas' *Structural Transformation* remains his most structured and rigorous account of the public sphere; the main concepts remain consistent in both his "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article" and his comments at the close of *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. *The Structural Transformation* itself generally (and admittedly, according to Habermas, not entirely successfully) strikes a balance between the normative ideal of the public sphere and the actual conditions of its existence as it developed throughout modernity through a robust sociological clarification of the concept itself.<sup>9</sup> For Habermas, the public sphere (or, at least, the *bourgeois* public sphere) is a space in which private individuals come together to use their reason publicly.<sup>10</sup> This public use of reason finds its satisfaction in the generation of public opinion, which is why Habermas, in "The Public Sphere," can complement and solidify his arguments in *The Structural Transformation* with the statement that the public sphere is "the realm of our social life in which something approximating public opinion can be formed."<sup>11</sup> The character of this sphere emerges out of Habermas' opening discussion in the *Structural Transformation* of the birth of the bourgeois public sphere in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In his analysis of the coffeeshops of England, the *salons* of France, and the *Tischgesellschaften* (table societies) of Germany, institutions which brought together and facilitated rational discussion between private people, Habermas identifies three institutional criteria of the fledgling public sphere. First, status difference between interlocutors is bracketed – that is, discussants entered the public sphere in the spirit of *equality*. Second, the rational/critical discussion quickly seized upon areas of public

---

<sup>9</sup> "Concluding Remarks," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 463.

<sup>10</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 27.

<sup>11</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," *New German Critique*, no. 3 (1974): 49.

concern (namely, affairs of State) that had not been previously open to public discussion – that is, discussants engaged in a *rational* exploration of questions relating to the public good. And finally, the new spaces operated, in theory, under the principles of *inclusivity* and *universality* – that is, that discussion was open to anyone.<sup>12</sup> Together, these principles provide us with the core of the normative framework of Habermas’ public sphere.

Despite the fact that Habermas notes that the bourgeois public sphere initially grew out of physical spaces, the public sphere, being constituted primarily by a critical and vibrant press and a reading public, quickly shed its spatialized character as it spilled out of the coffeeshops and *salons*. Charles Taylor clarifies this expansion of the public sphere, arguing that “[the public sphere] transcends... topical spaces. We might say that it knits together a plurality of such spaces into one larger space of nonassembly.”<sup>13</sup> For Habermas, members of a “public” do not need to meet face to face in order to participate in the activities of the public sphere. In this understanding, not only does the public sphere develop ‘metatopically,’ as Taylor notes, but it equally becomes expressly tied to *legitimation*. Initial public discourse, Habermas argues, was fundamentally reactive, as state intervention into economic activities prompted critical responses that appealed to the newly formed reading ‘public.’ The press emerged in opposition to public authority; public discussion, more often than not, circled around the legitimacy of legislation and administration.<sup>14</sup> In the British parliamentary system, for example, the opposition regularly pleaded its case to ‘the public,’ while the governing party attempts to wield its pre-agreed upon legitimate authority to

---

<sup>12</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 36-37. Habermas places specific emphasis on the principle of universality. As he notes, “the public sphere of civil society stood or fell with the principle of universal access. A public sphere from which specific groups would be *eo ipso* excluded was less than merely incomplete: it was not a public sphere at all” (85).

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 86.

<sup>14</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 24-25.

enact its program.<sup>15</sup> The emergence of the bourgeois constitutional state soon solidified the public sphere as the bridge between the legislative process and public opinion: the public reasoning of private individuals, leading to the generation and clarification of public opinion, subjected the legislation of public authority to rational-critical scrutiny, thereby (in theory) providing it with a noncoercive character. In other words, “*public debate was supposed to transform voluntas into ratio that in the public competition of private arguments came into being as the consensus about what was practically necessary in the interests of all*” (original emphasis).<sup>16</sup> This rationalization of the law, along with the supposed universality of discussants, created (again, in theory) a public sphere that was built for all, by all, and of all.

Habermas readily acknowledges that the bourgeois public sphere is largely a fiction that held within it a contradiction from the beginning – namely, the mistaken identity of human being as such with the role of property owners in society.<sup>17</sup> The second half of the *Structural Transformation* deals with the consequences of this oversight as it explodes existing categories of state and society and as Enlightenment publicity degenerates into the manipulative model of modern mass democracies. Habermas’ critique of modern mass society will resurface in chapter two; for now, it is worth dwelling upon Habermas’ concept of the public sphere at length here as it forms the backbone of some of the critiques, and even more so of the interpretative framework through which scholars approach Arendt. By way of reaching Arendt, however, there are several critical notes on Habermas’ public sphere that will create the space for Arendt’s public realm to

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 56, 88.

be understood on its own terms. I raise these in addition to the existing critical literature, especially the excellent reply by Nancy Fraser that, as far as I am aware, remains without serious response.<sup>18</sup>

First, while Habermas' work is an explication of the public sphere, its account of the structural transformation of the concept is intricately linked with the structural transformation of public opinion. The public sphere, both in the *Structural Transformation* and explicitly in "The Public Sphere," is defined by its ability to generate rational consensus. At the core of the argument of the former lies the question of the relation of public opinion to the legislative process. The movements of the notion of public – from the Medieval representative publicity, to Enlightenment rational-critical publicity, to the manipulative publicity of the twentieth century – are all defined by their relation to public opinion: namely, the lack of effective public opinion in the Medieval period, to the ostensibly rationally-generated opinion of the eighteenth century, to the advertising, interest-based machinations of organized groups and the corresponding nonpublicity plaguing the modern era. This is especially evident from Habermas' discussion in section four of the *Structural Transformation*. While he casts the discussion in terms of the philosophical foundations of the public sphere which reached its apex in the Enlightenment with Kant and was subsequently unmasked by Hegel and Marx, the relationship between public opinion and rationality forms the core of the argument. The central role of public opinion in Habermas' operative understanding of the public sphere means that the public sphere is (1) functional, and, as a result, (2) dependent upon its output for its legitimacy.

Second, Habermas explicitly understands the bourgeois public sphere to exist *in opposition* to public authority in its genesis and exercising a fundamentally liberal character – that is, it seeks

---

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the collected essays in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, especially Fraser's "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", 109-142.

to guarantee spaces free from arbitrary state intervention and domination. (Out of his discussion of the distinctions between public and non-public opinion we could, perhaps, re-characterize Habermas' work as the structural transformation of civil society.) While Fraser has already drawn out the consequences of the distinction between weak (only forming public opinion) and strong (both forming public opinion and transforming it into action) models of public spheres,<sup>19</sup> the oppositional relationship between public opinion and public authority hides another assumption that Arendt readily challenges throughout her career.<sup>20</sup> *Contra* the Greek model, Habermas notes that the bourgeois conception of the public sphere presupposes the primacy of the private: the intimate, not the public, is "humanity's genuine site."<sup>21</sup> This crucial distinction between the Greek and the bourgeois models inserts an ontological dimension into the argument. The contention that individuals are private before they are public, or vice versa, has considerable and obvious significance for questions of politics, and a sociological investigation that works from ontological presuppositions must equally deal with ontological challenges. If Arendt is able to demonstrate that there is an essential experience that occurs in the public realm – for example, the construction of meaning and identity, situation, or orientation in one's surroundings – then the bourgeois model faces a serious setback.<sup>22</sup> We see also that, in line with the previous comments about legitimacy, Habermas' inquiry is tied explicitly to the role of public spheres within democratic polities. A vital investigation, to be sure; to confuse this line of questioning, however, with Arendt's exploration of the conditions of politics and the possibility of their loss would be a serious mistake. With

---

<sup>19</sup> Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 134ff.

<sup>20</sup> It is also why scholars have routinely challenged the insufficiency of Arendt's account of the public on the basis that it completely ignores the spaces of civil society. Based on Fraser's distinction above, we can specify that Arendt is only interested in the public realm (from a political, action-oriented perspective) insofar as it is a strong public.

<sup>21</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 52.

<sup>22</sup> Arendt, as we will see, does not argue for the priority of the public, as some have thought. The public and the private exist in a necessarily reciprocal relationship. See below.

Habermas' normative framework in mind, as well as his emphasis upon legitimation and the ontological assumptions smuggled into the institutional model, we turn now to the ways in which Arendt's public realm has been misread in light of Habermas' work.

Habermas' conception of the public sphere, as well as his specific critiques of Arendt (see below), form the germs of the subsequent interpretative battles of the nineties. The use of the bourgeois public sphere as a regulative ideal, the communicative orientation of this normative framework, and the corresponding view that Arendt constructs her own normative framework out of the Greek experience of the polis, which, among other components of Arendt's work, remain wildly inapplicable to the politics of modernity, all lead to particular – and persuasive – misreadings of Arendt's work that must be addressed.<sup>23</sup>

First, as described above, Habermas' explication of the bourgeois public sphere suggests a normative framework within which to understand existing and actual public spheres. Although he insists in the preface that the *Structural Transformation* is not developing an ideal that can be transplanted,<sup>24</sup> the institutional criteria previously noted seem to serve as a normative core to the ideal of any public sphere. Habermas later noted that the book has often been read with a normative dichotomy in mind between the idealized public sphere of the Enlightenment and the corrupted contemporary notions of publicity and recognized that the confusion between the descriptive and normative dimensions of the book has rightfully frustrated some readers.<sup>25</sup> Despite this, he has

---

<sup>23</sup> It is worth noting that in the subsequent discussion Habermas is used more as an organizational focal point, and not as a scapegoat. Some of the tensions identified by Arendt scholars – especially the question of Arendt's relation to modernity and the elitist tendencies in her thought – predate the English translation of *The Structural Transformation*, but not necessarily his 1977 article (cf. especially the work of Kateb and Canovan). This is not the place for, nor is it meant to be, a comprehensive survey of the historiography of Arendt scholarship.

<sup>24</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, xvii.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 430; "Concluding Remarks," 462-3

recognized that there remains a key normative dimension to his inquiries into the public sphere, and, given the developments of his later work, has emphasized that his theory of communicative action should form the normative core of public sphere theory.<sup>26</sup> Regardless of Habermas' own thoughts, the attempted construction of an ideal-type public sphere has dominated readings of his work. Craig Calhoun recognizes that Habermas' analysis brings out "the element of truth and emancipatory potential that [the public sphere] contained despite its ideological misrepresentation and contradictions."<sup>27</sup> Fraser's critique of the bourgeois public sphere, which undermines the specifically bourgeois masculinist approach to the Enlightenment normative ideal, does not dismiss the public sphere itself as a goal, but rather hopes that the concept of the public sphere can be restored despite the internal contradictions of the bourgeois model.<sup>28</sup> And further, Seyla Benhabib, among the most prolific Arendt scholars, explicitly takes Habermas' discourse-oriented public sphere as a model in contrast to her constructions of the 'Arendtian' and liberal models.<sup>29</sup>

The construction of a normative framework of the public sphere, replete with typologies, conceptual structures, and institutions is not, in itself, a flawed activity. The challenges of such an approach, however, emerge when the same requirements and interpretative framework are demanded of other accounts of the public. Because, as we saw above, Habermas' account is despatialized and dependent upon both function and product, and proceeds through a historical analysis towards a normative ideal of public discourse and the public sphere, the same questions are asked of Arendt's work. Given that these questions, tied to the generation of public opinion,

---

<sup>26</sup> Habermas, "Further Reflections," 442.

<sup>27</sup> Craig Calhoun, "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 117; note 14, p. 139.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. both Benhabib's "The Embattled Public Sphere: Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, and Beyond," *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, no. 90 (1997): 2 and "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas" in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 73ff.

are fundamentally oriented towards *what happens in the public realm* and not *what the public realm itself consists of*, the analysis that demands a competing normative-institutional framework from Arendt's writings immediately begins on the wrong foot, and, further, obscures the question of method (see below). This difficulty has not gone unnoticed: Dana Villa has rightly warned us about the dangers of applying decontextualized models and normative typologies to theorists like Arendt.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, there has been a strong tendency to formalize and systematize Arendt's informal and unsystematic account of politics. This does not mean that the Arendt/Habermas comparison is fruitless – far from it. It does mean, however, that the comparative dimensions of Arendt scholarship have often accentuated or drawn out certain characteristics found in Arendt's work to either highlight the similarities to Habermas' model, or to separate and draw apart the two.

This tendency stems from the mistaken desire to develop a competing normative model to Habermas', which might have emerged in part because Habermas himself draws upon Arendt in the formulation of his own normative structure – both in his article “Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power” and as a loose foil in *The Structural Transformation*. In the former, he explores the communicative dimensions of Arendt's thought, emphasizing her unique understanding of ‘power’ as communicatively constituted and the role of speech acts in the legitimation and continuation of political practices.<sup>31</sup> His criticisms of Arendt's concept of power largely highlight elements of her work (correctly identified or not) that conflict with the communicative orientation of her politics. This approach is taken up by Benhabib: while she clearly reads Arendt's public sphere as an agonistic one in “Models of the Public Space,” by the

---

<sup>30</sup> Dana Villa, “Hannah Arendt: Modernity, Alienation, and Critique,” in *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*, ed. Craig Calhoun and John McGowan (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997), 199.

<sup>31</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power,” *Social Research* 44, no. 1 (1977).

mid-nineties she begins to develop and privilege the ‘associational’ public sphere of modernity in Arendt’s work over the agonistic Greek model.<sup>32</sup> In *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* Benhabib tries to “think with Arendt against Arendt”<sup>33</sup> and draw out the more Habermas-friendly, communicatively oriented aspects of Arendt’s thought (or, in turn, the Arendtian dimensions of Habermas’ public sphere theory), among other things. Benhabib’s criticism of Arendt’s politics as lacking any institutional framework and as sidestepping questions of democratic legitimacy are direct consequences of Habermas’ attention to these two dimensions of the public sphere.<sup>34</sup> This approach, which privileges elements of Arendt’s thought best suited to deliberative democracy while downplaying or problematizing those that do not, in turn draws out the inverse misreading of understanding Arendt as a fiercely agonistic thinker who resists elements of closure in politics. This agonistic Arendt finds champions in Bonnie Honig, who reads Arendt “from Nietzschean premises,”<sup>35</sup> and Dana Villa’s early work, in which he draws a stark line between Arendt and Habermas in order to demonstrate how Arendt’s public and politics is better equipped to weather the postmodern critiques of Habermasian rationality and consensus-oriented politics.<sup>36</sup> As his

---

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Benhabib, “Models of Public Space”; Ibid, “The Embattled Public Sphere,” 4-6; Ibid, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 2nd ed. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 69ff.

<sup>33</sup> Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 198. On Arendt and Habermas cf. 200ff, as well as the remarks in the preface to the second edition (see the note below).

<sup>34</sup> Benhabib is a prolific theorist in her own right. While her broader interpretation of Arendt, especially in *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (1996/2003) remains an excellent resource, the intertwining of Arendt and Habermas in her thought obscures, in my opinion, some of the most important insights surrounding Arendt’s public realm. Benhabib attempts to correct this in the preface to the second edition: her answer, however, “to the charge that [she] may have been reading Arendt as if she were a Habermasian,” that she is concerned instead with “[showing] the respects in which Habermas is an Arendtian” is only a half-solution (2003, xii). Her recognition of the complementary relationship between Arendt and Habermas’ work is a vital step towards untangling the current predicament of modern liberal democracies. Whatever fruits this analysis might bear, it also runs the risk of misunderstanding through comparisons. Nevertheless, as Benhabib recognizes, “every interpretation is a conversation, with all the joys and dangers that conversations usually involve;” (2003, xlviii) my own conversation with her engagement with Arendt has hopefully borne fruit of its own.

<sup>35</sup> Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 9

<sup>36</sup> Dana R. Villa, “Postmodernism and the Public Sphere,” *The American Political Science Review* 86, no. 3 (1992): 712–21.

career progresses, Villa argues that Arendt's understanding of Socrates and Kant limit the Nietzschean side of her agonistic approach to politics;<sup>37</sup> while more amenable to nuance, however, he still resists the "corrective readings" that "radically devalue the aesthetic dimension" of Arendt's work, such as her theory of judgement.<sup>38</sup> In Habermas' shadow, these readings of Arendt become polarized as interpreters attempt to either reconcile or differentiate the constructed normative model of Arendt from that of Habermas.<sup>39</sup> To a certain extent, later scholars have worked to bridge the gap between the two positions. For example, Markell highlights the mutual complementarity of Habermas' and Arendt's positions as he explores the interdependence of agonistic action and the stable structures that support it, but also require the former for their legitimacy and democratic nature,<sup>40</sup> whereas Calhoun notes that Arendt's conception of the public sphere includes the vital process of identity construction, revelation, and the heightened role of the imagination, which could enliven and enrich Habermas' discourse-driven account.<sup>41</sup> And Kimberly Curtis, whose work is particularly attuned to the ontological grounds of Arendt's political thought, and who is equally sensitive to the need to bridge the divide between the deliberativists and agonists, argues that a thorough examination of the aesthetic dimension of Arendt's thought will reveal the ethical implications and reach a common ground between the two

---

<sup>37</sup> Cf. both Dana R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), esp. chapter 3, and *Ibid*, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), chapter 5.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, "Hannah Arendt: Modernity, Alienation, Critique," 196. We could also include Chantal Mouffe among those who read Arendt agonistically – she certainly notes that Arendt has inspired such agonistic thinkers as Honig and William Connolly (cf. 2009, 107). She does not, however, fully endorse Arendt's conception, finding it to be an "agonism without antagonism" that, like Habermas, aims at consensus, albeit by different means (2013, 12-14). While there is something to be said for Mouffe's approach, her use of Arendt as a foil and launching pad, rather than a serious conversation partner, leaves her excluded from this thesis.

<sup>39</sup> Villa's own readings have developed in nuance over time and remain immensely valuable resources today.

<sup>40</sup> Patchen Markell, "Contesting Consensus: Rereading Habermas on the Public Sphere," *Constellations* 3, no. 3 (1999): 379.

<sup>41</sup> Craig Calhoun, "Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 170.

positions.<sup>42</sup> Because of the split in the nineties, however, this divide continues to permeate Arendt scholarship.

The previous interpretative barrier is compounded by an overreliance on Arendt's remarks about the classical polis of ancient Athens and the mistaken idea that these statements comprise the normative core of Arendt's political framework. Once again, this misreading has its roots in Habermas' work: in the *Structural Transformation* he remarks on the curious "normative power" of the Greek world in contemporary work, explicitly citing Arendt.<sup>43</sup> More explicitly, and more damning, he argues in his article on Arendt that she "stylizes the image she has of the Greek polis to the essence of politics as such."<sup>44</sup> This critique speaks to the mistaken tendency mentioned above to develop an explicitly normative political-public ideal out of Arendt's work – especially out of *The Human Condition*, which Margaret Canovan has correctly described as "not so much [concerned] with politics as with the predicament from which politics must start."<sup>45</sup> It equally stems from the challenging question of Arendt's relation to modernity, which weaves in and out of Arendt scholarship and lies at the core of charges of elitism, nostalgia, and antidemocratic tendencies leveled at Arendt. Whether Arendt is a "great antimodernist," as George Kateb would

---

<sup>42</sup> Cf. especially Kimberley F. Curtis, "Aesthetic Foundations of Democratic Politics in the Works of Hannah Arendt," in *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics* and *Ibid, Our Sense of the Real: Aesthetic Experience and Arendtian Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). Curtis' work, while an excellent evaluation, perhaps overaestheticizes Arendt's thought and ignores the other constitutive experiences of the world and the other. In *Our Sense of the Real*, the aesthetic experience of wonder is the underpinning force behind Arendt's political theory. While this is certainly present in Arendt, it belies the latter's own admission that the experience of wonder – especially as a catalyst for thought – is not the primary drive behind the phenomenon of thinking (cf. esp. LotM-T 191). Curtis does not differentiate between the phenomenal and the aesthetic; this, in my opinion, is the reason why her work does not fully unify the deliberativist and agonist positions. That said, her observations, for the most, part, are spot on. We will treat Curtis' arguments in more detail in chapter one.

<sup>43</sup> Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Habermas, "Hannah Arendt," 14.

<sup>45</sup> Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 99-100.

have it,<sup>46</sup> or whether she is halfway between as both a modernist Jew and an antimodern philosophy student, as Benhabib believes,<sup>47</sup> or whether she espouses something else entirely, remains a challenge that we will deal with over the course of the thesis. What is important to note here is that the overreliance on Arendt's discussion of the polis to the neglect of other works and their implications for the interpretation of *The Human Condition* remains a considerable problem, especially insofar as it continues to obscure the distinction between the public and the political.

Finally, and as almost a direct result of the above, Habermas accuses Arendt of developing a politics which, because of her Hellenic commitments, "is inapplicable to modern conditions."<sup>48</sup> For Habermas, this means that Arendt ignores the structural and strategic dimensions of 'power' and, as a result, pulls the social and economic dimensions out of politics. This latter point, taken up extensively in the literature, is certainly one of the most serious criticisms leveled at Arendt. Benhabib, once again, argues repeatedly that Arendt's "distinction between social and political makes no sense in the modern world... primarily because the struggle to make something public is a struggle for justice."<sup>49</sup> Zaretsky, working from the perspective that Arendt has fundamental "aristocratic, antidemocratic, and premodern prejudices," believes that her work stands completely apart from democratic theories, and that her "attack on the social is untenable."<sup>50</sup> Kateb, against Arendt's antimodernism noted above, worries that her concerns and dismissal of representative politics ignores the enormous gains and possibilities modern democracies have opened, and

---

<sup>46</sup> George Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984), 183

<sup>47</sup> Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt: New Edition*, xxxviii-ix.

<sup>48</sup> Habermas, "Hannah Arendt," 14.

<sup>49</sup> Benhabib, "Models of Public Space," 79.

<sup>50</sup> Eli Zaretsky, "Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of the Public Private Distinction," in *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*, 208, 225. Zaretsky also makes the same pervasive mistake that Arendt attributes to the philosophical tradition when he suggests that Arendtian action "occurs in a public – that is, social – space" (223). Compare this to HC, section 4.

Canovan's early assessment of Arendt's politics involves a puzzling through of the contradictory elitist and democratic elements in her thought.<sup>51</sup> While there were contemporaneous attempts to defend Arendt against some of these charges (especially Isaac's work highlighting Arendt's commitments to civic engagement and its consequences for modern democracies),<sup>52</sup> and other, more critical attempts to work through perceived contradictions in Arendt's thought in order to salvage insights,<sup>53</sup> the inapplicability of Arendt's thought to modern politics – whether representative democracy, contemporary questions of gender, or on the benefits and drawbacks of modernity, technology, and social equality – remained a deep concern for scholars seeking to engage with Arendt's thought.

These remarks should come as no surprise from a generation of scholars working through Habermas' misreadings. It goes without saying, of course, that many of the works cited above remain brilliant sources of insight and inspiration for contemporary Arendt scholars; we must, however, step away from the positions identified above in order to look at Arendt's work with fresh eyes and understand what Arendt understands by the public and its relation to politics before we can agree with or dismiss the harsh judgements of early scholars.

Subsequent literature has honed in on some of the paradoxical links and distinctions between the categories of the social, the public, and the political in Arendt's thought, and worked to overcome the methodological and normative hurdles raised by Habermas and perpetuated through the nineties. Aspects of Arendt's thought previously dismissed or discarded by earlier

---

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Kateb, *Hannah Arendt*, esp. chapter four; Margaret Canovan, "The Contradictions of Hannah Arendt's Political Thought," *Political Theory* 6, no. 1 (1978): 5–26.

<sup>52</sup> Jeffrey C. Isaac, "Oases in the Desert: Hannah Arendt on Democratic Politics," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 1 (1994): 156–68.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. e.g. Hannah Fenichel Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

scholars, such as Arendt's reliance upon the notion of loneliness in her analysis of the emergence of totalitarianism, her description of the rise of 'the social' in *The Human Condition* and other works, for example, have been resuscitated, or at least critically rehabilitated.<sup>54</sup> The worldly dimension of Arendt's thought has also been repeatedly emphasized – either through the relationship of her thought to ethics and the origination of principles from worldly conditions, as Lucy Cane notes; in terms of using the worldly co-origination of common sense as a means of bypassing the transcendental/empirical divide, as Marieke Borren has done; or the role that the world and the present plays in determining how to read her work, as Buckler draws out in his book *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory: Challenging the Tradition* – which has led to a more nuanced, appreciative, and subtle understanding of the ways in which Arendt's thought remains applicable to both contemporary scholarly debates and our current political predicament.<sup>55</sup>

The elements of the public – the common and the world – have often been discussed in separation, or, when brought together, without the political implications of their relationship to the

---

<sup>54</sup> On loneliness cf. e.g. Martin Shuster, "Language and Loneliness: Arendt, Cavell, and Modernity," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 20, no. 4 (2012): 473–97; Richard H. King, "Hannah Arendt and American Loneliness," *Society* 50 (2013): 36–40; as well as Peter Baehr, *Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism, and the Social Sciences* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), especially chapter two on Arendt's relationship to social scientists. On the rehabilitation of "the social" cf. Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen, "Tentative Lessons of Experience: Arendt, Essayism, and 'The Social' Reconsidered," *Political Theory* 42, no. 5 (2014): 569–89; Patricia Owens, "Human Security and the Rise of the Social," *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 3 (2012): 547–67; and Owens, "Not Life but the World Is at Stake: Hannah Arendt on Citizenship in the Age of the Social," *Citizenship Studies* 16, no. 2 (2012): 297–307. Both of these will be explored in chapter two, below.

<sup>55</sup> Lucy Cane, "Hannah Arendt on the Principles of Political Action," *European Journal of Political Theory* 14, no. 1 (2015): 55–75; Marieke Borren, "'A Sense of the World': Hannah Arendt's Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Common Sense," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 21, no. 2 (2013): 225–55; Steve Buckler, *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory: Challenging the Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011). Borren's work is among some of the best research on common sense I have come across, as it explicitly ties the origins of common sense to the common world itself and links the loss of the common sense and the real to the conditions of totalitarianism, something that previous Arendt scholars seemed hesitant to do. I was pleased to find her attentive and insightful analysis late in the research process, as it both affirms my own conclusions and provides a welcome interlocutor to this thesis. Borren's work approaches Arendt from a distinctly philosophical standpoint, and I hope both to deepen some of the ideas she explores in her paper and to draw out the political consequences insofar as common sense relates to the public, specifically, something that Borren does not do in the paper.

public realm, and there seems to be a hesitancy to return to the larger question of the constitution of the public in the Arendtian sense, or her relation to Habermas.<sup>56</sup> More often than not, Arendt's understanding of the world has been explored in terms of world-alienation and the developments of modernity; common sense, in terms of her reliance upon Kant and her theory of judgment; and the public itself, in terms of the Hellenic/nostalgic dimensions, agonism, and her understanding of politics more generally. Ashley Biser's insightful study of the role of orientation and bearings-taking in Arendt's work is an excellent example.<sup>57</sup> Her analysis of the destabilizing effects of thinking and the ways in which we might exercise the faculty of thought in such a way as to resist disorientation clarifies a key confusion in Arendt's thought and explicates the relation between thinking and the world, but does not tie this back to the essentially political. This is not a criticism; rather, it shows how Arendt scholars have carved off smaller and smaller pieces in order to work through the more difficult and obscure portions of her writings at the expense of the synoptic overview of earlier work. In this thesis, therefore, I aim to avoid the interpretive pitfalls provoked by the Habermasian account of the public, and engage with and connect both Arendt's work and recent work that has illuminated the most salient parts of her thought and reconnect with the political demands imposed by Arendt's conclusions.

---

<sup>56</sup> It is also worth noting that, thanks to Jerome Kohn, Arendt's essays, notes, and unfinished works are now widely available and provide a deeper glance into the conditions and motivations behind her published corpus.

<sup>57</sup> Ashley N. Biser, "Calibrating Our 'Inner Compass': Arendt on Thinking and the Dangers of Disorientation," *Political Theory* 42, no. 5 (2014): 519–42.

## *Methodology*

Untangling Arendt is a difficult enterprise. Considering that she is a thinker who was particularly sensitive to the nature and character of the thinking process and who aimed to avoid thinking in such a way that it produced results,<sup>58</sup> Arendt's work – especially her later, more philosophically-oriented writing – resists systematization, both in content and form. In particular, her reliance upon distinctions, rather than definitions, diligently preserves the dignity of the particular, the contingent, and the possible. Distinctions allow the theorist to breathe life into the particulars while at the same time bringing them into relation with each other: exposing without destroying. Definitions, in contrast, rely upon negations which obliterate the particular through systematization and classification and exclude the richness of the parts through the coherency of the whole. That Arendt generally chooses to employ the former instead of the latter fits with her theoretical program; it creates nothing but problems, however, for scholars who aim to find straightforward answers.

Therefore, any reading of Arendt must keep in mind her sensitivity to lived experience, actual political conditions, and the urgency of the time. It must also consider Arendt's own ambivalence about the writing process itself. How are we to read a thinker who acknowledges that if not for a bad memory, they might not have written anything at all?<sup>59</sup> Some scholars – especially Margaret Canovan,<sup>60</sup> and, more recently, Buckler and Hyvönen – have highlighted the

---

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Buckler, *Hannah Arendt*, 43.

<sup>59</sup> Hannah Arendt, “‘What Remains? The Language Remains’: A Conversation with Günter Gaus,” in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 3

<sup>60</sup> Cf. in particular Canovan, *Hannah Arendt*, 1-16. Among all of the early Arendt commentators, Canovan is the most attuned to Arendt's style and content; it is a shame that her work has not guided subsequent inquiries into Arendt's thought and method.

methodological challenges that pursue conversations with Arendt's work. Both Hyvönen's explication of the role of experience in Arendt's thought and its implications for her essayistic style,<sup>61</sup> and Buckler's analysis of Arendt's diverse methodological tools that enable her "preoccupation with the present"<sup>62</sup> to assume written form are excellent steps towards correcting the methodological imbalance and the preoccupation with Arendt's use and abuse of narrative and storytelling, which was the primary explanatory vehicle of early Arendt scholars.<sup>63</sup> They also pull us away from the unfortunate tendency of scholars to essentialize Arendt to provide a structure to her work – either as unrepentant antimodernist,<sup>64</sup> 'reluctant' modernist torn between her Jewish modernism and Heideggerian antimodernism,<sup>65</sup> or as a woman, Jew, or immigrant - in ways that ignore Arendt's own reasons for privileging whoness over whatness and the ways in which human beings' extraordinary capacity for action and beginnings allows us to transcend the accidental. Whether or not this transcendence is accomplishable is, in many ways, secondary to the fact that it does happen from time to time, much in the same way that Arendt's own work relies heavily upon phenomenological evidence as its point of departure.<sup>66</sup>

With this in mind, I want to clarify some of the methodological assumptions of this thesis, which itself relies primarily upon a textual evaluation of Arendt's work. Given the obstacles outlined in both the literature review and above in this section, I will, first and foremost, be reading

---

<sup>61</sup> Hyvönen, "Tentative Lessons of Experience".

<sup>62</sup> Buckler, *Hannah Arendt*, 9.

<sup>63</sup> On storytelling and narrative cf. esp. Seyla Benhabib, "Hannah Arendt and the Redemptive Power of Narrative," *Social Research* 57, no. 1 (1990): 167–96 and its reformulation in *ibid*, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 87ff.

<sup>64</sup> e.g. Kateb.

<sup>65</sup> e.g. Benhabib.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Arendt's simple statement at the outset of her discussion of the will in *The Life of the Mind*: "In what follows, I shall take the internal evidence of an I-will as sufficient testimony to the reality of the phenomenon." (LotM-W 5)

Arendt charitably, but cautiously, taking her as a traveling partner, not as a prophet. I am also working from the idea that, despite variations in description and characterization in different works, Arendt maintains a consistent understanding of ‘the public’ over the course of her writing career – or, at least, that it is possible to uncover a consistent and robust concept out of her thought. To tease out a single concept or phenomenon loose from the tangled web of Arendt’s thought itself poses particular methodological challenges: Arendt herself often seems to work through multiple strands of argumentation and exposition at once, and any untangling must be cognisant of the differences in characterization in different contexts. Other attempts to treat a singular theme often chart its chronological development over the course of Arendt’s career.<sup>67</sup> The chronological treatment, while useful in its own way, imposes a certain linearity upon the explication, and shifts the analysis more towards the theorist herself, and always with the danger that the biographical veers into the psychoanalytic.<sup>68</sup>

Second, from the way in which Arendt describes her own approach, we should note that there is no single work from which to take a point of departure to understand Arendt’s thought. Early intention and contextual debates in Arendt scholarship over the role of individual works in the overall interpretation of Arendt’s thought provide excellent resources,<sup>69</sup> but cannot be the last word. The phenomenological analysis of plurality which begins *The Life of the Mind* informs a reading of *Origins* just as much as a careful study of the destruction of the stable signifiers of

---

<sup>67</sup> Cf. e.g. Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob*, on “the social”, as well as Ronald Beiner’s interpretive essay on judgment (“Hannah Arendt on Judging” in Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press/Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982)). Additionally, more synoptic works (e.g. Canovan 1992, Benhabib 1996/2003, Buckler 2011) proceed in a loosely chronological manner. Beiner’s excellent analysis resists the chronological pull in his assessment of the concept of judgment itself.

<sup>68</sup> Pitkin, especially, is guilty in this respect, the intellectual bankruptcy of psychoanalysis, of course, notwithstanding.

<sup>69</sup> Canovan’s work in *Hannah Arendt*, for example, aims to decentre *The Human Condition*, which had formed the core of prior Arendt interpretations (7).

European politics and society in *Origins* informs the *The Life of the Mind*. As a result, I will be reconstructing Arendt's explication of the public by weaving together threads from various works, both published during Arendt's lifetime and collected posthumously.

And finally, some thinkers have tried to apply Arendt's own methodology to her work itself – namely, the pearl-diving she highlights in *Between Past and Future*. This challenge – like Benhabib's injunction that we need to 'think with Arendt against Arendt' – overlooks the ways in which we still live in Arendt's world, and the prejudices with which thinkers have been apt to bring to Arendt's work. *Pace* Benhabib, we must read Arendt *with* Arendt in order to understand how, and to what extent, her warnings continue to ring true today. The questions of whether there are eternal and recurring questions in political thought, of how relevant the past is to present concerns, and to what extent we must divest ourselves of the prejudices of past thinkers are not as important when the thinker in question remains proximal; the earthquakes of modernity have left us stranded on the same side of the divide as Arendt, one where "we cross our bridges when we come to them and burn them behind us, with nothing to show for our progress except the memory of the smell of smoke, and a presumption that our eyes once watered."<sup>70</sup> If Arendt is correct in her diagnosis of modernity and the threat of the loss of the common world, then the question we must ask ourselves is not how to make Arendt fit with other frameworks, but rather, the opposite.<sup>71</sup> It might be the case that all interpretation is conversation; as any conversationalist understands, however, it is in the listening, not the speaking, that knowledge is produced.

---

<sup>70</sup> Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 61.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, the excellent distinction raised by Honig between 'the Women question in Arendt' and 'the Arendt question in Feminism' in "Introduction: The Arendt Question in Feminism," in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 1–16.

## Chapter One: Plurality and the Common World

*No permanence, no perseverance in existence, can ever be conceived of without men willing to testify to what is and appears to them because it is.*

*-- Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics"<sup>1</sup>*

We begin by recognizing, first, that the public and the political are not co-extensive. As Arendt notes in "The Crisis of Culture," and as others have duly pointed out, not only politics but culture inhabits the public realm.<sup>2</sup> Neither, too, is the practice of politics – of decision-making and policy – solely in the public realm. This is certainly the case in authoritarian regimes, where decisions are made behind closed doors and no legitimation or rationale is required to justify arbitrary decisions and policies. And even in representative democracies is politics not wholly public; in addition to Habermas' observations about manipulative non-publicity, we can add that the phenomenon of *transparency* has become a quasi-public surrogate that allows glimpses into non-public processes from a single perspective, and not the authentic public experience of participation and recognition of diverse perspectives. Transparency is the illusion of participation – a curated glimpse behind the curtain of secrecy that, for a contemporary society that has lost a full understanding of publicness, appears sufficient. Contemporary politics plays out in various registers, only one of which is public in the sense of being visible.

What is obscured, however, in the contemporary and everyday conception of politics is precisely the phenomenon of *publicity*, not only in its foundational role in rational-institutional conceptions of organization (e.g. Habermas) but equally in the ontological sense, as we have seen

---

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics," in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 225.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g. Margaret Canovan, "Politics as Culture: Hannah Arendt and the Public Realm," in *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays*, ed. Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 84ff. Canovan, here, also presents one of the most succinct analyses of the public realm, recognizing both its spatiality and artificiality.

in the introduction. The separation between politics and publicity means that our inquiry into *the public* as a constitutive phenomenon captured in Arendt's work becomes distinct from the arguments surrounding her conception of politics. This is particularly relevant, since as we saw in our literature review, several commentators have approached Arendt's public realm through the dimensions of her *political* structures, and not through the quality of publicity itself. Arendt herself draws this distinction carefully in *The Human Condition*: the space of appearance arises under conditions of human plurality; the 'public realm' itself is the formally constituted (i.e. *intentional*) space of appearances, and the structures of government "the various forms in which the public realm can be organized."<sup>3</sup> There is likewise a clear difference between the sheer condition of being together and the more intentional condition of being-together-politically;<sup>4</sup> while both experiences need to be properly understood in their own right, the inability to distinguish between the two leads to confusion with respect to the conditions of politics. Our investigation, therefore, will examine the space of appearance and the public realm distinct from the structures of government that organize it.

What, then, is this elusive quality of publicness, and what is the public realm that is so necessary for our sense of self, of other, of the world, and of the real? As previously mentioned in the introduction, Arendt points to two "closely interrelated but not altogether identical phenomena" that compose the term 'public'.<sup>5</sup> First, it consists of appearances "seen and heard by everybody."<sup>6</sup> While this has been regularly understood as the 'space of appearances' in the literature,<sup>7</sup> Arendt's

---

<sup>3</sup> HC 199.

<sup>4</sup> OR 9.

<sup>5</sup> HC 50.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. esp. the works of Canovan and Benhabib, as well as d'Entreves' entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, among others. It is important to note here that this reading is not strictly incorrect; the public realm does indeed rely upon the space of appearances. The distinction I will continue to draw here is between the 'public realm' as identified by Arendt and the literature, and the phenomenon of publicity itself, upon which the public realm rests.

first phenomenon of publicness is not only the space in which appearances are perceived but rather also *the appearances themselves* – that is, the *common*. The disjunct in the literature stems from the complication that Arendt understands things to at once “appear in public” – which indicates the spatial dimension of appearance itself – and that the appearances in public “[have] the widest possible publicity” – that is, possess the attribute of publicness.<sup>8</sup> The distinction between the adjectival ‘public’ as a phenomenological quality and the constructed noun of *the public* as a phenomenon itself, like the distinction drawn above between sheer togetherness and intentional political community, has created a hermeneutical challenge compounded by the elusiveness of Arendt’s own terminology. The distinction above has led to obvious confusion, but this distinction implies the challenging proposal that public things depend upon *the public* for their own identity and reality; this observation underlies the ontological function of the public itself.

Naturally, appearances require space in order to appear at all; if all appearances require a spectator, then a necessary spatial relationship between perceiver and perceived develops. But the inverse is also true; without appearances, there is no space (and, of course, in a similar sense, the passage of time itself requires movement or change to be registered). The co-originating relationship between space and appearance is excluded from the literature’s reliance upon the ‘space of appearance,’ the grammatical construction of which subordinates appearance to the space in which it appears.<sup>9</sup> This, of course, is only the case if we are investigating the adjectival public; *the public realm*, insofar as ‘realm’ indicates a spatial dimension, is precisely *the space of appearances* (formally constituted), in which public appearances are perceived by everybody, and thereby solidified and confirmed in their *reality*, and it is in this sense that Arendt can state that

---

<sup>8</sup> HC 50.

<sup>9</sup> This question of co-origination is most aptly considered by Borren (2013), although she deals more precisely with the co-origination of common sense and the world as such.

“the function of the public realm [is] to throw light on the affairs of men by providing a space of appearance.”<sup>10</sup> In our initial investigation of the phenomenon of publicity itself, however, we must distinguish between the full space of appearance and the mode of disclosure of appearances which are themselves public.

By virtue of appearing before multiple people, appearances find themselves in a *context* – that is, they find themselves to be situated *between* human beings, and, in so being, acquire sense and significance: this in-between is the second phenomenological understanding of ‘publicness’. For Arendt, this is the *world*, which “both relates and separates men at the same time.”<sup>11</sup> The concept of ‘world’ has a rich philosophical and phenomenological heritage, and Arendt is conscious of this in her deployment of the term. As we will see below, the world is not merely “that which is the case,”<sup>12</sup> as Wittgenstein begins his *Tractatus*; it is not a running catalogue of facticity or a sum of that which is. The world is a dynamic and durable referential totality that grounds, situates, and relates human beings to each other and their environment. Further, while Arendt emphasizes the world’s spatial dimensions, especially in her discussion of ‘work’, it is not *exclusively* spatial. In the development of this phenomenon Arendt owes a great deal to Heidegger; the latter’s conception of the world will therefore feature prominently in our analysis.

So it is these two interrelated phenomena – appearances which are held in *common*, and the process of situating that occurs through the engagement of these appearances with the *world*, that form the backbone of Arendt’s conception of *the* public, which, as mentioned, is the formally constituted space of appearances, the common framework of difference within which identity – and, by extension, meaning – are comprehended. The public guarantees our sense of reality,

---

<sup>10</sup> MDT viii.

<sup>11</sup> HC 52.

<sup>12</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London and New York: Routledge, 1974), 5.

provides a foundation for moral and aesthetic judgments, and is the space in which an individual can, through action and speech, become fully themselves. Over the course of this chapter we analyze this in more detail. First, we develop Arendt's nuanced conception of plurality to understand the dependence of human beings upon the existence of others. Plurality itself underscores both of the phenomena of the public: common public appearances are perceived by more than one person, and the world discloses a shared context. Second, we take up the common, and the world, in turn, in order to see how and to what extent the two aspects of the public are interrelated and rely, in turn, upon the condition of plurality. Borren has already pointed to the co-origination of common sense and the world;<sup>13</sup> however, it is also the case that our identity itself co-originate with the world and the ability to exercise common sense in the company of others. Without plurality, there is no identity; without common sense, there is no judgment; without the world, there is no meaning.<sup>14</sup> We will first take up these constitutive elements in isolation in order to clarify their character, and then in their inter-relatedness, which is what Arendt understands to be the human condition *par excellence* that only the public realm can make possible. Finally, we will return at the end of the chapter to evaluate some of Arendt's more explicit writings on 'the public' to understand some of the finer points of Arendt's reliance upon the Greeks and the way that the 'public realm' co-exists with the private sphere of human affairs. The public realm exists as the political expression of the principle of plurality. It is far more than a site of rational-critical discussion: its ontological functions – as the guarantee of reality, as the site of the creation and

---

<sup>13</sup> Borren, "A Sense of the World."

<sup>14</sup> In the broadest sense, Arendt describes it thus: "This, however, is not to say that [*homo faber* and *animal laborans*] are free to dispense with the public realm altogether, for without a space of appearance and without trusting in action and speech as a mode of being together, neither the reality of one's self, of one's own identity, nor the reality of the surrounding world can be established beyond doubt." (HC 208).

disclosure of identity and meaning, and as the origin of freedom – are far more important to the continued existence of the common world and, by extension, the practice of politics itself.

### *Plurality*

The framework of the public realm and the characteristics of its constituent pieces are impossible to fully understand or appreciate without the concept of plurality, which scholars have rightly and regularly acknowledged as the cornerstone of Arendt's thought and one of her most significant contributions to our understanding of politics.<sup>15</sup> "Plurality is the law of the earth,"<sup>16</sup> "one of the basic conditions of human life on earth."<sup>17</sup> It is "the condition *sine qua non* for that space of appearance which is the public realm"<sup>18</sup> and "*the* condition – not only the condition *sine qua non* but the *conditio per quam* of political life."<sup>19</sup> Human beings "[exist] *essentially* in the plural,"<sup>20</sup> both insofar as "men, not Man, inhabit the earth and live in the world"<sup>21</sup> and insofar as any human being, "even if [they] were to live entirely by [themselves they] would, as long as [they are] alive, live in the condition of plurality."<sup>22</sup> The twin pillar of Arendt's thought, freedom, is itself, "at least in its political aspects, [inconceivable] outside of plurality."<sup>23</sup> And it is precisely the danger of totalitarianism at its most extreme that it aims to exterminate plurality as such through a slow destruction of individuality that leaves only "a never-changing identity of reactions" that

---

<sup>15</sup> Cf. e.g. Canovan, *Hannah Arendt*, 205, 281; Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 190; Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, 13; Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real*, 24ff.

<sup>16</sup> LotM-T 19.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>18</sup> HC 220.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>20</sup> LotM-T 185.

<sup>21</sup> HC 7.

<sup>22</sup> PoP 20.

<sup>23</sup> Hannah Arendt, "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought," in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 436.

“can be exchanged at random for any other.”<sup>24</sup> If we are to re-situate the “genuine site” of humanity from the bourgeois intimate to the public, then the phenomenon of plurality, especially since Arendt sees it as the necessary condition of the public itself, will play a preparatory role in the argument.

The idea that we “exist essentially in the plural” develops in three strands in Arendt’s work: the ontological, the phenomenological, and the epistemological modes of plurality. The first, the ontological, stems from the straightforward and indisputable fact that the earth is inhabited by multiple human beings, and not a single individual. Arendt recognizes that it is impossible to live without either the presence or influence of other human beings: even if one could, conceivably, live outside the bounds of the human world, the fact of natality – that every human being is born into the world and has the capacity to begin – rests upon the presence of others who bring one into the world. The philosopher’s emphasis on the solitary experience of death as the defining existential moment is tempered by the politically explosive event of a new human birth; only in leaving the world is the individual rendered unto themselves. For those of us in the world, this mode of being is necessarily being-with-others.<sup>25</sup>

Arendt’s explication of this proposition comes at the end of her life in the opening to *The Life of the Mind*, where she outlines what Kimberly Curtis has called the “ontology of display.”<sup>26</sup> In resuscitating the oft-derided concept of appearance, Arendt aims to rehabilitate the world over and against the philosophers’ attempts to flee and trivialize it. Beginning with the fact that everything in the world appears, she distinguishes between those things that appear only in their “inorganic thereness” – that is, appear indiscriminately and unchoosingly – and living beings, who

---

<sup>24</sup> OT 438.

<sup>25</sup> We will briefly discuss the Heideggerian dimensions of Arendt’s thought later in this chapter.

<sup>26</sup> Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real*, 30.

“make their appearance” in the world and who have the ability to influence, to a certain degree, how they are perceived. In both cases, Arendt argues, appearances are meant to be perceived by an other.<sup>27</sup> Curtis is right to highlight the aesthetic dimensions of the appearing subjects, or, as Arendt puts it, the “sheer entertainment value of [the world’s] views, sounds, and smells,”<sup>28</sup> but over-emphasizes the aesthetic experience: the distinction drawn by Arendt between self-display and self-presentation shows that the urge towards self-disclosure of self-aware subjects is not only the urge to self-display but the urge to *be perceived correctly*.<sup>29</sup> The fact that I appear is a brute fact – I do not have the aesthetic provocation of being, I merely am. In so being, I am perceived by others to be *someone*. To avoid the break between that which I believe I am and that which I appear to be before others, I must either hide myself through deception, or else, as Arendt quotes Socrates, always “‘be as [I] wish to appear’... even if it happens that [I am] alone and appear to no one but [myself].”<sup>30</sup> This is not an aesthetic phenomenon, but an attempted exercise of control on the part of a subject who fears losing what they are in the face of the experience of the other’s perceiving gaze.

As a consequence, Arendt argues that appearances demand and require spectators.<sup>31</sup> This is not a new statement: she is taking up the old Idealist adage that there is no subject without an object, and no object without a subject. Arendt, however, nuances the point. She connects Husserl’s concept of intentionality to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘perceptual faith’ to argue that, while we perceive objects through intentional relationships, their reality, and our corresponding perceptual certainty, is only grounded through others’ perception and acknowledgement that the

---

<sup>27</sup> LotM-T, 19-21.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 34-37.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid 37

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 46.

object also appears.<sup>32</sup> If this is the case, then solipsism is always “out of tune with the most elementary data of our existence and experience.”<sup>33</sup> Following Merleau-Ponty’s argument that the thought of perception is never an adequate substitution or replacement for perception itself, Arendt argues that Cartesian doubt, as the theoretical pinnacle of solipsism, denies the basic reality of the *thereness* of the world as perceived and guaranteed.<sup>34</sup> It is easy, she contends, to lose sight of the world and appearance while engaging in the activity of thought, which is conducted in solitude and is concerned with the individual. In a more practical sense, the philosopher or scientist’s seeming independence from the phenomenal world through a withdrawal into thought is belied by the fact that they, like everyone else, must return at the end of the day to the world and leave their labs and thought-palaces.<sup>35</sup> So, Arendt understands that the reality of perception is guaranteed by its worldly context:

Although everything that appears is perceived of in the mode of it-seems-to-me, hence open to error and illusion, appearance as such carries with it a prior indication of *realness*. All sense experiences are normally accompanied by the additional, if usually mute sense of reality, and this despite the fact that none of our senses, taken in isolation, and no sense-object, taken out of context, can produce it.<sup>36</sup>

This sense of reality is not produced by a single sensation, nor through the grasping of an object outside of its context; it is instead produced *by* the context itself – which also includes, Arendt notes, the existence of others who perceive the same objects as I do, and the combined efforts of *all* of my senses. This context is unified by our *common sense*, which, as we will see, is one of the constituent pieces of the public realm. We have seen here, however, that the ontological plurality of other perceiving beings is both one of the basic facts of human life on earth, and also that which

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 25. This is not a new observation. Hume had previously recognized that prolonged and serious research without interruption leads to “pensive melancholy” and “endless uncertainty.” He exhorts his readers to “be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man.” (David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 5-6).

<sup>36</sup> LotM-T 49.

grounds our sense of reality. As we will see in chapter two, the loss of ontological plurality destroys our sense of reality – in its most extreme sense, as Martin Shuster succinctly puts it, “without others, no common sense, and without common sense, no experience.”<sup>37</sup>

It would be a mistake, however, to understand plurality to be solely an existential/ontological condition of shared life on earth; this would ignore the mental experience of thought itself. Arendt understands that “men not only exist in the plural as do all earthly beings, but have an indication of this plurality within themselves.”<sup>38</sup> The phenomenological mode of plurality is the two-in-one of thought, the “silent dialogue of me and myself”<sup>39</sup>, observable when the thinking self withdraws from the world and, in solitude, recognizes itself to be present with itself.<sup>40</sup> This inner plurality arises directly from the thinking experience itself, and is an unavoidable encounter unless one flees from the thinking experience itself. The colloquial expressions “to be alone with one’s thoughts,” “to not be able to live with oneself,” “to be able to look oneself in the mirror” point to this basic experience of being-with-oneself – that human consciousness is at once a duality that only solidifies into a unity when faced once again with the outside world. Thinking, according to Arendt, arises from the condition of being-in-the-world itself; it is, she notes, “an activity that accompanies living,” to the point that (similar to the distinction above between mere togetherness and the intentional being-together-politically) “to

---

<sup>37</sup> Shuster, “Language and Loneliness,” 481.

<sup>38</sup> PoP 22. Annelies Degryse turns from this quotation to the issue of the *sensus communis* in Arendt’s thought and the intersubjective requirements of judgment (2011, 351-2). While this is certainly the case, the internal indication of plurality, however, lies far more closely to the experience of thought, as the context of the quotation itself indicates.

<sup>39</sup> LotM-T 122.

<sup>40</sup> Arendt’s understanding that the experience of solitude provokes the most intense realization of inner plurality runs throughout her work – the repeated referrals to Cato’s quote that “never is he more active than when he does nothing, never is he less alone than when he is by himself” (HC 325) testifies to this continued fascination with the experience. For an explication of the first clause cf. LotM-T 122-123; for an explication of the second cf. OT 476.

think and to be fully alive are the same.”<sup>41</sup> A mental operation distinct from logical reasoning,<sup>42</sup> it responds to the human need for meaning. Further, in its activity, which leaves no traces behind (unlike a product-oriented process), the experience of consciousness and the two-in-one is accompanied by the phenomenon of conscience as the requirement of self-consistency. This experience of the inner voice that compels an account, whether it be Socrates’ ‘room-mate’<sup>43</sup> or Rubashov’s “grammatical fiction” that “[seems] to begin where the ‘thinking to a conclusion’ [ends],”<sup>44</sup> emphasizes the degree to which human beings, in their desire for self-consistency and harmony, find the beginnings of their moral life.

This moral core, Arendt notes, does not generate any universally valid moral prescriptions, but rather compels us to render an account of ourselves to ourselves. If we cannot render such an account, we seek to escape the thinking activity itself. Arendt follows the Greeks in this respect – she notes that Aristotle, for example, is conscious of the fact that the base and vicious are at odds with themselves and avoid their own company.<sup>45</sup> We can extend this to note that the harmony of the two-in-one lies at the heart of the experience of Western tragedy: Benhabib’s rebuttal to Arendt’s position by way of Walt Whitman (“Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes”)<sup>46</sup> unfortunately ignores this deep current in our own self-experience. The crashing wave of nemesis that drowns the tragic hero is not the will of the gods but the unendurable moment of self-recognition that accompanies it, the agony of revelation of self; suicide is the admission of irreconcilability. Macbeth’s anguished realization that “to know

---

<sup>41</sup> LotM-T 178. By extension, “a life deprived of thought would be meaningless” (ibid), both in the sense that meaning cannot be found without recourse to the world and to thought, and in the sense that, according to Socrates, such a life would be entirely pointless.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. e.g. OT 475, HC 170-171, LotM-T 14-16.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. LotM-T 188; equally, PoP 21-25.

<sup>44</sup> Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, trans. Daphnae Hardy (New York: Scribner, 2006), 112.

<sup>45</sup> LotM-T 189; cf. also chapter two, below.

<sup>46</sup> Qtd. in Seyla Benhabib, “Judgment and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Arendt’s Thought,” *Political Theory* 16, no. 1 (1988): 44.

my deed ‘twere best not know myself,’”<sup>47</sup> the hollowness of Col. Nicholson’s “what have I done” at the sight of Shears dying in the River Kwai, and Jocasta’s desperate plea, “Oh Oedipus, God help you! God keep you from the knowledge of who you are!”<sup>48</sup> are all derived from the deep and urgent human need for self-reconciliation, the trauma of failing to reconcile, and the degree to which this experience forms the backbone of our own moral and cultural experiences.

Despite the fact that the two-in-one lies at the beginning of the moral experience, Benhabib is right that the harmony required by the thinking subject is not sufficient grounds for a moral basis of Arendt’s deeply intersubjective politics. Self-consistency does not have to render an account of itself to others; while it is appealing to understand the most powerful moral moments as deriving from a deep well of ‘here I stand; I can do no other,’ the convictions of conscience, as Kierkegaard has shown us, have limits, as they are ultimately not communicable. In his gloss on the Binding of Isaac, his pseudonym expresses horror, revulsion, and perplexity at the moral monstrosity of the intention of Abraham’s almost-murder of his son; the religious obligation – or, in Kierkegaard’s terms – the ‘teleological suspension of the ethical’ – is apparent only to Abraham. Whereas the ethical paradigm, in Kierkegaard’s sense, requires disclosure and communication,<sup>49</sup> Abraham remains silent about the task God places on his shoulders, for “humanly speaking, he is mad and cannot make himself understandable to anyone.”<sup>50</sup> As a result, the averted sacrifice cannot be justified from a communicative perspective: as the pseudonym reflects, “thinking about Abraham... then I am shattered.”<sup>51</sup> He “cannot understand Abraham – [he] can only admire him.”<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> William Shakespeare, “Macbeth,” in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 2579. 2.2.70.

<sup>48</sup> Sophocles, “Oedipus the King,” in *Greek Tragedies*, ed. David Grene and Richard Lattimore, trans. David Grene, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960), 157. 1067-8.

<sup>49</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Kierkegaard’s Writings, VI (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 86.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

Arendt is aware of this conundrum, however: she clearly states that conscience is not a political foundation.<sup>53</sup> This does not mean that conscience plays a negligible role in human affairs – it remains one of the last safeguards against evil in the world. It persists, however, only as long as the phenomenon of inner plurality and the activity of thought itself are preserved.

The ontological plurality of the world of appearances, which grounds our sense of the real and provides the political conditions of human life, and the phenomenological plurality of the inner life of the mind, out of which develops conscience and the drive towards meaning, are completed by the epistemic plurality required for our conceptual apparatus to function. It is impossible to develop a concept without difference; all identity begins with negation. Any essential characteristic of an object is only essential by way of *not* belonging to anything else, as a marker of identity only becomes such through its unique applicability through differentiation. This either happens through the negation of the particular through the process of definition, whereby the general oversees the sublimation of particulars, or through distinctions, which, as we mentioned above, preserve the particular through comparison and description.<sup>54</sup> The very ability of cognition to create the concepts necessary to unify and understand intuitions relies upon the world itself and its plurality for its being, if we are to trust Kant's famous statement that "thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."<sup>55</sup> These three modes of plurality – phenomenological, ontological, and epistemological – are at work in Arendt's thought independent of any sort of monism/dualism argument, or any orientation towards traditional metaphysical concerns of

---

<sup>53</sup> Cf. e.g. Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 188.

<sup>54</sup> We recognize that Arendt understands all definitions to be distinctions (HC 176); but we expand this to note that not all distinctions are definitions.

<sup>55</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 193-194. A51/B75.

substance and Being. Rather, these observations demonstrate that insofar as human beings *are* in the world, they are in the plural; plurality is the guiding light of the human condition.

This three-fold distinction between the modes of plurality establishes the condition of human existence in a strikingly original way. Plurality gives rise not only to our political considerations – that is, how we navigate a world that is inhabited by others – but, in a more foundational sense, to our mental faculties.<sup>56</sup> All three mental activities that comprise the life of the mind - thinking, willing, and judging – are performed through a withdrawal from the world of appearances, but all three still rely, in various ways, upon the world. The will, seemingly unconcerned with other human beings *per se*, develops out of the event of natality and is the expression of human spontaneity; further, the will is always world-oriented, either acting in or reacting to the world as its projects are aided or frustrated by the facticity of the real or the existence and wills of other human beings. Judgment, the “mysterious endowment of the mind by which the general, always a mental construction, and the particular, always given to sense experience, are brought together,”<sup>57</sup> relies both upon experience itself and, according to Arendt’s reading of Kant, the existence of other judging beings whose possible judgments are re-presented through imagination and reflective thinking.<sup>58</sup> Thinking, while arising out of the inner plurality of the two-in-one, at first glance appears to operate independently from the world; Arendt, however, goes to great lengths in *The Life of the Mind* to demonstrate the ways in which thinking borrows its

---

<sup>56</sup> As we will see below, plurality is also what gives us our sense of the *real*, or, as Curtis puts it, “a certain density within our experience.” (1999, 25) This is certainly true, and remains one of the core arguments of my thesis. But we can step beyond merely the sense of the real and see how our *self* – both in presentation and contextualization in the world of appearances and its ability to operate at all with the aid of its mental faculties – is itself dependent upon others.

<sup>57</sup> LotM-T 69.

<sup>58</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 67-72. In fact, Arendt seems to have developed the notion of the reliance of the mental faculties upon the community from Kant: “Kant stresses that at least one of our *mental faculties*, the faculty of judgment, presupposes the presence of others.” (Ibid, 74.)

conceptual and metaphorical vocabulary from the world of appearances itself.<sup>59</sup> At first glance, this does not seem to be a particularly ground-breaking assertion. The idea, however, that our mental faculties are dependent upon the world and are only fully realized through the participation in modes of plurality brings greater urgency to facing the threat of the totalitarian drive which seeks to destroy plurality as such.

The condition of existential plurality contains, *in nuce*, the seeds of the public realm itself.

As Arendt notes in *The Human Condition*,

Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech, has the twofold character of equality and distinction. If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or ever will be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood.<sup>60</sup>

The expression of distinction, Arendt continues, occurs through action: the revelation of the actor through speech and deed discloses a unique individual before others.<sup>61</sup> Action, despite its seemingly fiercely subjective bent, is fundamentally *interaction*; not only do we act into a world filled with others, but our actions and free choices equally have a normative flavour that indicates what sort of world we wish to live in, in addition to who we are. It is precisely because of this inter-action that plurality equally expresses equality. The common framework by and through which action is comprehended and reified is an essential counterpart to the action itself and gives rise to challenging questions. How do we understand each other? How do actions enter into and

---

<sup>59</sup> Cf. esp. LotM-T, sections 12 and 13. This is in addition to the complex relationship between experience and thought, which Arendt would have been thoroughly familiar with both through her reading of Kant specifically and her philosophical training more generally.

<sup>60</sup> HC 175-6.

<sup>61</sup> Benhabib, relying upon d'Entrèves' notions of 'expressive' and 'communicative' action, distinguishes between so-called 'agonal' and 'narrative' models of action in Arendt's thought: the first is the disclosure of the "unchangeable identity of the person" (HC 195), the second, the construction of a narrative of life that stands in conflict with the first. (2003, 125-6). This categorical split has, unfortunately, been woven into the subsequent literature. Benhabib, in this division, fails to bring the distinction between the life process and the thought process to bear on the question at hand (a transposition of Bergson's distinction between time and duration – see below). The identity of the actor is revealed in the act; the act only takes on *meaning* insofar as it is contextualized and situated in the larger web of relations. The distinction, therefore, is a false one.

affect the world? The public realm, as the site of both this equality and distinction, nurtures the political expression of the principle of plurality. And further, the ability to act – to dare to appear before others as oneself – relies upon the *common world* which situates, contextualizes, and opens the space of disclosure; it is this common world, now, that we turn towards, both to understand its nature and to recognize how to preserve and protect it.

### *The Common*

Having established the foundational role that plurality plays in Arendt's conception of existential conditions, mental faculties, and conceptualization and identity, we now return to the two phenomena of publicness. First, we take up appearances that are "seen and heard by everybody." As we noted at the outset of the chapter, because of the way Arendt weaves arguments together, a straightforward approach that seeks to isolate and describe necessarily interrelated phenomena will encounter obvious defects and pitfalls. Appearances that are held in common (and, more narrowly, our common sense which orients and contextualizes our private senses) can only *be* thanks to a common world.<sup>62</sup> Common sense "discloses to us the nature of the world insofar as it is a common world."<sup>63</sup> At the same time, as we shall see, the world itself houses the common appearances and provides them with stability and durability that is lacking from our own private experiences. Before we arrive at the phenomenon of the world, however, we must elucidate Arendt's conception of 'common sense.'

---

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Hannah Arendt, "Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)," in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 318.

<sup>63</sup> Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance," in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Penguin, 2006), 218.

Arendt's focus on the concept of appearance in *The Life of the Mind*, as noted above, is obviously sensitive to the ways in which appearance has been dismissed and subjugated to Being by a prejudicial philosophical tradition, but is equally sensitive to the good reasons philosophers have given in favour of such a dismissal. Appearances are, by nature, fickle; philosophers have been wary of their propensity to obscure and hide that which "actually" is, and the ontological priority given to the unchanging reflects the deep-seated anxiety and uncertainty that flows from the lack of stability. That appearances come and go is further complicated by the fact that no single perceiver is able to completely comprehend an appearance – our sensory apparatus is too sensitive to positionality in the shared world. Because of the plurality of perspectives that open onto the world, Arendt notes that "nothing that appears manifests itself to a single viewer capable of perceiving it under all its inherent aspects."<sup>64</sup> This opens not only the possibility of error (that I am not perceiving the true object), but also doubt. And while it is not true that pure inner experience, with both its requirement of external objects and stimuli and its reliance upon the conceptual language of experience, is possible without the existence of other things (with the exception, perhaps, of logic; see chapter two, below), the certainty of a given appearance is always vulnerable to doubt, from the perspective of our own subjective sensory experience.<sup>65</sup> As we saw above, however, Arendt firmly believes that the worldly context of an object – namely, that it is situated between perceivers who, despite perceiving it from different perspectives, are able to *agree* upon the nature of the object itself – grounds its reality.

Arendt's use of the term 'reality' might offer us pause here. Thankfully, Biser has done excellent work identifying the modes in which Arendt employs the term – either in the sense of *The Human Condition's* material, durable world of *homo faber* and the web of relations

---

<sup>64</sup> LotM-T 38.

<sup>65</sup> On Descartes and the challenge of doubt in the modern age, cf. HC, sections 38 and 39.

superimposed on it, *The Life of the Mind*'s subjective, "individualized reality" and the more substantial phenomenal reality that belongs to appearing objects in the world, or in the facticity of the real in *Origins* and "Truth and Politics."<sup>66</sup> All of these modes, she argues, turn back on a "fixedness" – that an appearance persists long enough (or longer) than others and can therefore be perceived by more than one person. This quality, both the *durability* and *availability* of an appearance or object, is an essential component of worldly things, according to Arendt.<sup>67</sup> So we find, then, that appearances which are 'seen and heard by everybody' derive their reality by virtue of appearing before and between multiple perceivers.

This, at first, seems to open a horrendous hole in the argument. Aren't inner sensations, intense experiences of pleasure and pain, taste, smell, emotions such as anger, sadness, or joy just as real as external appearances? They exist, after all. Isn't the contentment I feel with a morning cup of coffee and a book as I sit on my couch just as real as the cup of coffee and the book themselves? Thankfully, Arendt's understanding of the reality of sensations is more nuanced than it might seem. An uneasy balance – if it can be said to be a balance at all – exists between the reality of the world and the intensity of inner sensations. The reality, or the worldliness, of a given sensation depends entirely upon its communicability; until it is comprehended – that is, if it remains long enough to be apprehended, then understood – it "[leads] an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until [it is] transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit [it] for public appearance."<sup>68</sup> The deprivatization and deindividualization of a sensation isn't as ominous as it sounds – it is the consequence of expression through language,

---

<sup>66</sup> Biser, "Calibrating our 'Inner Compass,' 529-530.

<sup>67</sup> Arendt recognizes, in a limited capacity, the ambiguity of the term. The vague explanation that "what we call real is already a web which is woven of earthly, organic, and human realities" (PoP 112) both points to the various capacities in which the term 'real' is deployed (i.e. facticity, durability, and intersubjectivity), but also to the rather cavalier way in which Arendt, perhaps because of her political and phenomenological commitments, engages with traditional metaphysical debates over the course of her career.

<sup>68</sup> HC 50.

either out loud, to another, or through the crystallization of the cognitive framework through which we understand ourselves.

Arendt's position here bears striking similarities to Bergson's analysis of emotional states and their relation to language in his thesis *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Arendt was clearly familiar with Bergson's work, at least later in life, as his resolution to the problem of the will features in her discussion of the faculty in *The Life of the Mind*, and perhaps she drew upon his work earlier in her career as well. Bergson's explication of the sensitive distinction between time, a quantitative multiplicity that itself relies on the concept of spatiality for its own intelligibility, and duration, a qualitative multiplicity that corresponds more accurately to the lived experience of what we generally refer to as time, exposes another distinction between two different senses of self. The self of duration, of lived experience, experiences states and emotions that melt or bleed into each other in the way that the notes in a musical phrase are each informed and understood through reference to the phrase in its entirety; the other self – of time, language, social life, and conceptual solidity - recognizes “well-defined states” that, while more solid, sacrifice intensity for comprehensibility.<sup>69</sup> This has a direct effect upon our perceptions, as

our perceptions, sensations, emotions and ideas occur under two aspects: the one clear and precise, but impersonal; the other confused, ever changing, and inexpressible, because language cannot get hold of it without arresting its mobility or fit it into its common-place forms without making it into public property.<sup>70</sup>

For Bergson, intent as he is on rescuing the vitality of the lived experience and the individual's sensitivity to the intricacy of our sensory apparatus, the falsification of lived experience through language poses serious problems. Not only does it lead to the mistaken notion that sensations and

---

<sup>69</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. R. L. Pogson (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2001), 127ff.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

appearances themselves remain unchanging, but it also dims the vibrancy of individual sensations and states through the conceptualization and application of broad forms to unclassifiable experiences.<sup>71</sup>

For Arendt, however, it is precisely the transposition of inner experience into communicable forms that allows a sensation to be ‘real’ – that is, worldly – at all. While Bergson is right in his distinction, the entrance of a sensation into the world requires its comprehension, insofar as an internal sensation must be communicable in order to be visible.<sup>72</sup> It is also why, in her brief explication of sensation, Arendt refers to pain’s character as “the most intense... [and] at the same time the most private and least communicable of all.”<sup>73</sup> Pain not only obscures the world (‘blinding’ pain) and inhibits action (‘debilitating’ pain) unlike any other sensation, but it also has no reference to its cause in itself.<sup>74</sup> What little communicability the sensation of pain possesses is through its effects, and the human capacity for empathy; while we might recognize the pain of another from its outward physical or linguistic manifestations, the experience of pain itself remains deeply unworldly.

As we saw above, the ‘sense’ of reality is not the product of a sensation taken in isolation, but rather is a result of the context in which the object itself is apprehended and comprehended. This context – the existential plurality of other perceivers as well as the sensory experience of all

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 127-137.

<sup>72</sup> The communicability (or incommunicability) of sensations is also one of the most enduring and powerful characteristics of art, especially non-linguistic art. By bypassing written words through visual or auditory media, it becomes possible to awaken an emotional state in the observer that might bear more resemblance to the artist’s own. This intersubjective awakening through the work of art has, perhaps, been dimmed in the modern age as the 20<sup>th</sup> century art movements (such as the abstract expressionists) sought to awaken interiority itself through the presentation of incomprehensible works (thereby causing the viewer to question ossified relationships) or turned to the written word in order to make their own process and intentions comprehensible.

<sup>73</sup> HC 50-1.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. HC 114. Even our vocabulary used to describe pain – e.g. ‘gnawing,’ ‘splitting,’ ‘shooting,’ ‘throbbing’ – refers to the experience of pain itself and not to its referent, unlike other methods of describing sensation (i.e. a “loud” sound is still a sound *of* something; a strong smell is still a taste *of something*, etc.).

of my senses working together – produces our *common sense*. That the worldly context of the perceiver produces the sense itself is vital to Arendt’s argument as, throughout her work, Arendt consistently affirms that this common sense, our ‘sixth’ sense, forms the bridge between the self and the world. Her recognition at the close of *Origins* that “the experience of the materially and sensually given world depends upon my being in contact with other men, upon our *common sense* which regulates and controls all other senses and without which each of us would be enclosed in his own particularity of sense data which in themselves are unreliable and treacherous”<sup>75</sup> is unwound throughout her entire career until it finds its clearest articulation in *The Life of the Mind*.<sup>76</sup>

Common sense, she argues, fits the inputs of the five private, subjective senses into the common intersubjective world. An observer, therefore, comes to understand that, while another’s perception of an object might differ from theirs, they both grasp the same object. This process of situating is three-fold: first, each of the five senses grasp the object from their own unique vantage point, solidifying its *character*. Second, Arendt notes that members of the same species, equipped with similar faculties, situate the object between them within the species’ context and thereby give it *meaning*; finally, every species can engage with the object in *some* capacity, thereby guaranteeing its *identity*.<sup>77</sup> Common sense operates in the second step of this situating process, and provides the security of the real through the communicability (either potential or actual) of experience through conceptualization and language. It is important to clarify that this ‘common sense’ that is shared by all human beings does not mean that Arendt is working with some concept of human nature. On the contrary: in *The Human Condition* she explicitly disavows this, noting

---

<sup>75</sup> OT 475-76.

<sup>76</sup> It is unfortunate that the clearest articulations of common sense found in Arendt’s work are found amongst the posthumously published texts. *The Life of the Mind* contains the clearest articulation of the working of common sense; *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* likewise contains excellent insights, but it remains difficult to determine in that work to what extent Arendt is merely developing Kant’s own idea. References to common sense, however, are peppered throughout Arendt’s work.

<sup>77</sup> LotM-T 50. Cf. also HC 208-9.

that the reality of our common world is guaranteed instead by the fact that human beings consider the same objects from different perspectives, and not different objects from the same perspective.<sup>78</sup> It is when common sense becomes understood as a *faculty* common to all human beings, as opposed to a sense of reality that emanates from the context and shared content of the world itself, that common sense becomes diminished and some semblance of a ‘human nature’ can be deduced from faculties.<sup>79</sup>

It might seem odd, at this point, to emphasize the role that common sense plays as an ontological guarantee without referencing or tying it to Arendt’s theory of judgment, especially since, outside *The Life of the Mind*, the more extensive articulations of common sense are generally linked to discussions of judgment.<sup>80</sup> There exists an enormous body of scholarship attempting to reconstruct or deduce Arendt’s theory of judgment, which, famously, was never completely or comprehensively articulated.<sup>81</sup> In the face of serious questions about the accuracy of Arendt’s reading of Kant,<sup>82</sup> as well as the status of Arendt’s *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* within Arendt scholarship more broadly<sup>83</sup> and the consistency of Arendt’s account of judgment throughout her career, a serious engagement with Arendt’s conception of judgment lies well outside the scope of this thesis. Further, and more importantly, the separation of common sense

---

<sup>78</sup> HC 57-8.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. esp. HC 280-284.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 68-72, as well as the question of judgment in “The Crisis in Culture.”

<sup>81</sup> Cf. e.g. Beiner, “Hannah Arendt on Judging”; Benhabib “Judgment and the Moral Foundations of Politics”; Buckler, *Hannah Arendt*, 29, 134-6; Borren, “A Sense of the World”; Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real*, 114 ff; Annelies Degryse, “*Sensus Communis* as a Foundation for Men as Political Beings: Arendt’s Reading of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37, no. 3 (2011); Bryan Garsten, “The Elusiveness of Arendtian Judgment,” in *Politics in Dark Times: Encounters with Hannah Arendt*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>82</sup> Cf. esp. Beiner on this point, as well as Andrew Norris’ critical rejoinder to Arendt, “Arendt, Kant, and the Politics of Common Sense,” *Polity* 29, no. 2 (Winter 1996).

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Borren, “A Sense of the World,” 227.

from the question of judgment allows us to consider the constitutive role that the former plays in the construction of the public sphere.

While it might be the case that, as Degryse notes, the influence of Kant “is, from the beginning, central to [Arendt’s] views on judgment,”<sup>84</sup> it is not clear that common sense, both as a concept and in its subordination to the judging process, stems from the same root. For example, in *Origins*, as quoted above, the loss of common sense is clearly linked not to the loss of judgment, but to the loss of the real and the world. In any event, the judging activity itself belongs to the *practice* of politics which, as we noted at the outset of this thesis, lies outside the scope of our current investigation into the *conditions* of politics itself. The actual mechanisms of the judging process – whether characterized as ‘representative thinking,’ or the ‘enlarged mentality’ – as well as Arendt’s concern with the potential similarities between moral and aesthetic judgments again relies upon the *actual possibility of judgments* themselves. And likewise, the sense of reality produced by common sense, which itself is produced by the lived context of being-with-others, is not in itself a moral or aesthetic judgment, but rather the condition of stability and durability required for the judging process to occur.

Arendt’s work, in addition to its other diagnoses of the modern age, clearly points towards a crisis of judgment; to diagnose this predicament as *merely* a crisis of judgment, as though it could be resolved by simply making better judgments or by re-assessing our standards of judgment, is a mistake. The loss of common sense itself, as we will see in chapter two, leads to the degradation of the faculty of judgment itself, and thus to a deeper difficulty in fully developing a robust practice of politics capable of persisting through dark times.

---

<sup>84</sup> Degryse, “*Sensus Communis*,” 347.

## *The World*

We turn now to the second of Arendt's two interrelated phenomena that comprise 'publicness': the notion of the *world* – that which “relates and separates” human beings,<sup>85</sup> and that which lies “at the centre of politics” itself.<sup>86</sup> While the uncovering of the phenomenon of the world in Arendt's work seems at first a straightforward proposal, it is complicated by the fact that, over the course of her career, Arendt uses this word in several senses, often varying within a single work itself. Perhaps the best example is in her interview with Günter Gaus:

ARENDR: [...] I admit that the Jewish people are a classic example of a worldless people maintaining themselves throughout thousands of years...

GAUS: 'World' in the sense of your terminology as a space for politics.

ARENDR: As space for politics.<sup>87</sup>

Then shortly after:

ARENDR: [...] Nobody cares any longer what the world looks like,

GAUS: 'World' understood always as the space in which politics can originate.

ARENDR: I comprehend it now in a much larger sense, as the space in which things become public, as the space in which one lives and must look presentable. In which art appears, of course. In which all kinds of things appear.<sup>88</sup>

This is not necessarily equivocation. The 'world,' for Arendt, takes on several meanings in various contexts, and features prominently in works spanning her entire career, from *Origins* to *The Life of the Mind*.

The centrality of the concept of the world to Arendt's thought and her deep concern for the crisis of world-alienation is routinely acknowledged by Arendt scholars.<sup>89</sup> It is odd, then, that some

---

<sup>85</sup> HC 52. Arendt's explanation of this relation and separation is often accompanied by the metaphor of a table, situated between human beings (cf. *ibid.*, “The Concept of History,” 87.)

<sup>86</sup> PoP 106.

<sup>87</sup> Hannah Arendt, “‘What Remains? The Language Remains’: A Conversation with Günter Gaus,” in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 17.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>89</sup> On this point cf. e.g. Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 49-50; Canovan, “Politics as Culture,” 181; Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real*, 7; Hyvönen, “Tentative Lessons of Experience,” 573; Kateb, *Hannah Arendt*, 2; McCarthy, Michael H. *The Political Humanism of Hannah Arendt* (Lanham, M.d.: Lexington Books, 2012), 284; Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, 189; Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*, 130ff.

very clearly miss the mark. For example, Kateb's definition of the world as "the common life of a group," or Frazer's rather odd interpretation of the world as "a series of 'domains'" that emphasises the institutional nature of the common world both fall short of a clear understanding of Arendt's usage of the term.<sup>90</sup> The more common reading of the 'world' is generally drawn from *The Human Condition* and emphasizes its artificiality, durability, and, in a more general sense, its materiality;<sup>91</sup> more recent readings have highlighted the more immaterial dimensions and reconnected the concept back to its phenomenological roots.<sup>92</sup> This latter should come as no surprise, given that early Arendt scholars regularly refer Arendt's conceptual framework back to Heidegger's phenomenological analysis.<sup>93</sup> This section will explicate Arendt's understanding of the 'world' with an eye to this phenomenological heritage *without* obscuring the material dimensions of the phenomenon: as such, in addition to developing the concept through Arendt's own work, we will make use of Heidegger's explication of the world in order to understand how the material and immaterial dimensions of the world are intertwined.

First, Arendt does not use the term in its immediate, intuitive sense. In *The Human Condition*, she explicitly distances the world from the biological, physical reality of life on earth. This is somewhat confused by Arendt's later use of the term in *The Life of the Mind*, in which she points out that "to be alive means to live in a world that preceded one's own arrival and will survive

---

<sup>90</sup> Kateb, *Hannah Arendt*, 159; Elizabeth Frazer, "Hannah Arendt: The Risks of the Public Realm," *Critical Review of International and Political Philosophy* 12, no. 2 (2006), 210.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. e.g. McCarthy, who suggests that the world is the "man-made artifice that separates human existence from all merely natural environments." (2012, 69)

<sup>92</sup> Cf. e.g. Borren, "A Sense of the World," 235-6. Buckler goes as far as to understand the world as a "mode of experience" (2011, 79) that stands in opposition to that of 'process,' which is an excellent insight. Canovan suggest that there are some less visible dimensions to the world, such as states, but doesn't draw out the full implications of this idea (1992, 106ff).

<sup>93</sup> An entire cottage industry has developed around Arendt's relationship – philosophical and personal – to Heidegger. This falls, naturally, well outside the scope of the current project. I will be limiting myself to a discussion of Heidegger's own conception of the 'world' in order to draw out the implications in Arendt's work, and in no way will comment on the larger relationship between the two. For more on Arendt and Heidegger cf. Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 102ff; Biser, "Calibrating Our Inner Compass,"; and above all Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*.

one's departure."<sup>94</sup> While we can read this statement in light of the world-concept of *The Human Condition*, Arendt blurs the matter further by highlighting the discrepancies between our subjective perception of time, which is fluid and appears to change as we age, and the objective time of the clock, whose passage is not influenced by our own internal accounting of time. Arendt notes that this latter is "the time of the world."<sup>95</sup> This contrast between subjective and objective time stands in opposition to her explication in *The Human Condition*, where she contends that human subjectivity's opposite is the man-made objective world, and *not* "the sublime indifference of an untouched nature."<sup>96</sup> Within this distinction lie three distinct time-perspectives: the 'subjective' time kept by the subject in their relation to the changing world; the 'objective' time, which is an *agreed-upon* standard of measurement, and 'earth' time, which flows in an unchanging river of 'sublime indifference.' Humans dwell in the first by virtue of being, live with the second by virtue of being in a community that relies upon clocks,<sup>97</sup> and abide alongside the third, only able to observe and surmise its experience.

The world, Arendt insists in *The Human Condition*, is the solid structures erected by human beings that situate and contextualize them, as well as their creation, in webs of *meaning*. The world – our context – is sustained by human artifice, and constructed over generations: that is, it is *built*, and requires *maintenance*. It is through the processes of fabrication and use that worldly objects become separated from the earth. However, one of Arendt's examples points to a more fundamental characteristic of worldly objects – namely, objects become worldly when they dwell *in relation to* human beings. In other words, worldly things acquire *significance*. Objects built are

---

<sup>94</sup> LotM-T 20.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>96</sup> HC 137

<sup>97</sup> On this, see Lewis Mumford's classic description of the all-pervasive influence of the clock on European society (1963, 9-28). The clock is obviously not a ubiquitous feature of human communities, and the degree to which it became embedded in daily life has obscured the constitutive role 'objective time' plays in our worldly experience.

always at risk of falling out of the human world: for example, if a chair, a use-object that exists in the human world, “is left to itself *or discarded from the human world*, the chair will again become wood, and the wood will decay and return to the soil from which the tree sprang” (my emphasis).<sup>98</sup> A chair is only a ‘chair’ within the meaningful context of the human world; outside of it, it is nothing other than its material.

A further observation in *The Life of the Mind* stresses the meaningful context that comprises the world. In her explication of the three-fold working of common sense (see above), she writes that “... every animal species lives in a world of its own.”<sup>99</sup> That is, every species has its own *context* within which it understands and engages with its environment. The world is therefore not only fabricated use-objects, but also their organization and contextualization.<sup>100</sup> This is the ‘relating and separating’ activity that Arendt identifies as the foremost characteristic of the world. As a result, world-building is not exclusively undertaken by *homo faber*, but is also the providence of human beings who come to *know* objects – in their use, in their relation, and in their environment: “the activity of knowing [in contradistinction to the activity of thinking] is no less a world-building activity than the building of houses.”<sup>101</sup> The notion that the world is artificial is now to be understood in its double sense: first, the world is artificial insofar as it is the product of human artifice that transforms the earth into objects, and second, it is artificial in the sense that it requires human cognition to construct its categories, classes, and relations through intentional procedures. Or, in other words, “in the pure act of finding himself as part of God’s creation, the

---

<sup>98</sup> HC 137.

<sup>99</sup> LotM-T 50.

<sup>100</sup> Arendt, “The Crisis in Culture,” 206.

<sup>101</sup> Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” 163. This statement, I think, is what allows us to push back against Canovan’s assertion that Heidegger’s world and Arendt’s world are, as it were, worlds apart (1992, 263). Rather, Villa is correct that “Arendt more or less accepts” the Heideggerian world (1996, 137).

creature is not yet at home in the world. Only by making himself at home in the world does man establish the world as such.”<sup>102</sup>

By now it should be clear that a purely material explication of the ‘world’ is entirely insufficient. The concept, however, remains somewhat confused. Given that Arendt’s world-concept bears striking similarities to Heidegger’s, an understanding of the latter’s use of the term will help us clarify the concept.<sup>103</sup> Arendt only infrequently addressed her mentor in her published work; even less frequent are mentions of Heidegger’s concept of world at all. On two occasions, both in unpublished works, she references it. The first is a footnote in her dissertation on St. Augustine, in which Arendt points to Heidegger’s slim volume published a year previously titled *The Essence of Reasons* and singles out his treatment of Augustine in the broader “history of the concepts of the world.”<sup>104</sup> The reference is scholarly, and concerns Heidegger’s (partial) interpretation of Augustine; we mention it here only to show that Arendt, from the outset of her career, had a familiarity with the Heideggerian world-concept. Second, and more importantly, in a 1954 lecture to the American Political Science Association, “Concern with Politics in Recent European Thought,” Arendt suggests – but only suggests – that Heidegger’s concept of ‘world’ might indicate the way out of the disconnect between the philosophical and political conceptions of human beings throughout Western history.<sup>105</sup> In light of the latter statement, we should pause

---

<sup>102</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 67. Cf. also the preceding paragraph.

<sup>103</sup> Canovan (1992, 106) recognizes Arendt’s debt to Heidegger in this respect. Villa’s *Arendt and Heidegger* (120ff) provides a slightly more substantial overview; likewise, Benhabib (1996/2003, 51ff) also provides an interesting analysis of the relation of Heidegger’s ‘world’ to Arendt’s political thought, although she quickly moves past the nature of the ‘world’ itself to the ways in which Arendt works with Heidegger’s observation that being-in-the-world is being-with-others. Benhabib’s gloss is excellent; our focus here, however, is on the actual phenomenon of world itself. Since Benhabib and Villa’s work scholars have focused on Arendt’s relation to Heidegger in various ways, but I have not encountered anyone who seriously takes up the world-problematic as introduced by Heidegger and continued by Arendt.

<sup>104</sup> Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, 66.

<sup>105</sup> Arendt, “Concern with Politics,” 443. Both Canovan and Benhabib’s works drew my attention to this essay.

here and briefly consider the Heideggerian ‘world’ to see how the phenomenological concept suggests and helps develop key characteristics of Arendt’s public.

In the introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes the bold claim (now commonplace) that insofar as Dasein (a human being; more specifically, a being whose own Being is an issue for itself)<sup>106</sup> is, it is essentially in the world. As a result, there exists an unavoidable connection between our knowledge of our own Being and of our being-in-the-world.<sup>107</sup> The world, he argues later in the work, can be understood both in an ontical and an ontological sense: ontical, insofar as it is used to refer to the totality of entities that are, insofar as they are present-at-hand,<sup>108</sup> ontological, insofar as the totality of entities exists at all. But further, and most importantly for Heidegger, the world is “that ‘*wherein*’ a factual Dasein as such can be said to ‘live.’”<sup>109</sup> It is this last understanding that he carries throughout his work. This ‘wherein’ is revealed, over the course of several sections, to be “that in terms of which the ready-to-hand is ready-to-hand.”<sup>110</sup> That is, the world is that in terms of which the reference and context of equipment (Macquarrie and Robinson’s acknowledged clumsy translation of *Zeug*) is present and understood. Heidegger stresses that the “Being of the ready-to-hand... has in itself the character of *having been assigned or referred*” (Heidegger’s emphasis).<sup>111</sup> This ‘having been assigned’ indicates an *involvement* in

---

<sup>106</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 32.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>108</sup> A full discussion of Heidegger’s idiosyncratic and innovative terminology, and the clear difficulties in translation, is beyond the scope of this thesis. Briefly, however: Heidegger distinguishes between the *ontic*, which concerns things that are, and the *ontological*, which concerns Being itself – *that* things are at all. *Presence-at-hand* refers to that which is insofar as it exists at all; Heidegger equates it with the Latin *existentia*, as opposed to *essentia* (Ibid, 67). *Readiness-to-hand*, as we will see, refers to that which is insofar as it is enmeshed in the significant context of Dasein’s environment. A tool is ready-to-hand, as it indicates how, in what capacity, to what extent, and in relation to which other beings it is to be used. The material used to construct the tool is present-at-hand. This to Arendt’s example of the chair, above: the chair itself is ready-to-hand; abandoned from the world, it returns to the present-at-hand of wood and metal. Cf. also Ibid, 106.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 114.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 115.

the world – in other words, a situated and contextualized relationship to other Beings and activities. As a result, in the ready-to-hand, the world itself is present: a single hammer itself discloses the activities, materials, and ends it was made to interact with. Dasein dwells in this world both in a fundamental sense, insofar as “Being-in-the-world... amounts to a non-thematic circumspective absorption in references or assignments constitutive of the ready-to-hand of a totality of equipment,”<sup>112</sup> but also in an active sense, insofar as Dasein understands the world as it is disclosed to it, and situates itself within it through *assigning itself*. The relational and referential totality of use-objects (that which is ready-to-hand) constitutes Dasein’s world; it does not, in Heidegger’s terms, announce itself, but rather, through encounters with signs and signifiers which specifically identify a totality of equipment, is *disclosed*.<sup>113</sup> What is disclosed? Precisely the relational totality, which Heidegger understands to be *significance*.<sup>114</sup> The world of human beings, therefore, is a *meaningful* web of relations, references, and contextualizations that situate both use-objects and humans within a significant whole.

Heidegger’s elucidation (in the absolutely loosest sense of the word) of the world is developed further in *The Essence of Reasons*, which Arendt certainly read, and in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, which she might not have. In the former, Heidegger’s broad history of the concept of world points to certain key characteristics that could have informed Arendt’s own work. In his typical fragmentary manner, Heidegger weaves together a picture of ‘world,’ beginning with the Presocratic *kosmos*, that always includes a relational dimension: the world “means a *How of the Being* of being rather than being itself... [and] this primary How in its totality is itself *relative to*

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 105-6.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 120.

human *Dasein*.”<sup>115</sup> This *how* is contained within the ‘world’ employed by the early Christian authors as the being of human beings “estranged from God.”<sup>116</sup> Heidegger continues this analysis through the Scholastics to Kant’s cosmological and anthropological conceptions of the world (*The Essence of Reasons* is, after all, an examination of transcendence and reasons, and not, strictly speaking, of the world itself), but the essential point for our purpose is made early in the argument. The phenomenon of the world, despite being prior and primary to *Dasein*’s own Being, exists itself in relation to *Dasein*.

If *The Essence of Reasons* emphasizes *Dasein* and the world, Heidegger’s later essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* develops both the ways in which objects themselves are situated and the way in which they disclose a world. The work of art, leaving aside Heidegger’s larger argument and observations about art itself, brings forth both *world* and *earth*. The two are, in Heidegger’s view, more primal than the matter/form dichotomy, and, in the context of the essay, resist strict categorization. The world, in this case, is the Being of the there-ness, and the earth is the there-ness of Being; together, they form the space within which *Dasein* lives.<sup>117</sup> It is the former, the world, that concerns us here: the world is disclosed in the work of art itself. Heidegger’s description of the Greek temple highlights the way in which the world is brought into visibility and the relational totality is constructed and revealed:

It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. The all-governing expanse of this open relational context is the world of this historical people.<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Reasons*, trans. Terrence Malick (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 51.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

<sup>117</sup> Alternatively, we could perhaps consider Heidegger’s *world* and *earth* as somewhat analogous to the ready-to-hand/present-at-hand distinction drawn above, although a clearer elaboration of this comparison, once again, falls outside the scope of this thesis.

<sup>118</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Works*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 167.

The temple bestows shape upon beings and reveals them in their Being: in other words, it fills them with *meaning*. For Heidegger, the work of art sets forth and reveals the relational totality of the human world that encompasses both use-objects and human beings.<sup>119</sup> It does so in a more complete and intentional manner than the rest of the ready-to-hand world, as the artist works with intentionality.<sup>120</sup>

Given that Arendt takes cues from Heidegger at various points throughout *The Human Condition*, this is an important clarification. Her argument that “the world, the man-made home erected on earth and made of the material which earthly nature delivers into human hands, consists not of things that are consumed but of things that are used”<sup>121</sup> bears striking similarities not only to Heidegger’s world/earth opposition but also to his understandings of the fundamental and constitutive nature of equipment as use-objects. Her assertion that the relationship between use-objects and the world is analogous to that between consumer goods and the life process itself likewise points to a Heideggerian understanding of the world that is geared towards situation, contextualization, and signification. That *knowing* is itself a world-building process has echoes in Heidegger’s assertion that *technē* meant, in its most original sense, not a way of making but a way of knowing.<sup>122</sup> Bringing Heidegger to bear on the world-phenomenon in Arendt, therefore, helps clarify its nature: the world is not merely relational, nor is it simply objective structures. As the in-between which organizes, relates, separates, and preserves the *how* of being, it both is, and holds

---

<sup>119</sup> Cf., for example, Marcel Duchamp’s “Fountain” and its recontextualization of gallery space, art-ness, and the significance of the urinal.

<sup>120</sup> There is, naturally, a more complete comparison to be made between both Heidegger and Arendt’s understandings of art and its relationship to the world-building process, but this falls outside the scope of this thesis.

<sup>121</sup> HC 134.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. e.g. Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 184; Ibid, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 339, the question of the etymological rigour behind Heidegger’s own archaeological projects notwithstanding.

within itself, the objects, structures, and meanings that work in tandem to create an environment fit for human habitation.

This human world depends upon the continued existence of other people who, as we have seen, continue to guarantee the reality of the world through their presence and perspective *and* who remember the deeds and speeches of others, thereby rendering the intangible and unworldly processes of action worldly and durable.<sup>123</sup> The continued existence of use-objects and things both provide the context in which action can take place and also provide the means for the observers of action to reify it outside of memory, thereby preserving and determining its meaning.<sup>124</sup> The world's durable character, however, is a qualified durability that grants only "relative independence"<sup>125</sup> insofar as it outlasts the human beings who inhabit it, and not insofar as it has meaning *without* the human beings who inhabit it. The common world itself is nevertheless more solid, and more real, than either the interior, private emotions and sensations that make up one's inner life, or the unworldly, ephemeral actions that exist solely in the space between human beings.<sup>126</sup> And it is precisely in this common world, the framework which brings human beings in their distinctness together into an intentional plurality, that lies at the heart of the public realm and which provides the space for free individuals to reveal themselves in their identity.

---

<sup>123</sup> It is also brought into being by human beings working together – as Honig puts it, the world "is the product of power rather than strength or violence." (1993, 101.)

<sup>124</sup> HC 95.

<sup>125</sup> HC 137.

<sup>126</sup> Both Arendt and Heidegger point to the same Heraclitus quotation ("The wakeful have one single cosmos that is common to all, while in sleep each man turns away from the world into his own") to emphasize this point. Cf. Heidegger, *Essence of Reasons*, 49 (qtd. here) and HC 199.

## *The Public*

We have seen that, according to Arendt, the common world provides both an ontological guarantee of reality through the development and preservation of the context within which human beings live together. It is underwritten by the principle of plurality; since every object, and every individual in the world, is apprehended by multiple perceivers, its meaning and identity lies in the in-between of the world. Our mental faculties are intricately intertwined with this common world, both originating from it and building and maintaining it at the same time. What, then, is *the public*? The common framework outlined above is not the entire picture – indeed, it is missing a key piece. To bring this to light, we must weave back briefly through Arendt’s understanding of action and the Greeks.

Because of both our plurality and our natality – that is, that every human birth is at the same time the entrance of possibility into the world – every human being has the possibility of being distinct. The revelation of this distinctness, the process of *action*, can occur only in public; the confirmation of both the spectator of the self and of others guarantees the reality of the self. Through deed, the actor reveals their *whatness*; through speech, intention is clarified.<sup>127</sup> The disclosure of the individual through action stands apart from the other modes of the *vita activa*: whereas labour concerns human beings *qua* biological organisms, and work human beings *qua* fabricators and creators, only action reveals the individual as such, as distinct from that which they create or that which they require to sustain themselves.<sup>128</sup> Actions themselves, having no durable

---

<sup>127</sup> Cf. HC, section 24.

<sup>128</sup> HC 7, 176. What is missing from the broader discussion of Arendt’s distinctions of the *vita activa* is the fact that the revelation of the actor in speech and deed is not *exclusively* confined to political activities. Take, for example, the activity of doing dishes, which can be done in all three modes. A dishwasher (i.e. labourer) in a commercial kitchen, confronted with the never-ending piles of plates and bins of cutlery, does dishes to sustain their life process – both as a wage-earner, and as a contributor to the feeding of others. At home, they do dishes *in order to* clean the kitchen – certainly guided by the functional *in order to* of the mentality of work and utility, with perhaps a splash of aesthetic pleasure in the sight of a clean kitchen. But to do the dishes, as Thich Nhat Hanh suggests, not “to wash the dishes in

product in the way that work produces things and use-objects, leave no tangible trace behind. Because of action's fragility and unworldliness, it depends, like sensations and inner states, upon the presence of others in order to assume reality or worldliness. In one sense, this occurs through the reificatory process of narrative or art – that is, action is transformed through *work*, and thereby preserved and provided with a durable, yet malleable, meaning. It is equally remembered, internalized, and preserved through tradition and context, as it is fitted into the web of relationships that comprises the intangible in-between of human beings. This context grants a solidity and durability to the actions themselves, which, in turn, bestows the same sort of reality upon the individual who discloses themselves.<sup>129</sup>

It is precisely the public realm, which provides and protects this common framework *within which to act*, that creates the possibility for human beings to reveal themselves through speech and deed – that is, to insert themselves into the shared context of the common world. Behind the formal organization of the public realm into government, behind the debate over its rules, procedures, and limits, behind the question of deliberation about political ends or the agonistic contest of the political arena lies the actual expression and solidification of identity and meaning. This, for Arendt, is the core insight of the Greek *polis*, which provides not only a space of freedom to act but is also a system of organized remembrance that formed a bulwark against the unpredictability and transience of action.<sup>130</sup> It both relates and separates citizens: relates, by guaranteeing a shared

---

order to have clean dishes, [but rather to] wash the dishes in order to wash the dishes,” (1987, 4), is an act of intentionality that reveals the actor in deed. Arendt's distinctions are, by their very nature, permeable; politics, in her conception, is the site of this free revelation through speech and deed, but an actor will continue to act – the polis, in addition to being situated, is attitudinal.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. HC 208.

<sup>130</sup> HC 31-33; 197-199. Tsao, in his analysis of the German version of *The Human Condition*, notes that Arendt distances herself from the “organized remembrance” of the Greeks which, in his view, “amounts to a fantasy wish to prolong the present, a vain refusal to accept the passage of time” and instead takes up the Roman conception of memory (2002, 114). This is not entirely correct – the passage Tsao cites is not a disavowal of organized remembrance *as such*, but merely of the Greek mode that, in his analysis, strives towards a ‘perpetual present.’

framework which situates citizens in the world, and separates, by providing opportunities for each to distinguish themselves from their peers, thereby disclosing themselves *qua* individual.

Arendt's use of the Greeks was among the most contentious issues in early scholarship: Kateb feared that the rejection of representative modern democracy was "also to be averse to some of the more humane possibilities of life in the modern age;"<sup>131</sup> feminist thinkers like Adrienne Rich and Hanna Pitkin despaired at the masculinist agonism that had, via the adoration of the Greeks, permeated Arendt's "lofty and crippled book;"<sup>132</sup> and Habermas, as we saw in the introduction, pushed back against the normative intrusion of the Greeks in the modern conceptions of democracy and discourse, to the point where Benhabib charges that "Arendt's thoughts on the public realm were often left mired in a romantic invocation."<sup>133</sup> Recent readers have been more discerning in their interpretations of Arendt: Buckler rightly understands that Arendt "'raids' the past for images that may remind us of lost experiences and atrophied capacities that might help us to think with originality about our current condition."<sup>134</sup> J. Peter Euben, in his insightful discussion of Arendt and tragedy, notes that "the Greeks were for Arendt what Greek tragedy was for the Athenians: a way of pushing back the veil."<sup>135</sup> Finally, Roy Tsao recognizes that "the Greek Solution" (which, after all, should be read as 'the *Greek* solution,' and not '*the* solution we've inherited from the Greeks') develops the Athenian understanding of – and not necessarily the proper relation to – action. Tsao offers an excellent, comprehensive analysis of Arendt's relationship to the *polis* by

---

<sup>131</sup> Kateb, *Hannah Arendt*, 146.

<sup>132</sup> Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), 212; cf. Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Public and Private," *Political Theory* 9, no. 3 (August 1981).

<sup>133</sup> Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 202.

<sup>134</sup> Buckler, *Hannah Arendt*, 84.

<sup>135</sup> J. Peter Euben, "Arendt's Hellenism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, ed. Dana Villa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 163. Euben also notes, although with less substantiation, that Arendt seems to misrepresent the Greeks' perspective on labor.

way of a textual engagement with the German version of *The Human Condition*, and authoritatively dispels the claims of Hellenic nostalgia that dog Arendt scholarship.<sup>136</sup>

Arendt's turn to the Greeks illuminates categories and modes of political life in a radical newness that the modern age has grown over. Her analysis of the *polis*, far from providing an archetypal political arrangement, points instead to the challenges of containing and reifying action, and the pitfalls of such an intensely agonistic culture. Arendt is fully cognizant of the fact that the *polis* required violence and slavery for its operation, and that the intense agonistic drive led to the Greeks' own destruction.<sup>137</sup> Most importantly, Arendt characterizes the polis as

...not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be. "Wherever you will go, you will be a *polis*": these famous words became not merely the watchword of Greek colonization, they expressed the conviction that action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere.<sup>138</sup>

The Athenians, ultimately, did not hold true to this experience:

Because the commonness of the political world was constituted only by the walls of the city and the boundaries of the law, it was not seen or experienced in the relationships between the citizens, not in the world which lay *between* them, common to them all, even though opening up in a different way to each man.<sup>139</sup>

The crux of the interpretative challenge of Arendt's public lies in these two passages. The public, in Arendt's conception, is necessarily spatialized. It remains relatively straightforward to point to public 'spaces' where public relationships are nurtured and encouraged, whether it be the Athenian *agora* or a London coffeeshop. Habermas's aspatial public sphere, or Taylor's metatopical conversation, both lack this crucial dimension. But spatiality, however, does not imply *locality* – that is, there are no specific requirements of a space for it to become public. The world itself is

---

<sup>136</sup> Tsao is also among the few scholars I have seen who notices Arendt's claim that the public extends beyond the physical space of the polis – see above.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. HC 197, "On Violence," in *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 148-9, and PoP 16, as well as Tsao, "Arendt against Athens," 116ff.

<sup>138</sup> HC 198.

<sup>139</sup> PoP 16.

relational in nature; there must, in addition to the spatial representation of appearance, be an attitude of intention that accompanies the representation of the individual who takes up this relation to the world. The public realm, in Arendt's understanding, then, is just as relational, or attitudinal, as it is spatial: as citizens open to the in-between, they take on a relationship to the world and to each other that stands independently of the private realm. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."<sup>140</sup>

Public spirit, one of the animating forces of the revolutionary period, is precisely the mode of being-together that characterizes the public realm – or, to borrow from Heidegger above, the *how* of the being-in-public.<sup>141</sup> Arendt identifies the public spirit as both attentiveness to "stability and durability" and "the exhilarating awareness of the human capacity of beginning," and we can infer from this a deep and abiding concern for the common world and the plurality that makes it possible.<sup>142</sup> It is this combination of *public space and public spirit* that together realize the public realm. Understanding the public in this way also unlocks two other important modes of being-together that concerned Arendt throughout her entire career. Public space without public spirit leaves an opening for the social, which we will discuss in the following chapter. Public spirit without public space, on the other hand, is the condition of the common world under threat in 'dark times,' when citizens go underground and resist domination.

This explains why Arendt, at the beginning of *Between Past and Future*, paradoxically refers to the "public realm" of the French *résistance*. The ordinary French citizens,

...who as a matter of course had never participated in the official business of the Third Republic were sucked into politics as though with the force of a vacuum. Thus, without premonition and probably against their conscious inclinations, they had come to constitute willy-nilly a public realm where –

---

<sup>140</sup> Matthew 18:20 (NRSV)

<sup>141</sup> OR 212-215.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 215.

without the paraphernalia of officialdom and hidden from the eyes of friend and foe – all relevant business in the affairs of the country was transacted in deed and word.<sup>143</sup>

In spite of the required secrecy in the face of totalitarian domination, the public spirit and the ‘sense of reality’ is preserved by the fact that every individual must now appear before others as either collaborator or resister: the identity is determined in the face of pressure. The underground struggle, obviously, was not “seen and heard by everybody;” Arendt, perhaps, should not have used the term ‘public’ here. Nevertheless, the essence of the thought remains true: the common world, however, persisted however it could under the onslaught of the totalitarian counter-world (see chapter two, below).

This combination of public space and spirit, and the example of the *résistance*, also reveals why Arendt dwells upon the free actor, as opposed to the individual beset by necessity. For Arendt, “the meaning of politics,” which is “so simple and so conclusive that one might think all others are utterly beside the point,” is freedom.<sup>144</sup> Freedom, specifically, to be as one actually wishes to appear – that is, to act, to be seen, to understand and be recognized in one’s own identity by one’s peers, and to dwell in the world intentionally. No actor can choose absolutely how they appear, or what the meaning of their actions are – action itself is precarious. A free actor, however, is able to exercise a wider degree of intention. Under conditions of necessity, servitude, and oppression, the revelation of the actor comes through refusal of condition: the dignity of the no, which finds its expression in hunger strikes, sit-ins, picket lines, and protests. Human dignity is preserved through the “I can do no other;” but the actor is identified over and against their own condition, and not through the absence of necessity itself. Whether this liberation from necessity is possible without recourse to the violence of the Greeks, or the promise of technological automation, calls into

---

<sup>143</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Penguin, 2006), 3.

<sup>144</sup> PoP 108.

question the viability of the existence of the free actor; this questioning does not, however, destabilize the distinction itself.

There are, therefore, certain activities and properties of the common world that, if absent, leave the human condition incomplete. The Habermasian chronicle of the bourgeois public of private individuals coming together in public, and the corresponding priority of the private as the ‘genuine site’ of humanity finds itself unable to explain the developments of language, common sense, and the worldly generation of meaning and context. It would be a mistake, however, to leap to the opposite conclusion (as some have done) that Arendt lionizes the public at the continual expense of the private. Instead, she recognizes that the private sphere is just as necessary as the public. The two exist in interrelation: a life without a private space to collect oneself is shallow; a life without public appearance before others is unworldly.<sup>145</sup> The Greeks’ mistake (among others) was to dismiss the possibilities of private life altogether, since “no man... can live in [the public realm] all the time.”<sup>146</sup> Arendt is obviously sensitive to the immensities and wonders of the inner experience – not only the private sensations, thoughts, and the moments of solitude away from others, but equally the experience of love, one of the most human yet least worldly sensations, remain intensely unpublic experiences. The inexplicable attachments of the heart remain incommunicable if they are to remain whole; they are impervious to the pleas of reason and rhetoric; the fissures they introduce into the common world and its webs of meaning persist long after the objects of love themselves have abandoned the worldly context. It is, perhaps, why the love of the world itself is one of the most powerful and least explicable phenomena, and why, though it often becomes confused with naïve nostalgia, it is able to endure long after the common world itself has passed away.

---

<sup>145</sup> HC 71.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 199.

## Chapter 2: Loneliness and the Modern Condition

*Loneliness, as the concomitant of homelessness and uprootedness, is, humanly speaking, the very disease of our time.*

-- Hannah Arendt, "On the Nature of Totalitarianism"<sup>1</sup>

As we saw in the previous chapter, the public realm is the space of common appearance, and the political expression of the principle of plurality. By bringing human beings together in the same world – the same relational totality which provides and protects our meaningful context – it provides the framework and space within which human beings can appear before each other and within which action is made possible. Both identity and meaning are generated through the appearance of individuals and objects before and between multiple observers, each with their own perspective onto the common world, and both identity and meaning find their *reality* through the guarantee of the public realm. The presence of others not only allows us to develop our own being and context, but also grounds our mental faculties, which rely upon the plurality of the human condition – at the same time the existence of others, the ‘silent dialogue between me and myself,’ and the conceptual differentiation required for the comprehension of any object. Since, as we also saw, appearances themselves require a space in which to appear, the public realm is distinctly *spatialized* without being *localized*. This common space is not a sufficient condition for the public realm; it equally requires the public spirit, itself an attitude towards the world that is cognizant of both durability and natality and not a specific thing created through simple proximity to public space.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, "On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding," in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 358.

The public realm, then, insofar as it *is*, brings forth a certain mode of being-together – that is, a being-together-publicly that relates to both the where and how of our being. It is also, unfortunately, extremely unnatural. If our previous chapter had outlined a natural state of affairs, we could quite happily shift our analysis to the procedural level and the goings-on within the public realm – that is, a discussion of the practice of politics itself. The experience of modernity, and especially the horrors of Nazi totalitarianism, however, has demonstrated the fragility of the human condition and the contingency of authentically public spaces and relations. The world does not defend itself; common sense can atrophy, and the public realm can collapse, be broken, or wither away, culminating in the loss of our certainty of perception, reality, meaning, and identity that it protects. Plurality might be “one of the basic conditions of life on earth,”<sup>2</sup> but the co-dependent and mutually conditioning relationship between human beings and their own condition means that the persistence of some of the constitutive elements of human life is not guaranteed. Indeed, as Villa notes, “from Arendt’s point of view, plurality is not just a condition, but also an *achievement* of political action and speech.”<sup>3</sup> If the kind of being-together that the public realm encourages were to be supplanted or contested by another mode of human relations, if we were to lose our sense of the world (and, by extension, our world itself), then our ability to appear freely before others, our ability to participate in the generation and determination of meaning, and the very functioning of our mental faculties comes under threat.

This, for Arendt, was one of the most important revelations of totalitarianism. Amidst the emergence of antisemitism as a pan-European movement that transcended national boundaries, the global march of the imperialist mindset that eroded progress to process and started the self-propelling engines of accumulation and expansion, the victory of nation over state and the rise of

---

<sup>2</sup> LotM-T 74.

<sup>3</sup> Villa, “Postmodernism and the Public Sphere,” 717.

bureaucracy, the race-thinking of the colonial projects and the slow disintegration of classes into masses lies the experience of loneliness which, although not strictly a historical phenomenon, is one of the most dangerous experiences of the modern age. Totalitarianism, Arendt fully understands, was not a historically necessary event<sup>4</sup> - because human beings, themselves capable of action, create history, no historical event is necessary – but the totalitarian impulse (whose roots, Arendt demonstrated, run deep throughout Western history) was easily able to sprout in the early twentieth century and, in the process, almost choked out the practice of politics on the continent.

That totalitarianism was able to so nimbly exploit the lonely mind was symptomatic of the vulnerabilities of mass society and the degree to which world-alienation and the atrophy of common sense had already permeated Western civilization. Totalitarianism's assault upon plurality and the common world exposed deeper structural challenges; *Origins*, therefore, is a far more nuanced exploration of the pathologies of industrial mass society than merely an explanatory vehicle studying causal relations.<sup>5</sup> Arendt herself, cognizant that “it may even be that the true predicaments of our time will assume their authentic form – thought not necessarily the cruelest – only when totalitarianism has become a thing of the past,”<sup>6</sup> spends significant energy throughout the rest of her career puzzling through the elements of the Western philosophical tradition and political culture that made totalitarianism possible. In particular, the question of the social, the

---

<sup>4</sup> On this point cf. the preface to the first edition of *Origins*, as well as Canovan, *Hannah Arendt*, 52 and Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 64ff, 86.

<sup>5</sup> This also assuages some of the methodological concerns about the book. According to Benhabib, the book “defies categorization” (1996/2003, 63) it is a “deeply reflective personal account,” rather than serious historical scholarship (McCarthy 2012, 31-2); clearly not a work of the social sciences, as it lacks the ‘clinical objectivity’ Arendt herself was so critical of (cf. Baehr 2010, chapter 1); as a work of “destructive history,” its writing faced serious challenges not usually suffered in history writing (cf. Dietz 2000, 87); it is not a “definitive overview,” but instead works “to create thematic resonances that might inform our intellectual encounter with totalitarianism (Buckler 2011 65). Arendt, clearly a theorist more concerned with present than past, is certainly, as Benhabib argues, working to “comprehend the new” in the same style as Tocqueville (1996/2003, 68). A fruitful comparison could be drawn between Arendt’s “analysis in terms of history” (Hannah Arendt “A Reply to Eric Voeglin,” in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 403) in *Origins* and Foucault’s “history of the present” (1977, 31), but this falls well outside the scope of this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> OT 460.

hybrid space and spirit that destroys both public and private spaces and experiences, emerges from the modes of spatial and institutional organization of modernity.

This chapter, therefore, will develop the pertinent aspects of Arendt's analysis of totalitarian structures from *Origins* to understand the ways in which the public realm comes under threat in dark times. The totalitarian drive, in its bid to reshape the human condition, strikes at both plurality and commonality. On the one hand, it annihilates difference and distinction through conformity and conditioning (in the most extreme form, the creation of the subject of the concentration camp). On the other, the erection of a competing totalitarian 'world' by the Nazis and Bolsheviks, and their seizures of collective memory and reality, erode the common – the real world and the shared context that forms our site of disclosure through action. Through this, the public is shattered; lonely individuals, incapable of deploying common sense, are severed from each other and the world, and those who manage to retain the public spirit in the face of the deprivation of public space are forced underground into the resistance.

We will then turn to Arendt's explication of mass society and the modes in which the common world comes under threat in less extreme, yet equally dire conditions. If the daring public spirit required to appear before others atrophies to apathy, if the hollowed-out public space is public in name only, and if the conditions of loneliness persist even amid the crowd, then there is as much concern about the loss of the authentic public under social conditions as under the extremity of totalitarianism. First, however, we must understand Arendt's conception of loneliness, isolation, and solitude to see the new ways of being-together that she believes dominate the totalitarian experience.

## *Loneliness and Totalitarianism*

Arendt's concluding reflections in *Origins*, written in 1953, reveal the extent to which she understood the depth of the crisis totalitarianism posed to the human condition. While it might seem odd to indulge in a reflection about isolation and loneliness at the close of the book, it re-frames the wide-ranging analysis around the question of "what kind of basic experience in the living-together of men" is found under totalitarianism.<sup>7</sup> That loneliness is the answer demonstrates the stark opposition in which terror stands to the human condition of plurality, itself "one of the basic conditions of life on earth."<sup>8</sup> We might "exist essentially in the plural" in the ontological, phenomenological, and epistemological senses; the success of totalitarianism, however, relies upon the loss of these conditions of plurality. Ontological plurality, the fact of being-in-the-world with others, is threatened first, by isolation in a mild sense, and then by loneliness and its world-deprivation. The phenomenological plurality of the two-in-one, the spontaneous and silent dialogue between me and myself, is not constant; *thoughtlessness* is the absence of this dialogue.<sup>9</sup> And finally, the epistemological plurality that allows us to develop and unify concepts through intuitions becomes supplanted by ideology and logic, the unworldly unfolding of an internally consistent framework that stands impervious to external, worldly refutations.

We should note that, while some scholars resist Arendt's reliance upon the phenomenology of loneliness as an explanation for totalitarianism for either lack of clear evidence (e.g. Peter Baehr) or conflicting accounts of associational culture under the Nazis (e.g. Benhabib),<sup>10</sup> it has

---

<sup>7</sup> OT 474.

<sup>8</sup> LotM-T 74

<sup>9</sup> Arendt's concern with thoughtlessness developed out of her encounter with Adolf Eichmann, and remained a persistent concern throughout her career. Cf. LotM-T 3-5.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Baehr, *Hannah Arendt*, 52-56, as well as his contention that 'Ideology and Terror' is Arendt's "most unsubstantiated" work (77). Baehr instead praises Arendt's observations on the totalitarian counter-world and the permanent motion of totalitarian governments. Likewise, cf. Benhabib's inclination to reject the "explanatory centrality of categories such as 'loneliness' and 'mass society'" (2003, xlvi), and her turn, in keeping with her

begun to receive more serious treatment by scholars, either in relation to language and thoughtlessness,<sup>11</sup> the broader social fabric,<sup>12</sup> or liberal conceptions of citizenship.<sup>13</sup> Shuster is correct in identifying the fact that Arendt understands her phenomenology of loneliness to be ahistorical;<sup>14</sup> as a result, while empirical evidence might be able to contest the use of the concept from a causal perspective, it cannot dispute the experience of loneliness itself. The criticisms above, important as they are, lie beyond our focus here, as we concern ourselves with the phenomena of loneliness, especially given the continuing and widely recognized crisis of loneliness today.

Isolation, Arendt notes, is a political phenomenon. Pre-totalitarian in nature, it occurs when human beings' political context, and along with it, the ability to act, is destroyed.<sup>15</sup> Isolated individuals are powerless – that is, they are deprived of the specific ability to act alongside and with others that characterizes political action.<sup>16</sup> An isolated individual, while severed from public life, remains in contact with their world: work itself, the world-building activity that provides the solid structures and which house the memories of action, requires isolation.<sup>17</sup> Arendt is aware that isolation for the purposes of world-building or craftsmanship is not a deficiency, any more than the scientist's isolation in a laboratory is a necessity for technical and scientific development. From

---

Habermasian inclinations, to the “political sociology of the public sphere and of intermediate associations” (1996/2003, 69).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Shuster, “Language and Loneliness.” Shuster also deftly connects loneliness to both the loss of common sense and thoughtlessness. However, he prioritizes the loss of self over the loss of the world, and sees these as ‘two paths’ as being either through isolation *or* through solitude, when in fact, the two occur together. Because we require the world to ground our mental faculties, we lose the self when we lose the world; because we lose our ability to be with others when we lose the ability to ‘stop and think,’ we lose the world when we lose the self.

<sup>12</sup> King, “Hannah Arendt and American Loneliness.”

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer Gaffney, “Another Origin of Totalitarianism: Arendt on the Loneliness of Liberal Citizens,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 47, no. 1 (2016): 1–17.

<sup>14</sup> Shuster, “Language and Loneliness,” 474.

<sup>15</sup> OT 474; HC 188.

<sup>16</sup> Arendt's use of the word power is a novel and highly idiosyncratic one – for more explication cf. Arendt, “On Violence,” in *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 150-5, and HC, section 28.

<sup>17</sup> HC 212.

the perspective of the political, however, isolation prevents human beings from establishing the relationships out of which polities not based on tyranny and fear are formed.<sup>18</sup> And while “the whole sphere of private life with the capacities for experience, fabrication, and thought are left intact,”<sup>19</sup> and *homo faber* is able to maintain the pseudo-public of the exchange market (through which human beings relate not as actors but as producers) under isolation the experience of human plurality is dimmed.

Arendt, however, recognizes that totalitarianism exploits a condition of atomism that runs far deeper than isolation; “isolation may be the beginning of terror; it certainly is its most fertile ground; it is always its result.”<sup>20</sup> If the only condition of being-together of the totalitarian government were isolation, then we would be confronted with a variation on an old theme, and not, as Arendt repeatedly suggests, a radically new melody altogether. Loneliness, however, rips individuals not only out of the political but out of the world altogether. The lonely individual no longer *belongs* to the world; having lost their place, they are unmoored from the solidity of their surroundings:

What makes loneliness so unbearable is the loss of one’s own self which can be realized in solitude, but confirmed in its identity only by the trusting and trustworthy company of my equals. In this situation, man loses trust in himself as the partner of his thoughts and that elementary confidence in the world which is necessary to make experiences at all. Self and world, capacity for thought and experience are lost at the same time.<sup>21</sup>

In no way can common sense withstand the loss of other human beings; nor can the inner dialogue of thought, easily found in the company of myself in solitude, provide a surrogate sense to confirm

---

<sup>18</sup> Cf. e.g. HC 202: “Montesquieu realized that the outstanding characteristic of tyranny was that it rested on isolation—on the isolation of the tyrant from his subjects and the isolation of the subjects from each other through mutual fear and suspicion—and hence that tyranny was not one form of government among others but contradicted the essential human condition of plurality, the acting and speaking together, which is the condition of all forms of political organization.” This contradiction of plurality remained the most violent up until the emergence of totalitarian terror.

<sup>19</sup> OT 474

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 477. This passage also demonstrates one of the key conceptual challenges in Arendt’s thought, namely, the intense interconnectedness of the constitutive elements of the human condition means that the latter do not easily yield themselves up to be examined independently of each other.

my reality. And this is why, perhaps, the seeds of loneliness can be planted in solitude: we have already cited Hume to this effect in the first chapter.<sup>22</sup> It is also why, as Arendt argues throughout her career, philosophers have always been hostile to common sense. It is what Plato believes philosophers lose when they leave the Cave;<sup>23</sup> the loss of this sixth sense renders the familiar unfamiliar, yet seems to (more often than not) lead to the loss of *sense* altogether.<sup>24</sup>

Because loneliness is not a historically conditioned experience but “one of the fundamental experiences of every human life,”<sup>25</sup> insofar as every individual stands alone before death, and faces it without the political community itself, it is a mode of being that constantly threatens other modes of being-alone. Arendt is well aware that many dimensions to human life require separation from others – in “Truth and Politics,” she lists the philosopher, the scientist, the artist, the historian, the judge, and the reporter, among others, whose professions require distance from others and a stance, on occasion, from outside of the political. This involves either a retreat into ‘impartiality’ or ‘objectivity,’ or an actual separation from the presence of others in order to create or investigate. The separation becomes dangerous, however, “when one of them is adopted as a way of life,” and one either forgets or foregoes one’s relationships to the world and to other human beings.<sup>26</sup> For

---

<sup>22</sup> We could equally point to Rousseau, who, perhaps more than any other modern philosopher, was sensitive to the conditions of isolation, loneliness, and solitude. His description of his isolation begins to blend into Arendt’s loneliness: “tiré je ne sais comment de l’ordre des choses, je me suis vu précipité dans un chaos incompréhensible où je n’aperçois rien du tout; et le plus je pense à ma situation présente et moins je puis comprendre où je suis” (1964, 25). Amidst this confusion, and in the face of being exiled from the company of his equals, he turns inwards, delivering himself over “tout entier à la douceur *de converser avec [son] âme* puisqu’elle est la seule que les hommes ne puissent m’ôter” (Ibid, 30, my emphasis). It is worth noting here that Rousseau’s return to his soul is one of resignation, not joy; without the grounding of the world, not even the soul can provide a refuge.

<sup>23</sup> PoP 30.

<sup>24</sup> Arendt places Hegel, more than any other philosopher, into stark conflict with common sense, for “no one could ever quite be sure whether [his philosophy] provided a residence or a prison from reality.” (Arendt, “What Is Existential Philosophy?” in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 164) See Arendt’s other comments on Hegel, in particular OT 476-7, PoP 35-36, and LotM-T 89ff.

<sup>25</sup> OT 475.

<sup>26</sup> Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” 255. Cf. also Arendt’s comments on the “splendid transformation” that the legal system effects upon individuality in “‘As If Speaking to a Brick Wall’: A Conversation with Joachim Fest,” in *Thinking Without A Banister: Essays in Understanding, 1953-1975*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New: Schocken Books, 2018), 285-6.

this reason can the philosopher doubt the entirety of their sense-experience, and for this reason can they re-cast common sense as an inner, and not an intersubjective, sense; they become persuaded that “what men now have in common is not the world but the structure of their minds.”<sup>27</sup>

The condition of loneliness itself, the loss of the ontological plurality as the connection to others dims, begins to leech over and erase the phenomenological plurality of the two-in-one. Again, we find in “Ideology and Terror” themes that occupy Arendt throughout the rest of her life.<sup>28</sup> The loss of self that occurs in the slide from solitude to loneliness is at the same time the loss of thought, the ability to think *with* oneself, and, by extension, the ability to understand if one is in harmony with oneself. Eichmann, of course, is Arendt’s best example. Despite the fact that Eichmann was more than capable of reasoning and rational calculation, Arendt found him to be missing thoughtfulness. Eichmann’s seeming incapacity for authentic or meaningful speech and his reliance upon well-worn phrases was indicative of a deeper problem: namely, the fact that he was incapable of thought. This thoughtlessness, the inability “to think from the standpoint of somebody else,”<sup>29</sup> is manifest through the failure of communication and the inability not only to make oneself understood to others, but equally through the failure to properly develop and deploy language, which is itself inexorably intertwined with thought.<sup>30</sup> The loss of the ability to think *with oneself* implies, as Arendt suggests, the loss of the ability to think *with others*; thoughtlessness,

---

<sup>27</sup> HC 283. For an extended discussion cf. HC, sections 38 & 39. This also explains, in part, Arendt’s trepidation about the philosopher’s involvement in political affairs – since “loneliness is... a professional danger for philosophers, [it] seems to be one of the reasons that philosophers cannot be trusted with politics or political philosophy.” (Arendt, “On the Nature of Totalitarianism,” 360).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. LotM-T 3-5.

<sup>29</sup> EJ 49.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. e.g. LotM-T 98ff. Arendt’s description of Eichmann’s thoughtlessness also bears comparisons to the mode of representative thinking employed in the judging process. If common sense atrophies, so too does our capacity for judgment – the question of whether the categories of thoughtlessness and inability to judge collapse into each other deserves more considerations than this thesis can afford. But cf. Arendt, “Heidegger the Fox,” in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 361–62, as well as Biser, “Calibrating Our Inner Compass,” for departure points.

therefore, is also the atrophy of judgment and representative thinking. This, of course, occurs because the lonely individual has lost the world, and, as a result, the self. But thoughtlessness, in terms of the loss of the two-in-one, can be not only the loss of the capacity but also of the appetite for conversation with oneself. The refusal to face oneself, out of cowardice and fear of what one will find, is just as much a cause of loneliness as the actual loss of the conversational partner.<sup>31</sup> Thoughtlessness is just as much a part of the criminal's avoidance of nemesis through willful self-deception as it is of the sleepwalker. Arendt's odd comment at the end of *The Human Condition* – that “it is in fact far easier to act under conditions of tyranny than it is to think”<sup>32</sup> – suggests that just as action requires courage to stand before others, the thinking experience requires the courage to stand before oneself and suffer one's own judgment.

In Eichmann's linguistic patterns, Arendt noticed something else at work. Language is not only interconnected with thought; it is also intricately interwoven with worldly reality. The lonely individual who relies upon “clichés, stock phrases, [and] adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct”<sup>33</sup> demonstrates both thoughtlessness *and* a conceptual insulation from reality. The “language rules,” of the Nazis, for example, which fundamentally altered the cognitive grammar of the Final Solution, provided a new referential framework that displaced the pre-totalitarian conceptions of murder.<sup>34</sup> This new framework, part of the totalitarian counter-world that emerges alongside our own, actual referential totality, and which is held together by the overpowering “straight jacket” of ideology develops independently of experience, and can therefore maintain itself without reference to reality.<sup>35</sup> The epistemological plurality of the mental

---

<sup>31</sup> Cf. LotM-T 189, discussed in the first chapter. Not only the wicked, but equally the mediocre, avoid themselves. As *True Detective's* Wayne Hays quietly acknowledges in response to persistent questions about his own conduct: “I don't ask myself questions like that. Could be I'm too chicken-shit, Mr. Woodward.”

<sup>32</sup> HC 324.

<sup>33</sup> LotM-T 4.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. EJ 84-5.

<sup>35</sup> OT 470.

process of cognition, therefore, which requires difference and distinction in order to create the identity of concepts, stands in stark contrast to the logical development of ideology.

Logic appears to be the only cognitive function that can claim “a reliability altogether independent from the world.”<sup>36</sup> Our distinction between validity, the internal consistency of an argument, and soundness, the *truth* of an argument, demonstrates that logical consistency and truth, insofar as the premises and conclusion are themselves anchored to communicable reality, are not co-extensive. It is this lack of anchor that gives logic its unworldly character; indeed as Arendt notes in her lectures on Kant:

Kant... remarks in his *Anthropology* that insanity consists in having lost this common sense that enables us to judge as spectators; and the opposite of it is a *sensus privatus*, a private sense, which he also calls “logical *Eigensinn*,” implying that our logical faculty, the faculty that enables us to draw conclusions from premises, could indeed function without communication – except that then, namely, if insanity has caused the loss of common sense, it would lead to insane results precisely because it has separated itself from the experience that can be valid and validated only in the presence of others.<sup>37</sup>

Logic, being a private mental faculty, requires no dancing partner and no conversation in order to determine its results: it unfolds out of itself, stacking propositions upon axioms, deducing all from a single premise, and is the mental function *par excellence* of the lonely mind. Its aim is not conceptual plurality, but conceptual consistency.

In spite of its unworldly character, logic itself bears no ill will towards the world. That Archimedes remained engrossed by his circles in the midst of the Roman invasion points to the larger desire of the logical and mathematical disciplines to be left alone. When logical rationalizations develop an explanatory function that is wielded in the world, however, the danger of developing a comprehensive worldview that transcends or ignores the particulars and lived experience grows. The epistemological plurality of the conceptual process functions within a mental ecosystem that permits a multiplicity of nuanced concepts to unfold alongside each other;

---

<sup>36</sup> Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” 318.

<sup>37</sup> Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 64.

the moment that logic enters the world as ideology, this epistemological plurality is threatened.<sup>38</sup> Ideology, Arendt notes, is precisely the product of exhaustive logic applied to an idea, which itself becomes a premise of an all-encompassing logical system that grows with complete disregard for actual conditions. The explanatory totality of ideology is eminently appealing to the lonely mind, unmoored as it is from its place in the world: as Arendt understands, “the human mind stands in need of concepts if it is to function at all; hence it will accept almost anything whenever its foremost task, the comprehensive understanding of reality and the coming to terms with it, is in danger of being compromised.”<sup>39</sup> The consistency and internal coherency of an ideological worldview provides the order and conceptual familiarity that can re-contextualize a lonely individual, and cultivates the single mental faculty that can operate under the conditions of loneliness.<sup>40</sup>

Arendt recognizes, of course, that we can distinguish between worldviews and explicitly totalitarian ideologies, but she is keenly aware of three key “totalitarian elements” present in any ideology, namely, totality, unreality, and logicity.<sup>41</sup> The “escape into the ‘whole’<sup>42</sup> away from

---

<sup>38</sup> Or, as Baehr so succinctly puts it, “the real world is a colorful, cacophonous place. Ideology is monochromatic and tone-deaf.” (2010, 13)

<sup>39</sup> OR 212.

<sup>40</sup> There are fictional correlates to the role of logic and language in totalitarianism. The best-known is Orwell’s Newspeak and its destruction of thought through the destruction of language. Orwell’s heavy-handed works pale in comparison to Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*, which is a marvellous complement to Arendt’s analysis of totalitarianism. Pace Villa, who reads Koestler’s Stalinism “as Machiavellianism run amok” in contrast to Arendt’s view (1999, 14), we can find many parallels between Koestler’s and Arendt’s accounts of totalitarianism. Machiavellianism certainly plays a role in Koestler’s account, but if we turn to his account of the ‘grammatical fiction’ of the I that we mentioned in the first chapter, and the intense logicity at the expense of all other modes of thought and action that dominate not only Rubashov’s reflections but Gletkin’s interrogation, we find something that moves outside of the pure means-end distinction. This seems to correspond more clearly to Arendt’s description of ideology. For example, during the final interrogation, “[there was] an unspoken agreement... if Gletkin could prove that the root of the charge was right – even when this root was only of a logical, abstract nature – he had a free hand to insert the missing details... without becoming aware of it, they had got accustomed to these rules for their game, and neither of them distinguished any longer between actions which Rubashov had committed in fact and those which he merely should have committed as a consequence of his opinions; they had gradually lost the sense of appearance and reality, logical fiction and fact.” (Koestler 2006, 227-8).

<sup>41</sup> OT 470-1.

<sup>42</sup> Arendt, “The Concept of History,” 83.

particulars into history, begun in the turn to philosophies of history in the 18<sup>th</sup> century offers the possibility of total explanation of not only history, but also the present conditions and future expectations. That is, ideology seizes upon temporality itself. Second, this total explanation is completely unmoored from reality. The new referential framework produced is solidified by a new “sixth sense” of ideology, which supplants common sense as the means by which one orients oneself within the totalitarian counter-world (see below). Arendt, later in her career, juxtaposes common sense and logic, since the former requires a world and the latter does not.<sup>43</sup> The worldly context of an event, object, or person that produces and protects its meaning is replaced by the ideological system, which itself re-organizes sensory data and fits it into the pre-established web. And finally, the system’s total explanation is itself internally consistent – so consistent, in fact, that “it proceeds with a consistency that exists nowhere else in the realm of reality.”<sup>44</sup> This consistency, comforting in its total explanation of a cold and confusing world, provides a ready substitute for the lonely mind.

So, we see that in contradistinction to the three modes of plurality outlined in the first chapter, there exist alternate modes of being, rationalizing, and conceptualizing that do not rely upon the world for their support or validation. The lonely individual is adrift, severed both from the world and from themselves; their inability to think with themselves leaves them with rational cognition and logical deductions which find the consistency of ideology far more appealing than the complexities and contradictions of lived experience. Likewise, the atrophy of common sense leads to the atrophy of judgment, the mental faculty that relies upon it. What is left is the will, directed outwards towards a world that is no longer understood in its worldliness, but only in its

---

<sup>43</sup> Cf. e.g. Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” 317-8.

<sup>44</sup> OT 471.

instrumentality and inertness.<sup>45</sup> The result is an individual who is uprooted from their context and, in the midst of an ever-growing society, feels increasingly superfluous. Their bitterness and self-centered concerns provide the perfect receptivity for totalitarian propaganda.

Totalitarian propaganda and its alarming efficacy points to the more serious consequences of worldlessness and the loss of common sense. While Arendt recognizes that there are, obviously elements of totalitarianism that are appealing for the intellectual class (e.g. fascination with movement, causes of world-historical importance, and the developing senses of progress and human achievement) as well as the underbelly of bourgeois society (e.g. fascination with violence and unrespectability and the release of unsocial or anti-social tendencies), totalitarian propaganda and its “outrageous” insults to common sense, through the use of ideology, attempts to create a new referential totality through which experience is mediated, and ultimately ignored. This extends beyond the mere appeal of a regime and the success or appeal of its policies; it is one of the key ways totalitarianism seizes not only upon political structures, but upon the human condition itself.

The plausibility of the ideological counter-world is possible once common sense has atrophied; cut off from the reality as confirmed by others, the lonely individual retakes their bearings with the help of the new explanatory totality. Further, totalitarian propaganda and the ideology it propounds reacts and responds to a need of the human mind for consistency and clarity (both conceptual and moral); the real world, so full of contradictions, can rarely achieve the completeness of comprehensibility that the totalitarian counter-world offers.<sup>46</sup> In this way, totalitarian propaganda “shut[s] the masses off from the world”<sup>47</sup> and seals them in the internally consistent counter-world. As Arendt notes,

---

<sup>45</sup> The idea that the mass man will “under no circumstances [ever do] ‘a thing for its own sake’” (OT 322) has striking similarities to the standing-reserve which is enframed by Heidegger’s essence of Technology.

<sup>46</sup> OT 351-53

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 351

[Totalitarians'] art consists in using, and at the same time transcending, the elements of reality, of verifiable experiences, in the chosen fiction, and in generalizing them into regions which then are definitely removed from all possible control by individual experience. With such generalizations, totalitarian propaganda establishes a world fit to compete with the real one, whose main handicap is that it is not logical, consistent, and organized.<sup>48</sup>

This new world forms the new referential totality and context within which individuals relate to their use-objects, concepts, and systems.

Totalitarianism, then, does not only seek to destroy difference and plurality through the destruction of the individual as such,<sup>49</sup> but it also destroys commonality by setting upon the common world in order to supplant it. No previous political organization or structure had ever sought to destroy factuality *as such*; and since facts, which are “infinitely more fragile than axioms, discoveries, and theories,”<sup>50</sup> form the basis of political thought,<sup>51</sup> no threat to the common world has threatened at the same time our ability to think politically to such an extent. Arendt recognizes, therefore, that “factuality itself depends for its continued existence upon the existence of the nontotalitarian world.”<sup>52</sup> At every moment the totalitarian counter-world comes up against the non-totalitarian world, it is confronted with reality, facts, and the stubborn resilience of experience; since it cannot bear the contradictions and refutations of the common world to its ideological consistency, it seeks to destroy the common world at every turn, either through the seizure of memory and the past through the use of the secret police, disappearances, and revisionist history,

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 362.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Arendt's description of the camps, which laid bare the totalitarian drive to exterminate plurality and individuality: first, through the destruction of the juridical aspect of humanity through a brutally arbitrary detention system, then of the moral aspect of humanity through the elimination of witnesses and the social contexts required for morally meaningful actions, and finally of identity and individuality through the reduction of inmates to pure *animal laborans* (OT 447-456). Arendt's analysis of the camps, itself concise and chilling, has long formed the backbone of scholarly engagements with her theory of totalitarianism, and, as such, I have little to add in this respect. In addition to Canovan's work, Villa's *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*, ch. 1 (“Terror and Radical Evil”) is an excellent analysis of not only the camps but the implications for constructions of evil and human nature.

<sup>50</sup> Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” 227.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>52</sup> OT 388.

or through the ambiguous relationship of present and future through “infallible predictions:” that any statement of fact issued by a totalitarian state is equally a statement of purpose.<sup>53</sup>

The non-public counter-world totalitarianism seeks to establish, however, is not nearly as durable or stable as the actual world verified through our senses. Arendt seems to argue in later works that totalitarianism itself, because of its uncompromising instability, will be unable to establish itself in the long term. Further, the fact that the private sphere itself remains somewhat intact in the early stages of totalitarian rule means that the possibility of resistance and the preservation of the public spirit outside of the public space remains viable. But the processes that led to totalitarian government have not receded quietly into history books; because Arendt believes that they persist in the Western world after 1945, she spends significant energy throughout the rest of her life trying to think through their alternate manifestations and modes – specifically, the form of mass society.

### *Mass Society*

Because loneliness is a permanent possibility for human beings, it is not a historically determined phenomenon. It remains an ever-present danger for those who withdraw from the presence of others into solitude or isolation, having formed a core aspect of the Abrahamic mystical traditions and religious experience, either in the form of the ‘long night of the soul’ or in the theological explanation of hell as absolute separation from God. Likewise, worldlessness had, prior to the modern age, been an exception, and not a general condition. What totalitarianism demonstrated and exploited, and what Arendt attempts to untangle, is the degree to which loneliness moved from certain “marginal social conditions” to become a central component of

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 350.

modernity as “an everyday experience of the evergrowing masses of our century.”<sup>54</sup> The collapse of the common world and the corresponding rise in world-alienation has led to the “mass phenomenon of loneliness” – that is, the paradoxical fact that loneliness itself can be a constitutive feature of a collective.<sup>55</sup> Arendt recognizes that the “nightmare” of loneliness “can very well overcome us in the midst of a crowd”<sup>56</sup> as “man as an individual is deserted even by his own self and lost in the chaos of people.”<sup>57</sup> If this is the case, then the question remains: what is the form of living together that occurs under the conditions of loneliness *without* a totalitarian regime?

Just as the experience of plurality finds its political expression in the public realm, so too does the experience of loneliness (as well as the interrelated conditions of thoughtlessness and ideological rationalization) find its social expression in mass society. The two are, for Arendt, two sides of the same coin, as the loss of the world in the modern age

...has left behind a society of men who, without a common world which would at once relate and separate them, either live in desperate lonely separation or are pressed together into a mass. For a mass society is nothing more than that kind of organized living which automatically establishes itself among human beings who are still related to one another but have lost the world once common to all of them.<sup>58</sup>

In the same sense that common sense and the world are co-constitutive, so too are loneliness and mass society, or social atomism and crowd behaviour.<sup>59</sup> The threats that the impulses of mass society pose to our sense of self and world stem, it seems, from the same sources as the dangers of totalitarianism. While the public might go underground in dark times as the public spirit finds itself without a space, under the conditions of mass society it is the public spirit itself that is eroded,

---

<sup>54</sup> OT 478

<sup>55</sup> HC 59. This might also bring to mind David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd*. Arendt and Riesman maintained a correspondence for some time, but encountered substantial disagreement in terms of both method and aims. Cf. in particular Baehr, *Hannah Arendt*, chapter 2.

<sup>56</sup> Hannah Arendt, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy,” in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 96.

<sup>57</sup> Arendt, “On the Nature of Totalitarianism,” 359.

<sup>58</sup> Arendt, “The Concept of History,” 90.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Tocqueville’s distinction between egoism and individualism that slumbers at the core of American society in *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2, trans. James T Schleifer, ed. Eduardo Nolla (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 881ff.

while the spaces of community might remain intact. It is this phenomenon of public space without public spirit that comprises Arendt's sphere of the social, or the mode of being-together of mass society that is neither wholly public nor private. Given the fact that Arendt's social has faced enormous scrutiny from scholars (which we will examine shortly), we propose to revisit the concept here as part of Arendt's concern with modernity as a whole to recontextualize it within Arendt's discussion of loneliness.

The particular challenge posed by Arendt's assessment of the modern age is that it is composed of so many disparate strands. From the constitutive concerns of public spirit, with both its awareness for stability and novelty (or, for the public realm itself, commonality and plurality) we can draw two separate movements of modernity: the first erodes the stability and durability of the world, whereas the second stifles plurality and contingency. Both lead, in circuitous ways, to the condition of modern mass society and loneliness. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, we will tease out some of the threads in Arendt's works in order to try to begin to understand the threat to the public realm in mass society.

The unmooring of the individual from their worldly context is equally the destruction of the stable signifiers and structures that form and inform the world. In *Origins*, Arendt's analysis extends beyond the simple question of totalitarianism itself to some of these movements. Politically, the emergence of antisemitic parties threatened the boundaries and structures of the state, both in terms of the interstate nature of the parties and in terms of the new relationship these parties took to the conventional party structures – namely, that they stood *above* parties as such.<sup>60</sup> As politics abandoned parliaments and moved into the streets, as in the case of the Dreyfus affair,<sup>61</sup> antisemitism and race-thinking found their expression in nationalist movements that transcended

---

<sup>60</sup> OT 38-40.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

conventional political structures and re-cast identity in oppositional forms, resulting in the idea of the ‘movement,’ which stands in opposition to the state and party system itself.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, the global intrusion of bourgeois capitalism through imperialist ventures not only exposed the expansionist mindset that stands in direct conflict to the stability sought by the nation-state,<sup>63</sup> but equally the catastrophes wrought by both superfluous money and superfluous people once they were freed from the pressures of politics.<sup>64</sup>

Parallel to the political developments on the continent are the shifts in our self-understanding Arendt details in *The Human Condition*. The question of world-alienation, which Villa rightly places at the core of the work,<sup>65</sup> is naturally too enormous to explore here in its entirety; we can trace, however, the contours of Arendt’s argument briefly. Arendt points to three pivotal events that changed our relationship to the world. First, the discovery of America catalyzed “the famous shrinkage of the globe in modernity”<sup>66</sup> as the conquered immensity of the world was now measurable, and therefore conceptualizable in its entirety. This led, over time, to the destruction of distance through the increase of speed in everyday life, which re-arranged our relationship to both space and time.<sup>67</sup> Second, while the Protestant Reformation shattered the religious landscape in Europe, Arendt argues that the expropriation of church property, an often overlooked consequence of the religious and political upheavals of the time, not only re-arranged the relationship between self and property insofar as the latter guarantees a place in the world, but also unchained labour power and accelerated the processes of economic abstraction.<sup>68</sup> And third,

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 250 ff.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 125ff.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Ibid, Part II: Imperialism, broadly, and chapters five and seven, more specifically.

<sup>65</sup> Villa (rightly, in my view) argues that the entire argument of *The Human Condition* is incomprehensible without a constant attention to “the de-worlding of the public world in the modern age” (*Arendt and Heidegger*, 189).

<sup>66</sup> HC 250.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid 250-1. Cf. also Hannu Salmi, *Nineteenth-Century Europe: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), chapter two, on the revolutions caused by the steam engine.

<sup>68</sup> HC 251-7.

the invention of the telescope, by mediating the discovery of truth through a technological instrument, not only caused us to doubt the relationship between our senses and reality, but also allowed us “to act on the earth and within terrestrial nature as though we dispose of it from outside of it, from the Archimedean point.”<sup>69</sup>

This analysis plays out in other registers throughout the rest of the book. The widespread replacement of tools with machines has re-oriented our material processes from world-building to labour-easing,<sup>70</sup> while the substitution of disposable consumer goods for stable use-objects undermines the durable nature of the world.<sup>71</sup> Economically, the degradation of property, which grounds an individual in the world, to wealth, analogous to the transient consumer goods which are used up in their function, to capital, the pure expression of the acquisitive forces of industrial capitalism, not only unchained productive processes but equally uprooted the economy itself by separating objects from any kind of intrinsic value. This transition, Arendt notes, replaces “the permanence of a stable structure” with “the permanence of a process.”<sup>72</sup> All of these developments, in their interconnectedness, strip individuals from their context, to the point where “nothing in our time is more dubious... than our attitude towards the world.”<sup>73</sup>

At the same time (yet again), as we mentioned above there is a second set of threads that Arendt pursues to demonstrate the degrees to which modernity has sought to escape the conditions of plurality and the perceived meaninglessness of the contingent and particular. This is not only the ideological movement towards race-thinking and history detailed in *Origins* and their

---

<sup>69</sup> HC 262. Cf. also *Concept of History* 52ff.

<sup>70</sup> HC 151.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 69, cf. esp. Arendt’s definition in note 74 (p. 68), as well as p. 257. On the question of process see also “*The Concept of History*,” 63.

<sup>73</sup> MDT 4.

antecedents in the Western tradition,<sup>74</sup> but equally the attempts on the part of the social and physical sciences to supplant action and will with behaviour and causal structures. On the one hand, behaviourism and statistical analysis replace a plurality of actors with a totality of behaviourists; while statistics are both valid and useful for large numbers of objects, to apply them to the activities of human agency such as “politics or history signifies nothing less than the willful obliteration of their subject matter.”<sup>75</sup> The social sciences,

which so quickly became to history what technology has been to physics, may use the experiment in a much cruder and less reliable way than do the natural sciences, but the method is the same: they too prescribe conditions... to human behavior, as modern physics prescribes conditions to natural processes. If their vocabulary is repulsive and their hope to close the alleged gap between our scientific mastery of nature and our deplored impotence to ‘manage’ human affairs through an engineering science of human relations sounds frightening, it is only because they have decided to treat man as an entirely natural being whose life processes can be handled the same way as all other processes.<sup>76</sup>

This decidedly modern perspective on human relations squeezes out the possibility of the two-in-one, the uncertainty and fragility of interaction, communication, and plurality, and, as a result, the possibility of action itself. Likewise, both philosophers and scientists have attempted to undermine spontaneity, either through mistakenly thinking the will away instead of letting the faculty stand on its own, without the aid of thought to comprehend itself, or through materialist paradigms that, in Arendt’s opinion, are just as spurious as idealism.<sup>77</sup>

These threads run, in each of their own tangled forms, through Arendt’s writings, and we could continue feeling for them throughout her work, from her concern with the social conformity of the McCarthy period,<sup>78</sup> to her caustic review of Dewey’s *The Problems of Man* and her fears

---

<sup>74</sup> See above. On this note cf. also Habermas’ notes on the origins of philosophy of history as a reaction to the loss of the rationality of the particular in *The Structural Transformation*, chs. 13 and 14.

<sup>75</sup> HC 42.

<sup>76</sup> Arendt, “The Concept of History,” 59.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. LotM-W 195ff. Arendt’s relationship to scientists and the laboratory, while interesting, falls far outside the scope of this thesis. Likewise, Arendt equally notes that philosophers have always been deeply uncomfortable with action; this, however, is not a specifically modern trend, but rather part of the long antipathy between the political and the philosophical. Cf. especially HC section 31.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Hannah Arendt, “The Threat of Conformism,” in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 423-427.

about social scientists' desires "[to fit education] into a scientifically controlled world" which has displaced the actual human beings within it,<sup>79</sup> to the post-revolutionary transition in the United States from the revolutionary principles of public freedom, public happiness, and public spirit to the more collective, privately oriented values of civil liberties, utilitarian welfare, and public opinion, which understand the political community as an amalgamation of private actors,<sup>80</sup> to the issue of mass culture.<sup>81</sup> The threats Arendt recognizes to our notions of commonality and plurality by both processes and systems – the former, disorienting motion, and the latter, overwhelming control – emerge in various ways from the textures of modern mass society. All of these contribute to the crisis of loneliness that is the hallmark of the modern age.

It might be natural, at this point, to think that Arendt is a devout antimodernist; indeed, as we saw in the introduction and the first chapter, this has been a boilerplate accusation leveled by critics. Arendt's attitude, however, is far more ambivalent: not only does she recognize that there is no return to the ancient world, she also does not seem to *want* this return to occur, even if it could. The possibilities of the modern age – not only politically, in the form of the short-lived council systems at the core of the modern revolutions, but also technologically, in the form of the elimination of labour as a driving concern of the human condition – open horizons that would have been impossible to more than the select few who could participate in direct politics or free themselves from labour through the violence of slavery in antiquity. The disquiet provoked by the violent transformations of the modern age is wielded by both the nostalgic and the resolute, and Arendt, firmly among the latter, has often been mistaken for the former. Not only was *Origins*

---

<sup>79</sup> Arendt, "The Ivory Tower of Common Sense," in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 195.

<sup>80</sup> OR 212ff.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. "The Crisis in Culture."

written “against a backdrop of both reckless optimism and reckless despair,”<sup>82</sup> but so too was *The Human Condition*: the fears embodied in the prologue are not, strictly speaking, of the progress of technology itself, but rather of the thoughtlessness that has accompanied it. It is not automation as such that worries Arendt, but rather the consequences of automation for a community that has come to define itself through labour. It is not the exploration of space itself that is a rejection of the human condition, but rather the unthinking rejection of the earth as the bedrock of human life that it permits.<sup>83</sup> Just as how Arendt recognizes that the emergence of totalitarianism was not determined or necessary, the crisis of loneliness despite its overwhelming and paralyzing nature, is neither a permanent nor necessary condition for modern humans.<sup>84</sup>

As we’ve seen, both process and system precipitate this crisis – the former, by eroding the stable structures and uprooting human beings; the latter, by dwarfing the individual amidst enormous complexities and overwhelming numbers to create the feeling of superfluousness. Two considerations emerge from the above: first, Arendt’s analysis of the underlying shifts in our relationship to the world and to each other is in good company. While Patricia Owens has situated Arendt’s concept of the social (see below) alongside other accounts of the emergence of society in the modern period,<sup>85</sup> we can expand this to thinkers grappling with the relationship between

---

<sup>82</sup> OT vii.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. HC 1-6.

<sup>84</sup> We could draw similarities in Arendt’s analysis of modernity to the challenges outlined by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. Neither the gruesome punishment of the body described in the opening pages nor the totalizing surveillance of the panopticon that works upon the soul are particularly appealing; yet Foucault’s analysis does not provide us with the relief of an escape from punishment as such. Likewise, Habermas’ *Structural Transformation* poses a similar problem: the transformations of modernity have juxtaposed a limited, rationally-guided public sphere that remains accessible only to the few and operates under principles of exclusion (of class, race, and gender) with the political arena of mass society that, while opened in ways that previous generations could not have dreamt of, has shed all pretense of rationalization. As Habermas notes, “laws which have obviously come about under the ‘pressure of the street’ can scarcely still be understood as arising from the consensus of private individuals engaged in public discussion” (1964, 54). This suspension, which emphasizes the denial of ideal conditions and the refusal of nostalgia, is a vital and too-often neglected dimension of political analysis.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Owens, “Human Security” 551. Owens includes Karl Polanyi, Gunnar Myrdal, Habermas, Jacques Donzelot, Foucault, Robert Castel, and George Steinmetz. In “Not Life but the World” she equally compares Arendt favourably with Foucault’s development of biopolitics (cf. esp. 305-6).

individual and context in modernity itself. From Marshall Berman's modernism, which is "the struggle to make ourselves at home in a constantly changing world,"<sup>86</sup> to Charles Taylor's Great Disembedding,<sup>87</sup> to Foucault's study of the emergence of political economy, governmentality, and population,<sup>88</sup> we see that critics of Arendt's development of the lived conditions of modernity must equally contend with a range of scholarly analyses that chronicle the deep changes to our own self-perception.

The list above, of course, equally ignores the voices contemporary to the shift itself. It was not only the armchair elitists who were concerned about the rise of mass society (see, for example, Kierkegaard's crowd, Nietzsche's herd morality and the decay of the individual in democratic society, or Ortega y Gasset's *Revolt of the Masses*).<sup>89</sup> Early sociologists, from Le Bon's pioneering study of the conditions of crowd psychology to Durkheim's study of the "kindred" forms of egoistic and anomic suicide, to Max Weber's disenchantment and the conditions of politics in the mass age, took the new forms of political, social, and psychological activity seriously.<sup>90</sup> So too were philosophers and theorists from Karl Jaspers to the Frankfurt School.<sup>91</sup> And the interwar cultural rejection of Enlightenment values and the philosophical tradition – seen either in the rejection of rationality by the Dadaists or the embrace of motion and industrialism by the Futurists – points to the degree to which these transformations were not merely contained within the

---

<sup>86</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 6.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 49ff.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. esp. Michel Foucault, *Security Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2009), in particular lectures 1-4.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Harpers, 1988), 61-65; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966), 112-118; José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1957).

<sup>90</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, trans. Robert K. Merton (New York: Viking, 1960); Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (London: Routledge, 2002), 219; on Weber, cf. particularly the vocation lectures in Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).

<sup>91</sup> Cf. in particular Karl Jaspers, *Man in the Modern Age*, trans. Eden Paul and Cedar Paul (New York: Anchor, 1957).

academy but became part and parcel of the cultural, aesthetic, and social atmosphere. This, of course, is only a glimpse at the knowledge-production that surrounds mass society and its effect upon the individual; one would need a book-length, if not multi-volume study to chart the genealogy of and reactions to the conditions of mass society in all its forms. We include this short selection of voices and issues here to make the obvious, if not belaboured, point that Arendt is not describing our world in a vacuum, and neither is she ignorant of both the possibilities and perils of the modern age.

The second consideration that emerges from the tapestry above is that any consideration of the concept of the social that does not keep this backdrop in mind will fall short. Without it, ‘the social’ becomes an incoherent mess.<sup>92</sup> Keeping this backdrop in mind also shows us how other commentators have carved off pieces of Arendt’s thread of modernity and her description of the social itself from the human condition to co-equate the social with specific elements of modern society. Pitkin develops the social to mean “a collectivity of people who... conduct themselves in such a way that they cannot control or even intentionally influence the large-scale consequences of their actions,”<sup>93</sup> which addresses the question of system, but not process and movement. Canovan understands it to be “a kind of pseudo-public, a distortion of authentic public life characterized by a combination of conformity and egocentricity,”<sup>94</sup> which identifies the textures of behaviour in mass society but not the larger patterns outlined above. Benhabib picks out the “growth of a capitalist commodity exchange economy... aspects of mass society... [and]

---

<sup>92</sup> Hanna Pitkin, for example, argues that Arendt scholars have seen the social as “a complex composite, somehow involving both economics and normalization,” but “have not found an overall, unifying meaning or importance to the complexity.” (1998, 17) Likewise, Canovan begins her remarks on the social with the recognition that “few readers feel confident that they can see exactly what [Arendt] is getting at, and even fewer find her view persuasive.” (1992, 116). Pitkin’s analysis faces serious hurdles, both in terms of its rigour and its psychoanalytic commitments, perhaps best summarized in Canovan’s review: “should we be wondering why it is that as the book’s emotional temperature rises, the level of scholarship drops?” (1999, 620)

<sup>93</sup> Pitkin, *Attack of the Blob*, 16.

<sup>94</sup> Canovan, *Hannah Arendt*, 117.

sociability to the quality of life in civil society and civic associations,”<sup>95</sup> addressing some of the systemic changes without the attitudes that accompany them.

Recently, commentators like Ari-Emeri Hyvönen and Patricia Owens have resuscitated Arendt’s analysis of the social by emphasizing the historical dimensions of the concept as opposed to the normative implications, albeit through two separate tacks.<sup>96</sup> Owens’ excellent work, particularly sensitive to the historical dimensions of the concept, seeks to dig out ‘the social’ from underneath the normative dimensions habitually imposed by Arendt scholars. Hyvönen’s attention to the essayistic style of Arendt’s writing points to one of the larger interpretive problems scholars have faced in their approach to the social – namely, that the concept of the social should “be approached as an experience-laden, tentative argument, rather than as part of a system,”<sup>97</sup> and that, as a result, there is no single definition of the social as it is a “historical, emergent phenomenon, or rather a set of practices and mentalities.”<sup>98</sup> The attention to the contextual development of the practices that fall under Arendt’s account of the social is a critical component to understanding the concept itself, but it is not a sufficient exploration. A phenomenon can be historical in nature and yet introduce new normative considerations into the world; for Arendt, this is obviously the case with the arrival of totalitarianism, the experience of the camps, and the atomic bomb. All three of these are historical events which introduced new principles of political theory – namely, government by terror, the complete mutability of the human condition, and the perennial possibility of complete annihilation. Political theory that takes these into consideration is not

---

<sup>95</sup> Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism*, 23.

<sup>96</sup> We could, to a certain extent, include Philip Walsh’s attempted *rapprochement* of Arendt and the social sciences here as well (cf. Walsh 2011), but since Walsh arrives at his conclusions by way of the delicate balance of labour, work, and action and not through Arendt’s analysis of ‘the social’ as an emergent concept we exclude his analysis here.

<sup>97</sup> Hyvönen, “Tentative Lessons of Experience,” 582.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid* 583.

necessarily completely historical by nature, but rather sensitive to the worldly condition that we encounter as human beings.

Can we, then, in light of these considerations, find a coherent meaning of Arendt's social? If we remain sensitive to the historical developments of modernity that we have outlined above, as well as the investigation into the public realm of the first chapter, I believe that we can. As we saw in the first chapter, the public realm relies upon both a space of disclosure and the spirit of those who disclose themselves. If the public spirit is forced out of the public space, then we encounter resistance in dark times. If the space remains, but is inhabited by lonely people who lack the public spirit, a new set of conditions emerge where, given the preoccupation of individuals with their own conditions, "private interests assume public significance."<sup>99</sup> It is for good reason that we place Machiavelli and Hobbes at the beginning of the modern tradition, since for the first time the question of mere life, or the basic principle of mutual self-defence, entirely insufficient as a starting point for Aristotle, becomes a viable foundation for a body politic. When this attitude towards politics is joined with the worldlessness of the twentieth century, we see the development of society, or "the form in which the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance."<sup>100</sup> 'The social,' then, for Arendt, can be described as public space *without* public spirit.

This understanding of the social clarifies the disparate strands of the modern experience. Through this conception of Arendt's argument, experiences as disparate as the early modern attempts to grapple with the consequences of rapid urbanization and its new forms of behaviour to the concern of the creeping economification of values and the subtle transformations of the

---

<sup>99</sup> HC 35.

<sup>100</sup> HC 46.

neoliberal paradigm begin to come into focus through the lens of worldlessness and loneliness.<sup>101</sup> It allows us to understand the social as both the result of historical developments and the spread of a new mode of being in the world (namely, being *without* a common world) that has become the core of the modern experience. This is, of course, not to say that the experience of the social has become the univocal mode of modernity – the category of mass society always runs the risk of being deployed thoughtlessly itself. ‘Society’ itself remains composed of individuals capable of transcending the accidental, and Arendt’s assessment of modernity is always tempered by the recognition of the human potential for radical newness and the cautious optimism that accompanies it. But to neglect the creeping forms of loneliness, thoughtlessness, and the siren-song of ideology is to ignore the ways in which the modern experience is bound up with the seeds of its own destruction.

---

<sup>101</sup> Cf. e.g. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, ed. Michael Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2010), esp. 225-246; Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

## Conclusion

*“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo.  
“So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us. And already, Frodo, our time is beginning to look black.”*

-- J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*<sup>1</sup>

*Comprehension does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalities that the impact of reality and the shock of experience is no longer felt. It means, rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us – neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality – whatever it may be.*

-- Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*<sup>2</sup>

This thesis set out to uncover Arendt’s public realm as the *condition* required for politics, whatever politics in practice might be. In so doing, we distinguished between the three modes of plurality that, together, comprise the foundation of the human condition. The first, the ontological plurality of being-with-others, supplies us with the reality of experience through the generation of common sense, the sense which situates appearances between human beings and which, therefore, makes meaning possible. The second, the phenomenological plurality of the two-in-one, shelters the beginnings of our moral experiences through the requirements of self-consistency. And the third, the epistemological plurality of our conceptual apparatus allows us to come to understand and unify concepts without severing their ties to the world of appearances itself. Not only do our mental faculties rely upon these forms of plurality in their own way, but our experience of our common

---

<sup>1</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, “The Fellowship of the Ring,” in *The Lord of the Rings: 50th Anniversary Edition* (New York & London: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 51.

<sup>2</sup> OT viii.

world, the relational totality which both ‘relates and separates’ human beings, is itself dependent upon the conditions of plurality as well. The common world, our shared framework of difference that provides a space of disclosure for individuals to act and be recognized, forms the backbone of the public realm. But we equally noted that the individuals inhabiting the public space enter into an intentional relationship with both the space and each other: it is this mode of being-together-publicly, which we identified as the public spirit, that is conscious of the requirements of both commonality and plurality. Without stability, the world cannot persist. Without spontaneity and plurality, human beings lose their ability to disclose themselves and begin anew.

The dangers of this loss, and the threats to the public realm, were developed in chapter two. The experience of totalitarianism, for Arendt, demonstrated not only the fragility of political institutions but the precarity of the given conditions of plurality itself. Isolation breeds powerlessness; loneliness breeds worldlessness. Worldlessness – and the confirmatory presence of others and the shared webs of meaning – threatens the self and the silent dialogue of the two-in-one, which risks thoughtlessness. And, severed from the world and the self, the lonely mind easily falls prey to the constricting logicity of ideology, which usurps the epistemological plurality’s process and re-situates the individual within a quarantined counter-world completely cut off from the complexities and possibilities of the common world itself. These modes of being-alone provide fertile soil for the totalitarian impulse, which sets upon the world and its inhabitants in a bid to eradicate both plurality, through the destruction of the individual, and commonality, through its assault upon factuality, history, and future horizons of possibility. The public spirit, however, might survive without public space through these dark times in the form of the resistance. Arendt recognizes, however, that the experience of loneliness persists in the post-Holocaust era. Her analysis of mass society and the tumultuous upheavals of modernity that have placed

loneliness at the centre of the modern experience identify both the rootlessness and superfluosity that develop in the face of both process and system. And it was through this understanding of loneliness in the modern world that we recast Arendt's concept of the social, long derided by scholars, as public space without public spirit.

This thesis, like much of Arendt's work, was also written against a backdrop of optimism and despair. The sterility of academic prose and the clinical objectivity of the social scientific method easily obscures both the seriousness of the challenges of modernity and the urgency with which they must be faced. And, while it might be the case, as Hume suggests, that "to declaim against present times, and magnify the virtue of remote ancestors, is a propensity almost inherent in human nature,"<sup>3</sup> Arendt's work, with both its rejection of nostalgia and its refusal to accept the conditions imposed by the present, constantly reminds us that, while we might turn to thinkers of the past for resources, they no longer offer us the assurance required to navigate the post-Holocaust era. Arendt's theorizing and thinking is both *this-worldly* and *our-worldly*, and, decades on, we continue to live out the hopes and fears embedded with her writing.

Loneliness remains at the core of the modern experience. We struggle to recognize it, however, as a *political* phenomenon, and continue to view it through the lens of public health. From Cigna's study of American loneliness to Teresa May's declaration that "loneliness is one of the greatest public health challenges of our time" at the launch of the UK's first 'loneliness strategy,' the epidemiological approach to loneliness appears to have taken hold.<sup>4</sup> While obviously

---

<sup>3</sup> David Hume, *Essays Moral, Political, Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), [https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/704#Hume\\_0059\\_572](https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/704#Hume_0059_572).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Prime Minister's Office, "PM Launches Government's First Loneliness Strategy," October 15, 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-launches-governments-first-loneliness-strategy>; Cigna, "Cigna U.S. Loneliness Index: Survey of 20,000 Americans Examining Behaviours Driving Loneliness in the United States," May 2018, [https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/docs/IndexReport\\_1524069371598-173525450.pdf](https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/docs/IndexReport_1524069371598-173525450.pdf).

a welcome development, this lens risks ‘solving’ the ‘problem’ of loneliness in terms of social normalization and the care of the body without addressing the root causes that remain endemic to the condition of Western modernity. The disorienting rupture of loneliness is *not only* a public health issue intertwined with the current mental health crisis, but also a political problem of the first order. The lonely mind, as we have repeatedly seen, is always at risk of accepting experience-defying ideology that provides a tidy explanation for the loneliness itself. The various subterranean streams of this rejection of experience, either through the “red-pilling” allusion used by misogynist “men’s rights” groups, the resurgence of far/alt-right movements with all-too-familiar talking points across North America and Europe, and the explosion of conspiracy theories that have begun to bump up against the common world continue to course below the surface of ‘main-stream’ politics.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, the ubiquity of technology and the economy of distraction has radically decreased the amount of time we spend alone with ourselves. If we would rather give ourselves shocks than spend less than twenty minutes alone, where does that leave the core of the moral being and the capacity to think with oneself?<sup>6</sup> The conditions of plurality that establish the common world remain as fragile today as ever.

A quick glance at the media landscape reveals the precariousness of our situation. Political communities and parties have previously operated under the guiding assumption that while differences over particular policy perspectives and issues might divide, there remains an underlying commitment to the shared framework of parliamentary democracy – that is, the peaceful transfer of power, the legitimacy of the vote, and the representation of the people through

---

<sup>5</sup> On the latter cf. especially the arrest made in connection with the Pizzagate conspiracy theory (Lipton, 2016) and, more recently, the QAnon theory, whose supporters have been increasingly vocal and visible at Trump rallies and among law enforcement and the military (cf. Bump, 2018, Stanley-Becker, 2018, and especially Haag, 2018 on the swat officer demoted for wearing a QAnon patch).

<sup>6</sup> Timothy D. Wilson et al., “Just Think: The Challenges of the Disengaged Mind,” *Science* 345, no. 6192 (July 4, 2014): 75-7, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1250830>.

the legislature. Likewise, civil society requires the same shared framework, *mutatis mutandis*. Plurality is not only the law of the earth in a metaphysical sense; it is equally the guiding principle behind democratic societies. A political and social community remains firmly grounded in a world. What happens, however, when this world begins to fragment under the weight of difference itself? We see now, in the United States primarily, a shift in the commonality that grounds the public sphere. The two-party system, fed by an increasingly divisive and rancorous press, have begun to split into two entirely different political contexts and relational wholes: each has its own source of news, its own mediated reality, its own system of values grounded upon separate principles. We draw closer to Tocqueville's incisive observation that

there are countries so vast that the different populations living there, through united under the same sovereignty, have contradictory interests that give rise to a permanent opposition among them. Then, the various portions of the same people do not form parties strictly speaking, but distinct nations; and if civil war happens to break out, there is a conflict between rival peoples rather than a struggle between factions.<sup>7</sup>

If we couple the increasing social atomism, isolation, and loneliness of the modern world in which “nobody can any longer agree with anybody else,”<sup>8</sup> the public realm risks collapse under the weight of difference without mediation.

News outlets and the press play an oversized role in determining and orienting political reality, and a loss of balance (in relation to reality, rather than coverage and bias) can destroy the public sphere in two ways. The first is through excessive censorship: a totalitarian state needs only a single news outlet to proclaim reality, and the public sphere vanishes as the plurality of perspectives is silenced. The second is through a fractured news landscape: a multiplicity of perspectives no longer reach agreement on the object under consideration, and the object itself loses its meaning and place in the web of the world. Regardless of the political orientation of a

---

<sup>7</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Vol. I*, trans. James T Schleifer, ed. Eduardo Nolla (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 279.

<sup>8</sup> HC 58.

paper, there should, at core, be a basic agreement as to the facts of an event.<sup>9</sup> The very idea that an outlet – or, for that matter, a president – could appeal to ‘alternative facts’ (i.e. falsehoods) prefigures the establishment of a competing world that runs parallel to the existing one guaranteed by common sense.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the notion of ‘fake news,’ a moniker that discredits institutions based on political orientation, and not upon facticity, is the corresponding attempt to break down and discredit sources that engage in proper journalistic practices and generate stories that, while factual, conflict with this competing world.<sup>11</sup> This should, in light of the arguments above, sound uncomfortably familiar.

This is not to argue that the United States is currently veering towards totalitarianism, or that it is experiencing a ‘totalitarian moment’ – that would require a separate thesis itself. Instead, we note here that the totalitarian forces that seek to seize reality through the press can equally be *social* forces, and not necessarily ones of state. Some market-oriented press outlets no longer seem to feel an obligation to the ‘public’ at large, and have realized that their subscriber base is the primary audience. In the same sense that Rousseau found the theatre objectionable because, among other reasons, it tacitly encouraged the artist to create art that caters to the audience’s taste, thereby surrendering the aesthetic standards of judgment, the current media marketplace operates on a similar level, except instead of surrendering along aesthetic lines, it risks surrendering factuality. What reality do these isolated, lonely individuals wish to live in? “What convinces masses are not facts, and not even invented facts, but only the consistency of the system of which they are

---

<sup>9</sup> On this, cf. Arendt’s anecdote about Clemenceau in “Truth and Politics,” 234.

<sup>10</sup> For what it’s worth, Oxford Dictionaries declared ‘post-truth’ to be the word of 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Compare Arendt’s statements on the epistemological ecosystem of totalitarianism with Trump’s statement at the 2018 Veterans of Foreign Wars national convention: “just stick with us. Don’t believe the crap you see from these people – the fake news... and just remember: what you’re seeing and what you’re reading is not what’s happening. And I’ll tell you, I have so many people that are so in favour – because we have to make our country truly great again.” (CPAC, 2018)

presumably part.”<sup>12</sup> Any leader, any presidential candidate, still requires supporters and voters to rise and remain in power. And any form of self-isolation and ghettoization, any attempt to inoculate against difference by avoiding contact with other perspectives, and any attempt to give up on facts and rationality for the sake of ease and consistency, erodes the pillars of the public world.

This self-isolation has been entrenched in our daily experience along several axes. More material trends not developed by Arendt or this thesis have obviously contributed: cities designed for the quarantined experiences of car-drivers, the slow decline of non-commercialized public spaces and the subtle ‘nudging’ of urban planners that build mechanisms of exclusion into the remaining few public places, and the changes in entertainment delivery and the use of unstructured leftover time, among many other factors, have turned us away from each other and into the privacy of our own homes, workplaces, and vehicles. This loss of physical public spaces has developed alongside the conceptual retreat of the public sphere into corporately-owned social media ‘spaces’ that have rapidly and unthinkingly been integrated into the experiences of daily life. Just as Arendt did not take issue with automation as such, but its consequences for a society of labourers, so too do we find that social media as such contain enormous possibility for the democratization of information and the resistance to tyranny.<sup>13</sup> Leaving aside the rapidly-growing mountain of research on the psychological and behavioural consequences of social media usage and the Foucauldian analysis of the mechanisms of control and normalization made possible through the ubiquity of data tracking and surveillance capitalism, social media platforms themselves are in no way an adequate substitute for an authentic public realm. The principles of self-selection that govern social media interactions, the algorithmic manipulation of news feeds that pre-screen

---

<sup>12</sup> OT 351.

<sup>13</sup> A proper analysis of this subject obviously exceeds the scope of this thesis, but we can quickly point to the dissemination of videos of police brutality and the use of social media and technology in the Arab Spring as examples of the emancipatory potential of the new technology.

content for users and the resulting risk of the exclusion of nuance and difference of opinion, and the fact that these platforms remain under the jurisdiction of companies with no obligation to the public world should provide ample warning that the adoption and integration of new modes of communication, being-together, and appearing before others has quickly outstripped our ability to make sense of the changes themselves.

At the same time, the conditions of the social that we explored in the second chapter appear to have become further entrenched. There is perhaps no better illustration of public space without public spirit than the damage done to national parks by visitors during the 2018-19 U.S. government shutdown. These parks, common spaces for all that preserve and remind us of the worldly obligations of a political community to respect and care for the natural world, were inundated with visitors' trash and suffered severe damage.<sup>14</sup> The unfortunately (and, by and large, unsurprising) realization that only the thin veneer of punishment kept visitors from wreaking havoc upon the natural ecosystems points to the extent that enough private individuals who continue to occupy public spaces have lost the public spirit.<sup>15</sup>

These issues, of course, are all playing out against the backdrop of climate change, which, if left unchecked, will destroy the only habitable planet we know. Given that our attention in this thesis has been on the *world* and its artificiality and reliance upon human beings for its maintenance, the question of the *earth* and our dependence upon its given conditions has been largely uninterrogated here. But the atomisation of the modern age and the myth of self-sufficiency

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf. e.g. Ashley Boucher, "Joshua Tree National Park 'may Take 300 Years to Recover' from Shutdown," *The Guardian*, January 29, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/28/joshua-tree-national-park-damage-government-shutdown>; Sarah Gibbens, "National Parks Face Years of Damage from Government Shutdown," *National Geographic*, January 7, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/01/why-national-parks-trashed-during-government-shutdown/>.

<sup>15</sup> The public spirit, however, has not been completely extinguished: even throughout the shutdown, small contingents of volunteers continued to try and maintain some of the parks, however difficult or futile it might have felt.

that develops out of it crumble in the face of our deep dependence upon the earth and the natural context. The relationship between the risks of worldlessness and *earthlessness* – that is, the ways in which the separation of the individual from shared contexts of meaning equally strips them from their relationship to the given earth – would be a fruitful avenue of future research. What relations of responsibility and care can the lonely mind develop?

\* \* \*

It is easy, in the face of the overwhelming complexities of both system and process, to surrender to powerlessness, paralysis, and despair. Likewise, the incommunicable depths of the life of the soul, accompanied by the charms and small wonders of the everyday, provide a refuge from the public realm for a time; dwell in it for too long, however, and the siren song of political quietism threatens to become irresistible. We have already seen how Arendt’s work refuses nostalgia; it likewise rejects both pessimism and quietism. The common world, vulnerable and fragile as it is, will not maintain itself, and we are too wrapped up in it, too dependent upon it for our ability to act, to judge, to make sense, and to be fully human to observe with clinical detachment as it turns to dust. And further, the world itself and the experiences it makes possible are too beautiful, too awe-inspiring in their originality, variety, and vibrancy, to abandon.

“I arise in the morning,” E. B. White noted, “torn between the desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (or savor) the world. This makes it very hard to plan the day.”<sup>16</sup> It is this hardship that Arendt invites us to take up and shoulder. By urging us to “think through what

---

<sup>16</sup> Qtd in Israel Shenker, “E. B. White: Notes and Comment by Author,” *New York Times*, July 11, 1969, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/03/lifetimes/white-notes.html>.

we are doing,”<sup>17</sup> to consider the phenomenon of living rather than the totality of life, and to take up the human being instead of humanity, Arendt remains deeply grounded in the world, recognizing its wonders and horrors yet refusing to give in to either. And yet, her work remains permeated by a cautious optimism confirmed by the simple fact that,

politically speaking, it is that under conditions of terror most people will comply but *some people will not*, just as the lesson of the countries to which the Final Solution was proposed was that “it could happen” in most places but *it did not happen everywhere*. Humanly speaking, no more is required, no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation.<sup>18</sup>

The resilience and courage required to face dark times are not superhuman attributes; they stem from the responsibility each of us has to support and maintain the common world and all its tangled threads. Living in the world is a messy and complicated affair. Thankfully, it never has to be done alone.

---

<sup>17</sup> HC 5.

<sup>18</sup> EJ 233.

## Bibliography

- Arendt, Hannah. "A Reply to Eric Voeglin." In *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 401–8. New York: Schocken Books, 1994.
- . "'As If Speaking to a Brick Wall': A Conversation with Joachim Fest." In *Thinking Without A Banister: Essays in Understanding, 1953-1975*, edited by Jerome Kohn. New: Schocken Books, 2018.
- . *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. Edited by Jerome Kohn. New York: Penguin, 2006.
- . "The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern." In *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 41–90. New York: Penguin, 2006.
- . "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought." In *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 428–47. New York: Schocken Books, 1994.
- . "The Crisis In Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance." In *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 194–222. New York: Penguin, 2006.
- . *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin, 1963.
- . *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*. Edited by Jerome Kohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1994.
- . "Heidegger the Fox." In *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 361–62. New York: Schocken Books, 1994.
- . *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- . *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Edited by Ronald Beiner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- . *The Life of the Mind*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.
- . *Love and Saint Augustine*. Edited by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- . *Men in Dark Times*. London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1970.
- . *On Revolution*. New York: Penguin, 1965.

- . “On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding.” In *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 328–60. New York: Schocken Books, 1994.
- . “On Violence.” In *Crises of the Republic*, 105–98. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972.
- . *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968.
- . *The Promise of Politics*. Edited by Jerome Kohn. New York: Schocken Books, 2005.
- . “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy.” In *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 49–158. New York: Schocken Books, 2003.
- . “Thinking and Moral Considerations.” In *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 159–89. New York: Schocken Books, 2003.
- . *Thinking Without A Banister: Essays in Understanding, 1953-1975*. Edited by Jerome Kohn. New York: Schocken Books, 2018.
- . “Truth and Politics.” In *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 223–59. New York: Penguin, 2006.
- . “Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding).” In *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 307–27. New York: Schocken Books, 1994.
- . “What Is Existential Philosophy?” In *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 163–87. New York: Schocken Books, 1994.
- . “‘What Remains? The Language Remains’: A Conversation with Günter Gaus.” In *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 1–23. New York: Schocken Books, 1994.
- Baehr, Peter. *Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism, and the Social Sciences*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.
- Beiner, Ronald. “Hannah Arendt on Judging.” In *Lectures On Kant’s Political Philosophy*, edited by Ronald Beiner. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982.
- Bergson, Henri. *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, translated by R. L. Pogson. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2001.
- Berman, Marshall. *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. New York: Penguin, 1988.

- Benhabib, Seyla. "The Embattled Public Sphere: Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, and Beyond." *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, no. 90 (1997): 1–24.
- . "Hannah Arendt and the Redemptive Power of Narrative." *Social Research* 57, no. 1 (1990): 167–96.
- . "Judgment and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Arendt's Thought." *Political Theory* 16, no. 1 (1988): 29–51.
- . "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas." In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun, 73–98. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992.
- . *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. 1st ed. London, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996 / New edition. Lanham, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2003.
- Biser, Ashley N. "Calibrating Our 'Inner Compass': Arendt on Thinking and the Dangers of Disorientation." *Political Theory* 42, no. 5 (2014): 519–42.
- Borren, Marieke. "'A Sense of the World': Hannah Arendt's Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Common Sense." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 21, no. 2 (2013): 225–55.
- Boucher, Ashley. "Joshua Tree National Park 'may Take 300 Years to Recover' from Shutdown." *The Guardian*, January 29, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/28/joshua-tree-national-park-damage-government-shutdown>.
- Brennan, Daniel. "Considering the Public Private-Dichotomy: Hannah Arendt, Václav Havel and Victor Klemperer on the Importance of the Private." *Human Studies* 40 (2017): 249–65.
- Buckler, Steve. *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory: Challenging the Tradition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.
- Bump, Philip. "Why the QAnon Conspiracy Is the Natural Culmination of the Trump Era." *The Washington Post*, August 1, 2018. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2018/08/01/why-the-qanon-conspiracy-is-the-natural-culmination-of-the-trump-era/?utm\\_term=.a2251a62d5db](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2018/08/01/why-the-qanon-conspiracy-is-the-natural-culmination-of-the-trump-era/?utm_term=.a2251a62d5db).
- Button, Mark. "Arendt, Rawls, and Public Reason." *Social Theory and Practice* 31, no. 2 (2005): 257–80.
- Calhoun, Craig, ed. "Concluding Remarks." In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 462–80. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992.
- Calhoun, Craig. "Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere." *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 147–71.

- Cane, Lucy. "Hannah Arendt on the Principles of Political Action." *European Journal of Political Theory* 14, no. 1 (2015): 55–75.
- Canovan, Margaret. "The Contradictions of Hannah Arendt's Political Thought." *Political Theory* 6, no. 1 (1978): 5–26.
- . *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- . "Politics as Culture: Hannah Arendt and the Public Realm." In *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays*, edited by Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, 179–205. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- . "Review: The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social by Hanna Fenichel Pitkin." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 3 (September 1999): 619–20.
- Cigna. "Cigna U.S. Loneliness Index: Survey of 20,000 Americans Examining Behaviours Driving Loneliness in the United States," May 2018. [https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/docs/IndexReport\\_1524069371598-173525450.pdf](https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/docs/IndexReport_1524069371598-173525450.pdf).
- Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. "Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourteenth to Seventeenth Periodic Reports of China (Including Hong Kong, China and Macao, China)," September 19, 2018. <http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRiCAqhKb7yhslsn s7vAyg8M3uDZ7rn5ZZMW4psIG8%2fevE%2fZXWBEvcRTevsX4htmWQRmXdLs%2fC29w CxsvSRzNMUUMc2kVpwgZMtPy7CP%2bLMBCCgcm%2fXghaV49BfVszv5rtlelug%2f%2f hbhA%3d%3d>.
- CPAC. *President Trump at VFW Convention*, 2018. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?448868-1/president-trump-urges-supporters-stick-vfw-speech>.
- Curtis, Kimberley F. "Aesthetic Foundations of Democratic Politics in the Works of Hannah Arendt." In *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*, edited by Craig Calhoun and John McGowan. Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997.
- . *Our Sense of the Real: Aesthetic Experience and Arendtian Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- Degryse, Annelies. "*Sensus Communis* as a Foundation for Men as Political Beings: Arendt's Reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*." *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 37, no. 3 (2011): 345–58.
- d' Entreves, Maurizio Passerin. "Hannah Arendt." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2019. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/arendt/>.

- Dietz, Mary G. "Arendt and the Holocaust." In *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, edited by Dana Villa, 86–109. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Durkheim, Émile. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Euben, J. Peter. "Arendt's Hellenism." In *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, edited by Dana Villa, 151–64. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*. Edited by Michael Senellart. Translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Picador, 2010.
- . *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage, 1977.
- . *Security Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*. Edited by Michael Senellart. Translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Picador, 2009.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun, 109–42. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992.
- . *Transnationalizing the Public Sphere*. Edited by Kate Nash. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014.
- Frazer, Elizabeth. "Hannah Arendt: The Risks of the Public Realm." *Critical Review of International and Political Philosophy* 12, no. 2 (2006): 203–23.
- Gaffney, Jennifer. "Another Origin of Totalitarianism: Arendt on the Loneliness of Liberal Citizens." *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 47, no. 1 (2016): 1–17.
- Garsten, Bryan. "The Elusiveness of Arendtian Judgment." In *Politics in Dark Times: Encounters with Hannah Arendt*, edited by Seyla Benhabib, 316–41. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Gibbens, Sarah. "National Parks Face Years of Damage from Government Shutdown." *National Geographic*, January 7, 2019. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/01/why-national-parks-trashed-during-government-shutdown/>.
- Greg, W. W., ed. *Marlowe's Doctor Faustus: 1604~1616*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950.
- Haag, Matthew. "Florida Swat Officer Is Demoted After Wearing QAnon Patch Next to Mike Pence." *The New York Times*, December 4, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/04/us/swat-leader-qanon-patch.html>.
- Habermas, Jürgen. "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere." In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun, 421–61. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992.

- . “Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power.” *Social Research* 44, no. 1 (1977): 3–24.
- . “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article.” *New German Critique*, no. 3 (1974): 49–55.
- . *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989.
- Hanh, Thich Nhat. *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. Translated by Mobi Ho. Boston: Beacon Press, 1987.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
- . *The Essence of Reasons*. Translated by Terrence Malick. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969.
- . “The Origin of the Work of Art.” In *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, edited by David Krell, 139–212. New York: HarperCollins, 2008.
- . “The Question Concerning Technology.” In *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, edited by David Krell, 311–41. New York: HarperCollins, 2008.
- Honig, Bonnie. “Introduction: The Arendt Question in Feminism.” In *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, edited by Bonnie Honig, 1–16. University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.
- . *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Human Rights Watch. “‘Eradicating Ideological Viruses’: China’s Campaign of Repression against Xinjiang’s Muslims,” 2018.  
[https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/china0918\\_web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/china0918_web.pdf).
- Hume, David. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter Millican. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- . *Essays Moral, Political, Literary*. Edited by Eugene F. Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987. <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/704>.
- Hyvönen, Ari-Elmeri. “Tentative Lessons of Experience: Arendt, Essayism, and ‘The Social’ Reconsidered.” *Political Theory* 42, no. 5 (2014): 569–89.
- Isaac, Jeffrey C. “Oases in the Desert: Hannah Arendt on Democratic Politics.” *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 1 (1994): 156–68.

- Jaspers, Karl. *Man in the Modern Age*. Translated by Eden Paul and Cedar Paul. New York: Anchor, 1957.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited and translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Kateb, George. *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil*. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld, 1984.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Fear And Trembling/Repetition*. Edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Kierkegaard's Writings, VI. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- King, Richard H. "Hannah Arendt and American Loneliness." *Society* 50 (2013): 36–40.
- Koestler, Arthur. *Darkness at Noon*. Translated by Daphnae Hardy. New York: Scribner, 2006.
- Kuo, Lily. "'My Soul, Where Are You?': Families of Muslims Missing in China Met with Wall of Silence." *The Guardian*, September 13, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/13/uighur-xinjiang-family-missing-china-kazakhstan>.
- Le Bon, Gustave. *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. Translated by Robert K. Merton. New York: Viking, 1960.
- Lipton, Eric. "Man Motivated by 'Pizzagate' Conspiracy Theory Arrested in Washington Gunfire." *The New York Times*, December 5, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/05/us/pizzagate-comet-ping-pong-edgar-maddison-welch.html>.
- Macready, John Douglas. "Hannah Arendt and the Political Meaning of Human Dignity." *Journal of Social Philosophy* 47, no. 4 (2016): 399–419.
- Markell, Patchen. "Contesting Consensus: Rereading Habermas on the Public Sphere." *Constellations* 3, no. 3 (1999): 377–400.
- McCarthy, Michael H. *The Political Humanism of Hannah Arendt*. Lanham, M.D.: Lexington Books, 2012.
- Mouffe, Chantal. *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. London: Verso, 2013.
- . *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso, 2009.
- Mumford, Lewis. *Technics and Civilization*. New York: Harbinger, 1963.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1966.

- Norris, Andrew. "Arendt, Kant, and the Politics of Common Sense." *Polity* 29, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 165–91.
- Ortega y Gasset, José. *The Revolt of the Masses*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1957.
- Owens, Patricia. "Human Security and the Rise of the Social." *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 3 (2012): 547–67.
- . "Not Life but the World Is at Stake: Hannah Arendt on Citizenship in the Age of the Social." *Citizenship Studies* 16, no. 2 (2012): 297–307.
- Oxford Dictionaries. "Word of the Year 2016 Is..." Accessed March 4, 2019. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016>.
- Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- . "Justice: On Relating Public and Private." *Political Theory* 9, no. 3 (August 1981): 327–52.
- Prime Minister's Office. "PM Launches Government's First Loneliness Strategy," October 15, 2018. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-launches-governments-first-loneliness-strategy>.
- Pulkkinen, Tuija. "Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Philosophy." *Alternatives* 28 (2003): 215–32.
- Regencia, Ted. "Escape from Xinjiang: Muslim Uighurs Speak of China Persecution." *Al Jazeera*, September 10, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/escape-xinjiang-muslim-uighurs-speak-china-persecution-180907125030717.html>.
- Rich, Adrienne. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Les reveries du promeneur solitaire*. Paris: Flammarion, 1964.
- Salmi, Hannu. *Nineteenth-Century Europe: A Cultural History*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008.
- Samuel, Sigal. "Internet Sleuths Are Hunting for China's Secret Internment Camps for Muslims." *The Atlantic*, September 15, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/09/china-internment-camps-muslim-uighurs-satellite/569878/>.
- Sandel, Michael J. *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012.
- Shakespeare, William. "Macbeth." In *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus, 2555–2619. New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.

- Shenker, Israel. "E. B. White: Notes and Comment by Author." *New York Times*, July 11, 1969. <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/03/lifetimes/white-notes.html>.
- Shuster, Martin. "Language and Loneliness: Arendt, Cavell, and Modernity." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 20, no. 4 (n.d.): 473–97.
- Sophocles. "Oedipus the King." In *Greek Tragedies*, edited by David Grene and Richard Lattimore, translated by David Grene, 2nd ed., 1:107–76. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1960.
- Stanley-Becker, Isaac. "'We Are Q': A Deranged Conspiracy Cult Leaps from the Internet to the Crowd at Trump's 'MAGA' Tour." *The Washington Post*, August 1, 2018. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/08/01/we-are-q-a-deranged-conspiracy-cult-leaps-from-the-internet-to-the-crowd-at-trumps-maga-tour/?utm\\_term=.33b03fb8d9ba](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2018/08/01/we-are-q-a-deranged-conspiracy-cult-leaps-from-the-internet-to-the-crowd-at-trumps-maga-tour/?utm_term=.33b03fb8d9ba).
- Stoppard, Tom. *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- Taylor, Charles. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. Edited by Eduardo Nolla. Translated by James T. Schleifer. 2 vols. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010.
- Tolkien, J. R. R. "The Fellowship of the Ring." In *The Lord of the Rings: 50th Anniversary Edition*, 21–407. New York & London: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004.
- Tsao, Roy T. "Arendt Against Athens: Rereading *The Human Condition*." *Political Theory* 30, no. 1 (2002): 97–123.
- Villa, Dana R. *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- . "Hannah Arendt: Modernity, Alienation, and Critique." In *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*, edited by Craig Calhoun and John McGowan, 179–206. Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997.
- . *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- . "Postmodernism and the Public Sphere." *The American Political Science Review* 86, no. 3 (1992): 712–21.
- Walsh, Philip. "The Human Condition as Social Ontology: Hannah Arendt on Sociology, Action and Knowledge." *History of the Human Sciences* 24, no. 2 (2011): 120–37.
- Weber, Max. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Edited and translated by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Wilson, Timothy D., David A. Reinhard, Erin C. Westgate, Daniel T. Gilbert, Nicole Ellerbeck, Cheryl Hahn, Casey L. Brown, and Adi Shaked. "Just Think: The Challenges of the Disengaged Mind." *Science* 345, no. 6192 (July 4, 2014): 75–77. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1250830>.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. London and New York: Routledge, 1974.

Zaretsky, Eli. "Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of the Public/Private Distinction." In *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*, edited by Craig Calhoun, and John McGowan. Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997.