Hannah Arendt's Theory of Political Judgment

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Political Science in the Graduate
School of Duke University.

2014
ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Hannah Arendt's theory of political judgment has been an ongoing perplexity among scholars who have written on her. As a result, her theory of judgment is often treated as a suggestive but unfinished aspect of her thought. Drawing on a wider array of sources than is commonly utilized, I argue that her theory of political judgment was in fact the heart of her work. Arendt's project, in other words, centered around reestablishing the possibility of political judgment in a modern world that historically has progressively undermined it. In the dissertation, I systematically develop an account of Arendt's fundamentally political and non-sovereign notion of judgment. We discover that individual judgment is not arbitrary, and that even in the complex circumstances of the modern world there are valid structures of judgment which can be developed and dependably relied upon. The result of this work articulates a theory of practical reason which is highly compelling: it provides orientation for human agency which does not rob it of its free and spontaneous character; shows how we can improve and cultivate our political judgment; and points the way toward the profoundly intersubjective form of political philosophy Arendt ultimately hoped to develop.
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Chapter One: *Introduction ~ Hannah Arendt's Political Judgment*

*The Question of Political Judgment*

Political judgment is an intrinsic element of all forms of human life with others, and good judgment, although preeminently instrumental is one of the greatest human goods. While there are many other goods that one might rank above it, including peace, justice, virtue, happiness, or liberty, all of these depend in the long run on good political judgment to bring them into being and sustain them. When we elect political leaders, it is good judgment more than anything else that we hope they will exercise: while their political ideology or party affiliation may be a factor or even the key factor in securing our vote, their ideological position will be worthless to us if they lack the judgment to bring that political vision into reality. Moreover, given the increasing interconnectedness, complexity, and centralization of modern societies and economies, the ecological challenges of our times, and the massive destructive power in the hands of our regimes, political judgment today is perhaps more important than ever before. Yet, despite the obvious importance of such judgment, we have a very difficult time understanding exactly what it is. Very often we point to examples of good judgment, as for example in the actions of Lincoln, Mandela, or Martin Luther King, and even more often complain about instances of bad judgment too innumerable to need mentioning; yet, it is difficult for us to put our finger on exactly what made one person effective, while so
many others seem to fail. It is clearly not due to one person simply having more knowledge, since two people may have roughly similar information of a given set of circumstances and still arrive at better and worse judgments about the matter in question. Good judgment seems rather to rest on a certain kind of **insight** into circumstances and an ability to summon up just the right response to that insight: a kind of wisdom or "common sense," that while potentially sharpened by greater knowledge is still something separate from it—a kind of skill or ability to see not only more broadly but more deeply. This is the subject which this dissertation aims to address—or at least to begin addressing, since the topic vastly exceeds the bounds this project.

How then can we define good judgment? 

Following Kant we might define judgment as the ability to subsume particulars under "general rules." While this is a

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simplistic and very abstract account, it captures our basic intuitions about the matter. The most obvious case of such judgment in political life is a judge's ruling in court, deciding whether the particular case before him can be "subsumed" under some law or precedent. However, judgment, when conceived in the arena of politics, seems to extend further than this. When we talk about the proverbial relationship between theory and practice, we are discussing judgment. The fundamental question about this relationship, however, has always been what constitutes "theory," what constitutes "practice," and how are they related? But regardless of how we define them, at the very least we seem to have to understand judgment as, in some sense, the establishment of a relationship of our mental activities with our activities in the actual world. This last characterization, however, is so abstract that it does not give us a great deal of purchase on our question. An analytic approach to this question can perhaps help us to orient ourselves in a general way but it does not give us much to go on. Thus, in what follows I will take another approach, examining the work of a thinker who devoted her life's work to concretely understanding the true nature of this relationship: Hannah Arendt, whose theory of political judgment, I believe, may be perhaps the most significant consideration of the topic since Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. Arendt believed that understanding the nature of political judgment and the sources of its validity required a dramatic rethinking of what theory and practice are, and how they are related to each other. An examination

of her thinking on this matter can help us come to terms with the question of political judgment, and moreover, give us a much deeper view of the role and importance of judgment for politics in the modern era.

**The Significance of Hannah Arendt**

Assessing Hannah Arendt's legacy is an unusually difficult task. She came to prominence with the publication of her first major work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, which was a best-seller and launched her world-wide fame. The work was acclaimed by many as a work of genius, v and Arendt herself joked that she had become a "cover girl" when her photo began appearing on magazine covers. vi Her next book, *The Human Condition*, raised her profile even higher. Yet, despite her undeniable fame, her work has perhaps been less consistently influential than that of figures like Rawls, Strauss, or Habermas. Many have found her work to be more suggestive than definitive, her arguments difficult to follow, and the content of her thought at times, frustratingly obscure. At a conference on her work in 1972, Christian Bay expressed a frustration no doubt common to her readers, saying "I read Hannah Arendt with pleasure, but out of aesthetic pleasure. She is a philosopher's philosopher. I think it is beautiful to follow her prose, her sense of unity in history, and to be reminded of the great things the Greeks

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vi Ibid. p. xxxviii.
have said that are still pertinent today. I think, however...there is a certain lack of seriousness about modern problems in much of her work."

In fact, it appears that a significant part of Arendt's enduring prominence does not depend directly on the ideas in her work. Much of it, instead, relies on the significant connections she had both as a literary figure and as one of the most controversial public intellectuals of her era. According to Irving Howe, her personal charisma made her a significant figure in the intellectual world well before she published anything of true significance. He writes that "while far from 'good-looking' in any commonplace way, Hannah Arendt was a remarkably attractive person, with her razored gestures, imperial eye, dangling cigarette... She bristled with intellectual charm, as if to reduce everyone in sight to an alert discipleship...Whatever room she was in Hannah filled through the largeness of her will; indeed, she always seemed larger than her setting." But it would be a mistake to imagine that her work was not equally if not more important to her enduring fame. Origins is both a basic text of social science research and a touchstone of Cold War politics. The Human Condition had a profound impact on the New Left and Civil Rights movement, similar in importance to that of C. Wright Mills and Herbert Marcuse. And of course the impact that her controversial book on Eichmann had not merely in its own time but in our continuing confrontation with the question of evil in the modern

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world cannot be overlooked. It is perhaps no accident that she is the only major intellectual of the twentieth century who has been the subject of a major motion picture.

Arendt's celebrity, however, has often had adverse consequences for how her thought has come to be perceived. The literary quality of her work at times actually counts against the intellectual seriousness she is attributed. She has often been characterized by the social science community, for example, as one of the literati: brilliantly imaginative, but too little concerned with evidence. Moreover, her unwillingness to always write in a clear and straightforward manner adds to this confusion. There is a deep idiosyncrasy to her writing: almost always in essay form, and generally directed toward particular, specific topics, it thus makes it difficult to see the larger systematic character of her thought. Even her monographs tend to be a series of essays which form something like a conceptual mosaic, rather than a sustained and systematic argument. Her body of work is thus fragmentary, with no comprehensive statement of what holds everything together.

As a result, understanding Arendt is not as simple as interpreting her published work, but instead requires a reconstruction of her thinking from a broader range of sources including her various essays, notes of her lecture courses, unpublished material, and correspondence. When we take these sources into account, it becomes clear that Arendt's work is focused not merely, as is often claimed, on the revival of freedom as political action through participatory citizenship in a public realm, but first and foremost on the revival of political judgment in the modern world. This in not to suggest that
political action was not Arendt's political ideal, but to suggest that the revival of political judgment for Arendt was the answer to the question of how human freedom could be revived in the modern world. In other words, when we pay attention to this centrality of political judgment to Arendt's project, we are able to see the larger unity of her thought and the possibility it represents for reviving human freedom in an era that has come to resent and misunderstand it.

Assessing Arendt's Theory of Political Judgment and its Reception

Arendt's theory of judgment has received significant scholarly consideration in the years since her death, although there is little consensus about its meaning and significance. Moreover, her interest in judgment has inspired many scholars to consider

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the question, building on her insight that Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* can be applied to practical philosophy in general. At the same time, her theory of political judgment has most often been treated as a kind of appendix to her thought—an interesting possible direction which she pointed towards but which remained obscure and incomplete at her death. Given the number of scholarly articles and book chapters it has generated, it is somewhat surprising that only one book has been devoted to the topic, Max Deutscher's *Judgment after Arendt*, and even this book is only tangentially concerned with her theory of judgment in the context of his phenomenological analysis of *The Life of the Mind*. Moreover, this book is not really about her theory of political

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judgment, and in fact completely ignores the political elements of her theory. Given the volume of work on Arendt's theory of judgment, it is perhaps surprising that no real consensus has ever emerged about the meaning of her theory. As recently as 2010, after literally dozens of pieces had been written and published on the topic, Bryan Garsten perhaps summarized this literature best when he wrote that "we cannot avoid confronting the fact that while her theory of judgment is suggestive it is also notoriously difficult to understand…\textsuperscript{xii}

There are several texts that scholars typically focus on in their efforts to reconstruct her theory: the two essays in \textit{Between Past and Future} dealing with the question of judgment and her lectures on Kant’s political philosophy.\textsuperscript{xiii} The theory takes its starting point from her observation that what is commonly understood as Kantian political philosophy was not very well developed and possibly not even seriously believed by Kant himself.\textsuperscript{xiv} Arendt claims that—Kant’s authentic political philosophy can only be found in the \textit{Critique of Judgment}, even though he may not have recognized this fact. While this claim at first seemed somewhat outlandish, it has increasingly gained credibility, and not just among Arendt scholars and sympathizers, but among

\textsuperscript{xiv} Arendt, \textit{Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy}, pp. 7-10,
philosophers who are more interested in using the third *Critique* for moral and political philosophies that are not directly related to Arendt's thought.\textsuperscript{xv}

Arendt’s idea for interpreting Kant in this way is rooted in her own political philosophy, which is outlined in *The Human Condition*. There, she takes a hermeneutic position in respect to human agency, arguing that it is always engaged—always “conditioned,” as she calls it—by background conditions, which she defines drawing on Heidegger's account of “being-in-the-world.” As a result, human agency is concerned chiefly with how things show up within this worldly context; human agency, in other words, is concerned with “appearances.” This means that when we act in the world, we have no time to consider scientific, moral, spiritual, or any other deeper kinds of issue which cause or give meaning to our acts. This is not to say that these factors do not inform our actions; only that when we act, these conditions are in the "background," influencing our decisions, and not a part of the "foreground," of our activity. As a result, any discussion we have about the world and appearances in the world can only take the form of *doxa* or opinion, and in any difference of opinion we cannot demand assent from others as we would in the activity of cognition. Rather, we can only woo their consent through persuasion. Therefore, Arendt argued that in order to understand Kant’s true political theory we should turn to Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgment, since it is the only part of his critical philosophy concerned explicitly with judging phenomena qua phenomena.

\textsuperscript{xv} See note xiii.
Arendt makes a series of claims about the phenomenological structure of political judgment drawing chiefly on the sections in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* which are concerned with taste, *sensus communis*, and genius. She claims that because political actors are always located at different locations in the world and thus always operate from differing perspectives, judgment involves what Kant called an “enlarged mentality.” This means that whenever we judge, we implicitly take into account the perspectives of other actors, and indeed that the best political judgment is capable of taking in the widest variety of perspectives. The capacity to do this is called *sensus communis* or common sense. However, there are important restrictions on these claims. This is not an empirically conditioned theory, or as Arendt says, this is not “counting noses”: it is a 'common sense' conditioned feeling of evaluation which does not directly take note of other individual judgments when it judges, but instead reflects on a more broad-minded position one has gained that is distinct from our subjective private interests.\(^{xvi}\) Furthermore, we do not “identify” with others through empathy when we take on the enlarged mentality. And as with any theory of taste, Arendt believes that not everyone has taste—or at least has cultivated their sense of taste. She believes that the judgment which employs enlarged mentality looks at things from the perspective only of other judges who have or would have demonstrated exemplary taste and judgment, and uses those examples of good judgment to cultivate the enlarged mentality on which it reflects when it judges.

This theory has been the target of significant criticism. George Kateb and Seyla Benhabib have criticized her theory for an apparent amorality. Kateb argues that Arendt's interest in her theory of judgment is an "aestheticization of politics." In contrast to many of her interpreters who see her use of The Critique of Aesthetic Judgment as attempt to apply an aesthetically inspired theory to fundamentally political phenomena, Kateb suggests that in the end she is really only trying to turn politics into aesthetics. In other words, Kateb believes that Arendt's political ideals are fundamentally aesthetic ideals—that for Arendt there are no political evaluations that are essentially political, but all are in the end simply aesthetic. He believes she was driven to this because she sought to distinguish political phenomena from "the practical, the moral, and the universally true." Kateb does not see any other form of evaluative activity in Arendt, and so he argues that she must have believed that political evaluations are—it would appear by default—simply aesthetic evaluations. He writes, "Political involvements, when taken in the right spirit (and this proviso is of fundamental importance) are not primarily practical or moral, nor do they take their bearings from abstract and universal truth." This assertion that politics must be "taken in the right spirit" is the basis for his conclusion that Arendt "subordinates morality" to politics, and thus by extension to aesthetics. Working mainly from the essay "What is Freedom," Kateb claims that this "right spirit" means "to act for the sake of exemplifying a passion," or "for the sake of displaying one's political

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xxv Ibid, p. 122.
skills" (i.e. virtù)," or "for the sake of the exhilaration of action." As a result, Kateb argues that Arendt's theory of political judgment place too much weight on what amounts to existential standards of judgment, and that it thus becomes dangerously amoral. Benhabib echoes this concern. She finds Arendt guilty of relativism and irrationality in normative contexts. Arendt, as we will see, draws a strict separation between morality and politics: morality being a concern with the integrity of the self, while politics is a concern with the world we have in common. Benhabib, however, denies that this separation is possible, for this would mean that political institutions would not be open to criticisms from the perspectives of universal human rights. Benhabib argues that there is a "normative lacuna" in Arendt's thought, and "a resistance on her part to justificatory political discourse, to the attempt to establish the rationality and validity of our beliefs in human rights, human equality…"

Jürgen Habermas, Peter J. Steinberger, and others have develop a similar line of critique, focusing on Arendt's claim that political judgments are non-cognitive, and that politics demands that we maintain a strict distinction between truth-claims and opinions or political judgments. These scholars find this distinction problematic because it...

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means that Arendt's theory of judgment would then be irrational. Without some kind of cognitive (i.e., knowledge-based) relationship between the competing arguments, there can be no way of deciding which argument is right, and no way of fully understanding what any interlocutor means or claims. By drawing a distinction between truth and political opinion, Habermas, for instance, believes that Arendt creates an rational gap between the different political opinions of various groups and individuals that can only be bridged if we presuppose some kind of truthful relationship between the judges involved. He argues that Arendt has an "antiquated concept of theoretical knowledge" which leads to "a yawning abyss between knowledge and opinion that cannot be closed with arguments."xxiv

A different line of criticism comes from Ronald Beiner and Richard Bernstein, who argue that there appears to be a fundamental contradiction in Arendt's theory of judgment.xxxv Bernstein, for instance, argues that there is a deep tension between two different contexts in which judgment seems to appear in Arendt's work: in politics and in intellectual life.xxxvi He argues that in essays such as "The Crisis of Culture," judgment seems to appear in a more prospective capacity, as a kind of practical wisdom like virtù or phronesis. To be sure, it still has classic Arendtian attributes: it is focused on debate and deliberation in the public realm, and seems in its adoption of Kantian judgment to avoid directly accommodating teleological components. Nevertheless, Arendt does say

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xxiv Ibid, pp. 22-23.
that it involves "judging and deciding" in debate among one's political peers. However, only a few years later in *The Life of the Mind*, judgment takes on a very different sense, according to Bernstein. She places much less emphasis on its prospective qualities, and much more on its retrospective aspects. Judgment in the later works becomes a matter of contemplation, of passing judgment on what has already happened. In his "Interpretative Essay" to *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Beiner agrees with Bernstein's position, claiming that there is no other conclusion to be drawn than that Arendt simply had two completely different theories of judgment: an earlier, more political and practical one, and a later contemplative and retrospective one. Bernstein, for his part sees in this "a deep tension between acting and thinking," evident throughout her work, which she never reconciled. He does not, however, see this tension as an error or logical flaw in her work. Noting Arendt's comments on Marx to the effect that flagrant contradictions in the thought of great thinkers should not be held against them, but should be recognized as at the core of their originality, Bernstein suggests that Arendt's concern was less with maintaining a systematic theory, than with being true to her observations and research.

This observation of an apparent duality in Arendt's theory of judgment led Beiner to another line of criticism. He argued Kant's account of judgment in *The Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* is an explicitly reflective activity, and as result has no structural capacity to accommodate teleological judgments. While it is of course perfectly

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appropriate to articulate a non-teleological account of judgment in the context of the human capacity to reflect on the beautiful, politics inevitably involves purposes. In an article revisiting the lectures several years after their publication, he summarizes his critique saying that "...my criticism of her Kant lectures is that as an account of the power of judgment, her exclusive attachment to Kant is partial and one-sided, for she failed to appreciate that the capacity for making reasonable judgments, without reliance upon already available rules or algorithms, and aiming at intersubjective validity, is not restricted to one side (the spectator's side) of Arendt's distinction between the doers who act and the critic who watches and reflects." In essence, Beiner's concern is that within Kant's aesthetic theory there seems to be no account given of how political actors, who inevitably will have purposes, can exercise judgment with the same sort of intersubjective validity as the judging spectator. As a result, Arendt's account of political judgment, particularly in the Kant lectures, appears to be inadequate or, at best, incomplete.

Finally, a number of other critics also have problems with the Kantian framework of Arendt's theory of judgment. Andrew Norris focuses on the crucial concept of common sense that Arendt borrows from Kant. He argues that there are fundamental problems with how Arendt interprets Kant's concept of sensus communis and in turn with her account of its relation to politics. As a result, he argues that her use of Kant's aesthetic theory cannot be sustained. When the problems with this misinterpretation are


fully appreciated, any philosophical *a priori* justification becomes untenable. Norris thus argues that Arendt's theory is at best "suggestive," but lacking any true philosophical standing.\[^{xxxii}\] Peter Steinberger, working along similar lines, is even more critical, claiming that Arendt's use of the third *Critique* in this way ultimately ends in the very real potential for "nihilism" in her politics.\[^{xxxiii}\]

Clearly, Arendt's theory of judgment has been subject to a variety of critiques, and we can consequently hardly help admitting that if all of this criticism were true, the study of her theory of political judgment would be doomed before the start. In the following chapters, however, I will argue that none of these critiques is finally dispositive, and that in many ways they do not fully understand how Arendt's theory of judgment fits into her work as a whole. Kateb and Benhabib, for instance, are correct in claiming that Arendt draws a sharp distinction between morality and politics, but they fail to recognize that in doing so Arendt moved many of the functions they associate with moral theorizing into the activity of political judgment. In truth, what Arendt really does is expand the scope of politics and shrink the scope of morality, but in ways that still preserve much of what concerns these critics.\[^{xxxiv}\] The only real "normative lacuna" is simply Arendt's aversion to rationalist justifications of universal norms: Arendt (like the later Rawls) repeatedly recognized the historical contingency of Western norms such as equality. Her concern was with the ultimate worth of these norms. The modern notion of universal equality in


\[^{xxxiv}\] The question of how Arendt dealt with moral versus political phenomena is a complex question. I return to it in the conclusion of the dissertation, but suffice it to say, while Arendt's work is not as troubling as these critics present it to be, it remained equivocal and underdeveloped throughout her work.
her view has its roots in an understanding of human beings as laboring animals, which moreover had been thoroughly undermined by World War II. She believed that abstract ideals of universal equality such as human rights were too abstract, too open to the equivocations and doubletalk of bureaucrats and political leaders, and to the self-serving interpretations of ideological movements. She sought to replace this ideal with something concrete and historically determinate: that human beings had 'the right to have rights'—the right to citizenship in a particular, concrete political community. 

As for Habermas, et al's worries about the distinction Arendt draws between truth and political opinion, Arendt is on much firmer ground than they think. Arendt believed that it was crucial to draw the distinction between these two different modes of asserting validity, and that the failure to do so had been at the roots of many of the political pathologies of the past century. But to simply draw this distinction does not imply that there is an "abyss" between knowledge and opinion for Arendt: she certainly never says there is, and it is unclear where Habermas gets the idea that Arendt believed there was one. She simply believed that these are two different activities which complement one another, but which must be sharply distinguished. The activity of truth-telling must be kept out of politics, and we see every day on cable news the problems that arise when truth-claims become politicized.

In the case of Beiner's concern with the lack of teleology in Kantian aesthetics, this criticism seems to be completely unjustified. Arendt relies on Kant's discussion the

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xxxvi This point is developed at length in the second section of chapter eight.
relationship between taste and genius in order to illustrate how judgment relates to action. Beiner is in a certain sense correct to claim that there is no teleological element in aesthetic judgment, but he ignores the fact that Kant simply relocated this element to the capacities for creativity and spontaneity found in genius and action. By appealing to the structure of Kantian aesthetics, Arendt in fact emerges with a theory of political judgment and action which is much less muddled and preserves much more room for human freedom and creativity than a theory of phronesis. This fact also addresses Bernstein's concern that there is a fundamental conflict between the actor and the judge, and Beiner's argument that there was a prospective early theory of judgment and a retrospective later theory of judgment. Arendt simply located the prospective, deliberative elements of her theory in the human capacity for action, while she located the reflective element in the capacity for judgment.

Finally, critics such as Norris who suggest that Arendt's use of Kantian sensus communis is flawed to a certain extent have a point. Nevertheless, their conclusions go too far: even if the initial deduction of sensus communis in SS20-21 cannot be directly applied to politics as Norris claims, this does not necessarily mean that Arendt cannot appeal to the same phenomenological validity she appeals to in other aspects of her work such as her various articulations of the vita activa or vita contemplativa. In other words, even if Arendt abandoned the formal deduction—and it appears she did sometime after

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This point is dealt with at length in chapter seven.

See chapter five for more on this point. In essence, the chapter argues that Arendt's strong conception of agency meant that politics and history were essentially co-terminus, and that Arendt always understood them to be so. Thus, Beiner cannot be right that Arendt had to theories of judgment and view one prospectively in terms of politics, and the other retrospectively in terms of history.
1964—she could still claim that any possible political experience demands a capacity for common sense in terms which closely resemble Kantian sensus communis as it is articulated in the rest of the third Critique. Such a claim is not merely "suggestive" as Norris claims. Indeed, on this view any phenomenological argument would have to be considered merely "suggestive." xxxix

Previous work on political judgment thus has not exhausted the topic and in many ways has been mistaken about what political judgment is for Arendt and how it functions in her thought. More recent work gives it a somewhat more significant place, but generally speaking, this seems mainly intended to recognize the fact that so many Arendt scholars have addressed the topic in various journals; political judgment in these later monographs is still addressed in the same kind of appendix-like fashion. Margaret Canovan's book devotes only three pages to the topic in a section devoted to Arendt's account of 'thinking'. xi Dana Villa gives it more prominence and while he does not give it the kind of centrality I will be arguing for, he does recognize that it plays a key role in explaining Arendt's account of the relation to aesthetic experience and politics. Nevertheless, judgment still operates at best in an auxiliary role here. xli Benhabib gives the concept more attention, yet only at the end of her book with little effort to connect the theory of judgment to Arendt's broader political theory. Benhabib treats it, rather, as

xxxix Chapter seven deals with Norris' critique in more depth.
xli Dana Villa, Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political, Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ (1996), pp. 102-107. Consulting the index shows that judgment's entry is five lines long, while action's entry is in excess of twenty-five lines.
having interesting but problematic possibilities, for which she turns to Habermas for help in solving.\footnote{Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt, New Edition*, pp. 172-215.}

In what follows, I will argue that Arendt's theory of political judgment was the central core of her political thought, and that understanding it correctly makes it possible for us to grasp the systematic thread that runs through her diverse body of work. However, while this theory of judgment can give us a substantial push in the right direction, it cannot fully resolve all of the difficulties involved in interpreting Arendt. Along with the focus on political judgment, this study draws on a wide range of sources that have been heavily underutilized in the literature on Arendt. Once these sources are taken into account, many of the historical and theoretical gaps that have perplexed her readers and made her theory of political judgment difficult to understand are resolved. The reason for the underuse of these sources is mainly that until recently they were not easily accessible. One of the secondary goals of this dissertation is to provide a roadmap of sorts for engaging with these lesser known sources. The only other book to make serious use of these sources was Margaret Canovan's *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought*. While it was a fine interpretation of Arendt, it was plagued by two major difficulties. One is that at the time of its publication in 1992, the underutilized sources she used could only be accessed through on-site archival research, and as a result the usefulness of the book was limited because her readers could not refer to these sources. Now that the Library of Congress holdings are available electronically and various other writings and correspondences have be published posthumously, access to
her sources is much easier. The second problem, however, is that although Canovan did pay attention to these materials, she did not recognize the centrality of political judgment that in my view they make explicit.

As recently as 2012, Michael H. McCarthy claimed that "her account of the intelligible connection between thought and action remains obscure…Although practical wisdom is the supreme political virtue, Arendt is surprisingly silent about it."\textsuperscript{xliii} My claim, in fact, is that virtually all Arendt did was examine the nature of this relationship between thought and action, that Arendt's political thought should be understood as always fundamentally concerned with understanding the true relationship between theory and practice.\textsuperscript{xliv} For Arendt it was the consistent misunderstanding of this relationship that lay at the heart of the failure of modern revolutionaries to refound freedom in the modern world and that consequently led them into totalitarian politics. She was convinced that only by authentically reconceiving this relationship could we escape the political pathologies of the modern world. In her attempt to confront this relationship anew, Arendt made a crucial distinction throughout her work between what she calls "common sense" and "common sense reasoning," each of which characterizes a faculty of human beings around which Western politics has at various times organized itself. Common sense is what she refers to as a kind of sixth sense that fits us into our


\textsuperscript{xliv} To my knowledge, the only time this has been suggested as a way to understand Arendt's thought as a whole was by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's "Reflections on Hannah Arendt's \textit{The Life of the Mind}," in \textit{Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays}, Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, eds., SUNY Press: New York (1994), and in Canovan, \textit{Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought}, pp. 255ff.
community and world. While its existence cannot be demonstrated empirically, Arendt (along with Heidegger, Kant, and many others) believed that it had to be presupposed in order to account for our ability to live together and operate in a common human world. Common sense reasoning, on the other hand, is based on the structure of the human mind, and the attempt to utilize it to organize politics was a uniquely modern phenomenon, although the idea to do so originated in the ancient world. For Arendt, the question whether the relation of theory and practice is a political one or not depends on whether we interpret this relationship from the perspective of the common sense or of common sense reasoning. When humans rely on common sense reasoning in political life, politics is conceived in terms of sovereignty and rulership, and political judgment is understood by analogy to the fabrication process. When humans rely on common sense in political life, politics is conceived in what she called "non-sovereign" political categories based in human plurality and worldliness.

Arendt believed common sense reasoning had dominated the understanding of the relationship between theory and practice since shortly after the emergence of modern science. The sources of modernity's misinterpretation of theory and practice had been overdetermined: first, through the great prestige of modern science in our world; and second, through the prominence achieved by the tradition of political thought after the rise of modern revolutionary activity. Both of these elements of our politics reinforced what she referred to as a "fabricative" understanding of the relationship between theory and practice which understood political action as the execution of an preconceived model of political activity in the mind of a political ruler and theorist. As a result, politics is
conceived in our era in terms of what she considered "sovereignty," which for her meant that political relationships and political action in our world, whether we recognize it or not, always operate under the principle of rulership. Because of the principle of rulership, thought and action had, in her words, "parted company," meaning that their relationship entailed a relationship between a ruler as the one who conceived political acts, and those she rules over who carry them out. Of course, the ruler may carry out her own political actions, but Arendt's point is that it is not essential that she do so: in the fabricative analogy of politics, it is not essential that the one who acts be the one who thinks and judges. While this fabricative model may appear intuitive and relatively harmless to inhabitants of the modern world, she believed it had had far-reaching negative consequences for the politics of our civilization.

In responding to this situation, she sought to understand what theory and practice authentically were, and how they could be related to each other in a way that escaped the problematic aspects of the fabrication analogy. As Arendt began to examine what thought and action actually were, she came to the conclusion that they could not be understood to be related to each other in such an obvious and simplistic manner. To begin with, she concluded that in order to deal with the relation of thought and action, it was necessary to view them more broadly within the framework of activities as a whole that included thought and action. This entailed providing an account of the two distinct spheres of experience where they were located, what she called the *vita contemplativa*, the life of the mind, and the *vita activa*, the life of worldly activity. The fabrication analogy of politics had in fact appealed to activities within these two distinct spheres
which were not political: from the *vita activa*, it appealed to the activity of work, which always understands and defines itself in terms of the means/ends category; while from the *vita contemplativa*, it appealed to the mysterious faculty of contemplation which had been the origin and inspiring ideal of the philosophical way of life. Neither of these activities were essentially political, because they had no essential relationship to what Arendt referred to as the political conditions of human life. Such political conditions included the fact that humans are plural beings, that is each is unique and *sui generis*, and each experience existence as unique life stories which are essential conditioned by speech, living in a common world which separates and relates them. This relationship to a common world is only possible through common sense.

Once these political conditions are taken into account, Arendt believed that the fabricative model of political judgment becomes untenable. The role that thought and action play in relation to each other is shown to have nothing to do with executing models, but rather with how we come to have a narrative form of existence which can find its place among other stories in a common world. What allows our stories to be related to each other and to the common world is a third faculty, the faculty of judgment, whose essential structure is the common sense which orients us in the common world. All of these political conditions meant for her that there could be no sovereign relationship between thought and action, that the one who thought and judged had to be the same as the one who acted. Politics had to be conducted in the mode typical of the ancient citizenship, which involved rulership only in emergency situations, and otherwise was always conducted in the mode of persuasion. Good political judgment arose when
one was exposed to as many political points of view as possible, and having taken in
these opinions, forming an enlarged and broad-minded opinion for oneself. But judgment
had to be rendered by citizens deliberating and participating together in the management
of public affairs, and could never be a matter of giving and receiving orders.

Thus, my central argument is that Arendt understood there to be two kinds of
judgment involved in politics, only one of which was truly political—i.e., always
essentially a political activity—while the other was only contingently related to politics,
and could never provide standards for political action. Though Arendt never specifically
calls them this, for my purposes I want to refer to these two modes of judgment as non-
sovereign political judgment and sovereign judgment. In using these terms, I am seeking
to indicate that sovereign forms of activities can never be truly political, that any truly
political judgment has to be non-sovereign, to have derived from the political conditions
of human life. Sovereign judgment involves any kind of judgment which is the result of
the work activity which utilizes the means/ends category. For Arendt, this includes
sovereign violence such as policing and war-fighting, administration, and the intellectual
establishment of truth claims, whether factual or rational. These activities, while
certainly relevant to politics, do not involve political judgment in their explicit
performance. Non-sovereign political judgment, by contrast, is judgment which
determines whether these activities should be performed in the first place, and what their
meaning for the community was after they have been completed. Of course at this point
all of this is quite abstract, and it will be my task in the coming pages to give it
concreteness by showing how it makes sense of Arendt's work and what that work reveals about political life.

**The Plan of the Study**

There are two major aspects of Arendt's work that I will focus on in what follows. The first involves understanding her analysis of the nature and history of Western politics. This broad historical background informed all of her work—an understanding of Western history which was in many important ways unique—and therefore must be pieced together from the various sources available. The second aspect involves understanding how she saw her thought to be a response to this history, what we might call her productive project. In *The Human Condition* and elsewhere, Arendt clearly seems to be engaged in something more than a diagnosis of modern political pathologies, something which suggests she understood her work to have a propaedeutic character as a preparation for a positive political project that she never clearly spelled out. As a result, the first part of this study will focus on the problems which arose as a result of modern Western civilization's pathological misunderstanding of politics and political judgment in terms of sovereignty; and the second part will consist in a reconstruction of Arendt's productive project which aimed to revive the non-sovereign political judgment of true citizens in a modern world where it has become increasingly rare and ambiguous.
The first part of the project in chapters 2-4 seeks to understand the deep political philosophical problem that Arendt saw at the heart of modernity's problems. Chapter 2 seeks to fill an important gap in the literature on Arendt. It works to reconstruct her account of the development of Western civilization's politics, and the elements existing within and alongside it which would ultimately contribute to the development of modernity's sovereign forms of political judgment. I examine how Arendt understood philosophy and politics to have been the original instance of the parting of ways of thought and action, in that their origins in ancient Greece showed that the two activities understood themselves to be two distinct and separate ways of achieving immortality. Philosophy pursued this goal through the profoundly unpolitical experience of contemplation, while politics pursued it through the activities of citizenship in the polis, what she called political action: action performed in an authentic public realm. Arendt argued that the notion that there could any relationship between the activities of philosophy and politics was an innovation developed by the philosophers in response to the threat they perceived politics to pose to their way of life. From out of this conjunction, Plato and his intellectual descendants formulated a fabricative model of sovereign political judgment. Arendt claimed that this model had little actual impact on the development of Western political life, but was instead superimposed over the Romans' authentic form of non-sovereign political action and judgment, which was different from political action as understood by the Greeks. The Romans in her view in the Republican period were able to establish a civilization that lasted for millennia
because of an expansive conception of legislation and foreign policy, a conservative form of political judgment, and a foundation in the trinity of religion, tradition, and authority.

Chapter 3 presents an interpretation of her account of the rise of modernity and its pathologies. I examine Arendt's account of the way in which modern science both undermined the notion of authority that grew out of the Roman trinity and provided a new but fundamentally flawed political foundations for Western civilization. As modern science gained prestige in Western politics, the activities which had always been assumed to be the freest, thought and action, were rendered nearly irrelevant by the process-driven character of the modern scientific outlook, an outlook that by its very nature could only define human beings in political life as laboring and consuming animals, the *animal laborans*. The result of this new perspective was a society that held distinctions and inequalities among its members in contempt, giving birth to a public realm which she called "the social realm": a realm that did not offer the opportunity which previous public realms had afforded of displaying one's unique identity through action, but instead demanded conformity and hypocrisy from its members. In this context, political judgment was naturally conceived in terms of fabrication, as the modeling and organization of a society of laborers in order to ensure the smooth functioning of production and consumption.

Chapter 4 examines Arendt's account of the failure of the revolutionary attempts to respond to these pathologies and the consequences of those failures. Modern revolutionary activity was a form of political action which sought to refound the public
realm after the collapse of the authority that had been rooted in the Roman tradition which had been undermined by modern science. However, the mode of political judgment the revolutionaries appealed to was not authentic political judgment, but rather the inauthentic and sovereignty-oriented mode of judging that had grown out of the political philosophical tradition. This mistake was the reason for their failure to refound freedom in the modern world. Instead they gave birth to ideological thinking and an ideological politics which understood political action in terms of the progress of the human species toward various obscurely defined political goals. I then show how this ideological mode of political thinking eventually mutated into the phenomenon of totalitarian politics by explaining its roots in a theory of modern nihilism. Arendt in this way showed how the modern technically conditioned world ultimately produced a nihilistic, totalitarian politics that finally and fully left behind the old Western political world.

The second part of the study in chapters 5-8 attempts to reconstruct Arendt's productive project, showing how it was fundamentally directed toward reviving the capacity for non-sovereign political judgment in the modern world. Chapter 5 acts as a bridge chapter between the first and second parts. In it I address concerns that readers might have about the status and justification for the historical claims Arendt made in the previous chapters, and present the theoretical foundation for the following chapters. I focus primarily on the crucial importance of the thought of Martin Heidegger for Arendt's theory of political judgment. As Arendt's most important philosophical mentor, Heidegger showed her a distinctive approach to historical and ontological analysis, and a
wide range of politically fertile concepts such as worldliness, conditioning, action, plurality, narrative agency ("historicity"), speech, and common sense ("being-in"). However, it was Arendt's departures from and critique of Heidegger as she rearticulated these concepts—particularly on the concept of "historicity," i.e., the narrative nature of human agency and historiography—which defined her approach. Arendt's strong conception of human agency meant that concrete history and politics had to be carefully treated by political theory. Moreover, the political conditions of human life—particularly plurality, worldliness, and common sense—meant that no position of political sovereignty could ever truly be achieved by human beings.

Chapter 6 explains why we should understand judgment, as the bridge between thought and action, to be the central focus of Arendt's productive project. I show here that Arendt clearly saw her two major theoretical works, *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind*, as elements of a single project. However, I argue that she did not understand these two works to have exhausted the project, that there still remained another to be written which explained the relationship between the two works worked at various times worked on this project. In this way I am able to show that the goal of Arendt's productive project—from its earliest articulations which preceded *The Human Condition* to well into her research and work on *The Life of the Mind*—was to understand the true relationship between thought and action. By understanding this relationship, Arendt hoped to begin the process of understanding for the first time what an authentic political philosophy would look like, i.e., to understand the true relationship between philosophy and politics.
Chapter 7 considers her theory of political judgment. I show how she believed it to have resolved the question of the relationship between thought and action, and thus of philosophy to politics. I examine the development of this theory, explaining the problems she uncovered in her earlier, Heideggerian approach that focused on phronesis. I then show how and why she turned to Kant’s aesthetic theory as a more authentic foundation for political judgment. She made use of Kant in an attempt to provide political judgment with a distinctive inter-subjective validity that she called "impartiality." At the same time, she adopted this Kantian idea of judgment in order to explain the progressive improvement of judgment and its involvement with spontaneous human agency. All of this was possible because humans possessed a unique political faculty: common sense. Finally, I explain how she understood the relationship between thought, action, and judgment to lead to a profoundly inter-subjective form of political philosophy that literally can only be practiced in deliberation with one's fellow citizens, and that can never take up a sovereign relationship of truth in relation to the political world and the judgments of one's fellow citizens.

Chapter 8 brings the reconstruction of Arendt's productive project to a conclusion. It consists of three sections that are intended to progressively defend and make more intuitive Arendt's theory of political judgment and its role in her productive project. The first section is an interpretation of her concept of non-sovereign agency. I argue that non-sovereign agency is the kind of agency which results from Arendt's recognition of the narrative character of human existence, and then work out the implications of this claim and explain its relevance to politics. In the second section, I explain the nature of the
non-sovereign political judgment associated with this non-sovereign agency. This conception of judgment differs from sovereign judgment and adopts a stance that is critical of the tradition of political thought. I argue that Arendt fully recognized the importance of both forms of judgment, but nevertheless believed that they must be kept distinct from one another. Moreover, she was convinced that only non-sovereign judgment was truly political because only non-sovereign judgment appealed to the faculty of common sense which allows us to take in the perspectives of our fellow citizens. Section three concludes my interpretation of the productive project that Arendt believed would help to reestablish non-sovereign agency in modern political life. Arendt believed that the modern practice of Western politics drew its political language from three sources: the Greeks, the Romans, and the modern revolutionaries. I examine what she believed each of these political elements could teach us about the possibility of authentic political action and citizenship in the modern world, but suggest that she was convinced none of them were up to the task of refounding an authentic political life. I argue then in conclusion that Arendt believed that non-sovereign political judgment was the key political element that was necessary in any attempt to refound political freedom in the modern world. Non-sovereign political judgment would allow citizens to practice an authentic political philosophy with one another, and in this way supply the key ingredient for the revival of an authentic political existence in the modern world.
Chapter Two: Arendt on the Traditional Era of Western Politics

Arendt's Conditions of Political Judgment

Understanding Hannah Arendt's theory of political judgment requires understanding the role that theory of judgment played in a specific historical narrative she had developed about the emergence and decline of Western politics and political freedom: as I've said previously, when placed at the center of Arendt's thought, her theory of judgment allows us to gain a much better grasp of the unity of her historical narrative of Western politics. In this chapter, addressing an aspect of her thought that is far too much neglected in the literature on Arendt, I examine what she believed she had learned, both about the history and nature of Western politics' traditional civilization, and about how political actors judged and acted in the context of that civilization. Patchen Markell and Dean Hammer have addressed aspects of this portion of Arendt's thought: Markell has written on Arendt's critique of the tradition of political thought, while Hammer has examined the role of Roman politics in her work.¹ In this chapter, I work to unify the aspects of Arendt's thought these theorists are addressing by reconstructing the role these elements of her work played in her broader theory of political judgment. In the following two chapters, I explain her genealogy of how this 2500 year old civilization, a near

universally recognized marvel of political stability, came crashing in upon itself in the first half of the twentieth century, creating bizarre disparities between cause and effect which, politically speaking, utterly perplexed the inhabitants of the modern world and prompted them to abandon what was traditionally understood as the faculty of political judgment. While this has been examined in the Arendt literature, what not been recognized is the central role that the various misinterpretations of judgment given by scientifically conditioned modern culture and the tradition of political thought played in the fall of Western civilization. These chapters remedy this gap in the literature.

Reflecting on the milieu which she and her fellow members of the "lost generation" had inhabited prior to the political turmoil of the 1930's, Arendt wrote:

My early intellectual formation occurred in an atmosphere where nobody paid much attention to moral questions...Das Moralische versteht sich von selbst, moral conduct is a matter of course. I still remember quite well my own youthful opinion of the moral rectitude we usually call character; all insistence on such virtue would have appeared to me as Philistine...We did not know much about the nature of these phenomena, and I am afraid we cared even less. Well, it turned out that we would be given ample opportunity to learn."

This was not just an off-hand remark in a moment of nostalgia. Arendt was trying to illustrate the fact that once upon a time responsible, intelligent people were so complacent and secure in the stable moral structures of their civilization, that they did not feel a need to question the value of those moral structures. As she notes, it was not long before she and her contemporaries were given a traumatic lesson in the worth of the stability of that civilization and its morality. Arendt elaborated this point somewhat

\[\text{Arendt, "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship," pp. 22-23.}\]
during a colloquium that she chaired for *Christianity and Crisis* in 1966, entitled “Remarks on ‘The Crisis Character of Modern Society’.”iii Quoting Tocqueville’s statement that “the past ceases to throw light upon the future, and the mind of man wanders in obscurity,” Arendt claimed that the series of crises which the members of the colloquium had witnessed up to that point in the twentieth century were symptomatic of a general crisis of the modern world. The realities of our world are now “enormously changed and daily changing,” regularly giving birth to “unprecedented developments.” “If,” she remarked, “the series of crises in which we have lived since the beginning of the century can teach us anything at all, it is, I think, the simple fact that there are no general standards to determine our judgments unfailingly, no general rules under which to subsume the particular cases with any degree of certainty.” The habit, she believed, of subsuming particular cases under general rules has “died much slower than the old rules that once had been held valid,” but it is a habit we must now break. We must, she believed, find a way to deal with these crises and unprecedented developments without “trusting the validity of the so-called lessons of history.” Doing so “is difficult and uncomfortable, but it also contains great challenges and perhaps even promises.” Her hope ultimately was that from “out of this turmoil of being confronted with reality without the help of precedent, that is, of tradition and authority, there will finally arise some new code of conduct.” In essence, Arendt was arguing here that the modern world no longer presents reliable orienting conditions for the exercise of political judgment.

iii “Remarks on ‘The Crisis Character of Modern Society’,” *Christianity and Crisis*, 26:6 (May 30, 1966), pp.112-114. Acknowledgements go to Margaret Canovan’s *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought* for pointing me to this source. There are a variety of other sources which her book also pointed me to.
We can no longer trust the old prejudices and traditions that were so effective in orienting our judgment through most of the history of Western civilization.

To begin to understand why this is so, we must address what prejudices meant to Arendt. She writes that "the prejudices that we share, that we take to be self-evident, that we can toss out in conversation without any lengthy explanations, are themselves political in the broadest sense of the word—that is, something that constitutes an integral part of those human affairs that are the context in which we go about our daily lives." Thus, if prejudices are "political in the broadest sense of the word," what is politics? Her most terse statement of the meaning of politics comes in "Introduction into Politics," when she says simply that "the meaning of politics is freedom." But this terse statement presupposes a broad theoretical framework for Arendt. Politics, as she understands it, involves literally all the conditions for humanity's highest possibilities of being in the world, finding their expression in human freedom or action. Arendt, in other words, believes that to understand the meaning of politics, we must understand its conditions—and those conditions are extremely broad, entailing nothing less than the human condition as such.

Arendt described these conditions in *The Human Condition*. In the first section, entitled “Vita Activa and the Human Condition,” she writes that “men, no matter what they do, are always conditioned beings.” There are three fundamental conditions to

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which human beings, as conditioned beings, are subject: the natural necessity of the life process, the worldly human artifice, and the condition of plurality (i.e., the fundamental uniqueness of each human being). Corresponding to each of these conditions are, respectively, the three essential human activities: labor, work, and action. Labor is the activity humans perform in order to survive because they are driven by natural necessity. Work establishes a bulwark against natural necessity, which allows a space for humans to escape labor and to act freely. Action establishes relationships among human beings, which collectively becomes what Arendt calls the "web of human relations." She refers to this web as a kind of overgrowth upon the worldly human artifice: together the two constitute what she calls the "common world." Arendt claims that the objective world produced by work gives stability to the web of human relations—which by nature is futile, ephemeral, and unstable—and allows the deeds done by actors to have lasting significance and, possibly, immortality. These are the political conditions of human life in its "broadest sense," and are thus the essential structure of what Arendt is referring to when she speaks of "prejudices" in their broad, productive political sense.

When she speaks of the idea of "conditioning" she is not saying that when we theorize about the various possibilities of human agency, we have to keep all of these other conditions in the forefront of our mind. This would at best only be of political use to intellectuals; Arendt was much more interested in dealing to the political world as

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vii Ibid, pp. 7-9.
x Ibid, p. 183.
such, where actors do not have time to consider these broader articulations. Rather, she is here speaking of what are called "background conditions": conditions that are always already presupposed in any form of human agency. These background conditions are what allows human communities to have a consensus about the nature of reality as such. Her political theory, while it is clearly concerned with the idea of knowledge as it relates to politics, is not an epistemology: it is only concerned with how human communities establish consensus concerning the nature of reality, and for the most part she brackets the question of whether or not that consensus is true in an absolute sense.

But while there is almost always some sort of common world which relates the human beings in particular communities, the connection which the members of these communities have to that world will vary from community to community, and from historical era to historical era. Arendt calls this connection to the world "common sense." This notion of common sense is an idea that runs like a red thread throughout her mature writings, and in fact is one of their unifying themes. It emerges initially during the argument of The Origins of Totalitarianism. Arendt spends the first of book of Origins dealing with the fact that anti-Semitism was an outrage to "common sense," in that a seemingly silly racist conspiracy theory and ideology was able to exercise such an outsized role in world affairs. Her explanation for this involved unearthing certain structural conditions in the early twentieth century of European nation-states that had resulted in the emergence of political groups such as "the masses," and their leaders, "the

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\[\text{xi} \] Arendt, The Human Condition, p. 57; The Promise of Politics, pp. 41–42.  
\[\text{xii} \] Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, p. 3.
These political groups did not fit into the traditional classes which until then had dominated the politics of nation-states, and, as a result, did not take political actions which were predictable in terms of self-interest as it was traditionally understood. The disconnection with self-interest is crucial for Arendt's diagnosis of modernity because she believed that self-interest and common sense were intimately related. She argues that our perception of and desire for our interests were the result of our connection and identification with a particular community, which she formulates using the compound Greek word *interesse*, claiming that it is what "lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together." Self-interest, in other words, was predicated on being connected to a common world via common sense, and to the extent anti-Semitism seemed to be a political principle that operated outside this framework of self-interest, it was an outrage to common sense. After the publication of *Origins*, Arendt would go on to formulate the notion of common sense in a variety of ways throughout her mature writings, but in fact its meaning remains essentially unchanged. In *Origins*, she writes that:

Even 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. Only because we have common sense, that is only because not one man, but men in the plural inhabit the earth can we trust our immediate sensual experience.

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In one of her earliest direct contributions to political theory she says that it is "that sixth sense that we not only all have in common but that fits us into, and thereby makes possible, a common world." 

In *On Violence*, she says that it is "our mental organ for perceiving, understanding, and dealing with reality and factuality," while in *The Life of the Mind* she calls it our feeling for "reality" or "realness."

As we will in the coming pages, in relation to our capacity for political judgment common sense is so intimately related to it for Arendt that it is very difficult to distinguish them from one another. The obvious difference is that judgment is an active faculty and activity, while common sense is a kind of intuitive sensing faculty. Nevertheless, common sense is so deeply embedded in the very structure of judgment that judgment would simply cease to exist without the orientation it provides.

Moreover, the stronger and more stable our common sense connection is to our community and historical civilization, the more intuitive and straightforward our judging activities will be. On the other hand, she argues that we can recognize historical crises for they are, i.e., a breakdown in the common world, when we recognized failures of common sense, and, consequentially, losses of confidence in common sense. Tradition plays a crucial role in allowing common sense and judgment to have this intuitive relationship to the common world. In *The Promise of Politics*, Arendt writes that "it lies

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xvi Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," p. 451. This formulation is the most common and the one she usually turns to when making off hand references to common sense. Other places she uses it are in *The Human Condition*, p. 283; "Crisis of Education," p. 175; and "Thinking," *The Life of the Mind*, pp. 50, 81.


in the nature of a tradition to be accepted and absorbed, as it were, by common sense, which fits the particular and idiosyncratic data of our other senses into a world we inhabit together and share in common."xx Articulating the intuitive nature of tradition-bound judgments, Arendt explains that "the tradition-bound judgment of common sense extracted and saved from the past whatever was conceptualized by tradition and was still applicable to present conditions. This ‘practical’ common-sense method of remembrance did not require any effort but was imparted to us, in a common world, as our shared inheritance."xxi In terms of our own civilization, it was the Romans who played the crucial role in establishing its tradition and common sense. Arendt writes that

Historically, common sense is as much Roman in origin as tradition. Not that the Greeks and Hebrew lacked common sense, but only the Romans developed it until it became the highest criterion in the management of public-political affairs. With the Romans…it is in the sense of tradition that common sense found its politically most important expression."xxii

However, while the Romans established our civilization's tradition and common sense orientation to the Western world, its own theoretical understanding of its political activities and standards of legitimacy was dominated by a tradition of political thought that, from a practical standpoint, was relatively foreign to the Roman form of political action and judgment. And this tradition will turn out, in the next chapter, to be pivotal in Arendt's account of how Western civilization and its forms of political judgment ultimately collapsed. Thus, Arendt's narrative begins well before the Romans entered the

xx Arendt, The Promise of Politics, p. 41.
xxi Ibid, p. 42.
xxii Ibid, p. 42.
scene of Western history, at the very origins of that tradition of political thought in ancient Greece.

**Philosophy and Politics**

The primordial source of the tradition of political thought, according to Arendt, is found in what inevitably appears to be a fundamental tension that exists in each human being, between the faculty for thought and the faculty for action. Though this tension was a relatively obvious and abiding theme in her thought, there are in fact surprisingly few explicit statements of it. While she states in *The Human Condition* that there is an "unequivocal opposition" between these faculties, her most explicit analysis of the tension came in a late lecture course from 1969, at the conclusion of which she writes, "We started from the analysis of two activities, thinking and acting, which apparently are antagonistic." In the modern world, however, it is relatively common to understand there to be a gap of sorts between theory and practice, which must be bridged or reconciled. The idea that there is an essential or fundamental tension between them is less intuitive. However, this tension which humans possess was not seen by Arendt as a flaw; in her view it made human beings intensely interesting creatures, capable of

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xxiii This is best argued by Arendt in published materials in "Tradition and the Modern Age," particularly on pages 29, 35, 39-40, where she claims that attempts to do away with the binary oppositions of the tradition, rooted in the original opposition of thought and action, are self-defeating, for they lose the essential tension at the heart of the tradition. There are even more explicit statements of this tension in unpublished materials. See Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," Lecture Course (1963), LOC 023846, and "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" Lecture Course (1969), LOC 024461-024462.

inexplicably combining faculties and engaging in activities that, from a phenomenological perspective, appear to have almost nothing in common. In the closing moments of the 1969 course, she writes:

If you ask what is the solution to the riddle [of the relationship between thinking and acting], I'd answer: in terms of this course, simply the unity that is man: it is human to act and to want to act; it is human to think and to want to think. Wherever you don't have them combined, though they are in a sense opposites in the living man, you have either thoughtless action or impotent thought. It is always life that offers the solutions.\textsuperscript{xxv}

This "solution to the riddle" was "only in terms of [the] course," however. As we will see, Arendt has a much broader and deeper answer to the riddle, and this answer is fundamentally rooted in the human capacity to judge. Judgment is the faculty that builds a bridge, so to speak, between the two antagonistic activities.

This tension between thought and action arises out of their respective predominance in two fundamentally distinct and mutually exclusive spheres of experience. Action's sphere of experience was our engaged activity in the world. Thought's sphere of experience took place in a mysterious gap in time between past and future which was utterly and existentially withdrawn from the common world. These spheres of experience gave rise to two authentic ways life, each directed toward the actualization of either thought or action. The \textit{vita activa} sought to actualize action, and the activity it developed to do this was politics. The \textit{vita contemplativa} sought to actualize thought, and the activity it developed to do this was philosophy. As we will

\textsuperscript{xxv} Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" Lecture Course (1969), Library of Congress Box 024461. Furthermore, in "Introduction into Politics," Lecture Course (1963), Library of Congress Box 023846 she writes, "It meant that the same men acted and thought. Did they do it at the same time? Hardly: it meant that there was a time for action and a time for thought…Neither thinking nor acting are specialties, all men do it insofar as they are human."
see, it was this conflict between the pursuits of politics and philosophy that instigated the tradition of political thought; but before examining why this was, we need to understand how the two pursuits arose.

Arendt's idea of a faculty of 'thought' is much broader than is commonly brought to mind by the idea of the role of 'theory' in the famous binary of "theory and practice" as it is commonly understood in the modern era. Theorizing is, of course, a particular type of mental process, but the activity of thinking encompasses much more than this, involving such activities as rational deliberation, memory, reflection, and imagination. In order to capture the nature of the thinking faculty, in *The Life of the Mind* Arendt engaged in a deep phenomenology through an examination of the fundamental experiences that underlay original articulations of great philosophers. Arendt claimed that the faculty for thought gave rise to a variety of mental activities, but the highest and purest were the activities of thinking and contemplation. These two activities took place in a space of utter withdrawal from worldly existence, which Arendt called the "thinking ego," which was located in what she identified as a temporal "gap between past and future."xxvi The activity of thinking was understood to be the lower and less pure of the two, though still of very high order. It is essentially what we mean when we speaking of "reflecting" on a particular topic, in that it involves such reflective faculties as imagination, memory, and rational deliberation.xxvii As a result, it takes the form of a kind of inner dialogue with oneself, which she refers to as the "two-in-one" of the thinking

ego. Not surprisingly, Socrates is taken as the exemplar of this thinking activity. But the thinking activity is only the handmaiden of an even higher mental activity, contemplation, which thinking has been traditionally understood to have only prepared the ground for—a kind of forerunner of contemplation. As the highest activity produced by the thinking faculty, contemplation was understood to have inspired the pursuit of philosophy itself. Unlike the thinking activity, contemplation involved a speechlessness and wonder at the fact of Being as such, which emanates from the asking of ultimate questions and the recognition of eternity, and which the ancient philosophers had referred to as \textit{thaumazein}, the "pathos of wonder." \cite{Are:THC} \textit{Thaumazein} was experienced by the ancients in such a fundamental and profound way, that they were inspired to dedicate their lives to it, and they called this pursuit "philosophy." \cite{Are:THC} The way of life of the philosophers is what has been known in the Western tradition as the \textit{vita contemplativa}, the life devoting to dwelling "in the neighborhood of those things which are forever." \cite{Are:THC} Thus, in \textit{The Human Condition} Arendt writes that "the philosopher's experience of the eternal, which to Plato was \textit{arrheton} ('unspeakable'), and to Aristotle \textit{aneu logon} ('without word'), and which later was conceptualized in the paradoxical \textit{nunc stans} ('the standing now'), can occur only outside the realm of human affairs and outside the plurality of men." \cite{Are:THC} There were, furthermore, two directions which contemplation

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Are:THC} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, p. 20.
\end{thebibliography}
might take. One was that adopted by Aristotle in his scientific works, and it is what is commonly called "metaphysics." It sought to find some useful knowledge in the experience of wonder. But the second, earlier, and seemingly more authentic direction it took was to try to stay and dwell in the experience of wonder itself. This was the approach adopted by Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle in his more ethical articulations of wonder, and in his conception of *nous*. This later experience of contemplation had disappeared for many centuries, but had recently been revived in intellectual life by the thought of modern existentialists such Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger.

Unlike the faculty of thought which occurs in a temporal gap between past and future that is existentially withdrawn from worldly existence, the faculty of action is utterly worldly, and indeed dominates the sphere of experience that centers on our activity in the world. As was mentioned earlier, action is one of the three activities that arise in response to the conditions of human life on earth. Labor and work, however, find their justification and meaning in the fact that they make action possible: action redeems these activities from meaninglessness and futility by unleashing processes into the web of human relations that result in meaningful stories. It is these stories that give meaning to worldly human life. Action is able to accomplish this feat as a result of several unique

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xxxv Ibid, Box 024455; "Thinking," *The Life of the Mind*, pp. 78-79, 114-115. To illustrate the phenomenon of wonder even in modern times, Arendt actually quotes Coleridge in the 1969 course, perhaps to demonstrate its enduring nature, even if only experienced in the realms of art and religion: "Hath thou ever raised thy mind to the consideration of existence, in and by itself, as the mere act of existing? Hast thou ever said to thyself thoughtfully, It is!" (Box 024423)

xxxvi Arendt writes in *The Human Condition*, p. 236: "We have seen that the *animal laborans* could be redeemed from its predicament of imprisonment in the ever-recurring cycle of the life process, of being
qualities it possesses. Action, in its purest sense, is the human capacity to begin a new chain of events or process within the human world. Arendt calls this capacity for authentic spontaneity the condition of natality.\textsuperscript{xxxvii} Each action is \textit{sui generis}: it always has a meaning that is completely distinct from any act that has come before it.\textsuperscript{xxxviii} Action is furthermore essentially conditioned by speech. Without speech, action would be meaningless. They are like two sides of the same coin: action creates new realities, and speech discloses those new realities.\textsuperscript{xxxix} Arendt writes that "the action he begins is humanly disclosed by the word, and though his deed can be perceived in its brute physical appearance without verbal accompaniment, it becomes relevant only through the spoken word…"\textsuperscript{xli} Each action discloses the "who", rather than the "what" of the actor.\textsuperscript{xli} This is because each human being is unique, and unlike any other that has come before. The stories created by the deeds of actors disclose this unique 'whoness.' As a result, plurality is the essential human condition of action, in that no other human will act and speak in exactly the same way. Because of this plurality, Arendt endlessly repeated in her writings the claim that "men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world."\textsuperscript{xlii}

Action, by its nature, produces and establishes relationships among humans, and this forever subject to the necessity of labor and consumption, only through the mobilization of another human capacity, the capacity for making, fabricating, and producing of \textit{homo faber}, who as a toolmaker not only eases the pain and trouble of laboring but also erects a world of durability. The redemption of life, which is sustained by labor, is worldliness, which is sustained by fabrication. We saw furthermore that \textit{homo faber} could be redeemed from his predicament of meaninglessness, the 'devaluation of all values,' and the impossibility of finding valid standards in a world determined by the category of means and ends, only through the interrelated faculties of action and speech, which produce meaningful stories as naturally as fabrication produces use objects."

\textsuperscript{xxxvii} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 9, 177-178.
\textsuperscript{xxxix} Ibid, p. 200.
\textsuperscript{xli} Ibid, p. 178-179.
\textsuperscript{xlii} Ibid, pp. 181-186.
results in a web of human relations. As a result of these qualities, action inevitably is boundless and unpredictable: each course of action undertaken will impact the other individuals in the web of relations, eventually coming to have a meaning far exceeding anything the actor could have imagined or foreseen. As a result, Arendt argues that action has a process character: while we are bound to the natural world through labor by the processes of natural necessity, through action we begin new processes in the web of human relations.

Action, though it produces meaningful stories, would remain just as futile and ephemeral as labor and work if it were not for the human capacity to remember and immortalize the deeds which take place in these stories. As a result, Arendt argued that politics was (and is) the activity humans engaged in to give these deeds an enduring meaning and remembrance. There is a specific sense of "politics" which Arendt found realized most authentically in the Athenian polis. On the basis of this historical instance, she believed she had discovered a uniquely authentic instance of political phenomena, which could then be used to shed light on political phenomena in the less unambiguously political regimes and situations which followed the occurrence of the polis in the history of Western civilization.

The most crucial element of politics is without question her concepts of the common world and the public realm. According to Arendt, the common world separates

and relates human beings from and to each other, while the public realm is a space in the common world where the things of world appear to human spectators. The plurality of unique human beings find themselves related to each other in different locations in the common world, and thus always see the appearances that occur in the public realm from a different perspective, which Arendt refers to as their "doxa", the Greek word for opinion. When citizens enter the public realm, they leave behind the distinctions and inequality that characterize the private realm, and establish conditions of equality through the institutions of the public realm, which Arendt refers to as the Greek word isonomy. Isonomy is radically separate in quality from the private realm, which is characterized by inequality and rulership.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt states that she means by "public realm" "two closely related but not altogether identical phenomena." The first phenomenon was what she called "the space of appearances," and the second was what is called "the common world." This articulation is obviously problematic, and she justifiably revised it shortly thereafter in later publications. In later writings she clearly draws a distinction between "the common world and its public realm." This distinction is clearer because Arendt

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III Ibid, pp. 50-53.

believed that though the private realm had a place in the common world, it was emphatically not a part of the public realm. On this later articulation, the space of appearances would be equivalent to the public realm. This space of appearances is a broad phenomenon, and can appear wherever people act and speak together. Thus, the space of appearances is not necessarily a formal phenomenon. "It is the organization of the people in their speaking and acting together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be…Action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost anytime and anywhere." Thus, by Arendt's account, any formally instituted public realm is based on a more original, primordial, and informal public realm which precedes it, and enables its continuation in the world. Nevertheless, it is these formally articulated public realms which are crucial for the fundamental purpose of politics, which is to preserve the memory of the deeds of acting human beings.

The form of the public realm which Arendt focuses on most heavily in *The Human Condition* is the Greek polis. In the polis, nearly all action was political action.

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liv Through most of Western history, was made possible through a very unambiguous conception of private property, which was understood to be a privately owned piece of the common world where each citizen could withdraw from public life to engage in activities not appropriate for the public realms, such laboring or reflecting (thought). See, for instance, *The Human Condition*, pp. 52, 61, 71, 111-112, 253. Increasingly, however, private property has given way to the much more ambiguous economic institution of capital, which Arendt believes has played an important part in the rise of the social realm in the modern world. Thus, Arendt writes, "We saw before that property, as distinguished from wealth and appropriation, indicates the privately owned share of a common world and therefore is the most elementary political condition for man's worldliness" (Ibid, p. 253).


lvI Ibid, p. 199: "The space of appearances comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm…"

lviii Ibid, pp. 192, 196-199.
All human beings are capable of action, but not all have the opportunity to perform it. Action can take place in the private realm or in the public realm, but to the extent it occurs in the private realm, it lacks the visibility and the potential for remembrance which only the public realm can provide. Only action performed in the public realm has the potential to be commemorated and immortalized, and only this form of action is what she considers political action. Political action, historically, has been most likely to occur in what she calls a political public realm in "Introduction into Politics." It is a political public realm because political action and remembrance are performed at the same time by the same actors. Thus, the Athenians could dispense with Homer and the poets, because they believed their political activities where both a space to perform great deeds, and a kind of organized remembrance of those deeds. The Athenians were not the only people to maintain a political public realm. Later, we will see that the Romans and the modern revolutionaries had their own versions of political public realms. Historically, however, most public realms have been non-political public realms. The church in the Christian era afforded a kind of public realm, though because of Christian theology it was a much less authentically political space. The same was true for the early modern era of emerging capitalist expansion, which found it own public realm in

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lxix Throughout her work Arendt provides a variety of forms of private forms of action such as violence, forgiveness, promise-making, and technological innovation. states explicitly that action. She furthermore says The Human Condition (p. 49) that action in the modern world generally takes place in the private realm: "While we have become excellent in the laboring we perform in public, our capacity for action and speech has lost much of its former quality since the rise of the social realm banished these into the sphere of the intimate and the private."

lx Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," Lecture Course (1963), LOC 023846.

lxi Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," pp. 139-140


the exchange market. \textsuperscript{lxiv} The public realm of the modern world is generally what Arendt calls the "social realm." The social realm is a form of public realm where the distinction between the public and the private has lost its meaning, and as a result, many of the activities that historically were thought to belong in the private realm have been allowed into the public realm. \textsuperscript{lxv} The social realm is a space of appearances, no doubt, but one that has lost the original political capacity to memorialize and disclose the "who" of the actors, and instead has become a place of conformity and corruption. \textsuperscript{lxvi} All of these public realms are places where political action can be performed and commemorated, though certainly political action is much more likely to occur in public political realms. Thus, even in the context of the corruption, hypocrisy, and conformity that characterizes the social realm of the modern nation-state, it still is possible to perform political actions— though these are vanishingly rare, and becoming rarer. \textsuperscript{lxvii}

While the originary and primordial source of all public realms or spaces of appearance is begun and kept alive by speaking and acting human beings, the structures

\textsuperscript{lxiv} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 159-160.
\textsuperscript{lxv} Ibid, pp. 33-35, 38-41.
\textsuperscript{lxvi} Ibid, pp. 38-43. On p. 43, Arendt writes: "The larger the population in any body politic, the more likely it will be the social rather than the political that constitutes the public realm"; see "On Humanity in Dark Times," p. 4, for a discussion of how the modern public realm has lost its power to illuminate, i.e. to disclose the "who" of the actors.
\textsuperscript{lxvii} It is true that Arendt occasionally makes rather hyperbolic statements about the social realm, such as on p. 40 of \textit{The Human Condition}, where she writes: "It is decisive that society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household." These sorts of statements should be read as "ideal-type" formulations, rather than factual and concrete descriptions. After all, Arendt states that it is in the nature of action to perform the miraculous. Does she really believe that the miraculous is somehow an impossibility in the social realm? This would conflict with the very idea of miracles, since they by definition emerge from causes which could never have been predicted. I would argue that she probably means by this quote that actions performed in society have a tendency to be corrupted and perverted in their remembrance. See also p. 33, where she states that in the modern world the social and the political constantly flow in and out of each other, thus suggesting that the political has not completely disappeared.
and institutions which make these spaces of appearance take on an enduring quality are
generally the result of work, rather than action. As was mentioned before, the human
world has two elements: human artifice and the web of human relations. The human
artifice is the result of work, and the web of human relations is a result of action and
speech. Thus, in order for an informal space of appearance to become a durable and
objective formal public realm, it must find itself realized objectively through the activity
of work in the human artifice in the form of laws, institutions, technology, scientific and
historical documentation and literature, and works of art. This artifice has the function of
providing a civilized bulwark against natural necessity, without which human life
becomes futile and superfluous, and descends in savagery.\textsuperscript{lxviii} Within this bulwark,
human rights lose their abstract nature and can become the concrete political realities
which allow for what Arendt had called "the right to have rights."\textsuperscript{lxix} The artifice allows
for continuity from generation to generation in the form of a civilized tradition or
common world, which can provide a home for each new-comer to the world—our
children—who within it can find a recognizable life story.\textsuperscript{lxx} This, in turn, allows for the
possibility of the commemoration of human greatness for those few actors who can
achieve it in the form of action and speech.\textsuperscript{lxxi}

In most historical public realms, the memorialization of the deeds of actors takes
place in the form of the human artifice through the activity of work, though in a high and

\textsuperscript{lxix} Arendt, \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}, pp. 296-297.
\textsuperscript{lxx} Arendt, "The Concept of History," p. 42.
\textsuperscript{lxxi} Ibid, pp. 43-48.
profundely transfigured sense of work. At the most abstract level, Arendt distinguishes work from action by the fact that work has an definite beginning and ending, and this ending is always characterized by a finished product.\footnote{Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, p. 143.} She argues that work is inevitably more predictable and reliable than action, because the production process is always guided by a model conceived beforehand. As a result, work is the only human activity which employs the means/end category, and thus involves a form of specialized knowledge which can be taught and reproduced.\footnote{Ibid, pp. 143-144.} This distinguishes it from action, which, though guided by goals and intentions, could never properly be thought to involve a model, and even if it attempted to employ one, this would be irrelevant since action never produces a finished product, but rather sets off a chain of events in the web of human relations, which eventually only produces a meaningful story that is \textit{sui generis} and relatively unpredictable. Because of these characteristics of work, the humanly built world and its public realm are able to achieve the durability necessary to preserve the memory of the deeds of actors in the form of a human artifice, i.e., a civilized common world. As a result, work entails much more meaningful endeavors than is typically implied by the mundane idea of a "production process." As was just noted, when Arendt speaks of the human artifice, she generally has in mind the idea of civilization: the enduring monuments, art, literature, philosophy, technologies, scientific research, and historical documents and narratives which give a particular civilization durability over
generations and ages.\textsuperscript{lxiv} History in particular plays a central role as the part of the human artifice which allows civilization to immortalize the deeds of acting human beings.\textsuperscript{lxv} This is because it is the unique role of the historian to retell the meaningful stories which action gives birth to, and in the process, to pass judgment on the deeds of the actors.\textsuperscript{lxvi} The historian reflects upon these deeds, each of which has a distinctive "emerging, shining quality" which is different from all others, seeks to put them in a narrative, and in this process finds an enduring meaning for the deeds and gives the actors a place in the story of the world.\textsuperscript{lxvii} After the historian has told his or her story, the story is added to the stock of the common world's artifice in the hope that the deeds of the actors it tells of will find immortality.\textsuperscript{lxviii}

\textit{The Establishment of the Tradition of Political Thought}

Politics and philosophy for Arendt were thus the highest activities of the fundamental human faculties of action and thought. They held this distinction, Arendt concluded, because they were the two activities which were thought most likely to render human life meaningful by allowing it to partake, in some form, in the eternity possessed by the gods.\textsuperscript{lxix} Arendt writes in her 1969 lecture course that "the common root of

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\textsuperscript{lxv} Arendt, "The Concept of History," p. 90.  \\
\textsuperscript{lxvi} Ibid, pp. 44-46.  \\
\textsuperscript{lxvii} Ibid, pp. 47, 52.  \\
\textsuperscript{lxviii} Ibid, p. 71.  \\
\textsuperscript{lxix} Ibid, pp.45-48
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politics and philosophy is immortality, but not in the sense that the philosophers finally defined it, but only in the sense that both endeavors spring from the same desire of mortals to become or, since that is impossible, to partake in immortality, to get their share of it.\textsuperscript{1xx} Yet, despite this commonality, the standards, goals, and objectives of philosophy and politics have historically had an uneasy relationship, according to Arendt, at times breaking out into outright conflict, and it is in response to the original and most famous instance of this conflict that the tradition of political thought was established by the ancient philosophers.

The most articulate account, Arendt believed, of this conflict and its role in rise of the tradition of political thought was given by Plato in his famous "Allegory of the Cave" in Book VII of the Republic.\textsuperscript{1xxi} Her interpretation of the allegory of the cave is a key founding doctrine for Arendt's political thought: she arrived at it relatively early in her reflections on political theory in the early 1950's, apparently as a direct result of her attempts to understand the extent to which the tradition of political thought had been implicated in totalitarian terror regimes, and especially through the line which proceeded through Marx.\textsuperscript{1xxii} When Heidegger, for instance, asked in 1954 for details on the research which would eventual become The Human Condition, she mentioned her

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\textsuperscript{1xx} Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" Lecture Course (1969), LOC 024429.  \\
\textsuperscript{1xxi} Plato, Republic, G.M.C. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve, translators, Hackett Publishing Co.: Indianapolis (1992), 514a-517b.  \\
\textsuperscript{1xxii} The most well known account of her interpretation of the Cave allegory comes in "What is Authority?", but she had for the most part developed the line of argument well before the publication of The Human Condition, in materials that were more recently published in the manuscript "Philosophy and Politics," which was written primarily in the early 1950's. She also corresponded with both Heidegger and Jaspers about the argument around the mid-fifties. See p. 120 of the Arendt-Heidegger correspondence and pp. 284, 288-289 of the Arendt-Jaspers correspondence.
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interpretation of the cave allegory along with her account of the three activities in the *vita activa* and her critique of the concept of rulership, all of which play pivotal roles in *The Human Condition*.\textsuperscript{lxxxiii}

Arendt understood Plato to be articulating a "two worlds" theory in the allegory of the cave: the untrue, ephemeral, and shadowy world in which human affairs and human life for the most part take place; and the real world of true, unchanging, illuminating ideas.\textsuperscript{lxxxiv} For Arendt, the falsehood in the allegory of the cave lies in asserting that reality only exists in a form available solely to philosophical truth. The world of human affairs is not lacking in reality, it is simply a reality of a different kind, discovered in political experience rather than philosophical experience. Arendt continually takes Plato and, to a great degree, the tradition of political thought in general, to task for only seeking to comprehend the political experience from a philosophical point of view. It is this fundamental error which led Plato to characterize the realm of human affairs as only a shadow of the real world of ideas—at least, that is, in his political writings. Instead, Arendt believed that the cave allegory was in reality a kind of biographical account of experience of the philosopher in the world of human affairs.

Arendt argues that Plato attempted to capture the philosopher's experience of *thaumazein*, the pathos of wonder, during the activity of contemplation in the description

\textsuperscript{lxxxiii} Arendt and Heidegger, *Letters 1925-1975*, pp. 120-121.
\textsuperscript{lxxxiv} In the context of the cave allegory, then, Arendt has a relatively conventional understanding of Plato's doctrine of ideas. See "Tradition and the Modern Age," especially pp. 35-37. As we have seen and will discuss more fully, she recognizes that Plato's notion of philosophical truth is considerably more subtle, however.
of the journey of up from the cave into the true light of the sun.\footnote{Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," pp. 445-450.} This experience is expressed in religious themes by Plato, as a kind of conversion experience: it is a life-changing shock to the identity of the philosopher when he realizes that the mundane world of human affairs in which all his previous life been spent seems to pale in comparison to the speechless beauty, elegance, and illumination that he discovers in philosophical truth.\footnote{Ibid, pp. 448-449; "Tradition and the Modern Age," pp. 35-36; "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" Lecture Course (1969), LOC 024425-26.} The problem, however, is that this experience of \textit{thaumazein} has a disorienting effect on the one who experiences it when he returns from contemplation into the world of human affairs. The philosopher returns to the human world unaccustomed to its endless novelty, unpredictability, and heavy reliance on the faculty for speech. As a result, the philosopher's common sense—the sixth sense which should intuitively fits him to the humanly built world—is seriously degraded, and, according to both Plato and Arendt, this does not simply turn them into harmless oddities, but represents a genuine threat not only to the goals and objectives of the philosopher but to his very life. In the \textit{Republic}, Plato writes:

And before his eyes had recovered—and the adjustment would not be quick—while his vision was still dim, if he had to compete again with the perpetual prisoners in recognizing the shadows, wouldn't he invite ridicule? Wouldn't it be said of him that he'd returned from his upward journey with his eyesight ruined and that it isn't worthwhile even to try to travel upward? And, as for anyone who tried to free them and lead them upward, if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn't they kill him?\footnote{Plato, \textit{Republic}, 516e-517a.}

Arendt explicates the problem Plato was pointing to in "Philosophy and Politics":

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And before his eyes had recovered—and the adjustment would not be quick—while his vision was still dim, if he had to compete again with the perpetual prisoners in recognizing the shadows, wouldn't he invite ridicule? Wouldn't it be said of him that he'd returned from his upward journey with his eyesight ruined and that it isn't worthwhile even to try to travel upward? And, as for anyone who tried to free them and lead them upward, if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn't they kill him?
\end{quote}
Each of these turnings-about had been accompanied by a loss of sense and orientation. The eyes accustomed to the shadowy appearances on the screen are blinded by the fire in the rear of the cave. The eyes then adjusted to the dim light of the artificial fire are blinded by the light of the sun. But worst of all is the loss of orientation that befalls those whose eyes once were adjusted to the bright light under the sky of ideas, and who must now find their way in the darkness of the cave. Why philosophers do not know what is good for them—and how they are alienated from the affairs of men—is grasped in this metaphor: they can no longer see in the darkness of the cave, they have lost their sense of orientation, they have lost what we would call their common sense. When they come back and try to tell the cave dwellers what they have seen outside the cave, they do not make sense; to the cave dwellers whatever they say is as though the world were "turned upside down" (Hegel). The returning philosopher is in danger because he has lost the common sense needed to orient himself in a world common to all, and, moreover, because what he harbors in his thought contradicts the common sense of the world.

After the death of Socrates, Arendt argues that Plato concluded that the polis was so corrupt, chaotic, and dangerous that the only way the philosophical way of life could be assured of its right to pursue its goals was by establishing philosophically derived rules for the realm of human affairs. Viewing human affairs from the philosophical perspective, it was as if philosophers understood the activity of political philosophy as "laying down rules for a lunatic asylum."

Plato's particular solution was of course built on his particular philosophical theories, which as a result have structured the basic conceptual framework and experiential presuppositions of the tradition of political thought ever since. The loss of their common sense connection to the world of human affairs resulted in a circumstance in which philosophers seem to have no place in the world, and therefore could not exercise judgment appropriately within it. While action is inherently

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xxix Arendt, Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy, pp. 22-23; "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought," p. 429.
unpredictable in the sense that no one can ever grasp its meaning beforehand, common sense allows actors to at least force events in a particular direction. The philosophical way of life had degraded the philosophers' common sense feeling for the human world, and this had resulted in an unexpected danger to the life of the philosophers which appears somehow to be rooted in the apparent tension between thought and action. Plato's solution to this problem was to attempt to make philosophy relevant to the world of human affairs in a much more direct and explicit way than Socrates' attempt. To do this, he sought to establish a hierarchical relationship between the vita activa and the vita contemplativa by claiming that the eternal ideas which the philosophers alone had access to could be a guide to behavior and provide stable measures and standards for judging action. There were at least two key political objectives which this claim was intended to accomplish: it both justified the political rulership of the philosopher, and it made politics predictable to these rulers, thus solving the problem posed by their degraded common sense.

The problem with this approach, however, was that it was rooted in non-political experiences, which lacked an authentic connection to the fundamental political experience of Western civilization. Arendt argues that Plato was searching for a form of political life which only the Romans had experience of: the authentically political authoritarian way of political life. "Authority," Arendt writes, "implies an obedience in

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xci Arendt, "What is Authority?" p. 114; The Human Condition, pp. 221-230.
xcii Arendt, "What is Authority?" p. 109.
xciii Ibid, p. 104.
which men retain their freedom... Authority, in other words, is obedience which is rendered freely out of respect for a sacred source of hierarchy, and thus can involve no coercion or violence. Plato, however, was never able to devise such a hierarchy because he had no authentic political experience from which to derive it. Arendt points out that the only two viable candidates, tyranny and generalship, were for various reason unacceptable to Plato because they were each in their own way associated with extralegal (i.e., "lawless") circumstances: the tyrant was the "wolf in sheep's clothing" who respected no law, and the general was always a response to exceptional circumstances. Instead, Plato and later Aristotle turned in varying ways to Greek household life in order to provide examples and experiences on which to conceptualize this new hierarchy.

In attempting to apply philosophical truth to political affairs, Plato had to reckon with the fact that philosophical truth is "self-evident" and has a compelling effect on the mind. The problem was that only philosophers and their political protégés would be able to grasp these truths, and thus some strategy had to be devised to allow the coercion of truth experienced by the philosopher to be accepted by the many who did not directly experience it. Arendt claims that Plato began looking for instances of "glaring inequality" in which "the compelling element lies in the relationship itself" and not be means of "seizure of power and possession of the means of violence." He sought out his

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analogies in instances of expert knowledge well known to the Greeks such as the shepherd, the ship's captain, the physician, the master of slaves, and the craftsman, in which rulership was implied in the very relationship itself because the individuals involved "belong to altogether different categories of beings, one of which is already by implication subject to the other."\(^{ci}\)

At this point that Arendt's analysis begins to deepen. She insists that of all these analogies drawn from the realm of expert knowledge, it is the craftsman who is the real inspiration of Plato's politics because the craftsman indicates how the doctrine of the ideas relates to human affairs. The textual evidence she gives for this claim is relatively sparse, relying heavily on *Timaeus* and Book X of *Republic*.\(^{cii}\) She supplements this evidence by providing a series of meta-interpretative claims based on her phenomenologies of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* in connection with a strikingly esoteric interpretation of Plato's ultimate purpose for his political dialogues such as the *Republic*. As was discussed before, Arendt understands there to be three fundamental human activities performed in response to three fundamental human conditions. Work is the activity performed in response to the condition of worldliness, the fact that authentic human existence is only conceivable on the condition of a humanly built world. Such work includes all forms of specialized knowledges such medicine or navigation, since fundamentally they are tools or technologies used by *homo faber*, the human being in his working capacity. In the crucial "Reification" chapter (Chapter 19) of

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\(^{ci}\) Ibid, pp. 108, 110.

\(^{cii}\) Ibid, p. 110, note 13 (on p. 248).
The Human Condition, Arendt argues that the fabrication process, which always involves a preconceived "model" envisioned in the mind of the craftsman prior to the process, is the exemplary instance of all work.\textsuperscript{ciii} In the "Reification" chapter, Arendt argues that it is this process of making which inspired Plato's particular formulation of the doctrine of ideas as it is commonly understood.\textsuperscript{civ}

The story does not end here, however. The text of the "Reification" chapter suggests that Arendt understood Plato's doctrine solely in the craftsmanship formulation given in the Timaeus and Book X of the Republic. However, footnote 7 on p. 142 begins to suggest a considerably more subtle understanding of Plato's doctrine. Referencing the work of several classicists, she notes that the common interpretation of Plato's doctrine is borne out by its apparent Socratic and Pythagorean origin. But at the end of the note, she writes, "Needless to say, none of these explanations touches the root of the matter, that is, the specifically philosophic experience underlying the concept of ideas on the one hand, and their most striking quality on the other—their illuminating power, their being to phanotaton or ekphanestaton."\textsuperscript{cv} Arendt is indicating here a line of argument that comes later in The Human Condition in Chapter 31 ("The Traditional Substitution of Making for Action"), but which she repeats in variety of places both before and after The Human Condition was written. In these places, Arendt argues that Plato had two different

\textsuperscript{ciii} Arendt, The Human Condition, pp. 139-143.
\textsuperscript{civ} Ibid, pp. 142-143.
\textsuperscript{cv} Ibid, p. 143.
versions of the doctrine of ideas.\textsuperscript{cvi} One version can be found in dialogues such as *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, where the essential characteristic of the ideas is their illuminating power, and as a result, the highest idea is always the Beautiful. This is the doctrine which most clearly is associated with the experience of speechless wonder or *thaumazein* in the activity of contemplation.\textsuperscript{cvii} On the other hand, we find in the political dialogues such as the *Statesman*, *Republic*, and *Laws*, Plato claiming that the highest idea is the idea of the Good.\textsuperscript{cviii} Arendt surmised that this must have been a conscious decision on the part of Plato: in the Greek language, the word for Good, *agathos*, could carry the meaning of usefulness or fitness for.\textsuperscript{cix} As a result, if Plato's goal had been to establish the authority of philosophical truth to provide measures and standards for human action and behavior, it was the Good which would be the appropriate highest idea. However, it can serve this purpose only if the relationship between thought and action comes to take the character of the fabrication process involved in work, and thus it is through craftsmanship as work that the new hierarchical relationship between philosophy and politics is established.\textsuperscript{cx} Arendt points out in *The Human Condition* that, from a phenomenological perspective, there is an inner affinity between contemplation and

\textsuperscript{cvi} Arendt seems only to have felt confident publishing this argument at the time of *The Human Condition* and afterward. However, we know from correspondences that she had been consulting both Heidegger and Jaspers on the topic from the early the fifties. See the Heidegger/Arendt correspondence, pp. 120-121, and Jaspers/Arendt correspondence, pp. 284, 288-289. This is without question the most "existentialist" element of her doctrine. The quote from note 7 echoes in particular Heidegger's formulation of phenomenology in *Being and Time*, pp. 49-52, and she states that her interpretation of the cave allegory is heavily informed by Heidegger's essay "Plato's Doctrine of Truth." According to the correspondence, Jaspers seems to have agreed with Arendt's and Heidegger's broad interpretations of the doctrine of ideas, though he seems to have disagreed with their interpretations of cave allegory.

\textsuperscript{cvii} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 225-226; "What is Authority?" p. 112.

\textsuperscript{cviii} Ibid, pp. 226-227; Ibid, p. 112.

\textsuperscript{cix} Ibid, pp. 225-227; Ibid, p. 113.

\textsuperscript{cx} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 227.
fabrication in that both seem to heavily rely on a kind of inner vision in thought, while action and contemplation seem to stand in "unequivocal opposition to each other." As a result of all of this, Arendt argues that Plato's true intention in the political dialogues was not to give an authentic account the philosophical experience, but rather as a kind of theoretical *coup d'état* on behalf of the philosophical way of life over politics. She writes that:

Even in the first books of the *Republic* the philosopher is still defined as a lover of beauty, not of goodness, and only in the sixth book is the idea of good as the highest idea introduced. For the original function of the ideas was not to rule or otherwise determine the chaos of human affairs, but, in "shining brightness," to illuminate their darkness. As such, the ideas have nothing whatever to do with politics, political experience, and the problem of action, but pertain exclusively to philosophy, the experience of contemplation, and the quest for the "true being of things." It is precisely ruling, measuring, subsuming, and regulating that are entirely alien to the experiences underlying the doctrine of ideas in its original conception.

In terms of the broader tradition, it would be a tremendous oversimplification to suggest that the hierarchical relationship established between thought and action in the tradition required acceptance of Plato's doctrine of ideas. Plato, rather, established a pattern of thinking about politics which has been tremendously influential in the history of Western political thought, even if most of the specifically Platonic elements of that pattern were eliminated. It resulted in what became the "two conceptual pillars" of the tradition of political thought: law and rulership. Politics is understood by the tradition to be conducted in the form of a relationship between rulers and the ruled, and this rulership

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<sup>cxi</sup> Ibid, p. 301.  
<sup>cxii</sup> Arendt, "What is Authority?" pp. 112-113.
is legitimized to the extent it conforms with just laws.\textsuperscript{cxiii} But law can only provide this legitimizing function if it operates in a way similar to Plato's application of the idea of the Good to political life, i.e., as a "yardstick by which rule could be measured."\textsuperscript{cxiv} Thus, Arendt points out that Aristotle was well aware of the distinction between acting and making, and his political philosophy fully reflected this distinction.\textsuperscript{cxv} Nevertheless, Aristotle was in many ways more exemplary of the nature of the tradition. The point is that the principle of rulership by those who know over those who obey, and lawfulness as the criterion of a good regime, had been fully established in Aristotle. Thus, while Aristotle does not rely on the model of the specialized knowledge of the expert, he still nevertheless establishes rulership within the political realm on the basis of an educational model drawn from the "natural" relationships which existed in the household, and lawfulness was the criterion which legitimized these relationships.\textsuperscript{cxvi} And it is Aristotle's educational model which, in terms of the tradition of political thought, had perhaps the most direct influence on the history of Western politics.\textsuperscript{cxvii}

Summarizing the influence of the Greek political philosophy on the history of Western politics, Arendt writes:

The grandiose attempts of Greek philosophy to find a concept of authority which would prevent deterioration of the polis and safeguard the life of the philosopher foundered on the fact that in the realm of Greek political life there was no awareness of authority based on immediate political experience. Hence all prototypes by which subsequent generations understood the content of authority were drawn from specifically unpolitical...
experiences, stemming either from the sphere of "making" and the arts, where there must be experts and where fitness is the highest criterion, or from the private household community. It is precisely in this politically determined aspect that the philosophy of the Socratic school has exerted its greatest impact upon our tradition.\footnote{cxviii}{Ibid, pp. 119-120.}

The problem with this conflation of political with unpolitical experiences within the tradition is that it carried within itself latent tendencies and implications of violence, coercion, and indifference to authentic political phenomena that are essential to true human freedom. The consequences of these latent tendencies will be examined in detail in the next chapter; but for the moment, it is crucial to note that, on the basis of this conflation, political thought came to have what Arendt believed to be a deeply inauthentic understanding of the nature of politics. Political phenomena were now conceptualized not from their own authentic standpoint in the world of human affairs, from the standpoint of philosophy, and as a result, the distinctions within the \textit{vita activa} were either lost or viewed as insignificant.\footnote{cxix}{Ibid, pp. 114-115; \textit{The Promise of Politics}, p. 56; \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 14-17; "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought," pp. 314-315.}

Furthermore, by structuring its conceptual framework in terms of law and rulership, the tradition ultimately came to articulate political experience in a crude and simplistic fashion. Law came to mean measuring, subsuming, and categorizing political action, while political action itself was understood as rulership, the execution of the prescriptions of thought and administration of human activities and behavior.\footnote{cxx}{The most succinct statement is in Arendt, "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought," pp. 304-305; see also "What is Authority?" pp. 110, 127-128; "The Great Tradition I: Law and Power," pp. 713-716; \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 222-224f.} To the extent human political activity was recognized for itself, it was generally conceived in terms of work, due in large part to the conceptual affinities which existed between contemplation and work. What was lost in this was virtually all of
the essential characteristics of human freedom as action, and its highest possibility, political action. Action is disclosed in speech in the telling of a unique story which is its result, and which discloses the "whoness" of the actor. When it occurs in a public realm, it takes on a reality and endurance which opens the possibility for immortality. But because the traditional evaluation of action occurs in terms of a legal framework which tries to measure and categorize it, action's self-disclosive, spontaneous, and *sui generis* character is ignored by the tradition.\textsuperscript{cxxi} Action establishes relationships and occurs within a web of human relations in a humanly built world which makes predicting its ultimate outcome impossible, while rulership seeks to control the outcomes of action by attempting to assimilate it to a model envisioned by thought. In *The Promise of Politics*, Arendt writes, "This insulation shown by our tradition from its beginning against all political experiences that did not fit into its framework…has remained one of its outstanding features. The mere tendency to exclude everything that was not consistent developed into a great power of exclusion, which kept the tradition intact against all new, contradictory, and conflicting experiences."\textsuperscript{cxxii} The final result is that in the Western world the characteristics which are most essential to action have migrated into the realms of art, religion, and intimate relationships, and the idea that politics could be a sphere of authentic freedom and self-disclosure has become so foreign that it seems to defy credulity.\textsuperscript{cxxiii}

\textsuperscript{cxxi} Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, pp. 47, 56.
\textsuperscript{cxxii} Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{cxxiii} Ibid, p. 56.
The foregoing provides a broad outline of Arendt's critique of the tradition of political thought. The critique she develops, however, begs an obvious question. If the tradition of political thought was so crude and inauthentic, so lacking in action's fundamental capacities such as the ability to establish relationships, to disclose new worlds, and to begin new and unique stories, how did a huge, new, and unique world such as Western civilization—founded on an enormous web of relationships—somehow result from it? Arendt believed that Rome provided an answer to this question.

The Legacy of Rome

Arendt argues that Greek political philosophy would in all likelihood have remained utopian in character if the Romans had not decided to embrace and integrate it into their politics. The tradition, in fact, played very little role at all in establishing Western civilization. In reality, this was achieved through Roman political action, but because the Romans adopted Greek political philosophy as their highest authorities in matters of theory, the conceptual framework of the tradition spread to wherever the Roman empire spread. This was the result of the fact that Roman political action had several unique characteristics which distinguished it from Greek politics.

Greek political action had had a unique kind of purity and simplicity which Arendt exploited extensively in The Human Condition. This purity resulted in a foreignness to modern ways of thinking about politics that was highly productive for

\footnote{Arendt, "What is Authority?" p. 120.}
raising political possibilities which modern individuals might not otherwise take seriously. Arendt had no delusions, however, about the political instability and conflict of Greek political life. Roman political life, on the other hand, while it lacked the simplicity and purity of Greek political life, was much more stable and less individualistic. It seemed to embody in its very nature the civic friendship which Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle had believed could have saved the Greek polis. In "Ruling and Being Ruled," she writes that "[against the Greek experience] stands the spirit of polity which flourished in Rome rather than Athens. The Roman spirit embodies and exults—to a degree it is difficult for us to recapture—the great overflowing joy of companionship among one's equals." As we will see, Roman political action was also much less foreign to our way of thinking, and in fact lies at the roots of our own civilization. This familiarity made the Romans less useful than the Greeks for theoretical purposes, but they offered a better political ideal for emulation than the Greeks.

All forms of political action have certain structural features in common, as we discussed above, but Roman political life was uniquely authoritarian and conservative. It is a testament to Arendt's ability to transcend standard political categories, such as conservative, liberal, or authoritarian, that this recognition in no sense implied that Roman political action was any less free or authentic than other forms of political action, including that of the Greeks. The common world was the most sacred thing imaginable.

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cxxviii Ibid. pp. 952-954.
to Romans. In contrast to the Greeks for whom political action in a public realm was fundamentally agonal in character—a place to demonstrate one's areté or excellence—Roman political action was concerned with the care and preservation of the common world. While the Greeks sought immortality in performing great deeds which would be memorialized by the polis, the Romans sought immortality by taking part in and carrying forward the original act of founding the Rome world. Arendt writes that "the foundation of a new body politic—to the Greeks an almost commonplace experience—became to the Romans the central, decisive, unrepeatable beginning of their whole history, a unique event."cxxix She writes:

At the heart of Roman politics, from the beginning of the republic until virtually the end of the imperial era, stands the conviction of the sacredness of foundation, in the sense that once something has been founded it remains binding for all future generations. To be engaged in politics meant first and foremost to preserve the founding of the city of Rome.

cxxx This veneration for an authoritative beginning or origin was alien to the Greeks, who treated even Homer, "the educator of all Hellas," with a glibness that would have shocked the Romans.cxxxi

All Roman political action thus revolved around the preservation of this foundation of their common world. This was possible, however, only because political action was performed under the auspices of institutions that constantly tied it back to the foundation of Rome. Arendt describes these institution as "the Roman trinity of religion,

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cxxix Arendt, "What is Authority?" p. 120.
cxxx Ibid, p. 120.
Religion was central to politics, and the two were considered nearly identical in Rome, because "the binding power of the foundation" was rooted in the fact that "the city…offered the gods of the people a permanent home." Tradition preserved the authoritative beginning through a body of myths, legends, and authoritative examples and precedents—"the testimony of the ancestors." Authority represented the political force of religion and tradition. Authority was located in the Senate, an institution which was understood to possess no actual political power, but was instead conceived as "a council of elders" representing the *maiores*, the greater ones and ancestors, and was endowed with the right of "augmentation and confirmation" of the proposed undertakings of political actors. Arendt writes that "the strength of this trinity lay in the binding force of an authoritative beginning to which 'religious bonds' tied men back through tradition" and that "to act without authority and tradition, without accepted, time-honored standards and models, without the help of the wisdom of the founding fathers was inconceivable." Political judgment was thus oriented through a tradition connected the Romans closely to their common world. All political action had to find an authoritative precedent or example, and to act without such authority was considered impious and dangerous. This did not mean that political action lost it *sui generis* character: authorities "'augment' and confirm human actions but do not guide

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^cxxiii Ibid, p. 121.
^cxxiv Ibid, pp. 122-123.
^cxxvi Ibid, pp. 122-123; *The Promise of Politics*, pp. 41-42, 54-55. As will be discussed in more depth shortly, this subsumptive feature of Roman political judgment is chiefly a result of the involvement of tradition, "whose chief function," Arendt writes in *The Promise of Politics*, "is to give answers to all questions by channeling them into predetermined categories…(p. 55)"
them," and any political action itself offered the possibility of becoming an example and precedent in its own right.\footnote{cxxxvii}  

Precedents and examples, rather, lent political action "gravitas," the ability to bear the weight of Rome's sacred foundation.\footnote{cxxxviii}  

Getting a share of immortality, then—the purpose of all politics—was not, as with the Greeks, a function of leaving memorials behind that would be remembered by future generations. It instead involved leaving behind examples for the Roman traditions which allowed one to "[grow] closer to the ancestors and the past," and thus to the sacred foundation of Rome, and as a result old age, rather than mere adulthood, was considered "the very climax of human life."\footnote{cxxxix}  

These unique characteristics gave Rome an expansiveness that would have been politically inconceivable in any other political context. To appreciate this, one need only recall Arendt's thoroughgoing political opposition to all forms of modern imperialism in \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism} and her various attacks on the Vietnam War. Modern imperialism, according Arendt, was driven by economic necessities rather than political conditions, and as a result came to see politics in terms of "expansion for expansion's sake."\footnote{cxl}  

According to Arendt, from the viewpoint of politics this was "megalomania" and "insanity," and was a "contradiction to the human condition,"\footnote{cxli}  

because politics fundamentally involves limitations.\footnote{cxlii}  

"The concept of unlimited expansion" presupposed by imperialism can only lead to "the destruction of all living
For every political structure, new or old, left to itself develops stabilizing forces which stand in the way of constant transformation and expansion.\textsuperscript{cxliii} In view of this, her apparent admiration for Roman imperialism seems like a flagrant contradiction. The truth is that Rome seems to have developed a form of politics that could be highly expansive without overstepping the inherent limits of political life. Arendt argues that because Roman political action always revolved around the preservation and carrying forward of the original foundation of the city, the idea of beginning a completely new body politic—in the manner that the Greek city-states seemed to on a regular basis—was nearly inconceivable. Roman historical consciousness was rooted and found its intelligibility in this "unique" and "unrepeatable" event, an event involving action taken on the part of the gods and superhuman "effort and toil" on the part of those that founded it.\textsuperscript{cxliv} And unlike the Greek gods whose permanent home was on Mount Olympus, the permanent home of the Roman gods was in the city of Rome itself.\textsuperscript{cxlv} Thus, the only way Rome could have understood expansion was in terms of "adding to the original foundation" until "the whole of the Western world were united and administered by Rome, as though [it] were nothing more than a Roman hinterland."\textsuperscript{cxlvi} This would likely have kept any other body politic from significantly expanding; however, two aspects of Roman politics seems to have made Rome an exceptional case. One was the tremendous political stability which the Roman trinity of religion, tradition, and authority provided to its political activity. The second had to do with the way the foundational myths and

\textsuperscript{cxliii} Ibid, pp. 137-138.
\textsuperscript{cxliv} Arendt, "What is Authority?" pp. 120-121.
\textsuperscript{cxlv} Ibid, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{cxlvi} Ibid, p. 120.
Legends of Rome gave it a self-consciousness which was uniquely open and politically inclusive in antiquity.

Reflecting on the role legends in human history in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt writes:

Legends have always played a powerful role in the making of history. Man, who has not been granted the gift of undoing, who is always an unconsulted heir of other men's deeds, and who is always burdened with a responsibility that appears to be the consequence of an unending chain of events rather than conscious acts, demands an explanation and interpretation of the past in which the mysterious key to his future destiny seems to be concealed. Legends were the spiritual foundations of every ancient city, empire, people, promising safe guidance through the limitless spaces of the future. Without ever relating facts reliably, yet always expressing their true significance, they offered a truth beyond realities, a remembrance beyond memories...The truth of the ancient legends...was nothing but the form in which past events were made to fit the human condition...Legends made him master of what he had not done...[and] could not undo. In this sense, legends are not only among the first memories of mankind, but actually the true beginning of human history.\(^{cxlvii}\)

If Arendt is correct, there are few instances in which legends have had a more far-reaching impact on human history than in the case of the Romans. Drawing on Theodor Mommsen's enormous, Nobel Prize winning work on Rome, Arendt asserts that the Romans' literature shows that they located the city's foundation not in the violent actions of Romulus, but more primordially in the stories surrounding the Trojan War, particularly as it was emblematically embellished by Virgil in the *Aeneid*.\(^{cxlviii}\) When the Trojans, under the command of Aeneas, came to the Italian peninsula after the destruction of Troy, they were confronted by the native Latins, led by Turnus, who claims to be another Achilles. In this case, however, the Trojans won the war, and Turnus was defeated by


\(^{cxlviii}\) Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," *The Promise of Politics*, p. 173. Most of Arendt's observations on Rome are based on Mommsen's dated but highly influential, work.
Aeneas; but instead of ending in the total annihilation of one or the other of the two combatants, the *Aeneid* ends with an alliance and a treaty between the warring parties.\textsuperscript{cxlix}

The Roman foundation myth ends in reconciliation because the Trojans themselves had once been decisively defeated, and were thus able to take the standpoint of those they defeated.

Arendt argues that this foundation myth structured the basic self-interpretation of Roman politics. The foundation myth expressed itself most explicitly in the distinctively political way the Romans understood legislation and foreign policy. For the Greeks, both of these activities were pre- or extra-political. The Greeks understood political action to take place within strictly circumscribed boundaries which excluded any form of violence or coercion. As result, the sphere of the household, as the realm driven by biological necessity requiring a kind of benign despotic rule by the household head, had to be strictly excluded from the political realm. The household head was only free when he left the realm of coercion and moved freely among his peers in the political realm.\textsuperscript{c} Just as in the realm of domestic policy, foreign policy, because it was also perceived fundamentally to be a realm of coercion, violence, and necessity, required strict exclusion from the political realm. Thus, for the Greeks, the word for law, *nómos*, had the sense of being like the walls of the city, which circumscribed the area in which citizens could be free.\textsuperscript{d} Outside those boundaries, violence and coercion were simply the principle on which any

\textsuperscript{cxlix} Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," *The Promise of Politics*, p. 176.

\textsuperscript{c} Ibid, p. 170.

\textsuperscript{d} Ibid, pp. 170, 178-179.
Thus, on Arendt's interpretation, Thucydides' famous Melian Dialogue simply expressed the common Greek understanding of where foreign policy is located in relation to politics, i.e., outside it. The Romans, by contrast, had a dramatically different understanding of the relationship between politics, law, and foreign policy. Unlike the Greeks, for whom politics was conceived as a kind of "island" in a sea of necessity and coercion, the Roman *lex* meant "lasting ties" and "contract." Arendt writes that for the Romans "a law is something that links human beings together, and it comes into being not by *diktat* or by an act of force but rather through mutual agreements. Formulation of law, of this lasting tie that follows the violence of war, is itself tied to proposals and counterproposals, that is, to speech, which in the view of both the Greeks and Romans was central to all politics." Thus, legislation and the laws themselves were understood by the Romans to be political by nature, in stark distinction to the Greeks, who understood legislation to be "so radically disconnected from truly political activities" that the lawgiver did not even have to be a citizen, but could be contracted from the outside to supply the city's needs like an architect or sculptor.

From out of this capacity to politicize law and foreign policy, Arendt argued that the Romans established Western civilization as what came to be a massive "common world," the scale of which had never been seen before in human history. "There is no doubt," she writes,

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clii Ibid, pp. 164-165.
clii Ibid, p. 165.
cliv Ibid, p. 171.
clv Ibid, p. 179.
clvi Ibid, p. 179.
that...the idea of a political order beyond the borders of one's own nation or city, is solely of Roman origin. The Roman politicization of the space between peoples marks the beginning of the Western world—indeed, it first created the Western world as world. There had been many civilizations before Rome, some of them extraordinarily rich and great, but what lay between them was not a world but only a desert.\textsuperscript{clvii}

These experiences gave birth to strikingly cosmopolitan ideals for such a conservative body politic: the \textit{societas Romana}, "an infinitely expandable system of alliances initiated by Rome, in which peoples and lands were not only bound to Rome by temporary and renewable treaties, but also became Rome's eternal allies."\textsuperscript{clviii} From out of this \textit{societas Romana} sprang the ideal which to this day still encompasses the Western ideal of political judgment: \textit{humanitas} or humanism.\textsuperscript{clix}

\textbf{Political Judgment in the Traditional Era}

In her essay "On Humanity in Dark Times," Arendt explains the politics of the Roman ideal of \textit{humanitas} as "the political fact that in Rome people of widely different ethnic origins and descent could acquire Roman citizenship and thus enter into the discourse among cultivated Romans, could discuss the world and life with them."\textsuperscript{clx} The crucial point here, Arendt is quick to note, is that \textit{humanitas} was not simply a matter of individual cultivation or self-improvement, as the modern notion of "humanism" is often understood to be. It was a matter of political activity, and a crucial element of the

\textsuperscript{clvii} Ibid, p. 189.
\textsuperscript{clviii} Ibid, p. 186.
\textsuperscript{clx} Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing," p. 25.
cultivation of the political judgment exercised by Roman citizens. For Arendt, the essential characteristic of judgment is what she calls "impartiality." By impartiality, Arendt is not directly speaking of an epistemological ideal such as "objectivity." Objectivity is too directly implicated in the scientific or metaphysical objectives of seeking an "Archimedean point." Judgment, rather, is based on the principle of impartiality, which does not seek to escape the perspectivalism of living in a common world, but to take in as many perspectives as possible. Good political judgment was thus arrived at by a process of cultivating this impartiality, and different body politics in human history have utilized various strategies in arriving at such cultivation. For the Greeks, impartiality was achieved within the boundaries of the agora. She writes, "Since for the Greeks the public political space is common to all (koinon), the space where the citizens assemble, it is the realm in which all things can first be recognized in their many-sidedness. This ability of see the same thing first from two opposing sides and then from all sides [is an] ability ultimately based in Homeric impartiality…" Roman impartiality, however, while it encompassed the Greeks' impartiality, went beyond it. While the Roman cosmopolitan ideal of humanitas obviously involved deliberation among an extraordinarily broad set of citizens as participants in the deliberations of the public realm, the ideal itself grew out of a sense of impartiality that was rooted in the traditions, values, and religious practices that informed Rome historical consciousness and political judgment. As a result, the common sense connection of the Romans to their

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common world was extraordinarily deep and intuitive. Because their traditions informed their activities in such an effective and natural way, their political judgment required very little genuine thought and reflection, but instead simply the analogizing of "examples" to courses of action through the practice of seeking authoritative *gravitas*.\textsuperscript{clxiv}

The effectiveness of the Romans' political judgment is nearly incontrovertible. Throughout her work, we see Arendt insist that political judgment can never be effectively evaluated in terms of the criteria of success or failure. Yet, even by this measure the effectiveness of Roman political judgment cannot be denied, since it established the most expansive, stable, and enduring political regime in human history. But even taking into account the broader historical criteria to which Arendt is referring, to an extraordinary degree the Romans seem to have achieved their true *political* goals of preserving and adding to the sacred foundation of the republic, and thus to have gained a large share of immortality. Eventually, however, the Romans' political judgment eroded, and their political effectiveness declined. Arendt believed that even the Roman trinity could not stabilize the Roman *lex* indefinitely, which in its drive to establish ties and alliances would have gone on growing forever.\textsuperscript{clxv} Rome eventually collapsed through overreach, but its heritage passed to a successor, Christianity.\textsuperscript{clxvi}

The concept of authority soon became much more ambiguous in the Christian era. While the Roman trinity provided the foundations for Western civilization, the meaning

\textsuperscript{clxv} Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," pp. 187-188.
\textsuperscript{clxvi} Arendt, "What is Authority?" p. 125.
of the trinity was mistaken for the theoretical heritage of the Greek political philosophies, and this had far reaching consequences. Arendt suggests that the passing of the Roman principle of authority to the Christian Church is an historical event which approaches the miraculous, given the "anti-political and anti-institutional tendencies" of the original content of the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{clxvii} According to Arendt, Christianity, as a religion whose initial impulses were in rebellion against the public realm and political life in general, was able to discover in its own faith a principle of authority that appeared to be as powerful and enduring as the Romans'. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus became a "decisive and unrepeatable" founding event in the same sense as was the founding of the city of Rome, and the testimony of the Apostles became equivalent to that of the Roman \textit{maiores}, the ancestors and greater ones "who had laid the foundations for all things to come."\textsuperscript{clxviii} Arendt writes that "thanks to the fact that the foundation of the city of Rome was repeated in the foundation of the Catholic Church, though, of course, with a radically different content, the Roman trinity of religion, authority, and tradition could be taken over by the Christian era."\textsuperscript{clxix} Thus, in the Christian era, authority came to be located in the Church, while political power was located with the princes of the Western world, or in the words of Pope Gelasius I: "Two are the things by which this world is chiefly ruled: the sacred authority of the Popes, and the royal power."\textsuperscript{clxx} It is this separation of power from authority which is responsible for the famous separation of church and state in Western civilization, and which accounts for the fact that the Church

\textsuperscript{clxvii} Ibid, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{clxviii} Ibid, pp. 125-126.
\textsuperscript{clxix} Ibid, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{clxx} Ibid, p. 126.
has had at least as comparable a career of historical endurance as Rome, while political
structures in the West have been far more ephemeral.\textsuperscript{clxxi} In Rome, power and authority
were located in the same institutions and this explains how its politics endured for so
long.\textsuperscript{clxxii}

Arendt argues that to a large extent it was Augustine that performed this
transformation of the Christian Church into the Roman successor institution in Western
civilization, whom she suggests was "the only great philosopher the Romans ever
had."\textsuperscript{clxxiii} Augustine's transformation was performed through a conceptual articulation
that was of a heavily Platonic in character. The Romans, due to their general lack of
interest in theoretical matters, had always acknowledged the Greeks as their authorities in
matter of political theory, even though, as we have seen, the ancient political philosophies
generally failed to capture the authentic nature of Roman political action. Arendt
suggests that the Romans had simply "superimposed" the Greek political philosophies on
their own "greatly different political experiences."\textsuperscript{clxxiv} Following a line of argument
which appears to have been built on Eric Voegelin's \textit{The New Science of Politics}, Arendt
argues that Christianity, in very surprising way, seems to have allowed the Platonic
political concepts to "[unfold] in their fullest political effectiveness."\textsuperscript{clxxv} Plato's
postulation of the ideas as "spiritual yardsticks, by which the visible, concrete affairs of
men were to be measured and judged" was never a fully effective political theory because

\textsuperscript{clxxi} Ibid, pp. 126-127.
\textsuperscript{clxxii} Ibid, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{clxxiii} Ibid, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{clxxiv} Ibid, p. 106.
\textsuperscript{clxxv} Ibid, pp. 127, 286.
the measure itself was always an "unseen measure," whose specificity and direct political implications were always in some sense idiosyncratic to the particular philosopher taking the measure. In Christian revelation, "the standards for human conduct and the principle of political communities, intuitively anticipated by Plato, had been finally revealed directly."\textsuperscript{clxxvi} Arendt quotes Voegelin saying, "in the words of a modern Platonist, it appears as though Plato's early 'orientation toward the unseen measure was now confirmed through the revelation of the measure itself."\textsuperscript{clxxvii} As a result, authority, whose political origin was the concrete political experiences of founding and preserving a sacred order, came to be identified with metaphysical and transcendent standards for human conduct which provided "for the guidance of all individual judgment."\textsuperscript{clxxvii} Political judgment in the Christian era revolved around the two conceptual pillars of the tradition of political thought, law and power. The laws of God now served as the evaluative yardstick against which the acts of power were judged. Political judgment thus became more rationalized than the fundamentally political form of judgment found in the Roman era, where the practice of identifying individual political actions with authoritative examples given by tradition did not rob those actions of their \textit{sui generis} character, but instead only provided them with \textit{gravitas}.

The "amalgamation" which merged the Greek political philosophies with the Roman trinity of religion, tradition, and authority thus became the foundation of Western civilization. After many centuries, however, this foundation began to crumble due to the

\textsuperscript{clxxvi} Ibid, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{clxxvii} Ibid, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{clxxviii} Ibid, pp. 127-128.
contingent, historical constellation which eventually led to modernity. At various moments in the early modern period, each of the Roman foundations were challenged. The humanists challenged religion and authority, while Luther and the reformation challenged the authority of the Church, and, finally, Hobbes and the seventeenth century political theorists challenged tradition. But through all of this, it was the tradition of political thought which held fast. As the various crises arose, there was a continuous Platonic flavor to the political judgments that informed the responses given to the crises, a Platonism which was the result of the logic of the tradition's conceptual framework. This Platonic flavor consistently tended to introduce elements of violence into the concept of authority, a concept based on an experience, the act of foundation, which in its authentic meaning is devoid of violence. Thus, Arendt argues that Christianity's adoption of the threat of an afterlife with rewards and punishments had followed the same tradition and logic as Plato in his political philosophies, and as result, introduced an element of violence that diluted the Roman concept of authority. This logic played itself out again in the modern revolutions and their theorists, who presumed it was simple common sense that the prospective citizens of their new regimes could not be expected to behave morally without the disincentives involved in eternal punishment.

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\(^{clxxix}\) Ibid, p. 128.
\(^{clxxx}\) Ibid, p. 132.
\(^{clxxxi}\) Ibid, pp. 133-135; it should be noted that Arendt does not think the revolutionaries were necessarily out of step with their times in making this assumption. Once the Roman trinity began to crumble, the disincentives involved in the idea of Hell were in a real sense their last line defense. Arendt states that she believes the "unprecedented criminality" of the twentieth century was to a large degree a result of the modern world's loss of the belief in hell in its public function.
There was, however, a more fundamental violence inherent in the logic of the tradition of political thought itself. These elements of violence were inherent in the making process which, as we saw earlier, had inspired Plato's political theory. In "What is Authority?" Arendt illustrates this by examining the conceptual framework which seemed to inform theorists and modern revolutionaries who confronted the problem of foundations for the first time in the history of Western civilization since the Greeks. Arendt believed Machiavelli was the first to recognize the incipient decline which was moving just under the surface of Western civilization. This was translated for Machiavelli through a deep contempt for the Church which had introduced the Christian ideal of "goodness" (an ideal which we saw was initially conceived by Plato for purposes specific to the preservation of the philosophical life) into the public realm where it did not belong and could only corrupt the essential nature of politics. She argued that Machiavelli's greatness lay in his ability to unearth fundamental political experiences which the tradition of political thought had no categories for, in an effort to provide an new foundation for a unified Italy. The problem for Machiavelli, as it would be for the modern revolutionaries who Arendt believed were his intellectual descendants, was that the act of foundation seems to have eluded them. No event in Western history was truly available on which they could base their political concepts and categories. Even the Romans only understood foundation as an event which occurred in the primordial past; the thought of laying a new foundation would have been the height of hubris to them.

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clxxxiv Ibid, p. 139.
As a result, Machiavelli, like the modern revolutionaries who would come after him, could only turn to the conceptual framework provided by the tradition of political thought. They could only conceive the possibility of foundation in terms of the categories of "making" which had informed the tradition of political thought's basic analogies, and which in turn meant that violence was presumed as a necessity of any founding. In order to "make" something new, violence must be done to that which currently exists. Arendt writes:

"[Their] justification of violence was guided by and received its inherent plausibility from the underlying argument: You cannot make a table without killing trees, you cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs, you cannot make a republic without killing people. In this respect, which became so fateful for the history of revolutions, Machiavelli and Robespierre were not Romans, and the authority to which they could have appealed would have been rather Plato…"  

There was only one revolution which escaped this logic, the American revolution, and this occurred only because the revolution did not attempt consciously to found a completely new body politic, but instead merely "confirmed and legalized an already existing body politic." But whenever political actors were confronted with the genuine problem of self-consciously founding a completely new body politic, it was invariably to the logic of the tradition of political thought they would turn.

The crisis and challenge presented by the rise of modernity to its Roman foundations would continue to exist like fault lines in the soil of Western civilization. As its Roman foundations continued to crumble and the landscape continually shifted,

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clxxxv Ibid, p. 139.
clxxxvi Ibid, p. 139.
clxxxvii Ibid, p. 140.
political actors again and again attempted to respond, but their responses were always channeled into political judgments that could not escape the categories of the tradition of political thought. And this inability to escape the logic of the tradition's categories would have fateful consequences for the modern world during the twentieth century.
Chapter Three: A *Genealogy of Modern Politics*

*The Discovery of the Archimedean Point and the Human Condition*

The final chapter of *The Human Condition*, "The *Vita Activa* and the Modern Age," brings the many strands of the book together in an unexpected and obscure concluding narrative. The chapter is conducted in the form of a "genealogy," a narrative that seeks to comprehend and explain an historic occurrence or circumstance—in this case the rise of the modern age—by uncovering its origins or fundamental causes. Conducting a genealogy, of course, is a extraordinarily difficult and complicated proposition. How does one, after all, find these sources? What is the criteria for judging their relevance? On what authority does the genealogist make her claims? Arendt herself never seemed to feel the need to establish such authority. While discussing the genealogical method she employed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in her "Reply to Eric Voegelin", she writes:

What I did—and what I might have done anyway because of my previous training and the way of my thinking—was to discover the chief elements of totalitarianism and to analyze them in historical terms, tracing these elements back in history as far as I deemed necessary and proper. That is, I did not write a history of totalitarianism, but an analysis in terms of history.¹

The genealogist, in other words, must use her judgment as she deems "necessary and proper" when isolating the origins of historical circumstances. There is no final authority or criteria that can be completely justify the enterprise. As we will see in later chapters,

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however, certain structures of judgment, specifically the human faculty of "common
sense," can nevertheless be employed to orient the activities of the genealogist. Yet,
beyond the inherent difficulties involved in the activity of genealogical research,
discovering the origins of the modern age presented a unique set of problems. Prior to
the modern age, the idea of changing or altering the human condition had always been
conceived of as utopian: it had never occurred to anyone to presume that it was possible
to do such a thing. Yet, the modern age is fundamentally characterized by a wildly
successful promethean project of doing exactly that.ii What was it that convinced modern
humanity that it was even possible to do such a thing? As Arendt showed in the
preceding chapters of *The Human Condition*, the same human activities have always been
employed by human beings. How, then, did it occur to humans that these activities—
which had always been done in response to the unchanging givenness of the human
condition—could for the first time offer a means of changing it? The origins of this
revolution in human beings' assessment of their fundamental possibilities is the story
Arendt attempts to tell in "The *Vita Activa* and the Modern Age."

One of the crucial moves Arendt makes in *The Human Condition* is to attempt to
outflank modern science by appealing to what she calls "the human condition." Arendt,
of course, was not especially original in employing this approach. What she does bring
to this form of argumentation, however, is an unusually concrete richness, and a
sophisticated grasp of its historical and political implications. Arendt studied with
Heidegger and this approach no doubt owes a great deal in particular to his early work,

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Being and Time and to such essays as "On the Essence of Truth" and "Plato's Doctrine of Truth." It is particularly indebted Heidegger's argument that the essence of truth was not "correctness," but "unconcealment"; i.e., that we have an experience of truth as unconcealment that is the existential source of our concept of truth as correctness or correspondence, and without which we would never have arrived at our own concept of truth in the first place. In other words, Arendt, under the influence of Heidegger, wanted to argue that when we know, we can never escape still having a conditioned perspective or an "existential position." We will examine this relationship with Heidegger and its influence on her thought and approach to theorizing in much more detail in chapter five.

As we saw in the last chapter, Arendt had argued in the prologue to The Human Condition that we are essentially conditioned beings—that attempting understand our

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iii Arendt explicitly acknowledges Heidegger's essay "Plato's Doctrine of Truth" as a partial inspiration for her interpretation of Plato's cave, and she and Jaspers discussed his crucial distinction there between truth as correctness and truth as unconcealment in their correspondence. See Between Past and Future, p. 284. Heidegger's profound and formative influence on Arendt is, at this point, one of the most easily established relations of influence between important intellectual figures available. Heidegger was a key figure in her philosophical training. She attended some of his most famous and important courses; he sat on her dissertation committee, and they had an intermittent romantic relationship through much of the mid- to late 1920's. In a letter describing the project that would become The Human Condition, she told Heidegger that "I would not be able to do this…without what I learned from you in my youth" (Arendt-Heidegger Correspondence, p. 120). Furthermore, consulting her papers at the Library of Congress shows that in the early 1950's Arendt taught courses on Heidegger and was regularly consulted by his translators. Finally, her concept of worldliness is undoubtedly drawn directly from Heidegger's Being and Time. See Arendt, "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought," p. 443.


v At a conference on her work in 1972, Arendt used this notion of "existential positions" to describe her understanding of the indirect relationship between thought and action. In discussing the implications for the old fabrication analogy-based model of the theory and practice, she said: "If we really believe—and I think we share this belief—that plurality rules the earth, then I think one has got to modify this notion of the unity of theory and practice to such an extent that it will be unrecognizable for those who tried their hand at it before. I really believe that you can only act in concert and I really believe that you can only think by yourself. These are two entirely different—if you want to call it—'existential' positions" (italics added). "On Hannah Arendt" conference, p. 305.
existence without reference to the existential structures or conditions of our existence would be like "attempting to jump over our shadow." vi The consequence of this observation means that when we approach the question of the status of modern science, we cannot appeal to the methodology of modern science, since that would beg the question. In attempting to grasp the status of modern science, we cannot employ modern science to first grasp these existential structures; we must instead first recognized the "facticity" (another notion drawn from Heidegger) of the structures and then interpret how they always already condition modern science. As "conditioned beings," we thus must take into account the conditions of our existence as beings before we can confront our existence as knowing beings: ontology, in other words, must precede epistemology. Arendt writes that "the human condition consists in man's being a conditioned being for whom everything, given or man-made, immediately becomes a condition of his further existence." vii Human life is conditioned by such existential structures as temporality, mortality, embodiment, scarcity, language, natality, plurality, earthboundedness, historicality, and even its own technology. viii These are not objective facts, in the conventional sense. They are conditions of our consciousness or subjectivity, so to speak. We can only understand them by understanding how they influence our consciousness. There is, so to speak, no transcendental subject of knowledge. Even when Arendt moves furthest away from the human condition in her account of the

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vi Arendt, The Human Condition, p. 10.
vii Ibid, p. 147.
thinking activity, which occurs in position completely removed from worldliness, this activity is still "conditioned," in this case by what Heidegger had called "temporality," and what Arendt calls the "gap between past and future." Thus, when Arendt suggests that there are three basic human activities (labor, work, and action) that respond to three basic human conditions (natural necessity, worldliness, and human plurality), this articulation may seem simplistic, but Arendt intends it to be so.\textsuperscript{ix} Arendt is attempting to achieve a very high level of abstraction in her account of the basic human condition, a level of abstraction which should be relatively uncontroversial and encompass more specific human conditions (embodiment, language, historicality, etc.), because she is aware that the story she is about to tell of the relationship between modern science and the human condition becomes very complex, very quickly.

Outflanking modern science for her meant first establishing that even modern science has a "perspective" or "point of view;" however, attempting to understand the point of view of modern science has never been an easy task. Indeed, according to Arendt, it's true point of reference is unique in human history, and fundamentally alien to human experience. As a result, it is not surprising that there has always been a great deal of confusion about this point, even among its most brilliant practitioners. Scientists, with significant exceptions (Francis Bacon, Werner Heisenberg, Thomas Kuhn), have for the most part ignored this question, and left the problem to philosophers.\textsuperscript{x} The philosophic

\textsuperscript{ix} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, p. 5: "The book deals only with the most elementary articulations of the human condition…"

position most often used for the analysis of science—particularly in the period since Kant—has suggested that a "view from nowhere" (Thomas Nagel) or "a God's eye view" (Hilary Putnam) is most appropriate, i.e., that, at least as a methodological presumption, science seeks to find a point outside of space and time and causal sequence, since this would ultimately be the only way to fully understand "how the universe works," which in terms of modern science's methodology is the basis of all explanation.\textsuperscript{xi} This is the presumption at the heart of Kant's faculty of reason, i.e., that certain "regulative ideas," which can in principle never be attained, nevertheless structure our epistemological presuppositions.\textsuperscript{xii} In "The Vita Activa and the Modern Age," Arendt rejects this perspective, or at least wants to claim that it does not grasp the phenomenon of modern science deeply enough. She refers to the point of view of modern science as an "Archimedean point," which is not a "God's eye view" or "view from nowhere," for it is not clear how any human point of reference could ever fully transcend our universe.\textsuperscript{xiii} The Archimedean point for scientists is located either outside or beneath the earthbound conditions of human life: anywhere, in fact, that is most convenient for a particular scientific undertaking—anywhere, that is, \textit{except} from within the human condition.\textsuperscript{xiv}

Modern science represents what Arendt believed was a kind of secret human wish to "escape," and even a "rebellion against," the human condition, which for virtually all


\textsuperscript{xii} Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A310/B366ff. I am aware that pragmatist approaches tend to emphasize the practice of error correction in an attempt to head off the criticism implied in these views. However, in my view, these approaches are simply sidestepping the critique. It seems to me that there is an unavoidable "Archimedean" point of reference implied in the notion of error correction. Where, after all, is the standard against which an "error" is judged derived from?

\textsuperscript{xiii} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{xiv} Ibid, p. 263.
of human history until the dawn of the modern age was thought to be a mere fantasy—
"like the fulfillment of wishes in fairy tales."\textsuperscript{xv} This "Archimedean wish" is profoundly
different from the condition of "worldliness" established through the human activity of
work, which had always represented the uniquely human aspiration of transcending
natural necessity, though it is most certainly an extension of this aspiration.\textsuperscript{xvi} In her
famous critique of human rights in \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}, Arendt argues that it
has always been this "deep resentment against" the "mere givenness" of the human
condition that provided the urge to develop highly political societies.\textsuperscript{xvii} Yet, political
society did not seek to escape the human condition as such, but instead to establish a
human artifice as a bulwark against the natural necessity that was an unavoidable
condition of human life on earth. The perspective of "political resentment" against the
human condition never sought to escape it, but only establish as space for freedom to be
performed in the mode of political action. The "political" perspective is—and always
will be—embedded in the human condition. The "Archimedean wish," however, aspires
to escape the human condition completely by finding a point outside the earth and the
human condition with which it could somehow move or alter the world and human life as
such.\textsuperscript{xviii} The Archimedean point seeks to escape even those worldly conditions which
establish a space for human freedom, and thus, if this wish were ever fulfilled, would be
far more radical than the mere establishment of a regime of human artifice.

\textsuperscript{xv} Ibid, pp. 2-5, 262-264.
\textsuperscript{xvi} Ibid, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{xvii} Arendt, \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}, pp. 300-301.
\textsuperscript{xviii} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 262, 288.
No doubt this wish would have remained pure fantasy but for the occurrence of a completely unexpected event in human history, whose ramifications were, from the perspective of the pre-modern world, literally unimaginable. This was the invention of the telescope by Galileo. Arendt writes:

Like the birth in a manger, which spelled not the end of antiquity but the beginning of something so unexpectedly and unpredictably new that neither hope nor fear could have anticipated it, these first tentative glances into the universe through an instrument, at once adjusted to human senses and destined to uncover what definitely and forever must lie beyond them, set the stage for an entirely new world and determined the course of other events, which with much greater stir were to usher in the modern age.\textsuperscript{xix}

The telescope (to use a much overused and abused concept) introduced a completely new paradigm into the human history. This was not mere skepticism, which had been a topic of philosophical debate since pre-Socratic philosophy. The invention of the telescope was a "demonstrable fact," and as such, it had ramifications that when far beyond the mere idea of skepticism toward the human sense apparatus.\textsuperscript{xx} Arendt writes that "the modern age began when man, with the help of the telescope...learned that his senses were not fitted for the universe, that his everyday experience, far from being able to constitute the model for the reception of truth and the acquisition of knowledge, was a constant source of error and delusion."\textsuperscript{xxi} As a result of this experience, humanity learned a lesson that fundamentally changed the world and the way humanity viewed and interacted with the world.\textsuperscript{xxii} It recognized that truth—at least, that is, truth as defined by modern scientific methodology as the absence of error and illusion—could not be

\begin{footnotes}
\item[xix] Ibid, p. 258.
\item[xx] Ibid, p. 260.
\item[xxi] Arendt, "The Concept of History," pp. 54-55.
\end{footnotes}
achieved in the context of the simple givenness of the human condition.\textsuperscript{xxiii} Therefore, the givenness of the human condition had to be escaped so that a point of reference could be established outside it, "a point in the universe outside the earth."\textsuperscript{xxiv} As luck would have it, humanity already had at its disposal an activity that it had long used to escape certain aspects of the human condition. This was the activity of work, which humanity has always used to establish a human artifice to escape, to a limited degree, the natural necessity of earthbound existence. While human beings will probably always be terrestrial creatures, it became apparent that a perspective outside terrestrial life could be achieved, an "Archimedean point," and this point was not achieved solely through humanity's natural knowing capacities, but only after these knowing capacities had been augmented, altered, or even rendered irrelevant by the tools humanity was about to build through work. This Archimedean point, it was discovered, could be used to realize unheard of possibilities which could "increase man's power of making and acting, even of creating a world, far beyond what any previous age dared to imagine in dream and phantasy."\textsuperscript{xxv}

It should be noted that the invention of the telescope was a definitive instance of a central aspect of Arendt's thought: the concept of an "event."\textsuperscript{xxvi} An event is sharply distinguished from an idea, for Arendt.\textsuperscript{xxvii} The idea of the Archimedean point had existed in the imagination of Western humanity for a very long time, but only as a kind of

\textsuperscript{xxiii} Arendt, "The Concept of History," p. 55.
\textsuperscript{xxiv} Arendt, The Human Condition, p. 262.
\textsuperscript{xxv} Ibid, p. 288; On Revolution, pp. 130-131.
\textsuperscript{xxvi} Ibid, pp. 42, 248.
\textsuperscript{xxvii} Ibid, p. 259.
thought experiment. Yet, no such idea could ever exert an objective and concrete influence the history of mankind. An event, on the other hand, is an eruption of genuine novelty in the apparently eternal natural time sequence.\textsuperscript{xxviii} Nature is constituted by eternal processes, whose causal mechanisms modern scientific methodology understands as its task to identify. Humanity, however, because of the condition of natality, has the capacity to set off new processes, and to interrupt old processes. Thus, no event can be explained in terms of any chain of causality, though they themselves always are the beginning of such chains.\textsuperscript{xxix} Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize the implications of the move Arendt is making here. By claiming that the modern scientific world view, the Archimedean point, is the result of such an event, i.e., the invention of the telescope, it can very plausibly be argued that she has successful outflanked modern science. If modern scientific methodology, which on its own terms would reject the possibility of authentic "events," is itself the result of an "event," Arendt can then plausibly claim that human deeds, events, and history have a form of reality that the explanatory models of modern science cannot account for. Human agency must then be understood to be more primordial than modern science's methodology, since such an event brought modern science into being, and is thus a necessary element in any attempt to explain the meaning of modern science itself.

What is of immediate interest for Arendt's story, however, is that the invention of the telescope did not simply reintroduce an old idea into the intellectual discourse of Western civilization. As an "event," it instead demonstrated in concrete reality that

\textsuperscript{xxviii} Arendt, "The Concept of History," pp. 42-43
\textsuperscript{xxix} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, p. 248.
escape from the human condition was an objective human possibility, and furthermore, exemplified the strategies and point of reference outside the human condition that would need to be employed in order to do it. xxx Of course, escaping and eventually altering the human condition was a project that could not have immediately been given concrete reality. Nevertheless, the genuine possibility of making such a circumstance an actual, concrete reality was immediately realized by those who recognized Galileo's discovery for what it was. Arendt writes:

While the new science, the science of the Archimedean point, needed centuries and generations to develop its full potentialities, taking roughly two hundred years before it even began to change the world and to establish new conditions for the life of man, it took no more than a few decades, hardly one generation, for the human mind to draw certain conclusions from Galileo's discoveries and the methods and assumptions by which they had been accomplished. The human mind changed in a matter of years or decades as radically as the human world in a matter of centuries; and while this change naturally remained restricted to the few...[it foreshadowed] the radical change of mind of all modern men which became a politically demonstrable reality only in our own time. xxxi

Descartes provided perhaps the purest formulation of this realization in his Discourse on Method. Because it illustrates so many of Arendt's observations about the worldview of modernity, I will quote it a length:

But as soon as I had acquired some general notions regarding physics...[and] I had noticed where they could lead and how much they differ from the principles that have been in use up to the present, I believed I could not keep them hidden away without sinning grievously against the law that obliges us to procure, as much as is in our power, the common good of all men. For these notions made me see that it is possible to arrive at knowledge that would be very useful in life and that, in place of that speculative philosophy taught in the schools, it is possible to find a practical philosophy, by means of which, knowing the force and the actions of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that surround us, just as distinctly as we know the various skills of our craftsmen, we might be able, in the same way, to use them for all the purposes for which

xxxi Ibid, p. 271.
they are appropriate, and thus render ourselves, as it were, masters and possessors of nature. This is desirable not only for the invention of an infinity of devices that would enable one to enjoy trouble-free the fruits of the earth and all the goods found there, but also principally for the maintenance of health...and that one could rid oneself of an infinity of maladies...and even perhaps the frailty of old age, if one had sufficient knowledge of their causes...³³ii

No doubt a more deeply Archimedean viewpoint on the human condition, and the possibilities of transcending it which are afforded by modern science, can scarcely be imagined. To recognize the novelty of this outlook in human history one might, for instance, juxtapose this formulation with the incredulity and contempt which the Greeks directed toward Xerxes' insolence toward the earth's chthonic powers in building his marvelous pontoon bridge across the Hellespont, expressed most famously in Aeschylus' Persians.³³iii

The most radical moment in Descartes' formulation is his contemplation of a new kind of philosophy, a "practical" philosophy that was to challenge the "speculative" philosophy of "the schools." Of course, in a sense, "practical philosophy" had existed at least since Plato and Aristotle, but what was meant by this term was very different from what Descartes envisions in Discourse on Method. Prior to the modern age, "practical philosophy" meant philosophy that concerned itself with human activity. As we saw in the last chapter, Arendt is skeptical of the genuinely authentic philosophical nature of this form of philosophy, claiming that it was mainly the result of the ancient philosophers' need to find a place for themselves in the polis. But even excluding Arendt's argument

about the origins of the tradition of political thought, the tradition of "practical philosophy" was still of very different quality than Descartes' "practical" philosophy. The old practical philosophy still recognized that philosophical thought and contemplation were of a higher order than human activity: practical philosophy was not engaged in "for the sake of" better human action—at least, not strictly speaking. The end, the telos, the "for the sake of" of human action was still to make possible contemplation, the highest possibility of human life. Of course, there was an alternate tradition of political action that would have challenged these presumptions which the tradition had ignored and excluded, and which Arendt spends most of *The Human Condition* unearthing. But even this tradition rejected Descartes' vision, since the goals of political action pursued objectives and ideals that it felt were above the "welfare of mankind," which Descartes believed was now the highest objective of philosophy. Thus, the fundamental difference between the old "practical philosophies" and the new "practical" philosophy, is that philosophy itself—and not just a rather questionable and specific branch of it—now comes to be defined and have meaning only insofar as it furthers the welfare of mankind; the end and telos of philosophy is no longer located in the life changing experience of contemplation, but instead in bringing about the "common good" of mankind. Thus, ultimately, though it is true that modern scientific research still retains in certain respects its old contemplative ethos (moon landings, after all, have tended to have relatively little value for human welfare), it can hardly be denied that the

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This alternate tradition was articulated within the tradition of political thought in Aristotle's conception of *phronesis* and Machiavelli's concept of *virtù/fortuna*. Arendt, as we will see later in chapter six, was for various reasons convinced that neither Aristotle nor Machiavelli truly escaped that framework of fabrication in their articulations of action. She therefore looked beyond them to sources such as Homer, Sophocles, and other less philosophically oriented accounts of the life of action.
enormous prestige modern science holds in our society is due to its wildly successful fulfillment of the promise a "practical" philosophy envisioned by Descartes.

This shift in the meaning of philosophy was not, however, simply some haphazard development in the history of ideas. Arendt argues that it was instead a justifiable and even logical response to the discovery of the Archimedean point. As we learned in the previous chapter, Western civilization had traditionally understood there to be two fundamentally different ways of life: the life of the mind or *vita contemplativa*, which oriented itself toward the activities of thought, and pursued ideals and standards derived from the experience of contemplation; and the life of action or *vita activa*, which oriented itself toward the worldly activities of labor, work, and action, and pursued ideals and standards derived from the experience of political action. Western civilization had traditionally understood there to be a hierarchy between the two ways of life where the *vita contemplativa* was recognized to represent human possibilities that were of a higher order than the *vita activa*. This hierarchy was primarily a result of the Romans' embrace of the ancient Greek philosophers as their authorities in matters of theory, and was established firmly after the Platonic reaffirmation of Western civilization was articulated by Augustine and the Christian Church. This hierarchy, it should be noted, is not identical with the tradition of political thought. The tradition of political thought had sought to understand and establish a relationship between the two ways of life in order to secure the way of life of the philosophers. The hierarchy of the two ways of life, on the other hand, was simply a function of how the inhabitants of the West

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**xxxv Arendt, The Human Condition**, pp. 14-16, 289
**xxxvi** Ibid, p. 14; "What is Authority?" pp. 126-127.
understood the essential human possibilities available within the context of the human condition. In a world where the human condition was simply given and unchanging, the life of the mind was conceived to be higher than the life of action because it represented the only genuine possibility of leaving the human condition behind. As Aristotle says, "...the wise man can practice contemplation by himself [as opposed to needed other men to perform noble deeds before]...he is the most self-sufficient of all men," and "...it follows, then, that the activity of the gods, which is supremely happy, must be a form of contemplation...Happiness, then, is co-extensive with contemplation, and the more people contemplate, the happier they are." Further, we also saw that within the vita activa the distinctions within it had for the most part been ignored and political action had been conceived in inauthentic terms based on the fabrication process analogy. If they had been given articulation, however, it would have been recognized that action was above work, which in turn was above labor, since this was the order of activities which were naturally freest in relation to the human condition.

According to Arendt, the profound impact of the discovery of the Archimedean point can be grasped most fully by understanding how it's clear implications for human possibilities within the human condition completely altered the preeminence awarded both among and within the vitas—a shift in preeminence, moreover, that would appear to those experiencing it to have been completely merited. The telescope conclusively demonstrated that the human sense apparatus, which had developed in response to the human condition, was incapable of knowing the universe. Instead, it was revealed that

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humans had to develop tools and experimental techniques which escaped the human condition and allowed them to study the universe from the Archimedean point. In other words, while humans would always have a need and desire to understand the world they lived in, they realized they could never arrive at this knowledge through their given knowing capacities, but instead only through their capacities for making. As a result, a double reversal occurred in the *vitas*: within the *vita activa* preeminence was justifiably given to the goals and standards of the activity of work, while at the same time the traditional hierarchy among the *vitas* was inverted.xxxviii Thus, for the first time in Western civilization, doing came to carry greater prestige than contemplating. Arendt writes:

…the fundamental experience behind the reversal of contemplation and action was precisely that man's thirst for knowledge could be assuaged only after he had put his trust into the ingenuity of his hands. The point was not that truth and knowledge were no longer important, but that they could be won only by "action" and not by contemplation. It was an instrument, the telescope, a work of man's hands, which finally forced nature, or rather the universe, to yield its secrets.xxxix

The hierarchy between the *vitas* in the modern age was inverted because human beings concluded on the basis of the discovery of the Archimedean point that "one can only know what he has made himself."xl In this phrase, Arendt is pointing out that prior to the modern age, knowing something meant knowing "what" or "why" it was, while understand the natural processes that determined "how" it worked had always been a concern of the fabrication process' technical apparatus.xli In the modern age, this question

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of "how" became the defining characteristic of knowledge because it allowed for a level of certainty previously unavailable to humans' knowing capacities—but only on the condition that what was known was something in a certain sense "made" by the knower through the technique of experiment. Arendt writes that experiment allows humans, instead of only being conditioned by nature, to prescribe conditions to nature which would not have occurred otherwise than as a result of human thought. And, of course, none of this would have been imaginable without the discovery of the Archimedean point. The result of all of this has been the capacity to "act into nature," to channel natural or cosmic forces which would otherwise never have naturally occurred in the terrestrial context of the human condition, as was demonstrated so dramatically by the explosion of the atomic bomb. This idea of "acting into" conditions of human life (whether it is nature, the web of human relations, or human nature itself) in ways that set off unheard of processes is the ultimate concern for Arendt, because it has linked together action and work in ways that make them ambiguous, unpredictable, and deeply dangerous.

But it was not only the newly revealed truth-generating capacities of the work activity that generated these reversals. In fact, as we saw with Descartes, it was the practical implications that drove this reversal: for if there is, as Arendt suggests, such a thing as a profound, existential resentment against the human condition, then work had

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xlii Ibid, p. 298.
xliii Ibid, p. 231.
clearly demonstrated that humanity now had the capacity to grant the age-old utopian fantasy of escaping and altering the human condition.

While the new science...[needed] roughly two hundred years before it even began to change the world and to establish new conditions for the life of man, it took no more than a few decades, hardly one generation, for the human mind to draw certain conclusions from Galileo's discoveries and the methods and assumption by which they had been accomplished.xlvi

Within a century and a half, these new conditions would come to be a reality that would define the political circumstances of the modern age. Western civilization would see a previously unimaginable level of abundance that placed increasing pressure on political institutions to realize "unheard of conditions of universal equality" in concrete social life for all of its citizens.xlvii While initially these demands were exacerbated and radicalized by the drastic increase in misery produced by the early stages of the industrial revolution, in the modern world labor has come to be painless and effortless.xlviii Yet, for all of the deservedly prestigious accomplishments that modern science has achieved with the help of the Archimedean point, Arendt insists that they have not come without costs. This vast expansion of human welfare carried a deep, unrecognized darkening of the human world, and a profound alienation of political judgment that would have profound and, eventually, catastrophic consequences for Western civilization.

_xlvi_ Ibid, p. 271.
_xlviii_ Ibid, pp. 117, 132.
World Alienation and the Politics of the Modern age

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt argues that our modern world is fundamentally characterized by its being "a society of laborers." By this Arendt means that the hierarchies within the *vitas* have been completely inverted. Prior to the modern age labor and work were performed for the sake of action: the freedom actualized in action redeemed and gave meaning to them; and thought was understood to provide the standards against which action was judged, and ultimately demanded the protection of the *vita activa* so that it could pursue contemplation. Now, however, action and work have become ambiguously indistinct activities which are performed for the sake of labor, i.e., for the right of all human beings to perform their part in the increasing abundance and consumption of human welfare. Thought and the *vita contemplativa*, which are for the most part conducted in the form of scientific research, to the extent it is pursued for its for its own sake as an authentically theoretical activity, is viewed at best with indulgence and mild contempt by those who practice the now dominant *vita activa*, and who cannot appreciate the purpose of a thoughtful activity that does not ultimately somehow contribute to greater abundance and consumption. In other words, it is labor and the society it has produced that now gives meaning (i.e., which now provide the "for-the-sake-of") to all other human activities. The problem with this state of affairs is that labor can never be a meaning-generating activity in the same way that thought and action are, because, as we saw in the last chapter, only activities that can actualize human freedom

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xlix Ibid, p. 126.
1 Ibid, pp. 126, 130-135, 236.
can produce meaning, and labor, no matter how effortless, will always be driven by the necessity of the life process. Thus, in the very structure of its active life modern society is fundamentally futile, perversely making the one activity that is most futile and meaningless, labor, the goal and purpose of the activities humans possess which can produce the meaningfulness that could justify their existence. However, this radical change in the conditions of human life in Western civilization was no sheer happenstance event; underneath the surface, the discovery of the Archimedean point has driven this process.

Arendt uses the term "world alienation" to characterize this dark side of the discovery of the Archimedean point. It signifies the relation of modern individuals to their worldly conditions in the modern age and the modern world. As we saw in the last chapter, Arendt understands human activity to center around the fact that human beings are always already conditioned by an objective world which separates and relates them. The objective world is comprised of the public and the private realms: the public provides a sphere for humans to gain immortality through political action, i.e., action performed in the public; the private realm provides the space for withdrawal from the public gaze, where humans can concern themselves with reflection and maintenance of the necessities of life. The modern age and the modern world are both characterized by the fact that this objective world has ceased to perform these functions in an unambiguous way, and, moreover, the inhabitants of the modern world have for the most part lost their common sense feeling or intuitive connection and sixth sense which fits them into the common

\[\text{i}\text{ii}\text{Ibid, pp. 253-257, 261-268.}\]
world. The Archimedean point has destroyed the traditional world of Western civilization and altered the conditions of human life in profound ways that are virtually unintelligible in traditional terms; it, furthermore, has replaced the common world as the point of reference for humans’ political activities. The political consequences of world alienation are reflected in the history of the modern world where politics has taken the form of either a dangerous sphere of potential tyranny, or a sphere of corruption, hypocrisy, and national housekeeping, both of which exclude political action in all but the most extraordinary circumstances.iii

The discovery of the Archimedean point, though by far the most significant, was not the only factor that brought into existence the modern age and its successor, the modern world, along with the world alienation that has increasingly been their

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iii There is a slight terminological ambiguity concerning the idea of world alienation in *The Human Condition*. In the early chapters of "The Vita Activa and the Modern Age," Arendt draws a distinction between the "world alienation" begun by the accumulation of wealth that resulted from the Reformation's expropriation of Church land, and the "earth alienation" that was the result of the discovery of the Archimedean point's impulse to escape from the human condition (*The Human Condition*, p. 264). However, to my knowledge, this short passage is the only occasion where she ever draws this distinction, indeed, the only time she ever uses the term "earth alienation," either in the rest of *The Human Condition*, or throughout the remainder of her work. Other than this instance, she typically uses the more generic term "world alienation" or some other similar designation such as "worldlessness" or "loss of the world," etc. (Ibid, pp. 115-118, 322). Thus, this ambiguity should not trouble us all that much. In the last chapter, we saw a similar conceptual ambiguity in the discussion of "The Public Realm" chapter in *The Human Condition*, which Arendt eventually clarified in her later writings. A similar thing happens with "world alienation." In *Between Past and Future*, she uses the term "world-alienation" several times, and typically in places where, if the distinction had been maintained, should have employed "earth-alienation" ("The Concept of History," pp. 53-54). This unfinished quality of *The Human Condition* and its recurrent tendency towards occasional conceptual ambiguity is probably partly attributable to the fact that her contract with the University of Chicago Press stipulated a deadline (Arendt-Jaspers, *Correspondence 1926-1969*, p. 327), and partly to the unsystematic nature of Arendt's writing process. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl notes that "essays were Arendt's best medium, and she composed all of her books in essay-like sections, sometimes neglecting to make the joints between the pieces smooth when they emerged in book form" (Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, pp. 278-280). At any rate, I purpose to use the generic term "world alienation" to signify the various turns of phrase she uses in expressing the idea that the modern world has been fundamentally characterized by a growing detachment, obscurity, and ominous unpredictability in relation to its inhabitants, particularly in the most significant arena of life: politics (in Arendt's expansive sense).
There were at least two other key factors without which the modern world would not have come into existence in the exceptionally radical form it eventually did. One of these elements was Western civilization’s Christian tradition, which asserted life as the highest good. This element provided a kind of hidden center of gravity in the chain of events that would lead to the modern world, in that at key moments the modern age could have chosen to move in different directions than it eventually did. For Arendt, the influence of Christianity's heavy emphasis on life seems to be the underlying factor that pulled the modern age toward the world it eventually became.

The second element is the expropriation of church property that began in the Reformation, but which, unintentionally, led to the end of feudalism and the expropriation of the peasantry. The significance of this element lies chiefly in its involvement in a fundamental shift in the notion of property in the Western world which had far-reaching consequences for the conditions of life in the modern age. Prior to the expropriation process begun during the Reformation, property had always been understood as the condition *sine qua non* of political action: not something that fundamentally involves politics itself, but which had to be in place as a shelter from the necessities of life and the public gaze in order for the citizen to engage in politics. Arendt writes that "property, as distinguished from wealth and appropriation, indicates the privately owned share of a common world and therefore is the most elementary

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lvii Ibid, pp. 251-252.
political condition for man's worldliness."" When expropriation brought the end of feudalism, the peasants lost their private places in the world, and as a result, were the first definite strata of the inhabitants of Western civilization to experience world alienation.\textsuperscript{lx}\footnote{Ibid, p. 253.} Arendt writes that "the new laboring class, which literally lived from hand to mouth, stood not only directly under the compelling urgency of life's necessity but was at the same time alienated from all cares and worries which did not immediately follow from the life process itself."\textsuperscript{lx\textsuperscript{i}}} Expropriation began a process which would lead to a radical redefinition of property, particularly by the classical political economists, such as Locke, Smith, and Marx, whose work was so central to laying down the principles of modern interpretations of the tradition of political thought.\textsuperscript{lx\textsuperscript{ii}}} In the modern age, property was redefined in terms of wealth as a commodity which was amenable to accumulation and appropriation, but which in concrete reality had little actually relationship to the older ideal of privacy—indeed, actually worked against it.\textsuperscript{lx\textsuperscript{iii}}} Appropriation or wealth accumulation is a process of what is often called "creative destruction," where wealth is generated by overthrowing what was built before, and is therefore the central process involved in the development of capitalism.\textsuperscript{lx\textsuperscript{iv}}} Arendt points out, however, that what was unique about the process begun by the Reformation expropriation was that it was not like previous instances of this process in that it "did not simply result in new property or lead to a new redistribution of wealth, but were fed back into the process to generate further
expropriations, greater productivity, and more appropriation. Why was this instance of expropriation different? Why at this particular moment in history did it feedback into the process and begin the development of Capitalism? Arendt is never completely clear about exactly why this unique instance of the expropriation process first began to feedback into itself, though its seeming near synchrony with the emergence of modern science is suggestive. As we have seen, Arendt argued that the Roman foundations of the Western world—religion, tradition, and authority—were all undermined by the emergence of modern science. One could hypothesize that the "feedback" which occurred in this particular instance of expropriation had to do with the fraying of these objective structures of the Western world, which as a result could no longer contain and bring stabilization to the life process underlying the new expropriation process.

These three key elements—the discovery of the Archimedean point, the Christian emphasis on life as the highest good, and the Reformation's expropriation process which led to the Industrial Revolution—provided the historical transformation that would eventually result in the modern age's central political obsession, universal equality, and the society of laborers which is above all animated by this politics. Nevertheless, there is no question that the Archimedean point was the dominant variable, for without the pattern of thinking which arose from it, a pattern of thinking that focused on the concept

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Ibid, p. 255.
of "process" rather than the traditional idea of "being," the other two elements would have remained unremarkable.\textsuperscript{lxi}

The fact that, due to the emergence of modern science, process thinking would come to dominate the modern world with the kind of absoluteness it has was at first glance not necessarily obvious, according to Arendt. The discovery of the Archimedean point initially seemed to lead to a world dominated by \textit{homo faber}: a world where work was the highest activity of human beings.\textsuperscript{lxvii} This conclusion seemed unavoidable because, since human knowledge was now recognized to depend on the capacity to develop tools and instruments that allow us to escape the human condition, all activity was now interpreted from the viewpoint of work. Arendt points out that the structure of the fabrication process always leads to an objective, finished product, and as a result, it was at first not obvious that the modern world would lose confidence in the objective world in the drastic way it has.\textsuperscript{lxx} Initially, the modern age "found its most plausible theory in the famous analogy of the relationship between nature and God with the relationship between the watch and the watchmaker."\textsuperscript{lxix}


\textsuperscript{lxvii} Ibid, pp. 294-296.

\textsuperscript{lxviii} Ibid, pp. 296-297.

\textsuperscript{lxix} Ibid, p. 297.
The point in our context is not so much that the eighteenth-century idea of God was obviously formed in the image of *homo faber* as that in this instance the process character of nature was still limited. Although all particular natural things had already been engulfed in the process from which they had come into being, nature as a whole was not yet a process but the more or less stable end product of a divine maker. The image of watch and watchmaker is so strikingly apposite precisely because it contains both the notion of a process character of nature in the image of the movements of the watch and the notion of its still intact object character in the image of the watch itself and its maker.\textsuperscript{lxix}

Thus, Arendt argues that for a period of time in the early modern age it appeared that *homo faber* would establish a new world built on the idea of work as the highest activity. It was understood that human beings, as made in the image of God, were simply taking the standpoint of the One who made nature.\textsuperscript{lxxi} The activity of work, to the extent it was an activity that responded to the condition of worldliness, tended to judge itself—along with its own internal standards of "creativity and productivity"—according to objective worldly standards such as "utility and beauty," and idealized the objective, expressive activities of the artist.\textsuperscript{lxii} There is even an authentic public realm associated with *homo faber*,\textsuperscript{lxiii} the exchange market: "homo faber is fully capable of having a public realm of his own, even though it may not be a political realm, properly speaking. His public realm is the exchange market, where he can show the products of his hand and receive the esteem which is due him."\textsuperscript{lxiv}

Unfortunately, it soon became evident that the Archimedean point was problematic and unstable in terms of lived experience, in that there was ultimately no fixed point of reference which human beings could appeal to. Humans "move freely"

\textsuperscript{lxix} Ibid, p. 297.
\textsuperscript{lxxi} Ibid, pp. 295-296.
\textsuperscript{lxii} Ibid, pp. 152, 167ff, 296.
\textsuperscript{lxiii} Ibid, pp. 159ff.
\textsuperscript{lxiv} Ibid, p. 160.
through the universe using the Archimedean point; yet, this possibility seemed to imply
that there was no way for humans to orient themselves in a stable way to their worldly
existence.\textsuperscript{lxxv} Consequently, a world based around the standards of \textit{homo faber} turned out
to be analogously unstable. The instrumental standards of the work activity are
eventually always driven by its internal logic to seek out authoritative standards beyond
itself.\textsuperscript{lxxvi} Arendt argues that the means/ends category which is central to the utilitarian
logic of work is trapped in an infinite regress to the extent that when restricted to its own
standards it does not have some deeper meaning beyond that category to appeal to. She
writes:

Within the category of means and end…there is no way to end the chain of means and
ends and prevent all ends from eventually being used again as means, except to declare
that one thing or another is "an end in itself." In the world of \textit{homo faber}, where
everything…must lend itself as an instrument to achieve something else, "meaning"
[quote marks added to clarify her language] itself can appear only as an end, as an "end in
itself" which actually is either a tautology applying to all ends or a contradiction in terms.
For an end, once it is attained, ceases to be an end and loses its capacity to guide and
justify the choice of means, to organize and produce them. It has now become an object
among objects, that is, it has been added to the huge arsenal of the given from which
\textit{homo faber} selects freely his means to pursue his ends.\textsuperscript{lxxvii}

Politically, this meant that, since the modern age, action and work have become
ambiguously associated with one another.\textsuperscript{lxxviii} As we will discuss in more detail
momentarily, action has consistently been interpreted in terms of the means/end category,
with the result that when humans sought to reestablish an authentic political realm in the
modern age through the novel phenomenon of revolution, they rightly sought to reject the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{lxxv} Ibid, pp. 263-264, 284.
\item \textsuperscript{lxxvi} Ibid, pp. 165-166, 284, 304-308.
\item \textsuperscript{lxxvii} Ibid, pp. 154-155.
\item \textsuperscript{lxxviii} Ibid, pp. 228-230.
\end{itemize}
laboring and consuming activity that characterized modern politics and recurred back to the slightly older interpretation of political action interpreted in terms of *homo faber*, since on the basis of the Archimedean point, any other interpretation was nearly inconceivable.

As we saw in the last chapter, prior to the modern age such exogenous standards were provided by the activity of contemplation in the form of Christianity, which having reinterpreted and co-opted the Roman foundations of tradition, religion, and authority, provided standards and goals for the work of *homo faber*. However, as the logic of the Archimedean point became more apparent—particularly as it was articulated by modern philosophy, and preeminently by Descartes—it increasingly became the case that this traditional way of arriving at exogenous standards was implausible to the inhabitants of the modern age. Arendt points out that, unlike traditional philosophy which was based on the primordial experience of *thaumazein* or philosophical wonder at "what is," the primordial experience of modern philosophy is doubt, specifically the doubt engendered by the invention of the telescope and its concomitant demonstration that the human mind and sense apparatus is not equipped to perceive the way things truly are, and thus must be augmented and interfered with by the human fabrication of tools. She writes that "just as from Plato and Aristotle to the modern age conceptual philosophy, in its greatest and most authentic representatives, had been the articulation of wonder, so modern philosophy since Descartes has consisted in the articulations and ramifications of

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lxxx Ibid, pp. 302-304.
lxxxi Ibid, pp. 273-274.
Summarizing the unprecedented and radical nature of modern scientifically informed doubt, Arendt writes:

Cartesian doubt, in its radical and universal significance, was originally the response to a new reality...The philosophers understood at once that Galileo's discoveries implied no mere challenge to the testimony of the senses and that it was no longer reason, as in Aristarchus and Copernicus, that had "committed such a rape on their senses," in which case men indeed would have needed only to choose between their faculties and to let innate reason become "the mistress of their credulity." It was not reason but a man-made instrument, the telescope, which actually changed the physical world view; it was not contemplation, observation, and speculation which led to the new knowledge, but the active stepping in of homo faber, of making and fabricating... The old opposition of sensual and rational truth, of the inferior truth capacity of the senses and the superior truth capacity of reason, paled beside this challenge, beside the obvious implication that neither truth nor reality is given, that neither of them appears as it is, and that only interference with appearance, doing away with appearances, can hold out a hope for true knowledge.

This new experience of doubt became a primordial experience because it was far more radical than the ancient skeptical doubts about the human sense apparatus. To the extent doubt now became the driving force in the human pursuit of knowledge, certainty became the ultimate standard of knowledge, and certainty of knowledge, it appeared, could only be gained by escaping the human condition and by "making sure" through the use of tools. Thus, it was demonstrated that neither human sense faculties nor even human reason could be trusted, because the substantive or conceptual reason that philosophers prior to the modern age had employed had ultimately always depended on a original relationship with human common sense. Once common sense was called into

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\textsuperscript{lxxxii} Ibid, p. 274.
\textsuperscript{lxxxiii} Ibid, p. 274.
\textsuperscript{lxxxiv} Ibid, p. 290.
\textsuperscript{lxxxv} Ibid, pp. 274-275.
question, substantive conceptions of reason, even while they intended to criticize common sense, had no place to begin.

Thus, a profound skepticism toward given human experience lies at the roots of modern science. This radical skepticism is the source of modern "world alienation," because now a wedge had been driven between our worldly experience and our beliefs and confidence in the way things truly are. The Roman trinity of religion, tradition, and authority which underpinned the Western world was for the first time regarded with suspicion (which in a political sense amounted to its virtual destruction), and common sense, as the sixth sense humans possess that fits their other five senses meaningfully into the world, had now been shown to be intuitively oriented toward a world that, from the perspective of modern science, was ultimately only a source of illusion. She writes that "if Being and Appearance part company forever, and this…indeed is the assumption of all modern science, than there is nothing left to be taken on faith; everything must be doubted," and if everything must be doubt, what in our intuitive, common sense experience of the given world could we have confidence in? This realization was immediately greeted with horror by anyone not dazzled with the Promethean possibilities of the discovery of the Archimedean point: "the feeling of suspicion, outrage, and despair…was the first, and spiritually is still the most lasting consequence of the discovery that the 'Archimedean point was no vain dream of idle speculation…" Arendt, in other words, argues that the price humans paid for the unheard of capacities given to them by the discovery of the Archimedean point was the loss of confidence in all

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that their common sense connection to their world had allowed them to previously hold dear—"that both despair and triumph are inherent in the same event...It is as if Galileo's discovery proved in demonstrable fact that both the worst fear and the most presumptuous hope of human speculation...could only come true together, as though the wish would be granted only provided that we lost reality and the fear was to be consummated only if compensated by the acquisition of supramundane powers."\textsuperscript{\textit{Ixxxviii}}

Be that as it may, humans were still terrestrial creatures. If their common sense had been delegitimized by the Archimedean point, than some new way of organizing and getting around in a world structured on the basis of the Archimedean point was needed. The beginnings of the solution that would eventually be devised to this problem began when modern philosophy starting with Descartes turned inward and discovered that if we can no longer trust our common sense connection to a common world that separates and relates us, there were at least certain processes and structures of the mind which we, as humans, all shared.\textsuperscript{\textit{Ixxix}} Arendt argues that common sense was thus replaced by what Hobbes had called "reckoning with consequences" or what she calls "common sense reasoning."\textsuperscript{\textit{Xc}} Since they had been alienated from "given reality," the only reality humans in the modern world felt they could be certain of was the reality that they produced on the basis of introspective examination of the structure of the human mind, and exemplified by mathematical knowledge. It was only by appealing to this mental structure that Cartesian doubt could be escaped, since "neither God nor an evil spirit can change the

\textsuperscript{\textit{Ixxxviii}} Ibid, p. 262.
\textsuperscript{\textit{Ixxix}} Ibid, pp. 282-283.
\textsuperscript{\textit{Xc}} Ibid, pp. 283-284.
fact that two plus two equals four." Thus, Arendt argues that it was Descartes' ingenuous solution that eventually solved the problem of the instability of the Archimedean point: while scientists could always move the Archimedean point where they needed to for the purposes of research, for practical purposes the solution lay in locating the Archimedean point within human mind. When this shift toward process thinking or "common sense reasoning" occurred, the old early modern idea of a science based on the model of the watch and the watchmaker became untenable: the concern was no longer with thing observed, but with the forces and processes which underlay it. What appeared now were only incidental indications of the invisible forces or processes that constitute actual reality, and thus the criteria for knowledge in modern science became "whether or not it will work," i.e., whether the experiment produces the result that had been predicted in the hypothesis. Thus, the criterion of success became the singular standard of judgment of modern scientific knowledge. And as we will see, this standard has become, if not the only practical standard of judgment in the modern world, at least the preeminent practical standard, without which courses of action are necessarily judged as failures.

On the basis of this new standard of thinking in terms of processes, humans began to look for processes outside the direct confines of philosophical introspection and experimental science. They began to see processes in places they had never before thought to look: the realm of human affairs. In *The Human Condition* Arendt argues that

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xcii Ibid, pp. 296-297.
xciii Ibid, p. 278.
process thinking interacted with the other two elements identified earlier—expropriation and the Christian emphasis on life as the highest good—to give birth to the modern age's politics of universal equality, and its corresponding society, the society of laborers. Arendt argues that the classical political economists, beginning with Locke, and leading up to Smith and Marx, developed their theories about the origins and development of property and liberal government by utilizing process thinking to recognize that expropriation had started off "a hither-to unheard of process of growing wealth, growing property, and growing acquisition."\textsuperscript{xciv} Locke clearly held to the older conception of property as maintaining one's own private place in the world.\textsuperscript{xcv} Yet, he chose to locate the origin of property not in the objective worldly structure of the human artifice, but instead in human "labor power," which, according to Arendt, can never be the origin of property, since labor is our response to the natural necessity of the biological process which our privately owned share of the world is intended to be a bulwark against. Locke, and the political economists that followed him, were the first to recognize that human labor power has an essential fertility, that it always creates more than is necessary for its own life's maintenance, and furthermore that the accumulation of human wealth—demonstrated in his time in this novel process of expropriation—was somehow the result of human labor power.\textsuperscript{xcvi} It is ultimately, therefore, this labor power that is the source of the abundance that the modern world has seen, and only incidentally the result of the explosive growth and development of our society's technology.\textsuperscript{xcvii} Arendt argues that

\textsuperscript{xciv} Ibid, p. 105.
\textsuperscript{xcv} Ibid, pp. 105-106, 115.
\textsuperscript{xcvi} Ibid, pp. 101-106, 111-112.
\textsuperscript{xcvii} Ibid, pp. 118-119, 121-122, 124-126.
tools and technology are always characterized by instrumentality, by the category of means and ends. Tools may just as well be directed toward creating a stable world as they may be used to increase the natural fertility of human labor.\textsuperscript{xcviii} Our world would certainly have nothing like the abundance it now has if it were not for the tools and implements of modern labor power, but it is always labor, as the source of wealth, that is being accentuated and strengthened. Without it, its tools would be meaningless. Thus, it seemed highly plausible for Locke and his successors, especially from the standpoint of the process thinking engendered by the Archimedean point, to locate the origin of property in human labor power, because they had quite insightfully recognized that labor, if not actually the source of property, was clearly the origin of wealth.

The classical political economists had recognized expropriation and grasped that if it was generalized to society as whole, humans could expect great improvement in their material conditions. Arendt, however, had pointed out that this process had itself been the result of the end of feudalism and the worldless condition of these new workers in the emergent industrial revolution. Thus, in order for this process to be generalized to society as a whole, this condition of worldlessness would also have to be generalized. This meant that the inhabitants of the modern age would have to come to interpret themselves and their politics as a society of worldless laborers. She believed that theoretically, this articulation had been persuasively performed by Locke, Smith, and, most comprehensively, Marx.\textsuperscript{xcix} Nevertheless, some higher standard had to be in place in order to animate and bring into concrete existence this society of laborers. Her

\textsuperscript{xcviii} Ibid, pp. 121-122, 308.
\textsuperscript{xcix} Ibid, pp. 101ff.
solution was to argue that the Christian notion of life as the highest good is the element that provided this animating principle. Christian theology, under the direct influence of Hebrew theology, tended to place the life of the individual at the center of its outlook. Unlike political societies such as the Greeks or Romans that preceded it—for whom immortality was achieved by memorialization in an enduring common world—Christianity understood immortality to be bound up with the fate of each individual believer in the afterlife. Arendt writes that "the Christian 'glad tidings' of the immortality of individual human life…reversed the ancient relationship between man and world and promoted the most mortal thing, human life, to the position of immortality, which up to then the cosmos had held." Thus, what was sacred was the life of each believer, since this was the condition of their immortality, and not free political action in the company of their peers. And this belief in the sacredness of life has remained one of the great commitments of Western civilization. Traditional Christian society's "fundamental belief in the sacredness of life has survived, and has even remained completely unshaken by, secularization and the general decline of the Christian faith."

However, the modern version of this belief in the sacredness of life is, to say the least, far less elevated. In the modern world, for the first time people began to abandon the category of the immortal all together. It is no longer unimaginable to live one's life without belief in a God who exists in eternity or an immortal life or a common world that will outlast us. For the first time "absolute mortality" has become a possibility for human

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beings. Thus, the elevated ideal of Christian beatitude was replaced by what Arendt considers a far more bovine kind of value for life: modern "happiness." 

In terms of the concrete organization of modern society, life had to be articulated from the standpoint of the Archimedean point, and this meant understanding the processes that made for a modern good or "happy" life. Arendt argues that modern happiness was most thoroughly articulated by utilitarian philosophy, which understood happiness as simply when pleasure outweighs pain in the utilitarian's pleasure/pain calculus. In that sense, utilitarian philosophy was simply the logical extension of the Descartes' turn toward introspection and common sense reasoning in order to replace our now defunct common sense. We simply look inside ourselves and analyze our sensations, breaking them down into their simplest parts. Since, presumably, at that level all of us are the same, we can use the processes of pleasures and pains we discover there to generalize a rationalized, "practical" calculus for political action. From this perspective, all human activity is reduced to "behavior": the predictable responses of human animals to pleasurable or painful stimuli. As a result, the ideal of modern politics—especially from the utilitarian tradition that has so heavily influenced modern public policy—has become essentially herd-like. Political judgment is thus reduced to common sense reasoning. Far from the doxa we all as citizens in a common world are entitled and obligated to render, in a mass society the goal of politics is conformity: we

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\textsuperscript{cv} Ibid, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{cvi} Ibid, pp. 133-135, 308-311.
\textsuperscript{cvii} Ibid, pp. 307-309.
\textsuperscript{cviii} Ibid, p. 309.
\textsuperscript{cix} Ibid, p. 309.
\textsuperscript{cx} Ibid, pp. 40-46, 322.
would ideally all think essentially the same way about everything because our pleasure/pain calculus allows us to replicate the same perspective infinitely many times. Speaking of individuals in mass society, Arendt writes that, "men have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and being heard by them...they are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience, which does not cease to be singular if the same experience is multiplied innumerable times." cxi Of course, beyond the political articulations of happiness in modern society, many people may have in mind more elevated notions, but generally these are idiosyncratic, or at best limited to traditional views that have long sense lost their concrete relevance and effectualness to our world. In political terms—in terms of how we organize our world—they are nearly irrelevant. This is most evident in the very language modern society uses to describe their standards as "values." cxii This language is drawn directly from the language of sociology and political economy, and thus analyzes standards of judgment from an Archimedean perspective as social processes. As a result, standards are by their very nature understood as "relative," in the sense that they only represent the relative value given them by a given society. cxiii As a result of all of this, the only "value" that ever gained genuine authority in modern society was the idea of "universal equality." cxiv But this is only a logical extension of the fact that a politics conditioned by the perspective of the Archimedean point must necessarily level out anything that would distinguish us from each other.

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cxi Ibid, p. 58.
Thus, the modern age saw the raise what Marx called "socialized man,"\textsuperscript{cxv} and what Arendt referred to as the "society of laborers."\textsuperscript{cxvi} It is tempting to focus on the fact that modern society is a "consumer society,"—it is certainly an apt description, which Arendt exploits.\textsuperscript{cxvii} Nevertheless, Arendt considers the idea that we are a society of laborers a more authentic description of our society, because it reaches deeper into the meaning of what our society actually is and how it came to be. For Arendt, from the perspective of the Archimedean point, once life and modern happiness were asserted as the highest goals and ideals of modern politics, it was unavoidable that labor would be raised to the highest position in the \textit{vita activa}, because labor is the activity associated with the maintenance of life. Laboring is the activity we have in common with the animals, because all animals must respond to the demands of natural necessity. And, moreover, if happiness is based on our desire to experience pleasure and avoid pain, then this too is an outgrowth of our commonalities with the animals. Thus, Arendt refers to humans, insofar as they identify themselves as labors, as \textit{animal laborans}.\textsuperscript{cxviii} In this world, biological necessity—to the extent it is concerned with laboring and consuming the products of our labor—essentially characterizes how we organize and interpret our world and ourselves. The ideal of the modern world is a kind of laborer's utopia.\textsuperscript{cxix} Politics is mainly concerned with ensuring that all citizens are jobholders (since without an "occupation" \textit{animal laborans} loses his or her identity),\textsuperscript{cxx} that these jobs involve

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{cxv} Ibid, p. 321.
\item \textsuperscript{cxvi} Ibid, pp. 5, 31, 46.
\item \textsuperscript{cxvii} Ibid, pp. 126ff.
\item \textsuperscript{cxviii} Ibid, pp. 22, 84, 133-135.
\item \textsuperscript{cxix} Ibid, pp. 131-133, 322.
\item \textsuperscript{cxx} Ibid, pp. 46, 319, 322.
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effortless labor,\textsuperscript{cxxi} and, above all, that each inhabitant of our society is entitled to an equal share in the consumption of its ever increasing abundance.\textsuperscript{cxxii} No doubt Marx's communist utopia was the clearest articulation of this ideal, but Arendt argues that it is just as much the underlying outlook of capitalist societies, at least to the extent that it is the initial presumption of our politics.\textsuperscript{cxxiii} Thus, it is true that we are a consumer society, but this is only because a consumer society would necessarily be the ultimate objective of a society of laborers. Consumption is inevitably entailed in the laboring activity: they are like two sides of the same coin.\textsuperscript{cxxiv}

Modern politics, therefore, is the era where \textit{animal laborans} has occupied the public realm.\textsuperscript{cxxv} All meaningful activities must justify themselves as "occupations" which in some sense contribute to the increasing of society's abundance, and to the extent an activity cannot do this it is viewed as a form of entertainment or "hobby."\textsuperscript{cxxvi} The public realm of modern society is the social realm, where humans are expected to behave as docile, domesticated animals who quietly and predictably perform their jobs and conform to the expectations of society.\textsuperscript{cxxvii} Thus, the social realm does not provide a space of self-disclosure for men and women of action to reveal themselves; instead, it is a realm of conformity, hypocrisy, and corruption, where the uniqueness and plurality of humans gets reduced to our basic commonalities as human animals.\textsuperscript{cxxviii} Thus, it is now

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{cxxi} Ibid, pp. 131-132, 322.
\bibitem{cxxii} Ibid, pp. 117, 126, 131-132.
\bibitem{cxxiii} Ibid, pp. 133-135.
\bibitem{cxxv} Ibid, p. 134.
\bibitem{cxxvi} Ibid, pp. 92-93, 126-128.
\bibitem{cxxvii} Ibid, pp. 40-47, 130ff, 322.
\bibitem{cxxviii} Ibid, pp. 40ff.
\end{thebibliography}

clear what Arendt means when she suggests that the discovery of the Archimedean point was a kind of Faustian bargain:

If, in concluding, we return once more to the discovery of the Archimedean point and apply it, as Kafka warned us not to do, to man himself and to what he is doing on this earth, it at once becomes manifest that all his activities, watched from a sufficiently removed vantage point in the universe, would appear not as activities of any kind but as processes…

Arendt, in other words, is suggesting that viewing humans from the position of the Archimedean point robs them of their dignity and makes them, in principle, nothing more than worldless, though highly intelligent, animals who are in the deepest sense driven (albeit in a quite pleasant way) by the biological necessity of nature: the animal laborans.

_The Ambivalence of Modern "Justice"

There is little to be gained from sidestepping the withering scorn Arendt directs toward prominent contemporary political categories such as social justice and public policy, particularly in _The Human Condition_. This contempt is real, and any attempt to explain it away risks losing the force of Arendt's critique of modern society. However, it is important to be clear about exactly why Arendt regarded these standards and practices with such scorn. It is not that social justice or public policy is in any sense the source of the problems Arendt was attacking. Rather, what Arendt found objectionable about them has to do with the fact that she is convinced that they could only have gained

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^cxxx^ Ibid, pp. 322-323.
the prominence they have in a society where human beings interpret themselves politically as laboring animals. She believed that public policy could only have become as successful and effective as it has been over the last century if the humans in the society it is applied to have been rendered more or less predictable, and such predictability can only be found in humans insofar as they are responding to natural necessity. To the extent public policy is more or less highly effective in modern society, this suggests that our worldly human artifice has ceased to be a structure which provided a bulwark which to a certain extent resisted natural necessity, and instead has, as Arendt suggests, come to channel nature into the human world.\textsuperscript{cxxxii} Similarly, Arendt believes that social justice, as the political ideal which seeks universal equality above all, could only have become the highest ideal of a society of animal laborers who view all distinctions among its members with suspicion, envy, and hostility. And, moreover, the seriousness of this critique cannot be overstated. Arendt believes that humans, as essentially conditioned beings, to the extent they engage in politics, can create new conditions for themselves.\textsuperscript{cxxxii} But as a result of this, the society of \textit{animal laborans} is trapped in a vicious circle. To the extent they view themselves politically as nothing more than laboring and consuming animals, they will increasingly create a world that matches this self-interpretation, and thus make this self-interpretation more and more of a reality; and therefore all human beings' higher capacities such as action, thought, and work stand in great danger in the modern world.

It is also true, however, that Arendt's tone softens somewhat in her writings after \textit{The Human Condition}. Prior to the twentieth century, the modern demand for universal

\textsuperscript{cxxxii}Ibid, pp. 3-11, 147ff.
\textsuperscript{cxxxii}Ibid, pp. 45, 148-152, 321ff.
equality had meant that any attempt to found a political realm that could support political action was doomed to be thwarted by the hopelessness of ever totally escaping poverty. If all citizens were entitled to true freedom, than they must all first be freed from the yoke of natural necessity, and this seemed unimaginable. However, we have now reached an era where this is no longer inconceivable. Arendt writes:

The advancement of the natural sciences and their technology has opened possibilities which make it very likely that, in the not too distant future, we shall be able to deal with all economic matters on technical and scientific grounds, outside political considerations…Our present technical means …[suggest that] the wreckage of freedom on the rock of necessity which we have witnessed over and over again since Robespierre's "despotism of liberty" is no longer unavoidable. Arendt writes:

What we cannot conclude, however, is that these new possibilities for liberation from necessity automatically guarantee that freedom will follow. We may just as likely (perhaps more than likely) to go on living as laboring and consuming animals. Liberation is only the prerequisite for freedom, and the tendency to conflate the two was the fatal flaw of the modern age. Fully understanding why this mistake seemed so unavoidable and what it has meant for the world we live in will take us to the end of Arendt's story with the emergence of the modern world, a story which ends by crystallizing the problem of the oblivion of political judgment the modern world, and setting the stage for the attempt to answer the question which absorbed the remainder of Arendt's life after *The Human Condition* of how political judgment could be revived.

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Chapter Four: *The Failure to Refound Freedom and its Consequences*

*The Modern Revolutionaries' Failed Attempt to Refound Western Politics*

As we have seen, Arendt claimed that modern society is a society of *animal laborans*, the laboring animals. In such a society, human activity is oriented not toward (free) action but by (determined) behavior: modern society seeks to ensure the conformity and predictability necessary for its smooth functioning. This smooth functioning cannot happen spontaneously. It requires political action in the form of public policy and legislation to ensure this smooth functioning. Arendt argues that in the modern era, authentic political action and the work activity of making have been ambiguously associated with one another.\(^1\) Of course, as we saw earlier, the idea that political action could be conceptualized in terms of the fabrication analogy was ancient, and rooted the tradition of political thought. But, much like the idea of the Archimedean point itself, the notion that politics could fully become a matter of making and be determined according to the means/ends category of instrumentality had for the most part remained utopian and generally a matter of speculation.\(^2\) To the extent the fabrication analogy had any real political application, this was mainly a matter of providing standards of judgment with which to evaluate the lawfulness of political rule.\(^3\) But, generally, as we saw in chapter

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\(^1\) Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 228ff, 305-306.

\(^2\) Ibid, pp. 227-228; "What is Authority?" p 113; *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, pp. 22-23; "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophy," p. 429.

two, the tradition of political thought and its fabricative analogy of political action had little real impact on Western politics until the modern era according to Arendt, having mainly been superimposed on the existing political practices and traditions built by the Romans and carried forward by Christianity. To the extent it did have an impact, it was chiefly as a way to legitimize the application of the transcendent standards of judgment of the Christian doctrine to the political realm.⁴

The possibility that political action could be conducted—in any consistent fashion—in the mode of the fabrication analogy, only became a reality in the modern era as a result of a variety of consequences that derived from the emergence of modern science's Archimedean point. To begin with, the old traditional worldly conditions of freedom, which revolved around the Roman trinity of tradition, religion, and authority, was politically and intellectually undermined by modern science. After this, all that remained of traditional Western politics was the tradition of political thought, whose actual relation to Western politics had been ambiguous, representing as it did an inauthentic understanding of political life. However, in the modern era, the tradition of political thought—almost as a matter of coincidence—became much more relevant to Western politics, because the interests and activities of the inhabitants of the Western political world had been reduced to the kind predictable consumption and behavior that is found in the society of animal laborans. On that basis, it was for the first time possible to assume an Archimedean perspective in relation political society, much like the old utopian thought experiments. It would be possible to look at human activities in terms of

⁴ Arendt, "What is Authority?" pp. 106, 127-128.
predictable and manipulatable processes that could be structured and restructured according to the findings of empirical research into human biology and society. And all of this was predicated on the idea that humans are driven by the necessity to consume, that this is their chief function and goal in life, at least in terms of their social/political existence, and to the extent they behave otherwise, they are acting "irrationally."

Thus, Arendt argues that political action in the modern era is conceptualized on the outlook of *homo faber*'s attitude of "sovereignty." As we've noted, while the tradition of political thought had always theorized political action in this way, the actual implementation of sovereignty had always been resisted by the "non-sovereign" elements of Roman tradition and civilization. It is only in the modern era that these non-sovereign elements were—at least as a political factor—eroded enough by modernity to allow for any actual attempt to implement true political sovereignty. Arendt points out that Descartes and Hobbes, as the thinkers who most made use of the discovery of the Archimedean point to reshape politics, discovered their respective theories of sovereignty at virtually the same time, Hobbes in particular exemplifying how the modern era would come to think about political action as "reckoning with consequences." Modern political action, as sovereign action, understands itself in terms of the instrumentality of the fabrication analogy, where the actor conceives a model or end goal beforehand and employs various means of coercion and manipulation of society in order to achieve it. The legitimacy of this model of political action was established by drawing on the two

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1Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 234-236, 244-245, 305.
2Ibid, pp. 299-300.
3Ibid, pp. 228ff.
conceptual pillars of the tradition of political thought: law and rule. These two pillars were all that remained of the old Roman trinity on which the authority and legitimacy of Western politics had been based. The new model of political action fit like a hand in glove with the tradition of political thought, and this should come as no surprise, since they both drew conceptually on the experience of fabrication. On the modern interpretation of political action, an act of coercion and manipulation of a given political society could justifiable only so long as it could be subsumed under a legitimate legal order. However, traditionally the source of the legal order was conceived to be derived and legitimized by appeal through contemplation to a transcendent or metaphysical source such as is found in Plato or Augustine. In the modern era, such a transcendent appeal was no longer believable, and various forms of natural law theory, which had their source in modern "process thinking," came to predominate. Thus, when Arendt speaks of the "sovereignty" of modern political action, she means that political action is conducted in the form of fabrication in utilizing various means to bring about a pre-given end goal, and these means and end are legitimized through a "natural law" articulation of the tradition of political thought's framework of law and rule.

The problem, however, was that the status of natural law remained ambiguous. In the old traditional order, there was an objective world of laws and tradition which restricted the sovereignty of political actors. Now that all that was left of traditional

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Western politics was the tradition of political thought, the crudity and inadequacy of the tradition has increasingly become clear. The tradition of political thought had always presumed a distinction between human-made, positive laws which provided the human world with stability, and their source of authority in a metaphysical order. So long as the old metaphysical political tradition at least buttressed the idea of a separation between the imperfect human world and an ideal political world, there remained certain built-in limitations on any attempt to do away with this distinction. However, the modern age increasingly rejected metaphysics and came to find this distinction unacceptable. Arendt points out that by the time of Kant, the goal became to completely subsume all positive laws under a single universal natural law. The problem with this move to eliminate the distinction between positive and natural law was that the modern age had come to understand the laws of nature through the lens of modern science as laws of movement. Various modern ideologies emerged that seemed to suggest that almost any process could be identified in history and asserted to be the law of historical movement. As a result, anyone who claimed to understand such natural laws of movement in human history or politics could feel justified in ignoring or changing at will any positive law. Thus, the flaws in the sovereignty model of modern politics are evident in a kind of crystallized purity right from the beginning with Hobbes, who understood political action in the mode of instrumentality as "reckoning with consequences," and who argued that the sovereign was only limited by his or her ability to interpret the law of nature.

\[\text{xi} \text{ Ibid, pp. 718-719.} \\
\text{xii} \text{ Ibid, p. 721.} \\
\text{xiii} \text{ Ibid, pp. 719-720.} \]
However, in themselves, none of these political categories and concepts necessarily had to lead to the tyranny and violence that they would eventually be used to justify. If, as Arendt claimed, the goal of sovereignty was ultimately to ensure the smooth functioning of the worldless society of animal laborans, there seems no obvious culprit within this framework of sovereignty that would necessarily lead to such tyranny.\textsuperscript{xiv} Arendt argues that in all likelihood, the worst and truly significant abuses of the sovereignty model of modern political action would not have happened if it had not been for a novel phenomenon that arose toward the end of the eighteenth century: the phenomenon of modern revolution.\textsuperscript{xv} The rise of revolution was related to the emergence of the sovereignty, in the sense that they can both be tied back to shifts in Western civilization that resulted from the emergence of modern science and the discovery of the Archimedean point, but they are not the same phenomenon, and do not spring from the same human impulses. To state the distinction in its most terse fashion, sovereignty sprang from the human impulse toward liberation, the desire to escape natural necessity, while revolution sprang from the human impulse for freedom, the desire to achieve immortality through political action, and in Arendt's view any attempt to understand the

\textsuperscript{xiv} It is true that the original impulse to develop political sovereignty and sovereignty-based political theories came from the immediate need to end the post-reformation wars of religion. But the question of why exactly sovereignty was put forward as the solution to the problem, as opposed to other possible solutions, is not really addressed by this point. Arendt seems to have believed that the wars of religion were a peculiarly modern problem, and that therefore sovereignty was in all likelihood the obvious modern solution. While modern science may not have directly been the cause of the wars of religion, Michael Gillespie has shown that there were a variety of pre-modern sources that ultimately congealed into modernity with the emergence of modern science. See Gillespie's \textit{The Theological Origins of Modernity}, University of Chicago Press: Chicago (2008).

political history of the modern Western world demands an understanding of this distinction.\textsuperscript{xvi}

It was very easy to miss this distinction, because all but one modern revolution failed to produce freedom, and instead turned into popular acts of self-liberation. This was understandable, because freedom can only be established where liberation from the necessities of life has already taken place. Arendt argues that prior to the modern age, the distinction between the rich and poor was believed to be natural—that poverty constituted a fundamental aspect of the human condition.\textsuperscript{xvii} However, in the modern age people began to doubt that this was the case, and as a result, it was believed that any new political order demanded universal equality and emancipation. Thus, revolution, beginning with the later stages of the French Revolution, came to be identified with what Arendt calls the "social question." "The social question began to play a revolutionary role only when, in the modern age…men began to doubt that the distinction between the few, who through circumstances or strength or fraud had succeeded in liberating themselves from the shackles of poverty, and the labouring poverty-stricken multitude was inevitable and eternal."\textsuperscript{xviii} The consequences of the problem of the social question for the history of revolutions has been profound. This was because the authentic impulses which originally began the revolutions, and which the revolutionary actors were only vaguely aware of because they had almost no experience with political action in its

\textsuperscript{xvi} Her most extensive discussion of the distinction between liberation and freedom comes in \textit{On Revolution}, pp. 18-31. \\
\textsuperscript{xvii} Arendt, \textit{On Revolution}, pp. 11-12. \\
\textsuperscript{xviii} Ibid, pp. 12-13.
most authentic sense, became overwhelmed by the magnitude and, at the time, impossibility of providing universal emancipation.

The two original modern revolutions, the American and the French, began as vaguely articulated rebellions against what they considered "tyranny." But once the "tyranny" was overthrown, the revolutionaries were confronted by a task the magnitude of which was breathtakingly unexpected. The revolutionaries, in overthowing political orders that stretched back to the traditional era, were at the same time overthrowing the last vestiges of the old Roman civilization, and, as a result, stumbled into historical forces and circumstances that they had been at best only vaguely aware of. Thus, politically speaking, the revolutionaries were confronted not just by the prospect of reviving a human faculty of political action which had atrophied in the preceding millennium, but also with the massively more daunting prospect of having to found a new political order to replace the now defunct Roman order where they could practice this revival of political action. Arendt writes:

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\textsuperscript{xix} Ibid, pp. 108-109.

\textsuperscript{xx} Ibid, p. 24. This idea is fundamental for Arendt's thought, and well precedes \textit{The Human Condition}. Her first discussion of authority came in a talk from 1953 where she discusses these ideas in a terse three page statement, some excerpts of which I have edited slightly: "The breakdown of the Roman trinity threatens to carry with it our sense for the past and our capacity to ask ultimate questions for which religion provided answers and a sense for a common world protected by law and more permanent than our own lives…The French and American revolutions going back to the Roman experience of foundation tried to found a new body politics and with it establish a new authority. In France, they appealed to the cult of reason through Robespierre, the beginning of a new chronology, etc. This experiment failed…because, as one can learn from Tocqueville, the bureaucracy of the \textit{ancien} regime survived…In America, they appealed to the Constitution and the Founding Fathers. The authority of the Constitution is the fundament of Republic as well as of all liberties. The question is whether this new beginning of European mankind will be able to withstand the other later onslaught of modernity—the onslaught of a society of laborers, unlike those of universal equality, have become manifest only in our time.” See "Breakdown of Authority," lecture given at NYU (1953), contained at the Library of Congress website.
What the revolutions brought to the fore was this experience of being free, and this was a new experience, not, to be sure, in the history of Western mankind—it was common enough in both Greek and Roman antiquity—but with regard to the centuries which separate the downfall of the Roman empire from the rise of the modern age. And this relatively new experience, new to those at any rate who made it, was at the same time the experience of man's faculty to begin something new. These two experiences together...are at the root of the enormous pathos which we find in both the American and French Revolutions, this ever-repeated insistence that nothing comparable in grandeur and significance had ever happen in the whole recorded history of mankind, and which, if we had to account for it in terms of successful reclamation of civil rights, would sound entirely out of place.xxi

Indeed, Arendt argues that even the very etymology of the word "revolution," which originally had meant to restore or "revolve back" to a prior order, carried these implications of seeking to reestablish broken political ties.xxii

This turned out to be almost impossible in the modern context which idealized universal equality, and Arendt argues that the sole exceptional case of successful revolution was found in America. Indeed, the idea of revolving back seemed surprisingly apt for the American founding experience in that many of the Roman staples of political life and action were in some form carried over, such as, for instance, the Supreme Court, which she argues bears the same function as the Roman senate of augmenting political action with authority derived from a foundational event—in this case, the ratifying of the Constitution.xxiii The reason for this American exceptionalism, she claims, was that there already existed conditions of more or less equality of social conditions, at least among those who would be counted in the citizenry.xxiv And, moreover, the act of founding was not an act of complete novelty, as in the European revolutions, but instead only ratified

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xxiii Ibid, pp. 188-196.
practices that had already grown up organically.\textsuperscript{xxv} Thus, Arendt argues perhaps somewhat obscurely that America has succeeded in establishing the conditions for political freedom which have never been fully exploited. Socially speaking, of course, America is every bit a consumer society as any other developed nation of the Earth; yet, she believes America successfully established a public realm which has continued to withstand the onslaught of the modern era in a way the European nation-states failed to.

The result, in contradistinction to the European development, has been that the revolutionary notions of \textit{public} happiness and \textit{political} freedom have never altogether vanished from the American scene; they have become part and parcel of the very structure of the political body of the republic. Whether this structure has a granite groundwork capable of withstanding the futile antics of a society intent upon affluence and consumption, or whether it will yield under the pressure of wealth as the European communities have yielded under the pressure of wretchedness and misfortune, only the future can tell. There exist today as many signs to justify hope as there are to instill fear.\textsuperscript{xxvi}

In contrast to America, the European revolutionary tradition, beginning with the French Revolution, has had a very different experience. Like the Americans, they drew on the Western political tradition, but because they had no pre-developed political practices comparable to those of America, and therefore needed to theorized how to found a completely new body-politic, they turned to categories derived from the tradition of political thought, and this had fateful consequences.\textsuperscript{xxvii} The tradition had theorized the idea of founding in terms of a sovereign application of the fabrication analogy: in order to bring into existence something new, violence had to be done to what already

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\textsuperscript{xxv} Ibid, pp. 163-170.
\textsuperscript{xxvi} Ibid, p. 129.
\textsuperscript{xxvii} Ibid, pp. 26-29; "What is Authority?" pp. 127-141.
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She argues that Machiavelli was particularly influential in this regard, whom Arendt calls the spiritual father of the revolutionary tradition. This, of course, was one of the tradition of political thought's greatest political crudities, from Arendt's perspective. As we saw in the second chapter, the foundation of a public realm emerges from the power generated by people acting together, "where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities." Yet, the tradition of political thought itself could not truly be blamed for the violent forces which were released by the European revolutions. It only legitimized the logical response that modern sovereign political action would inevitably have adopted in response to the forces of necessity that were unleashed by the introduction of the social question into the original political problem of how to found a new political order. As a result of this, liberation became the predominate issue of the European revolutionary tradition, and overwhelmed the original impulse toward freedom that had initially instigated the French Revolution. And because this, revolution came to focus more on establishing the conditions of a society of universally equal animal laborans, than with establishing what Arendt calls a "new house where freedom can dwell."

The French Revolution was a "fundamental experience" for those that observed it, an experience so profound and novel that it seemed to demand that any political thought which came after it somehow account for that experience. What shocked the

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xxviii Ibid, pp. 8ff, 25-31, 54-55; "What is Authority?" pp. 139-140.
xxix Ibid, pp. 27-29; "What is Authority?" pp. 139-141.
revolutionaries, and those that observed them, was the fact that the revolutions, beginning perhaps most famously with the French Revolution, gave birth to bizarre disparities between causes and effects, between the intentions of the actors, and the eventual outcomes of the revolutions. These outcomes rendered nearly absurd the framework of political action as sovereignty and the notion that the fabrication analogy could be a model for founding new political orders. Each time they were attempted, the revolutions twisted out of control and made the revolutionary actors "the fools of history." Modern science's Archimedean point had unleashed forces of necessity that acting men could no longer hope to control, at least under the assumption that all were entitled to equality of conditions.

The observers of the French Revolution literally marveled at what they were witnessing. They were treated to a spectacle that demonstrated events of obviously enormous historical import. These events seemed ultimately to be controlled by no one's obvious intentions, to set off chains of violent events that went in completely unexpected directions; and when the events had finally run their course, it was clear that the meaning of the events were vastly different and much more far-reaching in their significance than any of those who began them could have possibly imagined. Writing of Kant's reaction to the French Revolution, Arendt says that "[his] reaction to the French Revolution [was]…by no means unequivocal…he never wavered in his estimation of the grandeur of

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xxxi Ibid, pp. 38-48; The Human Condition, 228ff.
what he called the 'recent event,' and he hardly ever wavered in his condemnation of all those who had prepared it.\textsuperscript{xxxiv} She then quotes Kant saying:

The revolution of a gifted people which we have seen unfold in our day may succeed or miscarry; it may be filled with misery and atrocities to the point that a sensible man, were he boldly to hope to execute it successfully the second time, would never resolve to make the experiment at such a cost—this revolution, I say, nonetheless finds in the hearts of all spectators (who are not engaged in this game themselves) a wishful participation that borders closely on enthusiasm, the very expression of which is fraught with danger…\textsuperscript{xxxv}

Arendt asserts that for Hegel, the French Revolution was the central disclosive event of world history (and therefore philosophy and politics), and as a result, history had to be taken as serious as philosophy or politics: "Hegel opened the dimension of time—the past tells a meaningful story, it unfolds the only true meaning…we did not know this before the French Revolution disclosed it…[in the] French Revolution, truth bec[ame a] reality: visible [and] concrete."\textsuperscript{xxxvi}

As a result of all of this, the idea of history came to be seen as a powerful new political category.\textsuperscript{xxxvii} Utilizing the process thinking that was a consequence of the Archimedean point, spectators of the French Revolution such as Kant, Hegel, and Marx came to believe that, much like the process of expropriation which has led through human misery to the possibility of unheard of abundance, history must also contain processes that work behind the backs of acting men and women. And therefore, in the case of Marx and the ideological political movements of the nineteenth century that would follow in his pattern of thought, if these processes could be identified and

\textsuperscript{xxxiv} Arendt, \textit{Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy}, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{xxxv} Ibid, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{xxxvi} Arendt, "Karl Marx," Seminar at University of Chicago (1966), LOC 024295, 024328.

harnessed by revolutionary actors, than the revolutions might finally be successful and end in the establishment of the long sought after freedom. xxxviii History, it was thought, might be the missing element in the revolutionary dream which would square the circle that allowed the liberation that can be the only best case result of all sovereign political action to become a dwelling place for freedom, which in truth can only come from power produced by the acting together of men and women. xxxix

Hegel pioneered this solution to the problem of refounding freedom for the modern era through his development of dialectical argumentation in a philosophy of history. xli Hegel sought to use dialectical argumentation to show that the notion that freedom and necessity must necessarily contradict each other is only valid when the terms are understood in sheer abstraction. xlii When their concrete content is dialectically worked out, however, we see that they are reconciled in the historical process of Freedom or Spirit. In her course on Marx in 1966, Arendt says that for Hegel "the power of the negative is in all becoming: only because something dies is something else born…truth is never contained in a single statement but only in a movement. [Thus], the axiom of contradiction is no longer right…in the life process A was non-A and becomes non-A again." xlii Arendt argues that what allowed Hegel to do this was the fact that he was ultimately a traditionalist: like the rest of the tradition, he accepted (speechless)

xxxviii Arendt, The Promise of Politics, pp. 70-78.
xl This section, which develops the relationship between Hegel's legacy, Marx's use of Hegel, and the development of ideological political thought, is augmented by several invaluable—though highly schematic—manuscripts and lectures which span from about 1951-1966, some of which I have retrieved from the Library of Congress and others that have been edited and published in various places by Jerome Kohn, along with her statements concerning Marx in "Tradition and the Modern age."
xli Arendt, "Willing," The Life of the Mind, p. 140.
contemplation as the highest activity and asserted that it must therefore be identical with freedom, and then argued that freedom was found in recognizing our practical activity as a realization of this freedom.xliii According to Arendt, Hegel incorporated "the two 'worlds' of Plato into one moving whole. The traditional turning from the world of appearance to the world of ideas...[or back] takes place in the historical motion itself..."xliv As a result of his traditionalist idealization of contemplation, Arendt argues that to the extent he saw his philosophy as a philosophy of history, he was ultimately bound to idealize the existing political circumstances of his era.xlv Arendt argues that there is therefore no "method" in Hegel's system, and that his philosophy is inseparable from the concrete content of his substantive philosophical and political traditions.

Hegel essentially eliminated completely the distinction between natural law, as the law of historical motion, and positive law that we noted earlier. To the extent the modern state had come to be the realization of Absolute Spirit in history, all its positive laws were fully legitimized by natural law through the realization of the Absolute in history. Arendt believes that Marx, however, sought to "formalize" a method from Hegel's work, and in doing so attempted to point a natural law of historical motion into the future, as opposed to simply the justification of the present.xlvi "Hegel's error was that he took account only of the past. Action concerns the future..."xlvii In doing so, Marx

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xliv Arendt, "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Philosophy," p. 310.
xlvi Ibid, pp. 70, 74-75.
xlvii Arendt, "Karl Marx" (1966), LOC 024295.
provided the model of the ideological movements that would follow in his wake, eventually resulting in totalitarian politics.

…dialectic only first developed as a method once Marx deprived it of its actual substantive content. Nowhere has the acceptance of tradition with a concomitant loss of its substantial authority proved more costly than in Marx's adoption of the Hegelian dialectic. By turning dialectic into a method, Marx liberated it from those contents that had held it within limits and bound it to substantial reality. And in doing so, he made possible the kind of process-thinking so characteristic of nineteenth-century ideologies, ending in the devastating logic of those totalitarian regimes whose apparatus of violence is subject to no constraints of reality.  

Yet, Arendt believed Marx came far closer than Hegel to recognizing the new political realities of the modern era, and the result was an attempt to solve the problem liberation and freedom which did not explain away these new realities in the way that Hegel had, but which nevertheless remained ultimately doomed to failure because it could not escape the structure of the tradition of political thought.

Marx recognized that the demand for universal equality in modern age meant that the solutions Hegel and other representative of the tradition offered were "only superficially posed in the idealistic assertions of the equality of man, the inborn dignity of every human being, and only superficially answered by giving laborers the right to vote." Arendt argues that Marx recognized that the only human activity in which all human beings, as individuals, were most fundamentally equal was in their capacity to labor as animal laborans. Thus, when Marx argues that equality had to be realized in concrete social conditions, and humans had to become "socialized men," this only meant

xliv Arendt, The Promise of Politics, p. 74.

1 Arendt, "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Philosophy," pp. 300-301.
actualizing the condition of modern consumer society as fully as possible.\textsuperscript{li} To the extent this consumer society was not as fully realized as Hegel had thought, Marx therefore insisted that philosophy could no longer be concerned with merely "interpreting the world"; it now must change the world.\textsuperscript{lii} Arendt concludes that this apparent contradiction stems from his belief in the dialectical structure of history. "Marx's own hope, nourished by his belief in the dialectical structure of everything that happens, was that somehow this absolute rule of necessity would result in, or resolve itself into, an equally absolute rule of freedom."\textsuperscript{liii} Thus, in formalizing Hegel's dialectic, Marx posited that the dialectic was not simply a way of grasping how philosophy realizes itself in our existing, daily life, but in fact represented a deep insight—inspired by the modern ideal of process thinking—into the processes at work in history, which could guide political action to bring about conditions that could not be made sense of based on existing circumstances.\textsuperscript{liv} Marx thus believed that if we allow our revolutionary action to be guided by the laws of history without reference to any clearly defined end goal (what essentially amounts to a kind of historicized deontological account of action), then the liberation that can only come from the abundance of labor, work, and the sovereign action brought through violence, will somehow allow the circle will be dialectically squared, and revolutionary liberation will finally result in a freedom, the nature of which will only become clear after the dialectic has completed. As a result, she argues that this formalization of Hegel's dialectic in Marx's thought is what led to the well-documented

\textsuperscript{lii} Arendt, \textit{The Promise of Politics}, pp. 75-76; "Karl Marx" (1966), LOC 024295.
\textsuperscript{liii} Arendt, "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Philosophy," pp. 310.
\textsuperscript{liv} Arendt, \textit{The Promise of Politics}, pp. 75-80; "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Philosophy," pp. 308-312; "Karl Marx" (1966), LOC 024294-95.
"flagrant contradictions" which arise in his work when he discusses the eventual communist utopia. She points out that almost all Marx scholars have noted the nonsensical nature of the utopia. If labor is humanity's most productive and essential human activity, and labor power the source of human equality, what activity would be performed in the communist utopia when labor was abolished? Similarly, if violence was the highest form of political action, what sort of meaningful free action would exist when history had concluded and there was no more need for violence in the utopia?

These contradictions were symptomatic of the unique form of theorizing that followed Hegel, which she calls "turning operations," and which were exemplified in Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche. The turning operations were pursued because the traditional foundations of Western civilization had been undermined by modern science. They were the last attempts of the tradition of political thought to refound the Western world: they had recognized that in the modern era the old hierarchy of the activities had been inverted by the Archimedean point, and that if the old civilization was to survive, it would have to somehow account for this politically. Yet, each attempt ended in self-defeat. Of the three thinkers, Nietzsche was perhaps the most clear-sighted—the only one that eventually recognized the inevitability of this self-defeat so long as they stayed within the traditional framework—when he eventually concluded that "together with the true world we abolish the world of appearances." Marx's turning

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Ivii Ibid, pp. 28ff, 34ff.
operation involved inverting the traditional hierarchy of activities: where Hegel held to the old assumption that contemplation was the freest human activity, Marx asserted labor as the highest activity, and claimed action was nothing more than violence. But Marx, like the tradition he still belonged to, degraded action and politics by idealizing an activity (labor instead of contemplation as in Hegel's case) which was essentially speechless.\textsuperscript{ix} And also like Hegel, Marx asserted that historical necessity was associated with the highest activity, which was now labor, and as a result, all politics and philosophy, and thus all action and thought, were asserted to be mere "ideologies"—nothing more than superstructural functions of the society and means of production.\textsuperscript{li} As a result, standards of judgment which once had been understood to proceed from contemplation became nothing more that social functions called "values," and human activity became nothing more than consumption and sovereign violence.\textsuperscript{lxii}

Marx, when he leaped from philosophy into politics, carried the theories of dialectics into action, making political action more theoretical, more dependent upon what we today would call ideology...Since, moreover, his springboard was not philosophy in the old metaphysical sense, but as specifically Hegel's philosophy of history...he superimposed the "law of history" upon politics and ended by losing the significance of both, of action no less than of thought, of politics no less than of philosophy, when he insisted that both were mere functions of society and history.\textsuperscript{lxiii}

Ultimately, Arendt believed Marx failed to refound Western politics because the tradition in general had always been doomed to fail. Action and thought were opposites in whose tension the tradition had always moved.\textsuperscript{lxiv} The attempt to eliminate or degrade one side of the tension by claiming the preeminence of the other, only meant that the

\textsuperscript{ix} Arendt, "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Philosophy," pp. 290-297.
\textsuperscript{li} Arendt, "Tradition and the Modern age," p. 29.
\textsuperscript{lxii} Ibid, pp. 30-33.
\textsuperscript{lxiii} Ibid, p. 29.
meaning of both would be lost. As Arendt said in the 1969 lecture course, "Wherever you don't have [thought and action] combined...you have either thoughtless action or impotent thought.\textsuperscript{lxv} And for Marx, to the extent they are both defined away into forms of sovereign violence and labor, they have become literally meaningless. In the end, Arendt believed the true service Marx performed for modern political thought was to set forth the true reality, not, as he thought, of the "history" of our politics, but of what our "politics" have become.

…values…are the only "ideas" left to (and understood by) "socialized men." These are men who have decided never to leave what to Plato was "the cave" of everyday human affairs, and never to venture on their own into a world and a life which, perhaps, the ubiquitous functionalization of modern society has deprived of one of its most elementary characteristics—the instilling of wonder at that which is as it is. This very real development is reflected and foreshadowed in Marx's political thought. Turning the tradition upside down within its own framework, he did not actually get rid of Plato's ideas, though he did record the darkening of the clear sky where those ideas…had once become visible to the eyes of men.\textsuperscript{lxvi}

\textbf{The Collapse of Political Judgment and Emergence of the Modern World}

It is difficult to exaggerate the impact of Marx's work on the nineteenth and early twentieth century political scene. Of course, Marxism became one of the major challengers to Western liberal-social democracy. But Marx's influence, and particularly the dialectical formalism he developed out of Hegel's much more substantive form of dialectical thinking, can arguably be asserted to have had an enduring formative influence on all political thinking after him, included the politics of the contemporary liberal-social

\textsuperscript{lxv}Ibid, LOC 024462.
democracies that tend to predominate in the post-Cold War era. This is because all political judgment after Marx essentially came to operate under the conditions of his formalized dialectic. Post-Marxian political judgment, like all modern political judgment, still understood the essential nature of political thought in terms of sovereignty, but like modern thinking in general, the form of this later version of sovereign political judgment was no longer essentially concerned with the end product or goal, but instead with the forces and processes that lay behind the goal. In modern political thought, like modern thought generally, it was the process that was considered to be what was truly real, and not the "thing"—which was only the mere appearance produced by the process.\textsuperscript{lxvii} Thus, Arendt points out that even in Western liberal democracies the political options available tend to be understood in "ideological" terms, i.e., in terms of certain historical processes dominated by the ebbing and flowing of the "progress" of a certain idea.\textsuperscript{lxviii} The left side of the political spectrum tends to be dominated by the idea of the progressing or regressing of the idea of "freedom" (and this, as we have seen, in the specifically modern identification of freedom with liberation); while the right of side of the political spectrum tends to be dominated by the idea of the progressing or regressing of the idea of "authority."\textsuperscript{lxix} For Arendt, the reason these ideas have become "ideologies" that are understood to operate in opposition to one another is because they have lost their substantive grounding in the old Roman common world, where the two ideas, far from being opposed, would have been thought to be preconditions of one another. And whether we realize it or not, the intuitiveness of this

\textsuperscript{lxvii} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 294ff.
\textsuperscript{lxviii} Arendt, "What is Authority?" pp. 100-104.
\textsuperscript{lxix} Ibid, pp. 100-101.
approach to political thinking in modern politics has its roots in Marx's famous attempt to turn Hegel right side up, i.e., to formalize Hegel's dialectical approach, and point it into the future as guide for consistent action. Moreover, as with Marx, the actual realization of either "idea" which presides over the logic of our sovereign and consistently guided action remains opaque to us. We simply have faith that if the logic of the idea is consistently realized in action, history will lead us to a society that has concretely realized freedom or authority. As we will see shortly, Arendt believes there is some basis in the nature of the modern world for this assumption, though almost certainly not a salutary one.

Of course, the assertion that all modern political thinking—even in Western democracies—is essentially sovereign and "ideological" carries some highly controversial implications. Because ideological political thinking was a central element of totalitarian politics, this carries the implication that our own political ideologies are similarly crude in their formulations and, potentially, even rather dangerous. Thus, the parameters of this assertion need to be clarified in a very concrete manner. What exactly is an ideology? What role did it play in totalitarian politics and political regimes, and how does ideological politics differ from totalitarianism? Finally, what shifted in the twentieth century that allowed ideologies—which had existed for quite a while before totalitarian politics came into existence—to play the role they came to play in totalitarian political movements and regimes? And, moreover, if, as Arendt suggests, they still play a central role in modern politics, why—other than in the rather watered down communist

versions that existed after Stalin—has ideology not given birth to new brands of totalitarian politics in the post-war era?

After Marx, the notion that there are historical processes or laws of historical motion which can guide political action metastasized into a variety of what Arendt calls "-isms": nationalism, liberalism, conservatism, imperialism, socialism, capitalism, communism, or racism. These ideologies, in a way similar to Marxism, claimed to be able to offer a "total explanation" of every historical occurrence. Yet, for all the obvious overconfidence they seemed to convey, the ideologies were actually a response to a sense of profound insecurity. With the failure of the tradition, ending with Marx, to refound Western politics in the radically changed circumstances of the modern era, Arendt argues that the Western world entered a period of "historical crisis." In historical crises, Arendt argues that the "prejudices" which once reliably oriented the inhabitants of a particular world begin to "crumble." But instead of attempting to pass new "judgments" which could establish new prejudices, modern political actors thought to radicalize the now defunct prejudices, and instead turn them into "pseudotheories" or ideologies. Thus, while prejudices were effective in sparing the individual from having to constantly pass judgments on everything he or she encounters, ideologies went much further, claiming to explain all occurrences and thus shield the individual from ever having to pass judgment again. Thus, ideology comes to replace what Arendt called

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lxxii Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, pp. 468-469.
lxxv Ibid, pp. 102-103.
common sense, the sixth sense human beings possess that fits their five senses into a common world and give them an intuitive feel for the concrete circumstances of their activity. Ideology, as she sees it, claims to be a kind of scientifically achieved "supersense" that is far superior to the old, and now quite unreliable, common sense.\textsuperscript{lxxvi} 

The political inspiration for ideologies has its roots in the ancient distinction between \textit{nómos} and \textit{physis}, between positive law and the law of nature.\textsuperscript{lxxvii} Positive laws were erected by human political communities to provide human affairs with stability. However, since ancient times, it was believed that there was a "natural law," a law which, according to Pindar, "is the ruler of all things."\textsuperscript{lxxviii} Arendt writes that "just as the king holds together and gives order to whatever is begun under his leadership, so the law is an order inherent in the universe and governs its motion…This law, obviously, could not be conceived as a wall or boundary erected by men. Laws derived from or nourished by it had a validity that was not restricted to one community."\textsuperscript{lxxix} It was this supposition of a natural order of the cosmos, whose motions were governed by certain laws, that ancient jurists and philosophers assumed was what lend authority to their positive laws. However, in the modern era, when the actual substantive grounding of the authority of positive laws in the Roman foundations were undermined by modern science, it was to this myth of a natural law as the ultimate source of the authority of positive laws that the modern political philosophers turned. Thus, beginning with Hobbes and proceeding through Kant, there is an obsession in modern political philosophy with the need to

\textsuperscript{lxxvi}Arendt, \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}, pp. 457-458, 475-477.
\textsuperscript{lxxviii}Ibid, p. 718.
\textsuperscript{lxxix}Ibid, p. 718.
justify existing positive laws by seeking out a basis of authority in a natural law, which reached its apogee in Hegel's philosophy of right.\textsuperscript{lxx} Therefore, until Marx, natural law, even if it was articulated in scientific terms as a law of historical motion, was still imagined to be found as a result of speechless contemplation, and thus to remain fundamentally traditional. It rarely came into conflict with positives laws, as the sources of human stability; rather, it generally sought to augment this stability by providing an authoritative justification.

However, what Marx achieved was to draw out the implications of this idea of natural law as if it was pointed into the future instead of the present.\textsuperscript{lxxi} If history is governed by certain laws, this suggests that positive laws, as stabilizing forces, may in fact come into conflict with the natural law, and since natural law is the source of the authority and legitimacy of those positive laws, the positive laws should lose out in any conflict.\textsuperscript{lxxii} But in order to perform such a role, the natural law had to be articulated in a much more historically concrete manner than the modern political philosophers had articulated it. Arendt argues that the problem with this approach, however, was that it turned out that virtually any "idea" could end up serving as the premise of a concrete articulation of the natural law, and this is what allowed ideological politics to proliferate in the way it did.\textsuperscript{lxxiii}

\textsuperscript{lxx} Ibid, pp. 718-721.
\textsuperscript{lxxi} Arendt, \textit{The Promise of Politics}, pp. 87-90
\textsuperscript{lxxiii} Arendt, \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}, pp. 468-471.
Nevertheless, Arendt insists that, though ideologies certainly formed crucial elements of totalitarian politics, they were emphatically not identical with totalitarian politics. She argues that for the most part, the abuses ideologies were put to by totalitarian regimes were resisted by the remaining elements of the old world, particularly by the class structure of the modern party system in nineteenth century. This was because, as parties representing the interests of certain groups, they were therefore tied back to the old common world, since for Arendt to have self-interest implied having a stake in a deeper *inter-*est, an in-between that separates and relates the individuals in the groups; while, on the other hand, as we will see, Arendt believed totalitarian politics was characterized by distinctive lack of self-interest and utilitarian calculation. Ideologies turned out to be relatively ineffective at agenda setting in the context of the old class-based party system. Arendt argues that this was because ideologies, as attempts at total explanation that try to account for the processes of motion at work behind the concrete facts of political life, can consistently organize any set of facts in a way that is explained by their idea of historical process. But as a result, the ideologies tended to end up disconnected from the concrete facts of the political situation, and could always explain away any political setback, because they rejected the idea that facts offered any definitive claim on the "truer reality" they possessed.


Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pp. 470-471; This was perhaps most famously exemplified by Eduard Bernstein, the closest associate and protégé of Marx and Engels. Bernstein, after several years involved in labor politics in Germany eventually broke with Marx and Engels after their deaths and suggested that Marxist ideology was having a counter-productive impact on the social democratic parties,
Thus, the question we are unavoidably left with is what shifted in the world in the twentieth century that suddenly allowed ideologies to begin to have actual political effectiveness in the world, most catastrophically exemplified in totalitarian politics? The answer Arendt eventually settled on was that it was not just that something in the old world shifted or changed, as had been the case, for instance, in the modern age of the old world with the introduction of the ideal of universal equality in response to the rise of modern science. It was not just a new set of conditions which still in some way remained rooted in the old Roman world, but instead Arendt believed that an entirely new world had emerged in the twentieth century, what she called the "modern world." It was this new world, and the strange, unexpected political possibilities it offered, that allowed ideologies, and therefore by extension the tradition of political thought, to for the first time have a genuine political effectiveness and agenda-setting relevance. This point has relevance to one of the key interpretative problems that scholars who study Arendt's work have had: to wit, explaining the relationship between *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*. Seyla Benhabib, Margaret Canovan, Michael H McCarthy, Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, and Dana Villa have all dealt with this question at length. These two books seem in many ways to be related to each other in only the

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and that, moreover, Marx would have never submitted to having his work turned into a kind of political theological dogma. Marxists needed to re-embrace "critique", and replace the "cant" in their ideology with "Kant." For a good account of Bernstein's thought and political activities see Sheri Berman's *The Primacy of Politics: Social Democracy and the Making of Europe's Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge (2006), pp. 35-46.


broadest, thematic ways. What led Arendt to write a book so different in so many ways from the earlier book? The answer to this question is that Arendt discovered the existence of what she came to call the modern world after she had written *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and, as a result, recognized a major flaw in the earlier book. She posited the emergence of the modern world in the twentieth century as the solution to that flaw, and one of the key purposes she had in writing *The Human Condition* was as an attempt to substantiate the existence of this new world by provided a genealogy of its emergence. Thus, at the very beginning of *The Human Condition*, she writes:

…the modern age is not the same as the modern world. Scientifically, the modern age which began in the seventeenth century came to an end at the beginning of the twentieth century; politically, the modern world, in which we live today, was born with the first atomic explosions. I do not discuss this modern world, against whose background this book was written...The purpose of the historical analysis...is to trace back modern world alienation, its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self, to its origins, in order to arrive at an understanding of the nature of society as it had developed and presented itself at the very moment when it was overcome by the advent of a new and yet unknown age.\(^{xc}\)

Unfortunately, for reasons that are unclear, Arendt was rarely forthcoming about exactly what she meant when she spoke of the modern world in her published writings. As this quote from *The Human Condition* illustrates, when she did discuss the modern world, her statements tended to be off-hand and oblique. Elsewhere in *The Human Condition*, she refers to it as "our technically conditioned world,"\(^{xci}\) while in *Between Past and Future* she calls it a "technological world,"\(^{xcii}\) and refers to "a chaos of mass
perplexities on the political scene and of mass opinions in the spiritual sphere." Most of her direct comments in her most well known published writings proceed along these rather ambiguous lines. However, a review of several unpublished and recently published sources sheds a great deal of light on the subject of how Arendt interpreted the modern world, and allows us to reconstruct what she had in mind in quite a bit more detail. The result, as we will see, is a theory of late modernity that is highly sophisticated, imaginative, and original.

In late 1951, Arendt wrote a proposal to the Guggenheim foundation for support for a projected sequel to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. One of the major flaws in *Origins* was that the bulk of the evidence it offered concerned the Nazis. Yet, the key claim of the book was that totalitarianism represented a form of government that was not captured in terms of the traditional left-right political spectrum, and which applied equally to the Soviets and the Nazis, whatever their ostensible ideological claims might have been. As a result, *Origins* could not substantiate its claims and thus seemed to have failed to have convincingly demonstrated the essential commonality of the totalitarian regimes. The Guggenheim Proposal is one of the few places where Arendt explicitly recognized this problem. In the proposal, Arendt admitted that the major problem in relation to the Soviets was that, unlike the Nazis, Soviet ideology was rooted in the tradition of political thought. She believed this presented conceptual perplexities that did not apply in the Nazi case, and which made it more difficult to substantiate her claims.

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about the fundamental political commonalities that existed between the Soviets and the Nazis. However, as Arendt worked on the project, she came to believe that the tradition of political thought in general had to be dealt with, and most of the early to mid-1950's saw her engaging not just with Marx, but with the tradition as a whole. It is often thought that Arendt eventually gave up on the projected Marx book, or at least became more interested in the larger political concerns that resulted in *The Human Condition*. This is true in certain broad terms, but it fails to recognize how deeply intertwined the two books remained for Arendt. It seems that at some point in the process of researching the Marx book Arendt discovered what she came to call the emergence of the modern world, and realized that the modern world provided the missing link between the Nazis and the Soviets that allowed their respective and seemingly disparate ideologies to mutate into what amounted in practice to fundamentally similar political regimes, which she called "totalitarian."

The beginnings of this conclusion can be seen in an article she published in 1953 called "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government," which she eventually edited into the final chapter of *Origins* in the 1968 edition. It does not appear that Arendt had fully developed her crucial political concept of "worldliness" by 1953, though a close of reading of *Origins* and "Ideology and Terror" shows that it seemed to exist in an inchoate form. While there are moments in the third edition of *Origins* where Arendt

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does mention the existence of the "common world," a comparison with the first edition shows that these were additions to the text made after its first publication. Rather, the notion of the common world seemed to run as a kind undercurrent in *Origins*, in such passages as her discussion of the Boers degeneration from the civilized world and T. E. Lawrence's attempt to lose himself in the Great Game of Imperialism and the stream of history, and in her brilliant critique of Imperialism. By the time of "Ideology and Terror," however, the notion of the common world seems to have gained some significantpurchase on her thought, though it is still not given the kind of prominence it would later have. It mainly operates as a kind of implicit explanatory vehicle for accounting for the existence of the political experience of "loneliness" in the twentieth century, which she believes was what allowed totalitarian politics to come to power. The loss of the common world meant that human beings, even though they lived together in a mass society, were no longer related to each other. Thus, Arendt argues that totalitarian politics were able to seize upon these masses and move them politically through the internal application of ideology and the external application of terror. This treatment is highly impressionistic, but nevertheless on its basis, we can note at least three novel elements of what would eventually come to be called the modern world: first, the loss of the common world and emergence of mass society; second, the

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xcix Pages 457-459 of the "Totalitarianism in Power" chapter in the third edition, which mention the "common world," begin where this chapter concludes in the first edition on page 428.


Ibid, pp. 216-221.

Ibid, pp. 123-134.

Ibid, pp. 474ff.

use of ideology, which Arendt claims was a replacement for common sense; and third, the ability to apply terror in an extremely effective manner.

As we have seen, between 1953 and the writing of *The Human Condition*, Arendt arrived at a fully developed and historicized account of the idea of the common world, which takes place in three stages: the era of tradition established by Rome, the era of the modern age characterized by growing world-alienation or worldlessness, and the current age of the modern world. The last hundred or so pages have been concerned with the first two stages; in the remainder of this chapter, I will flesh out the concept of the modern world by drawing together several sources. However, before I can do this I will need to introduce two new sources into the conversation, one of which I believe provides the closest glimpse we ever find of what Arendt believed her research after *Origins* added to her theory of totalitarianism, and both of which I will argue can be used to construct a kind of skeletal structure for understanding her concept of the modern world.

The first source is a lecture course from 1968 called "Political Experiences in the Twentieth Century." When Arendt speaks off-hand of the modern world, she tends to suggest that it came into existence with the development of nuclear weapons and the advent of totalitarianism. For instance, in *The Human Condition*, she asserts that "the modern world, in which we live today, was born with the first atomic explosions;" while, in "Introduction into Politics" she writes that both the bomb and totalitarianism were "the fundamental experiences of our age, and if we ignore them, it is as if we never lived in

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\(^{cv}\) Ibid, pp. 475-477.

the world that is our world." However, what Arendt meant by this was that these two experiences were in some way revelatory of the new world we have come to inhabit. It stands to reason that the modern world is constituted by a much broader array of political experiences than these two singular and highly revealing occurrences, many of which no doubt carry over from the modern age of the old Roman world. The 1968 lecture course demonstrates this by outlining a broad array of political experiences from the twentieth century that begin with the first world war and proceed through emergence of totalitarianism and the advent of the bomb. The course outline projected that they would discuss nine political experiences: World War I, its aftermath on Western Europe, the Russian Revolution, the broader left-wing search for a new political order, the 1930's consolidation of the totalitarian regimes, World War II, the French resistance, the Nazi death factories, and Hiroshima. It therefore seems that Arendt understood all of these experiences to in some sense constitute the world we now live in.

Most of the typed sections of the course focus heavily on the meaning of the post-World War I era, and it is this section I want to focus on. Arendt begins the course with a session devoted to understanding what is involved in grasping historical meaning. She writes: "No theories, forget all the theories. We want to be confronted with direct experience...The only aim is to recapture experiences." After this session, she then spends a considerable amount of time discussing the significance of the first world war

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\(^{cviii}\) Arendt, "Political Experiences of the Twentieth Century" (1968), LOC 023612-13.
\(^{cix}\) Ibid, LOC 023609.
and its aftermath. The initiation of World War I shocked the world, resulted in an unexpected bloody and prolonged affair, and left the participants asking why it had been fought in the first place. The striking unpredictability of the initiation of the War demonstrated once again what Arendt had noted in *Origins* about anti-Semitism and Imperialism: the odd disparities between cause and effect that seemed regularly to exist in the modern world. The aftermath of the War saw the coming to consciousness of the "Lost Generation"; Arendt believes that few generational nicknames have ever been as apt. The War saw the breakdown of the class system, when the old social distinctions got lost as elites and lower classes were forced to work and fight shoulder to shoulder. "The most important result: the slate was swept clean, [and we saw] the terrible freshness (Sartre) that descended upon the world." She asserts that especially among the intellectual and social elites, the War left an unforgettable mark on their consciousness: "war as [a] liberating catastrophe from [the] bourgeois world of security…[the] sacrifice [of war allowed one] to show something for one's life." Arendt believed that the War had somehow brought the old world to its conclusive end, and the members of the lost generation somehow sensed that they existed in an in-between period before a new world had come into existence, but after the old world had passed. This is the explanation for what she believes was a general trend in the early

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Ibid, LOC 023612.
Ibid, LOC 023592-93.
Ibid, LOC 023593. For a discussion of the profound impact of the first world war on Western society, see Fromkin, *Europe's Last Summer*, pp. 5-9.
Ibid, LOC 023594.
twentieth century politics of ideology: the loss of the self at the core of self-interest, and desire to give oneself over to the movement of history in a mass-movement. What the members of the lost generation were sensing was the coming of a new world: "...nobody seemed sorry for the old world. Everybody seemed eager to build a new one...and those that wanted to go back to the old world...it was no longer there or they [no longer] fit into it."\textsuperscript{cxvi} 

Since 	extit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}, Arendt had been fascinated by the life of T. E. Lawrence, and there are several pages in the lecture course that are nothing but excepts from his collected letters. Noting his loss of self-interest, she quotes him saying that he had been "cured of any desire to do anything for himself."\textsuperscript{cxvii} Summarizing the ethos of the era as Lawrence exemplified it, she wrote in 	extit{Origins} that "The story of T. E. Lawrence in all its moving bitterness and greatness was not simply the story of a paid official or a hired spy, but precisely the story of a real agent or functionary, of somebody who actually believed he had entered—or been driven into—the stream of historical necessity and become a functionary or agent of the secret forces which rule the world."\textsuperscript{cxviii}

"I had pushed my go-cart into the eternal stream, and so it went faster than the ones that are pushed cross-stream or up-stream. I did not believe finally in the Arab movement: but thought it necessary in its time and place." Just as Cromer had ruled Egypt for the sake of India, or Rhodes South Africa for the sake of further expansion, Lawrence had acted for some ulterior unpredictable purpose. The only satisfaction he could get out of this, lacking the calm good conscience of some limited achievement, came from the sense of functioning itself, from being embraced and driven by some big movement. Back in

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\textsuperscript{cxvi} Ibid, LOC 023594.
\textsuperscript{cxvii} Ibid, LOC 023594.
\textsuperscript{cxviii} Arendt, 	extit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}, p. 220.
London and in despair, he would try to find some substitute for this kind of "self-satisfaction" and would "only get it out of hot speed on a motor-bike." Although Lawrence had not yet been seized by the fanaticism of an ideology of movement, probably because he was too well educated for the superstitions of his time, he had already experienced that fascination, based on despair of all possible human responsibility, which the eternal stream and its eternal movement exert. He drowned himself in it and nothing was left of him but some inexplicable decency and a pride in having "pushed the right way." "I am still puzzled as to how far the individual counts: a lot, I fancy, if he pushes the right way."cxix

And this became the surprising pathos of the era. Arendt writes that "this, then, is the end of the real pride of Western man who no longer counts as an end in himself, no longer does 'a thing for himself nor a thing so clean as to be his own' by giving laws to the world, but has a chance only 'if he pushes the right way,' in alliance with the secret forces of history and necessity—of which he is but a function."cxx In Origins, Arendt outlines how this ethos was embraced by the social cast-offs and members of the criminal underground who she refers to as the mob, and who would eventually become the fanatical leaders of the mass-movements of the era, and ultimately of the totalitarian regimes that came to power in the 1930's.cxxi Richard Overy, in agreement with Arendt, writes in his 2004 study, The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, that

Hitler, like Stalin, did not pursue power simply for its own sake. The trappings of power seemed to have meant very little…but it was power for a particular purpose. Hitler regarded the power he enjoyed as a gift of providence for the German people…his personal power was a power assigned by world history…[Hitler and Stalin] were driven in each case by a profound commitment to a single cause, and for differing reasons they saw themselves as the historical executors.cxxii

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cxix Ibid, p. 220.
cxx Ibid, pp. 220-221.
Just as Lawrence had, they saw themselves as executors of historical forces whose end results could not be predicted, but which had nevertheless filled them with a profound sense of selfless purpose. And these "functionaries" of history were perfectly situated to inspire the masses of the early-twentieth century who had lost their world and been financially ruined by the economic and political catastrophes that followed the War.

Thus, Arendt seems to be suggesting that there was some kind of deep connection between the ideological politics of the era and a growing sense of nihilism that caught hold of the Western world in the early twentieth century. This connection between ideology, totalitarianism, and nihilism was theorized in more depth in the second source I would like to introduce. In 1955, Arendt gave a research seminar at Berkeley, where she presented a revised and expanded version of the argument of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, which included several new and highly informing elements.\(^{xxiii}\) This, to my knowledge, seems to be the closest Arendt ever came to providing a statement of her solution to the problem that the Marx book was intended to solve. She begins the course with some suggestive comments that will become more clear later.\(^{xxiv}\) She suggests that European political theory after Marx was characterized by an escape from philosophy into politics, and from theory into action.\(^{xxv}\) All the European political theories had one thing in common: "to relegate thought into the background, to measure it by action, to

\(^{xxiii}\) Arendt, "Ideologies," Seminar given at UC Berkeley (1955), downloaded from Library of Congress page. There appears to be a clerical error in the way the course was listed in the Library of Congress archive. The course is labeled "Ideologies Seminar" in the archive, but this is undoubtedly a mistake, since the first page of the course (Box 024106) is labeled by Arendt under the course heading "Totalitarianism 212B," and therefore should labeled in the archive as "Totalitarianism Seminar." Also, be advised that the pages of Arendt's notes are out of order, and as a result, anyone who consults this source will first have to reorder them.

\(^{xxiv}\) Ibid, LOC 024108-09.

\(^{xxv}\) Ibid, LOC 024108.
deny the independent value of thought." As a result, she believed that we no longer have a genuine political theory.\textsuperscript{cxvi} In order to clarify what she means by this assertion, she rejects the idea that the ideologies that had circulated in the era constituted true political theories, and instead invokes the Greek ideal of theory as \textit{aleitheia}, truth or revelation, which was no doubt drawn from her avid reading of Heidegger's work. The ideologies, she asserted, were in fact the result of the \textit{loss} of an authentic political theory, because in its absence truth is simply reduced to whatever explanation can organize the facts of politics without contradiction. She writes that "without a political theory, we live in a chaos of opinions, in the maze of -isms…In it, everybody is able to win who can present consistency, but consistency is not truth. Consistency…is inherent only in the order of sentences; truth is objective, it [reveals] part of reality."\textsuperscript{cxxvii} However, she points out that "against this background of wild-growing opinions…we have certain new political phenomena…which are entirely unprecedented." She therefore proposed to look behind the ideologies and the novel political phenomena and to search for the theory behind it all. As we will eventually see, this idea of seeking an authentic political theory is an early statement of what Arendt understood by the idea of political judgment.

Virtually all of the elements found in the original theory of \textit{Origins} are found in 1955 course: anti-Semitism; Imperialism and the decay of the nation-state; the political constellation formed between the elites, the mob, and the masses; the ideological political movements; etc. However, now the nihilistic underpinnings of Arendt's post-\textit{Origins} theory of ideology and terror in totalitarian mass politics is accounted for. Referencing

\textsuperscript{cxvi} Ibid, LOC 024108.
\textsuperscript{cxxvii} Ibid, LOC 024108.
Nietzsche heavily,\textsuperscript{cxxviii} Arendt asserts that nihilism is the fundamental experience behind all ideologies.\textsuperscript{cxxix} Over the past three chapters, we have seen how deep and sophisticated Arendt's account of the origins of modern nihilism goes. The 1955 Totalitarianism seminar shows what the political impact of this has been. The modern world is characterized by a profound "relativism,"\textsuperscript{cxxx} and the result has been the chaos of opinions that is modern ideological politics.\textsuperscript{cxxxi} In this situation where consistency is what defines the truth of an ideology, just as in the case of modern science in general, success is the criteria that defines the truth of a theory or ideology.\textsuperscript{cxxxii} But it is at this point that the peculiar traits of the modern world take its revenge. In the Totalitarianism seminar, Arendt outlines a theory of nihilism that proceeds in roughly three stages.\textsuperscript{cxxxiii} The first stage corresponds to the emergence of the modern age, where political action is undertaken within the framework of the means/ends category, or in Arendt's words: "Everything is permitted for the sake of something else, but only for this sake…This is Machiavelli to Marx." This, as we have seen, is the stage of the modern age, which came to understand politics in terms of\textit{ homo faber} and the means/ends category. The second stage is characterized by the shift toward historical movement and ideological politics, as we saw in the case of T. E. Lawrence, and thus, according to Arendt, "everything is permitted, period…” In this stage, the idea of a justifying end was effectively abandoned, even in the very obscure sense given by Marx's notion of the communist utopia or

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\textsuperscript{cxxxiii} Ibid, LOC 024137.
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Nietzsche's idea of the superman. But the third stage is the most disturbing and problematic: it is the stage where not just anything is permitted, but where anything is possible. She writes that "[previously, what was] permitted was limited by possibilities which were in the human condition on the one hand and nature on the other. This is no longer [the case.] Everything is possible: the change of nature as well as the nature of man." In the seminar, Arendt never fully makes the claim explicit that the final stage of nihilism is what brought about totalitarian politics. She appeared to be running the course as a formal research seminar: framed by a very large bibliography, tentatively setting out the various elements of her revised theory, and looking for substantial feedback from her auditors in the form of papers and reports on highly specified topics. However, we know from later writings, that she eventually settled on this explanation for the emergence of totalitarianism.

The vague sense of this coming new modern world was foreshadowed by the three figures whom she believed brought the tradition to its end. Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Marx had attempted to refound Western politics by inverting the traditional hierarchy: each hoped that a "leap" of some kind from thought into human action or willfulness would somehow result in the end state of affairs they had hoped for, such Marx's communist utopia or Nietzsche's rise of the superman. But how these end results would come about in concrete terms was unclear, other than as a result of some secret historical dialectical process that they only vaguely comprehended. But in the modern world, as we saw with Lawrence and the totalitarian dictators, Arendt believes

\[\text{cxxxiv Arendt, "Tradition and the Modern Age," pp. 31-38.}\]
that the beginning of processes has become for the most part unhinged from any concrete ideal, even those as vaguely conceived as Marx's and Nietzsche's.

By the time of *The Human Condition*, Arendt had begun to formulate this final stage of nihilism in terms of what she called "acting into."\textsuperscript{cxxxv} This was the ideal implied in the notion of the Archimedean point from the very moment it became a concrete possibility with the invention of the telescope, but which she believes has only been fully realized with the emergence of the modern world: the idea that humans could act—and not just think or make—from a truly universal standpoint. In "The Concept of History," Arendt argues that the history of the West can be broken down into eras dominated by certain self-interpretations of the essential human faculty of human beings.\textsuperscript{cxxxvi} Since the beginning of the modern age, the faculties of work and labor have successively been used to define the essential characteristic of human beings. The coming of the modern world has signaled, she believed, a new conviction that action was the essential characteristic of human beings.\textsuperscript{cxxxvii} But unlike previous eras, where the process character of action—the fact the action operates from the condition of natality, the ability to begin a new chain of events—was contained by the essential limitations inherent in the human condition, we now have discovered the ability to act from a position outside the human condition, and to begin processes that could never have naturally occurred in the context of the facts of human life as it was original always given to human beings.\textsuperscript{cxxxviii} Arendt argues that the possibility of acting into the human condition began in the historical context, and was

\textsuperscript{cxxxv} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 230ff, 238, 268ff.
\textsuperscript{cxxxvii} Ibid, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{cxxxviii} Ibid, pp. 58-63, 87-90; *The Human Condition*, pp. 231, 262ff.
best exemplified by totalitarian politics.\textsuperscript{cxxxix} It was on the basis of this new capacity of act into the human condition that totalitarian politics developed their bizarre disregard for factuality. Totalitarian systems did not need to worry about the existing facts, because they understood on some level that if they follow the application of the logic of their ideology consistently, they would be able to create a set of circumstances that matched their ideology.\textsuperscript{cxl} If Jews were not vermin now, they would be made to be so; if the bourgeoisie was not a dying class now, they would be made so; etc. Even if the totalitarian regimes were not completely successful, however, Arendt was still not convinced that this is a remotely adequate objection to her claims. Totalitarian regimes and their practices ultimately only lacked the time and technological know-how to bring off their ideological agendas.\textsuperscript{cxli} In other words, she believes their goals were in principle possible. And this is a profoundly terrifying proposition. The reason Arendt claimed that totalitarianism and the atomic bomb were revelatory of the modern world,\textsuperscript{cxlii} was because they demonstrated beyond question that we have learned to act into nature just as we act into history.\textsuperscript{cxliii} And all of this we do because of our capacity to assume the Archimedean point.\textsuperscript{cxliiv} With such potential historical and technological capacities, what in principle is the limit of our human possibilities, and if we do not know, how could we find them?

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\textsuperscript{cxxxix} Arendt, "The Concept of History," pp. 86-90.
\textsuperscript{cxl} Ibid, pp. 87-88.
\textsuperscript{cxli} Ibid, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{cxlii} Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," pp. 109-111.
\textsuperscript{cxliii} Ibid, pp. 88-89.
\textsuperscript{cxliiv} Arendt, The Human Condition, pp. 262-272.
\end{quote}
Humanism and Human Limits after the Archimedean Point

Since the time Arendt wrote about totalitarianism and the human condition at the height of the Cold War we have seen Western politics appear to return to a much less ambitious and more stable form of political practice. We might say that Western politics—particularly, after the collapse of the Soviet Union—has abandoned history and the hope of human freedom it was once believed to offer, and to have settled for the politics of the animal laborans and the quiet, if less than elevated, joys of private life. But the question remains, what is the source of this apparent stability? From Arendt's perspective, so long as we do not truly understand what it is we are doing, the existence of the modern world and its promethean possibilities guarantee that, just as the inhabitants of the Western world never imagined the possibility and the consequences of the Great War, we will remain in the grip of perils that we may not fully comprehend. The last decade, for instance, gave us two somewhat significant examples of the dangers still beset our world: the overreaction of U. S. political actors to the September 11 attacks in initiating the Iraq War, and the Great Recession of 2008. Both cases clearly illustrated examples of misjudgment and a failure to comprehend the world and its conditions. Apologists might respond that in areas of political practice such as foreign policy and financial regulation, matters are too complex and actors should not be held responsible for failing to foresee the negative consequences of their actions. But this is special pleading. Our contemporary world is not so opaque and complex that common sense has completely disappeared from the human world. There were many examples of those who foresaw danger in these propositions such as Brooksley Born and Warren Buffet in the
case of the financial crisis, and a significant minority of the politically engaged public in the case of the Iraq War. Those who pushed forward with these projects seemed to do so typically out of commitments to the equivalent of ideologies in Arendt's sense, such as neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. In each case, it seemed that political actors were committed more to the logic of their theories than to an assessment of the world. But the question remains, how can common sense and good judgment be reliably found in our world? And, perhaps even more mysteriously, how did those that have functioning common sense and good judgment come by it in the first place?

This, I believe, is the deep question Arendt sought to answer in her life and work. When Arendt suggested that the final stage of nihilism meant the belief that anything was possible, she was of course speaking hyperbolically. *The Human Condition* was after all written primarily to explain the worldly conditions of human life, whether the Archimedean point is taken into account or not. Indeed, in a later discussion of the Archimedean point she writes:

In other words, what I am pleading for here is a new realization of the factually existing limitations of human beings. To be sure, these limitations can be transcended up to a point, and men have always transcended them—in imagination, in philosophical speculation, in religious faith, in scientific discoveries. Only by transcending limits, moreover, can we become aware of them. What I am maintaining here—without being at all sure that I am right—is that such limitations have begun to make themselves felt in our scientific enterprises as well as in our technicalization of the world...The Archimedean point which actually would permit man to know all and to do all can never be reached. All we can find is the Archimedean point with respect to the earth and once arrived there, we obviously would need a new Archimedean point and so *ad infinitum.* In
other words, man can only get lost in the immensity of the universe; for the only true Archimedean point would be the absolute void behind the universe.\textsuperscript{cxlv}

The problem is that modern science's Archimedean point has made it much more difficult than it once was to determine human limitations and capabilities, and thus to pass judgment and decide on courses of action. What can be done and what cannot be done, and what the implications are of our doing them have become ambiguous. Indeed, it has become difficult to even sort out which activity is being engaged in at any given moment.

The achievement of the Archimedean point has meant that human activities have come to be viewed from a standpoint outside the human condition. As a result, the stature and dignity of human beings has become threatened, since from such a viewpoint even action, the freest worldly human activity, comes to be judged on the basis on "values," which by their very nature have no objective claim on us, and are thus in the end nothing more than processes themselves. And even from within the human condition, there is no escaping this conclusion: because our technology has come to channel the forces of necessity into the human world—instead of keeping them at bay—we seem increasingly to have come to think as nothing more than laborers and consumers who act in the predictable way the modern world expects us to.\textsuperscript{cxlvi} Thus, judgment, if it is to be reliably discovered once again, will require somehow disentangling all of these ambiguities concerning the structure of our world and the activities we engage in.

\textsuperscript{cxlv} Arendt, "The Archimedean Point," Lecture given at College of Engineers, University of Michigan (1968), LOC 031401.
\textsuperscript{cxlvi} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 148-151.
Is this possible? In a variety of places, Arendt argues that we must learn once again to be humanists.\textsuperscript{cxlvii} This means that we must learn to be educated citizens. Of course, we cannot know everything; but we can become literate enough to understand what other of our fellow citizens who know more about a particular subject are trying to tell us. And in this process of debate and deliberation, we can come to have a highly developed common sense feel for the world we live, even if it is a "technically conditioned world." However, this humanist ideal is not as easy to attain as it sounds. There are a variety of unfortunate and inappropriate ways of thinking about the world that we have inherited from our modern history that make doing this highly problematic. We have to, in a certain sense, "filter out" thinking constructed on the basis of modern science from the authentic human activities which recognize the limits of the human condition, for otherwise they lose their meaning. Arendt's solution to this problem was to provide authentic articulations of the human activities which were derived from what she believed were original and fundamental experiences of them in the past. Only by understanding this, could she explain how judgment could reliably function once again in the modern world. In following chapters, I will attempt to explain how she went about rearticulating these activities, and finally, what she believed judgment would look like in the modern world once these articulations had been performed.

\textsuperscript{cxlvii} Arendt, \textit{Between Past and Future}, pp. 208ff, 221, 262ff, 272ff.
Chapter Five: *Thinking without a Banister*

*The Challenges of Understanding Arendt's Productive Project*

Arendt, as we have seen, had a deep and highly sophisticated diagnosis of the political pathologies of the modern world. The question we are left with, then, is did she have a solution—or at least some productive prescription—for responding to these peculiarly modern problems? I have been arguing that political judgment was the central idea of Arendt's productive political thought, the political practice which formed the fundamental response she proposed for how to respond to the modern situation. As we have seen, Arendt came to believe that the fundamental problem in the era of modernity was that necessity had come to be the predominate characteristic of human affairs. This had happened because of the peculiar way that the modern age had come to apply thought to human activity in the world on the basis of modern science's Archimedean point. Thus, if judgment is presumed to be fundamentally an application of thought to activity in the world, i.e., the proverbial relation of theory and practice, than it follows that Arendt's diagnosis of modernity revolves around an analysis of what judgment has come to mean in the modern era. The question we are left with is what did Arendt believe our response should be to this situation, or if there even is a possible response? In the following pages, I will argue that Arendt believed there was a response to this modern predicament, and that it would necessarily involve an attempt understand what thought and human activity in the world authentically are if we do not refer to the Archimedean
point but instead stay within the human condition, and to, furthermore, understand what an authentic relationship was between these two spheres of experience should look like. The fundamental question, in other words, is what is judgment?

The great difficulty Arendt poses is that it is very hard to understand Arendt's project—and nearly impossible to adequately substantiate such an understanding—without consulting a variety of unconventional sources. Without investigating this broader source material, one is at the mercy of the uniquely peculiar and fragmentary mode of writing and theorizing she employed. These challenges are further exacerbated by the fact that she only revealed a limited portion and particular aspects of the full scope of her project in published materials. The problems presented by Arendt's style of thought are in many ways unique to her. She writes in an unusually unorthodox manner verging on awkwardness, at times seeming to deliberately hold back the central point of her argument. One can pick up any volume of her published materials, and recognize the rather tentative and fragmentary nature of the work. She almost never writes outside of the essay format, and even her monographs are for the most part a series of essays and forays into particular historical/theoretical topics strung together in something like an intuitively constructed narrative. And even in her more coherent projects, such as *On Revolution* or *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, many of the most important conclusions and points of argumentation are buried in a dense, historically-detailed narrative. As a result, coming to a coherent understanding what Arendt is arguing in a particular essay—such as, for instance, any of the essays in *Between Past and Future*—seems to demand
having read a very broad range of her writings, writings which I believe are not limited to published materials.

To my knowledge, there is no single, particularly decisive explanation for why Arendt wrote in this way manner. In Mary McCarthy's postface to *The Life of the Mind*, she states that as far as she knew all of Arendt books and articles were edited, often by several collaborators, before reaching print, and often over fundamental elements of the arguments.\(^1\) Arendt's way of thinking seems to have been more organic than systematic, often requiring the help of others to give it a more coherent form. In one place, Arendt acknowledged that her style of thinking and writing was not even wholly intentional, and that she really considered it a kind of character flaw. At a conference on her work in 1972 she said:

…then, of course the reaction is—and this has been my case quite often—that you are simply ignored. Sometimes you are attacked. But you usually are ignored, because even useful polemic cannot be carried through on my terms. And you may say that this is a fault of mine…this kind of ignoring the main literature of my own field is something that should be held against me at some point, I think.\(^ii\)

She goes on to admit that she was not even fully conscious of this obscurity, and dubious at the prospect of ever correcting it, saying "…well, you know, I don't reflect very much on what I am doing. I think it's a waste of time. You never know yourself anyhow. So it's quite useless. But I think this is a real fault, and not just a lacuna."

At the same time, there did seem to be some kind of intentionality behind her mode of thinking and writing—something like a kind of *ethos*. Arendt was open about

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the tentative and even potentially experimental nature of her thinking,iii and even admitted that she was uncertain of how finally to assess them. In the 1972 conference she concluded saying, "I would like to say that everything I did and everything I wrote—all of this is tentative. I think that all thinking, the way that I have indulged in it perhaps a little beyond measure, extravagantly, has the earmark of being tentative."iv She furthermore believed that the nature of intellectual activity did not afford the kind of authority that can go beyond such tentative and experimental forays, and that the true purpose of a political thinker might actually be only to teach others to think politically for themselves. One of the sharpest exchanges of the conference came between she and Christian Bay. Bay criticized Arendt's tentativeness, saying, "I was disturbed when Hannah Arendt said that her desire is never to indoctrinate. I think that this is the highest calling of the political theorist: to attempt to indoctrinate, in a pluralist universe, of course...Unless we passionately care for certain opinions I think we will all be lost..."v In response, Arendt said,

I cannot tell you black on white—and would hate to do it—what the consequences of this kind of thought which I try, not to indoctrinate, but to rouse or to awaken in my students, are, in actual politics...I wouldn't instruct you, and I would think that this would be presumptuous of me. I think that you should be instructed when you sit together with your peers around a table and exchange opinions...I think that every other road of the theoretician who tells his students what to think and how to act is...my God! These are adults! We are not in the nursery!vi

Arendt, thus, seemed to believe that a theorist somehow had an obligation to hold something back, to somehow avoid robbing those they teach and inform of their ability to

think for themselves. It was as if she saw herself as setting an example for others of how to think for oneself by giving them a place to start. Perhaps in a similar way, she seemed careful to maintain a certain diffidence and tentativeness in her work.

This idea of an essential experimentalism and tentativeness seems to connote a certain lack of seriousness. Yet, this hardly believable. Arendt wrote with too much urgency, and focused her thought on matters that were of momentous political importance for the twentieth century. Is there a contradiction between the urgency of her subject matter and the "experimentalism" and tentativeness with which she characterized her thought? Not if "experimentalism" and "tentativeness" was what these urgent matters required. Arendt, as we have seen, believed that we have now live in an unprecedented situation, what she called the modern world. While she did her best to characterized this new world, she did not believe that she could do this exhaustively or alone. The most basic premise of her theory of political judgment was that political judgment concerns reflection upon a world that separates and relates individuals who have it in common, and as a result, no one individual can fully comprehend it. The closest we come is by taking into account the reflections of those who hold it in common with us. Thus, if Arendt did maintain a certain diffidence in her writing, it no doubt involved a desire to open conversation about the world we have in common, rather than to close it. As a result, her discussions of thought, action, and judgment were less about making definitive statements concerning human capacities, than with showing us possibilities which this new world seems to somehow obscure.
Arendt thus did not seem particularly motivated to fully reveal her theoretical outlook, and, in fact, seems to have been temperamentally and intellectually predisposed against it. But this by no means implies that she did not have one. Indeed, I believe her theoretical outlook was, in fact, quite well worked out. As I tried to show in the last three chapters, Arendt had a fairly coherent account of the history of Western civilization and the emergence of the modern world; yet, she only revealed the full picture of this account in pieces, typically only so much as the subject matter she was writing about required, and some of which were never published in her life time, if at all. Fully drawing out that picture required consulting a broad range of often unconventional sources. But if the historical narrative that informs her thought is difficult to piece together, her response to the problems she had identified, what we might call her productive project, remained even more obscured. She never seems to tell us directly what we should do in response to the modern world.

That Arendt had a productive project which was concerned with rearticulating crucial political phenomena almost certainly needs no real argumentation. She herself characterized the project of *The Human Condition* as the positive element of her political thought in a letter to Jasper in 1957, which was written as she was just about to publish a German collection of several "transitional essays." "I'm afraid," she wrote, "you won't like them because they are entirely negative and destructive, and the positive side is hardly in evidence…but I wish you were already familiar with [*The Human Condition*], which you will surely like better…"[vii] Clearly, Arendt believed Jaspers would have liked

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The Human Condition because in her view at least it would carry much more of her positive project. The same obviousness surely applies to the notion that this productive project involved offering rearticulations of what she believed to be authentic political phenomena that had been in some sense been lost or corrupted in our modern era. What remains in question, however, was the exact nature of these rearticulations, along with their scope, status in relation to each other, and concrete applications to human experience. Arendt, for reasons that may always remain somewhat unclear, never laid out her theoretical framework or roadmap for comprehending and applying her thought. As I mentioned earlier, the reason for this seems to have been partly intentional and partly unintentional. But this does not imply that she had no such roadmap or structure. My thesis, which I will try to lay out in its broad outlines in the next chapter, is that there is a framework to her thought that is implicit in her published writings, but which can only be understood in a much more systematic and articulate fashion if we consult several less well-known sources of her thought, her manuscripts, lecture notes, and statements in more informal contexts such as conferences, correspondences, and notebooks. This theoretical framework revolves around a productive project which had at its heart the possibility of a revival of political judgment. This is not an unprecedented approach to working with Arendt. Recently, David L. Marshall and Tracy Strong have both made valuable use of such unconventional sources, while Ronald Beiner and Jerome Kohn have done so for many years.\textsuperscript{viii} As I mentioned in chapter 1, Margaret Canovan was the

first to fully exploit these sources, and the book she produced is still in many ways a gold standard for interpreting Arendt.\textsuperscript{ix}

The first step toward coming to terms with this theoretical framework will require an examination Arendt's approach to theorizing. This is necessary because many to the conclusions and final interpretations of Arendt's thought in the coming chapters will rely heavily on understanding this intellectual approach in some depth. In other words, I propose in this chapter to explain how she went about performing these rearticulations, before moving on in the next chapter to explain what she claimed in her rearticulations of political phenomena. This is unavoidable because any attempt to evaluate what she argued first requires understanding what her underlying philosophical and historical assumptions were, and why she believed these were superior to the standard modern ways of thinking. Any attempt to understand this must unavoidably involve examining her confrontation with the thought of her teacher and mentor, Martin Heidegger. Arendt's relationship to Heidegger has been dealt with elsewhere by Seyla Benhabib, Lewis and Sandra Hinchman, Jacques Taminiaux, and Dana Villa.\textsuperscript{x} While I have learned a great


from this work, none of them sufficiently addresses the specific purpose my examination of Arendt's relationship to Heidegger serves in the argument of this study about the role of judgment in Arendt's productive project. I am specifically interested in reconstructing Arendt's productive project as one focused on the revival of the political judgment of true citizens, and this first requires understanding how Arendt's use and critique of Heidegger—particularly on the concept of "historicity," i.e., the narrative nature of human agency and historiography—forms the theoretical basis and underlying phenomenological approach to her work. Moreover, this chapter also seeks to gain insight into Arendt productive project by highlighting how she co-ops but also significantly revises several key Heideggerian concepts such as being-in, worldliness, and historicity in her theory of judgment, along with the implications of those revisions for it.

In what follows, I will first examine what we can learn of her approach from her own statements, an approach she referred to as "thinking without a banister." Concluding that these statements are insightful, but illuminating enough, I will then examine what her confrontation with Heidegger can illuminate about her approach to theorizing. The result of this confrontation will resolve one of the controversies we discussed in chapter one: i.e., the critique of Arendt's theory of judgment made by Ronald Beiner and Richard Bernstein that there is a conflict or tension in her theory between the judgment of the actor and the judgment of the spectator.xi Yet, the significance of her confrontation with

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Heidegger goes beyond understanding her methodology. We will see that there are crucial aspects of Arendt's political thought, such as worldliness, conditioning, action, plurality, narrative agency (i.e., "historicity"), speech, and common sense (i.e., "being-in"), which can only be fully understood and appreciated after having explored her confrontation and critique of Heidegger. These crucial elements of her thought which we will examine here will be essential for understanding the nature of her productive project in the following chapters.

**How to Think without a Banister**

In order to escape the logic of modern interpretations of political phenomena and the implicit necessity these interpretations carry, Arendt had concluded she could not appeal to the tradition of political thought. She had discovered that the tradition's own categories could no longer adequately provide standards of judgment for modern political experiences, and indeed only tended to reinforce the elements of necessity she found so lamentable. In the context of the modern world, where the potency of human activity had been heightened, an appeal to the tradition thus no longer represented a viable option, but indeed might even represent a danger. According to Arendt, the tradition's "moral, legal, theoretical, and practical standards, together with its political institutions and forms of government, broke down spectacularly" in the first part of the twentieth century. As

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xii I examine Arendt's formulation of the problem of necessity in human affairs in depth in the next chapter.

a result, we now lived in an era without a "testament" or tradition which "selects and names, which hands down and preserves, which indicates where the treasures are and what their worth is..." She believed Tocqueville captured the historical moment best when he wrote that "since the past has ceased to throw light upon the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity." This crisis meant that we could no longer simply rely on our common prejudices about our political forms and concepts, because "we have lost the answers on which we ordinarily rely without even realizing they were originally answers to questions," and therefore we are forced "back to the questions themselves [which] requires from us either old or new answers, but in any case, direct judgments." Thus, she writes that we have been "confronted anew...by the elementary problems of human living-together."

But the elemental nature of such problems present novel and profound difficulties that are easily ignored and overlooked. Because the tradition had failed in the modern context, she understood that there was no authority and experiences of a tradition to appeal to in order to establish the validity of her claims. As a result, though certainly she often turned to members of the tradition of political thought for insight and inspiration, she realized she would have to develop new political categories and to rearticulate well-known political phenomena outside the more venerable sources of political thought. This, to say the least, was a daunting prospect, and she fully recognized the almost unavoidable presumptuousness of the undertaking. Arendt called this kind of thinking

\[xv\] Ibid, p. 6.
\[xvii\] Arendt, "What is Authority?" p. 141.
"thinking without a banister." The status and possibility of this kind of thinking—of thinking through and articulating basic political concepts without any source of authority to appeal to—plagued her, and the attempt to understand if there could be any source of validity for thought outside an authoritative framework remained the central preoccupation of her efforts to theorize political judgment, which she eventually believed she had achieved through her analysis of Kant's third Critique. Nevertheless, the reality for Arendt was that, however uncomfortable and insecure this situation makes us feel, we simply have no other options. It is the kind of thinking our historical moment has forced on us. As a result of all this, how Arendt understood the status and scope of historical reflection, not to mention the nature of history itself, becomes of crucial importance for any attempt to evaluate her thought and to assess the plausibility of her productive project. Arendt's statements about her approach to historical reflection tend to be evocative in nature. She typically moves swiftly past questions that concern her presuppositions about the nature of history through the use of striking imagery and concise formulations which, without a fair amount of familiarity with her philosophical background, can at times seem to resemble a Taoist kōan. As will become apparent in the coming pages, it is of vital importance for the argument of this dissertation to understand Arendt's approach to history.

Perhaps the key philosophical presupposition which remained in evidence in all her mature writings beginning with Origins was her commitment to what we might call the "irreducibility" of historical phenomena. Historical phenomena were, in her view and

the view of those who influenced her, ontological and thus could not be explained by the
naturalism of the modern science. Events and their significance are not explainable in
terms of epiphenomenal "value judgments;" rather, they have a particular objectivity that
cannot be explained naturalistically. This did not mean that nature and history were
somehow completely dirempt, for they were clearly related to each other in the context of
human experience and the human condition. It did, however, mean that modern science's
attempt to explain all things in terms of natural processes was doomed to produce
extremely stilted and unenlightening explanations for historical phenomena which were
of a much richer ontological order. Arendt discussed her "method" in a limited way in
her reply to Eric Voegelin's critical review of The Origins of Totalitarianism.\textsuperscript{xix} Arendt
had been criticized for incorporating value judgments too deeply into her analyses of the
totalitarianism, or in Voegelin's words, the "morally abhorrent and the emotionally
existing will overshadow the essential."\textsuperscript{xx} Arendt rejected this criticism because she
believed "morally abhorrent and emotionally existing" to form

an integral part of it. This has nothing to do with sentimentality or moralizing, although,
of course, either can become a pitfall for the author. If I moralized or became
sentimental, I simply did not do well what I was supposed to do, namely, to describe the
totalitarian phenomenon as occurring, not on the moon, but in the midst of human
society.\textsuperscript{xxi}

To illustrate what she meant, Arendt pointed to the fact that she had used the image of
Hell to describe the Nazi death camps, and asserted that she "did not mean this
allegorically, but literally…I think that a description of the camps as Hell on earth is

\textsuperscript{xix} Arendt, "A Reply to Eric Voegelin," pp. 401ff.
\textsuperscript{xx} Ibid, p. 403.
\textsuperscript{xxi} Ibid, pp. 403-404.
more 'objective,' that is, more adequate to their essence than statements of a purely sociological or psychological nature." For Arendt, in other words, historical phenomena cannot be separated from their experiential or qualitative context through the use of methods drawn from the natural sciences. Any attempt to remove these qualitative elements will inevitably lose what is essential for understanding the historical phenomenon.\textsuperscript{xxii}

This framework was at work in \textit{The Human Condition} in Arendt's notion of historical "events," and in her concept the "deeds" of acting human beings. These are, in fact, two different words for the same phenomenon, though they occur in different contexts. Deeds and events are "\textit{sui generis},"\textsuperscript{xxiii} and are characterized by "absolute, objective novelty."\textsuperscript{xxiv} Arendt writes that it is in the nature of events and deeds "to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary, where whatever is true in common and everyday life no longer applies because everything that exists is unique and \textit{sui generis}."\textsuperscript{xxv} As we saw in chapter three, Arendt believed that the invention of the telescope was one such event. While many of the elements of the modern scientific outlook including the development of nominalist ontologies, the idea of an Archimedean thought experiment, and skepticism about the veracity of the senses proceeded the telescope's invention, it required an act of pure human natality to turn these disparate

\textsuperscript{xxiii}Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, p. 205.
\textsuperscript{xxiv}Ibid, p. 259.
\textsuperscript{xxv}Ibid, p. 205.
elements into a potent historical "event." Thus, according to Arendt, there must be an act of sheer human spontaneity at the heart of all historical phenomena and historical processes, which she characterizes as what must appear from the view point of historical causality as "miraculous."xxvi

Every act, seen from the perspective not of the agent but of the process in whose framework it occurs and whose automatism it interrupts, is a "miracle"—that is, something which could not be expected...It is because of this element of the "miraculous" present in all reality that events, no matter how well anticipated in fear or hope, strike us with a shock of surprise once they have come to pass...History, in contradistinction to nature, is full of events; here the miracle of accident and infinite improbability occurs so frequently that it seems strange to speak of miracles at all. But the reason for this frequency is merely that historical processes are created and constantly interrupted by human initiative, by the initium man is insofar as he is a human being.xxvii

In order to assert this sort of strong objectivity on behalf of the deeds and events of historical phenomena—an objectivity which would have to be anchored in a powerful assertion of spontaneous human agency and initiative—Arendt clearly must have had an alternate conception of the meaning historiographic "objectivity." In order to determine what she meant by this kind of objectivity, it is necessary to know her basic metaphysical-ontological commitments, i.e., how she understands certain basic categories of existence, such as what "being" is, what "nature" is, and what "human nature" is. Arendt never wrote down her own commitments, but there is no question that they were existentialist in nature, almost certainly hewing closely to a broad amalgam of Jaspers' and Heidegger's existentialist views. In remainder of this chapter, I will focus on her relationship with Heidegger's views, since it is clear that Heidegger was much more

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influential than Jaspers in the ontological-epistemological commitments that underlay Arendt's conception of historical objectivity. xxviii

Arendt's Heideggerian Foundations xxix

Heidegger's profound and formative influence on Arendt is, at this point, one of the most easily established relations of influence between important intellectual figures available. To see how extensively and avidly Arendt read Heidegger's work, one need only consult Bard College's Hannah Arendt Collection, which provides electronic copies of the marginalia found in her personal library, and which shows that she took notes on at least twenty-five of Heidegger's works. xxx Furthermore, consulting her papers at the Library of Congress shows that in the early 1950's Arendt taught courses on Heidegger and was regularly consulted by his translators. Heidegger was a key figure in her philosophical training. She attended some of his most famous and important courses; he

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xxviii Arendt was at least as familiar with Jaspers' philosophy, but it appears that it was the more aspirational elements of her thinking, particularly in relation to the concept of human freedom, that owned more to Jaspers. For instance, in a 1952 lecture discussing existentialism which was particularly sympathetic to Jaspers and Heidegger, Arendt focused on Jaspers' conception of freedom as located in reasonable communication, while recapitulating Heidegger's emphasis on the meaning of Being. See Arendt, "The Spiritual Quest of Modern Man: The Answer of the Existentialists," Lecture at New School for Social Research, (1952).


xxx http://www.bard.edu/arendtcollection/marginalia.htm#h
sat on her dissertation committee, and they had an intermittent romantic relationship through much of the mid- to late 1920's. In a letter from the 1950's which described the project that would become *The Human Condition* and which attests to the crucial impact of Heidegger's classes and philosophical tutelage on her own thought, she told Heidegger that "I would not be able to do this...without what I learned from you in my youth." Indeed, Arendt attests to the extraordinarily influential nature of the early Heidegger courses she attended in a celebratory essay for Heidegger's eightieth birthday, noting that

...Heidegger's "fame" predates by about eight years the publication of *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*) in 1927; indeed it is open to question whether the unusual success of this book—not just the immediate impact it had inside and outside the academic world but also its extraordinarily lasting influence, with which few of the century's publications can compare—would have been possible if it had not been preceded by the teacher's reputation among the students, in whose opinion, at any rate, the book's success merely confirmed what they had known for many years.

Heidegger pioneered a mode of philosophical argumentation which applied phenomenological analysis in order to establish transcendental arguments about the nature of human existence. Phenomenology, an approach to philosophy developed by Heidegger's teacher, Edmund Husserl, Brentano, and others, in its most basic sense is simply the attempt to describe human experience as authentically as possible. Heidegger's innovation in this movement was to apply this descriptive procedure to the

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**Young-Bruehl, Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World.** Mainly discussed in chapter two (pp. 42-76).

**Arendt-Heidegger Correspondence,** p. 120.


**Heidegger, Being and Time,** pp. 51-53, 58ff. This approach, obviously, originated with Kant and Hegel, though Heidegger, though typically seen as the pioneer of the resurgence this approach has had in the twentieth century. For a helpful introduction to this approach see Charles Taylor's "Engaged Agency and Background," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger,* and "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments" in *Philosophical Arguments.*
attempt to establish competing explanations. Certain phenomena may have popular explanations attached to them. Phenomenology can be used to describe an experience or phenomenon in such a way that the more popular explanation is somehow undermined, and an alternative explanation—typically one the phenomenologist is advocating for—is presented in more convincing light.\textsuperscript{xxv} When Arendt, for instance, asserted that "Hell on earth" is a more objective description of the Nazi death camps than any mode of description based on scientific methodology could provide, she was in a certain sense utilizing this mode of argumentation.

Heidegger's use of this approach was extraordinarily ambitious its scope. The central project that dominated all of Heidegger's thought was what he called the attempt to "raise anew the question of the meaning of Being."\textsuperscript{xxxvi} Heidegger, in proposing this project, claimed that the question of the meaning of Being had long ago in Ancient Greece been put aside, and given an answer that had remained fundamentally the same throughout the history of Western philosophy.\textsuperscript{xxvii} He believed that the same fundamental answer of the meaning of Being had been given no matter which philosopher was consulted, be it Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, or Nietzsche. To someone unfamiliar with metaphysical philosophy, this may seem like a ridiculously elementary proposition. Being, after all, seems self-evidently to be whatever there is. On the other hand, to metaphysical philosophers, Heidegger would seem to be making no

\textsuperscript{xxv}This has been a fairly popular form of philosophical argumentation during the last century or so. Daniel Dennett has recently called this kind of argument "intuition pumps." The later Wittgenstein, for instance, was well known for the use of thought experiments in order to establish his claims about the nature of language, while other philosophers, such as Charles Taylor, John Searle and Thomas Nagel have made famous arguments based on the use of these kind of thought experiments.

\textsuperscript{xxxvi}Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{xxvii}Ibid, pp. 21-24.
sense at all, since a variety of different answers to the question of what Being was had been given: for Plato, being was the eternal forms; for Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, it was God; for Nietzsche, it was the will-to-power. For Heidegger, however, the problem with this claim is that metaphysics is answering a different question than he is asking about Being. Notice the difference in wording between Heidegger and the metaphysicians: the metaphysicians had answered the question of what Being is, while Heidegger proposes to answer the question of the meaning of Being. Is there a difference? Heidegger believed there was. The attempt to say what Being is, treats Being as if it is some sort of entity. But Heidegger points out that Being is no thing, but a quality which all things possess. The problem with attempting, as metaphysics had, to say "what Being is" is that it begs the question. When we attempt to articulate what something means, we attempt to explain it in terms of more simplistic and basic experiences and concepts. But if Being is the most basic quality of all things, if it is already present in everything, than any attempt to explain it cannot appeal to anything more basic. As a result, attempts to answer the question of what Being is, already presuppose an understanding of Being. Thus, any "theoretical" approach to the question, will come up short, because in attempting to conceptualize Being, modern science and philosophy are attempting to define Being as thing, rather than as a the most basic quality of things.

In Being and Time, Heidegger sought to approach the question of the meaning of Being phenomenologically: because Being is always already presupposed in all human existence, he proposed examining how it shows itself in human experience. What is
significant about this approach to the question of the meaning of Being in terms of Arendt's understanding of the objectivity of history is that Heidegger has rejected as yet another version metaphysics the idea that the physical universal, its matter and forces, can adequately describe Being. Metaphysics had always defined Being as what persists through all contingent changes, and thus, to the extent modern science defines matter and forces as what is present through all change, modern science has a metaphysical conception of Being. Heidegger argued that before this assertion can be justified, we must examine Being as it appears in human experience, for that is where our understanding of the meaning of Being is drawn from. If, as Heidegger proposed to do, we examine the way Being manifests itself in human experience, he believes that the naturalist presuppositions and claims of modern science will become much less convincing. The consequence of all of this for Arendt, as I will argue later, is that Arendt's grounds for claiming a kind of objectivity for historical phenomena, deeds, and events that fall outside naturalist ontology are greatly strengthened, because in the context of human experience Being, according Heidegger, encompasses both Nature and History.

As I mentioned above, Heidegger was looking for how Being manifests itself in human experience. However, Heidegger did not believed Being as such directly manifests itself. In human experience, Being is the quality of things insofar as they exist, and as a result, we can never grasp Being directly by paying attention what things are, but only by paying attention to the background that makes those things comprehensible as the things they are. This is a crucial point. In order to show that understanding Being can
only be grasped through the phenomenological analysis of human experience, Heidegger had to develop powerful philosophical arguments concerning the nature of human experience and the beings that human beings are, the most crucial of which is the assertion that human beings are beings that are *essentially* contextual: i.e., they only have being insofar as they are conditioned by a meaningful background or context.\textsuperscript{xxxviii}

Let me to explain what I mean by this in Arendt's terms. Arendt provided one of the most concise and penetrating formulations of Heidegger's perspective in the opening section of the first chapter of *The Human Condition*. The opening moments of *The Human Condition* are among the most striking and powerful passages of writing in the history of philosophy, rivaling Nietzsche, Kafka, Heidegger, and even Arendt's literary hero, Plato, whose work, she once remarked, was characterized by an unusual mixture of "depth and beauty, whose weight was bound to carry his thoughts through the centuries," no matter what twists and turns philosophy may have taken.\textsuperscript{xxxix} Arendt seemed to have been continuing the debate with Voegelin in these opening moments. Voegelin attacked an off-hand statement Arendt had made that "human nature as such is at stake" in his review of *Origins*, and argued that this was nonsensical, since human nature could never be changed. Arendt, in her reply, had sought to challenge the very idea that there existed such a thing as a human nature in Voegelin's highly platonic sense.\textsuperscript{xl} Her reasoning had to do with the nature of the existential threat she believed totalitarianism posed to human beings. If there was such a thing as an unchanging human nature, than the threat of

\textsuperscript{xxxviii}This draws on Charles Taylor's characterization in "Engaged Agency and Background," pp. 210ff.

\textsuperscript{xxxix} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 225.

\textsuperscript{xl} Arendt, "A Reply to Eric Voegelin," pp. 407-408.
totalitarianism was greatly diminished, since human nature could never fundamentally be altered or diminished. The essential capacities of human beings would only have to wait for a set of historical circumstances that allowed them to express their freedom again. Arendt's response to this was to suggest that we do not know if there is such a thing as human nature, and furthermore we have no grounds for believing the essential characteristics of human beings could not be altered in a fundamental way. As she remarked, "Historically we know of man's nature only insofar as it has existence, and no realm of eternal essences will ever console us if man loses his essential capabilities."

Arendt seems to continue this argument in the opening moments of The Human Condition. She writes that "the problem of human nature…seems unanswerable in both its individual psychological sense and its general philosophical sense. It is highly unlikely that we, who can know, determine, and define the natural essences of all things surrounding us, which we are not, should ever be able to do the same for ourselves—this would be like jumping over our own shadows" [italics added]. At first blush, this statement of the impossibility of comprehending human nature by drawing an analogy to "shadow jumping" seems like nothing more than a literary flourish. Yet, seen against the background of Arendt's existentialism, it turns out to be a penetrating formulation of Heidegger's highly complex thought. She goes on to write:

…nothing entitles us to assume that man has a nature or essence in the same sense as other things. In other words, if we have a nature or essence, then surely only a god could know and define it, and the first prerequisite would be that he be able to speak about a "who" as though it were a "what." The perplexity is that the modes of human cognition

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xii Ibid, p. 408.
xiii Arendt, The Human Condition, p. 10.
applicable to things with "natural" qualities, including ourselves to the limited extent that we are specimens of the most highly developed species of organic life, fail us when we raise the question: And who are we? This is why attempts to define human nature almost invariably end with some construction of a deity, that is, with the god of the philosophers, who, since Plato, has revealed himself upon closer inspection to be a kind of Platonic idea of man.\textsuperscript{xliii}

Thus, in Arendt's words, human beings, "no matter what they do, are always conditioned beings,"\textsuperscript{xliv} by which she means that the only certain statement that can be made about human nature is the fact that it always draws on, is dependent upon, and indeed is unintelligible without a context that transcends and gives meaning to it. A rock would always be rock, whether it had a context or not; but if a human being, however, could somehow exist without a context—if perhaps she was born and lived alone, somehow, in the vacuum of deep space—she would cease to be anything resembling a human being. This is deep reason why Heidegger insists that Being is revealed only indirectly in human experience, and never as in the form of scientific statements which should ultimately be reducible to statements about the physical universe, for if this was the case, it would be possible to give an account of human beings as "whats" rather than as "whos."

Of course, at this point, Heidegger and Arendt have not really proven this, and, in a certain sense, they cannot "prove" it. What they could do was present a persuasive account of experience, and rely on the insight of their readers to determine whether or not they have presented a more persuasive account. Thus, as was discussed before, they must engage in phenomenology, i.e., they must provide descriptions of human experience that are convincing and persuasive enough that we feel we have no choice but to accept their

\textsuperscript{xliii} Ibid, pp. 10-11.
\textsuperscript{xliv} Ibid, p. 9.
explanations as opposed to those that have become so dominant in the scientifically conditioned modern era. They have to show that there really are what Arendt called simply "conditions" of human life and human experience, and what Heidegger in Being and Time called "existential structures."\textsuperscript{xlv}

The most basic existential structure, according to Heidegger, was his notion human existence was always characterized by "Being-in-the-world."\textsuperscript{xlvi} Humans cannot be the sort of beings they are unless they always already find themselves in a meaningful context: human beings always are beings conditioned by being involved in a world. There is virtually no doubt that Arendt drew this concept directly from Heidegger's Being and Time when she formulated her own concepts of worldliness and common sense. The Bard College Collection shows that Arendt's German copy of Being and Time was heavily used.\textsuperscript{xlvii} Moreover, in an article written around the time she formulated the ideas that would result in The Human Condition—which is her book dealing most extensively with worldliness—she raises the key critique of the tradition of political thought that is found in The Human Condition. The problem with the tradition in her view is that it has always sought to deal with human beings in the singular, while politics is essentially concerned with the condition of human plurality, the fact that "men, not Man, live on the earth." Foreshadowing the central role that worldliness would play in The Human Condition, Arendt writes in this article that "it may be—but I shall only hint at this—that

\begin{footnotes}
\item[xlv] Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 33.
\item[xlvi] Ibid, pp. 78ff.
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Heidegger's concept of 'world,' which in many respects stands at the center of his philosophy, constitutes a step out of this difficulty.\textsuperscript{xlvii}

In claiming that humans are essentially beings-in-the-world, Heidegger was drawing on a deep phenomenological insight into human experience, which he formulated in the early courses that made him famous well before \textit{Being and Time}'s publication. According to Heidegger, there could be no particular objects, no things at all, unless they were conditioned by a meaningful world which provides a background of intelligibility to them.\textsuperscript{xlix} This worldly background is not a thing in itself, but somehow a condition of things which we only become aware of indirectly. This is what makes it an existential structure: it is a structure of human consciousness which makes the Being of things present to us.

The phenomenon of worldliness can only be grasped by appealing to a variety of intuitive experiences. For instance, when we say things like this or that would mean "the end of the world," typically we don't have in mind the total annihilation of the planet. Often this phrase might be limited to the end of our particular civilization or even our personal lifestyle, as in situations like divorce, career failure, a home foreclosure, or family tragedies. The "world" means more to us than just objects which surround us: it involves all our human meanings and involvements, things which cannot be reified into objects, but which somehow seem to be attached to objects from out of our world. Heidegger would occasionally use the German phrase "\textit{es weltet}" to describe this

\textsuperscript{xlvii} Arendt, "Concern with Philosophy in Recent Twentieth Century Philosophy," p. 443.
\textsuperscript{xlix} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, pp. 78ff, 91ff.
experience, which literally translates as "it worlds," i.e., that the world literally *worlds at us and around us*.\(^1\) In one of Heidegger's earliest discussions of the phenomenon of World, he said that "living in an environment, it signifies to me everywhere and always, it always has the character of world, 'it worlds'..."\(^\text{li}\) Sixteen years later, well after the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger wrote in an early draft of "The Origin of the Work of Art" essay that "the world worlds—it surrounds our *Dasein* as an accompaniment wherein the leisure and haste, the remoteness and proximity, the expanse and narrowness of all beings remain open to us. We never encounter this accompaniment as an object, but instead it guidingly holds our doing and leaving-be..."\(^\text{lii}\)

If this is true, it would then present modern science with a serious complication to its epistemological presumptions. It implies that there will never be any truly "theoretical" position—no final Archimedean point, in Arendt's words—for no matter what methodological and experimental precautions are adopted, they will always be rooted and have their origin in some kind of human worldly background. Moreover, it would also suggest that the whole framework of "value thinking"—which Arendt and her teachers were so critical of—would become untenable. Since meaning comes out of a world which always conditions our activities and reflections from an ever present meaningful background, there is in principle no way to ever give a satisfactory account of any particular "value." Whatever we label a "value" proceeds out of the meaningful

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\(^\text{li}\) Ibid, p. 35.

\(^\text{lii}\) Ibid, p. 135.
background and never fully captures the full meaning which the background provides. Worst of all, the attempt to objectify a meaning by labeling it a value only guarantees that it will lose its power to illuminate why we do and think the things we do in our lives.iii

Heidegger deals with the framework of being-in-the-world primarily in the first division of Being and Time. There are a seemingly endless array of phenomenological refinements Heidegger carefully adds to the notion of being-in-the-world, which we do not have space to deal with here. For my purposes, I will focus on only two such specifics Heidegger develops in the first division—both of which clearly influenced Arendt's thought—what Heidegger calls our "thrownness," and what he calls "being-in." Thrownness is the "factual" life situation in which human beings finds themselves in their unique social, political, historical, and relational circumstances.ivi Heidegger uses the word "factual," as distinct from "factual," because he is trying to emphasize that the concrete facts of our lives are not just objective circumstances which have only a contingent bearing on us; they are, as Arendt emphasizes, conditions of our existence. We are, existentially speaking, thrown into the particular world we inhabit, thrown into who we are and what possibilities we have available to us.

Our ability to engage with the unique worldly situation in which we are thrown is what Heidegger calls "being-in."iv Being-in seems clearly to have been a primary source for Arendt's idea of "common sense" as our intuitive connection to a common world, and

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iii The most well-known place Heidegger criticized value thinking was in the "Letter on Humanism," pp. 251ff, which Arendt was known to have called Heidegger's "Prachtstück" or "his most splendid effort" (p. 216), found in Heidegger, Basic Writings, Revised and Expanded Edition, David Farrell Krell, ed., HarperCollins Publishers: New York (1993).
iv Heidegger, Being and Time, pp. 173ff.
iv The most well-known place Heidegger criticized value thinking was in the "Letter on Humanism," pp. 251ff, which Arendt was known to have called Heidegger's "Prachtstück" or "his most splendid effort" (p. 216), found in Heidegger, Basic Writings, Revised and Expanded Edition, David Farrell Krell, ed., HarperCollins Publishers: New York (1993).
iv Heidegger, Being and Time, pp. 173ff.
iv Ibid. pp. 79ff.
what she refers to as the sixth sense which fits our five senses into the world. Since it is clear that Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world is the source of Arendt's fundamental political category of "worldhood," which is explicated primarily in *Being and Time*, there can be little doubt that "being-in" and "common sense" for all intents and purposes refer to the same basic existential structure, particularly since Heidegger devotes so much of *Being and Time* to "being-in." Arendt never provided anything like the kind of concrete specificity of her notion of common sense that Heidegger provides in his description of being-in, but this probably was not necessary for the type of research she was involved in, which was of a much more historical and political nature than Heidegger's philosophical and existential project. Heidegger unearths deep existential relationships to our factical existence, such as "attunement" (the way moods such as anxiety, fear, or being in love allow us to take a particular stance toward the world), "understanding" (our basic, common sense know-how for getting around in the world), "discourse" (our ability to articulate and make sense of our life situation by consciously taking stock of our goals and relationships in speech), and "falling" (our tendency to get lost in our daily affairs). Each of these activities allow us to deepen our connection to the world, which is what Arendt had called our "prejudices." However, Heidegger's broader descriptions of being-in are perhaps more important to Arendt. Heidegger articulates being-in as our ability to be and feel at home in our concrete worldly surroundings. Being-in has the sense of "inhabiting,"

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Ivi Ibid, pp. 79ff, 169ff.
Ivii Ibid, p. 80.
"residing," "dwelling," "to be accustomed to," and "to be familiar with."

As was seen in chapter three, Arendt believes that it is the loss of common sense as the ability to feel at home in the world and to intuitively know how to relate to and interact with the world that has atrophied in the modern era—and especially in the political arena. This loss of an intuitive, common sense connection to the world—the loss of an ability to "dwell" in the world—is what led to "process thinking" and attempts to replace common sense with what Arendt had called "common sense reasoning," which has no relation to worldliness, but only to the basic animal-like structures of the human body on which the initial Utilitarian philosophies were based. In a similar vein, Heidegger's later philosophy after *Being and Time* would increasingly come to focus on the nature and loss in the modern world of "being-in," i.e., the ability to dwell and feel at home in the modern world, and with speculation concerning how it could be reestablished.

Up to this point, the similarities to Arendt have focused on her use of Heidegger of for descriptions of worldly activities, especially in terms of the crucial notion of being-in-the-world for Arendt. However, it is clear that Arendt was also influenced by Heidegger in the realm of thought and the *vita contemplativa*. *Being and Time* famously contains only two of what was projected to have six divisions. Heidegger eventually abandoned the project's more ambitious objective, which would have required the final four divisions. This objective was to attempt to work out the meaning of Being

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lviii Ibid, p. 80.
lx J. S. Mill's "utilitarianism" could never have been vulnerable to the sort of criticism Arendt directs toward Bentham, et al., since Mill's version of the happiness principle is basically a modernized form of Aristotle's *eudemonia*. This probably suggests that there is a serious incoherence somewhere in Mill's utilitarianism, but it nevertheless is clearly not vulnerable to Arendt's attack on Bentham.
by appealing to the experience of Time. Heidegger had proposed to do this by examining first the being that already has an understanding of Being—however vague that understanding may be—what Heidegger calls *Dasein*, which is his word for human beings. In *Being and Time* Heidegger approaches human beings and their experience of Being in two steps: in the first division, Heidegger looks at the basic existential structures of human experience, while in the second division, Heidegger articulates the new qualities these structures take on when they are reinterpreted from the perspective of what he calls "ecstatic temporality," which is his word for how time manifests itself in human experience. While the existential structures of our being-in-the-world provide the background conditions which allow us to start to bring the meaning of Being into focus, Heidegger believes that it is only after we reinterpret these background conditions from our primordial experience of time as "temporality," that we finally come into genuine contact with Being. Heidegger believed that the normal way of the thinking about time as a linear progression or sequence of events actually drew on a primordial experience of time which we always already have before developing this more theoretical notion of time, which he called temporality. This temporality is "ecstatic" because in each element of this experience of time (past, present, or future) we "stand out" from our worldliness and "into the truth of Being," i.e. we somehow exist in an existential position which is removed from our worldliness, because it brings into focus the limits or "horizons" of

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Heidegger believed that when we can confront our primordial temporality, it will allow us to experience Being in its authentic meaning. This confrontation with Being will give insight, depth, and authenticity to our worldly involvements.

According Heidegger, the element of temporality is the basis of our existence as essentially historical beings, or what he calls our "historicity." By saying we are "historical," Heidegger is not simply asserting that there were a sequence of well-known events that our civilization's historians have documented and placed in bound narratives. Heidegger means that our lives are always grasped as stories or narratives which stretch out from birth to death. It is these unique stories which make us individuals, which allow us to have a unique identity—to become a "who" rather than a "what." The history books written by historians are only possible because we first and foremost originally experience our own individual lives as narratives. However, this ability experience our life as a "who," as our own unique life story, requires a direct confrontation with our ecstatic temporality, and Heidegger seems to believe that many, if not most, human beings never really do this, and, as a result, never truly become authentic "whos."

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\(^{\text{lxv}}\) Ibid, pp. 424ff. The German word is *Geschichtlichkeit*. I use the Macquarrie and Robinson translation, who translate the word as "historicality." However, the common practice when discussing this idea of Heidegger's has been to use Stambaugh's "historicity," and so I will also follow this practice.

\(^{\text{lxvi}}\) Ibid, p. 425.

\(^{\text{lxvii}}\) Ibid, pp. 150, 365, 427.

\(^{\text{lxviii}}\) Ibid, pp. 444ff.

\(^{\text{lxix}}\) Ibid, pp. 365, 427.
This confrontation with temporality seems to be a kind of three step existential process which moves from past to future to present. We primordially and originally experience the past as our "heritage." This is the traditions and civilization of our cultural background. We have to be familiar with our civilization's achievements and seek to emulate them by adopting what Heidegger calls "heroes," and through them we can resolutely confront our "destiny," i.e., the essential possibilities made available by our particular historical community. Nevertheless, it is only by confronting our future that we truly experience Being in its immediacy, in such a way that our story becomes truly own unique story. This primordial future is not just our goals and plans for the rest of our lives; Heidegger believes we only confront Being when we confront the absolute limit of our own being-in-the-world: our death. This is where Heidegger finally returns to his original project of attempting to bring the meaning of Being into focus by appealing to the horizon of time as temporality. Recall that Heidegger had argued that Being is not any thing, but a kind of quality of all things—indeed, the most basic and fundamental quality. Thus, according to Heidegger, Being is literally nothing, i.e. nothing. In other words, Being is that mysterious aspect of all things that is both its ground—the source from which it all came—but also completely opaque and mysterious, beyond human comprehension because it is the fundamental condition of all such comprehension. As a result, it cannot be thought, but only left in question, as the mysterious groundless ground, the nothing, of all things. This nothingness underlying all things can only be confronted when we confront our absolute mortality, the fundamental

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lxxi Ibid, pp. 310-324; see also "What is Metaphysics?" pp. 90ff.
nothingness which awaits all of us in death. When we do this, we receive a "moment of vision" which allows us to resolutely choose the life we were originally, thoughtlessly channeled into by the patterns of our worldly possibilities. This ability to choose what we have already been, both in terms of our own lives and in terms of our civilization's heritage, is what Heidegger calls authentic "repetition." This authentic repetition occurs in the mode of what Heidegger calls "resoluteness." The notion of resoluteness seems to be the closest concept Heidegger has to what Arendt ultimately understood by judgment. Resoluteness allows the moment of vision to take some kind of articulate form in what Heidegger had called "discourse," the linguistic and communicative element of our being-in, i.e. our common sense connection to the world. After we have faced up to our death and placed this moment of vision in some kind of articulate and expressive form, i.e. "discourse," we come to have what he calls "primordial truth" or "disclosedness," and later, after Being and Time, "aletheia," the word for truth he borrows from the Greeks which meant truth as "uncoveredness" or "unconcealment."

Heidegger's notion of aletheia seems to have been highly influential for Arendt as she formulated her distinctive approach to historiography, which will be discussed in more detail shortly. Heidegger argued that the common modern understanding of truth as correspondence or correctness, i.e., whether, for instance, a scientific theory is "correct"

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{lxii}} \text{Ibid, pp. 284-311.} \]
\[ \text{\textsuperscript{lxiii}} \text{Ibid, pp. 376ff, 387ff.} \]
\[ \text{\textsuperscript{lxiv}} \text{Ibid, p. 313.} \]
\[ \text{\textsuperscript{lxv}} \text{Ibid, p. 388.} \]
\[ \text{\textsuperscript{lxvi}} \text{Ibid, pp. 342ff.} \]
\[ \text{\textsuperscript{lxvii}} \text{Ibid, p. 343; "On the Essence of Truth," Basic Writings, pp. 111ff.} \]
or corresponds to a given set of facts, is actually rooted in more essential experience of truth that takes in a much wider sphere of human experience of Being.\textsuperscript{lxxviii} Heidegger believed that \textit{all} forms of truth are still rooted in what might be called a existential stance, point of view, or sphere of experience. This even applies to modern science, a point Arendt had tried to make by rooting modern science's methodology in the concrete discovery of the possibility that humans could achieve a stance outside the human condition, which she called the Archimedean point. For Heidegger, since all truth is rooted in a particular existential mode of experience or existential point of view, all truth—even scientific truth—always reveals only certain facets of Being.\textsuperscript{lxxix} To understand what Heidegger has in mind here, consider, for example, a famous work of art like Edvard Munch's "The Scream." From a scientific point of view, it would be a 'correct' statement about the being of "The Scream" to define it as canvass with dried paint on it. In that sense, science has indeed 'revealed' something about the painting. Yet, at the same time, it has concealed something about the painting; indeed, it might be argued that it has concealed much more than it has revealed. Heidegger in fact believed that the being of true art had a capacity to convey the "worlding" of our world—a "worlding" which normally operates in the "background" our experience, our being-in-the-world—which in turn allows us to "dwell," to find our "being-in" (in Arendt's terms, our common sense) more intuitively, and in a more familiar way, with our being-in-the-world.\textsuperscript{lxxx} Consider the way the world is reveal or disclosed in "The Scream."

\textsuperscript{lxxix} Ibid, pp. 130ff.
Munch, at the very least, seems to have captured in all its bizarre surreality and strangeness the way the world "worlds" when we experience moments of horror, trauma, and great tragedy. Munch captures the way the "worlding" of the world seems to slow down to crawl in these unforgettable moments in an odd kind of slow motion effect. The world suddenly becomes strange and foreign. People around become shadowy figures, little more than part of the landscape, carrying on superficial conversations, doing utterly meaningless things. In that sense, it may indeed be scientifically "correct" that "The Scream" is only a canvass with dried paint on it, but it's *aletheia*, what it reveals or opens up, its essential truth about its being, is also much more than that. Indeed, this "correct" statement seems to have obscured its true being much more than it has revealed it.
While art seemed to provide an exemplary example of Heideggerian aletheia, Heidegger believed aletheia went far beyond art, leading ultimately to a confrontation with the meaning of Being itself which lay beyond the world and grounded it, a meaning that was ultimately the source of human freedom, which could only be approached through what he called "thinking." At this point, it is crucial to understand the central role which Aristotle's practical philosophy played in the development of Heidegger's—and Arendt's—thought. It is a well-established fact of twentieth century philosophical history that both Heidegger's and Arendt's projects were inspired by and responding to Aristotle's practical philosophy, especially as it was articulated in the Nicomachean Ethics in Heidegger's case, while it appears Arendt drew broadly on the Ethics, the Politics, the Rhetoric, and the Poetics.\textsuperscript{lxxxi} It is by now clear that Being and Time should be interpreted as an attempt to establish the priority of Aristotle's account of action or praxis as the fundament of human existence.\textsuperscript{lxxii} The first division of Being and Time seems clearly intended to establish this assertion. Yet, action is never achieved in the first division. The closest we come to action is in the context technical activities, Aristotle's poiesis, which employs practical "know-how," or in Aristotelian terminology, techne—what Arendt would eventually call "work." All human activity in the first

\textsuperscript{lxxxi} The development of Heidegger's engagement with Aristotle's Ethics through the 1920's has been well documented. For a concise treatment, see Michael A. Gillespie's "Martin Heidegger's Aristotelian National Socialism." For book length treatments of the Aristotelian background see Walter Brogan's Heidegger and Aristotle: The Twofoldness of Being, and for how it eventually became Being and Time, see Theodore Kisiel's The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time. Arendt's Aristotelianism clearly comes through her adoption of many of Heidegger's existentialist ontological commitments. Moreover, her conceptions of action as praxis, while it draws on pre-Aristotelian sources, would not have been possible if she had not first been responding to Aristotle. The breadth of how extensively Arendt drew on Aristotle's various practical philosophical texts can be demonstrated by consulting her Denktagesbuch or thought journal, which was published in Germany in 2002. It shows that in the early to mid-50's she took notes on the Politics, the Rhetoric, and the Poetics, and several of Aristotle's Ethics.

\textsuperscript{lxxii} Gillespie, "Martin Heidegger's Aristotelian National Socialism," pp. 151ff.
division, while certainly inescapable and fundamental, is still essentially thoughtless and inauthentic, at best employing theoretical or technical means/ends thinking, because it does not reflect on the essentially mysterious grounds of our being-in-the-world. It is only in the second division, after *phronesis*, or what Heidegger would later come to call authentic "thinking," has been faced up to and confronted that our practical activity takes on the quality of action or *praxis*. What is crucial to grasp here is that Heidegger believes that free human action has less to do with the specific choices, activities, or concrete courses of action we choose to take, and more to do with how our everyday activities, our everyday way of being-in-the-world, which is thoughtless and conformist in nature, can be transfigured and take on a deep and profound quality—a quality which makes it truly free action—only when we reflect on and confront the meaning of Being. Michael Allen Gillespie argues:

In this respect, this phronetic moment of vision looks more like a conversion experience than a deliberative judgment. Heidegger reads Aristotle more through Paul, Augustine, Eckhart, and Luther than through the Aristotelian ethical tradition. Drawing on Augustine's account of the birth of Christ...Heidegger sees each moment of vision as revealing a new world, both forward and backward in time. This is not to say the world is thereby re-created *ex nihilo*, but rather that in such moments the world is there in a new sense...This phronetic moment of vision brings about not merely a transformation of the world but first and foremost a transformation or conversion of *Dasein* itself.

This conception of human freedom as an essentially reflective or contemplative endeavor is what ties Heidegger most closely to the philosophical tradition, and is probably the fundamental point of divergence for Arendt's various departures from Heidegger. Of
course, from Heidegger's perspective this is still ultimately a practical philosophy—indeed, all philosophy is ultimately practical, in Heidegger's very broad, existentialist sense. But Arendt, for her part, rejects this claim: she will go on to argue that contemplation and action are two very different activities, and their relationship—if there, indeed, is one at all—is extremely obscure. Indeed, in her critique of Heidegger in the "Willing" volume of *The Life of the Mind*, she writes of Heidegger's notion of action that

…the Self brings itself into a kind of "acting" (*handeln*) which is polemically understood as the opposite of the "loud" and visible actions of public life—the mere froth on what truly is. This acting is silent, a "letting one's own self act in its indebtedness," and this entirely inner "action" in which man opens himself to the authentic actuality of being thrown, can exist only in the activity of thinking. That is probably why Heidegger, throughout his whole work, "on purpose avoided" dealing with action.\(^{xxxv}\)

Thus, at least in *Being and Time* action for Heidegger turns out to be a contemplative and, in the end, fundamentally private affair. This contemplative and ultimately private interpretation of action characterized most of Heidegger's thinking on the nature of action through much of his life—with the exception, of course, of the early 1930s. This period revealed a much more activist perspective on action. Heidegger believed by this point that technology and its theoretical outlook had become so dominate in the modern world that the ability to have a phronetic moment of vision was becoming increasingly impossible. Heidegger seemed to believe that some kind of decisive political action might bring about a world where we could once again confront the

meaning of Being.\textsuperscript{lxxxvi} His discussions of art seemed to have grown out this political endeavor—or, more likely, appeared to be a response that grew out of the failure of his politics—as an attempt to gain a more authentic relationship to technology by grasping its essential commonality with art in the Aristotelian notion of \textit{techne}.\textsuperscript{lxxxvii} But this issue is tangential to our current concerns. Moreover, there is no evidence that work from this period of Heidegger's thought had any direct philosophical influence on Arendt. Finally, Heidegger himself seemed to abandon this much more activist stance in his later years, although it is unclear whether he actually gave up these notions.

By the end of the 1930s, Heidegger's conception of \textit{praxis} and \textit{phronesis} would, more than ever before, become increasingly more contemplative and quasi-religious. Heidegger would continue to articulate human freedom as having less to do with concrete acting in the world, and more to do with how we can establish an authentic relationship to Being through what he called "thinking." Thus, in the "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger continues to argue that true action only occurs in authentic thought in relation to Being, saying that thinking is a mode of action that is "the simplest and at the same time the highest, because it concerns the relation of Being to man."\textsuperscript{lxxxviii} Moreover, in "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger continues to present freedom as not

\textsuperscript{lxxxvi} For more information on this period of Heidegger's thought, see Gillespie's article which examines Heidegger's analysis of modernity, technology, and his apparent political goals and their meaning in a depth I cannot go into here. See, in particular, pp. 153ff. For other treatments of the Heidegger's political thinking and activities in the 1930s see Tracy Strong's "Martin Heidegger and the Space of the Politics,"(2012); Hubert L. Dreyfus' "Heidegger on the Connection between Nihilism, Art, Technology, and Politics,"(2006); and, as general resource, \textit{The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader}, Richard Wolin, ed.

\textsuperscript{lxxxvii} Dreyfus', Gillespie's, and Strong's articles all deal with Heidegger's shift of emphasis from politics to art and technology through the Nazi era.

\textsuperscript{lxxxviii} Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," p. 217.
essentially found in the realm of concrete action, but in maintaining what he calls elsewhere "openness to the mystery" in an era of the history of Being were Being has increasingly revealed itself technologically and theoretically in the mode of what he calls "enframing." Thus, Heidegger's later philosophy is characterized by a striking kind of passivism and perhaps even quietism, where freedom now only resides in what he calls "non-willing" or "releasement," by letting beings be in their authentic being. It remains an open question whether this more contemplative later stance was Heidegger's final doctrine of action—whether, perhaps, the more apparently "active" version of praxis articulated in *Being and Time* might still be available in a different "sending" or "destining" in the history of Being. But it is clear that he believed that in an era of the history of Being such as ours which is characterized by enframing, all we ultimately can do is await the return of the "gods," and somehow "in little things…foster the saving power.*

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**Pearl Diving**

Heidegger's characterization of modernity is in many ways persuasive: at the very least, it seems to have found something essential in the modern era which Arendt (and many others) largely agreed with. But, for a variety of reasons, she could never have accepted Heidegger's seemingly passivist conclusions concerning the nature of action in

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xci Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, p. 58ff.

the modern world. Indeed, while in certain crucial respects Arendt's thought could never have gotten off the ground without Heidegger, it is her departures from Heidegger that in many ways define her thought, and which—at least as I will attempt to show later in this dissertation—make it so powerful. This chapter will conclude, then, by examining how Arendt's various departures from Heidegger shaped her understanding of the nature and practice of history, and beyond this, how they situated her thought in relation to Heidegger's.

It is clear that Arendt had embraced, at the very least, Heidegger's insistence that Being can only be discovered out of our own concrete existence; thus Arendt says that "Truth is Being insofar as it reveals itself." The most obvious concept Arendt adopted from Heidegger was his articulation of human existence as fundamentally narrative: that we are "whos" that are defined by our life stories, and not "whats." This narrative character of human existence is what Heidegger had referred to as our "historicity." This historicity is a result of the sheer contingency or 'conditionedness' of human existence, i.e., our "thrownness" into a unique set of historical circumstances and a particular life situation which allow us to have life stories that define our very being-in-the-world as

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xciii Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" Lecture Course (1969), LOC 024427. A more explicit statement of her assumption of this Heideggerian understanding of Being can be found on the preceding page: "This Being, which permeates everything and outside of which we cannot think without falling into contradictory statements—like 'Nothing is'—is, as we could say today, the condition that anything exists at all; but itself is nowhere. We are surrounded by entities; but just as you cannot say what a forest is so long as you are in it surrounded by trees, so you cannot say what Being is so long as you are surrounded by entities. Truth is where no entity prevents you from noticing Being. Here, of course, my analogy of forest-trees becomes false. In order to see the forest you must step outside it; you cannot step outside Being. [italics added] You can only step outside the company of men." In published materials, cf. Arendt, "The Concept of History," pp. 41-44.

xciv Arendt, "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought," pp. 432-433; The Human Condition, pp. 7-11, 184-185.
'whos'; and moreover, according to Heidegger, all history ultimately grows out of this fundamental human condition of 'historicity'. In other words, our existence as 'whos' with unique life stories is, to use a very Heideggerian term, the most "primordial" form of history there is: it is the fundamental mode of history from which all formal histories spring. Arendt, for her part, hews closely to Heidegger as she formulates her concept of 'historicity' in *The Human Condition*:

That every individual life between birth and death can eventually be told as a story with a beginning and end is the prepolitical and prehistorical condition of history, the great story without beginning and end. But the reason why each human life tells its story and why history ultimately becomes the storybook of mankind, with many actors and speakers and yet without any tangible authors, is that both are the outcome of action.\textsuperscript{xcv}

However, Arendt's perhaps most fundamental departure from Heidegger arises out of her very different account of how human beings enact these life stories, and what human faculties give birth to them. The impulse for this departure seems to lie in what seemed to Arendt to be the essentially private nature of Heidegger's philosophy. There seems to be no obvious way to directly link concrete, factual human political history with his particular account of the origins of history in human 'historicity', the narrative structure of human existence. There is, in other words, what seems to be a deceptive appearance of concreteness in Heidegger's philosophy, which in the end never truly delivers on this concreteness in terms of anything resembling concrete human history as it is commonly known to us.\textsuperscript{xcvi} The closest Heidegger ever comes, is in his works

\textsuperscript{xcv} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 184.
\textsuperscript{xcvi} This concern over Heidegger's lack of concreteness was not limited to Arendt. Herbert Marcuse also suggested that it was what he eventually found to be problematic in Heidegger's thought, and what eventually led Marcuse to move away from him. See Marcuse, "Heidegger's Politics," *The Essential Marcuse: Selected Writings of Philosopher and Social Critic Herbert Marcuse*, Beacon Press: Boston (2007) p. 117.
centering on his notion of the history of Being, which, whatever its ultimate validity, takes place at a level of abstraction that is very distantly removed from the factual events of human politics which characterizes history. The problem, in other words, is Heidegger's distinct lack of interest in specific, concrete events, in the unique deeds of acting men and women.

As the last section showed, Heidegger understood individual, concrete events to have no actual meaning in themselves; they only have meaning insofar as they can be rendered so by an authentic confrontation with the meaning of Being by *Dasein*. This was the baseline of departure for Arendt. Writing of Heidegger's concept of historicity in 1954, she says that "it never reaches but always misses the center of politics—man as an acting being."\textsuperscript{xcvii} For Arendt, events are *sui generis*, having a unique meaning all their own. Without such events, there could be neither politics nor history, because politics is the only context where genuine events can occur, and whose results ultimately form the concrete subject matter of history. For Arendt, politics has an essential relationship to history, because historical narratives tell the stories of the deeds performed by men and women of action in the context of a public realm in a common world. History, in other words, is always fundamentally concerned with political action.\textsuperscript{xcviii} This is not to suggest that there are not general trends which historical reflection can grasp. Arendt believed this is, like Marx and Hegel before him, where Heidegger excelled. But these trends must always be grounded and find their origins in the concrete deeds and events of

\textsuperscript{xcvii} Arendt, "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought," p. 433.
human actors, and it must be recognized that such trends only have meaning insofar as they illuminate human action.xcix

This difference of opinion between Arendt and Heidegger is perhaps best highlighted by recognizing their almost diametrically opposed accounts of how human beings become "whos"—how they come to have unique life stories. For Heidegger, human beings only come to find an authentic and unique life story for themselves when they resolutely confront their ultimate groundless and nothingness in death. Historicity, in other words, is for him rooted in what Arendt called the human condition of mortality. cx Arendt, on the other hand, finds historicity, the essentially 'whoness' of humans as defined by their own, unique life story—though certainly unimaginable without the condition of mortality—to be rooted in a condition that is diametrically opposed to Heidegger's account: in birth, or what Arendt calls the condition of natality. ci Arendt equates human natality, the ability to be born, with the human capacity for action, which she defines as the ability to begin something new. cii

This beginning is not the same as the beginning of the world; it is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself. With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world itself, which, of course, is only another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before. It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and in all origins. Thus, the origin of life from inorganic matter is an infinite improbability of inorganic processes, as is the coming into being of the earth viewed from the standpoint of processes in the universe, or the evolution of human out of animal life. The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws

xcix Arendt, "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought," p. 433.
cx Arendt, "What is Existential Philosophy?" pp. 176-180.
cii Arendt, The Human Condition, pp. 7-9, 176-178.
and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle. The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world. With respect to this somebody who is unique it can be truly said that nobody was there before.\textsuperscript{ciii}

I have quoted this passage at length because it is in many ways the fundamental assumption of all her work. To fully appreciate the scope of what Arendt is claiming in this passage, it must be recognized that she is linking freedom as natality, the capacity to begin new, with the concept of human 'historicity', which for both her and Heidegger is the primordial origin in human existence of all science and history. Science and history came into being from out of the context of human experience, an experience which is always conditioned by the narrative structure of human historicity, and thus is always contingent and finds its meaning and origin from out of that original context. As a result, when we are born, it is not just that, as it might be described clinically, a fetus has passed through some woman's birth canal; it is the beginning of our own unique, individual life stories, and this more original conception of birth as action would thus be, to use Heidegger's term, more 'primordial', i.e., always already somehow be presupposed in the clinical accounts.

Of course, the notion that birth could be an instance of action seems to be an odd way to talk about this event, even presuming Arendt's much more phenomenological conception of the ability to born. Generally, we tend to assume, after all, that action should involve some kind of intention on the part of the actor. How, after all, could an action be judged to be a 'successful' instance of action, if we do not know what the actor

\textsuperscript{ciii}Ibid, pp. 177-178.
intended to accomplish? As we saw with Heidegger, however, this might not necessarily be the case. For Heidegger, freedom and action are a result of a reflection on the meaning of Being for our lives which changes the quality of both actions we have already undertaken and those we may intend to undertake; but the key point is that it is a quality that has been added to the action, rather than change the physical or concrete activities involved. Action, in other words, may not necessarily be contingent on the achievement of our goals and intentions, but rather on the quality of freedom they come to have as a result of our confrontation with mortality. Arendt, in many ways, has a similar account of action. Arendt formulates her account of action in this mode as a "non-sovereign" conception of action. In this notion of the non-sovereignty of human action, Arendt sought to emphasize the fact that human action is unpredictable, that when we begin a course of action, we always act into a web of human relations, and, as a result, the meaning of that action always ends up as something other than we expected or intended. Obviously, her notion of birth as action is an instance of action in its purest sense as the unpredictable ability to begin. If this were all there was to the story of Arendt's account of action, there would little justification for the idea that there could be such a thing a 'good' political judgment, at least, in its deliberative sense. However, this is not the end of the story. Mainly for polemical purposes directed at tradition of political thought, Arendt heavily emphasized the unpredictability of action in The Human Condition. I believe it can be shown, however, that Arendt believed there to be a deliberative aspect of action and judgment that was still at the same time non-sovereign.

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\(^{iv}\)Ibid, pp. 234-236, 244.
\(^{v}\)Ibid, pp. 175-199, 220-247.
This non-sovereign account of judgment that couples with her non-sovereign account of action cannot be discussed until a bit later in the argument of the dissertation, however.

At any rate, the fact that birth, as the beginning of a completely new life story which the world has never seen, is the source of historicity or 'whoness' for Arendt allowed her to posit her idea that politics is conditioned by and fundamentally concerned with human plurality, or, in Arendt's words, the fact that "men, not man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically the condition—not only the con ditio sine qua non, but the con ditio per quam—of all political life."\(^{vii}\) Unlike Heidegger, for whom it seems to be a relatively rare occurrence for humans to achieve authentic individuation or 'whoness'—and certainly not without a very highly developed sense of personal maturity and capacity for reflection—Arendt believes that each human being comes into the world as some kind of 'who', as the hero (or perhaps anti-hero) of some kind of story, though few seem to ever fully realize those stories in the objective human world through political action. Moreover, also unlike Heidegger, for Arendt action is solely a worldly affair. As the last section showed, Heidegger believed the true action could only be achieved after we confronted through mortality the fact that we are not solely worldly beings, that we are beings of ecstatic temporality—that we 'standout' from our being-in-the-world into authentic time. While Arendt agreed that we are not only worldly beings, that we also exist in a realm of thought which she called the gap between past and future, she did not agree that action was a result of our thoughtful existence in this gap. The world and the

\(^{vii}\) Ibid, p. 7.
gap between past and future were two completely different spheres of human experience, and therefore action and thought, like their corresponding spheres of experience, were completely irreducible to one another. This is not to suggest that thought does not have a part to play in action. Arendt believed that action was essentially conditioned and interpreted by speech, and this required the application of thought through the faculty of judgment. But Arendt, nevertheless, believed that it was the specific human capacity for action as the capacity to spontaneously begin something new that was fundamental origin of human historicity.

This competing account of historicity which Arendt articulated allowed her to develop a theory of historiography which had space for genuine, concrete historical events in a way Heidegger's original notion of historicity never did. Since she agrees with Heidegger that human historicity, the narrative structure of individual human existence, is the fundamental origin of all history, the fact that for her historicity is derived from our capacity to act, to begin something new in the objective human world, means that human action is the ultimate origin and source of all history. As a result, given Arendt's framework, human agency must be taken very seriously by historical narratives. This is why Arendt always seeks to ground her historical narratives in concrete events and deeds, such as, for instance, her assertion that modernity began as a result of the invention of the telescope. Of course, her intention had not been to claim there were no other elements at the roots of the modern era, but only to show that historical trends and processes, real as they may be, always have an origin in the actions of human beings, and not in some gigantic historical process or mysterious 'sending' or
'destining' from Being. The actions and events recounted in the historical narratives of skilled historians are not accidental or epiphenomenal; rather, they have a genuine, concrete effectiveness and potency.

Arendt's name for the methodology involved in the theory of historiography she developed—a mode of historiography which she had referred to as "thinking without a banister,"—was what she rather playfully called "pearl diving." The approach of pearl diving seems to have developed out of her recognition of the commonalities between her approach to analyzing totalitarianism, and Heidegger's thesis of a distinction between truth as aletheia, and truth as correctness. The authentic form of truth which Heidegger sought to capture in his notion of aletheia seeks to capture the authentic or fundamental human experience underlying commonplace words, assumptions, or prejudices that for one reason or another have somehow failed to express the experience adequately, such as in the example I provided earlier of the problematic nature of a purely scientific account of Edvard Munch's "The Scream." Arendt believed this approach expressed the mode of theorizing that she employed in her studies of totalitarianism, and she explicitly used the term aletheia to describe that approach in her 1955 totalitarianism seminar at Berkeley which presented her revised theory of totalitarianism. It was also clearly what Arendt was driving at in her exchange with Voegelin when she claimed that calling the Nazi death camps "Hell on earth" was a more "objective" account than any terminology which the social sciences can provide.\(^\text{cvii}\) In many ways, critics of theories of totalitarianism such as Arendt's still seem to fall into the same trap: they become bogged down in

\(^{\text{cvii}}\) Arendt, "Ideologies Seminar," Seminar at UC Berkeley (1955), LOC 024108.
descriptive models which may be "correct" to a certain degree, in that there clearly were very important factual differences between the Soviets and the Nazis. Yet, from Arendt's perspective, there are essential historical truths about the common natures of these two regimes which can only be grasped outside the frameworks of these models. Recently, the sociologist Peter Baehr defended Arendt's approach to analyzing totalitarianism in his 2010 book, *Hannah Arendt, Totalitarianism, and the Social Sciences*. While comparing and contrasting Raymond Aron's much more empirical approach to analyzing totalitarian regimes with Arendt's, he writes:

But now consider a dissonant conclusion: that Raymond Aron offers precisely the kind of analytic reassurance that Arendt warned against. Is not totalitarianism rather too familiar, too normal, in the hands of this master of sociological thought? Can the system that Aron unravels with such skill be the same one that produced the Gulag Archipelago and Auschwitz?...Chaotic, mad, absurd, demonic, beastly: this is the language of actors and witnesses. It conveys the dark side of the moon, a surreal, vertiginous landscape far removed from Aron's prosaic casuistry. No theorist has better captured that nightmarish quality, or registered the extent of totalitarianism's rupture with quotidian standards of judgment and even quotidian crimes, than Hannah Arendt.

However, methodologically speaking, as is evident in *The Human Condition*, Arendt continued to change her approach. These innovations appear to have been based on her observations of Walter Benjamin's approach to theorizing coupled with what she learned from Heidegger's refinements of his notion of *aletheia* through the 1940s and 50s. Heidegger and Benjamin had sought to involve the practice of *aletheia* in the process of interpretation. They showed that words carried behind with them authentic experiences, and these experiences could be revived and used to shed light on a present world which may have lost contact with those original experiences, particularly in our

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own era where tradition can no longer provide a viable link to those original experiences.\textsuperscript{cx} We live in a new world now, the modern world, and the words we use—even though they originated in the past—are fundamentally of this new world. Heidegger and Benjamin proved to Arendt that, through imagination and thought, those original experiences could be brought back to life. Arendt called this approach pearl diving. Characterizing Benjamin, Heidegger, and, by extension, also herself,\textsuperscript{cxi} she writes that this mode thinking

works with the "thought fragments" it can wrest from the past and gather about itself. Like a pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea...to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and coral in the depths and to carry them to the surface, this thinking delves into the depths of the past...What guides this thinking is the conviction that although the living is subject to the ruin of time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization...as though they waited only for the pearl diver who one day will come down to them and bring them up into the world of the living...\textsuperscript{cxii}

She sought to use this process of pearl diving to illuminate our political and historical world, a world which used a political language that was not firmly anchored in its traditional sources. For Arendt, the break in tradition meant that there was no longer what she had once called an "Ariadne thread" that connected our political language to our common sense experiences and connects us to the world.\textsuperscript{cxiii} Our political words were "empty shells\textsuperscript{cxiv} which, because they had lost their moorings in authentic experience,

\[\text{cx} \text{ Ibid, p. 201.}\]
\[\text{cxi} \text{ Arendt seems to have begun characterizing her approach by this name in a letter to Kurt Blumenfeld in 1960, (see in Young-Bruehl's } \text{Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World, p. 95, note 22). Arendt fleshed out more specifically what has in mind in using this term in her characterization of Walter Benjamin's approach (and Heidegger's, for that matter) in her essay on Benjamin in } \text{Men in Dark Times (pp. 200-201), which had originally been the introduction to a collection of Benjamin's essays that she edited called } \text{Illuminations (1968).}\]
\[\text{cxii} \text{ Ibid, pp. 205-206.}\]
\[\text{cxiii} \text{ Arendt, "Understanding and Politics," p. 311.}\]
\[\text{cxiv} \text{ Arendt, "Preface: The Gap between Past and Future," p. 14.}\]
could be redefined at will so long as they served to support some "functionalized" theory.\textsuperscript{cxv} Thus, Arendt adopted Heidegger's and Benjamin's form of "critical interpretation of the past" which she claimed would inevitably be of an "experimental" nature.\textsuperscript{cxvi} In doing this, she was not seeking to reestablish the past or "to retie the broken thread of tradition," but only "to discover the real origins of traditional concepts in order to distill from them anew their original spirit."\textsuperscript{cxvii} In doing this, she might shed light on our own activities in the present, understand their true origins, and perhaps find aspects of our own experience that have been left unexplored.

Arendt is often accused of contradicting herself or engaging a mode of theorizing that was overly messy. But this was to be expected. Arendt's chief concern was to pursue the \textit{aletheia}, the fundamental experiences that lay behind and at origins of historical and political life. She was much more concerned with capturing those experiences adequately than she was with conceptual and logical consistency, which ultimately is more a function of the simplicity of our articulations than the authenticity of our explorations of lived experience. When we read Arendt, we have to read her the same way she (and Heidegger, and Benjamin) read the tradition, by seeking for the \textit{aletheia}, the experience she is trying to capture or revive, whether successfully or unsuccessfully, to the best of her ability.

\textsuperscript{cxv} Arendt, "What is Authority?" pp. 101ff.
\textsuperscript{cxvii} Ibid, p. 14.
On the Validity of Political and Historical Judgments

We can now see why Beiner and Bernstein's critique of Arendt was wrong: it was based on a misunderstanding of how she theorized the status of historical and political phenomena, i.e., the fact that she saw them as essentially related and even co-terminus. Arendt's explorations of political action and its connection with human freedom in *The Human Condition* and elsewhere often seems foreign and strange, but they are intended to be that way. They are intended to shed light on our experience and to provide opportunities for experimentation and exploration of our present historical and political experience. Nevertheless, this language of "experimentalism" and "messiness" gives the impression that Arendt was unconcerned with the question of the validity of her conclusions. This was not the case. Arendt's theory of political judgment, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, served a dual purpose: it was intended to address this question of historical validity as much as it was intended to address the question of how judgment informs political action in the world. In this regard, Heidegger's concept of historicity was of crucial importance. Historicity is the key concept that allows Arendt to draw an essential connection between politics and history; for without it, Arendt's entire framework and theoretical approach would have had no place to start. Arendt, as we have seen, argues that politics arises out of human plurality, the fact that each human being is a beginning, and possesses the ability to act in the world. This ability to act is the source of our 'whoness', i.e., it is the source of human historicity. Arendt understood that history itself arises out of the narrative structure of human historicity, and concerns itself with the concrete, specific deeds that form the subject matter of our life stories.
Thus, unlike what was for the most part the case with Heidegger, for Arendt the validity of historical and political judgments must be related to each other in an essential and coterminus way. Arendt, as we will see, believed she had discovered an account of this common validity among historical and political judgments in Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment. But the story of how exactly these two seemingly very different activities of politics and history could be related to each other, and on the basis, no less, of a validity articulated in Kant's seemingly unrelated theory of aesthetic judgment, is a long one, which begins in the next chapter.
Chapter Six: Arendt's Essential Question: What is Political Philosophy?

Arendt as a Puzzle

This chapter begins the final arch of this dissertation, which will explain Arendt's theory of political judgment, and demonstrates how it structures her thought. I have been arguing that there is a structure to her thought, one which she never made available in print, and which revolves around the question of political judgment. In this chapter, I want to explain first what I mean by this notion of that judgment structures her thought, and then go on to explain what that structure is. In referring to a kind of implicit structure, I am not attempting to develop a 'meta-argument' about Arendt. I am not, for instance, claiming that she had some kind of basic, possibly even semi-conscious, theoretical outlook which she never fully articulated or committed to, as could be argued was the case with Socrates, Nietzsche, Foucault, or Plato. Nor am I primarily interested in laying out a developmental interpretation which tracks how her thought arose out of a foundational text, as might be claimed in the case of Kant, Hegel, or Heidegger. I am not, in other words, attempting to do any thinking for Arendt or to grasp a structure in her thought that she might not have been somehow fully aware of. My argument is much less ambitious. Arendt was quite aware of this structure, but she nevertheless seemed to have either never have gotten around to articulating it in published writings or to have chosen for one reason or another not to do so. Nevertheless, this structure is clear in her
unpublished materials: she regularly discussed it in talks and in her correspondence, and progressively developed that structure in a variety of unpublished manuscripts that stretch from at least 1954—well before the publication of *The Human Condition* in 1958—to at least 1969. Reconstructing this background structure thus becomes a relatively straightforward proposition.

Essentially, this structure is the broad vision which explains the relationship between her articulations of the two spheres of human experience, the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, a relationship which was never provided by Arendt in any of her published writings. Of course, it has always been obvious that there was some kind of relationship between Arendt's discussions of the life of action in *The Human Condition* and elsewhere, and her reflections on the *vita contemplativa* in her various writings on judgment and in *The Life of the Mind*. As we saw in the first chapter of this dissertation, the nature of this relationship has been the topic of much commentary and speculation since the two parts of *The Life of the Mind* manuscript were published posthumously. At her death in 1976, Arendt, as is well-known, had written two books of *The Life of the Mind*, "Thinking" and "Willing," and had planned a final section on "Judging." This final installment was never written, but it seems unlikely, given Arendt's own comments on the nature of the "Judging" section—not to mention extrapolating from the style of theorizing which took place in the first two volumes—that she would have provided there any such account of the relationship between the two portions of her work. At no point in either volume of *The Life of the Mind* does Arendt ever promise any such explanation of the larger theoretical context she envisioned which would make clear its relationship with her
earlier work on the *vita activa*, and in fact it would have been quite a jolting break in the trajectory of argument as it had developed in the previous two volumes. Several sources attest to the fact that Arendt would have drawn on her lectures on Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, which while quite political nevertheless have a similar orientation toward that part of her thought that appears as the life of the mind.\(^1\) Moreover, her projections of the length of the section, which was not intended to be a full third volume, but more likely some kind of extended concluding section to the "Willing" volume, seemed unlikely to have afforded the kind of space necessary to provide an adequate account of how the earlier and later portions of her thought were related and structured.\(^\text{ii}\) I will eventually argue that the lectures on Kant's theory of judgment are indeed crucial to understanding how the two parts of her work are related—indeed, that it provides the final piece to the puzzle. Nevertheless, it is still only a piece of a puzzle that requires much more information than is available, not only in the Kant lectures, but also in *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind*.

That Arendt understood *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind* to be her key works addressing the two fundamental spheres of human experience is beyond question. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt is quite clear that the sphere of experience where thought occurs, what she calls the *vita contemplativa*, is distinct and separate from the sphere of experience of action, which she calls the *vita activa*, and she is careful to

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\(^1\)Arendt seems to suggest this at the end of the "Thinking" volume (p. 215-216), and two of her closest friends, John Glenn Gray and Mary McCarthy, attest that this was her intention also. See Gray, "The Abyss of Freedom—and Hannah Arendt," pp. 225-226; McCarthy's "Editor's Postface" to *The Life of the Mind*, p. 242.

\(^\text{ii}\)Both Arendt and McCarthy state that "Judging" was intended to be a concluding section of the "Willing" volume. See "Thinking," p. 213, and "Willing." *The Life of the Mind*, p. 242.
stipulate that her concern in *The Human Condition* is almost exclusively with the *vita activa*.ii Writing of the ancient philosophers' discovery of contemplation, and the tradition and way life that it gave birth to, Arendt writes that the *vita contemplativa* "must lie in an altogether different aspect of the human condition, whose diversity is not exhausted in the various articulations of the *vita activa* and, we may suspect, would not be exhausted even if thought and the movement of reasoning were included in it."iv Arendt goes on to stipulate that "my use of the term *vita activa* presupposes that the concern underlying all its activities is not the same as and is neither superior nor inferior to the central concern of the *vita contemplativa*;" she furthermore describes this distinction in terms of "the various modes of active engagement in the things of this world, on one side, and pure thought culminating in contemplation, on the other."v It is clear, then, that Arendt is claiming that there is an aspect of the human condition that is separate from that of the *vita activa*, which exists somehow outside "the world" and its "various modes of active engagement," and concerns itself with human faculties such as "contemplation" and "thought and the movement of reason."

The text of *The Human Condition* never suggests that she planned to write a book devoted solely to the *vita contemplativa* and its sphere of experience; yet, there are clear indications that she thought it would eventually be necessary. *The Human Condition* seems to end with the equivalent of a "to be continued." Quite abruptly, in the final paragraph, Arendt leaves her discussion of the distinctions in the *vita activa* and turns to

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iiArendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 16-17, 324-325.
ivIbid, p. 16.
vIbid, p. 17.
the matter of thought. The paragraph clearly has no summary or concluding function—at least, not in relation to the concerns of the *vita activa*—and it is therefore difficult to imagine that she had any other purpose in concluding with this paragraph than to suggest that her discussions of the *vita activa* in the book were not a full account of the human condition, and thus that *The Human Condition* was in a certain sense incomplete. After *The Human Condition*’s publication, Arendt regularly described the project of *The Life of the Mind* as a direct sequel to *The Human Condition*. In a letter to Mary McCarthy in 1968 she says that her "preparations for writing about Thinking-Willing-Judging" are "a kind of part II to the Human Condition [sic]", while during the 1972 conference on her work, she said that "…I feel that this *Human Condition* needs a second volume and I'm trying to write it." *The Human Condition*, thus, at least by the late sixties, was in fact understood by Arendt to contain two parts, only one of which had been written.

The obvious objection to this claim is that there appears to be textual evidence which would lead us to believe that her interest in the matter of thought and the *vita contemplativa* began with the Eichmann trial. As a result, several Arendt scholars have concluded that she was not specifically interested in thought until the Eichmann trial. In the introduction to the "Thinking" volume, she seems to suggest as much, saying that "the

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Eichmann trial, then, [which occurred three years after the publication of *The Human Condition*] first prompted my interest in this subject."\(^3\) However, in the preceding paragraph, the subject to which she is referring is not the subject of thought as such, but rather the question "could the activity of thinking as such...be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually 'condition' them against it."\(^{xi}\) Moreover, the very next sentence after the one in question explicitly states that she is referring to "those moral questions."\(^{xii}\) Thus, while the Eichmann trial sparked an idea in Arendt that thought had moral implications, it did not spark Arendt's interest in thought generally. As I will show shortly, she was interested in thought well before she wrote *The Human Condition*; and in fact it was the question of the relation of thought to action that initially led to the writing of *The Human Condition*.

However, I am going to argue in this chapter that Arendt always recognized that there was a further step necessary beyond writing the sequel that addressed the *vita contemplativa*, and that this further step was in fact the most important step of all. The crucial issue which originally prompted her to write *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind* had always been the matter of the *relationship* between thought and action, and between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. In fact, the question the relationship between thought and action and their respective sphere of experience structured her thought well before the publication of *The Human Condition* in 1958, and in the remainder of this chapter I will explain how and why this was the case.

\(^{3}\)Arendt, "Thinking," *The Life of the Mind*, p. 6.
\(^{xi}\) Ibid, p. 5.
\(^{xii}\) Ibid, p. 6.
Theoretical speaking, it should probably have been suspected that this was the case anyway. As I noted above, *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind* focused almost exclusively on their respective spheres of experience, and almost completely ignored the question of their broader relationship to each other. It was therefore unlikely, based on the nature of the argument of *The Life of the Mind*, the projected length of the "Judging" section, and its known precursors, that the unwritten "Judging" volume would have significantly departed from this exclusive focus on the *vita contemplativa*. As a result, even if the "Judging" section had been written, it still appears that Arendt's broader project would have been unfinished. On a theoretical level it needed something else, something which does not focus exclusively on a particular sphere of experience, but which instead seeks to come to terms with how these two spheres were related to each other. Why did Arendt never publish this account? The obvious conclusion would be that she did not really have an answer. This chapter will show, however, that this is not a plausible conclusion and that she at least felt that she did understand the general structure of the relationship quite well. But then the question of why she never published an account of the relationship between the two spheres becomes quite perplexing. As I've said before, I am doubtful that there was any one particularly decisive reason. As we've seen, Arendt's style of theorizing was quite idiosyncratic, verging on eccentric, and she seemed to gravitate much more to the genealogical process of "pearl diving," of digging deeper and deeper into the origins of our historical world, than to the process of attempting to tie up all the loose ends of her explorations. On the other hand, it may simply have been that she ran out of time. After finishing *The Human Condition*, she
initially tried to write a book that developed this broader argument tentatively titled "Introduction into Politics," which was recently edited and published by Jerome Kohn in the volume *The Promise of Politics* (2005). In his introduction, Kohn writes that, though she did write an initial short draft in 1959 which is what appears in *The Promise of Politics*, before she eventually turned her attention to *The Life of the Mind*, she had "come to think of 'Introduction into Politics' as a large, systematic political work, which as one work exists nowhere in her oeuvre." In a letter to the Rockefeller Foundation in early 1960 requesting support for the project, she wrote that the projected book "will continue where the other book ends," and "will be concerned exclusively with thought and action." Part of this project is what eventually resulted in *On Revolution*, but there is clearly no way to interpret that book as providing an account of the relationship between *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind*. Thus, while there is certainly no guarantee that given enough time she would have finally written a book that explained the relationship between thought and action, and between *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind*, it is clear that Arendt recognized that this was a gap in her thought which she at least for a period of time worked to fill.

As we saw in chapter one, most of the attempts by scholars to flesh out this relationship for Arendt have typically focused on reconstructing Arendt's theory of political judgment out of a diverse set of published essays such as "Truth and Politics" and "The Crisis of Culture," along with various posthumously published materials such

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xiv Ibid, p. xvii.
xv Ibid, p. xvii.
as the Kant lectures, *The Life of the Mind*, and, more recently, "Thinking and Moral Considerations" and "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy." Yet, as I discussed in more detail in the first chapter, these attempts have remained for the most part speculative and lacking a clear connection with Arendt's work on action, and so much so that some of her most prominent interpreters have concluded that Arendt's work is somehow fundamentally conflicted. Indeed, as I pointed out before, as recently as 2010 Bryan Garsten still felt compelled to admit that "we cannot avoid confronting the fact that while her theory of judgment is suggestive it is also notoriously difficult to understand…"xvi

The reason for this perplexity, I believe, is that Arendt's interpreters have been trying to make her theory of judgment do more than it was intended to do. To be sure, they are correct that it does somehow provide a connecting link between the sphere of thought and action. Yet, I want to argue that the broader relationship between thought and action is sketched out in other materials.

In other words, Arendt needed to write a second sequel to *The Human Condition*, or perhaps, instead, a *prequel*, which explained the how the two *vitae* were related to each other. To my knowledge, the only time this has been suggested as a way to understand Arendt's thought as a whole by Elisabeth Young-Bruehl in her article "Reflections on Hannah Arendt's *The Life of the Mind*" and in Margaret Canovan's *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*.xvii Neither instance provides a truly adequate

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explanation of the idea, however. Young-Bruehl's comments are mainly suggestive, while Canovan examines many of the sources and ideas which I will in the following, but fails to adequately address the role of her theory of judgment in this question. In this chapter and the follow chapter, I want to try to provide a much more concrete account. To simplify things in the form of an analogy, I want to argue that this reconstructed theory of judgment which has been developed by many of her interpreters, coupled with her articulations of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, are like three large chunks of a picture puzzle; but, unfortunately, they do not form a full picture. We still need more pieces. In this chapter, I will add some more pieces to the puzzle, pieces which contribute to the picture by fleshing out the underlying relationship that Arendt understood the other three large chunks of the picture to have. These pieces reveal the underlying structure of her thought. The structure first involves her analysis of the problematic elements of necessity that modernity had introduced into its understand of the relationship between thought and action. Thus, the next section will be concerned with formulating this element of the structure. The following section will explain her response to this concern. This response constituted an attempt to deconstruct the nature of political philosophy, which she believed had failed to adequately respond to this growth of necessity in the modern context, and if anything had only abetted it. She argued that any authentic political philosophy would have to be founded on establishing a relationship between thought and action that accounted for their essential involvement with the medium of speech. This involvement in speech designated them as genuine political faculties because they are not subject to necessity, and thus were the only
faculties capable of actualizing human freedom through immortalization. Ultimately, however, she realized that this relationship could only be established through a third faculty, judgment, which provides the final piece to the puzzle of this structure, and which I will deal with at length in the next chapter.

*The Problem of Necessity in Human Affairs* xviii

The central problem that oriented Arendt's thought was the question of the role of necessity in human affairs, or in her words: "modern politics' greatest predicament is an unprecedented helplessness of man before his own future…" xix Arendt's fundamental critique of the modern era was that necessity had come to occupy a dominant place in human affairs, so much so that modern politics and political thought often tended to confuse freedom with conditions and activities that were driven by necessity. This question of the increasing predominance of necessity in human affairs is the central concern in all of her major political works, beginning with *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. In chapter four, we saw Arendt, in her discussion of T. E. Lawrence, assert that the modern individual understands himself to have agency "only 'if he pushes the right way,' in alliance with the secret forces of history and necessity—of which he is but a functionary." xx In "Ideology and Terror," Arendt asserts that the ultimate goal of the totalitarian politics is to employ these two methods fully in order to stamp out all human

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xviii This section draws heavily on discussions from previous chapters, and so I have foregone citations in places I typically would have included them.

freedom and spontaneity. xxI  *The Human Condition* focuses on the political implications of the introduction of the modern scientific outlook into the human condition, and from whose existential position, the Archimedean point, all human activities are viewed in terms of natural processes such as labor and consumption. xxII In "Introduction into Politics," Arendt asserts that politics has lost its true meaning in the modern world, which is freedom, because the confusion of freedom with liberation from necessity now dominates our politics, xxIII while in *On Revolution*, the force of necessity in "the social question" overwhelmed the revolutionaries' attempts to refound the Western political order, and drove modern revolutionaries to continually mistake liberation for freedom. xxIV

Arendt's analysis of the role of necessity in human affairs in the modern era moves along two interrelated, but nevertheless distinct, strands. One strand analyzes the historical-ontological impact of the modern science's Archimedean point on the activities of the human condition. The other strand focuses on the elements of necessity that derive from the influence of the tradition of political thought, insofar as that tradition was able to lend itself to providing standards of judgment and legitimation to a politics derived from the perspective that informs modern science. As chapter three outlined in much more detail, Arendt's analysis of the historical-ontological strand takes place mainly in *The Human Condition*. Arendt analyzed this strand in terms of her account of the hierarchies among the activities within the human condition. She believed that the original hierarchy of human activities emerged in response to the natural "givenness" of the human

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condition: it was, she believed, how humans had always naturally tended to rank the various activities, based on criteria from the freest activities to those most bound to necessity. As chapter two explained, there were two spheres of experience which offered human beings the opportunity for free activity and the chance to partake in immortality: the vita activa and the vita contemplativa. Arendt believed that humans naturally tended to rank the activities of the vita contemplativa, the activities of thought and contemplation, above the activities of the vita activa, whose activities were labor, work, and action. Thus, if the criteria of rank centered around freedom, than the natural hierarchy of the activities would have been contemplation, thought, action, work, and labor. This ranking was, of course, established by the tradition of the vita contemplativa, and Arendt openly acknowledges that this had been her approach also in The Human Condition. This was of necessity because Arendt believed judgment could only be passed, and standards of rank could only be established, from the position of the vita contemplativa.

However, Arendt argued that in the modern age this hierarchy of the activities within the human condition were completely inverted, so that the activities somehow, surprisingly, came to be ranked according to the standard of necessity. Modern society came to prize labor as necessary for consumption above all, and viewed work and action in terms of augmenting and administering the smooth functioning of this

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xxviii Arendt carefully tracks how the vitas and the human activities within them underwent the various inversions necessary in order to reach this state of affairs in “The Vita Activa and the Modern Age” chapter of The Human Condition.
consumption. As far as the *vita contemplativa* is concerned, to the extent thought is considered at all, it is solely in terms of the fabrication analogy applied to sovereign political action, while the experience of contemplation has become irrelevant. This inversion occurred because humans increasingly came to view the human condition from a position outside it through the outlook of modern science, which sees all human activities as natural processes. As a result, we have come to see labor as the only activity having true reality, while work and action have no inherent value of their own other than in enhancing further consumption. As far as the activities of the *vita contemplativa* in their authentic senses are concerned, thought and contemplation are viewed at best as epiphenomenal, psychological processes. Thus, in modern era it was the "social question" which increasingly came to dominate politics.

The other strand of Arendt's analysis of necessity revolved around the tradition of political thought, and focused on unearthing the elements of the tradition that allowed it to legitimize, first, this modern form of politics which idealizes a collective life that revolves around necessity, and second, ultimately to serve as a model and source of inspiration for attempts to theorize authentic political action in terms of sovereign violence. Arendt's assessment of the tradition of political thought is deeply ambivalent. She admired the philosophical tradition and philosophical experience, and indeed seemed to consider herself a member of that tradition, at least in practice if not in name,

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xxxi The evidence for this come out most powerfully in her discussion of philosophical 'wonder' or *thaumazein*. It is replete in the "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" (1969); see also Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," pp. 447ff; *The Human Condition*, pp. 12-21, 302-305; "The Concept of History," pp. 46-47.
since, as she noted, she still wrote about the *vita active* from the perspective of the *vita contemplativa*. Moreover, she believed that the tradition of political thought had played a venerable role in the traditions and culture of Western civilization. On the other hand, she believed that the tradition of political thought had ignored the true nature of political phenomena, and as a result, the authentic experiences of freedom that had been lived out by the Greeks, Romans, and modern revolutionaries had been nearly lost. To illustrate the tendency of the philosophical tradition to demean politics, she often quoted a statement from Pascal which she believed best summarized the tradition of political thought's attitude towards politics. Referring the political writings of Plato and Aristotle, Pascal wrote that political philosophy was the "part of their life that was the least philosophic and the least serious…If they wrote about politics, it was as if laying down rules for a lunatic asylum; if they presented the appearance of speaking of great matters, it was because they knew that the madmen, to whom they spoke, thought they were kings and emperors…They entered into their principles in order to make their madness as little harmful as possible." Elsewhere, she often claimed, "that Plato thought that human affairs…should not be treated with great seriousness; the actions of

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**xxxiv** Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 22. Arendt quotes this line from Pascal in several places that stretch from well before the publication of *The Human Condition* to her final work on *The Life of the Mind* manuscript. See "Concern with Politics in Recent European Thought," p. 429; "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" (1969), LOC 024420; "Thinking," *The Life of the Mind*, pp. 152-153.
men appear like the gestures of puppets led by an invisible hand behind the scene, so that man seems to be a kind of plaything of a god."

The inauthentic nature of the tradition of political thought, she believed, was indicated by the fact that Plato had founded this tradition in response to a clear threat posed to philosophy by the polis, exemplified in the death of Socrates. In other words, the tradition was not founded, as most philosophical subject matter had been, in the attempt to contemplate and grasp the meaning of the phenomena under investigation; rather, it was developed as an attempt to secure the ability of the philosophers to pursue the contemplative life in a hostile polis. As saw in chapter two, Plato's solution was to argue that the philosopher was the only legitimate ruler of the polis, but in order to do this Plato was forced to ignore the truly political activities and faculties of human beings: thought, action, and judgment, all of which essentially involve speech. Instead, he formulated the structure of the tradition in terms of two activities that were by their very nature essentially speechless: contemplation and work. Contemplation lent the philosopher-king a transcendent source of authority, because he possessed the vision of the idea which was inaccessible to those over whom he ruled. On the other hand, political action was thus interpreted in terms of the sovereign violence humans exert over nature whenever they engage in the activity of work. This conception of political action in terms of violence is very broad, and includes not just coercive activities such as war and enforcement, but also activities like administration, which seeks to impose a

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Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 185ff. The reference is to the *Laws* 803 and 644. Also see *The Promise of Politics*, pp. 56ff, 81ff; and "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought," pp. 312-313.
A preconceived model or structure on human affairs.  Arendt argues that the analogy Plato appeals to in order to make this notion of political thought intuitive is the fabrication model of the craftsman, who must contemplate the model of the finished product before he uses violence over nature to bring the product into existence.  She had pointed out that in ancient Athens, rulership was a matter of the private household, where the household head exerted sole sovereignty over it in order to be liberated to engage in politics. This liberation which sovereign rulership of the household achieved was not itself the true freedom found in politics, but only a precondition of political freedom. Yet, this political realm of freedom was simply ignored by Plato. The entire polis thus became a household that existed to allow the philosopher to pursue the highest activity human beings were capable of, contemplation.

However, as was noted in chapter two, true contemplation had nothing to do with ruling a polis. It was rather characterized by thaumazein, wonder at being as such; and as a result, Arendt claimed that Plato must have consciously chosen to replace the highest idea, which in the non-political dialogues was the beautiful, with the more practically

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xxxviii Arendt writes that "Insofar as the philosopher is also a mortal man he, too, is concerned with politics. But this concern has only a negative relationship to his being a philosopher: he is afraid, as Plato so abundantly made clear, that through bad management of political affairs he will not be able to pursue philosophy…Politics, therefore, seen from the specifically philosophical viewpoint begins already in Plato to comprehend…more than those activities that are characteristic of the ancient Greek polis. Politics begins, as it were, to expand its realm downward to the necessities of life themselves…In brief, when the philosophers began to concern themselves with politics in a systematic way, politics at once became for them a necessary evil…[From the perspective of philosophy] politics is supposed to watch and manage the livelihood and the base necessities of labor on the one hand, and to take its orders from the apolitical theoria of philosophy on the other." (Arendt, "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought," pp. 313-315).
relevant (particularly in the Greek language) idea of the good. In other words, Plato had to distort authentic philosophical experience and authentic political experience literally beyond recognition in order to establish a relationship between them that allowed philosophy to rule the \textit{polis}. Needless to say, Arendt believed Plato was far too keen a thinker to have missed these phenomena, and to have established such a crude relationship between them, and always maintained that he must have had ulterior motives for doing so which in all likelihood were a reaction to the execution of Socrates. It was on this basis that Plato established the structure of the tradition of political thought in terms of "rulership." Political action thus was understood in terms of the sovereign violence which ensures the political order, and which was legitimizied by lawful standards of judgment. According to Arendt, this was a deeply flawed understanding of what political action truly was. This does not mean that Arendt was a pacifist, and believed there was no place for sovereign violence in the political order. But she insisted that, just as in the Greek household and the \textit{polis}, sovereign violence was only contingently related to political action, and could never truly be political on its own terms.

\textsuperscript{xli} These motive were discussed in depth in chapter two; Cf. Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," pp. 446-447; "What is Authority?" pp. 107-113; \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 220-227.
On the basis of the concept of political rulership established by Plato, Arendt argued that thought and action had "parted company."\textsuperscript{xliii} In contrast to the pre-philosophical tradition of the Homeric historians when the faculties of thought, action and judgment conditioned and cultivated each other in each human being who exercised them,\textsuperscript{xliv} a new relationship, based on the fabrication analogy of political judgment, was established between the speechless contemplation of transcendent standards of legitimacy and political action conceived in terms of sovereign violence. On this basis, thought and action were conceived as two completely separate activities which could therefore be carried out by two separate individuals in the mode of political rulership. As a result, according to Arendt authentic political judgment was missing and political life was now characterized by "thoughtless action" and "impotent thought."\textsuperscript{xlv}

In order to show how deeply embedded the fabrication analogy was in the tradition's conception of political judgment, Arendt pointed out that this mistake was not limited to modern revolutionaries such as Robespierre and Lenin;\textsuperscript{xlvi} it could also be observed in the most insightful theorists of political action which the tradition offered, Aristotle and Machiavelli. Arendt believed that both Aristotle and Machiavelli had provided powerful articulations of her conception of political action and political judgment in, respectively, their accounts of \textit{praxis} and \textit{phronesis}, and the relationship

\textsuperscript{xliv} Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" (1969), LOC 024461.
\textsuperscript{xlvi} Arendt, "What is Authority?" p. 141; \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 228-230; \textit{On Revolution} p. 55.
between virtù and fortuna.\textsuperscript{xlvii} Arendt believed that Machiavelli, whom she called the "spiritual father of revolution,"\textsuperscript{xlviii} developed a theory of action that was accurate until he confronted the problem of the founding of the regime, and was then driven into the fabrication analogy. In her 1955 lectures on Machiavelli, she says that "because Machiavelli had virtù-fortuna, he saw action in the light of fabrication only in the predicament of foundation."\textsuperscript{xlix} On the other hand, Arendt believed that Aristotle's entanglement with the fabrication analogy of political action and judgment was likely more conscious. Like Plato, Aristotle was too closely connected to the Greeks' original experiences of political freedom to have failed to recognize them. She points out that he was "too conscious of the difference between acting and making to draw his examples from the sphere of fabrication,"\textsuperscript{i} and that his "whole political philosophy was centered around the problem of praxis, action, and had no greater concern than to avoid the interpretation of action in the light of fabrication."\textsuperscript{li} Yet, Arendt points out that his two chief examples of action, the benefactor and the legislator, both unreflectively appeal to the categories of fabrication. The benefactor loves the one he benefits more because it is his work, or something he has made, just as the poet loves his poem.\textsuperscript{lii} The legislator, on the other hand, is an even more problematic example since, according Arendt, Aristotle's

\textsuperscript{xlviii} Arendt, On Revolution, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{xlix} Arendt, "History of Political Philosophy: Machiavelli" (1955), LOC 024026; see also "What is Authority?" pp. 139-141.
\textsuperscript{i} Arendt, "What is Authority?" p. 116.
\textsuperscript{li} Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics: the Problem of Action and Thought after the French Revolution" (1954), LOC 023370.
\textsuperscript{lii} Ibid, LOC 023370.
theory of laws clearly treats them as incidents of fabrication. Moreover, Arendt points out that, even admitting his educational model, Aristotle's concept of political action as ruling and being ruled in turn, would have, from the Greek point of view, been in "flagrant contradiction" with his definition of the polis as "a community of equals for the sake of a life which is potentially the best." She thus concludes that Aristotle must have been following in Plato's line of esoterically treating political philosophy, for if he had simply applied his own theoretical articulations of praxis and phronesis, he could never have arrived at the examples he used or have adopted Plato's insertion of the notion of rulership—which was always a matter of the private household for the Greeks—into the realm of political action. She writes that "obviously, the notion of rule in the polis was for Aristotle himself so far from convincing that he, one the most consistent and least self-contradictory great thinkers, did not feel particularly bound by his own argument." Arendt would in her own theory of action in many ways attempt to "purify" Aristotle's and Machiavelli's correct (at least from a theoretical perspective) accounts of action of the elements of fabrication they had imported into them.

In terms of the history of Western politics, Arendt believed that the tradition of political thought had effectively played a relatively minor political role. What it did do, however, was provide transcendent standards of judgment in order to legitimize political

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liii Ibid, LOC 023370-71.  
liv Arendt, "What is Authority?" p. 116ff.  
action. This use of the tradition was effective through the age of the Roman empire, during the Christian, and up to the modern age. In each case, political action operated for the most part autonomously from the tradition of political thought, and only appealed to the tradition when courses of political action were called into question and needed to be legitimized by a transcendent standard of lawfulness. However, it was in the modern age that the tradition of political thought became a much better conceptual fit for the practical politics of the era. Arendt believed that as the modern scientific outlook became dominant, Western political action, which had for the most part operated under Roman political principles, came to resemble the sovereign violence that was implicit in the tradition's conception of rule. Thus, though modern political thought, which she believed to be best exemplified in the work of Hobbes, continued the tradition's focus on how to recognize lawful sovereign violence and rule, this was not especially novel in the tradition. What was new was the fact that concrete political action for the first time actually came to center around sovereign violence.

However, along with the activity of providing standards of lawfulness to political action, Arendt believed that the tradition played a second and perhaps more political important role at the height of the modern age as a model for the political judgment of revolutionary political action. As chapter four explained, though they only vaguely realized it, the revolutionaries were not just attempting to overthrow what they believed

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Iviii The appeal to sovereignty became a particular imperative because of the rise of the wars of religion. Yet, interestingly, the wars of religion were a result of the undermining of Roman authority due to the rise of modernity.
to be tyranny, but were faced with the more monumental task of refounding a public realm for the practice of political action after the Roman foundations of the Western world had been undermined by modern science. The problem they faced was that they had no real connection to the original experiences of political action which their Greek and Roman ancestors had lived out, and thus, since only political action can found true political orders, they were at a loss. Instead, they were forced to draw on the tradition of political thought in their attempts to refound a political order. As a result of the reliance of the tradition on the use of violence contained in its framework of rulership, all of the revolutions of the modern age except for the American revolution were plagued by violence. Since the revolutionaries could only theorize in terms of the political categories of the tradition, they imagined founding to be a matter of the application of sovereign violence to what currently existed in order to bring about a new order. However, since sovereign violence is only a precondition of liberation, which is necessary for politics but never politics itself, the revolutionaries nearly always failed. Arendt thus concluded that modern history demonstrated that the political judgment could never truly be theorized or comprehended on the basis of the fabrication analogy employed by the philosophical tradition.

The key category that theorists of revolution employed in order to assert the idea that sovereign violence could lead to the realization of freedom in concrete reality was the idea of history, which was first recognized by Kant, then more fully articulated by Hegel, and eventually turned into a political agenda by Marx. Arendt believed that Marx

especially had correctly understood that modern society was becoming a laboring and consuming society in a far deeper way than any before him. In his attempts to formulate a program fully realizing this state of affairs in the actual world, he was relying on this dialectical movement to square the circle and allow this society that seemed capable of only achieving liberation, to become a free social order. In this Arendt believed Marx’s hopes had always been doomed, because freedom was not the result of a hidden dialectical movement in history, but instead arose out of the political action of acting women and men, whose deeds had to be articulated in speech and performed in a public realm in common world, whose existence required the liberation Marx had sought to achieve, but also much more that his formulation of the project actually ruled out.

After Marx, the modern age of the Western world began to fade and the new modern world began to come into being. In this new world, Marx's approach to political thinking metastasized into a host of ideologies, all of which claimed to hold the keys to historical movement. The unique characteristics of modern world meant that events and actions had a potency never before experienced by human beings. The twentieth century was characterized by bizarre series of disparities between causes and effects which led to unprecedented violence and allowed ideological politics to have an effectualness in the realm human affairs it never had before, and, in its worst instantiations, resulted in totalitarian politics. As a result of this, Arendt believed that the categories of the tradition of political thought had become hopelessly obsolete in the modern world, and were in fact partially culpable for the loss of freedom in the world. With this, the meaning to her statement in the 1954 manuscript that "modern politics' greatest predicament is an
unprecedented helplessness of man before his own future" comes fully into focus. Human beings have placed themselves at the mercy of the forces of necessity in the human condition, and their attempts to escape this necessity have all been thwarted because they appealed to a tradition of political thought whose categories and articulations of human freedom were always doomed to reinforce this necessity. In response to this fact, Arendt attempted to imagine what a true political philosophy would look like. In order to do this, she realized that she would have to come to understand the nature of politics and philosophy, and then try to understand if there could be an authentic relationship found between them.

Reconceiving Political Philosophy

In a 1956 letter to Jaspers Arendt said, "I am in the midst of [writing] my Vita Activa [the working title of The Human Condition], and I've had to put completely out of my mind the relationship between philosophy and politics, which is really of greater interest to me."lx One of the true oddities of Arendt's thought, which becomes especially striking after reviewing her lectures and manuscripts, is that beginning in 1954 she returned to this question of the relation of philosophy and politics over and over, yet never published a direct account of her conclusions concerning the question. There are at least four different occasions between 1954 and 1969 where Arendt formally wrote about

the relationship between philosophy and politics. Each of these are distinct and original attempts to address this question.

The first occasion was in 1954. That year she wrote a long essay which she presented as a set of lectures in March, 1954 at Notre Dame\textsuperscript{lxi} entitled "Philosophy and Politics: The Problem of Thought and Action after the French Revolution."\textsuperscript{lxii} In 1990, Jerome Kohn edited and published the last portion of this manuscript as "Philosophy and Politics" in \textit{Social Research}.\textsuperscript{lxiii} It is not clear why he only published this portion, though it seems that, since the manuscript is about fifty-four pages long, issues of space were most likely involved. At any rate, the rest of the manuscript is highly illuminating, and develops several notions that are only gestured at elsewhere by Arendt. In this essay she explains how she believed philosophy and politics could be related on the basis of genuine understanding of the nature of thought and action. This manuscript appears to have set the stage for all of her later work, and indeed is a roadmap for understanding the structure of her work as a whole. The second occasion on which Arendt addressed the question of philosophy and politics was in the manuscript discussed earlier, "Introduction into Politics," which she worked on after the publication of \textit{The Human Condition}.\textsuperscript{lxiv} As noted earlier, while what we have of the manuscript deals only obliquely with relation of philosophy and politics, and thought and action, she said that the manuscript was ultimately intended to focus on the question of that relationship. The last two occasions


on which she discussed this question were a 1963 lecture course, also called "Introduction into Politics," and her 1969 lecture course, "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" Arendt often used her teaching obligations as opportunities to write initial manuscripts of what later became her essays and books. This is a boon for a researcher, because Arendt, especially through most of the fifties and early sixties, generally typed out what she would say, as if she planned to simply read it aloud. Very often, entire passages from these lecture courses reappear in later essays and books. Still, some of the courses were written much more formally than others. Though rough, these two drafts are unquestionably written, structured, and intended to be coherent pieces of writing.

Obviously, using these pieces will involve some unorthodox interpretive work. The interpretive approach I plan to employ will tend to place heavy emphasis on the "book ends" of the four pieces. The 1954 piece contains several foundational ideas and arguments which shed light on her later work. On the other hand, since the 1969 course was written after many years of reflecting on these topics, and having thought about and researched issues related to the life of the mind in much more depth than she had at the time of writing the other three pieces, I will generally tend to assume statements in that course have the most authority when it comes to determining her most conclusive

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Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," Lecture Course at University of Chicago (1963), *The Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress* (Series: Subject File, 1949-1975, n.d.). This is a completely different instance of writing from the earlier manuscript.

positions on these matters. The other two pieces will for the most part be used for supporting evidence and general reference.

Arendt's concern with this question of the true relation between philosophy and politics undoubtedly emerged in response in her critique of the tradition of political thought. Her statement in the 1956 letter to Jaspers came in the context of an exchange they were having concerning Jasper's defense of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, and her and Heidegger's critiques of the Allegory. This is illuminated further in a letter to Heidegger from two year earlier in 1954. Heidegger had asked what she had been working on, and Arendt replied that she had been working on a project for "about three years now." As the "Guggenheim Proposal" from 1951 attests, the project she was referring to was what had grown out of the Marx book she had proposed. As she outlines the project for Heidegger, a key element is her critique of the traditional representation of the relationship of philosophy and politics as rooted in "the attitude of Plato and Aristotle toward the polis" which is "the basis of all political theories." She goes on to note, almost prophetically that "I cannot make [the project] concrete without its all becoming endless."

This attitude of the philosophers toward the polis had its roots in the incommensurable notions of immortality that Arendt discovered had inspired philosophy

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\textsuperscript{lxvi} Arendt-Jaspers, \textit{Correspondence 1926-1969}, pp. 187-188.
\textsuperscript{lxvii} Arendt-Heidegger, \textit{Letters 1925-1975}, pp. 120-121.
\textsuperscript{lxix} Arendt-Heidegger, \textit{Letters 1925-1975}, pp. 120-121.
\textsuperscript{lxx} Ibid, p. 121.
and politics. In order to understand if there could be an authentic relationship between philosophy and politics, Arendt first sought to understand what the origins of the two pursuits were. What she discovered was that the goals and aspirations of the two pursuits were so fundamentally different, and even opposed to one another, that there seemed to be no obviously authentic way of reconciling them. Yet, for all their differences, they both sprang from a common root in a fundamental human impulse *athanatizein*, "to immortalize oneself." This desire to immortalize one's self arises out the basic existential predicament of human beings: the fact that they are the "mortals;" beings with a life story that begins in birth and ends in death. Yet, they are embedded in a cosmos that is characterized by its eternal recurrence and eternal Being.

…embedded in a cosmos in which everything was immortal, it was mortality which became the hallmark of human existence. Men are "the mortals,"...[an]individual life, a *bios*, with a recognizable life-story, from birth to death...This individual life is distinguished from all other things by the rectilinear course of its movement, which, so to speak, cuts through the circular movements of biological life.

The eternity of the cosmos in which mortal humans were embedded and which established the basic human condition constituted the goal towards which mortal human beings strove. As mortals, with the capacity to act and begin, the life stories of human beings were characterized by "single instances, deeds or events, [that] interrupt...the

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lxiv Ibid, pp. 41-42.

lxv Ibid, p. 42.

lxvi Ibid, pp. 41ff.
circular movement of biological life." Each deed was unique and sui generis, and possessed an "objective" "greatness" all its own, a distinct "emerging, shining quality which distinguished it from all others and made glory possible." It was through this capacity to act and leave behind great and distinctive deeds that mortals sought to attain to the eternity of the cosmos. The means that humans originally developed in order to capture the meaning of these deeds and to give them their place in the cosmos was history.

In the beginning of Western history, the distinction between the mortality of men and immortality of nature...was the tacit assumption of all historiography. All things that owe their existence to men, such as works, deeds, and words, are perishable, infected, as it were, by the mortality of their authors. However, if mortals succeeded in endowing the works, deeds, and words, with some permanence and in arresting their perishability, then these things would, to a degree at least, enter and be at home in the world of everlastingness, and the mortals would find their place in the cosmos...

The significance of this fact for Arendt, was that originally the capacity to immortalize oneself involved both the life of the mind and the life of action. History required both an actor to strive for immortality in the world of human involvements, and the poet or historian to reflect on the deeds of the actor from out of the gap between past and future by passing judgment on those deeds and placing them in a narrative.

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Ibid, p. 42.


Ibid, p. 47.


Ibid, p. 43.

The notion of "immortalizing" oneself referred to several different activities, and did not primarily or necessarily involve the idea of gaining fame or reputation—though that was certainly one possible avenue. The emergence of the Greek polis gave birth to two new activities that pursued immortality: philosophy, which sought immortality in the realm thought alone, and politics, which pursued immortality in the realm of action alone. According to Arendt, the philosophers discovered in the activity of thought itself, a hidden human capacity for turning away from the whole realm of human affairs…to 'immortalize' meant for the philosopher to dwell in the neighborhood of those things which are forever…Thus the proper attitude of mortals, once they had reached the neighborhood of the immortal, was actionless and even speechless contemplation, the Aristotelian nous, the highest and most human capacity of pure vision, which cannot be translated into words. This contemplation had no other object or purpose than maintaining this speechless vision, and thus, for philosophers it was a-telos, an activity done for its own sake and for no other end outside itself. As a result, the activity of contemplation, of dwelling in the neighborhood of the things that are eternal, in its truest sense had no relationship with human affairs for the philosophers, not even in providing absolute standards, which Arendt believed Plato only advocated for later for purely political purposes. "Hence the old paradox was resolved by the philosophers by denying to man not the capacity to 'immortalize,' but the capacity of measuring himself and his own deeds against the everlasting greatness of the cosmos…"

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philosophers' origins were related to the old Greek poets and historians, they broke
with them because they came to the conclusion that human action in the world "should
not be taken seriously," because it was "absurd" to think that humans could ever live up
to what was highest in the cosmos. Thus, according to Arendt, the philosophers took
the activities of the vita contemplativa, which take place in the gap between past and
future, and sought to live their lives in that gap, and to realize the activities of the gap
without reference to human affairs. From out of this, the philosophers found a kind
freedom all their own, a "philosophical freedom," which was elevated far beyond the
activities of the world of acting women and men.

Politics, on the other hand, sought through the establishment of the polis to
actualize action and achieve immortality without the help of the vita contemplativa
represented by the person of the poet or historian. Relying heavily on the comments of
Pericles about the nature and meaning of the polis, Arendt argued that the men of action
who established and took part in political action in the Greek polis considered politics
also to be a-telos, to be an activity that was performed for its own sake, because it offered
the possibility to achieve greatness. They furthermore seemed convinced that the
organization of the polis meant that they no longer needed the poets to immortalize them,
that the polis offered the opportunity to both act and to participate together in the
immortalization once reserved for the poets through the "incessant" political talking and

\[\text{Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" (1969), LOC 024426.}\]
\[\text{Arendt, "The Concept of History," p. 46-47.}\]
\[\text{Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," The Promise of Politics, p. 131; "What is Freedom?" pp. 145,149,
159; "Willing," The Life of the Mind, pp. 198-200.}\]
\[\text{"Arendt, "The Concept of History," pp. 71-72; The Human Condition, pp. 197-199; "Introduction into
Politics," The Promise of Politics, p. 123ff, 172; "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?"
(1969), LOC 024434.}\]
deliberation that occurred in the *agora*, and as result, the greatness they could achieve would be all the greater since they were the ones doing the immortalizing.\textsuperscript{xci}

Nevertheless, Arendt believed that, while there was a kind undeniable greatness to the activity of Greek *polis*, it was also characterized by recklessness and *hubris*. By ignoring the life of the mind, it would seem that politics would have also been alienated from the important political faculties of the mind, such as political judgment, which she believed was in the end always best exemplified by the judgment of the historian, even in the context of the deliberation of actors, who should take on the standpoint of the judgment of history when they decide on courses of action.\textsuperscript{xcii} However, Arendt believed that in the context of the endless deliberations of the *agora* the Greeks discovered that political judgment in a certain limited sense somehow did not need to rely on the faculty of thought which was so central to the *vita contemplativa*. She argued that this political judgment took advantage of the fact that each actor is located at a different point in the common world. By allowing each citizen to offer their *doxa* or opinion, they gained a kind of political judgment that, except for the faculty of judgment itself (which according to Arendt is "the most political of man's mental abilities"\textsuperscript{xciii}), did not need the help of the *vita contemplativa*'s defining faculty of thought.\textsuperscript{xciv} This intensely political version of judgment, which sought to ignore thought and reflection in deliberating on courses of


\textsuperscript{xciii} Arendt, "Thinking," *The Life of the Mind*, p. 192.

action, seemed to be effective in achieving the glory that the citizens of the *polis* sought, but it also appeared to be terribly reckless and unstable. Arendt illustrates this by setting up an opposition between the political judgment Pericles and that of Solon, who in the 1969 lecture course exemplifies, along with Socrates, the political relevance of the thinking faculty and the *vita contemplativa* in general—a kind of political path not taken by Athenian politics. Solon, like the ancient political philosophers after him, placed heavy emphasis on moderation or "putting within limits," while Pericles represented the ideal of "striving for excellence at any price."xcv

The chief reasons for Pericles' political victory had to do with the fact that the citizens of the Greek *polis* seemed too individualistic, competitive, and obsessed with heroic traditions and aspirations. Arendt points out that Greek life was consumed with an *agonal* spirit which "eventually was to bring the Greek city-states to ruin because it made alliances between them well-nigh impossible and poisoned the domestic life of the citizens with envy and mutual hatred (envy was the national vice of ancient Greece)…"xcvi This agonism came to dominate their politics, so that in Athens (as articulated through the speeches of Pericles) the major foreign policy objective seemed to be concerned with gaining glory at the expense of their rivals and at any cost.xcvii She quotes Pericles saying that "Even if we should be defeated, the memory will be left intact that we ruled over more Hellenes than any other *polis*, that we sustained the greatest wars against them, united or separated, and that we once inhabited the greatest and the richest *polis*. For the

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fame of the splendor, the present and the future fame, remains remembered forever." She goes on to assert that "Pericles (and Athens with him) were seized with the hubris of power. No one has trusted power so much as Pericles, or overestimated its possibilities. Or did he? Don't we still remember this short, ridiculously short period of Athenian history through the centuries? Despite all her follies?" Assessing their enduring legacy, Arendt writes that "it is the greatness and also the tragedy of Athens and of Pericles…that they thought of politics, the activity that corresponded to the polis, as something which could attain immortality directly without the intervention of the poets and historians." With this history in view, the "attitude of the philosophers toward the polis," and indeed toward realm of human affairs in general, comes to seem rather justifiable. Politics was characterized by "temporality, instability, and relativity," while philosophy concerned itself with the "stability, permanence, and finality" of the eternal things of the cosmos. Human action, particularly in the Periclean era of visceral hubris from which the ancient political philosophers emerged, may have achieved greatness on its own terms, but at what a cost, and especially when the philosophers had long ago embraced the contemplative experience thaumazein as the highest path to athanatizein, immortality.

With all of this in view, Arendt argued that the goals, ideals, and objectives of philosophy and politics seem to have no obvious connection to one another. They sought forms of realization that had no relation to each other: politics sought realization solely in

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xcviii Ibid, LOC 024435.
xcix Ibid, LOC 024434.
world of human affairs through action, while philosophy sought realization in the gap between past and future, an existential position utterly removed from that world, in the activity of thought leading to contemplation or *thaumazein*. After it became evident that the political world could not be ignored, which was explicitly demonstrated by the death of Socrates, Plato sought to subordinate politics to philosophy, and this, according to Arendt, was the origin of all political philosophy.\(^{ci}\) Politics had been *a-telos*, just as philosophy was: it provided a public realm where acting men and women could perform great deeds.\(^{cii}\) Plato sought to give political action a *telos*, an end beyond itself, which was to support and protect the contemplative way of life of the philosophers.\(^{ciii}\) This introduction of a *telos* into political action was the origin of the ideal of political action as sovereign rulership which has dominated the tradition of political thought ever since, for "this consideration of action under the category of end and means brings action into a dangerously close relationship with fabrication..."\(^{civ}\)

Arendt's critique of the tradition, as we have seen, revolved around Plato's introduction—and Aristotle's acceptance—of the ideal of rulership as the correct model for understanding the relationship of thought and action, and, by extension, of philosophy and politics. The analogies Plato drew on in formulating this political ideal were all drawn from non-political elements of Greek life. The idea that rulership reflected the appropriate model of political relationships was a radical argument on Plato's part, and

\(^{ci}\)Ibid, LOC 023358.
\(^{cii}\) As we saw in chapter two, this was just as true for the Romans as it was for the Greeks, though clearly Roman political action had much greater stability than that of the Greeks.
\(^{ciii}\) Ibid, LOC 023367.
\(^{civ}\) Ibid, LOC 023367.
would have been perceived as bizarre by his fellow Athenians, who only understood
sovereign rule to be appropriate in the context of the private household. Moreover, in
formulating the explicit relationship of thought to action that is entailed in this
relationship of ruling, Plato appealed to the ideal of the craftsman who conceives a model
and then may carry it out himself or allow associates to do it for him.⁵⁵ In either case,
thought and action have parted company because it is not necessary that the one who
thinks be the one that acts. At it is deepest level, however, Arendt points out that the
activities that Plato utilizes in formulating his account of political rule are contemplation
on the side of the vita contemplativa, and labor and work (in the form of political
violence) on the side of the vita activa.⁶⁶ Each of these activities, according to Arendt,
is essentially speechless.⁶⁷ By this she means that, while they may use speech in
contingent circumstances, each of them could be performed without speech and they
would still maintain their same essential character.⁶⁸ Contemplation grew out of the
experience of speechless wonder, while labor was the activity performed in response to
natural necessity. Finally, the activity of work, which brings about the human artifice,
must do violence to what is naturally given by nature. Speech is not required for any of
these activities to occur.

The fundamental flaw of Plato's construction of the rulership model of political philosophy, according to Arendt, is that he ignores the two most politically relevant activities. On the side of the \textit{vita contemplativa}, this activity was thought, which takes the form of an inner dialogue with oneself and which she referred to as the "two-in-one" of the thinking ego.\textsuperscript{cix} In context of philosophy, the thinking activity had historically been understood to be the handmaiden of contemplation, because it was this activity's capacity to ask ultimate questions that led the philosopher to contemplate and experience \textit{thaumazein}, the \textit{pathos} of wonder at Being.\textsuperscript{cix} On the side of the \textit{vita activa}, the politically relevant activity which Plato ignored was action, the worldly activity devoted to the human capacity to begin or spontaneously initiate something new.\textsuperscript{cx} This capacity is always disclosed in speech, and speech is essential to it, because action is always the beginning of a story which discloses the "whoness" of the actor.\textsuperscript{cxii} Thus, the crucial element which these two politically relevant activities had in common was their essential relationship to speech. In the 1954 manuscript "Philosophy and Politics: the Problem of Action and Thought after the French Revolution" she wrote:

Thought and action were grounded in the same human faculty which to the Greeks remained the highest faculty of man, the faculty of speech. Thought did not merely precede and guide action and speech did not merely eventually explain and justify action. [These] are later interpretations which do not do justice to the pre-philosophical Greek past and therefore are inadequate to explain the Greek understanding...To be aware that through action I can disclose thought and that through thinking I can act [only] because both move in the medium of speech, meant to be aware of being human in an articulate, 

\textsuperscript{cx} A\textsc{rendt}, \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 9, 175ff, 220-230.  
\textsuperscript{cxii} Ibid, pp. 8-11, 175-188.
specific sense. Action without speech was violence; since it could not disclose its meaning in words, it remained senseless and meaningless. Thought, on the other hand, [could be so little conceived as proceeding without] speech that one single word, *logos*, was used for both "word" and "thought or argument."\\[cxiii\\]

Arendt, in other words, came to believe that human freedom, whether expressed in the context of the *vita contemplativa* or the *vita activa*, and the human capacity for speech were so essentially related that it was literally impossible to comprehend one without the other. Speech thus becomes the crucial element in Arendt's attempt to escape the necessity that has come to dominate human affairs.

Arendt believed that recognizing the quality that thought and action take on when the role of speech is taken into account renders the tradition's model of the relation of thought and action as rulership hopelessly crude and inadequate. Commenting on the implications of her work for the traditional model at the 1972 conference, she said, "If we really believe—and I think we all share this belief—that plurality rules the earth, then I think one has got to modify this notion of the unity of theory and practice to such an extent that it will be unrecognizable for those who tried their hand at it before."\\[cxiv\\] This condition of plurality that so dramatically alters the relation of thought and action has its primordial roots in human faculty of speech. In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt argued that the two-in-one dialogue of the *vita contemplativa*'s thinking ego meant that plurality was found even in human self-consciousness, whose "inherent duality points to the infinite

\\[cxiii\\] Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics: the Problem of Action and Thought after the French Revolution" (1954), LOC 023361. In the last sentence, Arendt crossed out the part in brackets and scribbled in the following incomplete phrase: "was so [illegible word] [illegible word] with..." It seems obvious that she only intended to smooth out the language of the sentence, and not to alter the basic idea, so I have re-inserted the crossed out phrase in lieu of it.

plurality which is the law of the earth,”\textsuperscript{cxv} while human plurality in context of the common world of the \textit{vita activa} was only possible because the unique 'whoness' of each actor was disclosed through speech.\textsuperscript{cxvi} Through speech, thought and action together have the capacity redeem and disclose the meaning of the deeds of human beings. "The action he begins is humanly disclosed by the word, and though his deed can be perceived in its brute physical appearance without verbal accompaniment, it becomes relevant only through the spoken word in which he identifies himself as the actor, announcing what he does, has done, and intends to do."\textsuperscript{cxvii} At the same time, it is the reflection of thought that finally allows that the meaning of the action, and thus the 'whoness' of the actor, to be fully revealed. Thus, in \textit{The Life of the Mind}, Arendt notes that on hearing the bard's song of his deeds in the court of the Phaeacians, "Odysseus, listening, covers his face and weeps, though he has never wept before, and certainly not when what he is now hearing actually happened. Only when he hears the story does he become fully aware of its meaning."\textsuperscript{cxviii}

The recognition that human freedom essentially revolves around the relationship of action and thought through speech allows for a conception of political philosophy that escapes the framework of sovereignty that had dominated the tradition. As we saw in chapters three and four, Arendt believed that the tradition of political thought could not provide a conceptual framework that prevented success from becoming the defining characteristic of modern political judgment. Through speech, the defining characteristic

\textsuperscript{cxv} Arendt, "Thinking," \textit{The Life of the Mind}, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{cxvi} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 8-11, 175-188.
\textsuperscript{cxvii} Ibid, pp. 178-179.
\textsuperscript{cxviii} Ibid, "Thinking," \textit{The Life of the Mind}, p. 132.

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of action becomes not the sovereignty implied in success, but non-sovereign political categories such as historical greatness and commitment to the preservation of the common world and the public realm of acting men and women. This, of course, does not mean that success is not a factor in actors' deliberations concerning courses of action. But it does imply that success cannot be the fundamental criterion of political judgment, for success can never redeem action. A successful course of action, genocide, for instance, may successfully achieve the short term intentions of the actors, but it will never be redeemable in speech. The judgment of (authentic) history, Arendt believed, will eventually and inevitably come to view it as despicable. On the other hand, even in defeat an actor may achieve greatness with deeds and words that measure up to the moment. Arendt writes that

Man cannot defend himself against the blows of fate, against the chicanery of the gods, but he can resist them in speech and respond to them, and though the response changes nothing…such words belong to the event as such. If words are of equal rank with the event, if, as is said at the end of Antigone, "great words" answer and requite "great blows struck from on high," then what happens is itself something great and worthy of remembrance and fame…our downfall can become a deed if we hurl words against it even as we perish.\textsuperscript{cxix}

Thus, at the end of the "Thinking" volume, as she begins setting up the never written discussion of judgment, she quotes one of her favorite lines from Cato: "The victorious cause pleased the gods, but the defeated cause pleased Cato."\textsuperscript{cxx}

Nevertheless, the more Arendt pursued the question of the relationship between thought and action, the more convinced she was that these two faculties were completely

\textsuperscript{cxix} Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," \textit{The Promise of Politics}, p. 125.  
\textsuperscript{cxx} Arendt, "Thinking," \textit{The Life of the Mind}, p. 216.
irreconcilable on their own terms. In the 1969 course, she outline the just how seemingly irreconcilable these faculties appeared, saying:

We started from the analysis of two activities, thinking and acting, which apparently are antagonistic. We enumerated all the properties that separate them. We think by ourselves, but we act together. We look out for the invisible, the non-appearing within the visible [when we think], but [when we act we] are bound to the world of appearance where nothing is that does not appear and appear in public. We are immobile and, I should add, age-less when we think; but we constantly move about and [are] subject to time in every respect when we act. [When we think] we are solitary to the point of no longer be[ing] sure of the reality of the exterior world, which we can doubt, including our own reality; and are confirmed in this reality only when joined by other[s] through whom we become one again…recognized by them, and assured of reality because of the existence of a common world.

At the same time, these two faculties clearly were somehow reconciled in human beings.

At the end of the course she acknowledged this saying, "If you ask what is the solution to the riddle, I'd answer: in terms of this course, simply the unity that is man: it is human to act and to want to act; it is human to think and to want to think…It is always life that offers the solutions." One can easily imagine the students' perplexity as they left the class. They (and we) might well ask whether she didn't owe us more of an explanation of the relationship between the two spheres of experience than to simply say "it is always life that offers the solutions"?

The Question of Judgment

In the 1954 manuscript, to the extent Arendt does envision what a truly authentic political philosophy would be, she suggests that it "would have to make the plurality of
man, out of which arises the whole realm of human affairs—in its grandeur and misery—the object of...thaumadzein."\textsuperscript{cxxiii} What exactly this meant was left unspecified. Arendt relied heavily on speech in establishing the relation between thought and action, and she seemed content to assert that the "medium of speech" somehow reconciled them.\textsuperscript{cxxiv} Judgment, on the other hand, is hardly discussed. It is evident that she soon came to find this assertion of the medium of speech inadequate for understanding the relationship of thought and action that could ultimately lead to an authentic political philosophy. For one thing, as she continued to work on these questions, she seems to have come to find thought and action to seem increasingly irreconcilable on their own terms, even after the medium of speech had been taken into account.\textsuperscript{cxxv} Eventually, however, she came to believe that she had discovered in Kant's account of judgment in his third Critique a third faculty which could plausibly be shown to reconcile thought and action, and which could allow modern politics to escape the dominance of sovereignty and success as the ultimate criteria of judgment. Thus, at the end the "Thinking" volume, she writes concerning her coming discussion of judgment that

…this [anticipated discussion of judgment] is of some relevance to a whole set of problems by which modern thought is haunted, especially to the problem of theory and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{cxxiii} Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," p. 453.
  \item \textsuperscript{cxxiv} Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics: the Problem of Action and Thought after the French Revolution" (1954), LOC 023361ff.
  \item \textsuperscript{cxxv} Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" (1969), LOC 024461. She writes: "We started from the analysis of two activities, thinking and acting, which apparently are antagonistic. We enumerated all the properties that separate them. We think by ourselves, but we act together. We look out for the invisible, the non-appearing within the visible [when we think], but [when we act we] are bound to the world of appearance where nothing \textit{is} that does not appear and appear in public. We are immobile and, I should add, age-less when we think; but we constantly move about and [are] subject to time in every respect when we act. [When we think] we are solitary to the point of no longer be[ing] sure of the reality of the exterior world, which we can doubt, including our own reality; and are confirmed in this reality only when joined by other[s] through whom we become one again…recognized by them, and assured of reality because of the existence of a common world."
\end{itemize}
practice and all attempts to arrive at a halfway plausible theory of ethics. Since Hegel and Marx, these question have been treated in the perspective of History and on the assumption that there is such a thing as Progress of the human race. Finally, we shall be left with the only alternative there is to these matters--we either can say with Hegel: *Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht* [World history judges the world], leaving the ultimate judgment to Success, or we can maintain with Kant the autonomy of the minds of men...we may [then] reclaim our human dignity, win it back, as it were, from the pseudo-divinity named History of the modern age, with denying history's importance but denying its right to be the ultimate judgment.\textsuperscript{cxxvi}

The next chapter will examine what she believed she had discovered in Kant's theory of judgment that allowed her to conclude this.

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\textsuperscript{cxxvi} Arendt, "Thinking," *The Life of the Mind*, p. 216.
Chapter Seven: Arendt's Theory of Political Judgment

The Origins of Arendt's Theory of Political Judgment

In this chapter, I will explain how Arendt believed she had found a resolution to the problem of thought and action, and thus an answer to the question of the true relation of philosophy and politics. She believed she had discovered this resolution in the faculty of judgment as articulated by Kant in the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment. Kant, she argued, had formulated his true political philosophy there, one which she believed offered a unique form of political judgment that escaped the sovereignty that characterized the political philosophies of the tradition of political thought, and which could accommodate key political conditions such as plurality, natality, and worldliness. This chapter begins with an explanation of the development of Arendt's theory of judgment. I examine her initial, pre-Kantian theory of judgment which she drew from Heidegger's thought, and then show that it was the inadequacies in this initial Heideggerian formulation that led to her to turn to the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment. After this, I provide an interpretation of the Critique of Judgment, or perhaps better, an explanation how I understand Arendt to be interpreting it. This is a crucial section because the particular interpretation of the third Critique I present in this section is central for understanding the full of the argument of this dissertation. In the final section, I explain how Arendt applied the third Critique to her work as a whole, the result of which was a genuinely "non-sovereign" theory of
political judgment which could present a plausible alternative to the tradition of political thought's sovereignty based politics.

To anticipate Arendt's conclusions concerning the faculty of judgment, the key concept she appealed to in articulating its structure and activities was the phenomenon of common sense, specifically as it is discovered in aesthetic experience. By seeking to establish the validity of common sense as a structure of political judgment, Arendt believed she would be able to claim a unique kind of intersubjective justification for her mode of political and historical thought. At the same time, this theory would also demonstrate how judgment could be improved via an analogy to the cultivation of aesthetic judgment, and moreover show how it could, through an analogy to artistic activity, be understood to orient action as spontaneously creative and non-sovereign. She believed that all of this was already implicit in Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgment, and claimed that she had discovered how it was possible to apply the third Critique directly to politics. That said, reconstructing her argument for this has some unique challenges. We have already seen how Arendt's style of writing and theorizing presents unique interpretative challenges, and in the case of her theory of judgment, these challenges are exacerbated, since she did not complete the account of her theory of judgment at the end of the "Willing" volume of The Life of the Mind. The other published accounts tend to be highly truncated, usually not taking up more than a few pages, and typically in the context of discussions of other, relevant topics such as morality, politics, or history. Ronald Beiner's edition of the 1970 version of the Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy did add a somewhat more extended discussion of the theory, but even there,
her account is truncated, taking up only the last few sessions of the seminar. As a result, a full appreciation of her theory requires a reconstruction of her argument that builds on some new materials that provide a much more extended discussion of the Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* than in her 1970 lectures.

By the time she discovered her theory of judgment, Arendt's emphasis on common sense had been a mainstay of her thought for almost a decade beginning in her assertion in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that the modern world was characterized by a consistent tendency to outrage common sense with bizarre disparities between historical causes and effects, and with ideological thinking that flew in the face of given reality. It played an even more central role in her "Ideology and Terror" essay from 1953, as the faculty whose loss ideological thinking and terror took advantage of in totalitarian political actors' attempts to establish the absolute dominance of their politics. In *The Human Condition*, common sense was the faculty that modernity had fundamentally undermined in its attempts to establish one single Archimedean perspective as the only source of reality—a reality that did not need to appeal an intersubjectively constituted public realm. How exactly Arendt came to formulate this concept of common sense is not completely clear. While it is an important theme in *Origins*, it was not treated there in a theoretical manner in the initial edition from 1951.¹ It appears that sometime around 1953, when she wrote the "Ideology and Terror" essay that would eventually replace her "Concluding Remarks" in the third edition of *Origins*, Arendt began formulating the theory of common sense that would eventually come to play a central role in her analysis

¹A comparison of the first edition with the third additions shows that the sections that dealt with common sense theoretically were virtually all added later.

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of modernity in the final chapter of *The Human Condition*, and, ultimately, become the central concept in her theory of judgment. While in her later work, Arendt shows an extensive awareness of the various historical articulations of the notion of common sense, there is no real evidence suggesting that these were significant influences on her conception of it as it began to take shape around 1953. What we do know, however, is that Heidegger's influence began to become increasingly more prominent and explicit after 1953, both as a methodological touchstone and in providing key elements of her political theory. Not surprisingly, common sense seems to have been one of the central conceptions she took from Heidegger during this period.

As we saw in the last chapter, the question of the relationship between thought and action was at the heart of her work, and for most the fifties, Arendt drew heavily on the early Heidegger in formulating a theory of judgment that would forge a relationship between them. What Heidegger allowed her to begin to understand was how human judgment—what Aristotle had called "prudence" or *phronesis*—was not only a mere knack or talent which actors either had or did not have, but that it was a capacity that could be improved and given profundity and depth by the mysterious involvement of thought. In the 1954 manuscript "Philosophy and Politics," Arendt argued that, as was the case with Machiavelli, Aristotle's limitation of *phronesis* to action only, to the exclusion of thought, was a philosophical prejudice. She argues that current Greek

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ii The 1964 version of her "Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy" spends considerable time discussing the various articulations of common sense that preceded Kant's version in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, including among others Cicero, Gracian, Dubos, Gottsched, Baumgarten, and Muratori.

opinion, exemplified in Sophocles' *Antigone*, understood *phronesis* as "understanding and this on its highest level." She writes that in *Antigone*

action and thought are almost one and same, summed up as it were and bound together in the great words with which man meets his destiny and asserts himself in his essentially human condition...To find the right words, to be equal in greatness in words to the greatness of whatever may happen teaches insight and understanding; this insight is finally *eudaimonia*, blessedness or happiness (or whatever other word we may try to translate the untranslatable), because it is the state in which the meaningfulness of the human condition as a whole is revealed at every single moment to one particular human being.\(^iv\)

It is highly likely that this account of the relationship of thought and action as grounded in the medium of speech and as directed toward human *eudaimonia* or "the meaningfulness of the human condition as a whole...revealed at every single moment to one particular human being" was developed with Heidegger's thought in mind. As we have seen, Heidegger's version of practical reason or *phronesis* understood that true action was only possible after it was given meaning by authentic thought. As a result, Heidegger understood thought to be a form of action. Arendt, as we will see, began pursuing the question of judgment and the relation of thought and action initially along these lines. However, it appears that she was never quite satisfied with Heidegger's attempt to render the togetherness of thought and action unproblematically, mainly due to the question of the possible validity this togetherness and its tendency avoid concrete political and historical events and circumstances.

\(^iv\)Ibid, LOC 023363-64.
As we saw in chapter five, history is the storybook of the political actions of actors, and therefore political and historical judgment are essentially coterminous. Thus, when Arendt conducted historical research she saw it as an extension of her political thought and vice versa. Beginning around 1953-54, we see Arendt attempting to formulate a theory of historical judgment which will also be applicable to concrete politics using a broadly Heideggerian approach. In chapter five, we saw that Arendt embraced Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world in the 1954 essay "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought," and also saw her criticizing his notion of historicity for its lack of concreteness, or in her words, the fact that "it never reaches but always misses the center of politics—man as an acting being." We also saw that Heidegger's notion of "being-in" was conceptually identical to the notion of "common sense" that Arendt formulated after her 1953 article, "Ideology and Terror." Moreover, we saw that Heidegger had articulated his notion of phenomenological reflection in terms of what he called aletheia, the uncoveredness or disclosedness of truth which takes place on a more fundamental or primordial level than simple, scientific truths, and that Arendt had already essentially embraced this idea in her defense of her approach to history in her "Reply to Voegelin" in 1951, when she said that her description of the death camps as "hell on earth" was the most "objective" description available. Indeed, she had begun to refer to her approach to history and political thought explicitly terms of aletheia in her 1955 course presenting her revised theory of

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totalitarianism. Clearly, Heidegger's influence was central throughout her research and theorizing in the mid-fifties.

Arendt's earliest attempt to directly confront the phenomenon of judgment as the faculty that reconciles thought and action was therefore not coincidentally her most Heideggerian attempt. In an essay entitled "Understanding and Politics," published in 1954, the same year as her first "Philosophy and Politics" manuscript, Arendt seemed to rely so heavily on Heidegger—particularly, it appears, on SS31-34 of Being and Time, which are the sections commonly recognized as a central foundational text of hermeneutic philosophy—that her analysis anticipates by almost a decade many of the themes and arguments that are found in Gadamer's Truth and Method. In the article, Arendt does not clearly distinguish between thought and judgment in the same way she comes to in later work; nevertheless, her description of "understanding" here incorporates elements that her later work will separate into the distinct faculties of thought and judgment, though she does mention characteristics which she later associates with the faculty of thought in the essay. In the essay, she describes understanding as "a process which never produces unequivocal results;" that it is "an unending activity, by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world;" and, finally, that its result is meaningfulness, as opposed to knowledge, which it both "precedes and succeeds." These are all descriptions we will find Arendt using to refer to the activity of thought in later works.

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vii Arendt, "Ideologies Seminar" (1955), LOC 024108-09.
such as "Thinking and Moral Considerations" and *The Life of the Mind*. On the other hand, other elements of Arendt's analysis would later become key components of Arendt's account of the faculty of judgment. She draws a distinction between knowledge and understanding, arguing that they condition one another: understanding is based on knowledge, but knowledge "cannot proceed without a preliminary, inarticulate understanding." She links the faculty of judgment to the final conclusion of this interrelationship, calling it "true understanding": "preliminary understanding, which is the basis of all knowledge, and true understanding, which transcends it, have this in common: they make knowledge meaningful." But true understanding does not stop here: it "always returns to the judgments and prejudices which preceded and guided the strictly scientific inquiry" in order to give it a more profound meaning, and thus start the process over again. The faculty which allows this circular process of understanding is common sense, which she refers to as an "Ariadne thread" that ties the results of research and knowledge through this true understanding back to the original prejudices and presuppositions that started the inquiry in the first place and where we ultimately live our daily lives. As she often does elsewhere, Arendt describes common sense as a sixth sense that fits our five senses into a common world, and treats history and politics as essentially co-terminus, with common sense held to be the faculty which allows judgment or "true understanding" to be passed on both. Finally, Arendt points out that "events"—

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which as we know are only possible on the basis of human action—are what illuminate the past and thus what allows history to come into being. It is therefore evident that as early as 1954, the same year as the "Philosophy and Politics" manuscript where she first began thinking about the relation of thought and action, Arendt was already seeking a theory of judgment which understood common sense as the central human faculty that binds them all together, and moreover, that this theory was particularly Heideggerian and hermeneutic in nature.

In 1957, however, Arendt was struck by Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. Arendt's thought journal shows that she took extensive notes on the *Critique of Judgment* in August of 1957. In a letter to Jaspers dated August 29, 1957, Arendt wrote that she had been "reading the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* with increasing fascination. There, and not in Kant's *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, is where Kant's real political philosophy is hidden." From that point forward all of her discussions of judgment and understanding would be expressed in its terms. Although the earlier, more hermeneutic and Heideggerian version of her theory of judgment still remained an important influence, especially in her descriptions of the thinking activity, after the 1957 discovery that Kant's true political philosophy was found in the third *Critique*, Arendt would always link the elements of the earlier account to ideas derived from the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* such as impartiality, representative thought, enlarged mentality, and *sensus communis*

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(common sense).\textsuperscript{xviii} This fact leads to several obvious questions: What did Arendt find unsatisfactory about the earlier, hermeneutic theory of judgment which demanded the introduction of the third Critique? What did she discover in Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgment that was not available in the earlier, hermeneutic theory? And, finally, how did it resolve the inadequacies of the earlier theory? Arendt was quite aware of the controversial nature of her approach to analyzing political and historical phenomena. Therefore, I will argue here that it is likely that she turned to the third Critique because it offered her an avenue for articulating the legitimacy of her way of theorizing, a legitimacy which phenomenological analysis alone could not definitively provide. From a phenomenological perspective, i.e., from the point of view of the activity by which we search for the meaning of the events and actions of our lives and in the world around us, the third Critique could add several highly illuminating insights into the nature of the judging activity, such as the notion of enlarged mentality and the relation of the actor to the judge. However, what Arendt seemed to be most impressed with in the third Critique was that it seemed to her to offer what Kant called a "deduction," an \textit{a priori} assurance of the possible validity of claims concerning the historical and political meaning of events and deeds, or as he puts it in the third Critique, "a legitimation of [judgment's] pretension."\textsuperscript{xix}

In the 1972 conference on her work, Arendt had characterized her work as centered around the problem of the relation of thought and action once human plurality is


\textsuperscript{xix} Kant, Critique of Judgment, Ak. 279; Cf. Critique of Pure Reason, pp. A84/B116-A90/B122.
taken into account; however, she deliberately and explicitly chose to sidestep the question of judgment. The only comment she was willing to make about her work on judgment was that it was concerned with the possibility of "validity" in judgment in the political sphere.\textsuperscript{xx} This concern with the possibility of validity in political judgment is in fact found throughout her original notes, written in German in her \textit{Denktagebuch} or thought journal, on the political philosophy she believed she had discovered in the third \textit{Critique}.\textsuperscript{xii} There, she is clearly most fascinated by and concerned with the unique kind of \textit{Gültigkeit}, validity, found in the \textit{Critique of Aesthetic Judgment}. This is a kind of validity that is different from the validity in the first \textit{Critique}, a validity which she finds Kant calling a "\textit{subjektive Allgemeingültigkeit}," a subjective kind of universal validity.\textsuperscript{xxii} Indeed, Arendt claims here that Kant means by \textit{Allgemein} not "universality," but rather "generality," (\textit{Allgemein} can mean either in German). In the notes, she often alternates between using \textit{subjektive Allgemeingültigkeit} and simply \textit{Gemeingültigkeit}, which seems to be more commonly translated as "general validity,"\textsuperscript{xxiii} and, moreover, at one point she opposes it explicitly to "universal validity" ("\textit{im Gegensatz zu universaler Geltung}").\textsuperscript{xxiv} According to Arendt, subjective general validity, as opposed to universal validity, "lays claim to validity but without compelling in the least."\textsuperscript{xxv} This concern with finding a kind of validity which does not compel the mind but which still may be considered legitimate

\textsuperscript{xx} Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt" conference, pp. 312-313.
\textsuperscript{xii} Arendt, \textit{Denktagebuch}, pp. 569ff.
\textsuperscript{xiii} Ibid, pp. 574, 575.
\textsuperscript{xxiv} Ibid, pp. 574-575.
\textsuperscript{xxv} Ibid, p. 572.
\textsuperscript{xxv} Ibid, p. 572: "Das Urteilen erhebt Anspruch auf Gültigkeit, ohne doch im mindesten zwingen zu können."
remained the central concern in virtually all her proceeding accounts of judgment.xxvi Indeed, in her first version of the "Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy" in 1964, Arendt repeatedly asserts that she is seeking an "a priori principle"xxvii which will "prove that man is essentially a political being."xxviii Though it is not clear that she proves this, the principle she believes can do this is "common sense": "The question is: is common sense a constitutive principle of experience, something without which experience would not be possible…"xxix

Explaining her arguments supporting this claim to a priori validity will require the most reconstructive activity of the dissertation. In support of this reconstruction, I will be introducing a key document that has been almost completely neglected to this point. This document is the first set of lectures Arendt gave linking Kant's political philosophy to the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment in 1964.xxx These lectures provide a very different emphasis from that of the 1970 lectures, whose main concern was with establishing the legitimacy and intelligibility of the notion that Kant's true political philosophy was in the third Critique, and with explaining why this could be significant for her purposes. The first set of lectures from 1964 are much more theoretical in nature, and deal with the third Critique in much greater depth, focusing heavily on establishing the a priori validity of common sense as the key structure of judgment. Once both sets of lectures are consulted, not only do we get a better sense of how Arendt would have

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xxvii Arendt, "Kant's Political Philosophy" (1964), LOC 032259, 69, 70, 83, 92, 94, 95.
xxviii Ibid, LOC 032259.
xxx Ibid, LOC 032270.
written the "Judging" section of *The Life of the Mind*, but we also come to appreciate much more fully what she believed she had discovered in the third *Critique*, and how exactly she would have gone about proving what she discovered with Kant's help. Above all, we discover a much more convincing and compelling theory of political judgment—the non-sovereign theory of political judgment that Arendt intended to use to orient her non-sovereign theory of action.

*The Politically Relevant Structures of the Third Critique*

As we know, Arendt never wrote the "Judging" section of *The Life of the Mind*, and thus we do not know for certain how she would have articulated that faculty. Nevertheless, all of her statements about judgment in that book suggest that she would have drawn on Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* in her articulation of the faculty of judgment, and furthermore, suggest that she would have appealed to her unique interpretation of Kant's political philosophy in formulating this account of judging.\(^{xxxi}\)

Thus, there should be little doubt that Arendt's interpreters since Beiner's editing of the 1970 Kant lectures have been correct to assume the judging section would be drawn in some way from the Kant lectures. The problem, or perhaps rather the limitation, involved in relying on the 1970 lectures is that of the thirteen lectures in the course, only the last four are directly concerned with Kant's account of the faculty of judgment in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. The preceding nine lectures are concerned with

\(^{xxxi}\)Ibid, pp. 69, 94-98, 215-216.
justifying her claim that the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* should have been part of Kant's political philosophy, and, implicitly, with showing how this reinterpretation of Kant's political and aesthetic work fits into her own political ideas. Arendt's description of judgment in these last four lectures was too perfunctory and truncated to clearly convey exactly what she had in mind. Fortunately, as I noted above, the 1964 version of the lectures on Kant's political philosophy deal with the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* far more substantially, which along with her notes from the *Denktagebuch* and Kant's *Critique of Judgment* itself, gives us a fairly clear sense of her theory of political judgment. Reconstructing Arendt's political application of the third *Critique* will require a number of steps. First, I am going to explain what elements of the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* Arendt was concerned with. After this, beginning in the next section, I will explain Arendt's argument that the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* constituted Kant's true political philosophy. Lastly, I will explain how Arendt believed this applied to her own political philosophy.

Kant locates the domain of judgment in the faculty of "the feeling of pleasure and displeasure," and thus any reconstruction of what Arendt had in mind concerning political judgment has to recognize from the start that political judgment, in some sense, is a feeling. Kantian judgment, however, is a very complex feeling, a feeling that reflexively interacts with a wide variety of mental faculties in such a way that it only makes sense to refer to this feeling as some kind of intelligent feeling—even a profound or transfigured feeling—to which Arendt, for her part, will seek to add even more.

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intelligence, complexity, and profundity. In the 1964 lectures, Arendt points out in the course of her discussion of the feeling of the sublime that Kant had already indicated the existence of profound or intelligent feelings in the *Critique of Practical Reason* with his idea of respect for the moral law. She points out that two different intelligent feelings are indicated—the feeling of respect and the feeling of the sublime—when, at his most lyrical, Kant wrote at the end of the second *Critique*, "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and wonder, the more frequently and persistently one's mediation deals with them: the starry sky above me and the moral law within me." While in the second *Critique* Kant only deals with the feeling of "Respect" for the moral law, the third *Critique* has an extended discussion of this "Sublime" feeling Kant believes one should feel in reflecting on the starry sky above. Both of these feelings occur because of some kind of interaction of our faculty of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure with other mental faculties, but primarily the faculty of reason. Both feelings, for Kant, in some sense respond to the supersensible substrate from which our mental faculties work together to synthesize experience, but which seems to overawe us with its magnitude when we are directly confronted with it. She goes on to suggest that these two feelings are indicative of the philosophical tradition's famous experience of *thaumazein*,


xxxv Arendt, "Kant's Political Philosophy" (1964), LOC 032284; Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 203.

xxxvi"Kant has a short discussion of their similarities and how they related to the feeling of beauty in S39 of the *Critique of Judgment*. 289
"the speechless wonder before the whole of Being."xxxvii Kant believed that the feeling of the beautiful was another such profound feeling, and Arendt sought to take that feeling and apply it to human life together in politics and to historical reflection.

Kant opens the third Critique with an introduction that is interesting for several reasons. He is attempting to explain the role of judgment within the constructive epistemology of his critical philosophy, and in order to do this he is led for the first time to provide the entire framework of his constructive epistemology. This was because Kant wanted to show that the faculty of judgment had a priori principles which established the validity of its functioning. For Kant, the various faculties of the human mind (understanding, reason, imagination, judgment, etc.) interacted in different ways depending on the context or "domain," as Kant calls it. In each domain, one faculty is legislative, providing the essential principles of that domain, while a variety of other faculties work to support it.xxxviii Thus, in the theoretical domain, which is concerned with nature, understanding is the legislative faculty, while in the practical domain, which is concerned with freedom, reason is the legislative faculty.xxxix Kant's discussion of judgment in the first Critique is very short compared to the treatment of other faculties, and he presents it as a rather mysterious faculty that supports the understanding in the domain of cognition. In an early version of Wittgenstein's well-known rule-following

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xxxvii Arendt, "Kant's Political Philosophy" (1964), LOC 0322883-87. It is a common misconception that Arendt had no appreciation for the idea of a morally good will. Her point about the morally good, rather, was not that it did not exist, but that it had no relevance in the political realm, and indeed was potentially dangerous when used as standard of judgment there. See The Human Condition, pp. 73-78; "Some Questions Concerning Moral Philosophy," pp. 80-81; "Collective Responsibility," p. 154; "What is Authority?" pp. 137-138.

xxxviii Kant, Critique of Judgment, Ak. 174ff.

argument, Kant points out that in the context of cognition, where judgment's function is to subsume particulars under given universals, any rule we establish for this process would require yet another rule for its application, and so on indefinitely.\textsuperscript{xii} Thus, Kant states that judgment is simply the mysterious faculty that puts an end to this indefinite application of rules:

And thus we find that, whereas understanding is capable of being taught and equipped by rules, the power of judgment is a particular talent that cannot be taught at all but can only be practiced. This is also the reason why the power of judgment is the specific [feature] of so-called mother wit, for whose lack no school can compensate. For although the school can offer...an abundance of rules borrowed from the insights of others, yet the ability to employ these rules correctly must belong to the learner himself; and in the absence of such a natural gift no rule that one might prescribe to him for this aim is safe from misuse.\textsuperscript{xiii}

Kant wrote the \textit{Critique of Judgment} because he believed that there was more to be said about how judgment operated and what the source of its validity was. He believed it had structures and principles that could be identified and legitimated \textit{a priori}.\textsuperscript{xiv} But in order to do this, he concluded that it would be necessary to find a "domain" or context of experience where judgment itself was autonomous, i.e., where its functioning was not determined by another legislative faculty such as understanding or reason, but where it legislated to itself.\textsuperscript{xv} He believed that in such conditions, it would be possible to identify and justify \textit{a priori} the structure of judgment beyond the simple assertion of its mysteriousness in the way the first \textit{Critique} had. Kant believed he had

\textsuperscript{xii} Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A133/B172.
\textsuperscript{xiii} Ibid, A133/B172 - A134/B173.
\textsuperscript{xiv} Kant, \textit{Critique of Judgment}, Ak. 168.
\textsuperscript{xv} Ibid, "First Introduction," \textit{Critique of Judgment}, Ak. 225'.
found just such a domain of experience in aesthetic experience.\textsuperscript{xlv} He writes in the first introduction that "it is actually only in taste...that judgment reveals itself as a [faculty] that has its own principle and hence is justified..."\textsuperscript{xlv} The key structure of the faculty of judgment which Kant believes can be analyzed in order to provide for its justification or legitimacy is what he calls \textit{sensus communis}, or as Arendt calls it, common sense.\textsuperscript{xlvi} In Kant, there is a distinction between the faculty of judgment and the various activities it takes part in. In order to analyze and establish the validity of the structure of the faculty of judgment, which is common sense, through transcendental argumentation, Kant had to find an experience of judgment that intuitively seemed to appeal to common sense, and he believed this could be found in the experience of judgments of taste in beauty.

The rather loose tie that binds the two parts of the \textit{Critique of Judgment} together is the concept of purposiveness. Kant believes that judgment's transcendental principle is what he calls "the purposiveness of nature."\textsuperscript{xlvii} While teleological judgments are directed toward the object, Kant believes that judgments of taste involve what he calls a "subjective purposiveness" or, perhaps more clearly, a "merely formal purposiveness."\textsuperscript{xlviii}

What Kant means by this is that we find an object beautiful when it appears to have been

\textsuperscript{xlv} Ibid, "First Introduction," \textit{Critique of Judgment}, Ak. 244'-245'. In the second introduction, Kant, moreover, writes that "In a critique of judgment, the part that deals with aesthetic judgment belongs to it essentially. For this [faculty] alone contains a principle that judgment lays completely \textit{a priori} at the basis of its reflection on nature..." (Ibid, Ak. 193). For a discussion of the centrality of aesthetic experience and taste to Kant's philosophy of judgment, see Henry E. Allison's \textit{Kant's Theory of Taste} (2001), pp. 4-6ff. Allison, for instance, writes of "Kant's clear privileging of taste from the standpoint of transcendental critique..." \\
\textsuperscript{xlv} Ibid, "First Introduction," \textit{Critique of Judgment}, Ak. 244'. \\
\textsuperscript{xlvi} Kant, \textit{Critique of Judgment}, SS20-22, 40; Arendt considers Kant's notion of \textit{sensus communis} to be identical to the phenomenon of "common sense" that runs throughout her work. See \textit{Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy} (1970), pp. 70ff, and "Kant's Political Philosophy" (1964), LOC 032261-70; "Thinking," \textit{The Life of the Mind}, pp. 50-52, 213-216. \\
\textsuperscript{xlvii} Ibid, Ak. 181ff. \\
\textsuperscript{xlviii} Ibid, Ak. 188ff, 221-222.
made explicitly \emph{for} appearing to our cognitive powers, i.e., its \emph{form} seems to have been \emph{purposively} made to appeal to the way our cognitive powers are made.\textsuperscript{xlii} This is crucial because Kant must establish that what is being judged is not the object itself, but rather the response of the subject's cognitive faculties to the beautiful form of the object, which is itself produced to a large extent by the subject's faculties, and moreover that this response has a validity that, in his words, is "universally communicable."\textsuperscript{1} According to Kant, since it clearly would be "ridiculous" for someone who claimed to have taste to claim that her pleasure in the beautiful is idiosyncratic to herself,\textsuperscript{i} beauty cannot be something perceived directly through sense data. We cannot truly communicate the mere effect of sensibility: we may experience gratification or agreeableness in an attractive object, but the feeling of pleasure we experience has no claim to validity on other human beings, since it is unavoidably idiosyncratic to our interests.\textsuperscript{ii} In other words, in order for the feeling of pleasure to be universally communicable, we must not have an interest in it, because interest is always particular to who we are as individuals;\textsuperscript{iii} the pleasure in the beautiful, according to Kant, is a "disinterested delight," a pleasure that is "disinterested and free," since "all interest either presupposes a need or gives rise to one."\textsuperscript{iv}

Kant argues that the reason the feeling of pleasure in the beautiful is disinterested and universally communicable is because this pleasure is not a direct result of the sense stimuli of the object, but rather the result of our reflection on the beautiful form of the

\textsuperscript{xlii} Ibid, Ak. 189; Arendt, "Kant's Political Philosophy" (1964), LOC 032275.
\textsuperscript{i} Ibid, Ak. 217-219; Ibid, LOC 032278ff; \textit{Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy} (1970), pp. 69ff.
\textsuperscript{i} Ibid, Ak. 212
\textsuperscript{iii} Ibid, Ak. 204ff
\textsuperscript{iv} Ibid, Ak. 205, 209ff; Ibid, LOC 032288-91.
object in the interplay of the two key faculties involved in the cognition: imagination and understanding.\textsuperscript{iv} The faculties each have a role to play in making the feeling of the beautiful disinterested. Imagination here means the faculty that allows us to remove ourselves from the direct presence of the things of the world and relate to them in our mental space of withdrawal; Arendt argues that this allows us to gain an impartial or reflective relation to the object, one that can potentially be at a remove from our immediate interests in the object.\textsuperscript{v} Understanding, since it is the same in everyone, is therefore universally communicable.\textsuperscript{vi} Thus, though there is no actual cognition involved in the feeling of the beautiful, the subjective faculties involved allow for conditions of judgment which are potentially valid for all human beings, because the free interaction of the faculties of imagination and understanding allow for a feeling of pleasure that is disinterested and universally communicable.\textsuperscript{vii} According to Kant, "nothing…can be communicated universally except cognition, as well as [re]presentation insofar as it pertains to cognition [i.e., imagination]: for [re]presentation is objective only insofar as it pertains to cognition…"\textsuperscript{viii} Kant goes on to point out that if judgment about the beautiful is universally communicable but is still not a response to a concept of the object, then its basis "can be nothing other than the mental state that we find in the relation between the presentational power [imagination and understanding] insofar as
they refer a given presentation to cognition in general. In other words, the form of the beautiful object sets off a spontaneous interaction of our faculties of cognition, what Kant calls a harmonious "free play" or quickening of them, which is not related to the concept of the object, and thus not determined by the object, and it is this free play of the faculties that produces the pleasure, and not object itself.

To this point, however, no actual judgment has been passed on the beautiful object. Kant has only shown how the feeling of pleasure in the form of the beautiful object is produced in a way that is disinterested and universally communicable. There is still be no explanation and justification for judgments of taste, and no explanation of how aesthetic experience gives insight into the structure of the faculty of judgment. Kant thinks there is a kind of antinomy in the experience of the feeling of pleasure in the beautiful that leads to yet another level of reflexivity, one which appeals to the faculty of judgment. The feeling of pleasure in the beautiful is purely subjective in the sense that it is a feeling I have, which might lead me to claim that my assertion of beautiful is valid only for me; yet, when I claim something is beautiful, I clearly am asserting this should be valid of everyone else. He summarized the question at the beginning of S20:

If judgments of taste had (as cognitive judgments do) a determinate principle, then anyone making them in accordance with that principle would claim that his judgment was
unconditionally necessary. If they had no principle at all, like judgments of the mere
taste of sense, then the thought that they have a necessity would not occur to us at all.\textsuperscript{lxiv}

The solution to this antinomy is found in the structure of the faculty of judgment and the
reflexive relationship it has with our feeling of pleasure in the beautiful, i.e., the fact that
judgment and the feeling of pleasure in the beautiful condition each and interact
together.\textsuperscript{lxv} Arendt places heavy emphasis on this point in her interpretation of Kant: she
is careful to note that there must be another moment after the feeling of pleasure in the
beautiful where I decide whether I approve or disapprove of the fact that I experienced
that pleasure in response to a particular object, and this second moment is the moment
where taste is appealed to.\textsuperscript{lxvi}

This moment after the feeling of pleasure where I decide if I approve or
disapprove of my feeling is not based simply on my own personal inclinations, but rather
by an appeal to an essential structure of judgment that allows me to take a perspective
that stretches far beyond my own inclinations. Kant calls this essential structure of the
faculty of judgment \textit{sensus communis} or common sense.\textsuperscript{lxvii} Arendt, as we have seen,
probably originally drew this idea from Heidegger's notion of "being-in," and typically
refers to it as a "sixth sense that fits our five senses into a common world,"\textsuperscript{lxviii} and that
"we not only all have in common but that fits us into, and thereby makes possible, a

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\textsuperscript{lxiv} Ibid, Ak. 237-238.
\textsuperscript{lxv} Ibid, Ak. 238ff.
\textsuperscript{lxvi} Arendt, \textit{Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy}, pp. 67-69.
\textsuperscript{lxvii} Kant, \textit{Critique of Judgment}, Ak. 238ff, 293ff.
\textsuperscript{lxviii} Arendt, "Thinking," \textit{The Life of the Mind}, p. 81.
\end{footnotesize}
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common world." The 1964 lectures on "Kant's Political Philosophy," however, are by far her most extensive treatment of sensus communis or common sense. She deals with several earlier formulations of the idea such as Dubos, Muratori, Gracian, Gottsched, Baumgarten, and Cicero—whose formulations of common sense as a "silent sense" she especially emphasizes—and develops Kant's idea of sensus communis from its origins in his pre-critical writings to the political writings and the third Critique. What Arendt was so taken with in Kant's articulation of common sense in the third Critique is the fact that he explained the implicit process of cultivation involved in the application of common sense in the faculty of judgment, and attempted to provide a legitimation of its existence, if not necessarily an explanation of how exactly it comes into being.

Kant first describes it as an implicit sense which we are only aware of because it must be presupposed so that there can be an attunement between the mental faculties that allow for their interaction with each other in cognition and free play in aesthetic judgment. This is the account of sensus communis that, in chapter one, we saw Andrew Norris probably correctly argue could not be convincingly applied to non-aesthetic phenomena. However, in §40 Kant's account of common sense becomes much more politically intuitive, so much so that it not easy to see how these are articulations of the same phenomenon. Kant, however, seemed to believe he need it in order to link his

— Arendt, "Kant's Political Philosophy" (1964), LOC 032262-63.
—Ibid, Ak. 238-239.
account of taste to his critical philosophy. At any rate, Kant states that "we must here take sensus communis to mean the idea of a sense shared by all of us, i.e., a power to judge, that in reflecting takes account (a priori), in our thought, of everyone else's way of presenting something, in order as it were to compare our own judgment with human reason in general…" Arendt often calls this having an "enlarged mentality." Kant describes how common sense works in S40: "Now we do this as follows: we compare our judgment not so much with the actual as rather with the merely possible judgments of others, and thus put ourselves in the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that may happen to attach to our own judging…" In other words, when we decide if we approve or disapprove of our feeling of pleasure in the beautiful, the appeal to taste or common sense is not to our own idiosyncratic judgments but rather to an imagined standpoint that takes into account how others would judge our feeling.

It is crucial to understand, however, that when I judge by appeal to common sense, this is not a decision procedure: in the moment of judging, I do not sit and try to think up different standpoints, as Kant's initial formulation here might suggest. Kant almost immediately qualifies his description S40: "Now perhaps this operation of reflection will seem too artful to be attributed to the ability we call common sense. But in fact it only looks this way when expressed in abstract formulas." Enlarged mentality is not a procedure of thought, but a standpoint I cultivate that is removed from my own

lxxii Ibid, Ak. 289-290.
lxxiii Ibid, Ak. 293-294.
lxxiv Arendt, Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy, p. 73.
lxxv Kant, Critique of Judgment, Ak. 294.
lxxvi Ibid, Ak. 294.
private point of view which takes in others' points of view, and it is from this broader standpoint, the standpoint of common sense or sensus communis, that I pass judgment on my feelings of pleasure in the beautiful. Arendt quotes Kant writing a bit later in S40: "However small may be the area or the degree to which a man's natural gifts reach, yet it indicates a man of enlarged thought if he disregards the subjective private conditions of his own judgment, by which so many others are confined, and reflects upon it from a general standpoint (which he can only determine by placing himself at the standpoint of others)." In other words, someone with common sense always, of course, has her own partial point of view; but she also has a kind of second point of view, a broader, more expansive point of view that is by its very nature political in the broadest sense, because it is a standpoint that judges from a perspective that includes those with whom she is in a community with.

At this point, Kant's analysis leaves some things to be desired: there are several implicit features of his theory of judgment that need to be articulated and fleshed out for him. To begin with, Kant only implicitly deals with the reflexive, ongoing effect of judgment on the feeling of pleasure in the beautiful, i.e., judgment's capacity over time to develop and cultivate this feeling in more subtle and sensitive ways. The fact that he assumes this reflexive capacity for cultivation is evident in any of Kant's comments and articulations of artistic and aesthetically critical experience. Kant argues that aesthetic and artistic judgment is best cultivated by judging other exemplary instances of fine art. He writes that "for all fine art, insofar as we aim at its highest degree of perfection, the

\[\text{Ibid, Ak. 295; this is Arendt's translation on p. 71 of the 1970 lectures.}\]
propaedeutic does not consist following precepts, but in cultivating our mental powers by exposing ourselves beforehand to what we call [the humanities]." It is also, moreover, implicit throughout his extended discussion of the relationship between taste and genius which will be discussed in much more detail shortly, especially in his comments on artistic training and cultivation. Kant points out that a young poet cannot be brought to abandon his belief that his poem is beautiful, despite the critical comments of others. To the extent he does this, in other words, the young poet is refusing to partake in the sensus communis of his audience. "Only later on," says Kant, "when his power of judgment has been sharpened by practice, will he voluntarily depart from his earlier judgment."

Secondly, there are several key terms still left unspecified in Kant's formulation of sensus communis: who is the "everyone" to which we refer, and to what "community" do I appeal in seeking this general standpoint? In principle, since the faculties in question are present in all human beings, the everyone to which I refer and the community in which I take part is potentially the entire human race. However, this principle of the universality of judgment is delimited by the fact that, as both Kant and Arendt repeatedly emphasize, the sensus communis is only valid for all judging subjects. They both emphasize that we take into account the views of everyone's "possible judgments," which must be interpreted to mean their feeling of the beautiful under the hypothetical condition

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Ibid, Ak. 282.
Ibid, Ak. 355.
Ibid, Ak. 296ff, 355.
that they have judged, even if in actuality they have not cultivated taste and cannot judge. When we claim that something is beautiful, we are not appealing to the unreflective feelings of pleasure in the beautiful that any human being is capable of; rather, we are appealing to what their feeling of the beautiful should be if they judged. Moreover, in practice, this community I appeal to is significantly delimited by the practical considerations in involved in the cultivation of taste. Kant points out that each subject has to start from "crude dispositions given by nature," and begins cultivating their taste through the examples of judgment and artistic taste provided by those who influence them and train them, through exemplary works found in the humanities, and through reciprocally communicating their pleasure to others who also have cultivated a sense of taste.\textsuperscript{lixiii} As we will see, this is a key point for Arendt, in particular: she repeatedly emphasizes that judgment is cultivated above all by the "company" we choose, i.e., the examples of judgment we rely on and appeal to in cultivating our common sense.\textsuperscript{lixiv} Thus, while in principle I could appeal to all judging subjects, in point of fact, my sensus communis is by far more influenced and cultivated by those whose judgment I trust, who I take to be examples of good judgment and taste, and those who I spend my time reciprocally communicating my judgments with.

Thus, both for practical considerations and in principle, Arendt asserts that the proper translation of Kant's \textit{Allgemeingültigkeit} is not "universal validity," because in

\textsuperscript{lixiii}Ibid, Ak. 282-284, 296ff, 312, 355.
actual fact it is not truly universally valid; the proper translation is "generally valid." It is generally valid because the validity it appeals to is hypothetical: it asserts a claim on all subjects not categorically or universally, but rather on all subjects only insofar as they have developed a capacity to judge by participating in the sensus communis. The upshot of this is a kind of oblique rejection of cultural relativism. Kant, and Arendt following him, draw a distinction between what Kant calls sensus communis, or true common sense, and what he calls "community sense," the basic, unreflective prejudices I grow up with in my community and culture. According to Kant, "community sense" is common sense at its lowest common denominator: it is literally "common," denoting a kind of vulgarity and lack of cultivation. However, a sensus communis will always imply a certain sense of civilization—a certain cultivation, humaneness, and sensitivity to art and high culture generally—irrespective of whatever culture or community I happen to grow up and live in. As a result, there is in principle no exceptions made for cultural differences for both Kant and Arendt: to the extent judging subjects participate in sensus communis—no matter what their cultural backgrounds and practices may be—as they "quarrel" and debate about the beauty of objects of taste, they will over time move

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Ixxv Arendt, "Kant's Political Philosophy" (1964), LOC 032266, 69-70, 91-92; Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy, pp. 42-45, 56, 76.
Ixxvi Tracy Strong has recently noted the importance of recognizing the distinction between universal and general validity for understanding Arendt's use of Kantian aesthetic judgment. He points out that "In principle, anyone can judge; in actual fact, most do not… and are excluded from generality or universality." As I interpret Kant, Strong would clearly be correct about the first part of the sentence, but perhaps incorrect concerning the second part. I would argue that in principle no one is fully excluded from generality because general validity is hypothetical: i.e., it is a validity that appeals to all humans under the hypothetical assumption that they had judged. See Strong, "Without a Banister: Hannah Arendt and Roads Not Taken," Politics Without Vision: Thinking without a Banister in the Twentieth Century, University of Chicago Press: Chicago (2012), pp. 344-345.
Ixxvii Kant, Critique of Judgment, Ak. 293ff; Arendt, "Kant's Political Philosophy" (1964), LOC 032266ff; Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy, pp. 70ff.
toward consensus as they cultivate more sensitivity in their common sense structures of judgment.

Before turning to Arendt's application of Kantian aesthetic judgment to the politics, it is necessary to discuss Kant's all-important (at least, from Arendt's perspective) account of the relationship between taste and genius. Kant's description of the faculty of genius clearly expresses many of the same characteristics Arendt associates with action, and, indeed, we will see that Arendt believes genius and action are rooted in essentially the same faculty, though expressed in different areas of human experience. Arendt believes that Kant formulated the relationship between action and judgment by analogy when he formulated the relationship between taste and genius: the same capacity for natality which characterizes action can be found in artistic genius, and indeed, so much so that in the modern age, with its limited possibilities for true action, "the work of genius…appears to have absorbed those elements of distinctness and uniqueness which find their immediate expression only in action and speech." Kant argues that the production of great or exemplary art requires more than the faculty of judgment of taste: all human beings, in principle, have this capacity to appreciate great art to some degree, though they may never have cultivated it. Kant calls this element of genius "spirit" [Geist], arguing that it is the animating principle of the mind that inheres in aesthetic objects: "Of certain products that are expected to reveal themselves at least in part to be fine art, we say that they have no spirit, even though we find nothing to censure in them as far as taste in concerned. A poem may be quite nice and elegant and yet have no spirit.

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A story may be precise and orderly and yet have no spirit. Kant claims that spirit is a unique endowment of talent and originality which "cannot be communicated but must be conferred directly on each person by the hand of nature. And so it dies with him, until some day nature again endows someone else in the same way…"

Kant, however (and, as we will see, Arendt with him) argues that of the two faculties necessary for great art, it is judgment of taste, and not genius, which is the higher and more important faculty. Kant asserts that only "charlatans" with "shallow minds" believe that they can display genius by ignoring standards of taste. Whatever inherent brilliance an artist may have, Kant claims it is futile without the element of taste, "for if the imagination is left in lawless freedom, all its riches in ideas produce nothing but nonsense…" Kant writes:

Taste, like the [faculty] of judgment, in general, consists in disciplining (or training) genius. It severely clips its wings, and makes it civilized, or polished; but at the same time it gives it guidance as to how far and over what it may spread while still remaining purposive. It introduces clarity and order into a wealth of thoughts, and hence makes the ideas durable, fit for approval that is both lasting and universal, and hence fit for being followed by others…

In other words, whatever fundamental human freedom is registered in artistic genius—and, by extension, human action—it is all but futile without having been given a form that is "communicable" to those who constitute its community of judges; indeed, it transfigures it, making incomparably higher, more "spiritual," more profound and

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xc Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Ak. 313.
xic Ibid, Ak. 309.
xcii Ibid, Ak. 309.
xciii Ibid, Ak. 310.
xciv Ibid, Ak. 319.
xcv Ibid, Ak. 319.
meaningful. As with the feeling of pleasure in the beautiful, “its value is increased almost infinitely by the idea of its universal communicability.”

So with all this in view, is it possible to answer the question of whether Arendt achieved her goal of establishing the general or inter-subjective—as opposed to universal—validity which had originally inspired her to apply the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* to politics? It would appear that she did not, at least from a strictly Kantian point of view which seeks to establish the validity of the faculty of judgment through Kant’s constructive epistemology as anchored in SS20-21. To begin with, the success of the deduction itself remains controversial. Arendt herself gives no real direct assessment of the deduction, though she does devote a few pages of discussion to it in the 1964 course. Critics, such as Paul Guyer and Anthony Savile, argue that he was not successful, while sympathetic interpreters, such as Henry Allison, argue that these critics have understood the scope of Kant’s deduction too expansively, and once this is taken into consideration, Kant is shown to have been successful. Moreover, Norris is probably correct in his observation that the formal deduction of *sensus communis* Kant provided, i.e., the argument for the deduction based in the critical epistemology, is too closely associated with aesthetic experience to be convincingly applied to politics. Nevertheless, Arendt’s claims still have quite a bit of power from a phenomenological

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xcvi Ibid, Ak. 297.
perspective. Kant's phenomenological articulation of *sensus communis* has little intuitive connection to the articulation of SS20-21 rooted in the critical epistemology, and it might be suspected that we could dispense with it if we do not fully accept the entire critical framework, which Arendt of course did not. Beyond the formal deduction, Kant's articulation of *sensus communis* still has a phenomenological validity. Specifically, it does appear that some kind of faculty of common sense must be presupposed in any reflective activity of judgment, i.e., any activity not determined by pre-given rules, and moreover Kant's account of how this structure of common sense operates is quite powerful and must be taken seriously. If this is so, than some kind of phenomenological validity is achieved, though perhaps not one which is as strong as the formal deduction's appeal to the critical epistemology. If Arendt can show that Kant's insights can be legitimately applied to political contexts, we can reasonably claim to have achieved a significant degree of understanding about the nature and operation of political judgment and common sense, even if we do not arrive at the certainty that would be achieved from a transcendental deduction.

*Arendt's Political Application of the Third Critique*

In the last chapter we saw that Arendt's central concern was with understanding the true relationship between philosophy and politics and more concretely, what the relationship between authentic thought and authentic action was after political conditions such as plurality and worldliness were taken into consideration. At the end of that
chapter, I claimed that she believed the faculty of judgment—specifically, as articulated by Kant in the third *Critique*—was a third faculty which bridged the existential gulf that seems to separate authentic thought and action. We are now in a position to understand how she believed it does this. Judgment, according to Arendt, is a faculty of the mind and thus emanates from the existential space of withdrawal where the mind is located, and yet judgment is applicable directly to the political and worldly sphere of plural human existence which is utterly removed from the existential space of the mind. How is this possible? Arendt, as we will see, believed Kant's true political philosophy was located into the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, and she sought to use this rearticulated Kantian politics to bring a kind of resolution to her own political thought. As we will see, in politics judgment has a unique capacity to reach out from the *vita contemplativa* and to bridge the seemingly unbridgeable existential and phenomenological divide between it and the *vita activa*’s worldly sphere of experience.

As I said before, we know both from sources who talked with her and from certain statements she herself made that Arendt believed her discussion the *vita contemplativa* in *The Life of the Mind* would find some kind of resolution, or at least tentative conclusion, in the never written "Judging" section, and, furthermore, we also know that she intended to draw heavily in this section on Kant's third *Critique*. In order to do this, however, Arendt would have had to find a legitimate place for the basic transcendental structure of Kant's critical philosophy within her account of the fundamental experiences of the *vita contemplativa*. This is exactly what Arendt attempted to do. Indeed, it can be argued that Kant's critical philosophy—or at least the
experiences Kant tried to articulate through it—is the most significant reference point for Arendt's exploration of the *vita contemplativa* in *The Life of the Mind*. Was this a legitimate move? Is it possible, in other words, to accept the basic structure and elements of Kant's critical philosophy to the extent she does without also admitting the modern metaphysical prejudices which Arendt and her existentialist contemporaries believed Kant had smuggled into it unawares? A conclusive answer to these questions lies beyond the scope of this chapter; nevertheless, I will at least try to show that Arendt's claims about her reappropriation of Kant are plausible, defensible, and have the potential to be highly enlightening.

In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt approached the *vita contemplativa* in the same way she approached the *vita activa* in *The Human Condition*: by seeking to uncover the authentic experiences which the philosophical tradition's metaphysically oriented articulations had distorted. But in this case the task was somewhat more complicated. While in *The Human Condition* Arendt could for the most part ignore the philosophical tradition's articulations of the worldly active life (other than when she was directly attacking it), in the case of the *vita contemplativa* Arendt was forced to confront the philosophical tradition directly. This was because the philosophical traditional was the one tradition that had most intensely and relentlessly engaged in the authentic experiences of the life of the mind.\textsuperscript{xcix} Thus, while it is true that Arendt was attempting to help dismantle the tradition's metaphysical fallacies,\textsuperscript{c} such as the distinction between the sensory and the supersensory worlds, and the more modern fallacies that

\textsuperscript{xcix}Arendt, "Thinking," *The Life of the Mind*, pp. 6ff; *The Human Condition*, pp. 14-17, 20-21.
\textsuperscript{c}Ibid, p. 212.
unconsciously presuppose it, this was not her ultimate goal. Like Heidegger and Jaspers, she believed that these metaphysical fallacies pointed toward some authentic experience of the life of the mind that led these great philosophers into such fallacies, and her task was now to try to understand what kind of experience those fallacies pointed towards. In a caustic moment tweaking the analytic philosophy movement of the time, Arendt writes that "it is characteristic of the Oxford school of criticism to understand these [metaphysical] fallacies as logical non sequiturs—as though philosophers throughout the centuries had been, for reasons unknown, just a bit too stupid to discover the elementary flaws in their arguments." The metaphysical history of philosophy could not, in other words, simply be dismissed as "nonsense" as members of the Vienna Circle once claimed. There were authentic experiences which lay behind the distortions they criticized, experiences which were too important to what it means to be human to simply ignore.

_The Life of the Mind_ is what might be called a phenomenology of the experience of "withdrawal." In quotidian terms, it refers to the experience of absent-mindedness which we all have literally every day. But Arendt is in fact making a dramatic claim in this: she is claiming that the theoretical foundations of virtually the entire intellectual history of Western civilization is based on metaphysical fallacies which were inspired and rooted in this prosaic experience. While there are other activities which require this capacity for absent-mindedness to some extent, such as judging and willing, she believes

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\(^{c_1}\) Ibid, pp. 10-11.
\(^{c_ii}\) Ibid, p. 45.
\(^{c_{iii}}\) Ibid, pp. 53, 72.
that the activity of thinking is the most worldless—the most withdrawn from worldly involvements. She furthermore believes that thinking is an inherently pleasurable activity, something we like to do, and actually need to do in order to live a fully human life.\textsuperscript{civ} Philosophers seem to experience this need and pleasure in thinking intensely, and have had a kind of obsession with this activity from the very beginning of their tradition. Arendt points to the story of the Thracian maid who burst into laughter when Thales fell into a well while observing the heavenly bodies or Socrates' deafness to the world while deep in thought to illustrate the absent-mindedness the philosophers have always displayed as they pursued the life of the mind.\textsuperscript{cv} It has been the philosophers' obsession with the activity of thinking that led to the two worlds fallacy.

The two worlds fallacy is the most famous and influential metaphysical fallacy: it postulated that the sensible world was characterized by sheer contingency and change, and that therefore our understanding of reality must be based on a timeless, eternal present which was somehow available to our rational faculties, but not in our sensible experience. Arendt argues that the two worlds fallacy was actually the result of the extraordinarily powerful nature of the thinking activity once it has been adequately discovered and engaged with by a thinking human being.\textsuperscript{cvi} Phenomenological analysis of the thinking activity certainly does not justify the idea that there is anything like a supersensible reality; however, Arendt believed that such an analysis does demand some kind of account of "where" exactly we are when we have existentially withdrawn from

\textsuperscript{civ} Ibid, pp. 88, 125, 178.
\textsuperscript{cv} Ibid, pp. 80-84, 197.
\textsuperscript{cvi} Ibid, pp. 197ff.
our world of meaningfully engaged human involvements in order to think. The clue which the old postulation of an eternal, supersensible reality points to is that this place, even if it has withdrawn from worldly reality, must still be located somewhere in time, but in a mysterious place in time that escapes the change and contingency of the past and future tenses which we primarily experience either in the context of worldly involvements or in our memories and imaginations.\textsuperscript{cvii} Drawing explicitly on Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Kafka, Arendt asserts that this is the present tense: a tense that is impossible to locate in the mist of our engaged, involved worldly experience, and which is only accessible in a space of existential disengagement which she calls "the gap between past and future."\textsuperscript{cviii} It is only in this space of withdrawal that human beings can think.

The form which the thinking activity takes is dialogical: when we think, it is as if we are "two-in-one," as if we are carrying on a dialogue with ourselves.\textsuperscript{cix} It is this dialogical form that gives the thinking faculty it inherently critical character.\textsuperscript{cx} It is another, more modern metaphysical prejudice that this idea of critical thought has come to be identified with the logical structure of the human mind,\textsuperscript{cxi} but according to Arendt this dialogical structure of thought indicates the authentic nature of critical thinking: the simple capacity to ask questions. The capacity for thought indicates that human beings

\begin{footnotes}
\item[cvii] Ibid, pp. 197-202.
\item[cviii] Ibid, pp. 204ff; "Preface: The Gap between Past and Future," p. 10.
\item[cix] Ibid, pp. 184ff
\item[cx] Ibid, pp. 56, 185ff.
\item[cxi] Ibid, pp. 56-60.
\end{footnotes}
are critical in an existential sense: we are "question-asking beings." As a result of the existential nature of our critical faculties, we are ultimately led to into speculative thinking, into asking ultimate questions. This capacity to ask ultimate questions leads to contemplation, where words finally break down in the experience of *thaumazein*, of speechless wonder. Because there can ultimately be no final answer given to the questions pursued in thought, thinking is an essentially circular and endless activity. Arendt writes that "the business of thinking is like Penelope's web; it undoes every morning what it has finished the night before. For the need to think…can be satisfied only though thinking, and the thoughts I had yesterday will satisfy this need today only to the extent that I want and need to think them anew."

Speculative thinking leading to contemplation is only the highest moment of thinking, and is only an indicator of thinking's nature. Arendt believes that the original exemplar of thinking in the Western tradition was Socrates. The historical accounts of Socrates show him exemplifying the thinking process for Arendt: "Thinking can become dialectical and critical because it goes through this questioning and answering process, through the dialogue of *dialegesthai*, which actually is a 'traveling through words'…whereby we constantly raise the basic Socratic question: *What do you mean when you say...?*" In the preface to *Between Past and Future*, Arendt explains that thought seeks to discover "the real origins" of concepts so that it "can distill from them...

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cxvi Arendt, "Thinking," *The Life of the Mind*, p. 185.
anew their original spirit."\(^{cxvii}\) With the passage of time, words and ideas "such as freedom and justice, authority and reason, responsibility and virtue, power and glory" tend to become "empty shells" which have lost their connection to "their underlying phenomenal reality."\(^{cxviii}\) In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt says that words become "frozen" and thinking's purpose is to unfreeze them by exploring the experiences which have been connected to them.\(^{cxix}\)

It is in this invisible element's nature [thinking] to undo, unfreeze, as it were, what language, the medium of thinking, has frozen into thought—words (concepts, sentences, definitions, doctrines) whose “weakness” and inflexibility Plato denounces so splendidly in the *Seventh Letter*… These frozen thoughts, Socrates seems to say, come so handily that you can use them in your sleep; but if the wind of thinking, which I shall now stir in you, has shaken you from your sleep and made you fully awake and alive, then you will see that you have nothing in your grasp but perplexities, and the best we can do is share them with each other.\(^{cxx}\)

As a result, Arendt argued that it truly is the case that the unexamined life is not worth living: one of the highest experiences of human existence, thought, is only possible in the two-in-one dialogue I have with myself, and therefore one cannot even be considered full alive if one cannot think. Socrates saw his function in the *polis* as waking up those that live their lives unconsciously, as if they were asleep.\(^{cxxi}\) "To think and to be fully alive are the same, and this implies that thinking must always begin afresh: it is an activity that accompanies living and is concerned with such concepts as justice, happiness, virtue,

\(^{cxviii}\) Ibid, p.13.
\(^{cxix}\) Arendt, "Thinking," *The Life of the Mind*, p. 171.
\(^{cxx}\) Ibid, pp. 174-175.
\(^{cxxi}\) Ibid, p. 178.
offered us by language itself as expressing the meaning of whatever happens in life and occurs to us while we are alive.\textsuperscript{cxxii}

However, though the reflection of thought takes place in the mode of generalities, because ultimately we are seeking out what our experiences have in common with others, this faculty has the effect of reconciling us to the world by allowing us to understand what is meaningful and significant in our experience. As a result, thought is a continuous process of creating stories and narratives of our experience, because it is fundamentally on a lifelong quest for the meaning and significance of things. As our authentic capacity for reflection, Arendt asserts that Hegel was certainly correct when he claimed that thought is how we reconcile ourselves to our worldly reality.\textsuperscript{cxxiii} This reconciling activity of thought fundamentally involves recognizing the significance of things in our lives and our world, and creating a narrative about them.\textsuperscript{cxxiv} Introducing her notion of thought at the 1972 conference on her work, she said:

Reason itself, the thinking ability which we have, has need to actualize itself. The philosophers and the metaphysicians have monopolized this capacity. This has led to very great things. It also has led to rather unpleasant things—we have forgotten that every human being has a need to think, not to think abstractly, not to answer the ultimate questions of God, immortality, and freedom, nothing but to think while he is living. And he does it constantly…Everybody who tells a story of what happened to him half an hour ago on the street has got to put this story into shape. And this putting the story into shape is a form of thought…And this is somehow the same sense in which you know it from Hegel, namely where I think the central role is reconciliation—reconciliation of man as a thinking and reasoning being. This is what actually happens in the world…I don't know any other reconciliation but thought.\textsuperscript{cxxv}

\textsuperscript{cxxii} Ibid, p. 178.
\textsuperscript{cxxiv} Ibid, pp. 132ff.
\textsuperscript{cxxv} Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt" conference, p. 303.
This capacity of thought to form stories finds its ultimate expression in historical reflection. In the preface to *Between Past and Future*, Arendt claims that historical understanding is only possible because of our ability to think and pursue the meaning and significance of events in our reflections within the gap between past and future.\textsuperscript{cxxxvi}

The problem, however, is that because there is potentially no end to our ability to reflect, since we will always be able to gain a deeper insight into things by exploring the narrative and underlying phenomenal realities that lie behind them, the activity of thinking tends to leave the thinker in a state of paralysis.\textsuperscript{cxxxvii} We cannot carry our thoughts into the world of everyday life because we do not have time to think there. “Practically,” she writes, “thinking means that each time you are confronted with some difficulty in life you have to make up your mind anew.”\textsuperscript{cxxxviii} What is needed, according to Arendt, is some kind of faculty that can, in a sense, refreeze these concepts, by giving them a decisive form again after they have been reflected on, so that they can again serve the same function in common sense which the previously frozen concepts had served. This is the function which Arendt believes the faculty of judgment performs:

The faculty of judging particulars (as brought to light by Kant), the ability to say “this is wrong,” “this is beautiful,” and so on, is not the same as the faculty of thinking. Thinking deals with invisibles, with representations of things that are absent; judging always concerns particulars and things close at hand. But the two are interrelated…judging, the by-product of the liberating effect of thinking, realizes thinking, makes it manifest in the world of appearances, where I am never alone and always too busy to be able to think. The manifestation of the wind of thought [e.g. judgment]…is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly.\textsuperscript{cxxix}

\textsuperscript{cxxxvii} Ibid, pp. 175.
\textsuperscript{cxxxviii} Ibid, p. 177.
\textsuperscript{cxxix} Ibid, p. 193.
Judgment, in other words, allows the thinker to come to a conclusion in his potentially endless reflections that emanate in the telling and retelling of stories, which Arendt had compared to Penelope's endless weaving and unweaving of her web. What judgment provides, in other words, is a decision—an ability of the poet, historian, or writer to conclusively decide about which narrative most fully and authentically captures the meaning of the deeds that he or she has observed. The exemplary case of this judgment of the historian and poet, according to Arendt, is when Odysseus came to the court of the Phaeacians and hears the bards tell his story: "Odysseus, listening, covers his face and weeps, though he has never wept before, and certainly not when what he is now hearing actually happened. Only when he hears the story does he become fully aware of its meaning." Arendt calls this capacity of the historical observer to "set [the story] right" "impartiality," as opposed to historical "objectivity," because it achieves a kind of intersubjective validity which does leave the realm of the human condition in favor of an Archimedean point. As a result, "all true historiography," and thus all true history, is grounded on this capacity to achieve impartiality. However, it is crucial to understand that this decision about the meaning and significance of an event or deed is not arbitrary: each event or deed is sui generis, having a genuine meaning that is unique unto itself—what Arendt calls "an emerging, shining quality" of historical "greatness" which only the impartiality of the historian can grasp. She believed that Kant, in the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment had provided the fullest explanation of this faculty of

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judgment which, as we have discussed, was laid out in her two lecture courses on Kant's political philosophy in 1964 and 1970.

In Arendt's lectures on Kant's political philosophy in 1970, she first seeks to gain support for the idea of applying the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* to politics by showing that Kant had all the pieces in place to discover the idea himself if he had had more time. Indeed, Arendt sees her theory of political judgment as completing Kant's unfinished political philosophy. She argues that Kant became aware of the political (defined in terms of Arendt's conception of politics) only very late in life, and after he had committed to the system of his critical philosophy. What led him to the discovery of the political was the rise of modern revolutionary activity, especially the French Revolution. The French Revolution seemed to indicate certain phenomena, distinct to the political realm, which did not fit easily into Kant's critical system, and Kant's writings which attempted to grapple with these political phenomena are what is commonly understood to be his political philosophy. The problem is that these political writings created what appears to be a flagrant contradiction in Kant's practical philosophy: politically, Kant could not bring himself to deny that spectacular greatness of what he called "the recent event;" yet, from the standpoint of the Kantian moral law, he was bound to condemn the actions of those who carried out the French Revolution. Arendt quotes Kant stating that despite all the "miseries and atrocities" of the event of the Revolution, it still "nonetheless finds in the hearts of all spectators...a wishful participation that borders closely on

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*cxxxiv* Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 9.
enthusiasm…For that event is too important, too much interwoven with the interest of humanity… Arendt thus argues that when political and historical phenomena where finally taken seriously by Kant, two principles appeared which seemed to be in direct conflict: a principle by which an actor should act, and a principle by which a spectator judges and evaluates the outcome and meaning of acts.

However, as we saw in Arendt's discussions of Aristotle and Marx, she believed that flagrant contradictions in the writings of great thinkers were the most important elements of their thought, elements which point to their deepest concerns and most potent ideas, and this is exactly what she claims concerning Kant's political philosophy. Kant's solution to this problem, as for many in the wake of the modern revolutions, was to replace political thought with a philosophy of history by adopting the postulation of the progress of the human species. The judgment of the spectators of history sought the meaning of the events in history and politics by judging teleologically concerning the moral progress the human species. An event was great to the extent it demonstrated the work of nature operating behind the backs of human beings to allow them to develop into fully free, rational, and moral beings. This was not a very satisfying political philosophy to Arendt: in the 1970 lectures she clearly dislikes it and presently turns toward a careful, immanent critique of Kant's political philosophy. However, in the 1964 course Arendt explains explicitly what she find so problematic in Kant's introduction of

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\(^{cxxxvii}\) Ibid, pp. 45-46.

\(^{cxxxviii}\) Ibid, pp. 48ff.


\(^{cxl}\) Arendt, Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy, pp. 8, 51-54.

\(^{cxli}\) Ibid, pp. 45-52.
the teleological principle of moral progress into judging history and politics.\textsuperscript{cxlii} Arendt argues that this teleological conception of politics and history is predicated on conflating nature with history, and fabrication with action: nature works like an artist through the process of history to bring about an ideally moral human species. The political problem, according to Arendt, is that by treating history and politics as natural, human plurality, the central condition of politics, is ignored, and humans are treated as members of species who are conceived as expendable in the ultimate progress toward moral perfection.\textsuperscript{cxliii} This of course echoes the previous criticism we saw Arendt direct toward post-French Revolution modern political theories that appealed to the category of history.

At this point, in the 1970 lectures, Arendt turns to an immanent critique of Kant's political thought. She argues that there are three different conceptions of humanity in Kant's thought corresponding to different aspects of his system.\textsuperscript{cxliv} The first conception is humanity as moral, rational, and intelligible, which corresponds to the second \textit{Critique}. The second conception is humanity as a species, which is found in his historical and political writings, and which draws its conception of judgment from the second part of the \textit{Critique of Judgment} which is concerned with teleological judgment. The third conception corresponds to the first part of the \textit{Critique of Judgment} about aesthetic judgment and, Arendt argues, to the very idea of critical thought in general.\textsuperscript{cxlv} This third conception is concerned with humanity as what Kant calls "sociable" beings, which Arendt argues indicates the fact that Kant here understood human beings to be

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\textsuperscript{cxlii} Arendt, "Kant's Political Philosophy" (1964), LOC 032253-59.
\textsuperscript{cxlii} Ibid, LOC 032255.
\textsuperscript{cxliv} Arendt, \textit{Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy}, p. 26-27.
\textsuperscript{cxlv} Ibid, pp. 41-44.
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conditioned by plurality and living in communities together on basis of common sense or sensus communis. Arendt then argues that the crucial mistake Kant made in his political philosophy was in locating action in the moral sphere, while locating political judgment in the sphere of nature and thus being led to employ the teleological judgment of the third Critique rather than the judgment of appearances that could be found in the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment. In other words, since aesthetic judgment is the only aspect of Kant's critical philosophy that appealed to the authentically political conditions of the human condition, i.e., humans as sociable or plural, he should have employed some kind of political version of aesthetic judgment rather than a historically applied version of teleological judgment when attempting to judge and grasp the meaning of political phenomena, and since he did not, Arendt proposes to do this for him.

Arendt argues, in other words, that Kant's aesthetic theory of judgment is uniquely constructed to be able to address key political conditions of human life such as worldliness, plurality, and natality. In the 1970 lectures, she argues that the solution to the apparently paradoxical relationship between the actor and the judging spectator can be found in the Kant's analysis of the relationship between taste and genius. This is this clearly the key moment in the 1970 lectures: all of her argument about the conflict between the actor and the judging spectator in Kant's practical philosophy had led up to this moment, and when she turns directly to the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment, it begins by point to the "analogous" relationship between taste and genius. This is crucial for

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cxlviii Ibid, pp. 61-62.
understanding her theory of political judgment, and by extension, her productive project in general: the analogous relationship between taste and genius to action and judgment is the key to understanding Arendt's theory of political judgment. As we saw in the first chapter, it has been argued that Arendt's theory, because of its embrace of Kantian aesthetic judgment, had no place for the deliberations of actors, but only for the contemplative activities of judgment. But the fact that the question of the relationship of taste and genius comes at such a pivotal moment in Arendt's argument in the 1970 lectures indicates that she believed it should be viewed as the central lesson we learn from the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. On the face of things, this may appear surprising to those familiar with her theory of political judgment since the idea of the relation of taste and genius does not appear in any of her other discussions of judgment, but in fact we now know that Arendt recognized this relationship when she first began formulating her theory of judgment in 1957. Her notes in the *Denktagebuch* from the August of 1957 show that she recognized this relation to express the relationship between action and judgment. She writes in note 34, August 1957, “Auch verhält sich Urteil und Tat in der Politik genau wie Geschmack und Genie [Also, in politics judgment and action behave like taste and genius].” This note can help us turn aside some of the criticism that is often directed at Arendt's non-sovereign theory of action. Due mainly to the fact that she emphasizes the unpredictability inherent in action so heavily in *The Human Condition*, Arendt's theory of action is often thought to be arbitrary. Yet, the 1957 notes indicate that before she even published *The Human Condition*, Arendt understood action

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dArndt, *Denktagebuch*, p. 582.
to be oriented through some kind of analogy to taste and genius. I will show momentarily that there is much more evidence supporting the idea that the taste and genius analogy was the central to how Arendt understood her theory of political judgment; indeed, this idea remained implicitly present throughout her work. With it in mind the conception of political judgment and practical reason it reveals turns out to be very powerful.

What needs to be understood in order to grasp the significance of the taste and genius relationship is that Arendt’s reference to taste and genius as “an analogous problem” in the 1970 lectures is something of a misformulation. It is not that taste and genius are analogous to action and judgment; rather, it would be better to say that both relationships draw on the same fundamental human capacities and structures of the mind, and thus virtually anything said in the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment can generally be applied in some sense to action and judgment. Just as aesthetic judgment or taste does, political and historical judgment takes its bearing from our common sense, the sixth sense that intuitively orients us in to a common world. This common sense happens by escaping our “subjective private conditions” and “putting ourselves in the place of everyone else,” i.e., by developing an “enlarged mentality.”

But as we saw in the discussion of the third Critique, this only applies to “everyone else” insofar as they are they are human beings endowed with a faculty of judgment, even if they fail use it: political common sense or sensus communis "extends over 'the whole sphere of judging

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Arendt, "Kant's Political Philosophy" (1964), LOC 032270, 291-292, 298.
subjects' but not further."\textsuperscript{cliii} In "The Crisis of Culture" Arendt writes: "Judgment, Kant says, is valid 'for every single judging person,' but the emphasis in the sentence on 'judging'; it is not valid for those who do not judge or for those who are not members of the public realm where objects of judgment appear."\textsuperscript{cliv} This does not mean that it is not valid for all human beings: indeed it is, but only generally—only under the hypothetical condition that all humans had developed a capacity to judge by participating in a \textit{sensus communis}. Thus, there are structures built into the very nature of judgment that, just as in aesthetic judgment, resist relativism and solipsism: any judging subject will increasingly become sensitive, civilized, and sophisticated in their exercise of judgment because their participation in the political \textit{sensus communis} will increasingly bring their judgment into consensus with other judges whom they trust.

The common sense is literally a kind of political sense of taste, a \textit{sensus communis} or enlarged mentality that we have cultivated for our political life in the world: "what Kant calls taste, Cicero called \textit{cultura animi}, a mind so trained and cultivated that it can be trusted with judging and taking care of the world."\textsuperscript{clv} When we begin to concern ourselves with the world (and particularly in our current era where the faculty of common sense has been undermined by modernity), our sense of judgment is crude, simplistic, and parochial, just like in matters of aesthetic taste. Arendt, drawing on the Roman notion of \textit{humanitas}, says that cultivating political judgment is done by what she calls "choosing

\textsuperscript{cliii} Ibid, LOC 032292.
\textsuperscript{cliv} Arendt, "The Crisis of Culture," p. 217.
\textsuperscript{clv} Arendt, "Kant's Political Philosophy" (1964), LOC 032298.
our company." We can cultivate an enlarged mentality or political sense of taste by carefully considering exemplary instances of judgment and taste and by participating in a community of citizens who are willing to offer their *doxa*, their judgment or opinion of the world and the events that take place there. In other words, we only participate in political debate with others who are willing judge, i.e., who are not trapped in ideological illusions, but who are working to cultivate their common sense connection to the political world, and we only study truly exemplary cases of judgment, such as those provide by the tradition of political thought. As we participate in this process of, in Kant's words, "reciprocal communication," and observe exemplary instances of judgment on our own, our sense of political taste will be cultivated more and more, and we will increasingly come to have a more sensitive, subtle, and sophisticated sense of political judgment; we will come to be truly broadminded, to have a truly "enlarged mentality."

Thus, at the end of "The Crisis of Culture," Arendt writes:

*Then we shall know how to reply to those who so frequently tell us that Plato or some other great author from the past has been superseded; we shall be able to understand that even if all criticism of Plato is right, Plato may still be better company than his critics...We may remember what the Romans...thought a cultivated person ought to be: one who knows how to choose his company among men, among things, among thoughts, in the present as well as the past.*

The process of cultivating political judgment or enlarged mentality is like progressively ascending up a mountain. We begin at the bottom with an uncultivated and crude understanding that is trapped either in our individual private conditions and in our

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*clviii* Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Ak. 355-356; Arendt, "Kant's Political Philosophy" (1964), LOC 032295.

community's unreflective prejudicial understandings, what Kant had called "common human understanding." But as we cultivate our judgment, we, so to speak, climb up the mountain and as we get higher and higher our perspective can take in more and more of the landscape, we can take on the viewpoint of more and more other perspectives—our mentality, in other words, has been "broadened" or "enlarged." In Arendt's words, we cultivate our judgment by "running, as it were, from place to place, from one part of the world to another, through all kinds of conflicting views, until it finally ascends from particularities to some impartial generality." But the key point is that this is still my own perspective. I have not left the world to achieve "objectivity" in the form of an Archimedean point; rather, I have gained an "impartial standpoint," a standpoint that sees more broadly than that of a private individual. In essence, political judgment is like a sense of political irony: I am, in Walt Whitman's words, "both in and out of the game." I have two different vantage points, one that is based in my subjective private conditions, and one that takes in a broader political landscape of perspectives.

Genius, on the other hand, draws on the same human faculties of spontaneity and natality as action. Both faculties involve what Kant called "spirit": the unique talent or natural endowment to bring something meaningful into existence that did not exist before. In "What is Freedom?" Arendt notes that action and art are similar in that while both the actor and the genius have certain motives and aims, the result of their activity is only free and meaningful to the extent it "transcends" those aims: as with art, action comes to have a meaning and significance that the actor could not have predicted when

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\[\text{Arendt, "Truth and Politics," p. 238.}\]
he first undertook the action.\textsuperscript{clxi} Arendt's attempts to distinguish art from action was something of a mild theoretical preoccupation for her: she can be seen trying to distinguish them from each other on a variety of occasions.\textsuperscript{clxii} The difference is that genius produces objects which add to our worldly civilization, while action manifests the unique identity of the actor, giving birth to a story that has the potential to be immortalized.\textsuperscript{clxiii}

The emphasis Arendt places on the unpredictable meaning and final result which art and action have to some readers, as I mentioned earlier, indicated that actors act arbitrarily. But in fact the deliberations of actors are no more arbitrary than those of artist genius. When a musician gives a brilliant rendition of a piece of music, clearly having the "aim or objective" of playing the song is not what make the performance great; rather, it is, as Machiavelli would say, the musician's virtuosity, his nature endowed talent and skill that allow the performance to "transcend" the sheer aim of playing a tune.\textsuperscript{clxiv} Arendt consistently associates the idea of virtuosity with the deliberation of action. Arendt believes that Machiavelli's concept of the interplay of virtù and fortuna, which was clearly heavily influenced by artistic endeavor and virtuosity,\textsuperscript{clxv} best describe the kind of deliberation involved in action. Indeed, while The Human Condition's treatment of action completely ignores the dimension of deliberative judgment which must be

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\textsuperscript{clxi} Arendt, "What is Freedom?" pp. 150-153.
\textsuperscript{clxiii} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 210-211; What is Freedom?" pp. 152-153.
\textsuperscript{clxv} In the 1963 lecture course version of "Introduction into Politics" Arendt points out that "Machiavelli living in this incredible flowering of the arts was always aware of a kind of competition between the artist and the political man: both are secular, both have as their object the world" (LOC 023827).
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associated with it, virtually any other time she deals directly with action, she associates it with Machiavellian virtù. It is, moreover, evident that Machiavellian virtù was, along with phronesis, one of the key influences on her theory of action in *The Human Condition*. In her 1955 lectures on Machiavelli, she writes:

Greatness as greatness of this world is constituted through virtù and fortuna. Fortuna is a constellation in the world which is visible only for virtù; fortuna is the appearing of the world, the shining up of the world, the smiling of the world. It invites man to show his excellence...But only together can greatness come into being. But the true fortuna which is more than chance sleeps unless virtù wakes her. World and man are bound together like man and wife: action fits man into the world like eyes fit us to see the sun...Action shows the world’s fortuna and man’s virtù at one and the same time.\textsuperscript{clxvi}

It is, moreover, clear that she carried this understanding of Machiavellian virtù as the deliberative element of action forward well after *The Human Condition*. Many of these lines from the 1955 course are directly reproduced in *Between Past and Future*, where Arendt states that “freedom as inherent in action is perhaps best illustrated by Machiavelli’s concept of virtù, the excellence with which man answers the opportunities the world opens up before him...”, that it is “the response, summoned up by man to the world,” and therefore is “the specifically political human quality.”\textsuperscript{clxvii} However, Arendt notes in the 1970 Kant lectures that this virtuosity of the actor would, as Kant pointed out, be sheer "lawless freedom" and "nothing but nonsense" without a sense of taste or political judgment which cultivates the skill and genius of the actor by providing "the discipline (or training) of genius; it clips its wings...gives guidance...brings clearness and order."\textsuperscript{clxviii} In other words, the virtuosity of action is only possible if taste or

\textsuperscript{clxvi} Arendt, “History of Political Theory: Machiavelli” (1955), LOC 024022-23.
\textsuperscript{clxvii} Arendt, "What is Authority?” p. 137; "What is Freedom?” p. 151.
\textsuperscript{clxviii} Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 62. These quotes are Arendt quoting Kant.

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judgment can orient it and give it a form that is sensible and communicable to other judging subjects.

The relation between judgment and action is thus fairly well articulated by Kant. But how does thought fit into this? Thought, according to Arendt, gives what she calls "depth" to judgment and action, it allows it to have a concrete historical meaning specific to itself. Without the depth and meaning thought provides, Arendt believes that Kantian judgment will essentially remain "aesthetic," i.e., it will remain superficial and only pay attention to the surface of things, while action will have no possibility for achieving its goal of immortalization, since ultimately only the reflection of history on action performed in a public realm can provide this. Sensitivity and cultivation are admirable, but they are ultimately not enough for true political judgment and action. Arendt cites as an example the "highly cultivated murderers" of the Third Reich, who read Hölderlin and listened to Bach, and had impeccable family lives. These individuals, she argues, were sensitive but also deeply thoughtless, and as a result political judgment failed them. In other words, from the standpoint of the deliberative judgment of action, it is evident that Machiavelli in *The Prince* was very much correct when he asserted political greatness or immortalization has certain built in limitations that revolve around the judgment of history. Arendt fully agrees with this: a truly virtuoso actor, though he can never be certain of how the story her actions initiate will turn out, like a great composer or a painter she has an intuitive sense that relates her skill with a political sense of taste and thoughtfulness. She can never be certain that her acts will be remembered as

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<sup>clxx</sup> Arendt, "What is Freedom?" pp. 151ff.
great, but she will be much more likely to be so than others who lack her talents and political common sense.

**Political Philosophy and Non-Sovereign Political Judgment**

We can finally now see how Arendt believed she had solved the problem of the relation between philosophy and politics. As we saw in the last chapter, philosophy and politics began taking separate paths toward *athanatizein* or immortalization with the emergence of the Greek *polis*: philosophy sought to realize thought alone, while politics sought to realize action alone. But as we can now see, Arendt believes that there was earlier an version of *athanatizein* which was employed by the Homeric poets and Greek historians that involved both thought, action, and judgment in the form of “impartiality.” This earlier version of *athanatizein* provides a kind of model for how the faculties employed by authentic political philosophy would relate to each other. Political philosophy is only truly authentic if it can relate thought to action via judgment in the context of political conditions such as plurality, natality, and worldliness. Because we are each unique and endowed with the faculty of beginning new things and performing unique deeds and events, and because we are each located at a different position on the world, there can never be a single, definite model of the relation of thought and action, such as the notion of "theory and practice" has always aspired to. The relation of thought and action will always depend on the insights of our own

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particular judgment—what Arendt calls our *doxa* or opinion—though we can expect to eventually come to some kind of agreement or consensus with our fellow judges if we aspire to impartiality by partaking in the *sensus communis*. In the final chapter, I will try to provide this idea with much more depth and concrete detail.
Chapter Eight: *Making Sense of Arendtian Political Judgment*

The Non-Sovereign Nature of Political Judgment

In this last chapter, I will explain the role I believe Arendt understood her theory of political judgment to play in her thought: a non-sovereign theory of judgment that was intended to apply to the non-sovereign theory of agency she articulated in texts such as *The Human Condition* and "What is Freedom?" Theories of non-sovereignty today take their bearings from Arendt's insight that political action is misconceived when it is articulated in terms of the sovereign engagement of a unified and unconditioned will.\(^1\) She argued that theorizing political action as sovereign is what lies at the roots of the tradition of political thought's entanglement with a fabricative model of political judgment, which imagines the relationship between thought and action to be simply the execution by those who obey a preconceived idea produced by a ruler. Her insight was that this understanding of political action leads to the identification of political action with violence, because only violence can unilaterally enact the intentions of a unified will.\(^2\) The moment action is conceived in unilateral terms of willful execution, it has lost contact with the phenomenal evidence associated with action, which always involves the

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creation of new realities and moves within a human web of relationships which responds and creates a new, unintended set of circumstances than the actor intended.

Arendt's notion of non-sovereign agency has previously been explored by Dana Villa, Patchen Markell, Linda Zerilli, and Sharon Krause.iii Such theories focus on how our concept of human agency is altered when various Arendtian political conditions are introduced, such as its essential involvement with speech, plurality, worldliness, relational relativity, and unpredictability. To the extent such theories seek to articulate the conditions of human agency more authentically, they are a salutary development in political theory; but they do have crucial weaknesses. To begin with, they struggle to explain how action could be oriented by judgment, since this notion of agency emphasizes the unpredictability and inter-subjective nature of such action. Markell's *Bound by Recognition*, for instance, articulates non-sovereign agency by going beyond Arendt and appealing to ancient Greek tragedy, and the result is a theory of agency that heavily emphasizes the tragic element of action's "frailty," its tendency to have consequences far beyond anything the actor expected and which recoil back on the actor.iv But in doing this, he is forced to take on the Greek tragedians sense that there is no real intelligent relation we can achieve toward our action before the fact. Villa's piece does address Arendt's theory of judgment's role in non-sovereign agency, yet it also illustrates the problems Beiner's criticism of Arendtian judgment as a-teleological raises.

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Villa's heavy emphasis on action as a-telos leaves the impression that worldly purposes and objectives play virtually no determinate role in judgment and action for Arendt. His account emphasizes what he considers the aestheticized nature of Arendtian action, as a "self-contained" existential activity, i.e., an activity which is a-telos, or done for its own sake in order to affirm the existence of the actor. Moreover, Villa's account is also highly abstract, and leaves readers bewildered about its connection to concrete human experience. This lack of concreteness is a general problem for these theories, because when they do attempt to bring concreteness to their theories—something Markell, Zerilli, and Krause each in their own ways attempt to do—they fall back on modern political categories related to social justice and equality, though with strong elements of a postmodern politics of identify and difference. Markell, for stance, writes that "My guiding rubric—'politics of acknowledgment'—must not be misunderstood. Such a politics consists in the first instance in a distinctive, yet fairly general, account of the meaning of justice in relations of identity and difference, one that is rooted in the ontological picture, and the diagnoses of injustice, that I have laid out over the course of the book."v

Is this reliance on modern and postmodern conceptions of social justice and equality a problem? I believe it is because such a reliance domesticates action, reducing it to something that is far too common and relatively harmless. vi The problem is that when humans act, in Arendt's view, the stakes are always exceedingly high, and the

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v Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, p. 178.
v Markell's 'tragic' interpretation of non-sovereign agency does deal with this burdensome character of action to a certain extent; nevertheless, I would argue that his ultimate concern with a kind of postmodern notion of social justice still domesticates action too much, making it lose its sui generis character.
consequences are far from harmless. They are risking something: their life and world as they know it. True action is extremely rare, and for good reason. Most people in fact avoid action if at all possible, because as Arendt repeatedly emphasizes, the consequences of action are burdensome, and require great labor in "carrying [the act] through." Action, because it requires so much courage and determination, almost by definition cannot be a matter of social justice, and the idea that it could be domesticated in this way shows just how diluted human freedom has become in the modern era. This does not mean that social justice is not a worthwhile pursuit, and Arendt certainly had no problem with it in principle. What she resisted was the idea that action could ever be reduced to a function of public policy and ever-increasing abundance. In essence, we have to recognize that political action for Arendt can never be a result of justice; it is instead the extraordinary origin of justice, and all other human worldly states of affairs.

In what follows, I propose to give a more concrete explanation of Arendt's idea of non-sovereign agency and the non-sovereign nature of the judgment that is associated with it, and once we understand these ideas we will finally be in a position to explain Arendt's productive project. The first section of this chapter explains the nature of non-sovereign agency as I believe Arendt understood it, the essential characteristic of which is its narrative character. The second section explains the non-sovereign nature of her theory of political judgment, in which I explain the differences between sovereign and non-sovereign forms of judgment, both of which are in some sense relevant to politics, but which nevertheless must be kept separate. In the last section I attempt to reconstruct Arendt's productive project, along with the central role it gave to Arendt's non-sovereign
theory of political judgment. I argue in this last section that her project was focused on renewing the political elements of what she believed to be the three sources of modern Western politics that derived from the ancient Greeks, the Romans republicans, and the modern revolutionaries. Unfortunately, in her view none of these sources were adequate models for a renewal of politics in the modern context. I therefore argue that her theory of non-sovereign political judgment was the "solution" that she developed to address the inadequacies of these models.

**The Narrative Nature of Non-Sovereign Agency**

The basic characteristic of non-sovereign political judgment is that it is the kind of political judgment that can best cope with the fact that human existence is *essentially* narrative in nature—that it is always already a story. Since each human life is a story, that story is the structure on the basis of which a human being has any kind of knowledge and experience. As we have seen, Arendt's claim about the narrative character of human existence grows out of her understanding of the conditioned nature of human beings. To say that humans are essentially conditioned beings means that they are creatures who have limits, and that these limits are *essential* to what and who they are. Humans can never get beyond them, just like they cannot jump over their own shadows. What we can do is articulate those limits, try to take their measure, and attempt to understand how they structure and condition our experience. In making this claim, Arendt is not just suggesting that we can discover something about human psychology through analogies to
novels, plays, or epic poems. She is asserting that the narratives humans write are structured the way they are because those narratives reflect the basic ontological character of the human condition. Human life is narrative because it enters a setting—the human condition—which is simply given: just like the stories we tell which derive from it, human experience can describe the setting, the human condition; but it cannot ever get beyond that condition, for we are not gods who live eternally but beings whose existence unfolds in time as a story.

Any narrative must have a setting. When we read a novel, we take the setting as simply given: the setting is the condition of novel. As we've seen, Arendt's work takes its starting point from an articulation of the context or setting—the background conditions—of our human stories or narrative, which she calls the human condition. Arendt describes three activities in *The Human Condition*—labor, work, and action—which respond to three fundamental conditions of human life on earth: the conditions of natural necessity, worldliness, and plurality. She refers to these conditions as the political conditions of human life. Strictly speaking, for Arendt the concept of the "political" is related to the condition of plurality, the fact that each human being is free, equal, and unique by virtue of their capacity for action, the ability to begin new things. Because of plurality, we all, as the main characters of our stories, must find a way to live with and give recognition to the many other on-going stories taking place around us. Without plurality, politics would be unnecessary; it is, as she says, the "conditio per quam" of politics. But in order for our various stories to do more than simply exist in sheer solipsism, with no relationship to

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other stories, we need a background conditions which can separate and relate our stories to those of others. These other conditions are thus the *sine qua non* for politics. Drawing on Heidegger, Arendt calls these political conditions the common world and its public realm. This common world is a home for humans on earth, providing a bulwark against natural necessity and a space of appearances, a public realm where we as actors—as whos with unique identities constituted through our life stories—can appear to each other. This common world provides the traditions, culture, history, and language of our agency and activity. Arendt argues that this space of appearances is reality. She is not concerned with the ultimate nature or status of reality, nor with the conditions of epistemic validity which it would underwrite. She is instead making a political claim: she is saying that whatever may be its true status, there always already unquestionably is something we call reality, a public realm, or a space of appearances.

Arendt's language can be more mysterious than is necessary. Fundamentally, a space of appearances is simply her word for relationships. In *The Human Condition*, she asserted that when humans act together, they generate "power," and the effect of power is the capacity to establish and maintain a space of appearances between the actors. When we forge relationships, something comes to exist between us, something which reveals and illuminates appearances in a particular way to the individuals within the relationship. But these more informal relationships depend on more stable and formal spaces of appearances which are the public realms of our various common worlds, i.e., our cultures and civilizations. The amount and kind of illumination will vary from space to space,

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ix Ibid, pp. 199ff.
and from civilization to civilization. Arendt considers the current era of Western civilization to be a period of more or less darkening of the public realm, since it is very difficult to distinguish one's self as an authentic "who" with a unique life story in the modern "social realm" which gives highest priority to conformity, hypocrisy, corruption, and leveling modes of human equality.

The public realm affords the opportunity for human beings to escape the futility of natural human existence and to immortalize themselves: to endow "their works, deeds, and words with some permanence and in arresting their perishability…to a degree at least, enter and be at home in the world of everlastingness…and find their place in the cosmos, where everything is immortal except man."\textsuperscript{x} The public realm, in other words, is the prerequisite for anything we do as human beings to have meaning or value in the world: when we think and draw out the meaning of our actions, it is to the illumination that the public realm provides that we refer to. Because of this, the public realm is the most precious thing there is to human beings. Political action is the highest kind action there is because it is the kind of action that takes place in a public realm which can illuminate the action performed by the actor so that it is afforded the possibility of being memorialized in history.\textsuperscript{xi} This is, in its most basic sense, why Arendt argues that

\textsuperscript{x} Arendt, "The Concept of History," p. 43.

political action is *a-telos*: it is performed for its own sake in hopes that it will be remembered and will offer the actor the opportunity to have her story immortalized.iii

All of this is the context or setting of the narrative character of human existence. But what does it actually mean to *be* a narrative—*to live a life as a story*? Arendt claimed that humans are not "whats," they are "whos."xiii They can never be defined, never be given labels, never meaningfully be placed in conceptual boxes: they are too interesting and dynamic. Unlike the animals, who remain members of species that revolve eternally in the cycle of the cosmos, humans are "the mortals,' the only mortal things there are...The mortality of man lies in the fact that individual life, a *bios* with a recognizable life-story from birth to death, rises out of biological life...[and] is distinguished from other things by the rectilinear course of its movement, which, so to speak, cuts through the circular movements of biological life."xiv The only way of coming to terms with the "whoness" of a human being is by learning her story, which will always transcend any definition that we use to try to capture her.

The two human activities which call this meaningful narrative structure into existence—and thus the two activities which allow humans to be distinguished from the animals—are thought and action.xv As we saw in the last chapter, thought is the human activity that grasps the meaning and significance of the events of our lives and puts them into narratives. We withdraw from the world into the gap between past and future when

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we think, and reflect on our lives and the lives of those around us. This reflection takes place in the medium of speech in two-in-one dialogue we carry out within ourselves. Thought, according to Arendt, produces meaning, and not knowledge, which is the result of a separate faculty, the faculty of cognition.\textsuperscript{xvi} She claims that everything we encounter outside the human web of relations can be captured in by conceptual knowledge. Humans however cannot; they can only be approached on the basis of meaning, something that continually slips from our grasp when we attempt to define it, but which we utilize every time we tell a story about someone or something. Meaning allows us to grasp which actions, deeds, and events have been important and significant to us, and which allows us to recognize how to frame them into a story that gives us a sense of our "whoness," our unique identity, and that of others. Meaning is what lends a story its significance, what reveals the "whoness" of the subject of the story. As a result, human actions are only redeemed and given meaning by the stories we tell about them.\textsuperscript{xvii}

Thought, however, would be a worthless activity of the mind if there was not a worldly activity that also moved in the medium of speech which provided the material for its reflections; that activity is action. Action is the subject matter of the narrative of a human life. Human lives are stories recounting actions, deeds and events. It is the specific, concrete, and \textit{sui generis} actions an actor undertakes that reveals the whoness of the actor, her unique identity. Only that actor and that actor alone would have summoned up that unique, particular response to the circumstances that were presented to her in the

\textsuperscript{xvi} Arendt, "Thinking," \textit{The Life of the Mind}, pp. 11-16; Arendt is here relying on Kant once again, in this case on his distinction between reason, which she reinterprets as "thought," and understanding, which she calls "cognition."

\textsuperscript{xvii} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 184ff, 236.
world. The action is something completely original to the actor, something that could never have been predicted on the basis of antecedent causes. Arendt argues that action is exclusively characterized by its extraordinariness, and thus human historical reality is the story of events, i.e., extraordinary, unusual, and thus significant actions. 

Arendt’s notion of action has both inspired and perplexed her readers since she first articulated it in The Human Condition. Many readers have struggled with her account of how human agency is altered to the point of unrecognizability in terms of the traditional accounts once the conditions human plurality are taken into account. To begin to understand Arendtian agency, the first thing that has to be abandoned is any simplistic conception of causality in terms of fabrication, i.e., of an effect as the result of an antecedent mechanical or efficient cause. If human life truly is at its basis a narrative or story, than the sense of causality associated with it has to be reconceived in a much more sophisticated manner. Philosophy has long found the very idea of causality difficult to defend, especially after Hume and Kant. But even beyond the metaphysically contested nature of the notion of causality, our phenomenal conception of causality has always been marked by much more sophistication than the mechanistic conception of cause and effect. Aristotle famously theorized causality in terms of four aspects of causation, none of which—not even causa efficiens—cohere exactly with the modern mechanistic conception of causality as cause and effect. In his essay "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger embraced this conception of causality, arguing that authentic

xix For a highly develop examination of the problems involved in mechanistic causality see, for instance, Charles Taylor's "How is Mechanism Conceivable?" in his Philosophical Papers, Volume I.
human causality is never sovereign causality: it recognizes that human action never truly enacts its will, but instead has the sense of cultivating and abetting that which proceeds out of physis or Being, for example in parenting, advising, or farming.xx

Although she almost certainly was aware of this neo-Aristotelian conception of causality Heidegger developed, Arendt developed a more dynamic notion of causality for the realm of human affairs. The causality of human potency she articulates does not just abet what is already proceeding out of Being; it is itself natal. It is the beginning of something new. To understand this, we might refer to Kant's discussions of causality in the Critique of Pure Reason. Kant understood mechanism (cause and effect) to be only one category of a threefold categorical account that included both "substantia et accidens" and what he calls "community" or "interaction."xxi This last category of interaction is much closer to the kind of causality Arendt understands human action to have, although her version is much more dynamic and potent. Kant refers to it as the notion of "a dynamic community," i.e., the fact that within a given community of phenomena they all are reciprocally interacting and determining each other and this interaction has to be understood dynamically and not successively.xxx Kant illustrates the idea by pointing to gravitation, the fact that it makes no sense to understand the relation between the earth and the moon solely in terms of the earth exerting a force on the moon or vice versa; rather, they interact, they exert a common force on each other. In other

xxi Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A80/B106ff.
xxii Ibid, A169/B211ff; A211/B257ff.
words, the notion of causality involved here is, as Kant says, "not successive but instantaneous."xxiii The notion of causality which I believe Arendt had in mind in her notion of non-sovereign action should be understood much more in terms of this sort of dynamic interaction than in the fabricative (e.g., sovereign) conception of cause and effect that arises out of causality's mechanistic aspect.

It is easy to find examples of dynamic causality in human life. Team sports are an obvious case of dynamic causality. In football or basketball, a good quarterback or point guard can never sovereignly and unilaterally enact his will. Rather, his leadership and decision-making abilities in fluid situations enable the team to execute together. There is an interaction and dynamism among the players that cannot be reduced to cause and effect. Another example is found in the art of persuasion. People in sales often point out that a skilled salesperson has to know when to stop selling her customer, has to find the right moment to let customer choose for himself to buy the product. These are, of course, not true actions in the profound, meaningful, and exceedingly rare sense Arendt finally means it, but they analogous phenomena. Actions in private life have similar qualities to true action, but they lack the revelatory character that comes from true action which takes place in some kind of public setting. But the point is that relationships are dynamic: any action requires a very subtle comprehension of the state of affairs the act will bring about between individuals effected by the action. When I relate to another person through action, I do not enact my will on them. Arendt insists throughout her work that the only

xxiii Ibid, A169/B211.
effect action has is to establish relationships; xxiv in other words, the moment I act in relation to another person, they simultaneously react to me. What results is not an effect, but a new dynamic state of affairs. Something arises between us, a relationship, which is fundamentally dynamic—what Arendt calls "a space of appearances" which separates and relates us—whose ultimate meaning I could never have exactly predicted and whose outcome I can never be certain of. This ultimate meaning, as we have seen, can only be revealed by the story of the relationship. This is why the analogy to art from the last chapter was so apposite. As with artwork, the actor can never be completely certain of what her actions will ultimately mean, but it is indicative of a skillful actor—an actor with virtù—to be capable of deliberating on a course of action that will end in a meaningful story, a story which reveals her "whoness."

In truth, Arendt's articulations human agency are much closer to phenomenal reality than anything produced in traditional accounts. There is nothing in life that is as exhilarating as the chance to truly act. It constitutes those rare moments in life—weddings, births, career choices, interventions, conversion experiences—where we know we are "laying it all on the line," so to speak, risking our life as we currently know it in order to initiate a course of action that expresses our "whoness," our unique identity, in a richer and deeper way that how our lives existed before. Action is certainly not at all equivalent to our capacity for free choice xxv: whether or not I choose to spend my Sunday morning working out, sleeping in, or going to church is not remotely an instance of

xxiv Arendt, The Human Condition, pp. 175ff, 190; "Introduction into Politics," The Promise of Politics, pp. 95, 190.
action. Indeed, it is not even clear if there is an unambiguous moment of choice involved in a particular action. Arendt notes that while action clearly involves some kind of initiation on the part of the actor, it also has to be "carried through," and this carrying through is just as much a part of the act or event. When a recent college graduate acts in undertaking to go to graduate school or decides to start his own business, it is not clear that there is even one specific moment of choice or initiation; rather, there might be a series of progressive choices and courses of action undertaken that when taken together amount to an action. What matters is not the specific instances, but rather whether there is a self-defining act that the actor can recount in the story of his or her life.

Moreover, this "carrying through" of the action can involve the actor, but not necessarily: other actors can see the action through for him. This is, for instance, often the case in the recovery movement. Very often, the fact that an addict or victim was able to transcend their history and begin establishing a productive and satisfying life for themselves and their family could never have been predicted on the basis of existing antecedent causes. Indeed, very often those that know them best have long since given up hope that they will ever change. The recovery movement illustrates the profoundly intersubjective nature of action that Arendt continually points to: addicts are the initiators of the act, in that they are ones who take the first step; but in many ways it is the support—the "carrying through"—which they receive from their peers in the movement.

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that allows them to, if not overcome completely, at least gain some kind of power over their addictions or traumas.\textsuperscript{xxvii}

But regardless of who carries it through, the action, event, or deed involves not just the initiation; it comprises a series of ongoing acts that progressively carry through the action, and moreover the skillfulness of the actor's capacity to carry it through—what, as we saw in the last chapter, Machiavelli called \textit{virtù}—is at least as important as the initial choice of the course of action itself. When parents decide what kind of parenting they are going to provide for their child, a great deal depends on what kind of child they are raising, the actual intentions of both parents (they may not agree as much as they think they do), the skill the parents have in carrying through their action, and openness to revising their plans if things do not go as they intended. In the end, it is likely that their parenting will look very different from what they intended; the question is whether the final meaning of their action is something like what they hoped for. The point is that in matters of action, there is no guarantee of success though it is undoubtedly true that there are actors with more or less skill. Arendt says, quoting Machiavelli, that "the most [the actor] may be able to do is to force things into a certain direction."\textsuperscript{xxviii}

The examples I am pointing to obviously skirt the sharp distinction Arendt draws between the public, where action in its purest form occurs, and the private, where it does not occur. It is important, however, to recognize that Arendt almost certainly believed

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\textsuperscript{xxvii} Studies have borne out the effectiveness of the recovery movement. For example, see Henry A. Montgomery, William R. Miller, and J. Scott Tonigan's study "Does Alcoholics Anonymous Involvement Predict Treatment Outcome?" \textit{Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment}, 12:4 (July-August, 1995).
\textsuperscript{xxviii} Arendt, "The Concept of History," p. 60.
\end{flushright}
that action in some form can occur beyond an authentic public realm like those in antiquity—though such non-political action may be much less elevated and, consequentially, less revelatory. While it is probably true that truly private action is impossible—since on action must be performed before others—it is likely that most action performed in the modern world is only of a very quasi-public nature. Arendt had argued in *The Human Condition* that the public and the private realms had become ambiguously meshed together in the modern world into what she called the social realm.\textsuperscript{xxix} This was a realm that merged elements of both realms in disfiguring ways. It took from the public realm its performative dimensions, and it took the elements of necessity and unfreedom from the private realm. The result was a sphere of conformity, hypocrisy, corruption, and hyper-consumption. It is thus extremely difficult to truly act in the modern world—to show one's excellence and be remembered—because the modern world makes this possibility so difficult. Still, it is an overstatement—partly due to Arendt's own tendency toward polemical statements in *The Human Condition*—that leads readers to believe there is no possibility for action at all in the modern world. A variety of textual evidence bears this out. A public realm is generated whenever people act together, and so most of our relationships probably involve some kind of informal public realm.\textsuperscript{xxx} In "Introduction into Politics," Arendt states that "wherever human beings come together—be it in private or social, be it in public or politically—a space is generated that simultaneously gathers them into it and separates them from one another…Wherever people come together, the world thrusts itself between them, and it is

\textsuperscript{xxix} Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 38ff.
\textsuperscript{xxx} Ibid, pp. 198ff.
in this in-between space that all human affairs are conducted."xxxii In Responsibility and Judgment, moreover, she states the there is such a thing as "nonpolitical action, which does not take place in public…"xxxii Even in The Human Condition there are discussions which suggest the existence of this kind of action in privately situated settings.xxxiii

It thus seems that what Arendt meant concerning action in the modern world is that it is generally much less revelatory than previous forms of action, though it does exist in a kind of twilight-like state between truly public action and sheer private activities like intimacy. It is easy to lose the forest for trees with Arendt's theory of the public, private, and social realms, and it has led interpreters such as Hanna Pitkin, for instance to accuse Arendt of "theoretical chaos.xxxiv Critiques like Pitkin's come from a basic misunderstanding of the status of Arendt's claims. Arendt's kind of theorizing, like Heidegger's, seeks to uncover the phenomena as authentically as possible, even if that comes at the expense of sharp, strict conceptual frameworks. Her account of ancient action was intended to indicate how it existed in its purest and an most authentic sense. This required a strict separation of the public from the private realm, such as was found in Athens and Rome. To the extent these strict separations have become extremely rare in the modern world, action has become much less elevated. Thus, I would argue that it is a basic misunderstanding of Arendt's approach to theorizing that leads readers to the conclusion that action can no longer take place at all in the modern world. It may not be

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xxxii Arendt, The Human Condition, pp. 42, 49.
action in its highest and purest form, it may be corrupted and conformist in its orientation, but it is still present in some less elevated form.

But no matter what the historical context, there is no question that true action is an extremely rare occurrence in any human life. It is not clear how often it happens—certainly not more than a few times in any given life. Nor is it clear that all humans are even given the opportunity to act, and if they are, whether they even have the courage to undertake an action. In the Greek oikos, Arendt is almost certainly right that there literally was no opportunity for action unless one was the household head who was able to leave the privacy of the home and enter the public realm. Household members simply had no opportunity to initiate, to take courses of action that revealed their "whoness." However, for those who did have the chance to act, doing so require a great deal of courage, for the action was performed for all to see in an authentic public realm, and thus they literally risked their lives. On the other hand, our modern world is characterized by a social realm where action is ambiguous. Most people in developed countries, if they choose to, have the capacity to act on some level, though the stakes are much lower and the action is less revelatory of their unique identities. Nevertheless, truly authentic action—that is, political action or action which takes place in a strictly separate public realm—is vanishingly rare, no matter what era one lives in.

xxxv Arendt, "What is Freedom?" pp. 154-155; The Human Condition, pp. 35-36, 186.
xxxvi Arendt, The Human Condition, pp. 198-199.
Non-Sovereign Political Judgment

We have now examined the political context, the conditions or setting, so to speak, both of human agency's narrative existence, along with its peculiarly modern version. We have furthermore observed the characteristics of this narrative existence, the fact that it is forged out of two fundamentally free human capacities, action and thought. What then is the role of judgment in this narrative character of human existence? As we saw in the last chapter, judgment is the mental faculty that takes the meanings we have gained in our reflective activity of thought and applies them to the world. In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt writes that when the world intrudes on the dialogue in thought which I have with myself, I can no longer be a "two-in-one," and must become one again. Judgment allows me to take the reflections I have gained in thought and apply them to the world and thus become "one" again. She writes that "judging…realizes thinking, makes it manifest in the world of appearances," and that when the thinking ego, which produces the narratives of our lives, "emerges from its withdrawal and returns to the world of particular appearances, it needs a new 'gift' to deal with them [i.e., judgment]." But in order to do this, judgment, as we saw, has to take account of other judging subjects through judgment's faculty of *sensus communis*, and as a result, judgment must essentially involve a process of fitting our narratives, the stories of our lives in a common world with other people's stories. Our individual stories are not the only stories in the world; there are a multitude of other stories, all of which must try to

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find their own place in the human world. The *sensus communis* which orients judgment allows each of our stories to fit into a world populated with a host of other stories, and furthermore, to allow these other stories, these other perspectives on the world, to improve and condition our own judgment and common sense.

Judgment thus allows us to fit our stories into a common world with other stories, to know how act and judge appropriately in the various unique situations that our life together in the common world presents us with. However, the fact that the non-sovereign judgment which fits us into the world always operates within the political conditions we have been discussing clearly indicates that there are elements of sovereignty or instrumentality we must engage when we judge. This is especially true in the modern era, where the modern science's Archimedean standpoint has become a fundamental element of the human condition, and thus in some sense conditions all our judgments in the modern world. Nevertheless, as I will argue in the coming pages, non-sovereign judgment means that when we deliberate on a course of action, the ultimate criteria of judgment is not the sovereign goals of instrumental rationality that can only think in terms of success or failure—though they can, of course, remain an influential elements in our deliberations. Instead, the ultimate criteria must be non-sovereign goals which derive from our narrative character, such as whether the act will affirm the common world and allow the actor to gain a measure of immortality. In this section, I want to explain how Arendt understood the distinction between sovereign and non-sovereign judgment. First, I will explain her critique of the tradition of political thought's sovereignty-based conception of judgment. After this, I will examine her account of the role of non-
sovereign judgment in politics in her essay "Truth and Politics," along with the sharp
distinction she draws there between political judgment and sovereign truth claims. This
distinction between non-sovereign political judgment and sovereign-based truth claims
can then be applied to any other mode of sovereignty-based reasoning (e.g., the logic of
political violence, law and public policy, etc.).

As we have seen, Arendt formulated her theory of non-sovereign judgment
because modern politics had come to understand political judgment solely and decisively
in terms of sovereignty, and begun to ignore the political conditions of human life:
plurality and worldliness. Political judgment in the modern era, in other words, had come
to be defined in terms of the enactment of a sovereign will (e.g., Hobbes, Rousseau, etc.),
and to be shaped almost exclusively by analogy to fabrication analogy, i.e., the execution
of a single, sovereign theory through application in practice. Political practice is
understood as the execution of the commands of the rulers by those whom they rule.
Thought and action have thus parted company: the one who acts does not need to be the
one who knows and commands. Political action in the modern era is generally
understood in terms of sovereign violence, i.e., as the doing violence to what is given
naturally in order to fabricate something that serves human ends. In modernity, that
human end is geared toward a greater and more fluid consumption by the society of
animal laborans, and thus political judgment is generally conceived in terms of public
policy, which is in Arendt's very broad sense a kind of sovereign violence, in that it is the
manipulation of large numbers of consumers in order increase the "smooth functioning"
of society.\textsuperscript{xl} This modern sovereign conception of political judgment, as we learned in chapters three and four, is almost fully a result of the development and tremendous prestige that modern science has achieved in Western society: it is the logical conclusion of the Archimedean outlook that has reversed the priority of the activities in the \textit{vita activa}. From the Archimedean perspective, labor and consumption are the most objectively important activities in human society, and therefore greater consumption is the central goal of politics. The rationalization and organization of the society by the activity that Arendt calls "work" is how political action end up being theorized then, because work is how humans organize labor and consumption. The activities of members of the society of \textit{animal laborans} must be "made" to instantiate the model of those who know best how to distribute its goods and services.

As we discussed previously, this modern sovereign conception of political judgment was not, according to Arendt, a result of the long standing emphasis on sovereign political judgment articulated by the tradition of political thought beginning with Plato, though this might seem like a reasonable assumption. The common emphasis on sovereignty between modern sovereign political approaches and the tradition of political thought was (or so it appears, anyhow) purely coincidental; but this commonality would, as we saw in chapter four, turn out to have profound consequences for the history of modern revolutionary activity. The tradition of political thought, as we saw in chapter two, was fairly inconsequential through most of the history of Western civilization, a kind of "superposed" theoretical outlook that failed to capture the

\textsuperscript{xl} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, p. 44.
authentically political nature of political practices that were founded on Roman principles of political action. This sovereign outlook of the tradition, despite its intuitiveness to our modern perspective, has proven itself to be much less innocuous than it seems, and moreover hardly represents the true realities of politics and action. Politics and action involve non-sovereign principles such as freedom and plurality in a common world; when politics has been approached solely on the basis of sovereignty, unfortunate consequences have tended to follow. As saw in earlier chapters, the tradition only became politically consequential after the Roman foundations of Western politics were undermined, and the modern revolutionaries began searching for ways to refound a public realm. They turned to the tradition of political thought, but this turned out to be a highly problematic because it ultimately led them to find principles of legitimacy for the enactment of new political orders on the basis of sovereign violence. They concluded, in other words, that in order to bring about something new, violence must be done to what previously existed. In order to attempt to cope with the inherent unpredictability of their political actions, modern revolutionaries turned to various philosophies of history which they hoped could then justify their reliance on the tradition's emphasis on sovereignty and the violence revolutionary outcomes it led to. There was a gap between the liberation that sovereignty could achieve and true political freedom which could not be theorized in the sovereign terms the tradition, and revolutionary theorists hoped that the dialectical movement of history would somehow resolve this incompleteness. The result was the history of ideological political movements that dominated Western history through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
The appeal to sovereignty has been an ongoing problem for modern practical reason on all its levels, including history, politics, theory, and in individual life. When judgment or practical reason is theorized in any of these contexts, it consistently falls prey to the sovereign outlook which presumes there can be—at least in principle or as a regulative ideal—one absolute answer to political and practical questions. Furthermore, appeals made to the tradition of political thought have turned out to only reinforce this emphasis on sovereignty in politics. Even the non-sovereign conceptions of practical reason the tradition offers, such as Aristotelian phronesis or Machiavellian virtù, still in the end fail to escape various blind spots rooted in sovereignty. Machiavelli, as we saw in chapter six, could not theorize non-sovereign action once he was forced to confront the problem of founding a new public realm, while phronesis, despite its deep insights into non-sovereign agency in certain respects, ultimately fails to adequately capture true human praxis. Its notion of deliberation as prohairesis fails to capture human freedom as natality, and instead limits it to simply the choice of means to a pre-given, eudemonic end which comes from the traditions of the community. As a result, to the extent traditions of modern communities now represent the sovereign outlook of modern science's Archimedean point, phronesis ultimately fails to escape sovereignty.

Because of this preeminence of modern science and its sovereign outlook, success has increasingly came to be recognized as the preeminent characteristic of good political judgment, because the success of experimental technique is the source of modern validity. This outlook was not effectively challenged by the tradition of political thought,

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whose purpose should have been to do so, as evidenced by Hegel and his intellectual and political descendants. Hegel and the various ideological philosophies of history that followed him showed that the model of political sovereignty of the tradition could be used to legitimize the idea that success was the defining characteristic of political judgment asserted by modernity. This assertion of success was be the basic proposition that Arendt sought to challenge in her non-sovereign theory of judgment.

In order to challenge the modern sovereign approach to political judgment, Arendt argued for a rehabilitation of the validity of the idea of political opinion or *doxa*, as she calls it after the Greek word. For Arendt, all political thought, debate, and history is a matter of the opinion: politics is of a nature which presupposes that any assertion we make comes from our own perspective, and the only way it can have validity for others is if we can persuade them to see things our way. In the realm of human affairs, in other words, there is no absolute validity such as are found in matters of truth claims. But this, however, does not mean that it has no validity. It is instead an intersubjective validity that, as we saw in the last chapter, is grounded in the human faculty of *sensus communis* or common sense, as observed in aesthetic judgment.

Arendt’s most explicit formulation of this idea came in her essay "Truth and Politics." This essay has been a target of several significant attacks, virtually all of which focus on her emphatic insistence that the validity of truth and politics are of different orders, and that it is vital that they remain as such. Truth, she argues, compels our

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assent: we have no choice but to accept its claims. Political judgment, on the other hand, is a matter of opinion: I must be freely and genuinely persuaded of its claims out on the basis of my common sense. On the face of it, this may seem difficult to grasp. Ronald Beiner, for instance, finds the idea unintelligible. He argues that in doing this, Arendt "slanders truth", when she labels it 'coercive' and 'tyrannical' by turns in the text of "Truth and Politics." Because of this, he asserts that Arendt ends up with a "defective phenomenology of political judgment" because it seems clear to him that any political opinion or judgment must have truth at the very least as a regulative ideal. He writes: “I engage in political debate with opposing points of views, not simply to add one more opinion to the wonderful diversity of opinions that are already circulating, but in order to try to challenge mistaken judgments and try to help the truth prevail. One fails to capture the authentic meaning of political judgment unless one understands sincerely intended judgment…as aimed at true judgment…”xliii Unfortunately, Beiner and a many other critics misunderstand the nature of her claims about truth and political judgment. Judging citizens do not offer their doxa in order to simply add to the "wonderful diversity of opinions;" the stakes, rather, are far higher than that, for as we saw in the last chapter, the more opinions I have access to, the more judgments I am exposed to, the better my common sense will be. Moreover, on my reading of "Truth and Politics," Arendt was by


no means "slander"ing" truth: her tone throughout the essay is in fact at least as defensive of truth as it is of politics. Indeed, at the very beginning of the essay, she states that what prompted her to write it was "the amazing amount of lies used in the 'controversy'" over *Eichmann in Jerusalem.*xliv In actuality, what she is above all interested in doing is explaining why any attempt to collapse the distinction between truth and political judgment or opinion is so dangerous.

As we discussed earlier, Arendt draws a distinction between cognition and meaning, a distinction she maintained from her earliest theory of judgment, "Understanding and Politics" (1954), where she formulated the distinction as that between knowledge and understanding.xlv "Knowledge and understanding," she asserts there, "are not the same, but they are related. Understanding is based on knowledge, and knowledge cannot precede without a preliminary, inarticulate understanding." In the context of the "Truth and Politics" essay, Arendt characterizes the distinction as one between truth and *doxa,* opinion, or judgment. It is crucial not to interpret what Arendt is claiming about truth and political judgment in terms of epistemology: she is not attempting of "establish" the validity of truth. What she is presenting, rather, is a phenomenology of truth: she is searching for the authentic experience of truth, and how it is related to politics.xlvi As to the status of its validity, she simply assumes that there is

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such validity, and that that validity is something that is always presupposed in the two
things humans have in common: the structure of their minds and the common world.\textsuperscript{xlvii}

She begins the essay by drawing a distinction between rational truth and factual
truth. Rational truths are a function of the structure of the human mind and result is such
truth claims as are found in mathematics, science, and philosophy.\textsuperscript{xlviii} Factual truths are
occurrences in human history. To clarify what she means, she conveys the story of when
Clemenceau was asked who was responsible for the outbreak of World War I, to which
he replied, "This I do not know. But I know for certain that they will not say that
Belgium invaded Germany."\textsuperscript{xlix} There is clearly a profound difference in the strength and
reliability of the two different forms of truth, and Arendt is particularly concerned to
examine just how vulnerable factual truths can be to manipulation once they have been
politicized, since such truths always rely on the memory of human beings.\textsuperscript{1} But
regardless of their relative vulnerabilities, Arendt insists that both rational and factual
truths have a validity that is not political: they are established by specific individuals
whose vocation is to arrive at these truths outside of the political realm and its inherent
relativity. She calls these individuals "truth-tellers," as distinguished from the citizens
who occupy the public realm.\textsuperscript{li} Truth-tellers, whether rational or factual, rely on
objective procedures to arrive at their claims, whether it is through reason, logic, and
experimentation in the case of rational truths, or through the careful examination of

\textsuperscript{xlvii} Ibid, pp. 226-227.
\textsuperscript{xlviii} Ibid, pp. 226-227.
\textsuperscript{xlix} Ibid, pp. 234-235.
\textsuperscript{1} Ibid, pp. 236-239.
\textsuperscript{li} Ibid, pp. 225-232.
evidence such as eyewitness accounts, documents, records, and monuments. They both thus aspire to establish their claims on bases of the compelling force of truth. If we recall Arendt's account of the two-part structure of the human world, Arendt claims that it is made up of the human artifice, which is created through the activity of work and includes all our civilization's technology, science, art, history, and literature, and the web of human relations, which arises out of the human activity of action and exists as a kind of "overgrowth" on the human artifice. Truth-tellers are in that sense "workers" on the human artifice, there to establish the objective structural elements of the common world, while citizens always exist within the web of human relations at different locations in the common world's public realm, and thus having differing perspectives on these objective facts.

In contrast to truth-tellers, Arendt asserts that it is the vocation of citizens to pass judgment—to offer what she calls their doxa—on these matters of fact. In "Truth and Politics," Arendt calls this kind of thought representative: "I form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoints of those that are absent." As we noted in the last chapter, judgment or doxa is not about ingesting everyone's actual views within our own—we are not "counting noses," she says. Rather, we are cultivating our judgment, developing an "enlarged mentality" which takes in the standpoints of as many other judges as possible. In doing so, I gain not the "objectivity" and self-evidence that truth-tellers are entitled to, but what

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lii Ibid, p. 239.
she calls "impartiality," a position that is still my own, but which has been cultivated to be able to take in the perspectives of as many other judging citizens as possible. Thus, for Arendt opinion or doxa does not simply refer any unreflective comment someone might drop in conversation about politics; an opinion is only truly an opinion if it has been formulated out of a cultivated sensus communis.

The upshot of all of this is that critics like Beiner are wrong to claim that Arendtian political judgment fails to account for cognitive elements in political judgment. The validity of truth is presupposed in political judgment to the extent that political judgment is always concerned with passing judgment on the meaning of pre-existing truths established in the human artifice of the common world. In other words, before the validity of the political sensus communis can be appealed to, the validity of the objectivity of the truths which we are to pass judgment on must first be established. The point that Beiner and other critics with similar critiques (Habermas, Steinberger, etc.) miss is that the crux of the matter turns on the question of validity. For Arendt, the nature of the validity of matters of factual and rational truth require that there should be, in principle, no debate about their conclusions: there is only one right answer, and thus in this sense truth is indeed tyrannical and compelling. However, in matters of political opinion, the nature of the validity being asserted means that it is quite possible for different judging subjects who are located in different locations in a common world to have different opinions on political matters, yet still be "right" in some sense in each case.

When I say "this war is unjust" or "this policy wrongly restricts freedom" or "government surveillance has gone too far," there are of course objective facts that I draw on, but I cannot ever assert that my claims are the only conclusions that have the force of political validity. To say that another judge who is truly employing their common sense is simply "wrong" would be something like if I and another person were standing on opposing sides of a house. If the other person says there is three windows in the back of the house, it would ridiculous for me to say they are "wrong" simply because I cannot see the windows behind the house. It is true that, as we noted in the last chapter, as we debate about political affairs we in all likelihood will begin to approach consensus; but there is no guarantee that this will be the case. The problem with Beiner, et al.'s analyses is that in matters of political judgment, thinking in terms of right or wrong answers is not the correct way to approach the question; rather, it has to do with who has a more illuminating and perspicuous understanding of our common world and the matters we are examining. For Arendt, there is an objective world that separates us from and relates us to our interlocutors: assuming they are capable of using their faculty of judgment (something by no means guaranteed), we may very well have different opinions, but both, so to speak, still be "right." The real question is to try to determine who is more right, who has a more perspicuous and cultivated sensus communis, who has the deeper, richer feeling for reality.

When a citizen passes judgment by forming an opinion, they are in essence offering a political interpretation of the facts established by the truth-tellers, but this "political" aspect is the crucial element. As we discussed in chapter five, all political and
historical interpretation is grounded in human historicity, the capacity to put our lives into narratives. Humans, as thinking beings, are always in a process of interpretation, of putting their lives in narratives. This capacity of human thought to put our individual activities into narratives is the same capacity we use when forming political opinions about the world we live in, to frame a narrative, so to speak, about it. It becomes a "political" interpretation, a political narration, when it has been fitted into the common world by the faculty of judgment, by having gained an impartial standpoint or enlarged mentality through representative thought. As a result, only judging citizens can truly be political theorists and authentic historians, because only judging citizens have access to a common sense feeling for a public realm in a common world. There will therefore never be any single, correct political theory—no final, sovereign account of politics—because no political theorist can ever escape having to render their theories as doxa, and the one great mistake, from Arendt's perspective, that the tradition of political thought made was to imagine that they could escape the fact that political opinion, no matter how ambitious, is always be rendered as doxa. In the end, all citizens thus are responsible for recognizing that they are not just citizens alone, but also political theorists and historians: responsible political opinions must at least on some level be capable of accounting for all of these activities.

This is why, as we saw in chapter six, Arendt recognized that the original political theorists were the historians, because the historians were the original practitioners of impartiality. For Arendt, the ultimate vocation of historians is not simply to document

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facts, but eventually to capture the true meaning of the story: "[the ancient historians] did not merely report, they also set [the story] right…”

This capacity of the historian is to "set it right" does not come from his capacity to document facts and is not directly a result of thinking's endless narrative-producing quality; rather it comes from the "impartiality" achieved by the faculty of judgment, the ability of judgment to choose the appropriate narrative or interpretation that represents the true significance of the facts—to get the story right. When a political leader fails to measure up, so to speak, in speech to a particular political or historical moment, generally his constituents become offended and this ultimately undermines their confidence in him. The reason for this should be clear now: he has failed to put the situation in the appropriate narrative, failed to capture its significance. A political leader who lapses into clichés rather than capturing the significance of the moment betrays a lack of political skill, an inability to frame the story appropriately by appealing to the sensus communis of his community of judging citizens. On the other hand, we rightly recognize leaders with the power to communicate well as leaders with true political skill, leaders who have the ability to measure up to the moment in speech by appealing to some kind of political sensus communis (think of Pericles' funeral oration or Churchill during the Battle of Britain). Whether we realize it or not, all political judgment in the end must invoke such non-sovereign political categories.

Thus, when the truth-teller moves beyond the sheer act of providing facts, and seeks to frame facts appropriately—to explain their significance—she is no longer really acting in the capacity of a historian, and instead has now begun acting in her capacity as a

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Arendt, "Thinking," The Life of the Mind, p. 132.
citizen, in that she is appealing to some kind of political common sense connection to a common world. Truth-tellers are always also judging citizens; but it is crucial to understand that when they do so, they are acting in different capacities, utilizing different faculties, and claiming different modes of validity. In an unpublished lecture from 1967 called “Intellectuals and Responsibility” she wrote: "Intellectuals have greater responsibility because they know more…[but that] knowledge does not mean that they are able to arrive at better…judgments…Their special responsibility lies in giving facts of the matter after which they resume their roles as judging citizens like everybody else…Each one of us wears two hats. We…teach the truth as we see it…[but] in addition, we are also citizens, and take our responsibilities." When a truth-teller makes a truth claim, she is in a very real sense attempting to coerce the assent of those around her; however, when she draws conclusions about the political significance of those claims she must woo and persuade those around her to judge similarly to her. She cannot avoid having to take on both roles and to engage in both activities. When she tries to collapse both activities into each other, according to Arendt, confusion and danger can only follow.

It is difficult to exaggerate how important it was to Arendt that the difference between of these two modes of validity be maintained. Her work had made her very aware that the tendency to collapse the distinction between the objectivity of the truth-tellers and the impartiality of political judgment is what lay behind the ideological and

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totalitarian political thinking that had become so virulently dangerous in the first half of the twentieth century. At first glance, it may seem counter-intuitive to suggest that appealing to the higher standard of certainty implied in the ideal of objectivity could lead to more dangerous results when applied to the political realm; however, it turns out that this has very much been the case. The reason for this is that what actually happened in modern political history was that political opinions went on being political opinions, i.e., reflections and doxa of specific individuals about a common world, yet these opinions were attributed the kind of validity which only truth can obtain. The result was a variety of ideologies—Marxism, Fascism, Leninism, Anti-Semitism, Liberalism, Conservatism, Socialism, etc.—all of which began simply as opinions, but ultimately claimed to be the truth. When this happens, it becomes impossible to rationally distinguish between what is fact and what is opinion, since they both aspire to the same form of validity. As a variety of ideologies with radically different worldviews all claimed to hold a monopoly on objectivity, facts increasingly came to be treated as mere matters of opinion, mere inconveniences. Competing ideologies came to believe that they could pick and choose their own sets of facts, could even manufacture facts if necessary or, in the case of totalitarian regimes, simply rewrite history altogether, and be justified in doing so because it was the ideology which represented reality, not the facts.

Even today, we see many of these same political pathologies in our debates. Many political movements regularly assert their belief that they are entitled to report their

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own sets of facts and justifying it as presenting an alternate point of view, such as in the case of those who deny man-made global warming, a theory whose validity should be a matter of the validity truth-telling and not of political judgment. This kind of politicization of scientific evidence is why Arendt was so emphatic in "Truth and Politics" about maintaining the distinction between truth and opinion. While the establishment of truth by truth-tellers is open to the same kind of human error all human activities are open to, it is dangerous and foolhardy to ever politicize the process of truth-telling. For Arendt, the relativity inherent in politics requires the existence of an objective common world to give it stability, and to the extent truth-telling is one crucial activity we engage with in order to add to this stable human artifice, any attempt to politicize that process can only be destructive of both our politics and of our common world.

If we now return to the question of the relationship between sovereign and non-sovereign political judgment, it should now have started to become clear that, though the former will likely always be an influential component in political activities, it is the later that must always have precedence. Like any other human activity involving sovereign judgment, truth-telling is a matter of expertise and therefore claims a kind of validity that is not political, is not rooted in human plurality and worldliness, does not express a doxa. The standards it strives for is not persuasive political standards but compelling standards: it seeks to compel the assent of those it delivers its truth to. In this appeal to expertise, it is like any other matter of sovereign judgment such as political violence in matters of war fighting and policing activities, or even in public policy. To the extent a particular
activity calls for such expertise, there is clearly nothing wrong with the application of such compelling or, as it were, "tyrannical" standards to the specific activity. But Arendt's point—in direct contradiction to Plato's claims about the need for expert knowledge in political leadership—is that these matters of sovereign judgment should never *politically* sovereign; indeed, if Arendt's conception of politics is correct, political sovereignty is literally an oxymoron. One of the things the modern world has clearly gotten right then is the insistence that expert knowledge such as truth telling and political violence must be answerable to the political judgment of leaders elected by citizens. Sovereign judgment must always take its bearings from the non-sovereign political standards of historical greatness and the affirmation of the common world, for these standards are the only final justification for any act of sovereignty. Thus, in the Machiavelli lectures she writes: "[If] war is fought, [then] its end is victory, [and] all means are permitted, [but only with the stipulation that it is] victory for the sake of Italy, [and] there comes [the] limitation... Without Italy your victory has no meaning, [and is simply the] glorification of violence."¹️ The public realm, in other words, is the ultimate justification and criteria for all political action.

The challenge this the critique of sovereignty presents to the tradition of political thought is dramatic and quite radical. In the 1954 manuscript "Philosophy and Politics: The Problem of Thought and Action after the French Revolution," Arendt speculated about what an political philosophy in which political conditions were genuinely

¹️ Arendt, "History of Political Theory: Machiavelli" (1955), LOC 024021; the quote is very rough, so I have edited it so that the meaning is clear.
accounted for would truly have to look like. As we have seen in this chapter and the one preceding it, the faculties that are directly involved in politics and political judgment—thought, judgment, and action in a common world—render a true sovereign judgment about political matters impossible. It simply cannot exist. Political matters are not of such a nature. This, of course, does not mean that the answers we give are not grounded in our involvement with an objectively given common world and human condition; it does, however, mean that we each, as citizens, will have our own unique perspective rooted in our plurality and location in the common world, and that we also will have greater or lesser levels of perspicuity in judging depending on our political talents and experience. As we refine our judgment through deliberation and participation in a political sensus communis, we may expect to increasingly find consensus with those we deliberate with, but we can never expect to discover the absolute and sovereign "truth" in matters of politics.

**Judgment and the Renewal of Modern Citizenship**

We can now finally deal with the nature of Arendt's productive project. This question has troubled Arendt scholars for many years in large part because she was so elusive about the specific nature of her project. As a result, the account I will provide entails a certain amount of informed reconstruction and inference. It is commonly recognized that her political project—the positive or prescriptive element of her political

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thought—involves an attempt to revive the Western tradition of citizenship. Arendt believed that participation or political action in a public realm, what she called public happiness or freedom, could provide the antidote to the increasing dominance of necessity in modern human affairs. On the face of it, this has always seemed like an unrealistic proposition. However, I will explain why her attempt to revive the idea of citizenship in the form of a strongly participatory mode of political action is not as unrealistic as it seems, and indeed that doing so may be an urgent necessity. Arendt's theory of political judgment is the key to understanding why this is the case. I have been claiming throughout this study that non-sovereign political judgment was the focus of Arendt's productive project. I want to argue in conclusion that this notion is central to her project to revive Western citizenship. For Arendt, citizenship and political judgment were inseparable: to engage in one activity always on some level meant taking part in the other. Nevertheless, Arendt's positive or prescriptive project focused on non-sovereign political judgment because it was only by way of political judgment that citizenship in the modern world could be renewed and maintained. One could say that while the "goal" of Arendt's project was to revive public freedom in the form of the renewal of citizenship, her "way" to do so was through the establishment of non-sovereign political judgment.

These terms "goal" and "way" of course are metaphorical. If they were taken literally they would very quickly lead to paradox, since as we have seen, political judgment is only available to those that have a common sense connection and commitment to the common world and its public realm, i.e., to those who are true citizens. The obvious conclusion would then be that neither is possible in the modern
world. We can, however, probably set this worry aside. Arendt did not believe that citizenship and judgment had completely died in the modern world, though they were hard to find. Her project of returning to the roots of our political experiences in order to retrieve those original experiences through "pearl diving," was essential for she hoped that we would be able to revive them in what our world has become. Thus, to the extent there is any judgment and citizenship at all remaining in our world, to the extent we still have access to these experiences on some level, this means that we can begin to cultivate them.

In the "Preface" to *Between Past and Future*, Arendt discusses the idea of freedom as political action in the public realm. She begins by pointing to the experiences of the actors in the French Resistance, such as René Char, who after the political collapse of France had been unexpectedly thrown into political affairs. Char indicates that the experience of the resistance was unlike anything else he had experienced. After the war, when politics returned to the stale old bitter struggles of competing ideologies, there was a vague sense among the former comrades-in-arms that "they had lost their treasure." Arendt asked. "What was this treasure?" Why could they never again, according Char, quite clearly locate it in public or private life? The reason for this, according Arendt, was that there was "no testament" that named the treasure, no "tradition" that allowed the actors to make sense of it. Arendt's productive project was an

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attempt to name and give meaning to that lost treasure, which she would variously call
political action, public happiness, public freedom, or citizenship.\textsuperscript{lxiii}

Arendt's only explicit discussion of her productive project comes in the 1969 course "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" where for the first time she tipped her hand about broad nature of that project. After a short discussion of the break in tradition in the modern era, she argued that this did not mean that we have no access to fundamental political experiences of the past which seem no longer available: they remain present in our language. "The past and its relevance are by no means identical with the tradition and its sacredness. The past is present first of all in the language we speak. All of our terminology in these matters, especially in political matters, is first Greek, second Roman, and third belongs to the revolutionaries of the Modern Age."\textsuperscript{lxiv} Arendt is here essentially summarizing all of the her productive work on politics during the previous decade and a half. It is no coincidence that the word "citizen" was treated as a sacred appellation by each of the original actors who took part in these experiences. Each of these three languages offered unique experiences of true citizenship in the form of political action in the public realm which Arendt had attempted to articulate in various writings, and each had shown her something different about what it meant to experience the freedom in political action which only true citizenship could offer, along with the challenges that our modern age now presented to its revival. The


\textsuperscript{lxiv} Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" (1969), LOC 024421. I have edited the passage slightly to smooth out the language.
modern revolutionaries, as Arendt argues most comprehensively in *On Revolution*, showed why it has been so difficult to perform authentic political action and to realize the political experience of true citizenship in the modern era. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt showed that the Greeks, as the originators of the political experience of citizenship, offered a kind of purity in that experience which never existed again since. Finally, in "Introduction into Politics," "What is Authority," and in various other places, Arendt indicated how the Romans showed that this political experience of citizenship could become a source of stability and enduring freedom in the world, and as a result, she seemed view them to a certain extent as a kind of historical ideal of what political action and citizenship could become again. Each of these experiences from the Western civilization's political history offered her unique insights into the nature and possibilities for genuine human freedom in the world, i.e., political action.

As we saw in chapter four, Arendt argued that the modern revolutionaries were confronted with the problem posed by modernity's undermining of the Roman foundations of authority. Though they did not realize it, the challenge they faced was with how to "revolve back" by refounding this public realm, how to build a "new house where freedom can dwell."\(^{lxv}\) It was same problem faced by Char and members of the French Resistance after the war: they had no language, no "testament," to give them guidance in the task of foundation a new authentic political order. Because of this, modern revolutionaries repeatedly turned to the categories of tradition of political thought, especially in the line proceeding through Marx which believed that philosophy

\(^{lxv}\)Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 34.
could discover in history the guide to orient their political action in order to allow
liberation to become freedom,\textsuperscript{lxvi} but unfortunately the tradition's broad understanding of politics in terms of political sovereignty meant that their attempts at refounding were doomed from the start. Arendt, as we have seen, argued that there is liberation, and there is freedom. The tradition's notion of sovereignty could only create circumstances of liberation, since it had no categories for theorizing the freedom that would come after it, a freedom that can only exist in the action of citizens in a public realm. The closest the revolutionary theorists ever came to accounting for the unpredictable outcomes of the political actions they witnessed during the revolutions was in the contingency of history. Their philosophies of history, however, were inadequate to the task since they remained trapped in the categories of political sovereignty, even when they assumed dialectical form. The modern revolutionaries' failure was thus overdetermined in part because of the overwhelming power of the social question, but also because the model of political judgment they appealed to was the sovereign fabricative model of the tradition of political thought. They had no categories for understanding the dynamic nature of political action, the fact that there finally can be no guarantees of success in political judgment, and indeed that success is not even the ultimate standard of appeal in politics.

In response to the failure of modern revolutionaries to found a new public realm for Western politics, Arendt looked to the Greeks and the Romans, the "twin peoples of antiquity,"\textsuperscript{lxvii} for insight into what an authentic politics would look like. In her search for the originating experiences of politics, the Greeks' experience seemed to be the first and

\textsuperscript{lxvi} Ibid, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{lxvii} Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," \textit{The Promise of Politics}, p. 163.
purest experience politics, and therefore also perhaps the most foreign to our modern politics, and she used this foreignness to give *The Human Condition* a powerful polemical effect. The Greeks understood their political activities in the *polis* in fiercely agonistic terms, as the primary space of self-disclosure, a place where their individual excellence could be judged by and measured against their peers in a kind of "organized remembrance." Demonstrating their excellence or "virtuosity" in these political activities through political action was seen as the primary means to achieving immortality or *athanatizein*. Because of this, the Greeks understood politics as fundamentally an activity where everyone had an equal right to show they excellence, and where no one could assert rulership over anyone else—a space where actors could move freely among their peers.

The original political experience of the *polis* found its expression in the Greek word for political equality *isonomy*, which literally means "no-rule." *Isonomy* was a profoundly different idea from how modern politics understands political equality, an understanding which can only deal with equality in political terms that emphasize sameness and conformity. The Greeks' political experience recognized the natural inequality of the individual citizens, a recognition that she believed was based on their sense of the fundamental political concept of radical plurality, the fact that each human being is unique and *sui generis*. Because of this radical plurality, the Greeks

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lxix Ibid, pp. 48ff, 55ff, 197ff; cf. "What is Freedom?"
recognized that (Aristotle's claims notwithstanding) there was nothing fundamentally political about human beings as individuals. The fact that they are so radically plural means that these unequal actors must somehow be "equalized," i.e., that they stand in need of being "relativized" by a public realm which can separate and relate them to each other. All of this was the basis for the sharp distinction they drew between the public and private realms, which corresponds to the distinction Arendt drew between liberation and freedom. The private realm represented the sphere of the household where we must be liberated—we must gain sovereignty—over natural necessity, and therefore whatever equality we have there is derived from our basic natural needs as animals, and thus laborers are animal laborans. However, the Greeks had the opportunity for true freedom when they entered the public realm, which they experienced as a kind of "second life." This second life was free from coercion of any kind. Arendt writes that the Greeks believed that politics "begins where the realm of material necessity and physical brute force ends." In this situation of "no-rule," the original meaning of politics was "that men in their freedom can interact with one another without compulsion, force, and rule over one another, as equals among equals, commanding and obeying one another only in emergencies…but otherwise managing all their affairs by speaking with and persuading one another." It is this high premium placed on persuasion over coercion in their political life that is what is essential to what it meant to be political. This, of

lxxiii Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 215
lxxviii Ibid, p. 117.
course, did not mean that matters involving material necessity or warfare and violence could not be discussed insofar as they pertained to public affairs, though some of her critics such as Hanna Pitkin, Richard Bernstein, Sheldon Wolin, and Peter Euben have read her as suggesting otherwise. Rather, to be political, she argued, concerned not the content of the conduct of public affairs, but the manner in which it was conducted. What mattered politically was not what was done, but how it was done: "In the polis, providing for life's necessities and defending itself were not at the center of political life but were political only...to the extent that decisions concerning them were not decreed from on high but decided by people talking with and persuading one another." Arendt points out that the Greeks were well aware that other forms of organization such as responsible tyranny were more efficient, and were willing to utilize them when absolutely necessary. They purposely held to the messier, more imprecise "political" way of life because only such a way of life allowed for their conception of freedom as "no-rule." While Greek political organization may have been messier and less efficient, at least in the sense of accomplishing short term goals, it also allowed for a kind of political judgment which was inherently superior to that of any possible tyrant, what I have been calling non-sovereign political judgment. Arendt argues that the Greeks understood that only through the exchange of opinion, of doxa, by citizens with a

common interest in the life of the polis, could an understanding of the common world that bound them together come about.\textsuperscript{lxxxii} No single individual, no tyrant, could provide the insight into their common world which their "incessant talk" could give. She argues that through experience in polis life the Greeks developed a form of "impartiality," the ability to gain an enlarged mentality, which as we have seen is another word for having the political sensus communis required for non-sovereign political judgment.\textsuperscript{lxxxiii}

Nevertheless, Arendt's assessment of the Greek polis experience was decidedly less sanguine than is commonly believed, her lionizing comments in The Human Condition notwithstanding. Because of The Human Condition's polemical character in relation to modernity, she seemed there to de-emphasis the aspects of Greek political life that troubled her. One aspect that clearly troubled her was the growing alienation of politics from philosophy in the Greek polis, which suggested that political action within it would become superficial, short-sighted, and reckless. Prior to the period of Pericles, Arendt argues that the polis always relied on the poets and historians—whose activity united thought and action—to provide immortalization for their activities.\textsuperscript{lxxxiv} However, the era of Pericles saw the increasing alienation of thought from action, as the two activities increasingly came to pursue immortality along separate ways of life in philosophy and politics.\textsuperscript{lxxxv} This problem played itself out in another aspect of Greek politics that troubled her: the Greeks' agonistic and highly individualistic form of political

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{lxxxii} Arendt, "The Concept of History," pp. 51-52.
\bibitem{lxxxiii} Ibid, pp. 51-52.
\end{thebibliography}

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action. She wrote that this agonistic spirit of the Greeks' political activities "eventually was to bring the Greek city-states to ruin because it made alliances between them well-nigh impossible and poisoned the domestic life of the citizens with envy and mutual hatred (envy was the national vice of ancient Greece)…"\textsuperscript{lxxxvi} Arendt believed that Socrates' goal was to reunite philosophy and politics, "to bring philosophy down from the sky to the earth…"\textsuperscript{lxxxvii} It was the increasing loss of faith in the worth of thought that had led to rancor among both among the various cities and between various citizens. "What Socrates [tried] to introduce into polis life is thinking itself, not a special philosophical doctrine, but the principle that everything should be examined in thought…"\textsuperscript{lxxxviii} Thought, Arendt argued, was for Socrates, as it was for her, a dialogue I have with myself—a two-in-one within my thinking ego. Without this dialogue, she was convinced that politics inevitably becomes superficial.\textsuperscript{lxxxix} She believed that Socrates wanted to teach his fellow citizens that "living together with others begins with living together with oneself…only he who knows how to live with himself is fit to live with others."\textsuperscript{x}\textsuperscript{c} Socrates' death, of course, demonstrated that he had failed in this objective, and by the time of Plato and Aristotle, philosophy and politics had nothing common.\textsuperscript{xci}

Arendt's work after \textit{The Human Condition} in many ways sought to solve these two failures in the Greek polis: first, the alienation of political action from thought, and second, the excessively individualistic nature of Greek political action. Arendt's

\textsuperscript{lxxxvi} Arendt, \textit{The Promise of Politics}, pp. 16-17; "Philosophy and Politics: the Problem of Action and Thought after the French Revolution" (1954), LOC 023401.
\textsuperscript{lxxxvii} Arendt, "Thinking," \textit{The Life of the Mind}, p. 165.
\textsuperscript{lxxxviii} Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" (1969), LOC 024441.
\textsuperscript{lxxxix} Arendt, "Thinking," \textit{The Life of the Mind}, p. 177.
\textsuperscript{xc} Arendt, \textit{The Promise of Politics}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{xci} Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics: What is Political Philosophy?" (1969), LOC 024439-47.

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laudatory comments about action can obscure its potential dark side which she often comments on in places other than *The Human Condition*: the fact that action, especially when taken in the wrong spirit, can be both dangerous and immoral. Though it is humanity's highest possibility, action is certainly not always a blessing; indeed, in a variety of places—including *The Human Condition*—she points to the burdensome nature of action, which especially in modernity has led to a "flight into impotency, a desperate desire to be relieved entirely of the ability to act." The Greeks' version of political action illustrates the potential dangers even in truly political action, which Arendt generally thinks is more likely to be a positive activity. Political action may be the path to immortality, but there is more to political action than simply this pursuit of immortality.

Arendt consistently referred to political action as *a-telos*, an activity performed for its own sake. This has often given the impression that action is essentially a kind of existential activity, and perhaps even a rather narcissistic one. Yet, Arendt also indicates in many places that political action has vital teleological implications: she continually argues that political action is *essentially* always concerned with maintaining and preserving the world. In the 1963 "Introduction into Politics" course, she refers to

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political action as having *amor mundi*, and writes, "What do I mean by 'politically minded'?...Very generally, I mean by it to care more for the world, which was before we appeared and which will be after we disappear, than for ourselves, for our immediate interests and for our life." Only political action is capable of changing the world because it is the only activity capable of beginning a new chain of events in the human world, and it therefore is the only kind of action that is capable of preserving and maintaining the world when necessary. She writes that "the world...is irrevocably delivered up to the ruin of time unless human beings are determined to intervene, to alter, to create what is new...Because the world is made by mortals, it wears out, and because it continuously changes its inhabitants it runs the risk of becoming as mortal as they. To preserve the world...it must be constantly set right anew." Political action, in other words, has to somehow change the world by beginning new initiatives, and yet it also must affirm and maintain that same world. Though this may appear to be a contradiction, it is not: the goal of political action is to preserve what is essential to our common world even if that means altering aspects of it current configuration in order to bring it back to itself after it has fall apart somewhere, and it must do this in spite of the fact that actors can never be completely certain of the final outcome and meaning of the actions they undertake. This is why Arendt argues that politics is never concerned with our individual interests: to act politically is always to act for the sake of a common world which separates and relates the individual actors within it, always with the goal of preserving

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xcvii Arendt, "Introduction into Politics" (1963), LOC 023803; see also LOC 023804-06.
and affirming that world while also changing it in the hope that our action will leave behind a mark of some kind in that world.

So which is it? Is action performed a-teleologically for its own sake in order to immortalize the actor, or is it performed teleologically for the sake of the preservation of the common world? The best place to turn for insight into what Arendt means when she calls action *a-telos* is to the *Republic*. At the beginning of Book II, Plato offers a threefold division of human goods. Plato has Glaucon assert that there are things that are good for their own sake such as joy; things that are only good for their consequences such as physical training; and things that are *both* good for their consequences and good for their own sake, one of which, Glaucon suspects, might be justice. This division of the human goods indicates that there are in fact two types of a-teleological goods: things done for their own sake, and things done *both* for their own sake and also for their good consequences. Arendt understood political action to be *a-telos* in this second sense. An exemplary instance of this Janus-faced conception of political action would be something like Arendt's allusion to René Char and the other actors in the French Resistance, or in our current era, Daniel Ellsberg's release of the *Pentagon Papers*. Ellsberg's action was an heroic act whose consequences were unpredictable and far reaching (e.g., Watergate), and which revealed the uniqueness of the actor in a way that was historically great and would guarantee his immortality; at the same time, it was also an act that was intended to preserve and affirm the American public realm. True political actors, when they act, are

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always acting *both* for the opportunity to achieve immortality, *and* to maintain and preserve the common world.\textsuperscript{ci}

Some of Arendt's most articulate discussions of this dual natured sense of the a-teleology of political action come in her 1955 Machiavelli lectures. As I mentioned earlier, Machiavelli was one of the crucial influences on the development of Arendt's theory of action. One need only think of the dual nature of *The Prince* itself in order to grasp this: i.e., the fact that Machiavelli is deeply concerned with the preservation and future of political life in Italy as well as his own glory.\textsuperscript{cii} Indeed, Machiavelli even suggests in his discussion of Agathocles' failure that he attained only power, not glory.\textsuperscript{ciii} In the lectures, Arendt points to the *a-telos* of political action saying, "Machiavelli never asks: What is politics good for? Nobody [else in the tradition] leaves this question out altogether. [For Machiavelli,] politics has no higher aim beyond itself."\textsuperscript{civ} She points to the dual nature of that a-teleological political action throughout lectures. Gesturing toward its concern with preserving and affirming the world, she writes: "Machiavelli says success is the end of all action, 'from which there is no appeal'...But success has [to be] for the sake of...Italy or the state or the realm of the secular or the world. The meaning comes from the same world in which politics is being conducted...Without Italy, your victory has no meaning."\textsuperscript{cv} At the same time, she continues to insist that politics is at the same time centrally concerned with the greatness of the actor: "The chief concept of

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\textsuperscript{ci} Arendt, "What is Freedom?" pp. 151-153ff.
\textsuperscript{ciii} Ibid, pp. 36ff.
\textsuperscript{civ} Arendt, "History of Political Theory: Machiavelli" (1955), LOC 024020.
\textsuperscript{cv} Ibid, LOC 024021.
political action...is glory, glory for a people or a prince or for whoever in involved in the business of the world. Glory shines...[it] does great enterprises all for eternal fame and present glory."cvvi Somehow, the two elements—the teleological concern for preserving the world, and a-teleological concern with the greatness and immortality of the deeds done by political actors in the name of preserving it—are so deeply intertwined they are impossible to distinguish from each other. In "What is Freedom?," an essay which drew directly from the Machiavelli lectures, Arendt formulates the point succinctly, saying that "the political...its end or raison d'être [is] to establish and keep in existence a space where freedom as virtuosity can appear."cvii Thus, while the idea of an "aestheticization of politics" draws on a certain aspect of Arendt theory of political action, ultimately it fails to capture what she truly had in mind. Political action is a-telos not because it is self-obsessed or self-centered, but because it has no higher goal or purpose beyond itself: it affirms the world in order to immortalize itself, and it immortalizes itself in order to affirm the world. The relation of agency to worldliness, in other words, takes place in a kind of virtuous circle.

Rome seemed to represent a kind of historical ideal of this notion of political action for Arendt for a variety reasons, but the most significant was that it demonstrated a much more responsible and stable version of political action than that demonstrated by the Greeks. On its face, this idea may seem surprising given that Roman politics did not have the same prominence as the Greeks in her work—though as I have noted, the Greeks' prominence was mainly for polemical purposes. As we have seen, however,

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cvi Ibid, LOC 024018.
Arendt's way of writing and thinking was too idiosyncratic to allow for easy assumptions based on who she talked about the most. The truth is that Arendt was never primarily interested in doing historical research for its own sake; instead, she was much more a problem-oriented thinker. While she clearly had a highly developed and expansive knowledge of Western history, she was only interested in writing about particular elements of her historical knowledge when they were relevant to specific, concrete political concerns. There is also the fact, which we noted in chapter six, that Arendt never finished the "Introduction into Politics" manuscript, which she had originally intended to have been the immediate sequel to *The Human Condition*. In what we have of it, however, (contained in the recently published *The Promise of Politics* volume and what eventually became *On Revolution*) we clearly see that Roman politics plays a prominent role—roughly equivalent, in fact, to that given to the Greeks. Moreover, as we saw in chapter two, given the place Rome occupied in her understanding of the political development of Western civilization, Rome would have had to represent something closer to her political ideal than the Greeks, since it was Rome that founded the politics of the Western world, and which the modern revolutionaries had unsuccessfully attempted to restore.\textsuperscript{cviii} Her comments at the "Christianity in Crisis" colloquium further support this idea. She said there that she hoped that after we confronted our current political world "without the help of precedent, that is, of tradition and authority, there will finally arise some new code of conduct"\textsuperscript{cix}—a comment which seems to suggest that her

\textsuperscript{cviii} Arendt, *On Revolution*, pp. 107ff, 188ff.
hope was that eventually something like Roman tradition and authority would be reestablished.

Finally, there are reasons related to Arendt's political involvement in European politics that suggest Rome was a political ideal for her. Arendt had argued in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that the only right all humans possess is "the right to have rights," the right to be citizens in a concrete political community that articulates specific, concrete political rights. This argument would on its face seem to suggest a skepticism toward cosmopolitanism. Moreover, Arendt was always quick to point out that any world government would be dangerous, given the sovereign assumptions that exist in the international arena.\textsuperscript{cx} Yet, Arendt often spoke positively of the idea of "world citizenship" as late as her essay on Jaspers and in the 1970 lectures on Kant's political philosophy. Moreover, she was highly active in the European integration movement in the fifties.\textsuperscript{cxi} Indeed, it appears that much of the impulse to develop the language of "non-sovereignty" was related to her desire to theorize notions of political organization that did not strictly adhere the idea of national "sovereignty." Rome represented for her an example of how these apparently conflicting ideas were once reconciled. The "Introduction into Politics" manuscript suggests that Arendt believed that some kind of non-sovereign association of highly republican states could perform the same function as republican Rome. As we will see, however, the stipulation that the states be "highly

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{cx} Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," *The Promise of Politics*, p. 97; "Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?" p. 89.
\end{footnotes}
republican," i.e., made up of body-politics of committed and participatory citizens, was essential.\textsuperscript{cxii}

Roman political action, in fact, matched the articulation of political action as 'concern with the world' that we have generally identified with Greek political action. As we saw in chapter two, Roman political action, as opposed to that of the Greeks, was far less individualistic, focused as it was on preserving and adding to the sacred foundation of Rome. While all actions in their public realm were still \textit{sui generis}, they nevertheless understood themselves as needing some kind of precedent that would lend their actions \textit{gravitas}, the authority bestowed by the Roman \textit{senate} that justified the action's place in the Roman history as an addition to the city's foundation. Moreover, Roman political action was anchored in a powerful stabilizing force which Arendt referred to as the Roman trinity of religion, tradition, and authority. The trinity gave Roman politics a stability which allowed it to apply political action in all its relativity and unpredictability to the areas of legislation and foreign policy which the Greeks had never been willing to allow. The Roman \textit{lex}, as opposed to the Greeks' \textit{nómos}, understood law not in terms of walls that separate one \textit{polis} from another, but in terms of established lasting relationships through treaties. As a result of the Roman trinity, Roman political action

was able to establish an extraordinarily expansive political realm which lasted for millennia, and which was only truly undermined with the rise of modern science.

The superiority of Roman political action here is almost obvious. This sense of political action, in its profoundly patriotic commitments, is much closer to Arendt's ideal of political action in Plato's second sense that we discussed above. Indeed, since it is probable that Machiavelli was a central inspiration for her theory of political action, it makes sense that Rome would exemplify the idea, since Rome had been such an inspiration to Machiavelli. In fact, Arendt argues that Rome seemed to have solved in a practical political context many of the problems the ancient political philosophers noted in Greek political life. Rome realized the idea of political authority as "an obedience in which men retain their freedom," an idea Plato had searched for but had been unable to discover. Moreover, Rome was a polity or mixed government, which, as Aristotle recommended, was capable of drawing on the strengths of both democracy and aristocracy. Indeed, Arendt points out that Rome realized the ideal of civic friendship which Aristotle had recommended and which Socrates had unsuccessfully attempted to bring to his fellow citizens through philosophy, writing "[against the Greek experience] stands the spirit of polity which flourished in Rome rather than Athens. The Roman spirit embodies and exults—to a degree it is difficult for us to recapture—the great overflowing joy of companionship among one's equals." Finally, Roman politics had much greater depth because it incorporated the faculty of thought, which Greek political life had sought

cxiii Arendt, "What is Authority?" pp. 104ff.
to ignore, through the Roman tradition. Arendt argued that in the Roman era tradition bridged the gap between past and future where thought occurs, offering the connection to the past which thought provides, but as a result making further thinking unnecessary.\textsuperscript{cxvi}

As we also saw in chapter two, the political stability of Rome allowed it to exercise better political judgment. Rome, as a republic, relied on the same kind of non-sovereign political judgment and impartiality in its citizens as the Greeks did. However, Roman judgment had advantages the Greeks lacked. It drew on the Roman trinity of tradition, religion, and authority, which provided a tremendous level of reliability and stability. The Romans were the first to formalize the idea of the "cultivation" of political judgment, which was done by developing it through the choice of one's company, by cultivating one's judgment through the study of judges one trusted.\textsuperscript{cxvii} It was thus considered dangerous to act politically without advice and consent of the \textit{maiores}, the ancestors, who were understood to be represented by the elders in the \textit{senate}.\textsuperscript{cxviii} Moreover, as we saw in chapter two, Roman impartiality was not limited to its immediate political community in the way it was in the Greek \textit{polis}. Roman impartiality understood itself in the context of its myth of origin that focused on Aeneas coming to Italy after the defeat of Troy. They saw their beginning as that of a defeated people, and as result always sought to do justice to those they defeated by establishing relationships with them and incorporating them into Roman civilization, until the whole world seemed to be a kind of "Roman hinterland." As a result, the political \textit{sensus communis} to which Roman

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Arendt, "The Crisis of Culture," pp. 208ff, 221-222; "Kant's Political Philosophy" (1964), LOC 032298.
\item Arendt, "What is Authority?" pp. 122-123ff.
\end{enumerate}
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political judgment appealed was far more expansive, taking in a far wider set of perspectives, and thus, on Arendt's definition, was capable of better judgment. The Roman word for this expansive cultivation of the political judgment of citizens was *humanitas*, a word which implied that one's cultural background did not deter one from becoming part of the Roman *res publica*, and indeed that this difference added to the Roman *sensus communis*. Arendt thus writes that "in Rome people of widely different ethnic origins and descent could acquire Roman citizenship and thus enter into the discourse among cultivated Romans, could discuss the world and life with them."  

Rome, thus, clearly seemed to represented a very attractive political ideal for Arendt. Unfortunately, Arendt concluded that we could not simply go back to Rome or any other bygone era. Therefore, she always insisted that political concepts never be discussed purely in the abstract: they always had to be understood in terms of their concrete historical background. Modern science had long since fatally undermined the Roman trinity of tradition, religion and authority which had unwritten Western politics for so long. That trinity could not simply be reconstituted because it had arisen in a very specific set of political circumstances that could never be consciously reenacted, as the modern revolutionaries in her view had tried to do. A renewed Western political realm could not be recreated through "theory," in some sort of sovereign act of fabrication as left and right wing revolutionaries had tried to do. She was convinced that in our time there can no longer be a separation between those that think and those that act. For the first in Western history, the modern era thus demands that citizens be not only judging...  

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and acting citizens, but also thinking citizens. In essence, Arendt was claiming that we must go back to the first exemplars of impartiality, to the Homeric historians who judged human action prior to the Greeks and Romans. Greek politics had sought to ignore thought, which they understood as the life of the mind of the philosophers; the Romans did not need to think because they had a tradition that made thinking unnecessary; finally, the modern revolutionaries, who attempted to complete the same task that has been left to us—the refounding of Western politics—had failed because they adopted the tradition of political thought's mistaken notion of thinking as fabrication. Instead, individual citizens who are committed to their political world have to think, to judge, and to act politically for themselves, without the direction of a sovereign theorist. Individual citizens have to recognize that no sovereign expert or theorist will be able to tell them how to act politically. Recognizing that they are not sovereign and can never be certain of the outcome of their actions or even that they are making the right choices, they will have to take responsibility together for their common world and utilize the non-sovereign political judgment they have in common.

This is why Arendt, as I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, was so urgently concerned with articulating what a true political philosophy would look like. In the prologue to *The Human Condition*, Arendt denied that it was her obligation in the book to tell her readers how to respond to modern situation as she had articulated it. "To these preoccupations and perplexities," she writes, "this book does not offer an answer. Such answers are given every day, and they are matters of practical politics, subject to the agreement of many; they can never lie in theoretical considerations or the opinion of one
person, as though we dealt here with problems for which only one solution is possible.\textsuperscript{cxx} This was not just a throwaway line; it expressed the deepest elements of her political thought, a thought which centered around how to imagine an authentic political philosophy that only true citizens could practice together, and not philosophers whose connection to the public realm was ambiguous. In the modern world, political judgment means that each citizen is both a political theorist and a political actor, and no one can do this thinking and acting for them. What we can do is appeal to a political common sense, and as we do so, our judgments will begin to condition and cultivate each other, and eventually to approach consensus. Non-sovereign political judgment, in other words, is essentially participatory: its results are wholly contingent on the judges involved, and though they are all reflecting on an objective world which they all have in common, there can be no certain outcome to the deliberations of these judges, for they are all plural beings located at different places in the world. But the essential element is that those who participate \textit{must} be true citizens: those who have cultivated "a taste for public freedom," who have a commitment to a common world and who are willing to take responsibility for that world by judging and acting politically. In that sense, Arendtian judgment is highly republican. As she notes at the end of \textit{On Revolution}, this participation will in principle be open to all, but the reality is that not everyone will have the taste for public freedom, and that is certainly their right.\textsuperscript{cxxi} But it is incumbent on us to encourage and empower as many as possible to participate and to deliberate: the more judging citizens are involve rendering their \textit{doxa}, the better their deliberations and the

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\textsuperscript{cxx} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, p. 5.  \\
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more enlarged their political sensus communis will be, and thus the better all of our political judgments will be.

As a result, Arendt believed that public policy should be directed toward seeking to expanding the public realm to as many public spirited individuals as possible.\textsuperscript{cxxii} Her model for this was America which, despite it many flaws, she believed had enacted the only successful revolution. She had in mind here the civically active America that Tocqueville had described, rooted in the principle of federalism, which she believed was the most ingenious idea in all of American political history.\textsuperscript{cxxiii} This was an idea that she believed allowed for a vast expansion of the public realm that at the same time retained the possibility for people at the most local levels to act politically and obtain at least a small share of "public happiness."\textsuperscript{cxxiv} If the idea of sovereignty could be overcome, this expansion of the public realm through the principle of federalism might eventually even be extended to a global level, and thus facilitate a non-sovereign association of states like that of Rome. She writes: “If politics is defined in its usual sense, as a relationship between rulers and the ruled, the hope [of a global government] is, of course, purely utopian…If, however, we understand politics to mean a global dominion in which people appear primarily as active agents who lend human affairs a permanence they otherwise

\textsuperscript{cxxiii} Ibid, pp.118-131; "Civil Disobedience," pp. 82-102. In Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life, University of Oklahoma Press: Norman, OK (2003), Theda Skocpol showed how accurate commentators like Tocqueville and Arendt were on the America's civic life. Arendt tends to undersell in On Revolution the amount of civic engagement that took place in America throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Skocpol's book remedy's that flaw, by showing how widespread the principle of federalism was to American civic life.
\textsuperscript{cxxiv} Ibid, pp. 241-247, 265-273.
do not have, then this hope is not the least bit utopian."\textsuperscript{cxv} Indeed, global non-sovereign politics is a clear consequence of Arendt's Kantian account of a political \textit{sensus communis}, as an \textit{a priori} structure that extends to \textit{any} judging subject—a point that is not lost on her in the Kant lectures. She writes that "One judges always as a member of a community, guided by one's community sense, one's \textit{sensus communis}. But in the last analysis, one is a member of a world community by the sheer fact of being human; this is one's 'cosmopolitan existence.'\textsuperscript{cpxvi} Arendt's "right to have rights" then, far from being an argument for parochialism and communitarianism, could conceivably extend to the whole world.

\textsuperscript{cxv} Arendt, "Introduction into Politics," \textit{The Promise of Politics}, p. 97.  
\textsuperscript{cpxvi} Arendt, \textit{Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy}, p. 75.
"There exists in our society a widespread fear of judging that has nothing whatever to do with the biblical ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged’...For behind the unwillingness to judge lurks the suspicion that no one is a free agent, and hence the doubt that anyone is responsible or could be expected to answer for what he has done...Hence the huge outcry the moment anyone fixes specific blame on some particular person instead of blaming all deeds or events on historical trends and dialectical movements, in short on some mysterious necessity that works behind the backs of men..."  

My hope is that the preceding study of political judgment in the thought of Hannah Arendt has shown some light on her political project; it is of course not exhaustive and perhaps has raised as many questions as it has answered. While I cannot answer these questions definitively, I would like to sketch out in a preliminary way what I think answers to these questions would look like. The reader will have guessed by now that I am a very sympathetic interpreter of Hannah Arendt; indeed, it would even be fair to label me an Arendtian. There are of course aspects of her work that I believe are either problematic or inadequate; environmentalism, for instance, seems to be a particularly problematic area of thought for her work. However, for the most part this and other problems lie outside the scope of this project and can be better deal with elsewhere. My general alignment with Arendt is partly due to a certain dissatisfaction with the liberalism-communitarianism debate. For someone uncomfortable with the tendencies toward neo-Hegelianism in communitarianism and

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toward atomism in liberalism, Arendt affords a happy escape hatch, one which sets an extremely high premium on radical individualism without losing sight of the fact that even radical individualism takes place in a context of human concerns and conditions. But perhaps more significantly, my Arendtianism is due to the fact that on closer inspection—and when properly understood—Arendt is far less disturbing, and more clear-sighted and honest than many of her critics have portrayed her to be. If anything she is probably simply too conservative for many to accept. She believed that the problems of modernity, which chiefly turned on the problem of what we might broadly refer to as nihilism and the possibility of totalitarianism that it seemed to open up were the result of a failure to recognize the fundamental limits, possibilities, and activities offered by the human condition. Her work sprang from a desire to confront these facts honestly, but also from a kind of hopefulness that if we were to do this we might find something better beyond it, something that does not go on reworking the same problematic modern political approaches. In that sense, far from being unrealistic or idealistic, Arendt's work when properly understood is deeply practical—it demands that we recognize the limits of the human condition and the activities within it, and not adopt a deluded Prometheanism. To follow Arendt is to strive to be a political grown up, to recognize that the world owes us nothing, and that it is up to each of us to take responsibility for his or her life and world; and moreover, to admit that the idea of total human fulfillment is pipedream, that chastened expectations are the rule of politics, not an obstacle we can hope to finally overcome.
Among these various avenues of future work, developing the theoretical implications of Arendt's conception of practical reason is the most prominent and obvious follow up to this study. Assuming we can define the concept of practical reason within the narrow confines of judgment theories, there are variety of current competing theories that need further examination including, among others, rational choice and game theoretical approaches, theories of *phronesis*, and theories of moral sentiments and the impartial spectator such as those found in eighteenth century figures like Hume, Berkeley, and Adam Smith.\(^{ii}\) Of these various theories, theories of *phronesis* are easily the most philosophically well-developed in contemporary literature and the most clearly relevant to Arendt's approach and political goals, and so for my present purposes it will be useful to compare Arendtian judgment to them, especially since she saw her theory as a revision and critique of *phronesis*.\(^{iii}\) In my assessment, Arendt's theory of judgment presents a significant improvement on a number of ambiguities and drawbacks in these

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phronetic theories' inherent neo-Aristotelianism. To begin with, theories of *phronesis* place great stock in communal traditions as providing orientation to judgment and purpose to action; however, if Arendt is correct about the nihilistic political consequences for any form of tradition thanks to tremendous prestige of modern science, then such reliance on tradition would be seriously problematic, if not fatal to these theories. Indeed, on her account, the failure to recognize the political consequences of this nihilistic situation has led to a dependence on politically pathological reliance on ideological thinking. Her attempt to situate common sense as not necessarily reliant on tradition would then seem to me to be a significant point in her favor. Moreover, phronetic theories of practical reason have a highly ambivalent relationship to individualism, in that it is difficult to distinguish the "who-ness" of the individual from that of her community: in essence, the narratives of the individual are difficult to distinguish from that of the group. Arendt's emphasis on natality as revealing the identity of actor, strikes me as a much more acceptable theory if one is committed to genuine individualism. Relatedly, as Arendt herself pointed out in one of her few explicit critical engagements with Aristotelian practical reason, the conception of human freedom involved in *prohairesis* seems inadequate and stilted in the post-ancient context.\(^{iv}\) While Gadamer is probably correct that *prohairesis* would seem to involve some kind of concrete reflection on our community's notions of the good life,\(^{v}\) this still cannot realistically approach the extremely strong sense of natal agency and individualism which Arendt's approach affords. Finally, there is what has always struck me as an

unacceptably ambiguous tension between the retrospective aspect and the deliberative aspect of phronetic theories of practical reason.\textsuperscript{vi} One of the great strengths I find in Arendt's theory of judgment is that she is able to clearly distinguish these aspects into two different faculties, i.e., the faculties of judgment and action, via the analogy to Kant's distinction between taste and genius.

Beyond the question of judgment, this study has covered a broad swath of controversial subject matter. While many of Arendt's claims can certainly be challenged, nothing she wrote was particularly unreasonable or implausible. Indeed, she brought to bear a great depth of historical concreteness and erudition for a political theorist. Therefore, her claims have to be taken seriously, and when they are they offer a unique, provocative, and ultimately hopeful and inspiring vision of human freedom and human possibilities. In particular, Arendt's analysis of modernity seems to me to be among the most penetrating and plausible accounts available, one which is more reasonable than it is commonly taken to be, and possessing very broad explanatory power. To begin with, Arendt's theory of modern nihilism is a particularly powerful one, a theory which seeks to explain its influence on twentieth century events and circumstances without capitulating to it, explaining it away, or falling into esotericism. Arendt's insistence that while we may still hold onto traditions in our private circumstances no real traditional political authority is capable of thriving in the era of modern science is an especially potent claim, one which implies that nihilism is in fact the governing principle of our political life. Because of this, Arendt's claims that the life process became the only viable goal of

\textsuperscript{vi} Ronald Beiner notes this tension in *Political Judgment*, pp. 7ff.
modern politics, leading in turn to a political world focused almost exclusively on social justice and mass democracy as ends in themselves seem deeply persuasive. This certainly did not mean that she opposed these modern political projects, only that they had become a kind of consolation prize for modern individuals who have been denied real access to an authentic public realm. Furthermore, her analysis of the relationship between modernity and totalitarianism is more sophisticated than is commonly recognized. She seems to me certainly correct that too much of the qualitative political experience of the twentieth century is unintelligible without some kind of acknowledgment that totalitarianism was a genuine political phenomenon in the era's politics. Moreover, unlike many theories of totalitarianism which link the concept with modernity, Arendt did not believe that it was a necessary and logical end-point of modernity and it's political nihilism, but rather a kind of freak possibility, much like the atomic bomb. Finally, I would argue that a great deal of the political polarization in our current politics is the result of the ongoing dominance of the ideological thinking which modernity tends to inspire, i.e., the assumption that there must be some one correct answer to political issues, instead of simply doxa, an inevitable diversity of political perspectives which we can overcome to some (always incomplete) degree through an enlarged mentality.

Another topic that is of particular salience in this context is the question of the distinction Arendt draws between morality and politics, and its relation to her theory of
judgment. This issue has been explicitly considered by Seyla Benhabib.\textsuperscript{vii} Arendt argued that the concerns of politics and morality were distinctly different: morality concerned the basic integrity of the self, while politics was concerned with action in and maintenance of the common world.\textsuperscript{viii} Morality was a kind of by-product of the thinking activity which goes on as a dialogue I have with myself: people who fail to be moral are those who seem to have an inability to think, and she pointed to Adolf Eichmann as an exemplary instance of this phenomenon.\textsuperscript{ix} There are some actions which we will not be willing to take simply because we value the ability to think, because if we did so we could not face the prospect of having to live together and carry on an ongoing dialogue with a murderer or thief or rapist. Arendt believed that such people are thoughtless people because if they could think they would not be able to commit the deeds they did in fact commit. However, when we engage in political activity, we do not orient ourselves on the basis of such moral phenomena, but on the basis of political judgment. In Benhabib's view this suggests that there is a "normative lacuna" in Arendt's thought, because there seems to be no way of objectively evaluating the morality of political institutions.\textsuperscript{x} Benhabib is probably too pessimistic in this regard. As we have seen, Arendt has dramatically

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{ix} Arendt, \textit{Eichmann in Jerusalem}, 287ff; "Thinking," \textit{The Life of the Mind}, pp. 3ff. It should be noted that Arendt's portrait of Eichmann as a kind of mindless and banal bureaucrat was probably not accurate. David Cesarani, for instance, has uncovered a variety of flaws in Arendt's research and introduced materials that show Eichmann was a much more traditionally evil character than Arendt had allowed. See Cesarani's, \textit{Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes and Trial of a "Desk Murderer"}.
\end{footnotesize}
expanded the purview of political judgment to such an extent that many of the elements we associate with moral judgment appear in the realm of political judgment. The nature of the sensus communis indicates that as judging subjects interact, they increasingly come to share a similar sense of sensitivity, cultivation, and enlarged mentality, which can then be applied to questions commonly associated with justice. What cannot be gained is any final, objective, and conclusive answers to these questions because, as we have seen, the nature of politics and political judgment as Arendt understands them does not afford this. This, it seems to me, provides a potentially significant improvement on the seemingly irresolvable debate about the application of morality to politics. It allows us to recognize that the claims of right over good, security over freedom, or vice versa are always made by judging individuals from particular standpoints within the common world, and with varying levels of judging ability, individuals who are always entitled to arrive at differing conclusions about these questions.

I have, however, chosen not to devote significant space to this topic in the study. This is because, while Benhabib's concerns about Arendt's account of moral phenomena can probably be set aside, there are a wider set of considerations involved in Arendt's discussions of morality which would have required too much space and led me too far afield of the argument of this book. In essence, the problem is that Arendt's various discussions of moral phenomena are much more expansive and equivocal than this simple dichotomy between the self and the common world can account for. To begin with, there is the fact that she believed that the kind of existential morality associated with the thinking activity only really comes into play when certain norms, customs, or traditions
of our communities do not give us appropriate direction.\textsuperscript{xi} Thus, for Arendt a large portion—perhaps even the lion's share—of moral phenomena are simply matters of convention. Furthermore, there are indications that Arendt seemed to believe that some kind of metaphysically existing relation to the morally Good was available to human beings, apparently through the mysterious activity of contemplation.\textsuperscript{xii} Finally, there are indications that various elements of moral phenomena were related to the human capacity for action in the world, specifically in \textit{The Human Condition}'s discussions of promise-making and forgiveness\textsuperscript{xiii}—activities which, as Elisabeth Young-Bruehl points out, \textsuperscript{xiv} clearly seem to be more related to morality than to politics. In truth, her apparent alienation of action from morality seems implausible, though for other reasons than Benhabib suggests. If there is a truly gaping hole in Arendt's thought, it is not in our relationship to ourselves or to the world but in our one-on-one relationships with each other. As I tried to show in the last chapter, there were easily enough resources available to Arendt from out of her own thought for dealing with individual relationships. The fact that she never concerned herself with individual relationships probably has less to do with her not being aware of this aspect, than with the fact that she seemed to have bigger fish to fry. It seems likely that examining individual relationships did not have the kind of political and historical significance that she believed to be her chief concerns.

\textsuperscript{xii} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 73-78; “Kant's Political Philosophy” (1964), LOC 032287.
\textsuperscript{xiii} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, pp. 236-247.
\textsuperscript{xiv} Young-Bruehl, \textit{Why Arendt Matters}, pp. 95ff, 122ff.
Another concept from the literature that I have not devoted considerable time to is the concept of exemplarity. Within the context of Arendt's thought there is only one real explicit discussion of this topic in relation to (Roman) political action in "What is Authority?" Several theorists have attempted to develop comments Arendt made at the very end of the 1970 version of her "Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy," and in "Some Questions Concerning Moral Philosophy" into a fuller theory. Beiner seems to have been the first to have developed this idea, but others have more recently sought to expand it much further, particularly Allessandro Ferrara. I chose not to address this idea beyond the discussion in "What is Authority?" chiefly because the idea is simply too ambiguous both in Arendt and Kant to take us very far. In the case of Kant, his various comments on the notion of "examples" are suggestive at best, and do not seem to play a significant role in either the first or the third Critiques. The idea that there is such a thing as "exemplary validity" comes from an comment Kant makes in S18 where he asserts that in aesthetic judgment the validity appealed to is "exemplary" because it is "regarded as an example of a universal rule that we are unable to state." Kant never mentions that idea of exemplary validity again, preferring the concept of a general validity, a notion more appropriate to the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment. In this case, Kant here seems to be providing an early, impressionistic and preliminary characterization of the theory, which

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xv Arendt, Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy, p. 76; "Some Questions Concerning Moral Philosophy," pp. 143-146.  


xvii Kant, Critique of Judgment, Ak. 237.
does not actually reflect the theory very well after it has been more fully developed. Thus, while there may indeed be some worth in exploring this concept—something which Ferrara has attempted to do more carefully than anyone else—I have not found the idea central enough to the third Critique or to Arendt's theory to warrant its inclusion in this study.

Finally, I want to address the clearly counter-democratic implications of Arendt's thought. This may not be immediately attractive, given our modern inclinations toward universal democratic inclusion, but it has to be recognized that this more republican, meritocratic, and exclusive conception of political activity clearly and almost inescapably follows logically from her analyses of basic political phenomena. Most obviously, as we have seen over the last few chapters, true political judgment seems to require this kind of highly active and republican conception of citizenship, and indeed that the more committed, skilled, and participatory the judging subjects are the better the resulting judgments will be. But beyond this, Arendt was clearly skeptical of the identification of universal suffrage and materially satisfactory bourgeois private life with human freedom. Arendt clearly disdained the idea that the rare, sui generis, self-revelatory, and extremely difficult activity she understood as action—an activity that in any realistic sense can be realized but a few times in a human lifetime—could be identified with the banal and mundane activities of bourgeois private life and large-scale representative democracy. This does not mean there is anything necessarily wrong with modern democracy and bourgeois life, other than the mistaken notion bourgeois citizens have about the significance of their activities. But from Arendt's perspective, it is imperative we call this
what it is: a peaceful, predictable, conformist, although highly pleasant way life. It has to be recognized that true action, in Arendt's account, is highly burdensome and something all but a rare few human beings seek to avoid. There are good reasons many who weigh these two possibilities might prefer the bourgeois world, even if it is less elevated.

One thing, however, that Arendt insists on is that *someone* must act and act politically in our modern world: someone must take responsibility for the world we are making and in which we live. In modernity, we have built a world where private life is intensely meaningful, pleasant, and rich, and it is a rare individual for whom this private life is not enough, who has as Arendt called it the "taste for public freedom." In pursuing this, these individuals most likely are not getting the better end of the bargain. They are the ones we blame when things do not work out quite like we all wanted, even though in the end we all bear responsibility for the world we live in. But if no one were willing to do this, if no one possessed this taste for public freedom, than our world would continue to be driven solely by the powerful processes of modern history, and we would at least politically be nothing but cogs in this grand, modern consumption machine. Arendt's goal was to show that even in the modern context—which above all seems to be directed toward rendering humans and their agency impotent—humans have the ability to act to change their world, and are therefore still responsible for the world they live in. And moreover the actions they take have a genuine intelligence and political wisdom which inform them, though the nature of that wisdom is difficult to understand given our modern ways of thinking. Arendt above all wanted us to see that we are responsible for
the world in which we live, and have the judging and thinking capacities necessary to make it more nearly what we need and want it to be.
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Biography

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