

## Uncovering the Nexus Between Arendt's Views on Thinking, Judgment, and Action

### Abstract

In this article, I examine the ethical and political dimensions of Hannah Arendt's fundamental categories of thinking, judgment, and action, with the aim of uncovering and defending the coherence of the otherwise enigmatic nature of their interplay. In so doing, I attempt to resolve many of the tensions and ambiguities that appear to permeate Arendt's account of judgment, by offering an analysis of its aesthetic structure that will later allow me to offer a new interpretation of the precise relation that holds between thinking and judgment, as well as of judgment's relation with regard to both morality and politics in general, making extended use of a writing analogy that involves thought experimentation. In this light, the category of judgment will be shown to serve as the bridge that seamlessly connects Arendt's private conception of thinking, which is personal, contemplative, and anti-teleological, with the intersubjective realm of political action in the public sphere. The nexus binding the three categories together will be shown to consist specifically of an ontogenetic chain of interdependence that begins with thinking and culminates in action, where each successor category in the sequence can be viewed as a higher-order version of its immediate predecessor category. From this, I then explain the way they are able to collectively create a positive feedback loop that turns on the axis of our progress as thinkers, as well as on the state of our moral development as individuals, and which, in the process, creates potential openings for genuine political progress.

This article examines Hannah Arendt's three central categories of thought (or thinking), judgment, and action. Its purpose is to uncover the nature of the enigmatic nexus she implicitly assumes can seamlessly connect all three categories. To that end, the article offers a novel interpretation and ostensive reconstruction of the connection Arendt might have had in mind as holding between them, but which she never provided. The proposed connection will be such that it would also seem to attest to the possibility of their being able to be integrated as a triadic conceptual unit in what is a generally coherent way, and this in spite of evident tensions in Arendt's own, unfinished presentation of how said categories might relate to one another. It seems unclear, for instance, how Arendt's anti-teleological conception of thinking, which, as shall be explained in more detail, is primarily marked by its contemplative and private character, can ever effectively connect, let alone lead, to any sort of action of a political kind. Action in that kind of context, after all, is of an unquestionably social character, if not a directly intersubjective as well as agenda-driven one. Beyond this, Arendt's unfinished account of the mental faculty or capacity to judge notably appears to oscillate rather ambiguously in the liminal space that lies between those two extremes, which raises serious questions concerning judgment's status relative to the other two categories, as well as with regard to its role in both morality and politics more generally. These are only a few of the conceptual loose ends in Arendt's own presentation of things that have since haunted the prospect of our being able to satisfactorily account for the requisite coherence their potential unity demands. The aporetic state of affairs this has collectively engendered had led Seyla Benhabib to pose the natural question which remains in need of a clear answer, and whose resolution represents this article's motivation, and that is the following: "[w]hat then is the relationship between thinking, judging, and acting?" (Benhabib 2003: 192).

## I. Background

To anyone familiar with Arendt's work, her ascription of fundamental importance to the three categories of thought, judgment, and action is beyond doubt. Whether one considers them individually or collectively, her interest in these particular categories, one should note, did not simply arise out of a vacuum, so to speak. Indeed, much of what spurred many of the eventual directions taken on by her work in ethics and political theory in general, including her account of the aforementioned categories, can be said to be a result of her lived experience and subsequent reflection on some of the unfathomable human atrocities which transpired throughout her lifetime. The one that undoubtedly stands out the most in this tragic respect was, of course, the genocidal Holocaust of the Jewish people in Europe during the Second World War. Arendt's relentless quest to find out how something so inexplicable could ever have taken place, as well as to find out how society could successfully prevent anything similar from ever occurring again, inarguably constitutes one of the most prominent threads running throughout her wide-ranging and often difficult to classify body of work, much of which concerned themes relating to the three categories whose connection is now under consideration.

The existential urgency Arendt attributed to solving the aforementioned particular task, together with her unyielding curiosity concerning matters both ethical and political, is something that explains why she found a need to go all the way to Jerusalem to cover the 1961 trial of former Nazi official Adolf Eichmann, as this would help her ascertain the thought process, or, better put, lack thereof, behind the unambiguously gross level of criminality he was so evidently responsible for. While there, Arendt observed a few key things, among which stood out, for instance, Eichmann's tendency to rely on "stock phrases and invented clichés," (Arendt 1994a: 49), his general lack of intelligence, an "almost total inability ever to look at anything from the other fellow's point of view," (Arendt 1994a: 47-48), as well as his constant need to belong to a group with an established identity. To this last end,

Eichmann even appeared to have a sense of conformity with the idea of genocide, one buttressed by the fact that those around him who comprised “respectable society” appeared to have no serious issue with it (Arendt 1994a: 126).

This is all to say, then, that Eichmann was not, for Arendt, an anomalous and inexplicably cruel, psychopathic moral monster *per se*, as would be expected of someone so involved in the enabling of a crime of such magnitude. If anything, Eichmann seemed normal to Arendt, psychiatrically speaking. What Arendt saw instead was a man submissive to the Nazi regime, and not even an ideologue at that. He was the kind of man who let others speak for him and who was woefully lacking when it came to those skills required for critical thought, particularly as these pertained to moral matters. All in all, Eichmann represented, for Arendt, the ideal subject from the perspective of a totalitarian regime, as the latter seeks to take advantage of such people in the implementation of its morally bankrupt political agenda. Arendt’s famous phrase, the “banality of evil,” is specifically a reference to the extreme lack of thought Eichmann displayed, which helped bring so much evil into being. In this respect, referring to him, Arendt writes, “[i]t was sheer thoughtlessness...that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of the world” (Arendt 1994a: 287-288).

While Arendt’s earlier work, as Benhabib points out, had long before dealt with and centered around issues concerning thinking and judgment (Benhabib 2018: 70), it can be said that it was after this experience in Jerusalem that, as Anne Heller writes, Arendt began to more properly dedicate the rest of her career to such themes, as her aim was to explain “just what kinds of thinking, judging, and acting conscious people must partake in to be members in good standing of a diverse and moral human race” (Heller 2015: 23). In particular, the three categories whose interrelation we shall begin to examine took on the centrality they did as a result of Arendt’s personal conviction that, as Elizabeth Minnich puts it, “[a]s we practice thinking, judging, and acting, we become who we are” (Minnich 2000: 88).

## II. Taking Oneself into Account: Arendt on Thinking

In light of the foregoing, it seems natural to begin with an examination of Arendt’s account of thinking. With respect to thinking, one can start by remarking that its concern is with meaning, where meaning is conceived as that which we have access to as the result of our finally understanding something, which is not quite up to us, in the sense that it is *indeterminate* in nature, or “unending,” so to speak, and thus “cannot produce final results” *per se* (Arendt 1994b: 308). This ties thinking to broad existential themes because, for Arendt, part of what we do throughout our lives consists in the attempt to reconcile ourselves to reality, or to try and be “at home in the world” (Arendt 1994b: 308), and getting there requires that we be able to constantly change and revise the way we look at or understand certain things along with the passing of time. The insatiable doxastic thirst this entails, together with our associated impulse to quench it, is going to be what generates in us an impetus to think, in the Arendtian sense. In particular, this is because the process in search of this reconciliation to reality will ultimately be what the search for *meaning* amounts to.

In conceiving of thinking in this way, Arendt seeks to contrast it from what is involved in our search to *know* something, which she views through the prism of its determinate and structured approach toward the attainment of its goal, which in this case is knowledge of some truth, which is why, as John McGowan notes, Arendt more or less identifies knowledge with fact (McGowan 1998: 112). By making this contrast, Arendt wants to underscore the idea that thinking is the type of activity that can only be carried out if practiced for its own sake, i.e., disinterestedly, which is to say it lacks a purpose. For Arendt, the paradigmatic example of a “thinking” person in this regard is the figure of Socrates, who was not known to seek conclusive answers in his philosophical dealings regarding truth,

virtue, beauty, justice, poetry, friendship, courage, and any number of things. Rather, Socrates operated exclusively out of wonder or, equivalently, out of disinterested love for the activity of thinking itself. In making Socrates her model, what Arendt has in mind by thinking, then, is one that is reflective and contemplative by nature, and this in a way that is more or less philosophical. This is why thinking, as Arendt notes, will first presuppose or require of us an initial withdrawal “from the present and the urgencies of everyday life” (Arendt 1978: 76).

Of course, Socrates’ approach in dealing with philosophical issues is just as notable for his use of the *elenchus*, or dialectical method, which sought to further or enable one’s understanding of things, through the incorporation of a plurality of perspectives that, once placed in conversation, could open up new avenues for one’s thinking which would otherwise have remained outside one’s reach. Arendt transposes this same idea by embedding it into her account of the structure inherent in the mental process of thinking itself, which is why she describes thinking as a soundless dialogue with oneself, or a dialogue in which we examine “what we say and what we do” (Arendt 1968: 94). Thinking, then, as a dialogue with the “I,” while always a solitary activity, should not be understood in the Arendtian context as an isolated activity.

For Arendt, the rationale in saying thinking is dialogical in form has to do with how one needs to be able to display one’s own person to oneself so as to be properly able to even address oneself in the first place in terms of “I.” That is, if one has no awareness of being “two-in-one” (Arendt 2003: 184), one can never manage to authentically relate to oneself. She means this in the sense that one must be able to step *outside of* oneself, so to speak, so as to attain a proper, albeit clearly not perfectly impartial, perspective of who one is. As such, for Arendt, there can be no “being-conscious-of-myself,” in the absence of an implicit awareness of my being “inevitably two-in-one” (Arendt 2003: 184). If thinking requires this, then the mind, in Arendt’s view, must necessarily contain within itself the potential to bifurcate itself in such a way that it can engender this kind of alterity within each of us that will then enable us to see ourselves from a kind of God’s-eye point of view analogous to Thomas Nagel’s “view from nowhere” (Nagel 1986). Arendt’s assumption about this latent alterity’s reality thus appears to be grounded in an implicit transcendental argument whose basis would be the fact that since thinking is clearly possible, as it clearly happens, this form of alterity is in fact within us.

That this mental and internal prototype of a real social space of equals can exist within me is what will allow me to shape and progressively crystallize my own sense of self or identity. Specifically, my identity is counterfactually dependent on the progress achieved by the interactions engendered through this plurality, or, in this case, duality, of perspectives which my mind’s inner social space is able to host, and which will orient my thinking in new and unexpected directions, as this is what constitutes thinking itself, speaking from a kind of functionalist perspective. For Arendt, progress in one’s thinking can clearly shape our identity in many ways, in terms of what we like, dislike, value, believe, and so on, and one thing that more or less comes hand in hand with such progress is our moral development. Indeed, for Arendt, it will only be through thinking in the first place that one is even able to have a conscience (Arendt 2003: 189).

In her account of the origin of conscience, Arendt’s views will thus share a strong affinity with Immanuel Kant’s, who wrote the following in his *Metaphysics of Morals*: “[a] human being who accuses and judges himself in conscience must think of a dual personality in himself, a doubled self which, on the one hand, has to stand trembling at the bar of a court that is yet entrusted to him, but which, on the other hand, itself administers the office of judge that it holds by innate authority” (Kant 1991: 234). Even if, as Richard Bernstein has noted, Arendt differs from Kant when it comes to her account of the nature of conscience’s judgments (Bernstein 1986: 232-233), it is interesting to observe how Kant and Arendt both find it logically necessary that an individual must in some way possess an anterior and interior form of alterity in order to have a conscience. Sigmund Freud, of course, also has

his own version of this idea with his account of the ego and the superego, from whose interplay our conscience arises, but the extreme power imbalance among the inner psychic structures makes his views a lot more difficult to relate or see as complementary to Arendt's.

For Arendt, morality is not just a question of having a conscience, however. It is a question of developing that conscience, which is critical for our moral development, despite the fact that, technically, conscience's main role, in her account, only consists of telling us what *not* to do. Or, as Guido de Graaf puts things, "the moral significance of thought is primarily negative: we are not so much told what do as prompted to refrain from acting" (de Graaf 2014: 109). In this respect, conscience aids us in the manner of warning signs, by helping us avoid what may lead to internal disharmony and possible eventual self-disintegration. The "existential" importance of conscience in this respect is one phenomenologically grasped by us in a negative fashion as well, for, in the act of disobeying one's conscience, i.e., in not doing what one believes to be the right thing, we end up reflecting within ourselves a kind of contradiction concerning who we are and which will attest to a lack of inner harmony that is unbearable, as what we want is to be friends with our own self, so to speak.

Since the state of conscience's development reflects or tracks our general progress as thinkers, this implies that Arendt probably believes we can never be entirely certain at any given time of what something like moral perfection consists in, since thinking's path is endless and unpredictable, meaning we can only guess our present moral categories and ideas are the right ones. In this sense, she diverges from Kant rather sharply, because conscience, for him, is secondary to the moral law itself, not only in terms of its origin, but also in terms of its importance, as the moral law's demands are always, in principle, immediately accessible to all rational beings, which only renders conscience an incredibly useful, but technically unnecessary, thing for knowing or being able to determine what is right or wrong. For Arendt, however, conscience appears to be the only escape valve we have if we are to ever attain a proper understanding of what is right and wrong, as she believes developing our conscience can help guide us in that right direction, as in the manner of a sieve that gets more sophisticated with time, one which hinges on the prior condition that one make progress as a thinker.

This becomes clear in Arendt's exhortation to make use of a Socratic strategy designed for thinking's benefit, but which also seems to be the most efficient strategy we can possibly adopt if we want a proper understanding of that which is required for morality, and, by extension, how to behave in order to develop morally. Specifically, Arendt's strategy consists in our unconditional adoption of a default kind of "gadfly" stance as thinkers, whereby we constantly challenge the status quo's ideas, values, and so on, whatever these may be. Its upshot is supposed to be a progressive improvement in our capacity to "unfreeze" the meaning of things, or in our being able to effectively dismantle the inner contradictions inherent in our assumptions about anything whatsoever, which of course can have implications for the course of our future moral development. In particular, Arendt writes, "[i]n unfreezing concepts, 'thinking inevitably has a destructive, undermining effect on all established criteria, values, measurements of good and evil'" (Arendt 1978: 175).

While there is much Socratic irony in Arendt's words, the point appears to be that we open the doors to genuine progress in our thinking and, by extension, moral development, in first ridding ourselves of inferior or contradictory beliefs, a kind of progress almost analogous to the way Karl Popper's views progress in science, which for him can only advance if its theories are falsifiable (Popper 1963: 217). As a result of this and other considerations, it seems to me that Arendt thus probably subscribes to a kind of subjective, albeit universalist, metaethical "ideal observer"-type theory in which humans have the potential to become progressively aware of what that hypothetical ideal observer's attitudes might be. However, in the absence of any obvious justification for believing in our potential, beyond her seeming optimism, Arendt also seems to leave the door open for the possibility of a kind of epistemological moral skepticism.

It is not clear, then, where her Socratic strategy may ultimately lead us, but what does seem clearer is that adopting the complete opposite of Arendt's Socratic strategy would lead to undesirable societal consequences of the sort that thus allow Arendt to say that thinking "ceases to be a marginal affair in political matters" (Arendt 2003: 188). In particular, never challenging the status quo's ideas, or thoughtlessness, opens up the door for political as well as moral or human disasters, and Arendt believes that the political importance of thoughtlessness, and indirectly, thinking, is one that manifests itself most clearly in times of crisis. It was, after all, an axiological and ideological kind of conformity that, in her view, lay at the root of the etiology of Eichmann's criminality, as well as in the complicity of those surrounding him. Thoughtlessness opens these doors because the thoughtless individual has not done the proper self-examination, and, in the absence of thinking, which morality depends on, the thoughtless individual can "never be either able or willing to give account of what he says or does; nor will he mind committing any crime, since he can be sure that it will be forgotten the next moment" (Arendt 2003: 187). As such, Arendt writes, "the greatest evil is the evil committed by nobodies, that is, by human beings who refuse to be persons" (Arendt 2003: 111), where to refuse to be a person implies, in this context, to refuse to think about what one does and what one has done (Arendt 2003: 112).

### III. Taking Others into Account: Arendt on Judgment

With a good sense of what thinking involves, we now move on to judgment, which is the second and most interpretively challenging Arendtian category in the conceptual triad whose deep nexus we are seeking to uncover. Judgment is supposed to be different from thinking, even though both belong to the mind and, as shall be made clear, are very deeply interconnected with one another. For instance, Arendt describes judgment as a "by-product of the liberating effect of thinking" (Arendt 2003: 189). In particular, she refers to judgment as the mental faculty which gives us "the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly" (Arendt 2003: 189).

The two aforementioned abilities listed by Arendt which judgment furnishes us with, are at best not very helpful as examples, and, at worst, they are confusing insofar as allowing us to discern what is supposed to be so special about judgment that could make it any different from thinking. After all, Socrates, Arendt's model of thinking, reflected on all sorts of different topics like these, making one wonder if it may be redundant as a category. For Linda Zerilli, however, Arendt's examples do tell us something. In particular, Arendt's reference to the ability to tell beautiful from ugly, which comes from the realm of aesthetics, implies that, whatever judgment is, it is clearly wrong to conflate it with something like morality, which is how Zerilli interprets Benhabib's own understanding of Arendtian judgment (Zerilli 2016: 366n37). I mention this because scholars have detected many ambiguities and tensions around judgment's relation to such issues when coming to grips with Arendt's presentation of the matter. Of course, a major reason for these uncertainties has to do with the fact that Arendt was unfortunately unable to fully develop her account of judgment, which was to make up the subject matter of the unwritten third volume of *The Life of the Mind*.

With this in mind, it might be useful to say a bit more about judgment in general by laying out at the outset that which seem to be fairly uncontroversial about judgment, at least in terms of what Arendt wants to emphasize about it. To this end, we begin by noting that, as Andrew Schaap *et al.* remark, while both thinking and judging share the trait of being highly active as mental faculties, they are primarily supposed to be distinguished on the ground that they clearly do not mean to "carve out the same type of visible space in the public sphere" (Schaap et al 2010: 4). This initial difference in their respective priorities and outlook, which is the difference between a private and public orientation, or the difference between an individual and collective one, is going to be part of the reason Arendt

will refer to judgment as the *most* political of our mental abilities (Arendt 2003: 188).

In particular, judgment's more "political" character will have to do with the manner through which judgment allows an individual to try and take the views of others into account. I shall elaborate on the specific way judgment attempts to do this. Before that, however, I want to remark that judgment's socially-oriented priorities and outlook will mean that its successful practice will require separate, albeit complementary, abilities relative to those involved in thinking. I want to stress this point about *complementarity* because thinking, while personal and private in nature, still tries to take into account some semblance of a larger world into account, even if in a much more limited and internal fashion. I am referring, of course, to how the soundless dialogue which defines thinking proper was conceived as one between two equals who are within one individual. If we recall, the conditions for the possibility of thinking in the first place depended on Arendt's thesis that there is an alterity latent within the mind, which when activated allows for the creation of a unique kind of "social space" that is fundamental in the development of our identity, via its mode of taking in a plurality of perspectives. As such, it seems clear that anyone with the abilities of a judging individual would probably, all things being equal, be able to think better as an individual, than, say, one who lacks these, which is something that will be an important point to keep in mind going forward.

In this respect, Benhabib provides us with what I find to be a good list of those attributes or skills which the exercise of judgment will require of an individual, which she discusses by reference to those that are required for thinking. She writes, "[w]hereas thinking requires autonomy, consistency, tenacity, independence, and steadfastness, judging requires worldliness, an interest in one's fellow beings, and the capacity to appreciate the standpoint of others without projection, idealization, and distortion" (Benhabib 2018: 55-56). As one might notice, possessing the second set of traits and skills, i.e., those that pertain to judgment, does not appear to be something "easily" achievable nor, it seems, well distributed among individuals, at least relative to those in the first set, seeing as it appears possible to cultivate these latter traits and skills in a way that does not appear to apply to those in the second set. In particular, some of the traits in the "judgment" set appear to require the good fortune of first possessing certain psychological propensities and tendencies which seem out of reach for many individuals. As more "difficult" or "rare," they also seem, as a whole, to be *markers* of a morally superior kind of individual, at least relative to the individual who lacks them. This would, of course, be an observation perfectly in line with Baruch Spinoza's famous dictum that "all things noble are as difficult as they are rare."

To understand the reason why the more exclusive group of traits and skills listed by Benhabib constitute the hallmark of a judging individual, it behooves us to first examine the genealogy that accounts for Arendt's need to distinguish between the faculty of judgment and thinking in the first place. In particular, I mean this so that we can make sense of the reason behind Arendt's peculiar need to have to distinguish judgment from thinking by making it a more "social" thing, which of itself is not too intuitive a presupposition. There is a basis for all of this, however, and it comes, specifically, from her consideration of Kant's account of *aesthetic* judgment, as presented in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, and whose role in Arendt's account of judgment has been the subject of much discussion. This even lies at the heart of why, as Jonathan Peter Schwartz notes, her account of judgment "has been the subject of numerous attacks" (Schwartz 2016: 153), seeing as her appropriation of ideas from aesthetics appears to suffuse her overall understanding of politics with a peculiar, if not worrying, tincture of amorality, which gives us all the more reason to examine such matters more closely.

To begin, it is important to note that in the Kantian context, aesthetic judgments such as, e.g., "the rose is beautiful," concern particulars rather than universals. However, they are notably distinct from some other judgments about particulars by virtue of what is their unusual, almost paradoxical nature as both subjective yet universal. That is, aesthetic judgments are not like those which are "determinative" in character, that is, where a given particular is subsumed under some specified

universal, as when we make the judgment “Fido is a dog.” Aesthetic judgments involve a lot more nuance than what is involved in that and, properly speaking, they are of a “reflective” nature, which in this context means they require the search for a new universal that can accommodate the particular we make a judgment about. In other words, “beautiful” in “the rose is beautiful” does not function quite the same as “dog” in “Fido is a dog.”

The reason for this has to do with the fact that in making my aesthetic judgment I am, in a way, updating and redefining the meaning of beauty itself by judging the rose as beautiful, whereas nothing similar can be said to apply in my judgment that “Fido is a dog.” Specifically, in judging the rose as beautiful I mean to express what is a semantic breakthrough of sorts, as what I took from that experience and am tacitly expressing with my judgment is that, if anyone is ever going to debate the meaning of beauty or what is beautiful going forward, such a definition must *not* conflict with our always being able to use the particular rose I saw as an example of something that is beautiful. This is something more than nothing, then, when it comes to clarifying our understanding of beauty, since nobody would disagree with my judgment that the rose was beautiful, as my appreciation of its beauty was disinterested and impartial, which is all the evidence I, and any other equally impartial person, would ever need. That is, for Kant, aesthetic judgments have a unique supra-subjective universal aspect or assertoric force which arises from their form, which lets us know they carry with them a kind of “Humboldtian” sense of objectivity.

What Arendt finds intriguing about all this is that, in formulating such judgments, the opinions of other rational beings, or of what Kant would call other persons, are in some sense necessarily being taken into account. There is, then, some level of social concern that is undergirded by an implicit egalitarianism. In the Kantian context, this has to do with the fact that such judgments always carry with them the implicit expectation that others, as equally rational, must see things the same way, or that they would freely agree with my judgment if they had the same experience. That is, although the supposed truth regarding the beauty of the particular rose I experienced all by myself will not be a given to those actual people who have not had an experience that was identical to my own, I still make the judgment that “the rose is beautiful” under the hypothetical conviction that, were they to share in my experience, where I contemplated the rose disinterestedly, without hidden motives or any kinds of impulses controlling me, they would just as equally appreciate just how much of a semantic breakthrough seeing that particular rose was in allowing me and, by extension, everyone else, to better come to grips with what could be referred to as the proper definition of beauty, which in some sense has now become, after my experience, a new universal.

Arendt politically appropriates this entire line of thinking through an idiosyncratic reading of Kant which also has him saying that, in the formulation of such judgments, what the individual attempts to create is an “enlarged mentality” (Arendt 2003: 140). This idea, for Arendt, is something like a generalization or externalization of her idea of personal identity, in the sense that it transposes identity from the individual to the social plane, just as she had transposed the idea of a community into the individual in her account of thinking. The crystallization of our personal identity in Arendt’s account of thinking, if we recall, requires at a social space where the interaction of plural perspectives is possible, referring here to the dialogue among equals that is only possible once one is able to step outside of oneself, which she sees as already constituting a form of alterity within oneself that is necessary if one is to shape one’s identity, for it is what allows one to recognize oneself in the first place, as this is a clear prerequisite to possessing a sense of self at all. Arendt, similarly, finds the analog to the collective aspect of this idea in Kant’s notion of “common sense,” which she interprets as tantamount to something along the lines of that pre-existing communal understanding of things that is held by members of a given society.

While I agree with Ronald Beiner insofar as Arendt misinterprets Kant’s concept of an



“enlarged mentality” as well as that of “common sense” (Beiner 2001: 95-96), in considering their interplay from what is clearly a kind of empirical, naturalistic, or historicized point of view, rather than through the proper transcendental prism, the point is neither here nor there for our purposes. What is important, rather, is that we can now understand the main inspiration behind Arendt’s account of judgment, as well as the rationale underlying her conception of judgment as something socially oriented. However, it is going to be the way that she takes Kant’s explanation of the manner in which subjective yet universal judgments work to transpose it into the structure of judging in general, just as she had done in transposing Socrates’ elenchus method into the structure of thinking in general, that will ultimately allow her to create the seamless bridge between the contemplative life and the active life of politics, as will be made clear later on.

In particular, Arendt’s mental faculty or capacity of judgment will be one whose function is to allow or enable an individual to look at the world from a common perspective, in the sense that an individual belongs to a certain world, but must step outside of it alongside its other members, so as to address that world as a community, society, or world. This is a move, then, that allows one, as an individual, to transcend, in a certain way, one’s own, limited perspective. By virtue of prioritizing the theme of the collective in this rather peculiar way, i.e., in trying to take the views of real others into account, the faculty of judgment thus appears inexorably tied to higher social purposes that go beyond the individual. Arendt hints at this when she describes judgment as “one, if not the most, important activity in which...sharing-the-world-with-others come to pass.” (Arendt 1968: 221). What this implies is, as I take it, that judgment should therefore be understood as a practice which, by virtue of its unique manner or procedure or mode of operation, has the ultimate purpose of allowing a society’s members, or citizens, to, as Zerilli puts things, “enlarge their sense of what belongs in the common world” (Zerilli 2016: 279), and this as a result of the kind of communal perspective it implicitly seeks to create, access, or reconfigure. As this objective would furnish judgment with an unquestionably teleological character, Arendt is thus forced to distinguish it from thinking *per se*, which, as we saw, has no purpose.

For Arendt, then, the fruit of judgment is, specifically, that of opinion formation, which can only properly result from our considering the viewpoints of others by “representing” them, so to speak, in the sense of making them present in one’s mind even in their absence. For, as Arendt writes, “[t]he more people’s standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representation thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinion.” (Arendt 1968: 241). As with thinking, one sees the direct social and political implications of judgment upon examining what is likely to happen in a society whose members do not make enough use of it. In that case, it is clear that without diversity of opinions, political possibilities in terms of debate are significantly limited, which makes society’s members fall right into the hands of a totalitarian regime that seeks to manipulate them, and it even allows such regimes to get into political power in the first place, even via elections.

Consequently, opinion pluralism is a good thing both socially and politically, in particular, because, as Arendt puts it, “[t]o hold different opinions and to be aware that other people think differently on the same issue shields us from Godlike certainty which stops all discussion and reduces social relationships to an ant heap” (Arendt 2007: 391-392). One must be careful here to avoid misreading Arendt’s antagonistic words against “Godlike certainty” in her positive valuation of opinion pluralism, as advancing a form of relativism, or as expressing hostility to the idea that we can ever lay claim to genuine objectivity, as may be especially tempting in light of how she had earlier contrasted thinking with knowing, to not speak of her endorsement of the benefit of “unfreezing” the meaning of concepts, as seen in earlier in our discussion regarding her metaethical views. For, on

the contrary, if anything, by valuing opinion pluralism Arendt seeks to underscore the importance of creating the best conditions that can allow us to lay the reasonable claims we can to objectivity. After all, the importance of opinions stems from their possessing a certain claim to impartiality in their expression, imparted to them through their form, and which bestows them, as Arendt sees things, with a validity that thus goes beyond the merely subjective, just as in Kant's account of the nature of aesthetic judgments, for the form of an opinion implicitly takes others into account while treating them as equals in an important sense, namely, in that they should freely agree to those claims that make up one's opinion on some given issue.

Of course, judgment is not just political in an indirect way, as was the case with thinking. For one, Arendt has her own theory of political judgment, although technically, as Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves notes, Arendt's work really offers two distinct models thereof (d'Entrèves 2000: 246). More specifically, one model sees political judgment from the standpoint of the actor, which will mean judgment amounts to what he calls the "faculty of political actors acting in the public realm" (d'Entrèves 2000: 246). The second model, on the other hand, considers judgment from the standpoint of the non-participating spectator, which would render judgment the faculty or capacity through which "privileged spectators [such as poets and historians] can recover meaning from the past and thereby reconcile themselves to time, and, retrospectively, to tragedy" (d'Entrèves 2000: 247). In this latter, more temporally backward-facing model, the spectators, in a counterintuitive way, hold political priority over the actors themselves, since they have the ability to deliberate and adjudicate on the meaning of actions as a result of having hindsight at their disposal. This, of course, is well in line with the Arendtian theme of our needing to step out of things to stand back and gain a truer perspective that allows one to address things properly, which is why Arendt writes, in this context, that "only the spectator, never the actor, can know and understand whatever offers itself as a spectacle" (Arendt 1978: 92).

#### **IV. Judgment's Relation to Thinking**

Stepping out from the limited context of political judgment to address the category of judgment in general once more, it is important to remark that, despite the fact that judgment's more social outlook is what is primarily supposed to distinguish it from thinking, it is only an individual's judgment that we are talking about at the end of the day. In particular, as Giunia Gatta writes, "[j]udgment remains in Arendt the practice of an individual who is imagining and making present the plurality of others, representing them for herself, but as an individual who is ultimately and individually responsible for her judgment" (Gatta 2019). As such, although the practice of thinking is clearly, as Zerilli says, "a necessary prelude" to judgment (Zerilli 2016: 366n34), it still seems that its mental and individual nature creates some level of ambiguity in trying to determine just how different it really is from thinking, or how exactly it relates to it.

In the secondary literature, this ambiguity between thinking and judging is often noted. For instance, Robert Bernasconi has claimed that "[t]he precise relation between thinking and judging as Arendt conceived it...remains unclear" and that her "convictions about their proximity is somewhat puzzling" (Bernasconi 1993: 68). Bernstein has similarly expressed that Arendt did not provide a clear account about "the precise relation between thinking and judging" (Bernstein 1996: 172), in particular, because her work sometimes gives us the impression judgment is a kind of thinking. McGowan hints at a possible redundancy in their distinction when claiming that the lines between thinking and judging are not always so clear-cut (McGowan 1998: 108). Benhabib, likewise, notes that Arendt's considerations on judgment with respect to its relation to thinking are ultimately "inconclusive" (Benhabib 2003: 191). As she sees it, "thinking and judging stand in tension with each other, and the link which Arendt sought to establish between them remains tenuous at best" (Benhabib 2003: 192).

Similarly, and more recently, Delia Popescu has said that “the relation between thinking and judgment in Arendt’s work remains unclear” (Popescu 2012: 90).

If this lack of clarity results from Arendt’s own presentation of things, this does not mean that the resources are not available in her account to allow us to answer the question of judgment’s precise relation to thinking in a satisfying fashion, which I believe to be possible. By extension, we can also include the question of judgment’s relation to morality, particularly in light of Zerilli’s earlier qualm with Benhabib’s interpretation of Arendtian judgment. To begin resolving these tensions and ambiguities, which will be critical in advancing my larger argument concerning the coherence of the nexus binding together Arendt’s three categories of thinking, judgment, and action, I will make extended use of an analogy involving a bit of thought experimentation. The difference between the two scenarios I describe will allow us to see what I take to be Arendt’s unstated vision of the relation between judgment and thinking, judgment and morality, as well as judgment and politics, which I shall discuss with the purpose of connecting to judgment to Arendt’s explicitly political conception of action.

The first case I will make concerns judgment’s relation to thinking. Specifically, I will argue that Arendt relates judging to thinking in the sense that the former represents an attempt at translating some of the “fruits” of the latter, and this by making our thoughts ready-made for public consumption in the form of opinions. This is something which, by virtue of such an objective, means that thinking’s more personal mode of abstract contemplation can have nothing to do with it, as discussed above, except in the sense of its collaterally providing judgment with its initial impetus as well as the raw content it works with, and in its indirect role in helping improve one’s judgments in the future. Judgment will therefore be shown to be more of a kind of second-order thinking, rather than a kind of thinking, and this through the way it considers how society can optimally process one’s thoughts in incorporating their potential assessment of these in the generating the eventual formulation my thoughts will take on as finished, properly communicable, products, of the sort an individual might, but technically need not, share with other members of society.

I begin my analogy, then, by describing the two scenarios. Let us call the first *Scenario One*. In writing an academic book, an author makes some grand case in favor of a certain view, and she tries to defend that view with argumentation, evidence, and so on. In preparing the final manuscript before its printing and subsequent publication, the author goes through many drafts. She does not do this out of pleasure, but only in order to be able to present a “finished product” to the world, as she operates under the hope that some (future) audience might eventually want to read her book, understand it, and, as a result, appreciate the contribution she believes to have made to her field, which is one she naturally wants, or even feels the duty, to share. Let us call the following *Scenario Two*. Suppose instead that, for whatever reason, there could be no possible audience for the same book idea. Suppose, in addition, that the publisher is aware of this, but still insists on wanting to publish it. Similarly, our same author is sadly aware of this truth as well, but she still wants to write it, as happens when one keeps a diary, where the motivation is never social, but strictly personal.

It seems safe to assume that the finished product in *Scenario One* will differ from that in *Scenario Two*. I mean this in the sense that it is very likely that the final manuscript in *Scenario Two* will at least be a lot sloppier than *Scenario One*’s, even if they make the same case. For example, *Scenario Two*’s final manuscript is likely to avoid expanding on the context behind a few points here and there, as well as likelier to skip over certain key definitions, and so on. As such, *Scenario Two*’s final manuscript might look more like a copy of an early draft of *Scenario One*’s manuscript than it might a copy of the final manuscript itself. There would be no point, after all, in our author exerting herself so much in making these changes, seeing as she is the only possible eventual reader, by which I mean to underscore the idea that she will always know what she is referring to, assuming she cannot lose her memory later on. With all this in mind, I believe Arendt views the process of judging as very much akin to what is

involved in the author's decision and process in drafting the much more presentable final manuscript found in *Scenario One*, where the final manuscript would here represent an individual's opinion on some issue.

I think the analogy is especially apt, then, because, in preparing many drafts, our author in *Scenario One* also imagines a hypothetical audience, and its members, whether she has met them or not, are critically taken into consideration, just as happens with judging. This imagined community drives the author to make certain changes in the text that are exhausting or irrelevant to make, possibly requiring an admirable level of sacrifice on her part, as she makes them only because they are presumably essential in ensuring that her overall message, which reflects the fruits of her research on some topic, can be successfully transmitted, understood, and reflected upon later. The successful transmission of the author's message is critical to her because the hope is that its future audience would similarly assent to the claims she is making, as she genuinely believes she has made a breakthrough that will reshape some aspect of her academic field's research landscape, which in this situation is an idea analogous to Arendt's vision of an enlarged mentality. The laborious edits undertaken by the author in *Scenario One* are exactly the ones that the author in *Scenario Two* decides to skip, and so her analog in the Arendtian context would be something like a "pure" thinker, or like someone a thinker alone in an alone, with no such possible higher (social) purposes.

In line with this, it can be said that once the drafting process is done in *Scenario One* and the manuscript has been completed, which is not to be confused with its being published, that one would then have something akin to what Arendt means by an opinion, or perhaps a set of opinions, particularly in the sense that the final manuscript's overall quality as a piece of research, i.e., in terms of how it carries out the lines of argumentation it presents and defends, will represent who the author is as a researcher since the quality of the piece of research supervenes on the quality of her ability to carry out research, thus shaping, or continuously defining, her identity as a researcher. The Arendtian parallel to this ability would be the sophistication, progress, or quality of one's thinking, for the latter's practice can be seen as a kind of capacity to be guided a certain way, aided as it often is by conscience, but also by improvements in one's logical skills and so on, which come with time and practice. One must be careful not to conflate the author's ability to carry out research, then, with the quality of one's judging in this analogy. Instead, the analogue here would be the quality reflected in the content of the research piece itself, which reflects who the author is as a researcher, in the same way that judgments reflect who one is as a person, but more properly depend on the prior ability to do research, which corresponds to the state of one's thinking, and thus to who one is.

It is important to note here that since *Scenario One's* final manuscript was produced under the assumption that other people would see it, it will also be more complete in terms of its presentation than the final manuscript in *Scenario Two*, were either of them to be evaluated by an outsider. This clearly holds even if said outsider disagrees with what *Scenario One's* final manuscript says, simply due to the fact that it does not skip over as many important things and so is better able to be accurately assessed and evaluated. The corollary to this idea is that *Scenario One's* final manuscript thus has the added benefit of more general coherence, despite how wrong its thesis might be. As such, it even seems safe to say that, not only to an outsider but even to the author herself, *Scenario One's* final manuscript serves as a better representation of her actual views on the eventual book's topic than *Scenario Two's*, notwithstanding the fact that *Scenario Two's* final manuscript was written for her eyes only. In a similar way, one can say that better judgment can also indirectly help shape who one is, by giving an individual a clearer sense of that, because if you have opinions, you know more about yourself than if have not formulated them as coherently, meaning their possession affects the direction of one's future thinking.

In addition, one can say that because the author in *Scenario One* was assuming any future readers would actively engage with her claims, she was also constantly thinking about peoples' potential

reactions to each of the points she was making. As a result of this, it is likely she would have changed not only her presentation but even her overall argument for the better in producing the final manuscript than had she not done so, as in *Scenario Two*. After all, doing so would have likely opened up new research avenues or directions that she would have otherwise missed out on. Of course, the chances the author in *Scenario One* has a much superior argument to that of the author in *Scenario Two* seems even higher if her hypothetical future readers are not just random, anonymous, and generic individuals but also *real* individuals, like, say, specific experts in her field (and, for the sake of argument, let us assume this is, in fact, the case). What this means is that the author in *Scenario One* made genuine progress as a researcher as a result of her taking others, namely academic colleagues or peers, which are egalitarian notions, into account in this way. This is something whose truth would be reflected in the fact of her having a more advanced final piece of research relative to what she had in her first draft, in terms of ideas, and also relative to *Scenario Two's* final manuscript.

This, I think, is very indicative of how the subtle and nuanced dynamic that exists between judgment and thinking, whose distinction is easy to miss, can be said to play out. I say this because, for Arendt, it seems quite clear that an improvement in our judgment must improve our thinking going forward, because it allows one to partly circumvent the limitations involved in ultimately being but one individual (even if thinking is always dialogical in the sense referred to earlier). Arendt's idea even aligns with common sense. There is a reason why, after all, people often say things such as, "I need your help, I am confused, I really need an outsider's perspective on this." Similarly, they might ask for your input so as to confirm to them they have not lost their minds over some counterintuitive or controversial opinion they hold, and so on. That is, individuals want more points of view because that leads to better assessments, decision-making, actions, and so on. In this respect it is clear that all things being equal in terms of information, the impartial viewpoint is the ideal viewpoint to have, and it is this one that our judgment strives to simulate, foster within itself, and thus approximate.

This means our progress as individuals can only benefit from our having better judgment, but in a way, this is only indirectly, as that is because it leads to better thinking, which is what, strictly speaking, truly shapes our sense of who we are. So, although judging helps us grow as individuals or reveals us to ourselves because, as Patrick Hayden writes, what we do in judgment is to disclose our preferences (Hayden 2014: 169), which allows us to individuate ourselves through the differentiation it engenders, since, as McGowan writes, "[o]ur judgments are peculiar, particular, to ourselves; what I judge differentiates me from others who form different judgments" (McGowan 1998: 128) it is not, strictly speaking, the judgments or the judging itself that directly effects the actual shaping of our identities. Rather, this occurs through the way our thoughts are re-oriented by the new considerations the mind has before, seeing as these would create new channels for further improvement in one's thinking.

Of course, the better one's thinking, the better one's future judgments, and in the end, it is quite possible that as a result of this positive feedback loop, a certain level of sophistication in thinking could make one's thoughts indistinguishable from one's judgments. In this case, the individual's faculty or capacity to judge, or to convert thinking's products into opinions by allowing them to lay claim to a kind of objectivity that results from the way it tries to take into account the views of others by implicitly addressing as equals, is one that, in principle, can take place nearly automatically, as if through muscle memory, and thus judgments would temporally succeed all our thoughts as if in a sequence that goes almost at the exact speed as our thinking, which is one something whose content will also start concerning itself more and more with other's and with their views, for this is what will happen when one's thinking skills grow in terms of their sophistication. But, to say that they are thus possibly or necessarily the same thing would, in this case, only be the result of an illusion or conflation of these two mental capacities.

## V. Judgment's Relation to Morality

Having hopefully untangled the nature of judgment's precise relation to thinking, the second case I want to make is that judging can be thought of as a kind of evolutionary step in a thinking individual's life, at least when considered through the prism of an individual's moral development. I clearly do not mean that in the sense that thinking itself is thus a sign of moral inferiority, let alone that it is somehow irrelevant once our capacity to judge is able to be activated. My point, rather, is that the will to engage in judgment is also, in an important sense, an inevitable corollary of one's progress as a thinking individual, which we know should, in Arendt's account, come hand in hand with one's continuous development as a moral individual. Our moral development is not, however, merely correlative when it comes to some matters pertaining to judgment. In particular, the will to judge results from a subjective principle of action that implies some significant level of progression in one's moral development has been reached, as reflected by a judgments' aspiration to be impartial, as well as sincere. Since we know that morality emerges *after* some progress thinking, this means that an ability to think does not come hand in hand with an ability to activate our capacity to judge, for the will or impetus to judge *in the first place*, whenever that is, is counterfactually dependent on one's having reached some non-negligible basic threshold in terms of moral development.

Assuming this is correct, Arendtian judgment is thus always tied to morality in a fundamental, albeit specifically etiological way, regardless of any judgment's subject matter or content *per se*. As such, although Zerilli is right that conflating judgment with morality is a mistake in one's interpreting Arendt, the mere impetus to ever make use of one's judgment implies that one might possibly hope to share one's opinions with others, and this because it presents them in a way where the expectation is that these others would freely assent to its claims, which also means seeing them as equals, with a kind of dignity afforded to them by their rational natures, which would coincide with one's own. This means then, that there is implicit respect on some level for others' autonomy and equality, and this holds even if we are talking about, say, purely aesthetic opinions. Further, any opinion, with its claim to impartiality, and thus to its need to say express something that is more than merely subjective, implies a certain level of altruism as well, to not speak of a sense of community, and perhaps even a nascent, embryonic kind of cosmopolitanism which must be existent within the judging person at all times. Simply put, then, judging implies one holds an unspecified combination of values that requires one to have morally developed by transitioning away from the direction of, say, pure egocentrism toward something better and more altruistic in a general way.

In addition, it is important to note that Arendt's discussion of opinion formation comes attached with the assumption of a certain honesty or sincerity in one's intentions as well. That is, to judge *simpliciter* is always to judge *sincerely*, in the same way that to think is always to think for its own sake. Of course, formulating opinions one does not believe seems possible once equipped with the faculty to judge, but then these are not opinions with the proper implicit relation to a subject which Arendt sees them as involving. That is, they would not be one's own opinions. As such, in light of all these foregoing considerations, it appears one cannot but accept that, at the very least, our initial impulse to judge, and all our subsequent attempts at doing so, necessarily implies one's having some minimum and unspecified combination of axiological tendencies which collectively reflect the fact that the judging individual must, at least on some level, value autonomy, equality, altruism, truth, and authenticity. This stage in our moral development is one that cannot be innate, but achieved, because, again, for Arendt, our conscience and thus morality only emerges as part of a causal developmental process that takes time and depends on one's progress as a thinker.

Of course, none of this means that the more "moral" one is the better one's opinions about anything should be. However, some positive correlation should still exist between the general quality of an individual's opinions and that individual's general state in terms of moral development. I say this

because both factors depend on one's progress thinking, and with better concepts and ways of looking at things, which better thinking is able to provide, one would imagine that all things being equal, even an immoral opinion, will, at least be of the same quality, and at best of a superior one, when considered *as* an immoral opinion, if this is one that is formulated by someone with more refined conceptual categories, better distinctions, and so on, as opposed to someone who lacks these. For instance, one's opinion on how to most effectively pull off a pension scam for the financial benefit of a crime ring might involve certain conceptual categories which an individual who is at an even lower level in terms of moral development would have no cognitive access to, all else being equal.

On the other hand, if one's judgments concern some strictly, or even indirectly, moral matter, then it is clear that the more morally developed person will make better judgments than the less morally developed person, all else being equal. Consequently, we can say that, in Arendt, although judgment is certainly not morality *per se*, a person's impetus to make use of it still necessarily reflects something positive about one's moral development, even if the judgments *per se* are wrong, and even if the judgments *per se* are immoral. However, if these are about moral matters *per se*, then the state of one's moral progress can generate better opinions about these. Finally, of course, seeing as improvements in judgment leads to better thinking, one can also say that this also leads to advances in one's moral development, for conscience develops hand in hand with better thinking as a result of the positive feedback loop it creates together with it.

## VI. Judgment's Relation to Politics

Since judgment is, at the end of the day, just a mental faculty, this makes its relation to politics one of much interest, particularly as Arendt, as mentioned earlier, sees judgment in general as being political on some level. In this respect, Zerilli writes that "[t]he key interpretive question in reading Arendt...is whether the term political refers to a particular mode (form) of judgment or only to a particular kind of object (referent) judgments can have" (Zerilli 2016: 8). My answer to Zerilli's question, which I shall justify here, is that, apart from the strictly *political* judgment of the kind relevant to Arendt's two models of it, which was discussed earlier and where relevant opinions concerned politically relevant matters, the faculty of judgment more broadly understood is still properly labelable as political, in that it enables the possibility of actual politics itself, and this by virtue of its form, together with the community-oriented moral development that improvement in judgment can help engender in an individual.

If one returns to the writing analogy and imagine a related situation, things might become clearer. Suppose a bunch of authors who are peers working in the same academic field attend a colloquium with the express purpose of giving each other feedback on their work. Imagine, in particular, that all of the authors' respective manuscripts in one such group are carefully prepared in a way similar to that undertaken by our author in *Scenario One*. Similarly, imagine all of the authors' manuscripts in a second group are prepared in a way similar to that of our author's final manuscript in *Scenario Two*, which is to say that what they wrote was originally intended for their eyes only. Which of these two groups is likelier to have a more fruitful meeting that can get off the ground and be somewhat productive? The answer, of course, is the first group, which does not get as bogged down by time-consuming clarifications, such as what a random abbreviation stands for, or why this and that point was skipped over, and so on. Indeed, perhaps an author in the second group wrote part of her or his manuscript in a made-up language, making it indecipherable to all the others!

Arendt's own vision of political action in general, as we will see shortly, is going to look very similar to this colloquium situation, at least in the sense that it will involve multiple, different, real individuals, which will thus make action a kind of second-order judging, or even third-order thinking (but this is getting ahead of ourselves). The point I wish to make here, rather, is that judgment should

be understood in Arendt as that which prepares us for the now possible reality of politics, in particular, because it lets us present our own viewpoints in a format that is coherent and ready for public consumption, as well as more cogent, as a result of the unique manner underlying its procedure, driven as it is by a desire for impartiality, respect for other's potential reactions, and so on.

After all, it would be quite unfortunate if one had somehow developed the will to care about, say, something very abstract like the public good, but then one's mind had no way to make its thoughts presentable in an impartial way that could also allow others to assent, or even properly dissent, from these, and which would also not even be as well-developed as they could be. After all, saying "the rose is beautiful," but only speaking for myself, and saying "the rose is beautiful," in a more Kantian sense, are two quite different things that illustrate the degree of importance of Arendtian judgment in her account of politics. The second claim, for instance, is much more thought-provoking, can be genuinely agreed upon or debated, and it also has wider implications for society's understanding of things as well as for the future, without, at the same time, ever erasing that person's experience of the flower, but, rather, merely embedding it within a framework that makes it as comprehensible or transmittable as it can be for everyone else to process meaningfully, in a way where one also does not renounce or cease to agree with what is expressed by it.

This is all to say that our judgment's unique function of ordering and synthesizing the matter of thought provides us with a much-needed bridge to politics, as its particular mechanism is a solution that helps compensate for the perspectival limitations inherent in one's being an individual. After all, an individual, by nature, is always going to be unable to see things through the first-person perspective of another, even when face-to-face, and particularly in light of the fact that even knowing who one is of itself represents a challenge and achievement! Judgment, then, is the bridge, or propaedeutic, to politics, because it allows us to begin to transcend this limitation in letting us articulate the fruits of our thoughts by "socially" translating them into opinions, and these of the kind able to be bandied about in the public sphere. It is also only through the possession and use of such a capacity that we can have any chance to meaningfully show others who we are, for in representing my thoughts in a way that strives to express something subjective, but universal in nature, I can let others access as much of my first-person perspective as I am able to in the process.

Furthermore, it also seems reasonable to believe that if someone has improved their judgment and created the previous positive feedback loop that it creates together with thinking, that one's conscience and moral development will ideally be able to reach a point at which one starts caring about higher, abstract ideas like the public good, which would create the individual's willingness to go about and enact political change. I say this, in particular, because it seems clear that getting to the point of wanting to act politically requires even more moral development than was needed merely to activate the once latent capacity to judge, as judgment does not require that one desire to actually engage with other humans for their own good. With this I mean to imply that to get to this higher point of moral development, improvements in one's judgment can be what indirectly leads one to even want to engage in politics in the first place. Of course, it is not clear if, for Arendt, getting to such a moral developmental high point requires the additional fortune of possessing certain psychological propensities which would limit some individuals' potential to access that kind of moral development which is required to engender our eventual willingness to engage in political action. This, however, is something of a separate issue.

As such, if improvements in judgment can help lead to our willingness to engage in political action, by virtue of the improvements that it leads to in one's thinking, and, by extension, the subsequent development of one's conscience, it seems that, in conjunction with the way it serves as a bridge to the possibility of politics by virtue of its manner of procedure, that there is nothing wrong in referring to judgment as the most "political" of our mental faculties or capacities. In this sense, judgment is, therefore, best described as political only in a transcendental sense, i.e., insofar as it is



what enables the conditions for the possibility of politics, but also insofar as it helps facilitate our reaching that requisite point in our moral development which can then engender our willingness to engage in politics for the sake of the public good.

## VII. Arendt on Action

Having a good sense of what thinking and judgment are, and how these interrelate, we can now begin discussing Arendt's third category, which is action, here referring to political action. Although its character is fundamentally different from that of the other two categories, which were but mental faculties or capacities, it is wrong to assume they cannot interconnect, as I will try to show.

To this end, one can begin by saying that one curious thing Arendt says about acting is that, in it, "men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world" (Arendt 1958: 179). That is, acting is directly being linked by Arendt, in a very important sense, to thinking, and by extension to judgment, since thinking, after all, is technically what makes us the "persons" we are in the *first* place. This is why, as Arendt writes, thinking is the "indispensable preparation for deciding what shall be and for evaluating what is no more" (Arendt 2018: 213). However, action engages with real, and not just internal or imagined, forms of alterity, which is why, as Arendt writes, in contrasting thinking with action, that "[t]he main distinction, politically speaking, between Thought and Action lies in that I am only with my own self or the self of another while I am thinking, whereas I am in the company of the many the moment I start to act" (Arendt 2003: 106).

Due to its unambiguous engagement with the real world, action is thus political as a category in a way that is different than even judgment was. In particular, one can say in agreement with Peter Steinberger, that "[i]n Arendt's thought, Action is roughly synonymous with politics" (Steinberger 2018: 54). As far as what this action involves, Arendt's answer will be grounded in a binary distinction which Mordechai Gordon refers to as "provocative" (Gordon 2001: 209). This is, specifically, her idea that political action should consist of *speech* instead of something more physical in nature, or at least, that is how things should be most of the time (Arendt 1958: 126). That is, action is essentially deliberation, or the exchange of opinions, albeit not any kind of opinions, of course. As George Kateb elaborates, deliberation takes place as "part of the process of deciding some issue pertaining to the public good" (Kateb 2000: 133). As such, in our earlier analogy about the process of publishing a book, *Scenario One's* final manuscript's finally being published as a book would represent the individual's entry into the public realm or political sphere, and the author's subsequent role engaging with her book's reception, e.g., by publishing a second edition of the book that takes into account her colleagues' criticisms of her argument, which she does not do strictly for herself, but for the higher purpose of advancing her and her peers' own field, is what would represent the analog of action itself.

In a way, then, action is just the real-world version of judgment, and I mean this not only in the sense that speech consists of judgments, but in the sense that judgment's procedure can be seen as the "mental" analog or even prototype of that which action in the public sphere represents. This means action can serve as a superior mode of individuation than judgment because now one is taking in a multiplicity of real, and not only imagined, perspectives, although technically, it must be noted that exchanging opinions without strictly political purposes would accomplish something very similar, as in, say, the academic colloquium scenario described earlier, which would be something like an interpersonal form of judging. However, bilateral engagement with others is not something that comes hand in hand with the practice of judgment *per se*, as it is but the mental faculty of an individual, whereas action by nature is inherently interactive. In any case, the parallel these two categories share in this respect explains why McGowan is right to refer to both acting and judging as "identity-constituting" activities (McGowan 1998: 128), as does Antonia Grunenberg, who similarly writes that

Arendt locates the “subjective capacity in acting and in judging” (Grunenberg 2017: xxiv). In this respect, she even notes, in particular, that, for Arendt, “acting and judging in the plurality of many people [thus] constituted the unique human capacity to be free” (Grunenberg 2017: xxiv-xxv).

As such, in action, we see the Arendtian theme of alterity grounding identity taken to its fullest expression in action. This is because, as Cindy Horst and Odin Lysaker put things, “Arendtian politics relates action and interaction to the very basic and diverse ways in which we all develop ourselves through relationships and interactions with others” (Horst and Lysaker 2019). But it must not be forgotten that this properly began and requires thinking. In this respect, what judgment and action accomplish for our identity is more or less only indirect, in the sense that both of them would not be possible without thinking, and in the sense that insofar as they help us develop ourselves, for it is only technically due the effect they have on our subsequent thinking. That is, Arendt’s three categories of thinking, judgment, and action integrate as a unit that takes on the form of an ontogenetic chain of interdependence, which begins with contemplative thinking and culminates in political action carried out with other individuals for the sake of the public good, and that later creates a positive feedback loop between the three, as I will now explain.

This integration is a seamless one, and, therefore, a coherent one, because in thinking, if we recall, one already has an internal version of alterity, latent within one’s own mind, and capable of creating an interaction between a plurality, or, in this case, duality, of perspectives, in a social space that allows for the self-dialogue known as thinking. It is through one’s progress in thinking, then, that one’s conscience emerges and develops, which makes moral development itself dependent on one’s progress in thinking. This development ideally and eventually manifests itself in a wish or need to begin to take others into account in some genuine and disinterested way, or for their own sake, which at a point leads one to activate one’s previously latent capacity to judge. By judging, one attempts to transcend the limitations of a first-person perspective, so as to take into account the views of others, thereby creating a collective identity in the process. Of course, an improvement in one’s judging only aids one’s future thinking, which comes hand with an improvement in one’s moral development, which relies on the development of one’s conscience, which would now possess better concepts to work with and so on, thus consolidating or engendering new values in the individual. At some point, the positive feedback loop that thinking and judgment create is then ideally able to shape an individual for the morally better and also to the point that this would manifest itself in the wish or need, to engage in political action itself, or to act with the public good in mind, a will that can be causally efficacious once enough individuals coalesce in terms of their agenda.

In action, then, the individual confronts and addresses fellow members of society, having been prepared for the otherwise impossible occasion via the exercise of judgment. At this point, the individual’s hope is to help steer society in the right direction when it comes to the indeterminate path that it is bound to follow. In the process of so doing, one naturally develops one’s opinions further and thus one’s identity as an individual by engaging in genuinely intersubjective, real-time deliberation of the sort that can allow for the creation of another synergistic positive feedback loop that binds together all three of Arendt’s categories in a unique way. This is one that would also create the opening for the possibility that someday society’s members may in fact come to agree on things and thereby truly determine their own path and for their own good. This means, then, action’s superior liberating effect is not only relevant to the individual but also possibly for the collective, politically speaking, assuming that everyone (or enough individuals) are able to get on the same page.

### **VIII. Closing Remarks and a Look Ahead**

In conclusion, if I am correct in my interpretation of Arendt’s categories, the implicit relation between thinking, judgment, and action is one that not only is able to be discerned but also able to be

threaded together in a way that attests to their coherence as an integrated unit. In the process of trying to uncover the nature of their hidden nexus, we were able to get a good sense of the precise relation that Arendt appears to believe holds between judgment and thinking, judgment and morality, as well as judgment and politics. Our examination of these issues allowed us to see how Arendt is then not only able to connect contemplative thinking to action of a political kind, since judgment, as we saw, serves as a bridge to politics, but also as a “middle term” in the much larger argument Arendt was constructing.

To say this nexus is coherent or that its construction is logically valid is, of course, not the same as saying that Arendt’s vision is perfectly sound, as some may argue with its premises. For instance, one reason it was coherent appears to be the fact that Arendt assumes a rather discursive view of who we are as individuals in terms of what we think and, presumably, what we feel. I mean this is in the sense that Arendt’s view of selfhood appears quite similar, in some respect, to the kind of reasoning we implicitly adopt in referring to the author of an academic book as though she were the same person as the book, e.g., when interchangeably saying things such as “this author defends X” and “this book defends X.” That is, Arendt seems to believe that if we somehow cannot say or articulate who we are, or what we think, through some kind of linguistic medium, that we are in some sense not able to be engaged with meaningfully anyway. This is why I think Arendt probably shares the same kind of vision expressed by René Descartes, who, in his *Discourse on Method*, compared the process of reading good books to having “a conversation with the noblest men of past centuries who were the authors of them, nay a carefully studied conversation, in which they reveal to us none but the best of their thoughts” (Descartes 2003: 6).

I say all this because, if we go back to our writing analogy from earlier, the author in *Scenario One* had no need, in principle, to have ever met the people whose potential reactions she was imagining in order to develop the superior argument she made in her final manuscript relative to *Scenario Two*’s. Assuming she was thinking of specific experts as part of her audience, all the author needed to improve her argument in this way was a mediated and unilateral engagement with their publications so as to develop enough of a general sense as to how they might respond to her points. This allowed us to see that judgment did not require, in principle, any genuine “social” engagement so as to be able to still serve as the necessary bridge to politics, which then consists of political speech (or the exchange of opinions). This all leads me to think that Arendt’s subtly implied assumption of discursivity appears to be what allows for that seamless continuity existing between her three categories, and which allows her to connect the inner world of the mind to the outside world of political action. It may also be what lies at the bottom of those apparent tensions and ambiguities which exist in her account of judgment in terms of its relation to thinking and which have hopefully been clarified somewhat.

If the extended writing analogy my larger argument used to advance the ideas presented herein was in any way successful, it seems of relevance to note, in the end, that the ostensive fact of its properness should lend some support to the idea that a hidden discursivity thesis is perhaps what ultimately accounts, at the deepest level, for the general coherence, even if not necessarily the soundness, of that implicit nexus which Arendt believed must have connected thinking, judgment, and action together. Assuming this is true, my hope is that new avenues for research might open up which will better help us in the future when engaging with Arendt’s writings on matters relating the interplay that exists among the categories of thinking, judgment, and action.

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