Hermeneutics of the *Polis*: Arendt and Gadamer on the Political World

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This dissertation raises the question of the political world, and pursues it as central theme in the political thought of Hannah Arendt and the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Within the phenomenological tradition, *world* refers to a referential context of relations between beings, within which those beings appear as meaningful. Since Heidegger, the concept of world has been inextricably linked with that of understanding, the disclosedness that guides any interpretation of beings and allows them to appear as what they are. In what sense is the world political? In what sense does the political constitute a world?

For Arendt, the political concerns human beings in their *plurality*. It concerns the relations between members of a *polis*, who are related to each other by the world that they share in common in action and speech. The *polis* is not simply a city or a political entity, but a space within which both things and human beings appear according to a distinctively political mode of disclosedness, a plural understanding. In this, Arendt operates within a hermeneutical ontology, though it is often unthematized or underdeveloped within her work. Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy makes it possible to explicate and develop this ontology, illuminating the complex reciprocal relationship Arendt develops between the worldliness of human beings and the space of appearance that arises out of the exchange of interpretive judgments: the political world. The central theme of the political world serves to uncover the hermeneutical underpinnings of Arendt's political thought, as well as the political implications of Gadamer's philosophy.

Part I shows how an embryonic and unthematized concept of the political world arises from the analysis of being-with [*Mitsein*] in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Part II proposes a novel systematic interpretation of *The Human Condition*, situating the conceptual distinctions of the *vita activa* within a hermeneutical ontology, with particular emphasis on Arendt's appropriation and development of the concept of world. Part III turns to Gadamer's treatment of tradition and historically-effected consciousness [*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*] in *Truth and Method*, arguing that the handing-down of tradition describes an historical activity of plural understanding, from which the political world emerges. Part IV traces the development of Arendt's theory of judgment in tandem with her account of δόξα, the discursive mode proper to plural understanding, and proposes a revisionist interpretation of her mature theory of judgment. Gadamer's fusion of horizons, rather than a Kantian extended mentality, emerges as an apt description of the space of appearance that emerges within plural interpretive discourse.
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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in the main text. Hannah Arendt was a prolific essayist and much of her work is available in the form of collections, either originally published in that form or posthumously amassed into edited volumes, like the influential collections edited by Jerome Kohn . Due to the nature of this project, when citing work by Arendt, I have chosen to abbreviate and reference specific essays rather than collections as a whole. Since my treatment of Gadamer's essays in this project tends to be less exegetical, I have chosen to abbreviate the English language collections instead. In these cases, the citation will include the full essay title, and the abbreviated collection title.

Not abbreviated below are Gadamer's collected works, the 10-volume *Gesammelte Werke*. In cases where it was necessary to cross-reference English translations with the German, this is what I have used. References to Arendt and Gadamer refer to the English texts and utilize the cited translations, unless otherwise noted. References to Heidegger and Kant refer to the German texts, but utilize the cited translations, unless otherwise noted.

Works by Hannah Arendt

CC Arendt, Hannah. "The Crisis in Culture," in *Between Past and Future*, 194-222. New York: Penguin Group, 2006. First published in 1961.

CP Arendt, Hannah. "Concern for Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 428-447. New York: Schocken Books, 2005.

EJ Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin, 2006. First published in 1963.

HC Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. First published in 1958.

GG Arendt, Hannah. "'What Remains? The Language Remains': A Conversation with Günter Gaus," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 1-23. New York: Schocken Books, 2005.

IP Arendt, Hannah. "Introduction into Politics," in *The Promise of Politics*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 93-200. New York: Schocken Books, 2005. Published in German as Arendt, Hannah. *Was ist Politik? Fragmente aus dem Nachlaß*, edited by Urusla Ludz. Munchen: Piper, 1993.

LKP Arendt, Hannah. *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy.* Edited by Ronald Beiner. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. Lecture course given in 1970.

LM1 Arendt, Hannah. *The Life of the Mind, Volume 1: Thinking*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.

LM2 Arendt, Hannah. *The Life of the Mind, Volume 2: Willing.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.

MDT Arendt, Hannah. *Men in Dark Times.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968.

PP Arendt, Hannah. "Philosophy and Politics. " *Social Research* 57, no. 1 (1990): 73-103.

TMC Arendt, Hannah. "Thinking and Moral Considerations," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 159-189. New York: Schocken Books, 2005.

TP Arendt, Hannah. "Truth and Politics," in *Between Past and Future,* 223-259. New York: Penguin Group, 2006. First published in 1961.

UP Arendt, Hannah. "Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 307-327. New York: Schocken Books, 2005.

WEP Arendt, Hannah. "What is Existential Philosophy," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, edited by Jerome Kohn, 163-187. New York: Schocken Books, 2005.

VA Arendt, Hannah. *Vita Activa, oder tatigen Leben.* München: Piper Verlag, 2020. First published in 1958.

Works by Aristotle

MP Aristotle. *Metaphysics,* translated by C.D.C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2016.

NE Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics,* translated by C.D.C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014.

Works by Hans-Georg Gadamer

EPH Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History,* edited by Dieter Misgeld and Graeme Nicholson, translated by Lawrence Schmidt and Monica Reuss. Albany: SUNY Press, 1992.

GC Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary,* edited and translated by Richard E. Palmer. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

GR Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, edited by Richard E. Palmer. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

PH Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, edited and translated by David E. Linge. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

RAS Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Reason in the Age of Science*, translated by Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990.

SW1 Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Hermeneutics Between History and Philosophy: The Selected Writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Volume 1*, edited and translated by Pol Vandevelde and Arun Iyer. New York: Bloomsbury, 2019.

SW2 Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Ethics, Aesthetics and the Historical Dimension of Language: The Selected Writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Volume 2*, edited and translated by Pol Vandevelde and Arun Iyer. New York: Bloomsbury, 2022.

TM Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method,* translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 1994. Published in German as *Hermeneutik I: Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzuge einer philosophichen Hermeneutik.* Gesammelte Werke, Band 1. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr: 1999. First published in 1960.

Works by Martin Heidegger

PS Heidegger, Martin. *Platon: Sophistes.* Gesamtausgabe, Band 19. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1992. English translation by Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003. Lecture course given in 1924.

SZ Heidegger, Martin. *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2006. English translation by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: SUNY Press, 2010. First published in 1927.

UK *Der Ursprung der Kunstwerkes.* Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2012. English translation by Albert Hofstadter in *Poetry, Language, Thought.* New York: Harper Perennial, 2013. First published in 1950.

Works by Immanuel Kant

KU Kant, Immanuel. *Kritik der Urteilskraft, Kants gesammelte Schriften*, Volume 5, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902–. English translation by Paul Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. First published in 1790.

INTRODUCTION

To pose the question of the political world is to ask, What are the aspects of the world that are distinctively *political*? and, simultaneously, In what sense do distinctively political activities constitute a *world*? In the reference to 'world,' this question is an unavoidably phenomenological. Within the phenomenological tradition, world refers to a referential context of relations between beings, within which those beings appear as meaningful. It is also unavoidably *hermeneutical*. Hermeneutics concerns itself with the question of meaning, what can and cannot be understand, what it is to understand. To ask about the political world is to ask about the way that the world is politically *meaningful*, and the meaning that the political world makes possible.

What is the political? Hannah Arendt provides an account of the political as the actualization of human *plurality*. Political activity is what takes place between human beings *as* plural, as human*s* – not Humanity – in relations to each other that are not grounded in a common metaphysical essence, natural commonality, or affective preference, but in the shared space of the *polis*. For Arendt, two related activities are distinctly political: action and speech. They are political because their meaningfulness depends upon the presence of others, unique others, with whom one shares a common world. In this way, for Arendt, the question of the political – the actualization of human plurality – is always already inextricably linked with the question of world.

In what follows, I pursue the theme of the political world primarily within the work of Hannah Arendt and Hans-Georg Gadamer, two philosophers (though the former would renounce such a title) who together articulate a hermeneutical conception of the political world as a space of appearance that emerges from the activity of plural discourse.

By bringing the two together in this way, my intention is not simply to place Arendt and Gadamer into an imagined dialogue with one another in regard to a common topic of discussion, however fruitful or interesting such a dialogue might be. It is not a comparative account, which would catalogue differences, and perhaps attempt to adjudicate between them, or take sides with one or the other. Instead, it proposes a reciprocal interpretation, a *translation* that attempts to discover – and even create – a common language. Gadamer writes that "we are continually shaping a common perspective when we speak a common language," and so this project develops a language about and perspective on the political world that is common to Arendt and Gadamer.[1]

Of course there are biographical and historical precedents for bringing these two together. The most obvious is their shared heritage as students of Martin Heidegger, not only influenced heavily by Heidegger's hermeneutical phenomenology, but even classmates together in his 1924 lecture course on Plato's *Sophist*. But, more important than any biographical justification, the question itself arises imminently within each of their own projects, and it does so in a similar way. This is due in large part to the shared influence of Heidegger, not least his treatment of the concept of world in *Sein und Zeit*. But it is also because both develop this influence in directions that push into the same areas, often those Heidegger sought to avoid: plurality, sociality, community, tradition,

[1] Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy," in GR, 244.

and politics. They share a humanism, of a type, that remained anathema to Heidegger himself.

This translation is not without its risks. Gadamer also writes that "translation, like all interpretation, is a *highlighting*." It plays down and even ignores some elements in order to emphasize others; it draws together what might otherwise appear fragmented; it flattens but also clarifies; it reveals and conceals. "This is precisely the activity that we call interpretation."[2] What follows is thus limited and constrained in particular ways, not only to these two writers, but to what is relevant to the theme. It is also limited in the texts under consideration: most notably, it focuses on Arendt's more 'philosophical' work (e.g. *The Human Condition*, *Between Past and Future*, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*), to the detriment of her more journalistic and historical exercises (e.g. *On Revolution*, *Origins of Totalitarianism, Eichmann in Jerusalem*). Nevertheless, at the risk of a loss, even a "betrayal," a "treason … against the original text[s]," my wager is that this reciprocal interpretation between Gadamer and Arendt yields a gain: uncovering a shared hermeneutical ontology at the basis of Arendt's political thought.[3] And this is a secondary, though central, goal of the project, to contribute the contours of a systematic approach to Arendt's work based in philosophical hermeneutics.

Mary Dietz memorably writes that "Arendt's concepts are fluid; they mix and match, intermingle, separate, change position, appear, disappear and reappear along a narrative course that is itself a tale of cyclicalities, lineations, dead stops, and boundless

[2] TM 386.

[3] John Sallis, *On Translation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 72.

possibilities."[4] Although scholars have long recognized the influence of Heidegger, it is not always viewed as *methodologically* relevant, or fully elucidated in detail.[5] Increasingly scholars have recognized the influence of phenomenology more broadly – Arendt was a student of Husserl too – but a hermeneutical approach provides a basis from which one might unify and relate the various theoretical strands in her often-idiosyncratic body of work.[6] To choose Gadamer as an interlocuter, then, is a strategic choice – his work provides the resources necessary to transpose Arendt's philosophy into a hermeneutical key.

The pursuit of the question proceeds as follows. **Part I** raises the question of the political world from within Heidegger's analysis of worldliness [*Weltlichkeit*] and being-with [*Mitsein*] in *Sein und Zeit.* World refers to the referential context of relations between beings, within which those beings appear as meaningful to Dasein. Within this framework, the political world can be characterized in two senses. In the first, it refers to the world insofar as it is disclosed in common to Dasein *qua* being-with according to its

[4] Mary Dietz, "Feminist Receptions of Hannah Arendt," in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 22.

[5] See especially Jacques Taminaux, *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker: Arendt and Heidegger*, trans. Michael Gendre (New York: SUNY Press, 1997); Paulina Sosnowska, *Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger: Philosophy, Modernity, and Education* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019); and Dana R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[6] See especially Sophie Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Marieke Borren, "'A Sense of the World': Hannah Arendt's Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Common Sense," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 21, 2 (2013) and "Arendt's Phenomenologically Informed Political Thinking: A Proto-Normative Account of Human Worldliness" in *Hannah Arendt and the History of Thought*, ed. Daniel Brennan and Marguerite La Caze (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2022); Klaus Held, *Phanomenologie der politischen Welt* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang GmbH, 2010) and "Toward a Phenomenology of the Political World" in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Dan Zahavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Nicholas de Warren, *Original Forgiveness* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2020); and Serena Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Challenge of Modernity: A Phenomenology of Human Rights* (New York: Routledge University Press, 2008).

own mode of disclosedness, plural understanding. In the second, it refers to the referential context in which Dasein are disclosed in their relations to each other, analogous to equipmental totality in which useful objects are disclosed. Heidegger's analysis makes this conception of the political world possible, but it does not thematize it in any cohesive way. On the contrary, the account of being-with is severely truncated by an exclusive focus on publicness [*Öffentlichkeit*], the inauthentic mode of disclosedness that Heidegger assigns to the public world shared with others. Even so, I show that the political world does make its appearance within the text in each of the two senses, if only in an indistinct way. It is this embryonic concept of the political world that Arendt develops in her work, especially in *The Human Condition.*

Part II turns to Arendt's own analysis in *The Human Condition.* Here, I propose a taxonomy of terminological relations within the text, in order to ground the distinctions in a cohesive methodology. Following Loidolt, Villa, and others, I argue that Arendt's treatment of the *vita activa* proceeds phenomenologically, in a way heavily indebted to Heidegger's hermeneutical ontology. My analysis highlights the way that Arendt uses the conceptual distinctions within the *vita activa* to refer to existential structures of human disclosedness and understanding. Specifically, Arendt's description of work [*Herstellen*], which she closely associates with the concept of world, is beholden both to the equipment analysis in *Sein und Zeit*, as well as the Aristotelian prehistory of that analysis, apparent in Heidegger's 1924 lecture course on Plato's *Sophist*, which Arendt attended. I show that her concept of work represents an adaptation and deployment of Heidegger's reading of Aristotle's description of τέχνη and ποίησις. It describes a productive activity (ποίησις) that operates according to a mode of disclosedness (τέχνη) that understands beings in

their instrumentality, and gives rise to an 'objective' thing-world [*Dingwelt*]. In contrast to work, Arendt reserves the term *action* for an incommensurate realm of non-instrumental human relationships, constituted by the exchange of interpretive judgments in plural discourse. But although her account takes on a remarkably hermeneutical valence here, Arendt does not thematize the way that the activity of plural discourse culminate in something like a world, or the way that this 'web' of human relationships gives rise to a disclosive space of appearance.

Part III begins to answer these questions by way of a turn to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Arendt's own work provides an imminent basis for such a turn, and I begin with an explication of her early essay "Understanding in Politics," which represents a clear parallel to – and even anticipation of – Gadamer's own work in hermeneutics. In the remainder, I develop the theme of plural understanding from within Gadamer's hermeneutics by way of his sometimes-controversial account of tradition. In contrast to the methodological procedures of the natural sciences, which demand the 'objective' and neutral distance of the researcher, Gadamer argues that understanding is an event that happens on the basis of the historical tradition to which we belong. Indeed, it is not inappropriate to say that, for Gadamer, understanding describes the happening of tradition. I argue that tradition must be understood in such a way that it simultaneously describes both what is presupposed in understanding – that which is to be understood – and the activity of understanding itself. In this description, Gadamer approaches the question of the political world via his own peculiar translation of Heidegger, transposing the latter's ontological version of the hermeneutical circle into the framework of historical tradition. Gadamer's controversial justification of the prejudicial character of

understanding serves to set up a parallel between world and understanding, on the one hand, and historical tradition, on the other. Against common misunderstandings of Gadamer's defense of tradition, I argue that his account must be understood first and foremost as an ontological description of the way that human beings belong to history. Traditionality, the plural activity of transmission from which the 'world' of tradition comes to be, emerges as an explanation for the way that the activity of plural understanding gives rise to a stable – though ever-changing – context of meaning.

Part IV turns to the way that the disclosedness proper to the political world takes place in plural discourse, specifically what Arendt names judgment. Having laid a groundwork with Gadamer's discussion of interpretation, prejudice, and traditionality, I argue that a hermeneutical model of understanding serves as a throughline that not only unifies Arendt's early and late theories of judgment, but underlies her account of δόξα – the discourse proper to the political world – and its relationship to action and judgment. Arendt's earliest treatment of these topics arises directly out of her early hermeneutical interest in understanding, by way of an extended account of prejudice. Like Gadamer, Arendt uses the language of prejudice to describe the hermeneutical circle of understanding, and this early link remains a central concern even in her later turn toward Kant's aesthetics. I argue that this turn occurs in response to a problem that Arendt recognizes within her early account of understanding, and that her idiosyncratic appropriation of Kant's aesthetic judgment must be viewed as a hermeneutical critique. Ironically, despite their divergent readings of Kant, Arendt and Gadamer share a common interpretation of judgment and its relationship to the political world. I propose that what Arendt describes (using Kantian terminology) as the occupation of a general standpoint

[*allgemeinen Standpunkte*] is best understood with reference to what Gadamer calls the fusion of horizons [*Horizontverschmelzung*]. This fusion of horizons describes the way the political world emerges as the space of appearance for plural understanding.

1.0 PART I

WORLDLINESS AND THE POLITICAL IN HEIDEGGER'S *SEIN UND ZEIT*

> It is almost impossible to render a clear account of Heidegger's thoughts that may be of political relevance without an elaborate report on his concept and analysis of 'world.'
>
> – Hannah Arendt[7]

1.1 A HEIDEGGERIAN PRELUDE

1.1.1 *Why Heidegger? Why Being and Time?*

Why Heidegger? In one sense, it seems incredibly ill-advised to turn to Heidegger for any concept related to the political. Nowhere does he develop a comprehensive political philosophy. When he did involve himself in politics, it was to affirm Hitler's fascist regime in the early thirties and participate fully as a member of the Nazi party in his capacity as rector at Freiburg. Though his rectorate was fraught and short-lived (he accepted the position in 1933 and offered his resignation in 1934), his involvement with Nazism is undeniable and – to say the least – raises serious questions about Heidegger's

[7] CP 433n.5.

ability to speak to political matters. Gadamer writes of Heidegger's behavior during this time as "a sad story we watched at a distance with anxiety," one that prompted a friend of Heidegger, after his resignation, to offer him the greeting "Back from Syracuse?" in reference to Plato's infamous misadventure with tyranny.[8]

It is far beyond the scope and purpose of this project to venture an analysis of Heidegger's politics.[9] Two comments should be sufficient in this context. First, the rejection of Heidegger's Nazism must be unequivocal. The repugnance of his political participation and his subsequent silence on these matters, is a stain that cannot be scrubbed out of his legacy. Second, as Gadamer reminds us – and this is by no means cancels the first – "It is not that easy to get by Heidegger." He goes on:

> Even one who lost faith because of Heidegger's political adventures, kept away from him for years, and together with him and others lived through to the end the increasingly dark future of their common country – even such a person could never dream of denying the philosophical impetus he received early on from Heidegger, an impulse often renewed later.[10]

Gadamer counts himself among those who received their philosophical impetus from Heidegger. Hannah Arendt, too, testifies to this in her admission to Heidegger that *The Human Condition* "owes practically everything to you in every respect."[11] As young students, both attended Heidegger's lecture course on Plato's *Sophist* at Marburg in the winter of 1924, a period in which he was developing many of the themes that would find

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[8] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Back from Syracuse?" trans. John McCumber, *Critical Inquiry* 15, 2 (1989): 429.

[9] Examples are numerous, especially since the publication of Victor Farias' *Heidegger et le nazisme* in 1987, which set off a massive surge of popular interest in Heidegger's relationship with Nazism. See Victor Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism*, trans. Paul Burrell and Gabriel R. Ricci (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). Much more helpful than Farias' text (which, despite its zeal, remains philosophically inept) is the discussion occasioned by its publication between Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in 1988, published as *Heidegger, Philosophy, and Politics: The Heidelberg Conference*, ed. Mireille Calle-Gruber, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

[10] Gadamer, "Back from Syracuse?," 429.

[11] Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, *Letters: 1925-1975,* trans. Andrew Shields (Boston: Harcourt, 2003), 89.

full expression in *Sein und Zeit.*[12] If for nothing other than biographical reasons, then, there can hardly be a more appropriate starting point than Heidegger for an account that explores, as mine does, the mutual intersection of Arendt's political philosophy and Gadamer's hermeneutics.

Of course, the philosophical reasons are far more relevant. Arendt's statement about what *Human Condition* owes to Heidegger is remarkable in part because that text does not contain a single reference to him. The light of this admission reveals the book to be a deep engagement with Heidegger and some of the most basic themes of his thought. On this point, Taminiaux argues that Arendt, "far from being an intellectual epigone of Heidegger, at every point delivers a retort."[13] This is surely an overstatement. While there are many points at which Arendt's analysis diverges from and even challenges Heidegger, it is more accurate to say that Arendt expands Heidegger's analysis along lines he left unpursued and underdeveloped. It should not be surprising that these expansions could be seen as corrective. In any case, the philosophical contributions of Arendt and Gadamer would not be possible without Heidegger, in particular – and of specific interest here – his concept of world.

Granting, then, the significance of Heidegger for my theme, why *Sein und Zeit*? The decision to orient the present analysis exclusively around this text, and to selective sections within this text, is guided first and foremost by a comment by Arendt. Writing

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[12] See PS. I will return to the influence of the *Sophist* course – especially Heidegger's reading of Aristotle – in Part 2. Of course, Arendt's attendance was also the occasion for the romantic relationship between her and Heidegger, though little more about this need be said – it is difficult to find a *philosophical* justification for reading Arendt's work through the lens of a personal relationship. For an account of their relationship, of strictly biographical interest, see Antonia Grunenberg, *Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger: History of a Love* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

[13] Jacques Taminiaux, *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker*, trans. and ed. Michael Gendre (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), x.

on the pervasive inability of philosophy to speak to political issues, she briefly notes that "Heidegger's concept of 'world,' which in my many respects stands at the center of his philosophy, constitutes a step out of this difficulty."[14] Although *Sein und Zeit* is not Heidegger's final word on the matter, it contains his fullest and most comprehensive treatment of the concept of world and worldliness. Moreover, it specifically considers world in connection with work and the world of the workshop, a clear parallel to Arendt's association of worldliness with fabrication.[15] Perhaps most importantly, it emphasizes the way the world is shared with others. For all the political limitations of his account, Heidegger's world is unequivocally a *with*-world, with the unavoidable political connotations that entails.

Even so, the decision to limit my exegesis and analysis to one text necessarily excludes others that would be fruitful and relevant in their own way. For example, Arendt sets her concept of world in direct opposition to the 'worldlessness' of biological life. This contrast is only implicit in *Sein und Zeit*, but developed more fully in the later essay "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," in which world is set in opposition to earth. Arendt also describes world as a 'space of appearance,' echoing closely Heidegger's later notions of the 'clearing' [*Lichtung*] and the 'open' [*Offene*]. It would be a fruitful, but vast, undertaking to trace all of these elements of Heidegger's thought through their appropriation and modification by Arendt (and Gadamer, for that matter). Given the particular goals of this project, mere gestures toward these promising connections will have to suffice.

[14] CP, 443.

[15] The example of the workshop is surely a trace of Heidegger's reading of ποίησις in the *Sophist* course, which clearly influences Arendt's account of work and world.

1.1.2 *Worldliness and the absent political*

Having provided these caveats, my argument for is as follows: The analysis of worldliness in *Sein und Zeit* enables us to characterize the political world in two senses, though both are significantly underdeveloped by Heidegger himself. In the first sense, the political world refers to the world insofar as it is disclosed in common to Dasein *and* others, that is, the public world. The political world, in this sense, is what is understood by Dasein as being-with, which I propose must be taken as a *plural* understanding. Put differently, it refers to the world as disclosed by Dasein to others, and by others to Dasein. In the second sense, the political world refers to the referential context in which other Dasein are disclosed in their relations *to each other*. This context is analogous to the totality of relevance in which useful objects are disclosed in their relations to each other and to Dasein. The political world, in this sense, is the whole structure of relations between Dasein as Dasein, the world from out of which the Dasein-with of others is disclosed.

Although this conception of the political world is only possible on the basis of his treatment of worldliness and being-with, Heidegger does not significantly develop it in either of these senses. It is difficult to get any cohesive sense of the political in *Sein und Zeit*, let alone of the political world. Among other things, this is because the analysis of the world as shared with others is almost exclusively limited to a treatment of 'publicness,' the inauthentic mode of disclosedness that serves to conceal both the world *and* the Dasein-with of others. However, I argue that Heidegger nevertheless implies both of the senses above, if only in an indistinct way. It is this embryonic concept of the political world that Arendt develops in her work, especially in *The Human Condition*.

Accordingly, I show how the concept of the political world arises out of Heidegger's analysis of worldliness and being-with in *Sein und Zeit*. In (2) I establish the concept of worldliness in general with a reconstructive exegesis of the relevant sections in Division I, Chapter 3. Due to the limited scope of this section, the treatment is somewhat schematic. But it is sufficient to show that world refers to the referential context within which phenomena are disclosed as meaningful, and worldliness refers to the structure of this context. Then, in (3), I turn to the emergence of the public world and the initial disclosure of others within the worldly context. Although others initially appear only insofar as they are implicated in relation to objects, Heidegger insists that the world is always a *with*-world, shared with a plurality of others (i.e. being-with) who can be disclosed to Dasein (i.e. Dasein-with). Even so, I show that the bulk of his analysis focuses on the way publicness prevents the authentic disclosure of others. Finally, in (4), after rejecting a common misreading that holds authentic Dasein to be solipsistic, I show the ways that *Sein und Zeit* – in a limited way – offers glimpses of the political world in both senses indicated above.

1.2 THE STRUCTURE OF WORLDLINESS

1.2.1 *Equivocal uses of 'world'*

The first division of *Sein und Zeit* is dedicated to an analysis of Dasein, the being which "we ourselves" are – in other words, the human being – which he describes as Being-in-

the-world [*In-der-Welt-Sein*].[16] The goal of the analysis is to approach the question of the meaning of Being by way of an interrogation of *this* being, Dasein, because Dasein is a being who cares about its own Being. Indeed, Heidegger identifies care [*Sorge*] as the being of Dasein.[17] This is not a statement about the particular affective or cognitive aspects of Dasein, such that it feels strongly about its being or thinks about it often. Rather, it is an ontological statement that Heidegger spends the majority of the text unpacking.

For my purposes here, it is sufficient to note three things about Dasein. The first concerns Dasein's relatedness to the world: Dasein is *thrown* [*geworfen*]. Dasein does not exist separate from or outside its world, but always already finds itself thrown into a particular worldly context which determines its possibilities. The second concerns these possibilities. Dasein's care for its own being is manifest in relation to the possibilities available to it within the world. Dasein *is* its orientation toward whatever is possible for it – Da-sein *is* its 'there' [Da]. In its projective orientation toward its possibilities from out of its thrownness, Dasein is described as a thrown projection [*geworfen Entwurf*]. The third concerns the nature of this orientation toward possibilities, which is *disclosive*: "*Dasein is its disclosedness.*"[18] In its directedness toward its possibilities, which it takes up within its world, Dasein discloses the beings it encounters in their being. Or, to put the point a different way, Dasein exists in such a way that the world and the things within it

[16] Heidegger takes pains to avoid the tacit metaphysical baggage that accompanies any reference to "man" or the "human." As such, it is not, strictly-speaking, accurate to simply equate Dasein with the human. There is a double meaning here; Dasein is the being that "we ourselves" are because 'we' human beings are Dasein, but also because Dasein describes the kind of being which can be a *self*, that is, for whom its own being is an issue. Nevertheless, it is not inappropriate to think of Dasein in relation to the human; in any case, neither Arendt nor Gadamer have any issue with doing so.

[17] See §41 in SZ 191-196.

[18] SZ 133.

appear as *meaningful* to Dasein.

This third point merely reiterates the first: any separation of world and Dasein, such that either might be conceivable without the other, is out of the question. Without a world and the possibilities to be taken up within it, Dasein simply *is* not. In its orientation toward possibilities, Dasein both constitutes the world and always already discovers itself within it. It is not surprising, then, that Arendt sees the concept of world to stand at the center of Heidegger's philosophy. And yet, 'world' and 'worldliness,' are terms which are often used in equivocal and ambiguous ways. Heidegger's analysis of world begins in earnest by distinguishing between the different ways they might be understood.

In §14, Heidegger distinguishes between four different referents for the term 'world,' two of which are ontic, having to do with beings [*Seienden*], and two of which are ontological, having to do with the being *of* beings [*Sein des Seienden*]. In one sense, world refers to (1) all beings that "can be present [*vorhanden*] within the world."[19] This designation actually encompasses a range of possibilities that correspond to various accounts of beings of this kind, beings that do not have the being of Dasein. It might refer to all actual beings – or even all actual and possible beings – as a whole, or it might be restricted to a particular subset of beings. In any case, a set of beings that are merely present can be called a world in this sense. Closely related is the second designation, according to which world refers ontologically to (2) the *being of* the beings designated by world in the first sense, and the region in which they are (possibly or actually) present. The region in question might correspond to the disciplinary boundaries which group subset of present beings for study by a particular science. Heidegger's given example is

[19]SZ 64. Emphasis in original.

the ‘world’ of the mathematician, that which encompasses all possible mathematical objects. So one might use the term ‘mathematics’ to designate a world in the first sense (i.e. all mathematical beings, including all numbers, operations, concepts, and so on) *or* a world in the second sense (i.e. the field to which all of the beings in the first sense belong).

The region – ‘world’ in the second sense – is beholden to a particular philosophical (or theological) ontology which accounts for the beings within it. A Christian theological ontology might take ‘world’ in the first sense to refer to creatures (i.e. all beings created by God) and in the second sense as Creation. Or, as Heidegger argues elsewhere (§§19-21), a Cartesian ontology takes ‘world’ in the first sense as physical bodies [*res corporea*] and in the second as extension [*extensio*] in three-dimensional space. Regardless of the particulars, any account which understands world in senses (1) and/or (2) cannot help but restrict itself to a conception of beings which is limited to their mere presence within the world. This has two important ramifications, important both for Heidegger and our purposes here. First, because they are restricted by definition to beings which are merely present, such accounts cannot help but exclude Dasein, who is essentially unlike such beings. Second, perhaps more importantly, they actually *rely* on the being of Dasein *a priori*, insofar as worldliness – an existential [*Existenzial*] feature of Dasein – is the condition for their possibility.

The third and fourth possible meanings of ‘world,’ which Heidegger takes to be designations of world and worldliness *proper*, correct the oversights of the first two because they are oriented around the being of Dasein. In the third sense, world can refer ontically to (3) “that ‘in which’ a particular factical Dasein ‘lives’ as Dasein.” It is in this

sense that one might colloquially refer to 'my world,' where I find myself and engage in all the activities that are meaningful and relevant to my day-to-day life. Heidegger is clear that it can be public, the "world of the we," or private, the "(domestic) surrounding world [*Umwelt*]."[20] There are a range of possibilities – the third sense of world might refer to something very specific, or to *the* world, which *we all* share – but in any case, it refers to the world of Dasein as opposed to the world made up of and occupied by beings which are merely present. The fourth and final sense corresponds to the third and refers to (4) the ontological concept of worldliness, the 'worldly' [*weltlich*] aspect of the being of Dasein. It is only because Dasein is worldly that the concept of world, in any sense (but especially the third), is possible at all. Terminologically, Heidegger reserves the word 'world' for (3) and 'worldliness' for (4), and these become the theme of the following sections.

1.2.2 *Innerworldly beings and the work-world*

Heidegger's starting point for this investigation is the pre-thematic, everyday experience of Dasein. The world of this experience is the 'surrounding world' [*Umwelt*], and within it Dasein encounters various beings, first and foremost objects of use [*Zeug*].[21] The trajectory of the analysis begins with the initial, mundane encounters with everyday useful things within the world with a view toward illuminating the phenomenon of world

[20] SZ 65. This distinction between the surrounding world and the public world is not quite as straightforward as it appears here, as I elaborate below. Separately, note that this is in clear anticipation of Arendt's distinction between the private, domestic realm and the public, political realm.

[21] *Zeug* can be translated generically as 'objects' or 'things,' but Heidegger is emphasizing their usefulness as opposed to just 'stuff.' He specifically links the term with the Greek πράγματα in this regard. I will variously use expressions like 'objects of use,' 'useful things,' 'useful objects,' etc. to refer to *Zeug* (clarifying with the German when necessary).

as such. There are two important points of emphasis here. First, the world is not something that is typically revealed in itself, even though it is always tacitly presupposed in Dasein's everyday experience with things. This is why we must move phenomenologically from useful objects, with which we have a *direct* experience, to world, with which we have an *indirect* experience, one that is usually only implicit within our dealings with things. Second, even our direct experience with objects within the world requires phenomenological clarification, because there is a widespread tendency to read into objects an unacknowledged (and faulty) conception of world, namely that it is properly designated by (1) and/or (2) above. By beginning with objects of use, Heidegger seeks both to dispel the misconceptions about objects and the world and, in doing so, point toward a better understanding of world by way of a better understanding of objects within it.

The analysis begins in the everyday, surrounding world of Dasein. Within this world, we make use of various objects in our everyday dealings [*Umgang*]. Hammers, nails, doorknobs, flyswatters, shoes and socks, hats and gloves, these are all useful things that we employ for various purposes in our everyday lives, that is, in the world where we find ourselves initially and for the most part. In these dealings, in which we make use of objects, we are 'taking care' of things. The references to Dasein 'taking care' in everyday life foreshadow Heidegger's later identification of the being of Dasein as care – 'taking care' [*Besorgen*] is the form that Dasein's care [*Sorge*] takes within the surrounding world. But even apart from this connection, in colloquial English one speaks of 'taking care of' something or 'having business to take care of' to refer generically to projects undertaken within the world. Our taking care of things involves various dealings, which

in turn involve various useful objects.

The guiding distinction here is between two contrasting ways of conceiving of objects in the world: those which are handy, ready-to-hand [*zuhanden*], and those which are merely present [*vorhanden*]. Heidegger emphasizes that objects of use are always encountered as the former and not (initially) the latter. It is not as though I first come across a round semi-spherical piece of metal affixed to a door, ascertain or ascribe its function, and then use it accordingly. Rather, I grab the doorknob and open the door. The doorknob, a useful thing, is not merely 'stuff,' just present there; it is handy, something in which *what* it is and *how* it is used are given simultaneously – and even identical – in its very use. Mere presence [*Vorhandenheit*], so often taken as the primary being of things, is actually a privative mode of the being of things within the world, which is handiness [*Zuhandenheit*]. In the ensuing sections, Heidegger references useful things [*Zeug*], the ready-to-hand, and 'innerworldly beings' [*innerweltlich Seinden*] interchangeably, because useful things are the beings that are encountered *within* the world, and these beings have the being of handiness.

When Heidegger describes the initial surrounding world, his examples are carefully chosen to make this contrast between these two different conceptions of innerworldly beings especially clear. The handiness of useful things is most manifest in objects whose useful character is impossible to deny: tools. And so, Heidegger orients his description around the world of a workshop filled with tools – what he calls the 'work-world' [*Werkwelt*] – in which Dasein's taking care takes the form of fabrication, the productive activity that results in the creation of an artificial object. It would be a mistake, or at least an oversimplification, to understand this to imply that every

innerworldly being is a tool, or that the surrounding world is fundamentally a workshop, or that 'taking care' is fabrication, *as such*.[22] Rather, the workshop is a plausible surrounding world for Dasein and workshop tools are well-suited as examples for the handy character of innerworldly beings. The analysis begins from the concrete example of the workshop in order to uncover the structure of worldliness, which he says at the outset might "be modified into the respective structural totality of particular 'worlds'" – like a workshop – but remains *a priori* for any world in general.[23]

Even so, there is more to the selection of the workshop example than pedagogical value. The surrounding world is a work-world because when Dasein is caught up in its everyday engagements within the world, specifically with innerworldly beings, its orientation is neither toward those beings nor to the world as such, but to what is being done: the work.[24] All of the dealings with innerworldly beings are governed by Dasein's taking care, such that those beings are contextualized by their relation to each other and to Dasein's work. Heidegger designates these relations with the term relevance [*Bewandtnis*].

1.2.3 *Worldliness as a totality of relevance*

The insight that objects within the world are encountered first and foremost as useful. This insight has two important implications. First, useful things are not encountered in

[22] Of course, as an example, the world of the workshop is far from an arbitrary choice on Heidegger's part. Arendt seizes on it and plumbs a more fundamental connection between fabrication and 'taking care,' as I argue in Part II.

[23] SZ 65.

[24] SZ 69.

isolation, but rather as part of a whole context of relations between various other useful things: "a *totality* of useful things [*Zeugganzheit*] is always already *before* the individual useful thing."[25] Consider a painter in her studio. The painter uses the brush, the paints, the canvas, the easel, and so on. All of these are useful things, but they are each only useful insofar as they are *together* part of a totality of things that are related to each other according to their usefulness for the given work. When engaged in painting, the paint is not useful without the brush, the easel without the canvas, and so on. Heidegger stresses that Dasein – here, the painter – is tacitly aware of these relations in the very use of the beings in question. Second, useful things – and thus the totality of useful things to which they belong – are useful insofar as their use is determined by that which they are useful *for*. That is, to be useful means to be useful 'for' a particular project, 'in order to' accomplish a task. These beings are therefore not only related to each other as part of a totality, but they are also related to the work for which they are useful, and ultimately to Dasein as the one who is taking care of the work. All of these relations – those between beings within a totality of useful things, as well as to the work, and to Dasein – are described by Heidegger as relations of reference [*Verweisung*]. Reference describes the character of useful things, since they are useful insofar as they are *referred* in these various ways according to that with which, for which, and by which they are put to use.

In §18, Heidegger shifts, rather abruptly, from the vocabulary of reference to that of relevance [*Bewandtnis*]. This shift does not appear to introduce a strong distinction between reference and relevance. Instead, it emphasizes not just the referential relations between beings and the work, but the directionality of these relations, which

[25] SZ 69.

simultaneously begins and ends with Dasein's discovery of beings *as* referred to each other 'for the sake of' something:

> The fact that the being of things at hand has the structure of reference means that they have in themselves the character of *being referred*. Beings are discovered with regard to the fact that they are referred, as those beings which they are, to something. They are relevant together with something else. The character of being at hand is *relevance.*[26]

In other words, relevance describes the character of the various references. Within a totality of useful things, in which beings are referred to each other, these beings are *relevant with* something else. The beings – and the totality itself – are referred to the work as *relevant for* whatever is being done. This might involve a series of activities. Returning to the example of the painter, her work as a painter involves a variety of tasks – stretching a canvas, affixing it to a frame, mixing paints, washing the brush, and so on. These all involve beings that are relevant *with* each other *for* the painting, but the tasks themselves are relevant *for* the work too.

Taken together, all of these relations comprise a totality of relevance [*Bewandtnisganzheit*]. But, Heidegger points out, this referential chain of relevance ultimately terminates at a being who is itself the primary for-the-sake-of-which, whose being does not have the character of relevance: Dasein. In its taking care, Dasein takes up particular possibilities within its world and discloses innerworldly beings as relevant, namely as relevant for the sake of its work, which ultimately is for the sake of Dasein. To use Heidegger's own example, a hammer is relevant for hammering, hammering is relevant for fastening something down, fastening is relevant for protecting against bad weather. But the protection is relevant "for the sake of providing shelter for Dasein, that

[26] SZ 83-84.

is, for the sake of a possibility of its being."[27] In describing Dasein as the primary for-the-sake-of-which, Heidegger is describing the character of Dasein's referential relation to the totality of relevance. *World* designates that within which this referential relation takes place, and *worldliness* designates the structure of that to which Dasein is referred.[28]

1.2.4 *Significance and understanding*

So far, the focus has been on the structure of worldliness, described as a totality of relevance. However, though I have attempted to hew close to Heidegger's analysis, my emphasis threatens to downplay his own. For Heidegger, whose concern is primarily the being of Dasein, it is important to stress that the disclosure of innerworldly beings within the structure of worldliness is rooted in Dasein itself. "Dasein is its disclosedness," and its reference to worldliness is ultimately a self-reference, since the referential totality itself is referred to Dasein by way of its relation to its own possibilities.[29] If, in a simplification of the discussion above, the totality of relevance can be thought as a referential chain of means-end relations that lead back to Dasein, it can also be thought in the other 'direction,' as that which is disclosed in Dasein's projecting itself upon its possibilities. As such (and in lieu of a more comprehensive treatment of these issues), this section focuses on two related concepts that Heidegger introduces in the context of his analysis of worldliness: *significance* and *understanding*.

In §15, when Heidegger first introduces the distinction between ready-to-hand

[27] SZ 84.

[28] SZ 86.

[29] SZ 86.

and present-at-hand, he notes that Dasein always already has an unthematized awareness of the handiness of a given useful thing. But this does not just mean that the being of a useful thing *as* useful is revealed in Dasein's dealings with it, as with turning the doorknob. It also means that the totality of references *within which* the useful thing is useful is revealed as well: "Our dealings with useful things are subordinate to the manifold of references of the 'in-order-to.' The kind of seeing of this accommodation to things is called *circumspection* [*Umsicht*]."[30] In circumspection, Dasein holds the whole totality of relevance in view, albeit in an implicit and unthematized way, when it is at work within the world.

Heidegger chooses his terminology carefully. This word highlights three important aspects of the way Dasein's awareness relates to worldliness. First, as the prefix *Um-* indicates, circumspection [*Umsicht*] is the mode of sight that corresponds to the worldliness of the surrounding world [*Umwelt*]. It is not the awareness of worldliness in general, but awareness of the concrete worldly structure implicated in Dasein's everyday dealings. Second, also indicated by the prefix, circumspection is a seeing 'around' or in a 'roundabout' way. It is not thematic, explicit, or direct. Circumspection describes an awareness that is taken for granted in Dasein's dealings with things. Yet, third, circumspection remains a kind of *Sicht* – it is sight, and thus it is disclosive. When unusual situations arise in which the handy character of useful things is disrupted – what Heidegger calls conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and obstinacy in §16 – the worldliness of the world is disclosed to Dasein in a direct and explicit way. But this only serves to reveal that, in a way, it was always already disclosed: it was "predisclosed" in

[30] SZ 69.

circumspection.[31]

Put differently, circumspection is the mode of understanding – the sort of *sight* – that (pre)discloses the referential relations that comprise the worldliness of the world. This disclosure includes the whole totality of relevance – the relevant references between innerworldly beings (e.g. the ironing board is relevant *alongside* the clothing iron and the wrinkled shirt), between beings and the work being done (e.g. the iron is relevant *for* ironing), and between the various activities implicated the work (e.g. removing the shirt from the hanger is relevant *in order to* lay it on the board *in order* to iron it) – as well as the relation of the totality of relevance to Dasein as the final for-the-sake-of-which (e.g. ironing the shirt is *for the sake of* Dasein, who plans to wear it). The term *significance* [*Bedeutsamkeit*] denotes the referential character of these relations, each signifying [*bedeuten*] each other within a totality that establishes their significance [*Bedeutung*], which Dasein signifies to itself in circumspection.[32] In short, Dasein sees, circumspectly, the world and innerworldly beings in their significance.

Just as the analysis of dealings in the surrounding world serves as a phenomenological starting point to uncover the ontological structure of worldliness in general, so circumspection serves as a starting point of sorts for a consideration of understanding [*Verstehen*]. In §31, Heidegger describes understanding as that which "constitutes existentially what we call the *sight* [*Sicht*] of Dasein," of which

[31] SZ 76.

[32] SZ 87. This translation uses the language of signification, which emphasizes the close relationship between reference and signs, which Heidegger discusses in §17. An alternative – which is helpful in highlighting the hermeneutical import – would use the language of meaning: innerworldly beings have their given meaning [*Bedeutung*] in the referential context of which they are a part and they mean [*bedeuten*] something to Dasein insofar as Dasein understands the meaningfulness [*Bedeutsamkeit*] of that context. In circumspection, the understanding 'sees' the meaningfulness of the world and the meaning of the things in it.

circumspection is a mode.[33] Understanding – along with the equiprimordial existential structures of attunement [*Befindlichkeit*] and discourse [*Rede*] – refers to the way Dasein is its 'there' [*Da*]. Recalling the description of Dasein as a thrown projection, understanding refers to the projective character of Dasein, who comports itself to the possibilities available within the world into which it is thrown. Although these possibilities are 'there' for Dasein by virtue of its thrownness – that is, the world into which it is thrown – they do not become possibilities apart from Dasein's projective orientation toward them. This account of understanding is complex, in part because it is at odds with traditional accounts that equate understanding with knowledge or cognition. Dasein does not simply find itself in a world, survey the available possibilities, and decide which to actualize and how, as a subject surveying a world of objects at its disposal. This would only be possible in a world made up of present entities – world in sense (1) [see 1.1.4 above] – which he rejects. Rather, it is in projection – the disclosive orientation that Heidegger names understanding – that Dasein first lets the possibilities within its world emerge *as* possibilities.

This account of understanding is intrinsically tied to the structure of worldliness as a totality of relevance and its relationship to Dasein as the primary for-the-sake-of-which. Or, simply, Dasein "*is* its possibilities as possibilities."[34] In projecting, Dasein *interprets* innerworldly beings in their relevance for Dasein, which is just to say that they are disclosed *as* relevant for the possibilities that Dasein projects itself upon. Understanding is this projecting; it proceeds as interpretation [*Auslegung*], and in interpreting it discloses – it understands – the worldliness of the world and the beings

[33] SZ 146.

[34] SZ 145.

within it, on the one hand, and Dasein *as* understanding, on the other. Accordingly, there can be different 'modes' of understanding that correspond to what is being disclosed. Circumspection, as we described above, is the mode of understanding that corresponds with 'taking care' and discloses the significance of the world. Transparency [*Durchsichtigkeit*] refers to the mode of understanding "primarily and as a whole related to existence," which corresponds to Dasein's understanding of itself.

There is, of course, much more to say about understanding, especially its connection with interpretation which Heidegger takes up in §32. This will be revisited in more detail in Part III. Here I have selectively focused on understanding – specifically the mode of circumspection – as the disclosure of innerworldly beings unlike Dasein, in order to lay the groundwork for an analysis of the disclosure of beings *like* Dasein, namely other Dasein. Because Dasein always exists in a world with others, Dasein as being-there is also being-with [*Mitsein*]. As stated at the outset, a concept of the political world must not only be a world, but it must be a world shared with others. It must be a 'with-world' [*Mitwelt*]. Having established, at least in a schematic way, the structure of worldliness for Heidegger, it remains to be seen how this world might be political. The remaining sections deal with this question.

1.3 PUBLICNESS AND THE WORLD AS WITH-WORLD

1.3.1 *The work-world's reference to the public world*

We have seen that Heidegger's analysis of the world of innerworldly beings is set in

contrast to one in which the world is understood as the totality of entities that are merely present. This, Heidegger contends, is the typical assumption about both beings (i.e. that they are discrete entities present in a given physical space) and about the world (i.e. that it is the totality of all possible and/or actual present things). Instead, the preceding analysis shows that the 'work-world' is a meaningful context in which innerworldly beings are first encountered in their handiness, as relevant for Dasein in a particular project, within a totality of referential relations between other useful things. The analysis of being-with follows a similar structure, by contesting the typical assumption that Dasein is a self-enclosed subject and the 'with-world' merely a conglomeration of such subjects. Against this, Heidegger insists that being-with others is an irreducible aspect of Dasein's being.

Earlier I noted that among Heidegger's examples of world – in the proper sense (3) [see 1.1.3 above] – is "one's 'own' and nearest … surrounding world" as well as "the 'public' world of the we."[35] So far the focus has been on the former, the surrounding world in which Dasein is caught up in taking care of things in the midst of innerworldly beings. It is from out of this description that we are able to see the structure of worldliness, but worldliness in general "can be modified into the respective structural totality of particular worlds." It is not simply a structure of the surrounding world of everyday Dasein, but the structure of world as such. Already it is clear that the public world, as distinct from the surrounding world, would have a worldliness proper to it, namely one that takes account of the 'we' mostly absent from the analysis of the surrounding 'work-world.'

Heidegger complicates his initial distinction between the surrounding world and

[35] SZ 65.

the public world, however, when he points out that the "work taken care of in each case is not only at hand in the domestic world of the workshop, but rather in the *public world*."[36] This reference is brief compared to Heidegger's extensive analysis of being-with (treated below), but already the appearance of the public world from within the surrounding world is telling about the relationship of worldliness to being-with others. Others – who, unlike innerworldly beings at-hand, have the same being as Dasein – are implicated in Dasein's dealings with innerworldly beings, even though the public world is not identical (or not simply identical) with the work-world. How do we account for the continuity as well as the distinction?

The question is more complex than it first appears, but we can begin pose it from two distinct directions: the appearance of others to Dasein within the world, and the appearance of innerworldly beings to other Dasein. How do others appear within the worldly context of the surrounding world? Heidegger points out that the references entailed in the work are not restricted to the objects and activities directly involved, but that "the simple conditions of a craft contain a reference to the wearer and user at the same time."[37] When the milliner constructs a hat, for example, she is not only circumspectly aware of the relevant references to and between the felted wool, the wooden hat block, needle, glue, pins, and so on. She is also aware of the one who will wear the hat and this is reflected in the work (e.g. its shape, its size, when the work must be completed, and so on). Whether the hat is custom-made for a particular individual or mass-produced according to generic sizing and style conventions, it remains the case that the work stands in a referential relation to other Dasein.

[36] SZ 71.

[37] SZ 70-71.

This relation is curious, however, because it appears to refer to others in the same manner as innerworldly beings: in their *relevance* for the work. The worker's circumspection pre-discloses this relevance when she is tacitly aware of, in this example, the size of the hat. But, as Heidegger consistently reminds us, others do not have the being of handiness – they have the being of Dasein. Others *are* Dasein, and Dasein as a for-the-sake-of-which does not have a relevance. The only way they can be taken as relevant within the surrounding world is if they are taken as being *other* than what they are. Or, to put it in terms of Dasein's disclosedness, in the surrounding work-world others are disclosed only from out of the work at hand. This should not be mistaken for a disclosure of the being of others, who after all have the being of Dasein.

A helpful parallel to this is found with natural things and the whole of what we call 'nature.' In productive activity – work – the totality of useful things implicated will always include materials. The statue is made of stone or bronze or wood, the paint on the canvas is made from pigments drawn from minerals or plants, the hat is made from wool sheared from a non-human animal, and so on. The tools themselves are made of natural materials. As materials, these things are all innerworldly beings at hand: "as the 'surrounding world' is discovered, 'nature' thus discovered is encountered along with it." But this nature is only nature "*thus discovered*," that is, nature as ready-to-hand. Nature as it is in itself, *qua* nature, as the "*power of nature* [*Naturmacht*]," which "overcomes us, entrances us as landscape, remains hidden." [38] Once again, there is a disclosure – the products of nature *are* useful – but not of what nature is in itself, which remains

[38] SZ 70.

concealed.[39]

This dynamic of disclosure and concealment is not straightforward. When nature appears *qua* materials, it is the materials that are handy. If we can say that the materials reveal nature in its handiness, this is also to say that they reveal nature in its concealedness, since handiness is not how nature is in itself. This is precisely the character of the reference: in the work's reference to natural materials (relevant), nature (not relevant) is also referenced. As it is with nature, so it is with others – within the work-world they appear, to borrow terminology from Arendt, under the condition of worldliness. The reference to others within the work-world only discloses others by way of useful things, revealing them in their handiness. Others become, for instance, a form for the clothing, manpower to lift the heavy object, or a patron for the painting. None of these actually get at the being of others *qua* others, who are not handy and are distinct from innerworldly beings. Yet the handy things that come from others, like materials from nature, reference those others who remain concealed from the insular perspective of the work-world.

Heidegger does not make this comparison between the reference to others and the reference to nature via natural materials explicitly. But it is clear from his description of worldliness as a totality of relevance that the references to others and to nature are not the same as the references between useful things that are relevant *with* each other (i.e. a totality of useful things) or between useful things and the work, such that things are

[39] Arendt almost certainly draws on Heidegger's contrast between nature as it is in itself, which is hidden, and nature as material, which is revealed within the world, when she makes her crucial distinction between labor and work. The latter corresponds with worldliness and deals with material, which is always "already a product of human hands, which have removed it from a natural location" (HC 139). Furthermore, this passage provides an early glimpse of the distinction Heidegger draws in his later work between world and earth, where 'earth' seems to connote the continual self-hiddenness of what he here terms 'nature,' locked in a relation of reciprocal strife. See Heidegger, *UK.*

relevant *for* something, and ultimately for Dasein. Instead, the references to nature and to others are indirect – they reference something that remains extraneous to the work-world, even as they enter it in a limited way. When Heidegger stresses that the being of others is "completely different" than that of useful things and, as we will see in more detail below, elaborates on the deficient kind of disclosedness within the surrounding world, he still allows that others remain implicated even when we strictly narrow our analysis to the work-world and innerworldly beings unlike Dasein.[40] Arendt picks up on this distinction, which becomes foundational for her distinctions between labor, work, and action (the subject of Part II).

Heidegger's own focus is less on "others … encountered in the context of useful things" and more on the way that "these 'things' are encountered from the world in which they are at hand for the others."[41] This is the second 'direction' of the question of the public world posed above: How do innerworldly beings appear to the others? For the most part, they appear in precisely the same way as they appear to me. When Heidegger's analysis reveals that Dasein is that for the sake of which a totality of relevance is relevant, this cannot be limited to individual Dasein. Others are not only disclosed insofar as they are relevant for my work, and as concealed from me (i.e. as not relevant), but also as those for the sake of whom the work is done. Others – along with me – are Dasein, the totality of relevance is for the sake of Dasein, therefore it is also for the sake of others. In the shared surrounding world, innerworldly beings are encountered in common, disclosed in their handiness in common, relevant for the sake of Dasein in common. "The world of Dasein is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]" and the "innerworldly being-in-itself of others is

[40] SZ 118.

[41] SZ 118.

Dasein-with [*Mitdasein*]."[42] The disclosive encounter with others within the world – as opposed to the way others are merely referenced from out of the work being done – Heidegger terms Dasein-with. Dasein is always in the world with others – that is, Dasein is being-with [*Mitsein*] – and these others are disclosed to Dasein as Dasein-with.

Another way to put this is that Dasein experiences others as those *to whom* the world is disclosed alongside Dasein. This begins (but only begins) to approach what Heidegger means by the *publicness* [*Öffentlichkeit*] of the world. Again, a comparison with nature is helpful. Nature becomes worldly not just insofar as it is referred by objects made of natural materials, but also insofar as it is public – "*the surrounding world of nature* [*Umweltnatur*] is discovered and accessible to everyone."[43] Like natural materials, the surrounding world of nature is 'nature' insofar as it is disclosed in its significance, for Dasein. The highway that follows the contours of a cliff face, the stilts that hold a house above the tide, the clock that hangs in an office lobby, all of these are ways that nature is disclosed insofar as it is significant *for* Dasein and for the others. Everyone structures their lives according to the directionality of highways, shelter from bad weather, and the standardized measure for the position of the sun in a 24-hour day. Or, to put it more succinctly, the surrounding world of nature exemplifies the ways in which the surrounding world is *public*.

All of this demonstrates that the first reference to the 'public world' (in §14) where it was apparently distinguished from the surrounding world, was somewhat misleading. It is not as though the surrounding world and the public world are two discrete examples of ontic 'worlds.' Rather, the public world *is* the surrounding world of

[42] SZ 118.

[43] SZ 71. Emphasis in original.

Dasein as 'being-with.' The surrounding world *is* public insofar as it is disclosed *to* others and, in so doing, discloses those very others in their Dasein-with – that is, *as* those to whom, with me, the common world is disclosed.

1.3.2 *Publicness and the they*

With the appearance of others within the public world, we begin to approach the question of politics and the political world, but only indirectly. Since Dasein is "initially and for the most part … taken over by its world," the public world is the 'everyday' context in which others are encountered.[44] Just as this 'everydayness' served as a phenomenological starting point to move from a description of the work-world to the structure of worldliness in general, the description beginning in §25 of everyday being-with also moves toward being-with (and Dasein-with) as such. And just as Heidegger contests the typical construal of the world as a totality of actual or possible present entities, he also contests any construal of the 'with-world' as a conglomerate of self-enclosed subjects. In themselves, other Dasein are not a 'that' (merely present), nor a 'what' (a what-for with relevance), but rather a *who*. When Heidegger asks, "Who is it that Dasein is in everydayness?" he means, Who is Dasein *within the public world*, to whom the world appears in common with all the others?[45]

We have already seen that Dasein encounters the world alongside others and, for the most part, encounters it in the same way that they do. This was a hint at an answer to Heidegger's question: in the public surrounding world, Dasein is *not* distinguished from

[44] SZ 113.

[45] SZ 114.

the others. Dasein does not appear in its distinctiveness to itself, nor do the others appear in their distinctiveness. In everydayness, the "others are not *definite* others." Rather, they have an anonymous interchangeability, such that "any other can represent them."[46] To the extent they are distinguished from the 'self,' this only serves to mask Dasein's indistinguishability from them. Heidegger names this 'who' of Dasein the they [*das Man*]. This term is carefully chosen, a neuter term that functions in everyday language to designate a vague, anonymous 'anyone,' which also includes me.[47] Examples of what the they designates abound in common language, as in expressions like, "They say it's going to be hot tomorrow," or, "One shouldn't say something like that." In English, this function can even be served by the second-person 'you,' as when someone reacts to a social gaffe by saying, "You just don't do that," to mean, "That just isn't done." Despite the variety of pronouns ('one,' 'they,' 'you,' and even the passive-voice absence of any pronoun), each of these examples indicates the same thing. This is what Heidegger means by the they.

Within everydayness, Dasein does not exist as itself, but rather as the they. Others, likewise, exist as the they. This 'they-self' determines the way things in the world are disclosed, according to its own ways of being. Earlier I noted that the observation that the world is encountered by others in the same way as Dasein begins to approach Heidegger's notion of publicness. Here, publicness is explicitly linked with 'the they,' as the *disclosedness* proper to the they-self. Dasein, as the they-self, discloses the world in

[46] SZ 123.

[47] Often *das Man* is translated more literally into English as 'the One,' though this is less than ideal because it connotes the idea of unity that is not quite appropriate, to say nothing of the potential religious overtones. The they is better, but also problematic insofar as it might give the impression that *das Man* signifies 'them,' those from whom I am distinct, those who are *not* me. This, of course, is the opposite of Heidegger's meaning.

its publicness, which "initially controls every way in which the world and Dasein are interpreted."[48] In other words, publicness denotes a particular way of *understanding* the worldliness of the world, and of the beings and others within it. Publicness is a modification of the modes of understanding that correspond with the beings that can be understood within the world. For example, recall that circumspection is the mode of understanding that discloses innerworldly beings in their relevance. Heidegger also says that circumspection can take the form of a 'theoretical' seeing that, when it is at rest, takes leave of the work-world and "tends to leave the things nearest at hand for a distant and strange world," a movement Heidegger associates with "the contemplation that wonders at being," even "to the point of not understanding."[49] By contrast, in its public form, circumspection is driven by *curiosity*. Curiosity engages with the world as a compendium of distractions to be pursued and 'understood,' but only as 'seen' in their outward appearance, not as disclosed from themselves in their being.[50]

Curiosity, restless and superficial, is the 'sight' of Dasein's they-self, one of three characteristics Heidegger associates with publicness. What it reveals serves to conceal a primordial understanding of being, that is, an understanding of the phenomena from out of themselves. As Heidegger puts it, "Publicness obscures everything."[51] Along with curiosity, publicness is characterized by *ambiguity* and *idle talk*. Ambiguity refers to the way that the world appears to Dasein's they-self as "accessible to everybody and about

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[48] SZ 127.

[49] SZ 172.

[50] Tangentially, note that this precisely matches Kierkegaard's depiction of the aesthete, who moves noncommittally from one project to the next, driven only by the aesthetic criterion of the 'interesting.' It should be noted, further, that Heidegger's description of publicness is in significant alignment with Kierkegaard's own description of the public. See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age: On the Death of Rebellion,* trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010).

[51] SZ 127.

which everybody can say everything," such that "we can … no longer decide what is disclosed in genuine understanding and what is not."[52] It presents the world and everything in it as already understood and revealed. Not only does this affect what Dasein 'knows' and understands about the world, but it also limits the capacity for Dasein to genuinely know others, since everyone assumes they already have a handle on what others are thinking and feeling ahead of time. And, crucially, it limits the capacity for Dasein to *act* in the world, since it "passes off talking about things ahead of time and curious guessing as what is really happening," and "stamps carrying things out and taking action as something subsequent and of no importance."[53]

Idle talk, perhaps the most salient feature of publicness for Heidegger, designates this "talking about things," this discourse that substitutes for genuine action. Discourse [*Rede*] will continue to be a theme going forward, since language is central to both Gadamer's conception of hermeneutics and Arendt's conception of politics.[54] In this context, it is sufficient to note that, for Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*, discourse refers to the articulation of understanding that is expressed in language: "The attuned intelligibility of being-in-the-world *expresses itself as discourse*" and the "way in which discourse gets expressed is language."[55] As such, "discourse expressing itself is communication," that is, it is addressed to the other in relation to the thing that is disclosed in the understanding expressed in the discourse.[56] But since publicness refers to a particular (and deficient) understanding of the world, it also has a particular (and deficient) discourse that

[52] SZ 173.

[53] SZ 174.

[54] It is relevant in this connection that *Rede* is the German translation for λόγος.

[55] SZ 161.

[56] SZ 168.

articulates and expresses this understanding. The discourse [*Rede*] of publicness is idle talk [*Gerede*].

As the discourse that corresponds with publicness, idle talk expresses an understanding of the world in its ambiguity. It is not difficult to come up with examples of idle talk, but it is important not to merely equate it with socially dubious practices like gossip, hearsay, rumormongering, and so on, as the term is not meant to be disparaging or moralistic.[57] Nor is it sufficient to simply equate idle talk with any discourse that is basically shallow or banal, like small talk or 'chit-chat.' Thought these examples, however limited, are not inappropriate, idle talk might also describe weightier forms of public discourse, like news journalism reporting on current events, or school curricula, or even earnest protest and dissent over social, political, and moral issues. What is crucial is that, formally, idle talk does not describe a particular – ontic – content of discourse, but rather the way everyday discourse 'communicates.' Strictly speaking, this discourse does *not* communicate, because communication is the disclosure of the beings about which the discourse speaks. Since idle talk moves only at the level of what is *said*, it is not oriented toward the beings themselves and cannot truly be said to communicate about them. Instead it proceeds by "spreading the word around" and "*passing the word along*," such that "the discourse communicated can be understood without the listener turning what is talked about *in* discourse." Because of this, idle talk ultimately results in "complete

[57] Admittedly, *Gerede* can carry a negative connotation, to describe vapid or nonsensical speech. Heidegger himself is not particularly careful about avoiding this negative connotation in his rhetoric (and the same can be said of most of his descriptions of publicness). But if we take his description seriously, we must interpret it in a purely ontological way.

groundlessness [*Bodenlosigkeit*]."[58]

The groundlessness that results from idle talk is a helpful way to understand publicness as a whole, as it accounts for the way its characteristics are related to each other. A public understanding of beings discloses them in an ambiguous way, as if they were already fully understood from themselves. Because they are *not* disclosed from themselves, ambiguity is both a concealment of the beings in question and a concealment *of* the concealment. Idle talk, because it remains content to express only this ambiguous understanding of beings, serves to perpetuate ambiguity and its attendant concealment. Curiosity describes the deficient sight of Dasein's they-self, restricted to the paltry revelation of the world in its ambiguity and led to substitute superficial interest and 'obvious' perception for genuine phenomenological investigation. In other words, public disclosedness – comprised by these three – is groundless because it is not grounded in the beings that it purports to disclose.

The forgoing account of publicness as the mode of disclosedness proper to the they helps make sense of Heidegger's statement, in §27, that publicness is constituted "distantiality, averageness, and levelling down," which are three "ways of being of the they."[59] Publicness, for Heidegger, refers both to the disclosedness proper to the they (idle talk, curiosity, ambiguity) *and* the corresponding way that the they-self takes care in the everyday world with others. This care takes the form of constant comparison with others and preoccupation with one's distinction from them (distantiality) according to the prescriptive criteria shared by everyone (averageness), which serves as a severe limitation

[58] SZ 168. Emphasis mine. It should be noted that idle talk also, perhaps implicitly, corresponds to Heidegger's understanding – and criticism – of tradition, where "what is handed down is handed over to obviousness" (SZ 21).

[59] SZ 127.

of the kinds of projects Dasein can engage in (levelling down). Each of these reflect a disclosedness of the world that is ambiguous, disclosed only in idle talk, and understood according to mere curiosity. Such an environment, in which "every priority is noiselessly squashed …[and] everything that is original is flattened down," curtails all novelty and initiative as a matter of course. It limits Dasein's freedom to act in the world, as well as what can be communicated in language.

Pulling back from Heidegger's account for a moment, we might recall that the impetus for this exegesis was the question of the *political* world. At the outset, I ventured – somewhat provisionally – that the political describes a relation to others within a shared world, a relation to others as others. Here Heidegger describes a shared *world* – a with-world – and relations with others within it, but his analysis of publicness seems to be a grim portent for the *political*. If politics has anything to do with the possibility of meaningful speech, the freedom for meaningful action, and a genuine relatedness with others, it is entirely incompatible with publicness, if understood as the deficient disclosedness and ways of being proper to the they.

1.3.3 *Inauthencity, publicness, and being-with-others*

It might be surprising that, up until this point, I have made no mention of Heidegger's important distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity. But, in a way, the distinction has been operative throughout this exegesis in the theme of Dasein's disclosedness. To describe the disclosedness of Dasein to describe the way that Dasein is its there [*da*]: "This being bears in its ownmost being the character of not being closed

off. The expression 'there' means this essential disclosedness."[60] The claim here, that disclosedness belongs to the "ownmost" [*eigensten*] being of Dasein, means that Dasein's disclosure of its own [*eigen*] being is what makes it authentic [*eigntlich*], as opposed to inauthentic [*uneigentlich*]. This does not exhaust everything that authenticity entails for Heidegger, but at a basic level it is referring to Dasein's self-understanding – it is either disclosed to itself from itself (authentic) or from somewhere else (inauthentic). In this context, what is especially relevant is the connection between inauthenticity, publicness, and being-with others. If the political refers to a relation with others as others, this 'as others' can only mean an *authentic disclosure of others* in their Dasein-with. Is this possible given Heidegger's understanding of publicness?

The answer, initially, seems clear. Publicness belongs to inauthenticity, insofar as it serves as a kind of disclosedness that obscures everything that appears within the public world, including the being of other Dasein, and even Dasein's own being. The they, the 'who' of Dasein within the everyday public world, refers to the inauthentic 'self' of Dasein, who exists as a they-self precisely because it has not authentically become a self (i.e. understood itself from itself). In its public disclosedness, Dasein is characterized by "falling" [*Verfallen*] – it has fallen away from itself, into the everyday world.[61] Moreover, not only has Dasein lost itself in the public disclosedness of the world, it is continually drawn to do so. The structure of everyday being-in-the-world is such that falling is "tempting" and "reassuring," since publicness itself suggests to Dasein that its comprehensive disclosure "could guarantee … the certainty, genuineness, and fullness of

[60] SZ 132.

[61] Stambough and Schmidt render *Verfallen* as "entanglement" or "falling prey," but it seems more appropriate to simply render it "falling" to avoid extraneous connotations.

all the possibilities of its being."[62] This has the effect of "tranquilizing" Dasein, who not only falls but fails to recognize its own fallenness in the everyday world.

The alternative – authenticity – requires a gathering of the self from out of its dispersal and fallenness within the world, and a disclosure of Dasein from out of itself. Heidegger's treatment of authenticity is complex and multifaceted. The mode of disclosure in which Dasein extricates itself from the superficiality of publicness is characterized by an understanding he calls *resoluteness* [*Entschlossenheit*]. In resoluteness – along with its corresponding attunement (anxiety) and discourse (reticence) – Dasein projects itself upon its own death as a possibility, death being the *absolute* possibility for Dasein, "the possibility of the impossibility of existence in general."[63] Death, "the *ownmost* possibility of Dasein," is taken up by Dasein as fundamentally "*nonrelational*" and claimed as something radically "*individual*."[64] Authenticity, in other words, individualizes Dasein as a 'who' by disclosing "the whole of being-in-the-world … as 'I am,'" in contrast to the 'anyone' or 'no one' of the they.[65]

Publicness, then, is basically synonymous with inauthenticity. It is only in turning away from public disclosure that Dasein is able, in resoluteness, to reveal itself to itself as an individual. What remains ambiguous is the ramifications of this analysis for being-with and the disclosure of *other* Dasein in their Dasein-with. Heidegger writes that "existing in the modes we have mentioned [i.e. the they], the self of one's own Dasein *and the self of the other* have neither found nor lost themselves."[66] This implies that

[62] SZ 177.

[63] SZ 262.

[64] SZ 263. Emphasis in original.

[65] SZ 297.

[66] SZ 128. Emphasis mine.

although publicness describes the common interpretation of the world as shared with others, it is not synonymous with Dasein's being-with. However, it also implies that an *authentic* disclosure of others within the shared world is incompatible with publicness. This raises a number of questions, and forms the basis for a key disagreement between Heidegger and Arendt. The latter writes that although Heidegger's "sarcastic, perverse-sounding statement" – that the public "obscures everything" – "went to the very heart of the matter," it "actually was no more than the most succinct summing-up of *existing conditions*."[67] This will be discussed at greater length later, as a key divergence from Heidegger and as the basis for Arendt's critique of modernity.

In any case, because Heidegger's analysis of being-with remains (for the most part) within the context of everydayness, the possibility of authentic being-with – communication with others that is not limited to idle talk and action that is not precluded by the levelling down of all possibilities – remains unelaborated. In all of this discussion of publicness we have barely broached the question of the relation to others as such, which means the question of the political remains mostly unexamined. Such a state of affairs, in which the concept of the political appears ambiguous except insofar as it is apparently incompatible with the public, has led some to argue that Heidegger's analysis necessarily relegates politics, and perhaps all relations with others, to the realm of inauthenticity. The remaining section will deal with this problem.

[67] Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), ix.

1.4 THE WITH-WORLD AS POLITICAL WORLD?

1.4.1 *Is there a politics in* Sein und Zeit*?*

There are many who would find in Heidegger's distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity the key to his inability or unwillingness to develop a politics in *Sein und Zeit*. For some, this is because they take Heidegger to mean that being-with others is necessarily inauthentic. In relating to others, this reading goes, Dasein is always dispersed in the they. It is only in resoluteness, in turning away from the world – including the others within it – that Dasein becomes free for its ownmost possibilities and its ownmost self-disclosure. This reading admits to variations, some more radical than others. Wolin, for instance, argues that being with others is an "unequivocally … *deficient* mode of Selfhood" and results in a "*self-canceling social ontology*."[68] For Wolin, this is an ethical and political blind spot that paved the way for Heidegger's support of National Socialism in the early 1930s. Such an interpretation is somewhat broad, and in any case it should be apparent that the political risks of such a "self-canceling" social ontology would not necessarily lead to fascism, but would be amenable to any political ideology, as Smith argues in response to similar arguments by Strauss and Löwith.[69] That Heidegger's own political commitments took a particularly odious path is not grounds to retroactively reinterpret *Sein und Zeit* as a prologue.

Even so, others who do not go this far still see in authentic Dasein a tendency

[68] Richard Wolin, *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 50.

[69] Steven B. Smith, "'Destruktion' or Recovery?: Leo Strauss's Critique of Heidegger," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 51, 2 (1997), 375.

toward the non- or even the anti-political. Taminiaux's criticism of Heidegger is worth dwelling on at greater length, since he draws a sharp distinction between an 'Arendtian' and 'Heideggerian' approach to Dasein's being-with others, and self-consciously endorses the former. For Taminiaux, the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity, and other attendant distinctions in Heidegger's fundamental ontology, are based in his reading of ποίησις and πρᾶξις, τέχνη and φρόνησῐς. There is value in this interpretation, especially given the influence of Heidegger's reading of Aristotle on Arendt and Gadamer, which I will discuss this in more detail in Parts II and IV. However, he also argues – like the others mentioned above – that authenticity and being-with are mutually exclusive. On this view, Dasein can have no *authentic* relation with others and, as such, no politics is possible within this framework.

Taminiaux comes to this conclusion because he understands the resoluteness of authentic Dasein to categorically exclude the possibility of authentic being-with. He writes, "In its essence, *Entschlossenheit* is linked with what Heidegger calls 'existential solipsism': *doxa*, relationship with other human beings, and plural debate are excluded from it and relegated into … the inauthentic comportment" of Dasein.[70] But, though he quotes Heidegger here, the reference to "existential solipsism" is not as straightforward as it might appear. Heidegger does write that anxiety "discloses Dasein as *'solus ipse*,'" but that this "existential 'solipsism' … is so far from transposing an isolated subject thing into the harmless vacuum of a worldless occurrence" and rather "brings Dasein in an extreme sense before its world as world."[71] With special attention to the quotation marks Heidegger places around 'solipsism,' we should note that at the same time he invokes the

[70] Taminiaux, *Thracian Maid and Professional Thinker*, 45

[71] SZ 188.

term, he qualifies it by rejecting solipsism as it is normally understood. He insists instead that authenticity involves an intensification of Dasein's relationship to the world, rather than a flight from it.

Elsewhere in *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger reiterates his insistence that authentic Dasein is not detached from the world, and moreover that resoluteness does not involve an inability to relate to others. On the contrary,

> As *authentic being a self,* resoluteness does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it as a free floating ego. How could it, if resoluteness as authentic disclosedness is, after all, nothing other than *authentically being-in-the-world*? Resoluteness brings the self right into its being together with things at hand, actually taking care of them, and pushes it toward concerned being-with with the others.[72]

In resoluteness, Dasein is freed *for* its relations with the beings in the world and its relations with others. This is far from solipsism – indeed, the reference above seems to indicate on the contrary that *in*authenticity has more to do with solipsism, because in its fallenness inauthentic Dasein is isolated from a genuine relation with others and a genuine engagement with the world. As Villa puts it, "resoluteness entails concrete choices, commitments, and actions – in the world and with others – lest it fall back into an inauthentic solipsism."[73] Heidegger clearly envisions a mode of being-with – of Dasein as *Mitsein* – that is not caught up in the idle talk of the 'they,' but instead authentically relates to others. Even so, would authentic being-with constitute a politics?

Arendt's own position on the political ramifications of *Sein und Zeit* is somewhat ambiguous, or, at least, seems to have changed over time. In her 1948 essay, "What is Existential Philosophy?" she argues – as Taminiaux does – that the Heideggerian self, constituted by way of resolute being-towards-death, is radically singular and separated

[72] SZ 298.

[73] Dana R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 134.

from others. She concludes that authentic existence must therefore be a kind of solipsism in which "I have the opportunity to devote myself exclusively to being-a-Self and … to free myself once and for all from the world that entangles me."[74] The only politics that can emerge from such a view is one in which "these Selves intent only on themselves [organize] into an Over-self in order somehow to effect a transition from resolutely accepted guilt to action."[75] This, Arendt implies, is obscure at best – how could such an organization take place? – and dangerous at worst.

Later, her view is significantly more nuanced. In a lecture given to the American Political Science Association in 1954, she remains critical of Heidegger insofar as his understanding of the everyday public realm repeats "the old hostility of the philosopher toward the *polis*." [76] However, she notes, even this might be misleading since Heidegger's concept of resoluteness "seems to lack an object" and might, presumably, be compatible with political action.[77] Moreover, it is Heidegger's analysis *itself* that potentially provides a way out of this age-old tension between philosophy, which treats the human being in the singular, and politics, which treats the human in the plural. After all, it is Heidegger who "insists on giving philosophic significance to structures of everyday life that are completely incomprehensible if man is not primarily understood as being together with others," whose early writings always "studiously avoided the term 'man,'" and whose later writings "borrow from the Greeks the term 'mortals,'" in the

[74] WEP 181. One version of this essay includes a lengthy footnote about the political dangers of Heidegger's philosophy in light of his involvement with the Nazis. She lambasts Heidegger as "the last Romantic … whose complete lack of responsibility is attributable to a spiritual playfulness that stems in part from delusions of genius and in part from despair." (176n2). Arendt's view of Heidegger, expressed here at its harshest point, softened significantly over time.

[75] CP 182.

[76] CP 432.

[77] CP 433n5. This note is present in one of the drafts of this lecture held by the Library of Congress.

plural. [78] But despite the promise that Arendt comes to see in Heidegger's analysis of Dasein as 'being-with' and especially in his concept of world, it remains the case that he does not articulate a political philosophy in any detail and for the most part appears uninterested in doing so. Even so, the promise of his analysis remains. Given this, it is helpful to establish exactly what kind of politics *are* indicated here, however sketchy the outline might be. At the outset, I posited that the political world can be understood in two senses: the world as disclosed by and with others, and the way others are disclosed as others within the world. Having established that Dasein's authenticity does not necessitate the rejection of being-with as such, it remains to show what glimpses *Sein und Zeit* provides, however brief, into the concept of the political world

1.4.2 *Glimpsing the political world: The 'authentic alliance'*

Even if it is clear that authenticity does not exclude a relation with others, textual indications of authentic being-with in *Sein und Zeit* are scarce. Furthermore, granting that authentic being-with is possible, it is more difficult to glimpse the way in which it is *political*. If the political implies a relation to the public, then politics – as authentic being-with others – would, for Heidegger, be impossible. Given his position on publicness, Heidegger must either understand politics to be in opposition to authentic being-with (which would presumably involve distinctly non-political relations with others), or advocate a politics that is not public. Clarifying which position is implied within the text is remarkably difficult, and not only because adequate textual evidence is lacking. For

[78] CP 443. She follows this with a caveat that "it may be presumptuous to read too much significance into his use of the plural" since Heidegger never clarifies his position. Even so, Arendt seems convinced that the analysis of Dasein as Being-in-the-world and especially as *Mitsein* holds promise for political philosophy.

one thing, it is not clear that *publicness*, the mode of disclosedness proper to the they-self, is identical with the *public*, the shared common world. For another, it may be that the semantics may prevent such a question from being adequately posed at all. It is tantamount to asking, Does Heidegger endorse a non-political politics?

These questions proceed in part from equivocal uses of words like 'political' and 'politics,' and hence demand a more primordial examination of the concept of the political itself. Both Arendt and Gadamer are particularly strong assets in this regard, as will become clear going forward. In our immediate context, it should be sufficient to assume that politics and being-with refer to roughly the same thing, and that Heidegger presumably allows for the possibility of inauthentic as well as authentic politics. Dostal has argued – convincingly – along these lines, pointing out that the descriptions of sociality in *Sein und Zeit* appear to align with Ferdinand Tonnies' influential distinction between community [*Gemeinschaft*] and society [*Gesellschaft*], the former designating an authentic mode and the latter inauthentic.[79] As Dostal writes, "*Being and Time* suggests, but does not develop, the thesis that the politics of society are the politics of 'the public' – alienating, uprooting, inauthentic – while the politics of community are the politics of a people – historically rooted, caring, authentic."[80]

This sort of interpretation helps make sense of the extraordinarily brief mention of "the occurrence of the community of a people [*das Geschehen der Gemeinschaft, des Volkes*]" in §74, which appears to refer to an authentic political organization of shared

[79] See Ferdinand Tonnies, *Community and Civil Society,* trans. Jose Harris and Margaret Hollis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[80] Robert Dostal, "The Public and the People: Heidegger's Illiberal Politics," *The Review of Metaphysics* 47, 3 (1994), 542.

resoluteness, established in "communication and in struggle."[81] Such a community would stand in contrast to the public society of the they, in which genuine communication with others is not really possible and struggle – which connotes action, with genuine stakes and outcomes – is always precluded by idle talk. Of course, given the brevity of the remark, it is difficult to do more than gesture at a contrast here. A more promising place to begin is the initial discussion of being-with and Dasein-with in §26. Because the subsequent section serves as a first introduction to the they, which limits the analysis of being-with to its inauthentic mode, it is easy to overlook the comments describing being-with and Dasein-with *as such*, which Heidegger interprets in terms of the care structure of Dasein and characterizes with the term *concern* [*Fürsorge*].

Just as 'taking care' [*Besorgen*] describes Dasein's dealings with innerworldly beings at-hand, concern is the kind of care that applies to interactions with others, who are categorically unlike beings with the being of handiness. Or, more simply, concern describes the way Dasein relates to the other. For the most part, Dasein's concern takes the form of "deficient modes," especially "passing-on-another-by [and] not-mattering-to-one-another."[82] Heidegger attributes these modes – deficiency and indifference – to the everyday, public disclosure of the Dasein-with of others. To Dasein as the they, not only the world but the others with whom the world is shared fail to be disclosed in an authentic way. So far, this is just a reiteration of the previous point that Dasein's they-self cannot authentically relate to others. However, Heidegger also describes positive modes of concern, which he holds to have "two extreme possibilities." In the first, Dasein "leap[s] in" for the other, displacing them by taking over their projects in the world. In

[81] SZ 384-385.

[82] SZ 121.

the second, Dasein "leap[s] ahead" of the other, and "helps the other to become transparent to himself *in* his care and *free for* it."[83]

It is not immediately clear exactly what this latter mode entails, but Heidegger explicitly identifies it as *authentic* concern. He then makes a very suggestive remark:

> when [Dasein and others] devote themselves to the same thing in common, their doing so is determined by the Dasein that each has grasped as his own. This *authentic* alliance [*eigentliche Verbundenheit*] first makes possible the proper kind of objectivity [*die rechte Sachlichkeit*] which frees the other for himself in his freedom.

This seems to mean that authentic Dasein engaging in common projects with others establishes the condition for authentic concern, which is to say it serves as the condition for the authentic freedom of the other. The "authentic alliance," then, appears to have a distinctly political valence. That said, it would be speculative to read too much into such a brief remark. The reference to "the proper kind of objectivity" is particularly nebulous.[84] It might mean, one the one hand, that this alliance makes it possible for others to reveal themselves 'objectively,' as they are in themselves. Or, on the other hand, it might serve as an alternative to publicness, revealing rather than concealing the things which are encountered, disclosed, and cared for in common. Anticipating Arendt's discussion of objectivity [*Gegenstandlichkeit*], which I take up in Part II, it might also

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[83] SZ 122.

[84] Although it is beyond the scope of this section to pursue the question further, it would be worthwhile to look more closely at the significance of Heidegger's use of *Sachlichkeit* here, which is somewhat puzzling. For one thing, Heidegger goes to great lengths in *Sein und Zeit* to problematize notions of objectivity and subjectivity, so any non-pejorative reference to 'objectivity' stands out. For another, *Sachlichkeit* is one of two terms that appear in the text that can be translated as 'objectivity.' The other is *Objektivität*, which is consistently used to designate the ontologically naive understanding of the world that Heidegger seeks to unsettle.

My own hunch – though this would have to be worked out in more detail – is that Heidegger uses *Sachlichkeit* in *contrast* to *Objektivität* to highlight a continuity between the former and a phenomenological attentiveness to *die Sachen selbst,* the things themselves. So *die rechte Sachlichkeit* would be the 'objectivity' that is genuinely revealed, in contrast to the *Objektivität* that seems obvious in Dasein's everyday understanding (e.g. the world as a collection of entities, other Dasein as present subjects, etc.).

imply that the authentic political relation is what makes it possible for *objects* (i.e. objects for an isolated, sovereign subject) to become *Sachen* (i.e. subject matter for shared understanding in discourse). If this is the case, the 'authentic alliance' makes possible a *plural understanding* of the world inhabited in common, one which might even be uniquely revelatory. It thus serves as a glimpse into the first sense of the concept of the political world.

1.4.3 *Glimpsing the political world: Analogy with the work-world*

When he expands his analysis beyond the work-world to include other Dasein, Heidegger notes that taking care [*Besorgen*] is not appropriate to describe the relation Dasein has with others, which he instead describes as concern [*Fursorge*]. Both, however, are related insofar they are grounded in the phenomenon of care [*Sorge*], which designates the being of Dasein in general. Even without a thorough treatment of care itself, we can see that this establishes an analogical relationship: as taking care is to innerworldly beings, concern is to other Dasein. The analogy is made possible on the basis of the being of Dasein as care, which Heidegger indicates when he introduces concern. In its taking care of things *and* its concern for others, Dasein "is a *being toward* beings encountered in the world. …The being to which Dasein is related as being-with does not, however, have the kind of being of useful things."[85] The two ways of 'being toward' are related insofar as they are ways of Dasein's being as care, but differ in the kinds of beings Dasein encounters.

Once this analogy is in place, it becomes possible to consider a more general

[85] SZ 121. Emphasis in original.

analogical relationship between the work-world of useful things and the with-world of others. In the exegesis of Heidegger's account of the work-world above, I noted the way that circumspection functions as the implicit 'sight' of Dasein at work, taking care of innerworldly beings. What circumspection 'sees' is the worldly structure within which these beings appear as meaningful, in their relevant references to each other, to the work, and ultimately to Dasein. Circumspection holds in view the surrounding world as a totality of relevance, which makes it possible to discover beings at hand. In the context of the with-world, "just as *circumspection* belongs to taking care of things … concern is guided by *considerateness* [*Rücksicht*] and *tolerance* [*Nachsicht*]."[86] These encompass a range of possible modes, including deficient ones, but serve as the 'sight' of concern, just as circumspection serves as the 'sight' of taking care.

So far, it might appear that these distinctions are merely semantic, pertaining to Dasein's disclosive relationship to two distinct 'worlds,' each with a separate, respective domain (objects and others), mode of disclosure (circumspection and considerateness/tolerance), and mode of care (taking care and concern). But this would be a misunderstanding. It is not as though the work-world and the with-world are separate from each other, even if it is possible to discuss them in isolation for the sake of simplicity – as Heidegger admits to have done in his initial treatment of world.[87] Instead, the surrounding world of objects is the very world Dasein inhabits with others, who – together with Dasein – are those for the sake of whom the things of the world are taken

[86] SZ 123. Emphasis in original. It is not clear if Heidegger is distinguishing *Rücksicht* and *Nachsicht* from each other as two distinct kinds of 'sight,' or if they are two aspects that together comprise a unified concept of the 'sight' of concern. I am inclined to read it as the latter, hence my ongoing reference to "considerateness/tolerance."

[87] SZ 118.

care of. Not only does this mean, as I noted previously, that others are always already implicated in Dasein's care relationship to innerworldly beings. It also means that the "previously constituted disclosedness of others … helps to constitute significance, that is, worldliness."[88]

Given that these are not two distinct worlds, what is the significance of the analogy? In the first place, as an analogy, it draws attention to both the continuity and the discontinuity between the terms. Taking care and concern are not merely two different kinds of care, appropriate to distinct 'objects,' even if this is what makes them discontinuous with each other. Concern must be understood as concern for those *with whom one takes care*. Concern and taking care are continuous insofar as the latter is implicated within the former. That others share the world means precisely that *we* take care within the world, that Dasein is being-with. Along the same lines, considerateness and tolerance disclose others *as others who disclose the world.* The disclosedness that 'sees' the others 'sees' them as those who, with us 'see' the world in circumspection. In both cases, the analogical relationship Heidegger draws serves to highlight the way that worldliness corresponds to a *plural understanding*, a glimpse – like the 'authentic alliance' – of the concept of the political world in the first sense.

Additionally, this analogy makes it possible to posit a novel field of contextual relations. Circumspection is the mode of understanding in which Dasein holds the significance of the world in preliminary disclosure. I noted earlier that a being's significance – its meaning – is determined by its place within a totality of relevance, with other beings, for a particular project, for the sake of Dasein. If considerateness/tolerance,

[88] SZ 123.

as modes of understanding, are analogous to circumspection, then there must be a way to refer to what these modes hold in view: the significance of other Dasein, which must be something other than relevance. Presumably this is what Heidegger means by Dasein-with, which refers to the disclosure of the other to Dasein in their uniqueness, as Dasein and not an innerworldly being. The disclosure of innerworldly beings in their significance takes place because circumspection holds a totality of relevance tacitly in view. The basis for the analogy is that both circumspection and considerateness/tolerance 'see' something *on the basis of which* the meaning of a being is disclosed. The former reveals useful things in their relevance and the latter reveals others in their Dasein-with. What does considerateness/tolerance *see*? [89] It would be analogous to the totality of relevance that Heidegger identifies with the worldliness of the world. In short, it would be the worldliness peculiar to the *political* world – a glimpse of the concept of the political world in the *second* sense, as a contextual field of meaningful relations that discloses others as others. Arendt calls this the "web of human relationships." [90]

Admittedly this is all quite speculative given how little Heidegger writes about political community in *Sein und Zeit*. But each of these glimpses of the concept of the political world – the reference to the 'authentic alliance' and the analogical relationship between the work-world and the with-world – imply that the only understanding of the political consistent with Heidegger's analysis is one of irreducible *plurality*. As Birmingham argues, in "the moment of *Fursorge*, the sense of 'others' is radically transformed" such that "Being-with-others now has the sense of a heterogeneous space

[89] To put this more formally, A:B::C:D. Here the relation [:] is 'sight' as a mode of understanding, A= circumspection, B= totality of relevance, C= considerateness/tolerance, and D= ?

[90] HC 181-188. However, the details are not especially clear in Arendt's account either, as I argue in Part II.

… in which each is grasped in his or her own specificity."[91] Any political community that arises from this must therefore be, as Brogan puts it, "a community where the other remains other, in this sense, a community of singular beings."[92] It may be, therefore, that Heidegger broaches – if only in a vague way – the necessary connection between the political and plurality, so central to Arendt's understanding of politics.

Heidegger himself fails develop the political implications of his analysis, aside from the few suggestive comments treated here. And one can hardly imagine a stronger rejection of political plurality than his personal foray into politics under the auspices of the Nazi regime. Even so, it remains the case that the concepts of world and worldliness central to *Sein und Zeit* are indispensable for any thinking of the political world. The adamant rejection of the ontologically naïve understanding of the world as a collection of entities makes it possible to articulate a way of inhabiting the world with others that does not reduce them to manipulable 'things,' or to fellows who share a common metaphysical essence, or to self-contained 'subjects' cognizing 'objects' in space. What Dasein shares with others is that they too are Dasein: Being-in-the-world. It is this remarkable discovery that enables Arendt to interpret worldliness as one of the "basic conditions" of human life, and the plural inhabitation of human beings within a common world as the "*conditio per quam* of all political life."[93]

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[91] Peg Birmingham, "The Time of the Political," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 14, 2 – 15, 1 (1991), 27.

[92] Walter Brogan, "The Community of Those Who Are Going to Die," in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy* (ed. Francois Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: SUNY Press, 2002), 241.

[93] HC 7.

2.0 PART II

WORLD AND WORK: THE ONTOLOGICAL PROJECT OF *THE HUMAN CONDITION*

> To the Greeks τέχνη means neither art nor handicraft but rather: to make something appear, within what is present, as this or that, in this way or that way. The Greeks conceive of τέχνη, producing, in terms of letting appear.
>
> - Martin Heidegger[94]

2.1 REINTERPRETING WORLDLINESS

2.1.1 *Arendt's political world*

In the preceding, I identified the way that Heidegger's analysis of world and worldliness in *Sein und Zeit* broaches – but *only* broaches – the concept of the political world. Hannah Arendt, in contrast, is a much more fruitful resource for this question. She places human plurality at the center of her analysis and argues, *contra* Heidegger, that it is only because the world can be a public world, shared in common, that genuinely disclosive relations with others are possible. Arendt's description of human affairs – the activities

[94] Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1993), 157.

that take place strictly between human beings in public – bring a new dignity to the realm of politics and serves as a strong statement of the way that it is uniquely revelatory and disclosive. Arendt's account adopts and expands Heidegger's concept of world into a complex reciprocal relationship between the 'thing-world' of instrumentality and the plural realm of human action, which together make possible a space of appearance that emerges from the disclosive character of plural discourse. A more expansive explanation of this latter, *political* world, will requires a turn to the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer in Part III. In what follows here, I lay out the way that Arendt appropriates key aspects of Heidegger's analysis of world in her text *The Human Condition*.

First, it is necessary to gain a methodological foothold from which to proceed. This is an especially difficult task given Arendt's manner of proceeding. The speed and confidence with which she tosses out conceptual distinctions can be dizzying, and it is not always clear exactly how they might be cohesively unified. In an attempt to do justice to this distinctly 'Arendtian' style, the analysis that follows often proceeds like a taxonomy of terms. But Arendt's methodology is more unified than she sometimes gets credit for. Following Loidolt and others, I argue that Arendt proceeds according to a broadly phenomenological method, specifically one indebted to Heidegger's hermeneutical ontology. I articulate the ontological function of the various terms that belong to the 'human condition' and the '*vita activa*,' highlighting the way that Arendt understands these concepts in relation to human disclosedness and understanding.

Next, I turn to the issue at hand: Arendt's adoption and modification of the concepts of world and worldliness. In *Human Condition*, she treats the concept of world

primarily in connection with the activity of work, which discloses beings in their instrumentality. I show that her analysis closely traces Heidegger's description of the work-world of equipment in *Sein und Zeit*, even as she stresses, much more than he, the specific character of work as fabrication [*Herstellen*]. In this, Arendt returns to the Aristotelian roots of Heidegger's analysis, which are apparent in his 1924 course on Plato's *Sophist.* I show that Arendt's treatment of work– especially her focus on the reification of a self-standing 'objective' product – proceeds from Heidegger's reading of Aristotle's description of the structure of τέχνη and ποίησις. This leads her to emphasize not only the referential and disclosive structure of the world (Heidegger), but also its objectivity and relative permanence. For Arendt, the thing-world's objectivity serves as a condition for the possibility of plural relations to a common world that appears to all.

Finally, I turn to Arendt's account of action and plurality, with a focus on its relation to the objective thing-world. I argue that the "'web' of human relationships" to which Arendt refers in *Human Condition* is an attempt to describe the political world in the two dimensions treated previously: the world that discloses others *as* others, and the world insofar as it is disclosed *by* others. This 'web' makes possible a space of appearance, within which its is possible for beings to appear under the condition of plurality, to be *understood* in a plural mode. I argue that the centrality of speech – and, later, judgment – within Arendt's explanation belies a *hermeneutical* account of the way the political world is constituted by the exchange of interpretive judgments in plural discourse. This will necessitate a turn to Gadamer's work, which can provide explication for the hermeneutical aspects of Arendt's account that remain unthematized (the subject of Part III).

2.1.2 *Human conditions and ontological conditionality*

In *Human Condition*, Arendt identifies three fundamental conditions for human existence, corresponding to the fundamental activities that together comprise the *vita activa*:

> Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor. The human condition of labor is life itself.
>
> Work is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in, and whose mortality is not compensated by, the species' ever-recurring life cycle. Work provides an "artificial" world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings. Within its borders each individual life is housed, while this world itself is meant to outlast and transcend them all. The human condition of work is worldliness.
>
> Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.[95]

Despite the clear existential content and the subtext implied by the use of phenomenological terms like 'worldliness,' it is not immediately clear what *kind* of inquiry Arendt is introducing here. On first glance, these distinctions and their relations appear somewhat arbitrary or piecemeal. Some have argued, in light of this, that Arendt simply does not have a consistent methodology, that "instead one encounters a maze of assertions, declarations, and distinctions."[96] However, I argue that Arendt's methodology

[95] HC 7.

[96] Shiraz Dossa, *The Public Realm & the Public Self: The Political Theory of Hannah Arendt* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1989), 51. This sentiment is reflected in a variety of Arendt's contemporaries within political theory. See especially Ernst Vollrath, "Hannah Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking," *Social Research* 44 (1977).

is best understood as phenomenological, proceeding in the vein of Heidegger's analytic of Dasein in *Sein und Zeit*, where the descriptions of (ontic) phenomena serve to reveal the (ontological) being of those phenomena.[97] Villa is correct when he argues that it is only by recognizing the ontological dimension of Arendt's thought that the otherwise paradoxical or disparate elements in her thought make sense.[98]

To recognize the way this plays out in *Human Condition*, it is imperative to grasp the sense of the titular 'condition' and the way that Arendt is employing this term throughout her text, and doubly so since the title itself is somewhat misleading. As Borren points out, Arendt is not describing a perennial – and overly broad – 'human condition,' or even a singular condition, but rather, as is made clearer in her German translation of the text (*Vita activa oder Vom tätigen Leben*), human *conditionality* [*Bedingtheit*].[99] For Arendt, conditionality is an *ontological* designation, referring to the *being of* human beings, which, like Heidegger, she radically distinguishes from the being of objects. Humans are not a 'what' but a 'who.' If the question of 'what' even makes sense in regard to the human – Arendt is suspicious that it does – it would be unanswerable by human beings themselves. Her analysis of the conditions of human existence is thus emphatically not an attempt to discover or compile the essence of the

[97] As noted in the introduction, scholars are increasingly recognizing the importance of phenomenology as a systematic backdrop for Arendt's work. In the context of the present discussion, it is notable that Benhabib *criticizes* the influence of phenomenology on Arendt, though she misrepresents the phenomenological method itself by labeling it 'essentialist,' as opposed to 'constructivist.' Even so, her point that Arendt often conflates different levels of analysis is relevant – not necessarily in the way she means it – because it draws attention to the open question of continuity between ontic and ontological levels. See Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 125-128.

[98] Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, *12*.

[99] Borren, "Arendt's Phenomenologically Informed Political Thinking," 183n4. Although Borren notes the clarificatory importance of the term, she does not strictly distinguish between Arendt's use of 'condition' [*Bedingung*] and 'conditionality' [*Bedingungheit*], whereas I argue that only the latter is properly ontological.

human, whose conditions might change radically over the course of human history. And yet, even under remarkably different conditions, human beings "still are conditioned beings," this being "the only statement we could make regarding their 'nature.'"[100]

It is in the context of an ontological statement about human conditionality, then, that Arendt proposes to describe the three conditions grouped within the *vita activa*. These – life, worldliness, plurality – are described specifically as "the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man."[101] Each is related to the "most general condition of human existence: birth and death, natality and mortality," to which these other basic conditions are all "intimately connected."[102] How should we understand this relationship, and the nature of the condition she names with natality and mortality? Again, it is helpful to turn to the German, where she refers not to a "general condition, but a "general *conditionality*," and adds detail not present in the original. She writes that all three conditions "are grounded in the most general conditionality of human life, namely that it comes into the world through birth and vanishes from it again in death."[103] Setting aside the complex question of how the basic conditions are "grounded" in natality and mortality, as well as the specifics of their fundamental role in human existence, Arendt's use of the term 'conditionality' in this context clearly gives birth and death a distinctly ontological valence, in an implicit reference to Heidegger's notion of Being-towards-death [*Sein-zum-Tode*]. Arendt stresses that natality is something like the

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[100] HC 10.

[101] VA 23 / HC 7. In cases where I reference the German in *Vita Activa*, I will cite both the English and German text, noting when a word or phrase is present in the German text but absent in the English (as is sometimes the case). In all other cases, the citation will only reference the English text.

[102] HC 8.

[103] VA 25 / HC 8. My translation. The original: "… in der allgemeinsten Bedingtheit menschlichen Lebens verankert, daß es nämlich durch Geburt zur Welt kommt und durch Tod aus ihr wieder verschwindet."

converse of mortality: if the latter designates the possibility for the *impossibility* of possibilities of Dasein (Heidegger), then natality must be something like the possibility *of* possibilities as such. Arendt does not characterize it quite like this, but given the ontological overtones, the point must be that the beginning must be as important as the end vis-à-vis Dasein's existence.[104]

Given these references, 'conditionality' [*Bedingtheit*] should be reserved as a ontological term, in contrast to 'conditions' [*Bedingungen*]. In other words, I argue that Arendt's project must be understood in the light of the ontico-ontological difference between beings and Being, easily the most important inheritance from Heidegger's fundamental ontology.[105] The conditions, then, should be understood as *ontic*, though this needs to be qualified further. Life, worldliness, and plurality are described as *basic* conditions [*Grundbedingungen*], but Arendt's description of conditionality makes it clear that they do not represent an exhaustive list. It is by virtue of their being-conditioned that *anything* has the potential to become a condition for human existence, since humans "constantly create their own, self-made conditions, which, their human origin and their variability notwithstanding, possess the same conditioning power as natural things."[106] Moreover, humans potentially have the capacity to radically alter their basic conditions – Arendt's example is emigration from Earth to a different planet, where we would presumably live under exclusively artificial conditions – rendering them less basic than

[104] It would be fruitful to pursue the ramifications of this idea in light of Heidegger's treatment of mortality. Arendt's natality seems to conceive of Dasein as Being-*from*-*birth* as much as Being-toward-death.

[105] Both Loidolt and Borren recognize the centrality of fundamental ontology for Arendt's view of conditionality, though Borren argues that Arendt intentionally subverts the ontological difference. With these exceptions, it is surprising how little it is mentioned by commentators, even when the ontological character of the basic conditions is acknowledged.

[106] HC 9.

they initially appear.

How should this be understood? The operative term that distinguishes basic conditions from conditions in general is 'earth.' The basic conditions are those which have been operative throughout the existence of human beings, into which all human beings are, to borrow Heidegger's term, thrown. So far, humans have not modified these conditions to such a degree that they have ceased to be operative (i.e. ceased to condition us), even though the particular ways that they operate have varied widely at different points in history. Their tie to the earth, to which all humans at all times have been anchored, gives them a kind of priority by virtue of which they can be considered fundamental [*Grund*-]. This has led some commentators to consider the basic conditions themselves to be ontological, but strictly speaking this is not the case. If they are tied to the (ontic) planet earth and potentially changeable through (ontic) human activity, they cannot be properly ontological in the sense that the ontico-ontological difference requires. As Sosnowska writes, Arendt's "question, unlike Heidegger's, is deliberately anthropological," even though "the premise of her anthropology is the Heideggerian question of *who Dasein* is."[107]

Even so, it is clear that the basic conditions – in tandem with their corresponding basic activities – seem to function for Arendt in something like an ontological way. As others have pointed out, there is a close resemblance to Heidegger's *existentialia*, that is, ontological structures of existence that can be uncovered as through an interpretation of the (ontic, *existentiell*) ways that Dasein exists.[108] As Loidolt argues, following Braun,

[107] Sosnowska, 156. The point here is that Arendt is mirroring some of the broad strokes of fundamental ontology even as she pursues explicitly 'human' questions.

[108] See SZ 14-16; Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, 112; and Borren, "Arendt's Phenomenologically Informed Political Thinking," 186. For an early example of this suggestion, see Lewis P. Hinchman and

the similarity is quite fruitful in that it draws attention to their "quasi-transcendental" character: transcendental in the sense that the conditions are conditions that make possible, and thus are presupposed in, the various ways that human beings exist, but only *quasi*-transcendental since they "can appear only in their historical enactment [and] can never be regarded as absolute."[109] For the same reason we might call them *pseudo*-ontological, even though I have severe reservations about the term.[110] One could, with justification, say that this simply means that Arendt does not account for the ontological difference. But simply ignoring the similarity between Arendt's method of description and Heidegger's would be a mistake. It is possible that Arendt's use of 'earth' has a different sense than one (ontic) being among beings, a sense more akin to Heidegger's use of the term (e.g. the strife of world and *earth,* or the 'fourfold' of *earth*, sky, mortals, divinities). The basic conditions ground structures of existence that are presupposed in a wide range of ontic activities carried out by human beings, even though they are ultimately contingent and subject to change according to those same activities.

With all of this in place, a terminological specificity begins to emerge that helps illuminate the way Arendt proceeds. I propose the following taxonomy to keep the various levels of analysis in *Human Condition* intact. *Conditionality* [*Bedingtheit*] refers to the ontological structure of human existence for Arendt, as always subject to

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Sandra K. Hinchman, "In Heidegger's Shadow: Hannah Arendt's Phenomenological Humanism," *The Review of Politics* 46, 2 (1984): 183-211.

[109] Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, 122. Loidolt credits her basic view of the transcendental and ontological character of the basic conditions to Martin Braun, *Hannah Arendt's transzendentaler Tatigkeitsbegriff* (Berline: Lang, 1994).

[110] Sorting out how the ontological difference works for Arendt, especially as relates to her terminology of 'earth,' would require a comprehensive analysis of Arendt's phenomenological methodology in the light of the *later* Heidegger, starting with her own late reflection on Heidegger's essay on the Anaximander Fragment. See LM2 172-194. This would be a worthy and important project, but one well beyond the scope of the question here.

conditions. *Basic condition* [*Grundbedingung*] refers to one of the pseudo-ontological conditions Arendt lists that condition human existence on *earth*, namely life, worldliness, and plurality. *Condition* [*Bedingung*] refers to anything that conditions human existence in general. For example, I am conditioned by the basic condition of life (i.e. I participate in the life process, I am alive in the organic sense), but also by everything I come into contact with (e.g. the films I watch, the people I know, the economic system I take part in, the kinds of tools I use, and so on). I am conditioned by the basic conditions by virtue of existing – like all humans – as a mortal on the earth, while the other conditions depend on my particular situation. All of the conditions, basic and otherwise, condition me because, as human, I am subject to conditionality as such.

So far, almost nothing has been said about the activities which correspond to these conditions, even though they are the proper theme of Arendt's account. And so we must add two additional terms to the list above: *basic activity* [*Grundtätigkeit*] and *activity* [*Tätigkeit*], whose character and relation to the conditions is the subject of the next section.

2.1.3 *Basic activities as existential structures*

Arendt's focus in *Human Condition* – as indicated by the German title and the structure of the text itself – concerns three basic activities that together comprise the *vita activa*: labor, work, and action.[111] These are *activities* in a double sense: they are things that

[111] In posthumously published *The Life of the Mind,* Arendt also characterizes the *vita contemplativa* in terms of a threefold distinction (thinking, willing, judging), but these are not related in the same way as the activities within the *vita activa*. For one, they are not discussed in terms of conditionality. For another, despite important differences, the 'life of the mind' is no less an activity than labor, work, or action, for Arendt. As I will argue below, and in Part IV, judgment has a unique connection to action.

human beings *do* – we labor, we work, we act and speak – but they are also *actualizations*, such that the activities make actual what is merely possible by virtue of a given condition. Furthermore, and unsurprising given how I have characterized the basic conditions, these are not simply descriptions of various (ontic) things that human beings happen to do, nor are they straightforward reassertions of premodern philosophical concepts (e.g. from Aristotle). Rather, the basic activities too need to be understood in a quasi-transcendental, pseudo-ontological way, as existential structures. They designate the particular ways of being that are determined by a given basic condition. I will address this ontological question first, and then show in what sense the activities actualize possibilities.

First, the ontological question. In what sense is it appropriate to call the basic activities existential structures? Arendt suggests that each basic condition determines a particular way of existing in accordance with that condition. In this sense, the activities describe the way that human life is conditioned in a particular way. So, for example, labor is the activity that corresponds to the condition of life. In order to *live* – to be alive in the biological sense that Arendt means in this context – we must *labor*. Without labor, it is not possible to live; labor describes the way that the human being exists under the condition of organic life. Each basic activity is a way of being, a particular structure of existence determined by a particular condition. This is what gives Arendt license to speak of the respective 'perspectives' of *animal laborans*, *homo faber*, and so on. When she writes, for instance, that from "the viewpoint of the *animal laborans*, it is like a miracle that it is also a being which knows of and inhabits a world [i.e. that the human being is also *homo faber*]," this means that the condition of life determines human existence in a

fundamentally different way than the condition of worldliness. They are incommensurate ways of being.

Now, given what has just been said, there is the potential for a massive confusion. Namely, it might seem that Arendt is simply listing different ways of life that individual humans might choose (or be forced to choose) – in other words, that I might be a laborer, or a worker, or an actor, and my experience will be very different based on which 'life' I choose. That may well be the case, but this is not what Arendt means. Recall that the conditions and activities are *not* ways to describe a human essence. They do not refer to different species of the human genus, nor do they refer to the ontic choices of a particular individual. Rather, to be human is to be *always already* conditioned by all of these, in that they determine both the limits and the prospects for human existence. In this regard it is helpful to remember Heidegger's characterization of Dasein as a thrown projection, who *is* its orientation toward the possibilities it takes up, which are determined by the situation into which Dasein is thrown. For Arendt, the conditions each determine particular human possibilities. Each basic activity is a description of the way the human exists in an orientation toward those possibilities.

If this is the case, how should we characterize the relation between these basic activities, on the one hand, and activities in the more everyday sense of things we do, on the other? Humans do all kinds of things – the farmer might work when she builds a shed, labor when she tills the field, and apparently do neither of these things when she sleeps or reads a book or watches TV). How can the (pseudo-ontological) basic activities account for all the various (ontic) activities that human beings take part in? Arendt's answer is that labor, work, and action are not properly the *genera* or categories in a taxonomy of

activities – as if eating, drinking, toiling in the field, and so on, were those things grouped under the umbrella category 'labor' – but rather *structures* that correspond to the ways human beings are existentially oriented *in* their activities, according to basic conditions. To continue with the example of labor, in tilling the field the farmer participates in the structure of existence determined by organic life, which is one of cyclical expenditure and consumption. A respite from the toil of laboring in rest or sleep, eating the grain after it has been processed into flour and baked into bread, these activities are still *labor*, in the sense that they take part in the cyclical structure determined by the condition of life, and are ontic manifestations of a way of being according to this condition. It might well be that the same activity might be understood differently within different basic activities and conditions, that is, according to distinct modes of disclosedness.[112]

There is a further, related, dimension to considering basic activities as existential structures. Because they describe the ways that human beings exist in relation to their conditions, the basic activities can also be described according to the kind of *understanding* operative within them. It is no less true for Heidegger than Arendt that Dasein *is* its disclosedness, and for Arendt this means that the activities that we do disclose beings in particular ways according to the condition in question. This is what motivates Loidolt's proposal that the basic conditions and activities be understood as "spaces of meaning." Although I have some specific qualms about this terminology, it nevertheless does justice to the way that each of the basic conditions and their

[112] To use, as Arendt often does, a biblical example: When Jesus and his disciples pick grain to eat on the Sabbath, their activity can be considered as labor ("his disciples were hungry"), but also as action (a political statement revealing that "the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath"). See Matthew 12:1-8 (or Mark 2:23–28; or Luke 6:1–5). It is worth noting, tangentially, that Arendt tends to miss the political valence of the Christian Gospels because she reads Christianity in general and the depiction of the historical Jesus in particular as being "unworldly."

corresponding activities determine what and how things appear, according to their particular structure.[113] For example – as we will see at length below – work discloses beings in their instrumentality, according to the ends for which they are useful. Action, on the other hand, discloses the 'who' of other human beings, something which is not disclosed in the basic activity of work.

To summarize all of this more succinctly: a basic activity designates the structure of existence determined by the basic condition in question, a structure that determines what is disclosed and in what way, and this structure might be expressed in a variety of different activities. Not only does this hew close to Arendt's phenomenological descriptions, which are clearly not reductionistic accounts of human behavior, it also makes sense of central claims of her critique of modernity. She writes, for instance, that the modern age can be described as "a society of laborers which is about to be liberated from the fetters of labor."[114] Her worry here has nothing to do with particular classes of people, or the glorification or debasement of labor as an activity, or anything like that. Rather, her worry is that, in the modern age, almost all of the activities we do – and not just the activities required by the basic condition of life – proceed according to the existential structure of labor. In other words, Arendt fears that we have come to exist *as* laborers only, and carry this 'logic' of labor into all kind of activities where it does not

[113] Much of my analysis in this section is beholden to Loidolt, and my understanding of activities as existential structures is inspired, in part, by her account. However, I have some (minor) terminological reservations about her reference to "spaces of meaning" (and related terms like "horizon, "world-opening mode," and "conditions of appearance") on two counts. First, Arendt is insistent that life/labor lacks a space of appearance. It is, within its own realm, the *privation* of meaning. Second, Arendt tends to reserve the term 'meaning' for that which takes place exclusively in the realm of speech and action, where the products of work become 'meaningful' in the discourse between those to whom they appear in common (this will be a central point in Part IV). So in an important sense labor is without a space (of appearance) and without meaning, and so it cannot be described as the enactment of a space of meaning, as Loidolt does. See Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, 110-123.

[114] HC 5.

belong. Without understanding the basic activities as existential structures expressed *in* ontic activities, this kind of critique would not make sense.

Now, in what sense are these activities *actualizing*? If the basic conditions establish possibilities for human existence, the basic activities refer to the way these possibilities are taken up and made real. Recalling that the conditions are *enabling* conditions, as well as limitations, the possibilities they determine can be understood as human *capacities*. Indeed, Arendt often explicitly refers to them as such, even describing *Human Condition* as a whole as "an analysis of those general human capacities which grow out of the human condition."[115] Of course, at the risk of repeating the same caveat too often, these capacities cannot be understood in the metaphysical sense of a capacity determined by the essence or nature of a human being. Instead, they refer to what a human being is capable of according to the conditions they are subject to. In other words, activities in Arendt's sense simply describe the way humans *do* what they are capable of doing. An activity is that by which and through which a condition *is*. In an important sense, life *is not* without labor, worldliness *is not* without work, and plurality *is not* without action and speech – these are possibilities because of our condition, but they remain mere possibilities if they are not actualized. This point in particular is central to the critical aspects of Arendt's analysis: the disappearance of authentic political action and speech is tantamount to the loss of human plurality, since plurality is a possibility that is only actualized *in* the doing.

Another way of putting this is, again, in terms of disclosedness and understanding. In work, beings are disclosed in their worldliness: they are understood in

[115] HC 6.

an instrumental way within a worldly context of referential relations, according to the work being done. In action, beings (i.e. human beings) are disclosed in their plurality: they are understood in a plural way, according to the uniqueness of the actions they take and the judgments of the many to whom they appear. From the perspective of *homo faber* alone, human beings are *not* plural – their plurality is not disclosed. From the perspective of *animal laborans* alone, the objects of the world are not organized in a meaningful totality of relations – their worldliness is not disclosed. To actualize a basic condition in a basic activity is to bring something to appearance according to that condition. The dynamics of this appearance will become a central question in what follows below.

Up to this point, this analysis has remained somewhat abstract and schematic, in order to articulate Arendt's tacit methodological commitments and demonstrate the relations between the various terms she employs in the text. Although there is more to be said, especially about the relations *between* conditions (an issue to which I will return in the context of worldliness and plurality below), this general schema of human 'conditionality' provides a necessary starting point for the central investigation here, the question of *worldliness* and Arendt's concept of *world*, to which I now turn.

2.2 WORK, WORLDLINESS, AND THE OBJECTHOOD OF THE WORLD

2.2.1 *Arendt's thing-world and Heidegger's work-world*

In *Human Condition*, Arendt describes worldliness as one of the basic conditions of human beings, and work as its corresponding basic activity. Work is the activity

through which it is possible for human beings to inhabit a world. In one sense, her account remains entirely consistent with Heidegger's treatment of worldliness in *Sein und Zeit* – as Villa puts it, she "more or less accepts the Heideggerian description of world as a totality of equipmental relations."[116] Yet, in another sense, Arendt is clearly using the term 'worldliness' in a slightly different way. It encompasses not only the referential structure of the world but also its 'objective,' thingly character. The world is not simply a set of referential relations for Arendt; it is also something *made*, a 'human artifice' on the earth. In this additional emphasis, on work insofar as it produces objects that become part of the world, Arendt remains true to an early influence on Heidegger's equipment analysis – Aristotle's description of ποίησις – and incorporates overtones of Marx's analysis of alienated labor. But first, we should establish the clearest parallels between Arendt's treatment of worldliness in *Human Condition* and Heidegger's in *Sein und Zeit.*

For Arendt, *homo faber* – the human *qua* worker – is determined by instrumentality. "During the work process, everything is judged in terms of suitability and usefulness for the desired end, and nothing else."[117] Tools are useful for work, and whatever useful thing is produced through the implementation of tools is itself useful for something else. This utility standard, according to which everything is a means to some further end, is "express[ed] linguistically" by 'in order to,' as opposed to 'for the sake of.'[118] The obvious parallel is the identical language Heidegger uses in *Sein und Zeit*, when he describes world as a totality of relevance, which includes the referential relations between useful things (i.e. relevant with…), between useful things and the work (i.e.

[116] Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, 137.

[117] HC 153.

[118] HC 154.

relevant for…), and the work's relation to Dasein's possibilities (i.e. relevant for the sake of…). Work, for Arendt, describes the same kind of determination, whereby activities make use of useful things in order to pursue some end, which is determined by the one working.

In all this, Arendt does not alter anything fundamental about Heidegger's account of world as a totality of relevance. The close similarity between them, including the distinction Heidegger makes in §14 between an ontic world and its ontological structure of worldliness, becomes especially clear when his famous hammer example is transposed into Arendt's schema. In the terms of *Sein und Zeit*, using a hammer (ontic) presupposes a referential whole – the *world* of the workshop (ontic) – which includes the relations between the hammer and other tools in the workshop. These referential relations are organized according to their relevance for the work, which itself is relevant for the sake of Dasein and the possibilities of its being, a structure Heidegger names *worldliness* (ontological). Now, consider the same example for Arendt. In using a hammer (ontic), my activity is structured instrumentally. I use the hammer as a means *in order to*, say, nail together a wooden chair, an object which belongs, with the hammer and the nails, to the *world* as human artifice (ontic). In its instrumental structure – *work* (pseudo-ontological) – my activity actualizes a basic condition through which I am able to organize my activities instrumentally to achieve an end, a condition Arendt names *worldliness* (pseudo-ontological).

Recalling that Arendt understands basic activities and conditions as existential structures with their own particular kinds of disclosedness, it is not inappropriate to describe work in terms of understanding. Work is guided by an understanding of beings

as means and ends. Work discloses things in their instrumentality. Heidegger named this kind of understanding circumspection [*Umsicht*], the tacit awareness of the referential totality of equipment, the usefulness of tools for a particular task and their interrelation with each other. Though Arendt does not adopt the term, her description of the perspective of *homo faber* aligns precisely. If she can be said to go beyond Heidegger on this point, it is only in her emphasis on the *limitations* of instrumentality. For *homo faber*, strictly circumscribed within this basic condition and its instrumental determination, things are *only* disclosed as useful for something (means) or as something for which things are useful (ends). *Homo faber* is trapped in an infinite regression of means and ends, a nihilistic situation of "meaninglessness," since work only discloses beings in their instrumentality.[119] For Arendt, meaning – in the stronger sense of the term – is only possible in the political realm of action and speech, where things appear to a plurality of perspectives. I will return to this briefly below, and more fully in a hermeneutical context in Part IV.

In emphasizing this point, Arendt lays the groundwork for a strong distinction between the world in which useful objects are disclosed in their instrumentality, on the one hand, and the *political* space in which others are disclosed non-instrumentally, on the other. Besides perhaps a shift in emphasis, this does not really go beyond *Sein und Zeit*, which – as I have argued [1.3.1] – also implies that beings (like natural things and other Dasein) remain concealed in their being even as they are revealed as useful within the world. The similarities, then, are quite close. And yet, in hewing close to Heidegger's

[119] HC 154. Aristotle discusses this kind of regress in his introduction of the highest good in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.2, where he takes it as a given that we do not choose everything as a means to something else, since "if *that* is the case, it will go on without limit so that the desire will be empty and pointless." See NE 1094a20-21.

analysis, Arendt discovers a deep continuity between worldliness and the specific character of work as an activity of *production*. This is an idea that is not thematized in *Sein und Zeit.* What is the nature of the relation Arendt sees between work and worldly disclosure that ties it so strongly with the production of objects?

2.2.2 *Work as* **ποίησις** *and the 'logic' of reification*

For Heidegger, the workshop and its tools proves to be an extremely fruitful example, but it remains an example nonetheless, a pedagogical choice on Heidegger's part to illustrate the being of useful things as handiness, and to "[simplify] the explication by focusing only on innerworldly beings."[120]. The 'work' within the workshop is a mode of Dasein's taking care, and that it takes the form of fabrication is, apparently, incidental. For Arendt, however, work *is* fabrication. This is what makes the workshop such a good example of Dasein's comportment to innerworldly beings, because that comportment is always actualized in the productive activity of work. In interpreting the 'work-world' this way – that is, one might say, *literally* – Arendt is seizing on an early impetus for Heidegger's own analysis: the classical notion of ποίησις and Aristotle's description of ποίησις and τέχνη. By reviving this influence, Arendt can explain work's particular disclosedness (instrumentality) on the basis of its teleological structure of reification, guided by an idea and culminating in a self-standing object.

Once again, it is helpful to look to *Vita Activa* for guidance. There, the title of the chapter on work is "*Das Herstellen*," more aptly translated as "Making" or "Producing"

[120] SZ 118.

than "Work" (the English title).[121] Literally, it can be translated as "setting forth" – *Her-stellen.*[122] And, as Taminiaux notes, this is also the term Heidegger uses to describe Dasein's everyday comportment toward beings, in which Dasein is guided by circumspection, and the literal translation of ποιεῖν.[123] In ancient Greek philosophy, ποίησις is productive activity according to τέχνη. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes τέχνη in the following way:

> Every craft [τέχνη] is concerned with coming to be, that is, with crafting things and getting a theoretical grasp on how something may come to be that admits of being and of not being and whose starting point is in the producer and not in the product.[124]

Here, in a basic sense, τέχνη describes the understanding of how to produce something. It is from a deliberation about *how* to make something come to be, that the actual activity of production proceeds. In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle is more specific: "From craft come the things whose form is in the soul of the producer," whose deliberation about what would need to take place for something to come to be leads "to a final 'this' that he himself is able to make. Then the process from this point onward … is called production."[125]

Heidegger's lecture course on Plato's *Sophist*, offered in 1924 and attended by both Arendt and Gadamer, begins with a close commentary on Aristotle's treatment of τέχνη. There, he summarizes the various relations at play: Τέχνη "guides the dealing with a thing in an orientation toward a 'for which' and an 'in order to.'"[126] The principle for this orientation is the 'look,' the "εἶδος of what is to be produced." It is this 'look' – how

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[121] Arendt, VA 182 / HC 136.

[122] The literal translation of *Herstellen*, and its relationship to τέχνη, becomes a prominent theme in "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes." See especially UK 47, and below.

[123] Taminiaux, *The Thracian Maid*, 39.

[124] NE VI 4 (1140a10).

[125] MP VII 7 (1032a32-b10).

[126] PS 40.

the produced thing should look – that is present as an idea "in the soul of the producer" and precedes the productive process, as Aristotle says.[127] For Heidegger, the crucial point here is that although the product being produced is the τέλος of this process, its relation to the εἶδος is severed once the process is done. "As soon as the product is finished, it escapes the dominion of τέχνη: it becomes the object of the use proper to it" and its τέλος, "refers away from itself" according to its use. Once the cobbler is finished cobbling, the "shoe is made for wearing and is for someone."[128] Or, to put it as Arendt does, the product serves as an *end* during the work process, but becomes a *means* to other ends once the work is complete, once the product has been added to the world.

Now, Heidegger finds this significant because it points to the stark contrast between τέχνη and φρόνησις. Unlike τέχνη, which is oriented toward things as means and comes to an end when its object is complete, "the τέλος of φρόνησις is … a 'for the sake of which,'" and what it deliberates about – πρᾶξις, action – does not bring the deliberation to an end. It is not various means and ends, but "Dasein itself … [who] comports itself to itself in this or that way."[129] At this point, it should be apparent that this reading of Aristotle is as an important precursor to the Dasein analysis in *Sein und Zeit*, and especially the key point in §18 that the totality of relevance terminates at Dasein as its primary for-the-sake-of-which, a being whose being does not have the character of relevance (i.e. is not relevant for something else as a means). For Heidegger, as for Aristotle, τέχνη and ποίησις come to designate the way that Dasein deals with innerworldly beings in particular, as opposed to itself as Dasein (and, we might note by

[127] PS 41.

[128] PS 41.

[129] PS 51.

implication, *other* Dasein). As Bernasconi points out, this made is clearer in a 1931 lecture course, where Heidegger explicitly links not just τέχνη/ποίησις but production [*Herstellen*] to the equipment analysis, writing "it is necessary to clarify what it means that man has a relation to the works which he produces. It is for this reason that a certain book called *Being and Time* talks of dealings with equipment."[130]

Despite the unambiguous connection, it is actually quite difficult to get a clear sense of how the various terms in Aristotle are taken up and reapplied within Heidegger's analysis, and in any case would take us quite far afield. In particular, given the apparent connection between τέχνη and the worldly equipment totality, it might seem that Heidegger – somewhat straightforwardly – follows Aristotle and takes τέχνη to be the kind of sight dealing with worldly beings, while φρόνησις is the kind of sight that deals with Dasein's *own* being, in the political realm of others, the realm of πρᾶξις. As I will argue, this is broadly Arendt's position, and there is good reason to see something similar in Heidegger. But Heidegger also appears to interpret φρόνησις and πρᾶξις in a more general and originary way, such that they govern *all* of Dasein's dealings which would include dealings with innerworldly beings, as if to understand Dasein's existence *itself* as πρᾶξις. It is this transcendental reading of πρᾶξις that leads Taminiaux, for example, to understand the distinction to refer to everyday inauthenticity (τέχνη) in contrast with authenticity (φρόνησις).[131]

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[130] Heidegger, *Aristoteles, Metaphysik* IX 1-3 (GA 33), 137. Quoted in Robert Bernasconi, "The Fate of the Distinction Between *Praxis* and *Poiesis*," *Heidegger Studies* 2 (1986), 114.

[131] Taminaux, *Thracian Maid*, 34-46. For a much more detailed treatment of Aristotle's influence on Heidegger as regards τέχνη and φρόνησις, see especially William McNeill, *In the Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle, and the Ends of Theory* (New York: SUNY Press, 1999); Walter A. Brogan, *Heidegger and Aristotle: The Twofoldness of Being* (New York: SUNY Press, 2006); Robert Bernasconi, "The Fate of the Distinction Between *Praxis* and *Poiesis*," *Heidegger Studies* 2 (1986): 111-139 and "Heidegger's Destruction of Phronesis," *The Southern Journal of* Philosophy 23, Supplement (1989): 127-

More to the point is how Arendt takes up key features of Heidegger's reading of Aristotle. First, she argues that work involves a particular kind of 'seeing,' a disclosedness peculiar to it, which determines and limits how beings appear (i.e. in their instrumentality). Above [2.3.1] I described this disclosedness in connection with circumspection, but now it is clear both should be understood in connection with τέχνη. Work, for Arendt, is not simply an activity (i.e. ποίησις) but an existential structure, a particular way of dealing with beings in a 'worldly' way. It operates according to its own mode of disclosedness, one which 'sees' beings in their instrumental relation to the activity of production, guided by an idea. When Arendt appeals to the idea that serves as work's principle, her point is not so much that there is a specific blueprint or plan that determines the work (though that could be the case), but rather that work is tethered to both the initiative and the *design* of the one working.[132] It is in reference to the idea that the producer maintains sovereignty over the activity – and its various means – from beginning to end (i.e. when the product is complete).[133]

Second, and related, work's product is independent of the productive process that brings it about. For Arendt, as for Heidegger and Aristotle, a key difference between work and action is that the former comes to an end when the producer has finished working. From that point, the product stands on its own, so to speak. It is no longer referred to the activity of work, nor to the 'idea' which organized the various means for

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147, along with Brogan's response, Walter A. Brogan, "A Response to Bernasconi's 'Heidegger's Destruction of Phronesis,'" *The Southern Journal of* Philosophy 23, Supplement (1989): 149-153.

[132] Something like a blueprint is not sufficient for describing how a painter produces a painting, for instance, but a painter *does* organize various means (e.g. paints, canvas, brushes) in service of the work that is being produced, which is primarily one that *looks* a certain way. This is the thrust of Arendt's use of 'idea.'

[133] This is an important part of the difference between work and action – the worker both initiates and sees the work through to its end; the actor initiates action, but cannot see or control its end.

its production. However, it continues to have an indirect relation to the idea insofar as the idea, since it guided the creative process, determines the 'look' of the product, which now *appears*. In its reification, the idea becomes "tangibly present" in the product. It is by virtue of this "durability" and "permanence" that "shines forth in [the] shape" of all objects – from the most mundane tool to the most enduring work of art – that they are able to "shine and be seen."[134] Most of all it is this aspect of work, that through reification something durable comes to stand on its own and therefore appear, which informs Arendt's 'literal' appropriation of Heidegger's work-world. But unlike Heidegger, she describes it as the world's *objectivity*.

2.2.3 *Ob-jectivity, between nature and politics*

In her emphasis on the thing-character of the world, Arendt remains phenomenologically true to the structure of work as ποίησις, which produces things and, in so doing, adds them to the existing world. But it is difficult not to recognize the influence of Marx in this emphasis as well, of whom Arendt writes that his "loyalty and integrity in describing phenomena as they presented themselves to his view cannot be doubted."[135] This is perhaps especially true of his description of alienated labor, which – strictly as description – is remarkably consistent with Arendt's understanding of work. For Marx, who offers his explanation and critique on the basis of the existing fact – that is, on description as opposed to flights of theory – of modern capitalist conditions, the laborer's relation to the product of their labor is one of alienation. He describes several kinds of

[134] HC 168; 172.

[135] HC 104.

alienation, but they each follow from the fundamental feature of labor, that "the object which labor produces … confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer. … It is the *objectification* [*Vergegenständlichung*] of labor."[136]

Often the most fruitful philosophical disagreements can also be expressed in terms of basic agreements, and so it is with Arendt and Marx on this point. Although the core of Arendt's critique of Marx is his alleged disregard for the distinction between labor and work, an overzealous focus on this disagreement would conceal the insight they share, namely that as reification, work – which Marx describes here as labor – is a process of objectification. When he writes of the worker's "loss of the object" at the end of the productive process, his description is quite apt. In reification, the object no longer belongs to the productive process, nor does it belong to the producer, properly speaking.[137] This separation is not problematic as such, but only becomes problematic and unjust, ironically, under conditions in which the productive capacities of work are exchanged and confused with the life-sustaining capacities of labor.[138] Thus the real target of Marx's ire seems to be the way that the worker is not only separate from but "a slave of his object," since under capitalist conditions the worker's work serves as the means to biological subsistence.[139]

Objectification, for Arendt, is the source of the objectivity of the 'objective'

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[136] Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,* trans. Martin Milligan (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1988), 71.

[137] Marx, *Manuscripts*, 72.

[138] I say "ironically" because Arendt accuses Marx of having made this fatal confusion. In fact, they both critique modern capitalist conditions on essentially the same basis, namely that for the modern worker, the τέλος of labor (biological sustenance) has been substituted for the τέλος of work (the object being produced). B. Parekh makes this point, arguing that Arendt's criticism of Marx downplays the extent to which he shares her critique. See Bikhu Parekh, "Hannah Arendt's Critique of Marx," in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, ed. Melvin A. Hill (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 90.

[139] Marx, *Manuscripts*, 72.

world. Unlike Marx, she does not understand it as alienation, though she does stress the durability and self-standing character of objects creates the conditions for human worldly existence. 'Objective,' especially when applied to 'world,' is a term overladen with philosophical baggage, and much care must be taken to avoid misinterpreting the thrust of Arendt's analysis. After all, Heidegger himself writes explicitly that world "is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. World is the ever non-objective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being."[140] This is a decisive rejection of the so-called 'objective' world, one made up of a totality of (merely present) entities and gazed upon by a self-enclosed subject. Accordingly, Arendt's use of the language of objectivity must be understood in a quite different way.

In order for this to become clear, we might first note the risk of a potential equivocation in Arendt's description of the world within the context of her account of work (i.e. the work-world). So far I have stressed the disclosedness that belongs to the activity of work, and so the work-world can refer to the world in which beings are disclosed within this particular realm. But Arendt also describes the world as "the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice."[141] By describing the world as a "sum total" of objects, would Arendt not pull us back to an understanding of world as a totality of present entities (i.e. the first sense of 'world' in Heidegger's taxonomy) [see 1.1.2.]? These clearly cannot refer to the same phenomenon in the same respect. Rather, I suggest there is a distinction here which is more evident in *Vita Activa*. There, Arendt often uses the term 'thing-world' [*Dingwelt*] to refer to the

[140] UK 30.

[141] HC 136.

'objective' world. The world *qua* human artifice means something like "the thing-world created by human beings." [142] In other words, the objective world refers the thing-world that comes about as the result of work as productive activity. It is the *product* of production. The thing-world thus refers to beings which come about as a result of the activity guided by the disclosedness of τέχνη.

Although Arendt does distinguish between different kinds of produced beings – between the instrumental character of equipment and the non-instrumental character of works of art – she stresses that what is common to all products of work is the durability and permanence that they add to the thing-world: "although the durability of ordinary things is but a feeble reflection of the permanence of which the most worldly of all things, works of art, are capable, something of this quality … is inherent in every thing as a thing."[143] In this, Arendt echoes a discussion to be found at greater length and detail in Heidegger's discussion of a similar threefold comparison in "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," in which he compares and contrasts the being of mere things, equipment, and works (of art). There he writes that both creation and making consist in a bringing forth [*Her-vor-bringen*] and a setting-forth [*Her-stellen*]. These are both terms that can refer to production, which Heidegger – like Arendt – draws together within their shared mode of disclosedness. He writes, "both the setting forth of works and the setting forth of equipment happens in a bringing forth" that allows beings to appear in the first place.[144] This is both a continuity and a distinction. It is a continuity because production can describe the activity of making (i.e. work), which produces an object, but a distinction

[142] VA 182 / HC 136. The example phrase here is, „Aber auch die Haltbarkeit der von Menschen geschaffenen Dingwelt ist nich absolut."

[143] HC 167.

[144] UK 47.

because this activity is more fundamentally a bringing-to-appearance, a setting-forth. The latter aspect is distinct as τέχνη from ποίησις – Heidegger notes here that "τέχνη never signifies the activity of making [*Machens*]" – but they are related within the concept of production [*Herstellung*].[145]

The thing-world, for Arendt, is the subject of her statements about the world's objectivity. It is the product of work, but remains distinct from the mode of disclosedness operative within the basic activity of work and the basic condition she calls worldliness. She gives other indications of this distinction, as when she writes early in *Human Condition* that,

> The objectivity of the world—its object- or thing-character—and the human condition supplement each other; because human existence is conditioned existence, it would be impossible without things, and things would be a heap of unrelated articles, a non-world, if they were not the conditioners of human existence.[146]

This comment clarifies that world is not identical with its objectivity. It does not issue an order of priority, as if there were first bare objects and humans came along to make them into a world. Rather, it emphasizes that the thing-world – the works [*Werke*] produced by work – sets up a world in which human beings exist. To abstract these produced things from their relation to human existence would be to consider them bare and meaningless – just there [*vorhanden*], a collection of unrelated things.[147]

Why, then, use the loaded term 'objectivity' to describe this thing-world? Arendt appeals to the literal meaning of the English 'object' and the German '*Gegenstand,*' when

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[145] UK 47. Hofstadter renders Tätigkeit as "action." Heidegger's statement here provides an indication as to why it would be a mistaken to understand Arendt's chapter "Work" ["*Das Herstellen*"] to be concerned simply with various ontic examples of making [*Machen*].

[146] HC 9.

[147] Heidegger's discussion of world-withdrawal and world-decay are relevant here, as is his description of the Greek temple, which sets up a world as a space within which the Greeks dwell. The work sets up this world, but also "belongs, as work, uniquely within the realm opened up by itself." See UK 27-28.

Arendt describes the products of work in terms of their 'objectivity,' she means the way that they "withstand, 'stand against' and endure, at least for a time, the voracious needs and wants of their living makers and users."[148] To be ob-jective is to stand against. She notes the root of the word in Latin, *obicere*, which literally means something like 'to cast in the way of.'[149] Given this, when Arendt describes the objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*] of the world, she really means the 'standing-against-ness' of the world: it 'stands,' with a kind of durability and permanence, and it stands 'against,' separate from the human beings who exist within it. This prefix (*ob*-) should not lead us to confuse this standing-against with an obstacle or an obtrusion. Arendt does not mean that the objective world necessarily makes itself conspicuous, protruding and obstructing the activities of human existence.[150] Rather, by standing against, the thing-world stands *between*, in two ways.

First, by setting up a world, the objective thing-world separates human beings from the biological processes of life. Human beings belong to this process – the basic condition of life – by virtue of being living beings, and we actualize it by laboring. But through work, in distinction from labor, human beings are able to see beings in terms of their objectivity, both as means for the production of (artificial) objects, and, simply, as objects. This is what enables 'nature' to appear for the first time as an object, something from which we are distinguished even as we remain a part of it. Arendt writes that it is only because we have "built [nature] into the *environment* of nature" are we able to "look upon nature as something 'objective.'"[151] In this, she makes precisely the same point as

[148] HC 137.

[149] HC 137n.2.

[150] Recall, for example, the way that the hammer disappears in the hand, and becomes obstructive precisely when it breaks, which occurs as a kind of alienation.

[151] HC 137.

Heidegger, who also argues that 'nature' is first disclosed as ready-to-hand through work, within the world [see 1.3.1 above]. This means, most obviously, that the production of artificial objects always involves the instrumentalization of nature. She stresses that the resulting objects always testify to the destruction of nature as it is given: "the tree [disappears] in the table" and *homo faber* "has always been a destroyer of nature."[152] It might appear that for work, both as an ontic activity (e.g. sawing this tree into lumber, or chipping and cooking it into pulp to be pressed into paper) and as an existential structure (i.e. one which tethers natural beings to a given τέλος of human τέχνη), nature can only be something to be destroyed, used up, or defended against. On the basis of comments like these, Arendt might be accused of holding a reductive understanding of nature. However, her view is more nuanced than it appears.[153] Although it is the case, for Arendt, that nature can only appear within the world (of human beings), its appearance is not simply limited to material. In their 'objectivity' within the world, natural processes appear in relation to human existence as linear processes (e.g. growth and decay, birth and death). In its 'objectivity' nature stands apart as something to be seen in its beauty,

[152] HC 103; 139. This destructive element of reification is clearer in examples that involve what we normally understand as 'raw materials,' as when trees are cut down for wood, mountains are mined for iron, and so on. It is less clear with more 'artistic' and non-instrumental examples. Arendt understands music, for instance, to utilize *sound* as material. Certainly sound is not destroyed in musical performance like the tree is destroyed in the lumber mill. Even though Arendt acknowledges that music is among the least 'materialistic' of the arts, she still argues that a certain "deadness … [is] somehow present in all art." See HC, 169.

[153] Recent scholarship tends to recognize a more nuanced and interdependent role for nature in Arendt's thought, and view her as an important resource both for the phenomenology of nature and for normative responses to the unprecedented natural destruction that has accompanied the Anthropocene. See especially Janet Donohoe, "Edmund Husserl, Hannah Arendt and a Phenomenology of Nature," in *Phenomenology and the Primacy of the Political*: *Essays in Honor of Jacques Taminiaux*, ed. Véronique M. Fóti and Pavlos Kontos (Springer International Publishing, 2017); Anne Chapman, "The Ways that Nature Matters: The World and the Earth in the Thought of Hannah Arendt," *Environmental Values* 16, 4 (2007); Kelly Oliver, *Earth and World: Philosophy After the Apollo Missions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); and Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen, "Labor as Action: The Human Condition in the Anthropocene," *Research in Phenomenology* 50 (2020).

no less than its utility. The landscape and the funeral, no less than the carpenter's table, are examples of nature appearing under the condition of worldliness.

Second, the objective thing-world separates humans from each other, and in so doing serves as a precondition for distinctly plural relations between human beings. Arendt famously describes this idea with the example of a table, which in its position "between those who sit around it … relates and separates [them] at the same time."[154] As with nature, which in its object-character within the world can be considered *apart* from us, even as we remain part of nature, the objectivity of the world makes it possible to consider others apart from us, even as we all remain human beings. When objects are brought to appearance, they appear to everyone to whom they are able to appear. The object, appearing in common, orients each perspective and also distinguishes it from every other. For Arendt, then, as for Heidegger, an analysis of world must take account of the way it is inhabited in common with others, and understood in a plural way: it must broach the question of the public.

2.3 WORLDLINESS AND PLURALITY

2.3.1 *The many faces of Arendt's public*

In a 1964 interview with Gunter Gaus, Arendt speaks of the broad sense in which she understands the relation of world and publicness:

> ARENDT: … Nobody cares any longer what the world looks like.

[154] HC 52.

> GAUS: 'World' understood always as the space in which politics can originate?
>
> ARENDT: I understand it in now in a much larger sense, as the space in which things become public, as the space in which one lives and which must look presentable. In which art appears, of course. In which all kinds of things appear.[155]

Here Arendt defines world as a 'space,' the "space in which things become public," where 'public' seems to simply mean 'appear.' Although the reference to a "much larger sense" seems to indicate a shift in her thinking, Arendt is only describing a shift in emphasis toward the most general sense of the public, already operative in her work prior to *Human Condition*. There, she claims that her use of 'public' "signifies two closely interrelated but not altogether identical phenomena."[156] In fact, it signifies *four.*

At this point, there are multiple paths one could take in defining these four senses of 'public.' One of these paths is a detour, a *via negativa* through the public's counter-concept, the *private*. It is true that, for Arendt, public and private form a strict binary (one for which she has often been criticized, especially in early feminist responses to her work).[157] What is public is not private, and what is private is not public. However, this path only approaches the issue from the opposite direction. Since the private is always a counter-concept to the public, it follows that *each* sense of public has a corresponding sense of private, and vice versa. Though I will continue to note the implications for the private realm throughout my analysis, I propose a different path, beginning instead with the claim which underlies each of the senses of the public and holds them all together: "For us, appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as

[155] GG 20.

[156] HC 50.

[157] See especially Pitkin's influential essay, Hanna Pitkin, "Justice: On Relating Public and Private," *Political Theory* 9, 3 (1981).

ourselves – constitutes reality."[158]

In one respect, this is – and is intended to be – a provocative claim, one that collapses a foundational philosophical distinction between being and appearing, what Arendt later calls the "old metaphysical dichotomy of (true) Being and (mere) Appearance."[159] In another respect, it is the clearest and most direct statement of Arendt's belongingness to the phenomenological tradition. She writes, approvingly, that "the attraction of Husserl's phenomenology sprang from the … anti-metaphysical implications of the slogan '*Zu den Sachen selbst*,'" which she argues are taken up by Heidegger in his project of "overcoming metaphysics."[160] And given what has already been shown above, that Arendt's method concerns itself with what is disclosed according to the basic conditions and activities of human existence, none of this should be surprising. Nor is it particularly controversial, at least within phenomenology, to make an ontological claim that maintains the coincidence of being and appearance and affirms "the world's phenomenal nature."[161]

What is more distinctive is the way that Arendt links phenomenal appearance to plurality. In this context, plurality does not simply refer to a basic human condition but, more broadly, to the dependence of the *appearance* of what appears, on those *to whom* it appears. Nothing exists in the world, she argues "whose very being does not presuppose a *spectator*," and spectators are always also *themselves* "appearing and disappearing

[158] HC 50

[159] LM1, 23.

[160] LM1, 9.

[161] LM1, 19. This is not to say that such an ontological claim is not fraught with complexity, and Arendt does not really delve into the question on purely ontological terms. It is not within the scope of this project to discuss this, but such an investigation would likely begin with Heideggerian notions of the 'clearing' [*Lichtung*] and the 'open' [*Offene*], as well as Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, which Arendt cites explicitly as an influence in *Life of the Mind*.

creatures."[162] Although it is possible for something to appear to someone in solitude – something which takes place in "sheer thinking"– such an appearance would remain untethered and elusive without the recognition and acknowledgement of other spectators, to whom the same thing appears from different perspectives.[163] And so, for Arendt, everything that is, insofar as it is, appears, and it appears not only according to the perspective of a single spectator, but to a plurality of them. Objectivity and appearance are mutually implied, and she goes so far as claim, appealing to Husserl's phenomenology, that "just as every subjective act has its intentional object, so every appearing object has its intentional subject."[164]

This summary does not begin to exhaust Arendt's position on being and appearance, or to her related accounts of sense perception, language, and thought found in *Life of the Mind*. I will return to these in various contexts in what follows. For now, however, it should suffice to establish the ontological presuppositions that inform each of the four senses the Arendt uses the term 'public.' Once again, as with the basic conditions and activities [see 2.2.1 above], an ontological claim – that being equals appearance (and the corresponding claim that non-being equals non-appearance) – is operative as a kind of transcendental to the various ontic phenomena signified by 'public.'

Returning to *Human Condition*, when Arendt claims that her use of 'public'

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[162] LM1, 19; 20. Arendt explicitly includes non-human animals in this claim. For an in-depth analysis of the 'worlds' of animals for Arendt, see Veronica Vasterling, "Arendt's Post-dualist Approach to Nature: the Plurality of Animals," *HannahArendt.Net* 11, 1 (2022).

[163] LM1, 47. As I will argue in Part IV, *horizon* will become a better term than perspective for this phenomenon. Arendt does not claim that the totality of 'subjective' perspectives on the 'objective' world constitute its objectivity, even ideally. Nor does she hold to a perspectivism, where there is only a multiplicity of conflicting, self-enclosed viewpoints on the world. As Heidegger notes, in a criticism of Nietzschean perspectivism, that horizon and perspective are mutually implied, but both are "founded in a more original essential configuration of human being (in *Da-sein*). See Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, *Band 1*. Pfullingen: Gunther Neske, 1961.

[164] LM1, 46.

signifies two related phenomena, the first meaning she provides is "that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity."[165] In other words, public is (1) an adjective, a descriptive term that describes beings insofar as they appear, at least in principle, to everyone. It is in this sense, for example, that we refer to celebrities as public figures – people who are seen and known by everyone – or to public scandals (and public apologies), or to information that has been publicized. In short, it means something like 'having publicity,' and so I will refer to public (1) as *publicity*. But, this 'everyone' requires some qualification. There are, after all, people in the United States who cannot name the Speaker of the House, or who won the Grammy for 'Best New Artist' in a given year, and so on. Nevertheless these are still public figures. Who is this 'everyone'?

Here, everyone really means *anyone*. In this we should recognize an insight already uncovered by Heidegger, who also describes publicness as the mode in which beings appear to *anyone*: the 'self' of everyday Dasein he calls the they. While they agree on the fundamental point that to be public means to appear to anyone, Heidegger and Arendt diverge considerably regarding what this means. Earlier [1.3.3] I noted a comment by Arendt regarding Heidegger's criticism of publicness as a deficient mode of disclosure. In his pronouncement, she writes, Heidegger simply provides "the most succinct summing-up of *existing conditions*."[166] This is adamantly not Heidegger's goal – as King writes, "it would be a complete misunderstanding of the existential-ontological idea of a 'they-self' to think that it applies only to modern society in some specific socio-

[165] HC 50.

[166] MDT ix.

political forms" – and Arendt surely understands this.[167] Accordingly, although it remains a high compliment of Heidegger's descriptive powers, her statement must also be taken as a criticism of the limitations of his thinking of the public.

The core of this disagreement lies in the way that this 'anyone' is understood. Both, in fact, agree that to appear to anyone means to appear in common. But for Heidegger, to appear in common means to appear to anyone *in the same way*, as "discovered and accessible to everyone."[168] This mode of disclosedness – the mode of appearing in the same way – is deficient because it restricts the self-showing of beings to the most general way in which they can appear (as ambiguous and levelled down), to something like the lowest common denominator. Arendt disagrees with this assumption. For her, to appear in common does not imply that something appears in the same way to everyone. On the contrary, it means that something is capable of appearing to a *plurality*. She would certainly agree that to appear in only one way to everyone would be a deficient mode of appearance – as if not men, but Man inhabited the world, to reverse her oft-repeated phrase. Indeed, this is precisely Arendt's indictment of modern 'society,' one which she attributes to Heidegger in his "summing up of *existing conditions*." But, unlike Heidegger, Arendt does not think that such an indictment applies to publicity *as such*.

Publicity, then, is a more neutral term for Arendt than it is for Heidegger. It does not name a deficient mode of appearance, but only the scope or extent to which something can appear: to anyone and everyone. The second referent provided by Arendt is closely related: public can refer to " the world itself, insofar as it is common to all of us

[167] Magda King, *A Guide to Heidegger's Being and Time*, ed. by John Llewelyn (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 82.

[168] SZ 71.

and distinguished from our privately owned place in it."[169] In other words, the public is (2) the *world* insofar as it is public in the first sense (i.e. has publicity). Arendt specifies that world, in this context, "is related … to the human artifact [i.e. the thing-world], the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together."[170] Accordingly, the corresponding senses of 'private' simply describe that which is *not* able to appear to everyone. Something private appears to some, but not all. I might share a secret with a friend that I would not share with 'just *anyone*.'[171] If the same secret is made public, this simply consists in its being 'brought to light' so that it can be seen by anyone and everyone. The parts of the thing-world that are private in this way might, along similar lines, be called private 'worlds.'

So, 'public' can refer to either (1) *publicity*, the capacity for a phenomenon to appear to anyone; and (2) the *public world*, which is the world insofar as (1). These are the two referents that Arendt provides explicitly. We might notice at this point that, for both, something lurks in the background. If "everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody," what is the sense of this '*can be*'? What does it mean to speak of the public in terms of the *capacity* to appear to everyone? By virtue of *what* does something appear publicly to all or privately to some? Since, as we have seen, Arendt argues that appearances are dependent on those to whom they appear, it would seem that these two senses of 'public' both depend on something we might call *phenomenal accessibility*: something is private or public according to whether its appearance is

[169] HC 52.

[170] HC 52.

[171] The private is, in other words, a simple negation of the public. But, since I am using 'everyone' and 'anyone' interchangeably, there is the potential for confusion: the negation of 'everyone' is 'not everyone' (i.e. not all), while the negation of 'anyone' is 'not anyone' (i.e. none). But the latter can also mean something like 'not just anyone,' which means the same as the former: some, but not all).

accessible to some or to all.

I argued at the outset that Arendt actually uses the term 'public' in *four* senses. The first two senses – those she provides explicitly – are both dependent on the third referent I propose here: the public as (3) a *space of appearance*. In a collection of writings, later published under the title *Was ist Politik?*, Arendt writes of "a space entered by those who dared to cross the thresholds of their houses," a realm which "became *public* because they were among their equals, who were capable of seeing and hearing and admiring one another's deeds."[172] In this realm, "everything … appears in the light that can be generated only in a public space, that is, in the presence of others."[173] Similarly, in *Human Condition*, Arendt writes of a space that comes into being wherever men are together "in the manner of speech and action."[174] There she emphasizes that this is a space in which human beings are able to appear in their distinctiveness to each other, "the space where I appear to others and others appear to me."[175]

The space of appearance, in itself, is ephemeral. It is dependent on the being together of plural human beings and on the actualization, in speech and action, of their plurality. Thus she argues that when people are gathered together, "it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever."[176] Moreover, it is entirely possible for there to be a public space of appearance without that space being political. Beyond Homer, Arendt gives the examples of the medieval Roman Catholic Church and Plato's

[172] IP 122; 123. My emphasis. These texts come from Arendt's work on a book, never completed, that would be an introduction to various political concepts as she understood them. Here, Arendt often elaborates and develops ideas that appear in *Human Condition*, and it serves an especially helpful point of reference for my discussion Arendt's theories of judgment and action in Part IV.

[173] IP 123.

[174] HC 199.

[175] HC 198

[176] HC 199.

Academy – each fostered a space of appearance in that they were occasions for a plurality of people to gather together in equality and freedom and appear to each other, even though they were not instituted for that purpose.[177] However, it is also possible for this space to be 'fixed' within a boundary or structure. This is the fourth, and final, possible referent, the public as (4) a space of appearance that has been institutionalized within a political community, 'stabilized' and "secured within a city … the polis."[178] I refer to this sense as the *institutional public*. This public space is held in place by the actual decisions – legal, moral, political – of a body of people acting together, decisions which draw and police its boundaries. It is in this sense, for instance, that Arendt condemns Eichmann for his presumption "to determine who should and should not inhabit the world."[179]

Considering the public, in these two latter senses, as a *space* helps explain what it means for something to be *capable* of appearance, a notion that underlies the two former senses of 'public' as publicity and public world. Although one might – like Benhabib – see Arendt's reliance on "topographical and spatial metaphors" as a limitation, the notion of the public as a space plays an important explanatory function.[180] It becomes meaningful to speak of appearance in terms of *access* to the space where things appear. As a space, it is something that can be entered and exited. It is something from which people or things can be excluded. Arendt writes of the space of appearance that, although

[177] IP 132-141.

[178] IP 123.

[179] EJ 279.

[180] Benhabib, *Reluctant Modernism*, 200. Benhabib contrasts Arendt's public space [*der offenliche Raum*] with Habermas's public realm [*die Offentlichkeit*] and seems to prefer the latter for its application to distinctly modern forms of public communication. However, she seems to limit Arendt's notion of 'space' to a metaphor drawn from face-to-face communication in physical space. Arendt seems instead to draw on a more originary sense of 'space,' perhaps one that echoes Heidegger, who argues that the relation of humans to space is more primordially grounded in human dwelling. See Martin Heidegger, *BTD.*

every human being is capable of the words and deeds that bring it about, "most of them – like the slave, the foreigner, and the barbarian in antiquity, like the laborer or craftsman prior to the modern age, the jobholder or businessman in our world – do not live in it."[181] These people have historically been barred from the public space, deprived in a double sense: those things which are public do not appear to them, and they themselves do not appear to others. It is especially as a counter-concept to the public in senses (3) and (4) that Arendt argues the private should be taken primarily as deprivation.[182]

Now that each of these referents are now in place, the interrelation between them becomes clear. Something is public (1) when it appears within a public space of appearance (3) to everyone with access to it, access which is determined by the particular way that such a space is (4)institutionalized within a community. The thing-world is a public world (2) insofar as it appears in this space. With that, we return to Arendt's comment about world in her interview with Gaus: the world is "the space in which things become public." Given what has now been said, this means that Arendt is comfortable simply defining 'world' as the space of appearance, and the two terms become interchangeable. What should we make of this? On what basis can Arendt identify these two terms? The public world, as defined above, is *dependent* on the space of appearance – which of these is world, properly speaking? Earlier in this same interview, Arendt also speaks of world as "a space for politics," and so these questions are no less germane for the concept of the political world as well.[183]

[181] HC 199.

[182] HC 58-59.

[183] GG 17.

2.3.2 *From (thing-) world to (political) web*

I stated at the outset that Heidegger's analysis of worldliness enables us to characterize the political world in two senses. First, the political world can refer to the world insofar as it is disclosed in common, to Dasein and the others. For both Arendt and Heidegger, this is the public world, and – anticipating somewhat – I described this disclosure as a *plural understanding*. Second, the political world can refer to the relational context – the 'world' – in which others are disclosed in their relations *to one another*, as a 'who' and not merely a 'what.' That there *is* such a relational context, a distinct with-world analogous to the work-world (or, for Arendt, thing-world), is implied by Heidegger's comments regarding concern and considerateness, but he does not develop the idea any further [see 1.4.3]. Nor does he give an account of the way the world can be disclosed by others in any way other than the inauthentic mode of publicness, even if he occasionally hints at the possibility of authentic plural disclosure [see 1.4.2]. For Arendt, in contrast, these are explicit themes at the very core of her analysis, which she provides under the rubric of *action*.

Though a more expansive discussion of action will take place in Part IV, we should note at the outset that action is Arendt's term for the activity which discloses the 'who' – as opposed to the 'what' – of a human being, in its "unique distinctness."[184] This is a disclosure that can only occur before others, and thus corresponds to the basic condition of plurality. As such, action is strictly demarcated from the basic condition of worldliness and the basic activity of work. By emphasizing that work and action are

[184] HC 176.

entirely distinct existential structures, Arendt's use of these terms function as labels that broadly correspond to, on the one hand, the way we exist in relation to objects and the objective world (work) and, on the other, the way we exist in relation to other human beings (action). And, it leads her to thematize the analogy that was already implicit in *Sein und Zeit*:

> the physical, worldly in-between [i.e. the thing-world] … is overlaid and, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between, which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to men's acting and speaking directly *to* one another. This second in-between is not tangible, since there are no tangible objects into which it could solidify; the process of acting and speaking can leave behind no such results and end products. But for all its intangibility, this in-between is no less real than the world of things we visibly have in common. We call this reality the *'web' of human relationships*, indicating by the metaphor its somewhat intangible quality.[185]

This 'web' of human relations, scaffolded, as it were, by the objective thing-world, provides the relational context for relations between plural human beings *as* human beings (i.e. in what Heidegger calls their Dasein-with), relations that proceed according to the structure of action. As a shorthand, Arendt often refers to these relations as human affairs.

The analogy, now between the (thing-) world and the 'web' of human relations, holds at multiple points. It provides an "already existing" context that determines the immediate consequences of action, just as the thing-world is an artifice that transcends the particular lifespans of human beings. Furthermore, it is in relation this 'web' that "[action] 'produces' stories … as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things."[186] It is through these "stories" – narratives told by the others to whom someone appears – that a 'who' is ultimately revealed. In other words, in a general way – and not to downplay the key differences between work and action – just as work makes use of existing worldly

[185] HC 182-183.

[186] HC 184.

relations to produce objects that themselves become part of the world, so action takes place in the context of existing human relations to produce narratives that become part of the world. The crucial difference is, of course, that work maintains a sovereignty over the way these relations are employed and affect the end 'product.'

So far this shows only that Arendt thematizes Heidegger's implicit analogy and establishes that there is something like a 'world' (i.e. the 'web') that provides a space in which human beings appear to each other. What about the other aspect of the political world, the notion of plural understanding? In fact, Arendt brings the 'web' of human relationships to bear on this question as well. She writes that action is often oriented around the objective "world of things … which physically lies between" human beings and gives rise to "their specific objective, worldly interests." These interests – Arendt notes the literal meaning, *inter-est*, from the Latin *inter-* (between) and *esse* (be) – "[lie] between people and therefore can relate and bind them together."[187] The relations of human beings *with* each other are organized around the thing-world to which they are related in common. But the thing-world to which a plurality is related in common is just the public world, as defined above. And the 'web' of human relationships appears to describe the space of appearance, as defined above, the disclosive space that comes about when human beings are together in the manner of speaking and acting.

The 'web' of human relationships, then, in its orientation to 'interests' in the public world, is more properly described as the space of appearance in which *objects as well as others appear to each other.* Or, in different terms, when Arendt tells Gaus that the world is the "space in which things become public" and the "space for politics," she is

[187] HC 182.

speaking of the way that both objects and human beings are disclosed in the interactions within a plurality related to a common public world within a space of appearance that comes about from such interactions. Or, in still different terms and echoing the previous discussion of Heidegger, the space of appearance is the site for both the disclosure of others *as* others *and* the disclosure of the world *with* others, which both take place through the actualization of the same condition: plurality. In short, it would seem that in Arendt's description of the space of appearance – that space of plural understanding – we have uncovered something like the political world.

2.3.3 *Arendt's hermeneutical foundations?*

Stepping back for a moment, the preceding discussions here have illuminated various aspects of Arendt's concept of world: Worldliness refers to a basic condition of human existence, such that human beings can create and inhabit a thing-world in distinction from their bare, organic existence. This condition is made actual in the activity of work, which discloses the things that make up the world in their instrumentality and presses them into service for the creation of objects. These objects and their references to each other make up the thing-world. In her description of the thing-world and its worldly, instrumental structure, Arendt closely follows Heidegger's description of world, in which innerworldly beings are disclosed in their usefulness (i.e. their instrumentality).

But, Arendt's concept of world is not limited to the objective thing-world alone, nor to the existential structure she calls work. In her description of the 'web' of human relationships, Arendt names what is only implicit in Heidegger: a 'world' of relations

between human beings alone, "without the intermediary of things."[188] Though she does not use the term, we should understand this as a description of the with-world, since it is the context in which others appear to each other in what Heidegger calls their Dasein-with. In this with-world, *plurality* is the basic condition that determines how the disclosure of others takes place. In the plural with-world, human beings are revealed in their unique 'who,' as the subjects of meaningful action and speech, irreducible to mere instrumentality. Thus Arendt argues, *homo faber*, producer of the thing-world, can never account for the kind of meaning that belongs to action undertaken before others – the disclosive context of the thing-world is not sufficient to disclose the being of others.

It would appear, then, that there are two 'worlds' for Arendt: the thing-world and the with-world. They correspond to two different basic activities: work and action. And yet, despite their demarcation from each other, we have already seen that their relationship is complicated and reciprocal. As Villa puts it, "the relation Arendt describes between the world of work (the 'human artifice') and the public realm is more complex, complementary, and 'Heideggerian'" than it might seem.[189] These two 'worlds' collide in the public world, which refers to the thing-world insofar as it appears in common within a space of appearance. I argue above that the space of appearance simply refers to the with-world insofar as it is disclosive – it is the space in which action and speech within a

[188] HC 7.

[189] Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, 139. Villa argues that we should understand the distinctions between basic activities as proceeding from less to more disclosive, along the lines of Heidegger's distinction between inauthenticity and authenticity. Work would correspond to an inauthentic mode of disclosedness, while action would be an authentic one. This is right insofar as relative disclosedness is the criterion according to which the basic activities are ranked hierarchically. And his basis in linking Heidegger's distinction back to his reading of ποίησις / πρᾶξις is sound. However, I hesitate to import the authenticity/inauthenticity distinction wholesale into Arendt's project for two reasons. First, the distinction is not always well-understood even in Heidegger [see 1.4.1]. Second, if we were to import such a distinction, it would be more appropriate to apply it to Arendt's contrast between (inauthentic) *society* and an authentic political realm. But society is a hybrid realm, and does not really refer to the instrumental mode of disclosedness proper to work. See Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, 136-143.

plurality reveals others in their distinctiveness, but also reveals the *things* that serve as common interests. For this reason, Arendt's description of the space of appearance in connection with the public world should be understood as a description of what I have been calling the *political world*.

And yet, much remains ambiguous about how this political world functions as a *world*. Why does the actualization of plurality occasion a space of appearance? What is unique about the kind of disclosedness that takes place therein? What kind of 'worldliness' does it have, given that relations between plural human beings must be non-instrumental? What kind of permanence or stability does it have, given that the 'web' of human relationships is fleeting and fragile? These all echo the general question I posed at the beginning: How is it that the political can describe a world, or that the political can constitute a world? Though she arguably places this concept of the political world at the center of her philosophy – and, at least, emphasizes it much more than Heidegger – Arendt is surprisingly light on explanations about what it is and how it works. This is not to say that Arendt has no answers for us. On the contrary, the answer to each of these questions is linked to another unifying theme in her work, though I have left it mostly unthematized until now: *speech.*

In *Human Condition*, whenever Arendt describes the basic activity that corresponds to plurality, she describes it as twofold: "Human plurality [is] the basic condition of both action and *speech*."[190] It is in speech that the meaning of action is disclosed, along with the 'who' of the actor, since it is in speech that the 'stories' or narratives of an action are disclosed. It is speech, in speaking with each other "*about*

[190] HC 175.

some worldly objective reality," that binds human beings to common interests in the public world.[191] It is speech, Arendt argues, that underlies Aristotle's definition of the human as a political animal. When he defines the human as "a living being capable of speech," Aristotle makes reference to the distinctly political life, "a way of life in which speech and only speech made sense and where the central concern of all citizens was to talk with each other."[192] In this context, 'speech' must be understood in a particular way. It is not simply the "faculty of speech," the ability to talk or use language.[193] And Arendt contrasts it explicitly with "mere talk," [*Gerede*], which functions in the mode of work – not action – as a "means toward the end," as in propaganda.[194] Speech, in contrast, must be disclosive in a way that reveals the unique 'who.' To put it in terms familiar from *Sein und Zeit*, it refers to the mode of *discourse* that belongs to the kind of disclosedness proper to the political world.

For Arendt, then, 'speech' refers to speech which reveals that *about which* it speaks, in a way that is only possible in speaking *with* others. After *Human Condition*, Arendt begins to use a different label for this kind of speech: *judgment*. There will be more to say about judgment in Part IV, but in this context we need only note the continuity between her descriptions of judgment and the earlier descriptions of speech in *Human Condition*. This continuity is clearest in the essay "The Crisis in Culture," where she writes that "wherever people judge the things of the world that are common to them, there is more implied in their judgments than these things. By his manner of judging, the

[191] HC 182.

[192] HC 27.

[193] HC 27.

[194] VA 248 / HC 180. In her use of 'mere talk' [*Gerede*] here, Arendt gives another indication that if she can be said to carry over Heidegger's notion of inauthenticity, it is in her criticism of the "existing conditions" of modern society.

person discloses to an extent also himself."[195] In other words, the disclosive quality that she had attributed to speech is now attributed to judgment, and specifically judgments of taste (Kant's aesthetic judgment, which Arendt appropriates as a political concept). These judgments reveal the 'who,' but they are *about* the world. She describes them as "the judicious exchange of opinion about the sphere of public life and the common world, and the decision what manner of action is to be taken in it, as well as how it is to look henceforth, what kinds of things are to appear in it."[196]

Speech, understood now as judgment, is the disclosive medium unique to the political world, in which the exchange of judgments between "acting and speaking" human beings reveals the things they have in common in a uniquely plural way. But Arendt goes further. She writes near the end of "Crisis in Culture" that "taste is the political capacity that creates a culture," and that judgments of taste have the "task of arbitrating and mediating between the purely political and the purely fabricating activities, which are opposed to each other in many ways."[197] Within the context of the essay, this refers primarily to 'cultural' objects like artworks, which are *produced* and yet judged not by their producers but by the spectators who encounter them as part of the public world. But, given Arendt's claim in *Human Condition* that action and the narratives it creates can become reified in "documents, monuments … use objects, or art works," her reference to the mediating function of 'culture' must be taken in a more general way.[198] It seems to name not only the *disclosive* function of the plural exchange

[195] CC 220.

[196] CC 219-220

[197] CC 221; 222. Unlike Heidegger, who strictly distinguishes his analytic of Dasein "from the aspirations of a 'philosophy of culture,'" Arendt seems to find some use for the term. See SZ 167.

[198] HC 184.

of judgments, but also something like a *productive* function as well. The exchange of judgments "*creates* a culture."

In all of this, Arendt provides the general contours of a concept of the political world. As Held argues, Arendt's significance for a phenomenology of the political world should be credited to her appropriation of Kant's aesthetic judgment.[199] And yet, there is much left unsaid and unthematized here. Two central themes in particular require more development and explanation. First, Arendt argues that the realms of work and action – the thing-world and the with-world – are mediated by judgment. The plural exchange of judgments, taking place within the political world, discloses objects, actions, and human beings as meaningful in a distinctly non-instrumental way. Putting the point in slightly different terms, Arendt argues that the way distinct perspectives on the common world are communicated to others with whom the world is shared, *discloses* that world in a way that is unique. But how is the plural exchange of judgments disclosive? What is uniquely revealed in communication with others, within a plurality, and why?

Second, in her curious – and, as Canovan notes, "atypical" – treatment of culture, Arendt alludes to the way that the exchange of judgments is not only disclosive of things within the world, but *creates* a world.[200] Though it certainly does not produce in the manner of *homo faber*, *something* ensues from this plural exchange. Although it is not tangible or 'objective' in the manner of the thing-world, it has a certain longevity. The exchange of judgments creates the context in which they occur, which they always also presuppose and continually transform. It is this 'culture' (though this is perhaps not the

[199] Klaus Held, "Toward a Phenomenology of the Political World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology,* ed. Dan Zahavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 451.

[200] Margaret Canovan, "Politics as Culture: Hannah Arendt and the Public Realm," *History of Political Thought* 6, 3 (1985): 624.

best term) that serves as a mediator between the ongoing interaction between speaking human beings in the with-world and the way that the thing-world is disclosed therein. Arendt says remarkably little about this, though she does allude to the way that speech and action become part of the world in the form of history, as well as the way that action is always contextualized by an existing network of human relations. How do judgments form relations, and how do these relations have the continuity of a world? What can be said about its unique worldly structure?

These two claims about the political world – that the plural communication of judgments is uniquely disclosive, and that this exchange creates a relational context that it continually presupposes – rest on hermeneutical foundations that remain underdeveloped in Arendt's account. Why *hermeneutical*? In the broadest sense, hermeneutics is the field that inquires into the conditions of understanding, and specifically understanding in situations which involve interpretation. The tradition of philosophical hermeneutics, associated with Heidegger but more strongly with his student Gadamer, investigates the way that *all* understanding is interpretive, and takes place in language, according to a dialogical structure of communication. For Gadamer in particular, the question of understanding and interpretation is inseparable from the question of human embeddedness within a historical tradition, which continually contextualizes understanding even as it ensues from it. A phenomenology of the political world is inseparable from a phenomenology of plural understanding, which is first and foremost a hermeneutical question.

By showing that the political world is constituted by political judgments and their exchange in communication Arendt has shifted the question to a distinctively

hermeneutical field. Judgment is interpretive. The exchange of judgments within a space of appearance is what Gadamer might call a hermeneutical dialogue concerning subject matter [*Sache*] that is shared by a plurality in common. Arendt's curious use of the term 'culture' belies a view of human historical embeddedness remarkably similar to Gadamer's (sometimes controversial) account of tradition. My claim is not simply that Arendt and Gadamer happen to share similar views on these points. Rather, Arendt's account itself has positioned the question of the political world on hermeneutical ground, because it refers specifically to a hermeneutical situation in which interpretive judgments are communicated, how and when this is possible, and what happens as a result. It is only by excavating Arendt's hermeneutical foundations, with the help of Gadamer, that the concept of the political world becomes intelligible, both as the result of a plural activity of understanding, and as a space of appearance in which the (thing-) world can be understood in a distinctively plural mode. This first point regarding the way that the activity of plural understanding comes to create a world will be taken up in Part III, where I equate this activity with the process that Gadamer describes in his discussion of tradition. Plural understanding as traditionality results in a shared context of meaning, tradition, a concept that functions for Gadamer's hermeneutics in a similar way as the political world does for Arendt. The second point, regarding the way that this activity, the exchange of interpretive judgments, gives rise to a disclosive space of appearance will be taken up in Part IV, where I show that Arendt's account of judgment gives rise to a phenomenon that Gadamer describes as a fusion of horizons.

3.0 PART III

WORLD AND TRADITIONALITY: GADAMER ON PLURAL UNDERSTANDING

> I never defended particular traditions, only that there is a horizon of tradition, which always constitutes the background for change.
>
> - Hans-Georg Gadamer[201]

3.1 UNDERSTANDING AS INTERPRETATION

3.1.1 *The hermeneutical circle in* Sein und Zeit

Arendt's emphasis on the unique disclosedness of speech and action within a plural 'web' of human relationships necessarily links her account of the political world to the concept of understanding. In one sense, this is not a surprise. As we have already seen [1.2.4], understanding is the name that Heidegger gives to the projective orientation of Dasein to its possibilities, which first *discloses* them as possibilities for its being. Its everyday mode is circumspection, the mode of understanding in which the world as a totality of relevance is pre-disclosed in Dasein's work – Arendt (implicitly) takes this up as the

[201] Gadamer, "Interview: The 1920s, 1930s, and the Present: National Socialism, German History, and German Culture," in EPH 150.

disclosedness proper to *homo faber*, who understands beings in their character as instrumental means and ends, according to τέχνη [2.2.2]. When Arendt distinguishes between the different and even incommensurate ways that the basic activities within the *vita activa* are disclosive, this simply means that she associates each basic activity with a particular mode of understanding, in Heidegger's sense of the term. Plural understanding, the mode of disclosedness proper to the political realm, conditioned by plurality and actualized in speech and action, is thus at the very center of Arendt's account of the political world.

This – mostly unacknowledged – role of the understanding in Arendt's treatment of the political world is primarily what I mean when I reference her hermeneutical foundations, and it is this that justifies a turn to the philosophy of Gadamer. First, though, it is helpful to briefly return to *Sein und Zeit* to see the way that Heidegger lays the groundwork for a hermeneutical treatment of understanding. Ironically, though Heidegger is often understood as a forefather of hermeneutical philosophy, he does not pursue the question of hermeneutics itself very far. Even so, Heidegger must be credited with recognizing the hermeneutical – that is, interpretive – character of Dasein's existence, and shifting the inquiry of hermeneutics beyond narrow methodological questions within textual criticism and the human sciences, toward the philosophical question of understanding as such.

In §32 of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger explicates the close relationship between understanding [*Verstehen*] and interpretation [*Auslegung*] in terms closely related to his treatment of Dasein's taking care within the world. In general, interpretation refers to the way that, in understanding, we construe beings *as* something. For beings implicated

within Dasein's 'taking care' (i.e. work, for Arendt), interpretation explicitly articulates the use of a particular thing: "it is for…" is the "circumspectly interpretive answer to the circumspect question of what this particular thing at hand is."[202] Our use of things is always already interpretive and takes something *as* this or that, according to the understanding that is operative. This is very clear in examples related to useful things, where the interpretation lies at such a basic level it rarely becomes explicitly expressed in a statement. When I stop at the gas station to refuel my car, a circumspect understanding of a whole 'world' of automotive transportation determines my interpretation of the fuel cap, which I simply construe *as* the thing I have to remove before I can put the gas nozzle in. Or, to use an interpersonal example, whether I interpret a harsh comment as a joke, as an insult¸ as posturing, or lying, or bantering, or manipulating, or even as nonsense, will be determined entirely by the situation in which it occurs – who says it, what our relationship is, what has happened, who else is there, and so on.

In every case, then, interpretation depends, in advance, on a given understanding, and it has what Heidegger calls an as-structure [*Als-Struktur*]. Note that this account of interpretation completely rejects any simplistic binary opposition between (true) facts and (mere) interpretations. Rather, *all* encounters with 'facts' take place within a worldly context, in which they appear according to a given understanding, and thus indicate particular interpretations of worldly phenomena. When Dasein understands – interprets – something as something, this is tantamount to a discovery of its meaning [*Sinn*]. But Heidegger stresses that, properly speaking, meaning does not belong to beings, as though

[202] SZ 149.

it were a quality or "property attached to [them]."[203] Nor is it something buried within or underneath them as something to be systematically exposed. Instead, meaning refers to the structure that underlies how a given being appears in the context of what Dasein understands. The beings which are disclosed in interpretation (i.e. in their relevance) are disclosed according to the projective character of Dasein's understanding, which is concerned with the possibilities of its own being. "Only Dasein can be meaningful or meaningless" because the 'meaning' that is articulated in interpretation is the *relevance* of a being for the sake of Dasein's project.[204]

Now, the way that the relation between understanding and interpretation – a relation we might simply call *meaning*, as described above – has a particular formal structure, which describes the way that the former always predetermines the latter. This structure has three 'moments' that together determine the way an interpretation proceeds. Dasein always begins with an implicit and undifferentiated understanding of a totality of relevance – circumspection – which it 'has' in advance. Heidegger calls this first moment *fore-having* [*Vorhabe*]. This fore-having determines the directed view from which something is interpreted, and so the second moment is called *foresight* [*Vorsicht*]. It describes the way that a particular being is 'seen' and disclosed according to the implicit context of which it is a part. Finally, the comprehension of that which is disclosed in foresight requires a particular conceptuality to make sense of the being in question. The determining role of this conceptuality in interpretation is called *fore-conception* [*Vorgriff*]. Together, these three moments – fore-having, foresight, and fore-conception make up the fore-structure [*Vorstruktur*] of meaning, which underlies and predetermines

[203] SZ 151.

[204] SZ 151.

interpretation. It is at work prior to any given interpretation, as that under which every interpretation stands.

Heidegger recognizes that his account might make it appear as though we are trapped in a vicious circle. But this, he argues, would be a mistake. The *hermeneutical* circle is not a limitation or hindrance to understanding, but rather the very condition for its possibility. Rather than deny the circularity of interpretation, or even to bemoan it as an unfortunate necessity, Heidegger insists that we recognize it as the "expression of the existential fore-structure of Dasein itself." The point is not to avoid it or flee from it, but "to get in it in the right way."[205] The conceptuality that guides an interpretation might be drawn "from [beings] themselves, or else the interpretation can force [them] into concepts to which they are opposed."[206] The important thing is that our interpretation be determined "in terms of the things themselves," and not according to "chance ideas and popular conceptions." [207] That is, it should proceed according to an (authentic) phenomenological description of the things themselves, rather than (inauthentic) everyday discourse – presumably the latter describes what happens when we understand innerworldly beings as discrete entities present-at-hand, an interpretation that proceeds according to a faulty concept of being. In this, Heidegger tacitly links the hermeneutical circle with the phenomenological method at a very basic level, since it is the circularity of interpretation itself that makes it possible to encounter beings on their own terms. More importantly for our purposes here, his account of understanding and interpretation provides a specific impetus for two of his students: Arendt and Gadamer.

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[205] SZ 153.

[206] SZ 150.

[207] SZ 153.

3.1.2 *Arendt's early hermeneutics*

It is not at all clear, especially from the late-1950s on, that understanding plays a major role in Arendt's work. She does not use the term in any significant way in *Human Condition* or *On Revolution*, and she only sparingly refers to it in *Between Past and Future*. In *Life of the Mind,* where one might most expect a thorough treatment of the understanding, it is conspicuously absent, almost as if she went out of her way to avoid it. But somewhat earlier, Arendt reveals the extent of the early influence of hermeneutics when she takes understanding as a major theme in a pair of essays from 1954: "Understanding and Politics" and "On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding." Though the stated theme of both essays is the difficulty in understanding totalitarianism, which Arendt insists is a unique phenomenon that cannot be subsumed into existing political categories (e.g. tyranny, imperialism, etc.), this theme serves as an occasion for an extended reflection on the nature and role of the understanding itself.

Various points from these essays will concern us in more detail going forward. For now it is important to note two general points about the hermeneutical impulses apparent in these earlier texts. First, and most clearly, Arendt specifically describes understanding in terms of Heidegger's hermeneutical circle. In "Understanding and Politics," Arendt distinguishes between understanding, on the one hand, and knowledge – "correct information" or "scientific knowledge" – on the other (though she does concede that they are related). Understanding "is based on knowledge," but "knowledge cannot proceed without a preliminary, inarticulate understanding."[208] It is more proper to say, as

[208] UP 310.

she does shortly after, that understanding "precedes and succeeds knowledge."[209] This claim, that knowledge is derivative from a tacit and undifferentiated understanding that is always already operative, is familiar from Heidegger. Familiar too, is the way that Arendt goes to describe the process of understanding in terms of a dialectic, which begins in "preliminary understanding," and culminates in "true understanding."[210]

Admittedly, the language of "true" understanding is not the most helpful. The movement toward true understanding really means something more like authentic understanding, or explicit understanding (in the sense that interpretation proceeds as a making explicit, a bringing into view).[211] True understanding uncovers a phenomenon and brings it to appear. It is thus possible, at least formally, to recognize Heidegger's description of the fore-structure and specifically the role of the fore-conception as that which guides an interpretation. In the specific context of this essay, our attempt to understand totalitarianism begins with an initial preliminary understanding that interprets it as a form of tyranny. That is, we bring the fore-conception of tyranny (and its related conceptualities – the fight for freedom, perhaps) to bear on totalitarianism when it makes its appearance in the world. But, Arendt argues, a *true* understanding of totalitarianism must move from the preliminary understanding toward a recognition of what is unique and new about it. To do otherwise is to "submerge whatever is unfamiliar … in a welter of familiarities and plausibilities," to understand the phenomenon only on the basis of

[209] UP 311.

[210] UP 311.

[211] Here my claim is not that Arendt provides an account of the hermeneutical circle identical to Heidegger's, or – if she does – that she describes and defends it in an appropriate way. Indeed, it is precisely because she often does *not* do this that an explication of her hermeneutical presuppositions requires a turn to other figures. And, as I will argue in Part IV, these early writings generate an imminent conceptual problem for Arendt, which she ultimately works out over the whole trajectory of her writings on judgment. Rather, the point is that it is clear that her account operates according to the contours of the hermeneutical tradition, at least broadly.

popular conceptions and unevaluated assumptions, which tend to cover over and conceal the thing itself.[212]

Now, up until this point, it might appear as though Arendt's dialectic of understanding is a linear process, something like enlightenment, in which one moves from ambiguity and ignorance to clarity and knowledge. But this is not the case. Instead, Arendt – like Heidegger – insists on the circularity of this process. She writes that understanding "may do no more than articulate and confirm what preliminary understanding … sensed to begin with," and thus

> will not avoid the circle the logicians call 'vicious'; it may in this respect even somewhat resemble philosophy, in which great thoughts always turn in circles, engaging the human mind in nothing less than an interminable dialogue between itself and the essence of everything that is.[213]

It is not a linear completion that the understanding seeks, then, but an endless circle that makes it possible for us to "take our bearings in the world."[214] This process must continue indefinitely, because in our historicity we are continually presented with the irreducible particularity of the new. With the occurrence of each new event, "everything changes, and we can never be prepared for the inexhaustible literalness of this 'everything.'"[215]

The second hermeneutical impulse that we might notice in Arendt's early work, though it is more in the background, is the role of language in understanding. Her account of this relationship is not the same as in Heidegger or Gadamer, but she does evince an interest in the way that understanding relates to language.[216] There are two points here.

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[212] UP 313.

[213] UP 322.

[214] UP 323.

[215] UP 320.

[216] In Part IV, I take this question up in a very selective way, in relation to doxa as the mode of discourse. To do justice to Arendt's philosophy of language in a more comprehensive way would require tracing this

First, understanding as such begins with the appearance in language of that which is to be understood. "Preliminary understanding," she writes, "expresses itself only in giving names."[217] It is in a *word* that the "frighteningly new" first comes to appear for the understanding, in which we "recognize it in a blind and uncontrolled reaction strong enough to coin a new word."[218] Although this initial 'discovery' might be undone by the later attempt to assimilate the new into existing concepts, Arendt argues that true understanding will remain attentive to what was originally (pre-)understood when it made its first appearance in language. A preliminary understanding, then, first emerges as a *name*, which is the starting point for *any* understanding, without which a phenomenon would simply remain fundamentally concealed.[219]

Second, understanding proceeds according to the structure of textual interpretation. We have already seen that Arendt describes understanding as an "interminable dialogue with everything that is," but she also writes of the way that "sources *talk*" and in so doing they "reveal … the self-understanding as well as the self-interpretation of people who act." To posit an interpretation on the basis of what is outside of or hidden beneath the text itself – except in cases that involve dishonesty and misrepresentation –is to "deny [the source] of the very faculty of *speech*, insofar as

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early account of concept formation in language through to her mature account of the relationship between thinking, concept-formation, and metaphor. See especially LM1, §§12-13.

[217] UP 330.

[218] UP 313n8.

[219] It is along precisely these lines that Fricker refers to a "hermeneutical lacuna" prior to the coinage of the term "sexual harassment" to name the experience of women like Carmita Wood. Without the name, Wood was prevented "from *understanding* a significant patch of her own experience." Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice : Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 151. My emphasis.

speech makes sense."[220] There is a clear similarity here between the understanding of a source (which could be a person, event, piece of historical material, etc.) and the classical model of understanding a *text*, in which an interpretation is always bound by what is actually *there*, written or spoken. But more importantly, note the more general assumption for Arendt's claim: understanding is not only a matter of naming, but of speaking and listening. Its medium is speech. In short, whatever happens when we understand happens *in language*. As I will argue more extensively in Part IV, this hermeneutical connection between understanding and language is indispensable to her theory of judgment.

3.1.3 *'Hermeneutical philosophy? Oh, that's Gadamer's thing!'*

Despite the clear influence of hermeneutics on Arendt's earlier work – specifically Heidegger's version of the hermeneutical circle and its application beyond texts to existence itself – the theme seems to dissipate by the time she writes *Human Condition*. Ironically, it dissipates for Heidegger too, who came to discard the term 'hermeneutics' to describe his own project. He would later remark that hermeneutical philosophy "is Gadamer's thing," a comment that, as Gadamer himself notes, is quite ambiguous – is it praise or criticism?[221] In any case, it is Gadamer who takes up the task of working out the

[220] UP 338. My emphasis. She also uses the language of the sources "speaking" for themselves (in contrast to explanations imported from scientific disciplines like sociology and psychology). See UP 311n5.

[221] Quoted in GR 410. The original reference is to a letter from Heidegger to Otto Pöggeler, which the latter cites in Otto Pöggeler, *Heidegger und die hermeneutische Philosophie* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1983), 395. In a 1999 interview, Gadamer speaks of the joy and surprise he felt when he heard that Heidegger had recommended his book to Hannah Arendt: "It was it's the only time that Heidegger ever expresses himself positively about Truth and Method." See Gadamer and Ricardo Dottori, *A Century of Philosophy: Hans-Georg Gadamer in Conversation with Riccardo Dottori,* trans. Rod Coltman and Sigrid Koepke (New York: Continuum, 2006), 138.

deeper implications of the hermeneutical approach to philosophy, which began with his early studies with Heidegger and remained a position from which he did not waver over the course of his long and varied career.

Although Gadamer clearly takes up and pursues the "hermeneutics of facticity" that Heidegger developed in the mid-1920s, it is important to recognize the way that he – unlike Heidegger – remained interested in the continuity between a hermeneutics of factical life and the 'classical' hermeneutics that concerns itself with philological and textual interpretation. *Truth and Method*, which remains the most thorough theoretical account of philosophical hermeneutics, is ostensibly concerned with the status of the human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*], that is, the fields in which traditional textual hermeneutics has a central place (e.g. history, philology, law, biblical studies). Gadamer recognizes the basic continuity between, on the one hand, the way that we engage with textual sources from the distant past and, on the other, the historical character of our experience as such. Gadamer therefore does not merely broaden the scope of hermeneutics to new fields of inquiry; rather, he recognizes that the methodological questions that long attended traditional hermeneutics arise from a disregard for the way that understanding is embedded in the historical world.

Here, I develop the theme of plural understanding from within Gadamer's hermeneutics by way of his sometimes-controversial account of tradition. In contrast to the methodological procedures of the natural sciences, which demand the 'objective' and neutral distance of the researcher, Gadamer argues that understanding is an event that happens on the basis of the historical tradition to which we belong. Indeed, it is not inappropriate to say that, for Gadamer, understanding describes the *happening* of

tradition. I argue that tradition must be understood in such a way that it simultaneously describes both what is presupposed in understanding – that which is to be understood – *and* the activity of understanding itself. Indeed, for Gadamer, tradition is an ongoing process of understanding, one that is unavoidably plural. If this is the case, Gadamer's hermeneutics transposes the question of the political world into the framework of historical tradition. This is, I argue, the account that Arendt presupposes when she describes the reciprocal relation between political judgments and their 'world' (i.e. 'culture' in "The Crisis in Culture") [2.3.2].

Accordingly, I proceed as follows. First, I articulate the way that Gadamer's hermeneutical account of understanding develops out of Heidegger's analysis of Dasein as a 'thrown projection,' projecting the possibilities it finds in the world into which it is thrown. I argue that Gadamer interprets thrownness to describe the way that understanding always occurs as an event within, and on the basis of, historical tradition – in doing so he is true to Heidegger's ontological version of the hermeneutical circle, but applies it in a new way. Then, I turn to Gadamer's controversial justification of the prejudicial character of understanding and propose that it serves to set up a parallel between world and understanding, on the one hand, and historical tradition, on the other. Against criticisms and misunderstandings of Gadamer that take his defense of tradition as an apology for conservatism or insularity, I argue that his account must be understood first and foremost as an ontological description of the way that human beings belong to history, and not as an argument in favor of the normative value of particular traditions. I attempt to quell this criticism with a close reading of his example of the classical, a 'lightning rod' for critics' concerns. Finally, I turn to a positive account of tradition, with

special attention to what I call traditionality, the process whereby traditions ensue in the plural activity of transmission or handing down.

3.2 FROM WORLD TO TRADITION

3.2.1 *Reinscribing the hermeneutical circle*

When Gadamer discusses Heidegger's characterization of the hermeneutical circle, it is ostensibly to recognize it as a positive turning point within the history of hermeneutics: it represents a movement away from a conception that views the circle as a procedure to apply to the text (i.e. a method) and toward the recognition that the circle describes the structure of understanding itself. Heidegger is thus employed by Gadamer as an ally in his anti-methodological project, even though he acknowledges that *Sein und Zeit* formulates the hermeneutical problem as the question of being.[222] Even so, Gadamer's ensuing arguments reveal that in taking up Heidegger's account of the circularity of understanding, he also appropriates his concept of world, albeit in a distinctive way. Against the background of the unique concerns in *Truth and Method*, Heidegger's account of the relation of understanding and world is translated by Gadamer into the relation of understanding and *tradition*.

To see how this is the case, recall that for Heidegger, Dasein's projective orientation toward its own possibilities – understanding – is inseparable from Dasein's thrownness. Although understanding describes how beings are disclosed according to

[222] TM 282.

Dasein's projection of its possibilities, this projection is bound to the possibilities that are there within the world in which Dasein is thrown. Hence when Heidegger describes Dasein as a 'thrown projection,' he means to do justice to both. Gadamer is careful to note that when he describes understanding in terms of projection, it must not be understood "in the sense of a plan." Rather, he affirms that "Heidegger was right to insist that what he called 'thrownness' belongs together with projection," a position he interprets to entail that "belonging to traditions belongs just as originally … to Dasein as does its projectedness toward future possibilities."[223] This is the clearest indication that tradition functions for Gadamer as a kind of surrogate for the concept of world: one could easily substitute 'world' for 'traditions' in the quotation above and it would remain equally true to the schema of *Sein und Zeit*.

It is somewhat curious that Gadamer does not explicitly make this connection, even though he clearly finds Husserl's life-world [*Lebenswelt*] to be a fruitful – if limited – concept for precisely the same question.[224] And, when he appropriates the concept of horizon and the 'fusion' of horizons, it is likewise an implicit nod to the way that tradition functions as the world of historical Dasein, as we will see in Part IV. In any case, the explicit connection here between thrownness, on the one hand, and belonging to tradition, on the other, is sufficient to illuminate what Gadamer is doing. Even when the ensuing sections on tradition tend to focus, understandably, on the implications for the production of knowledge within the human sciences, recognizing his ontological motive makes it possible to articulate the way that Gadamer considers tradition to be

[223] TM 262.

[224] See TM 242-254; Gadamer, "The Science of the Life-World," in *The Later Husserl and the Idea of Phenomenology: Idealism-Realism, Historicity and Nature*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1972), 173-185.

ontologically basic in much the same way that Heidegger – and Arendt – consider world to be. Accordingly, when Gadamer moves from a positive appraisal of Heidegger's hermeneutical circle to his own discussion of tradition, he does so according to these two 'directions' of projection and thrownness.

3.2.2 *Projection: The limitlessness of interpretation*

First, projection. When Gadamer introduces Heidegger's description of the hermeneutical circle, it is in the context of a discussion of previous articulations and accounts of the circle within the history of hermeneutical theory. Heidegger's ontological version of the circle is a "decisive turning point" insofar as it removes the circular structure of understanding from the narrow purview of textual hermeneutics, but it does not leave that field unscathed. Rather, demonstrates the insufficiency of previous positions, which only construed the circle as a methodological procedure to apply to texts (i.e. whatever is being interpreted) to guide and guarantee the validity of the interpretation's results. Interpreters of historical, artistic, and literary sources have long recognized that their understanding is guided in advance by an anticipation of meaning that stands in a circular relationship with the interpreted text: "we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole."[225]

Gadamer references Schleiermacher's hermeneutics as a representative case of how nineteenth century hermeneutics used the circle in a methodological way. For Schleiermacher, even as the text is a whole made up of parts (e.g. letters, words, sentences), it is itself a part in the whole of an author's corpus, which in turn is a part of

[225] TM 302.

the whole of a given literary genre. This is the "objective" aspect of the circle of whole and part, such that we might, for example, understand the biblical book of Revelation in terms of the genre conventions of first century apocalyptic literature, but also understand that genre on the basis of what we read in Revelation.[226] But there is also a "subjective" aspect of the circle for Schleiermacher, such that the text is also a creative expression and "belongs to the whole of its author's inner life."[227] The goal of the interpreter on this model, then, is to exercise this back-and-forth procedure until parts and whole are unified. At that point, 'true' understanding has been reached and the circular structure becomes superfluous.

For Gadamer, the mistake of Schleiermacher – and indeed of nineteenth century hermeneutics in general – is to "conceive the task of hermeneutics in a way that is *formally* universal."[228] The *content* of a text remains incidental, since what is important is the formal relation between the text and the whole to which it belongs. Or, to put this another way, this procedure is guided by the ideal of objectivity, in that its criterion for success is complete knowledge of a unified whole and the articulation of all of its parts. This knowledge – which determines the 'true' understanding of the text – is just the adequation of the interpreter's subjectivity with what is objectively the case, on the old model of truth as *adequatio intellectus et rei*. This division between subject (the interpreter) and object (the text, a cohesive part of an objective whole) rests on the

[226] Genre can be a very helpful example of the dynamic role of interpretation in the formation of traditions and the creation of what Gadamer calls the 'classical,' as I show in a slightly different context below [3.3.1]. However, his view is a complete departure from Schleiermacher and the general view ascribed here to Romantic hermeneutics. Gadamer's renders the 'classic' works of a given tradition (genre) *relative* to the dynamic historical-hermeneutical activity of the members of that tradition. This is quite different than viewing a work as a part of an objective whole.

[227] TM 303.

[228] TM 304.

assumption that the two are ontologically separate, one that mimics the natural sciences relationship to the objective whole of nature.

In the case of historical texts, this method is necessarily a reconstructive one, because the temporal distance between the interpreter and the conditions that are supposed to determine the correctness of understanding (e.g. the living author, contemporary linguistic usage, the contemporary audience of the text, and so on) make the latter difficult to know with any certainty.[229] More importantly, it is not possible for an interpreter to take leave of their own historical conditions to study those of the past with the same objectivity that, for instance, a chemist can do in the controlled experimental conditions of a laboratory. The differences of culture, language, time, material conditions, all prevent the neutral distance and universal perspective that Arendt calls the "Archimedean standpoint."[230] Having recognized this, hermeneutics cannot operate from this exterior 'no-place' that characterizes objective science, but instead must find a way to bridge between the perspective of the interpreter and that of the text.

In criticizing the methods of nineteenth-century hermeneutics, Gadamer certainly does not seek to deny the role of history in understanding. Nor does he seek to downplay the gap that exists to be bridged by interpretation. His point is that the locus of understanding does not lie in the formal relation between part and whole, but in the way that the content of the text emerges as relevant *to* the interpreter *vis-à-vis* a given subject matter. Meaning is not a property of a text that becomes apparent upon the proper

[229] In fact, this problem arises even for contemporary texts when the meaning is taken to ensue from the correct knowledge of the *mens auctoris* or the conditions of an author's inner life, which can never be experienced or known by someone else first-hand. Schleiermacher developed a theory of psychological transference to surmount this difficulty and reconstruct the' subjective' as well as the 'objective' whole to which the text is taken to belong.

[230] HC 11.

reproduction of its original conditions. Rather, meaning takes place when the text is understood as having something to say. In this way, "understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well," not in the sense that it continually produces "better" results, but in the sense that it happens each time anew, each time "in a *different way*."[231]

It is on this point that Gadamer takes Heidegger's contribution to be absolutely definitive. Heidegger recognizes that "the understanding of the text remains permanently determined by the anticipatory movement of fore-understanding." The circle does not disappear in perfect understanding, as a method no longer needed once the results have been achieved. Rather, it is in 'perfect' understanding (in fact, this modifier of 'perfect' is no longer conceptually appropriate) that the circle "is most fully realized."[232] When Gadamer characterizes understanding as an endless task, this is what he means. At this point, the role of projection should be apparent: the circular structure of understanding is endless and continually generative because it proceeds according to the anticipatory projection of Dasein on its possibilities. Understanding is always "understanding differently," because this projection is continually taking place in Dasein's historical existence, in which it understands beings in a relevant relation to its own projects. The turning point with Heidegger is not so much that he rejects a methodological view of the hermeneutical circle, but rather that he provides it an "existential grounding" and recognizes it as "an element of the ontological structure of understanding" itself.[233]

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[231] TM 307.

[232] TM 304.

[233] TM 304; 305.

Consider an fictional example, a scene from the film *Casablanca*.[234] Encountering a group of Nazi soldiers singing the German anthem "Die Wacht am Rhein," Humphrey Bogart's character Rick instructs his band to begin playing "La Marseillaise." The patrons of the café, most of them refugees from Nazi-occupied France (and in many cases portrayed by actors who are themselves refugees), all join in to sing and drown out the Nazi soldiers. Our interpretation of the meaning of this scene proceeds from an understanding that discloses the anthem in terms of our projects, enabling us to see it *as* a symbol of solidarity and defiance against hostile forces, in its *relevance to* the attempt (still ongoing when the film was released in 1942) to defeat Axis power in Europe. When "La Marseillaise" plays during a medals ceremony at the Olympics, it is not understood in the same way, since it is disclosed as having an entirely different relevance, in terms of different projects. Though this is basically an example that hews close to Heidegger's description of understanding and the hermeneutical circle, we can also see in it the basis for the importance of projection for Gadamer. When he claims that all understanding is understanding *differently*, he means that we are continually able to discover new meanings because our interpretations are always oriented according to the existential projects we are engaged in.

Of course, the way that our (future-oriented) projections determine our understanding and thus our interpretations is not the whole story. The way that these projections are bound to our concrete possibilities is equally important, and these are possibilities that are 'available' to us – understood *as* possibilities – according to the world which we occupy. Heidegger describes this as thrownness. When Gadamer turns to

[234] *Casablanca*, directed by Michael Curtiz (Warner Brothers Pictures, 1942), 1:12:35.

this dimension of understanding, he does so in concurrence with Heidegger's claim that the anticipatory projection of understanding is determined in advance by the pre-understanding we bring to a given interpretation. Gadamer pursues this theme under the heading of *prejudice.*

3.2.3 *Thrownness: The positive power of prejudice*

Although Heidegger does not develop his account of the fore-structure of understanding into a theory of prejudice, it is not correct to claim (as, for example, Grondin does) that he does not mention prejudice at all.[235] After discussing the structure of understanding, he writes that any straightforward appeal to what is 'just there' – as when one defends a reading of a text by saying, "That's just what it says!" – "is nothing other than the self-evident, undiscussed prejudice of the interpreter*,* … already posited with interpretation in general, namely as that which is pre-given in" the fore-structure.[236] Perhaps it was this side comment about the "prejudice of the interpreter" that prompted Gadamer's turn to the concept of prejudice.[237] His rehabilitation of prejudice must be understood not only as a reassertion of the positive role it plays in understanding, but also as a way of transposing the question of thrownness into analysis of historical tradition. It is by virtue

[235] Jean Grondin, "The Hermeneutical Circle," in *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. by Niall Keane and Chris Lawn (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 303.

[236] SZ 150.

[237] It is worth noting that, unlike Gadamer, the word translated as 'prejudice' in the Heidegger quotation above is *Vormeinung.* Gadamer consistently uses *Vorurteil* to emphasize its conceptual connection with judgment [*Urteil*] (much like Arendt, as we will see in Part IV). If one had to venture a guess as to why Heidegger chose *Vormeinung* over *Vorurteil*, it might be that he sought to *avoid* an association with the concept of judgment, which in *Sein und Zeit* refers to the operation of judging something 'true' or 'false' and is mostly the target of criticism for its derivative notion of truth. In any case, neither Gadamer nor Arendt understand judgment in this way, and so their use of *Vorurteil* as 'pre-judgment' is understandable.

of this line that Gadamer draws from thrownness and the fore-structure to prejudice and authority that he is able to establish the continuity of the question of world with the question of tradition.

Prejudice is a word with a negative connotation. This is especially apparent given its present usage in English, where it has become basically synonymous with bigotry and chauvinism, a fate it shares with the German *Vorurteil*. And in fact, as Gadamer notes, it has always maintained a certain association with harm: even the Latin *praejudicium* can mean "'adverse effect,' 'disadvantage,' 'harm.'"[238] Especially in a legal context – the original context in which the concept appears – it can be remarkably harmful or disadvantageous for a defendant when their legal proceedings are determined in advance by an unfavorable prejudice. However, Gadamer argues that this negative sense derives from a more basic, "positive validity" of prejudice. What does this mean? One way to understand the point here would be to recognize that prejudices are not necessarily negative, but might sometimes be legitimate. Indeed, he immediately goes on to say that part of the idea of prejudice is that "it can have either a positive or a negative value."[239] And later, pressed on this point by Habermas, he argues that there are both legitimate and illegitimate prejudices, between which we must learn to distinguish. In short, on this view, prejudice is a neutral term that has acquired an exclusively negative connotation, and Gadamer's rehabilitation of prejudice consists in recognizing its essential neutrality.

But this can only be part of the story. It does not explain in what sense prejudice can be said to have a "positive validity" that underlies its negative connotation, since such a validity would by the same token underlie prejudices both negative *and* positive,

[238] TM 283.

[239] TM 283.

illegitimate and legitimate. Gadamer identifies this basic, essentially positive sense of prejudice as "the value of the provisional decision as a prejudgment, like that of any precedent."[240] What is this value? As a prejudgment or precedent, a prejudice serves as the basis from which understanding proceeds. Apart from and prior to any of the positive or negative ramifications of its application – its truth or falsity, its legitimacy, its effect on a person, case, situation, and so on – the "positive validity" of prejudice is that it establishes the terms in which something can be understood. It serves as that which the ensuing 'judgment' confirms, rejects, modifies, exposes, or hides.[241] It determines the limits within which something is able to be initially understood, even as these limits are continually broadened and changed in experience.

It is important not to overlook the significance of this claim. Gadamer is not making the somewhat banal point that understanding simply cannot escape the influence of prejudices (as if it were hypothetically preferable if it could). Nor is he an advocate on behalf of prejudice (whatever that might mean) over and against other forms of understanding. Rather, prejudice plays such a basic and generative role in understanding that it would be an absurdity and confusion to conceive of understanding apart from prejudices, in Gadamer's sense. Like Heidegger, he stresses that prejudice is part of the structure of understanding as such, which begins from the predispositions that are drawn from the world into which one is thrown. Understanding as projection finds its possibilities within this world. Indeed, it would not be too strong to say that, in a basic sense, understanding *consists in* bringing prejudices to bear within a given situation –

[240] TM 283.

[241] The relationship between prejudice and judgment, and the particular meaning of the latter, will be a primary theme in Part IV.

hence Gadamer writes that the "prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being."[242]

In stark contrast to this view is an opposition Gadamer attributes to the Enlightenment, between the reliance on prejudices, on the one hand, and the correct exercise of reason, on the other. The roots of this opposition can be found already in Descartes' rationalism, when he attributes all errors in judgment to the hasty overextension of the will in the absence of justified knowledge of the intellect. The Enlightenment expands and radicalizes this rationalist principle – that "the only thing that gives a judgment dignity is its having a … methodological justification" – and in turn prompted a shift in the meaning of prejudice. It no longer designates a preliminary or provisional judgment, but instead an "unfounded" one, since it lacks the epistemological foundation that comes with the methodological use of reason.[243] For Gadamer, this reorientation of the concept of prejudice undertaken during the Enlightenment is itself a prejudice, a "prejudice against prejudice," since the rejection of unfounded judgments in favor of the right use of reason now serves as the precedent from which any 'genuine' understanding must begin.

This 'prejudice' is actually a network of related prejudices: basic preliminary judgments not only about the concept of prejudice itself (i.e. that it is an unfounded judgment), but also about what constitutes legitimate understanding (i.e. the methodological use of reason) and, consequently, the illegitimacy of any *authority* besides reason thus understood (i.e. reason serves as its own authority). In this way, the reorientation of the concept of prejudice results in a reorientation of the concept of

[242] TM 289.

[243] TM 283.

authority as well. Thus, Gadamer contends, the opposition posed by the Enlightenment between the use of reason and reliance on prejudice is properly understood as that between reason, on the one hand, and authority (i.e. authorities besides reason), on the other. Although the Enlightenment itself draws a distinction "between the prejudice due to human authority and that due to overhastiness," the latter only refers to mistakes in reasoning (as Descartes holds).[244] Authority, by contrast, is genuinely 'irrational,' since it is held to be "responsible for one's not using one's own reason at all."[245]

The main source for prejudices due to authority is tradition. For the Enlightenment, it was the religious tradition of Christianity in particular which represented the epitome of dogmatic prejudice. This tradition attributes special authority to a collection of texts (the Bible) and enshrines particular interpretations of those texts as legitimate, and others as illegitimate, on the basis of other recognized authorities (e.g. church institutions). Against this, the Enlightenment treated the Bible as an historical document to be understood "rationally and without prejudice," apart from the theological tradition within which it had been interpreted. [246] At its heart, this approach is only incidentally about religion. More fundamentally, it enacts the opposition of authority and reason in its orientation to history. This movement from an immature reliance on prejudices rooted in the authority of tradition to the enlightened use of individual reason alone does not tend toward the possible legitimation of authorities and traditions. Rather, it dispels them.

Here my initial claim about Gadamer's translation of the relation between

[244] TM 284.

[245] TM 289.

[246] TM 284.

understanding and world into the context of tradition should be somewhat clearer. Gadamer champions the positive function of prejudice on the basis of Heidegger's account of understanding, and uses the term 'prejudice' to name that which is pre-given in the fore-structure of understanding. For Heidegger, that which is pre-given is given according to the world into which Dasein is thrown – the world supplies the prejudices according to which Dasein's understanding proceeds.[247] But for Gadamer, it is *tradition* that serves as the source of prejudices. It thus occupies the same role in relation to understanding as world does for Heidegger. The Enlightenment's denigration of prejudice and its rejection of the prejudicial character of understanding, leads it to misconstrue the relation of human beings to tradition. This is, for Gadamer, not simply a disagreement about the relative epistemological merits of tradition – a term which will be further refined below – but, much more fundamentally, an *ontological* misunderstanding of the way that human beings relate to their *world*. It is striking that while Gadamer follows Heidegger in contrasting his own view against Cartesian ontology, he employs this contrast not to criticize the Cartesian concept of *world*, but rather the faulty concept of *historical knowledge* that follows from it: "The subject-object antithesis is legitimate where the object, the *res extensa*, is the absolute other of the *res cogitans*. But historical knowledge cannot be appropriately described by this concept of object and objectivity."[248] Tradition, as that by which human beings belong to history, must be understood as a translation of Heidegger's concept of world into the problematic of *Truth*

[247] This description would have to be adjusted to a given scenario of interpretation. In the case of textual interpretation, it becomes possible to speak of what is pre-given *in* the text (the 'world' of the text, perhaps). But even in this case, the prejudices that inform such an interpretation are taken up within the world of the interpreter.

[248] TM 528.

and Method.

3.2.4 *Belonging and history*

I have argued that tradition functions, for Gadamer, as a kind of world. Human beings belong [*gehören*] to tradition in much the same way as they find themselves thrown into a world, and understanding takes place from out of this situation. But Gadamer sometimes uses the language of 'world' not for tradition, but rather for *history*. In very similar terms as Arendt, he writes that although it is possible for the natural sciences to investigate questions like the appearance and biological evolution of humans on earth, human "'world history' is not a phase in [this] history of the universe, but is a whole in its own right."[249] Elsewhere he says, more directly, that history "is a completely inexhaustible system of all the worlds that are out there … *history is the world of human beings*."[250] Before turning to tradition in earnest, then, it is necessary to look more closely at what Gadamer means by belonging to tradition, and how it relates to history.

Human beings, for Gadamer, are historical. Not only do we exist in a particular time and place in history, we are aware both that the variety of our practices, beliefs, institutions, and so on are the products of a historical development. Gadamer refers to this awareness of "the historicity of everything present and the relativity of all opinions" as historical consciousness.[251] One of the goals of *Truth and Method* is to address the problem that historical consciousness poses for the understanding of the past without

[249] Gadamer, "History of the Universe and the Historicity of Human Beings," in SW1 30.

[250] Gadamer, "A World without History?" in SW1 49. My emphasis.

[251] Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 5, 1 (1975): 8.

falling into historicism, the view that the past can only be understood on its own terms as a self-contained whole, from which we are alienated by an historical distance.[252] It presupposes the absolute alterity of the past and responds by making it "the object of objective knowledge," compensating for the distance with a methodology.[253] For Gadamer, the specter of historicism has haunted the field of modern hermeneutics since its emergence in the late 18th-century. It is on historicist grounds that Gadamer criticizes the reconstructive methods of Schleiermacher, for example [see above, 2.2.2]. Even Dilthey, who attempted to surmount this problem by way of a "critique of historical reason," does not ultimately succeed in exorcising historicism from his philosophy.

By offering an alternative to historicism, Gadamer does not suggest that we abandon historical consciousness. Rather, he argues that we "[think] historical consciousness through" to its proper conclusion.[254] Historical research already recognizes that when we inquire about something from the past, we might also inquire about its *effects in history*: we can study the way that Renaissance artists were inspired by the sculptures of antiquity, the way the Luther read the book of Romans, the way Impressionist painting was first spurned and then embraced by the fine art establishment, and so on. These 'histories of effect' [*Wirkungsgeschichten*] and reception histories (which we might understand as a species of the former), acknowledge that things from the past – "aspect[s] of tradition" – are received and interpreted in different ways at different times and, furthermore, that temporal distance can often be an advantage to the

[252] The problem of historical consciousness is Gadamer's stated theme, but his argument goes much farther. Indeed, he seeks to challenge the world-alienation that arises from modern subjectivism, a theme that he first raises in the realm of art and then applies to the problem of historical knowledge. I will take up, in part, his critique of modern aesthetic consciousness in Part IV.

[253] TM 314.

[254] TM 311.

historian, since it takes time for historical effects to become clear.[255] There is a sense that, for example, Chamberlain's celebration of "peace in our time" could not be fully understood until after the outbreak of the second World War, when it became possible to hear it not as an expression of hope or confidence, but of tragic naivete.

But, for Gadamer, this recognition of the efficacy of a past work or event in history remains incomplete insofar as it remains committed to the 'objective' methodologies that attend historicist approaches to history. Instead, he insists that historical consciousness must become *historically-effected consciousness* [*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*] – which Gadamer sometimes calls hermeneutical consciousness – which recognizes that it operates from within a hermeneutical situation which renders us "unable to have any objective knowledge of it."[256] This term is artfully ambiguous and it is difficult to maintain its polysemy without translating it in multiple ways. It refers to our awareness of historical effects as well as the closely related idea that this awareness is itself effective in history. But at the same time, it refers to the way that history is effective *in* consciousness, such that it is not too much to say that consciousness is an *effect of* history. [257] All of these are mutually entailed in historical consciousness, such that "the effect [*Wirkung*] of a living tradition and the effect of historical study must constitute a unity of effect, the analysis of which would reveal only a texture of reciprocal

[255] TM 300.

[256] TM 282.

[257] As should be clear, it is notoriously difficult to retain the sense of this term in English. Stressing any one sense over the others is apt to produce significant misunderstanding, and might even seem to imply a more radical kind of historicism (i.e. a strong sense of historical determinism). This would, of course, be completely opposed to Gadamer's point, that being historical is a condition that makes understanding possible, even when it is at the same time a limit.

effects."[258]

This analysis reveals, then, that – contra historicism – our relation to the past is not one of alienation, but one of *belonging.* Gadamer writes that

> history does not belong to us; we belong to it. … The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being.*[259]

Here, the statement that consciousness is an effect of history is equivalent with the claim that we "belong to [history]," and is given as the explanation for the outsized influence of prejudice in human understanding. This is a crucial point. Gadamer not only brings his discussion full circle – connecting historically-effected consciousness with the rehabilitation of prejudice – but also tacitly confirms a subtle shift he has enacted from within the framework of Heidegger's hermeneutical circle.[260] Just as Heidegger holds that our thrownness in the world entails that we understand according to what is pre-given in the fore-structure of understanding, Gadamer holds that our belonging to history entails that we understand according to the prejudices handed down in tradition. Recalling that prejudice simply names the content of the fore-structure, this account confirms Gadamer's translation of Heidegger's treatment of world into the problematic of hermeneutical consciousness.

What does it mean to belong? Belonging to history takes the form of an *address*; it is a continual state of having-been- and being-addressed by what has come down from the past. As Walhof notes, Gadamer draws attention to the connection between belonging

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[258] TM 282-283.

[259] TM 276-277. Emphasis in original.

[260] Although the discussion of historically-effected [*wirkungsgeschichtliches*] consciousness actually occurs later in the text, this quotation clearly anticipates that discussion in its reference to historical reality [*geschichtliche Wirklichkeit*]. It is appropriate and even necessary, therefore, to read them as connected.

[*Zugehörigkeit*] and hearing [*hören*]. It is possible to avert one's eyes or look away from something visible, but it is not possible to "hear away" a sound.[261] And it is here that tradition comes to the fore in the analysis. Gadamer writes that belonging is "the element of tradition in our historical-hermeneutical activity," whose meaning "is fulfilled in the commonality of fundamental enabling prejudices." [262] The connection between belonging and tradition seems to indicate that the latter might refer not only to *that which* addresses us and which we hear, but also the addressing and the hearing. It is, in other words, not a straightforward concept despite its central place in Gadamer's hermeneutical ontology. As I argue below, it must be understood in a multifaceted way, but fundamentally as a description of plural understanding.

3.3 TRADITION AND PLURAL UNDERSTANDING

3.3.1 *A classic misunderstanding*

Gadamer's account of tradition has been the subject of widespread criticism. His critics' positions span a wide range of views and styles, from nuanced critiques to baseless attacks, but they tend to share a pair of closely related concerns. The first concern is that Gadamer takes for granted the universality and continuity of tradition, and thus severely overstates the normative power of what has already come to be. Habermas sums up this concern when he writes that "hermeneutics bangs against the walls of tradition from

[261] Darren Walhof, *The Democratic Theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 88.

[262] TM 314.

within."[263] This means that it becomes impossible to achieve a standpoint from which one might reflect critically on the tradition to which they belong. In one respect, this concern – at least in the form it takes for Habermas – simply reflects a basic disagreement about the nature and value of critical reflection. Gadamer is, after all, skeptical about the desire and even the notion of such a perspective. But in another respect, it speaks to a deeper and more harrowing possibility, that any affirmation of the power of tradition only reaffirms the insidious normative power of ruling ideologies.

The second concern is that, as a result of the first, Gadamer effectively defends or even champions a particular tradition, namely the mainstream Western European canon. Eagleton, for example, accuses him of projecting on to the world at large … a viewpoint for which 'art' means chiefly the classical monuments of the high German tradition."[264] Jantzen, similarly, fears that 'tradition' simply means "the canon of Western culture reaching back into Greek and Roman antiquity, and that 'we' are those who have been

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[263] Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophische Rundschau 14, Beiheft 5: Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1967) 177. My translation. The influential debate between Gadamer and Habermas is relevant to this theme, insofar as it concerns the nature and scope of tradition, but demands a much more comprehensive treatment than the present analysis allows. In a nutshell, though, it might suffice to say – as the quotation indicates – that Habermas's view proceeds according to a particular view of tradition, as if it were a kind of container with "walls," which we stand within. This is not an apt metaphor since it presupposes an inside/outside relation that Gadamer simply does not admit. He says as much in response to Habermas, writing that "if we understand this 'within' as opposite to an 'outside' that *does not enter* our world – our to-be-understood, understandable , or nonunderstandable world – but remains the mere observation of external alterations (instead of human actions) . With this area of what lies outside the realm of human understanding and human understandings (our world) hermeneutics is not concerned." Gadamer, "Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection," in PH 31.

Aside from the texts of the debate itself, Ricoeur's intervention and attempted synthesis between *Ideologikritik* and hermeneutics is an exceptional response, both as a summary of what is at issue and as an attempted synthesis. (That said, I admit I am not ultimately convinced by this synthesis, which posits a dialectical relationship between recollection of tradition and the anticipation of freedom in the ideal of unconstrained communication. I find that Ricoeur overstates the role of consensus in the former, and is not sufficiently dubious of the latter). See Paul Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," in *From Text To Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

[264] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 63.

educated according to its norms: probably white, Western, male, and privileged."[265] Caputo takes this view to an extreme, arguing not only that Gadamer forgets "tradition is largely the story of the winners while the dissenters have been excommunicated, torched, castrated, exiled, or imprisoned," but also that his view belies a "closet essentialism," with "deep roots in the metaphysical tradition from Plato to Hegel."[266] The picture that ensues from these twin concerns is starkly reactionary. It presents a view of tradition eager to instill a healthy admiration for the ivory columns and heady tomes of the classical past, and fearful that we might become deaf to its timeless truths.

Ultimately this picture is a caricature, one which stems from misunderstanding – and, sometimes, misrepresentation. Given his deep unease with Enlightenment rationality (i.e. the rejection of the 'prejudice against prejudices') and his background in classical philology, it is easy for Gadamer's apparent *apologia* for tradition to appear conservative. We have already seen the way that a simplistic reading of Gadamer's theory of prejudice

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[265] Grace M. Jantzen, "The Horizon of Natality: Gadamer, Heidegger, and the Limits of Existence" in *Feminist Interpretations of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 291-292.

[266] John D. Caputo, "Gadamer's Closet Essentialism" in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, ed. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), 263; 264. Given Caputo's accusation in this piece – a vague association of Gadamer's hermeneutics with the historical violence of orthodoxy against heretics and rebels – it is ironic that his rhetoric recalls a kind of holy war, crusading under the banner of so-called Derridean deconstruction. In any case, the argument is remarkably misguided.

It is worth noting that Caputo later provides a much more nuanced appraisal of the relationship between Gadamer and Derrida, arguing that their ultimate difference actually lies in their respective approaches to polysemy and dissemination. Even so, he maintains the same basic misunderstanding when he writes that for Gadamer (and unlike Derrida) "polysemy reflects a kind of civility in a pietas for tradition, for the classics," which "descends from a tradition of progressive humanism." See Caputo, "Gadamer and the Postmodern Mind," in *The Gadamerian Mind*, ed. Theodore George and Gert-Jan van der Heiden (New York: Routledge, 2022), 441.

I am much more sympathetic to the view that Gadamer and Derrida are not well-considered as antagonists, and that the traditions of hermeneutics and deconstruction are far more compatible than they often appear. Sallis, Risser, Bruns, among others, read philosophical hermeneutics in a way that is more 'deconstructive' – and thus, I think, actually more faithful to Gadamer – than Caputo allows. See especially John Sallis, "On John D. Caputo, *Radical hermeneutics: Repetition, deconstruction, and the hermeneutic project,*" *Man and World* 22, 3 (1989); James Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other* (New York: SUNY Press, 1997); Gerald Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

is liable to miss the point he is trying to make. Just as his account of prejudice must be read in the light of the fore-structure of understanding, so Gadamer's claims about tradition must be understood as operating in an ontological register often unrecognized by his critics. Even so, it is not as though they conjure their points from thin air. Their concerns correspond, respectively, to Gadamer's own emphasis on the *authority* of tradition and the concept of the *classical*. He writes of the "nameless … authority" that belongs to "that which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom," and the classical's "binding power of … validity that is preserved and handed down."[267] Even Warnke, otherwise a defender of Gadamer against charges of conservative traditionalism, argues that when Gadamer refers to the classical, "he slips from an investigation of the conditions of understanding to the basically conservative thesis according to which we are not only members of a tradition but also its ideological supporters."[268]

As I argue below, Gadamer's treatment of authority actually provides substantial evidence for the dynamism and, most importantly, *pluralism* of his concept of tradition. But first, given how large it looms in criticisms of Gadamer, it is important to briefly address his discussion of the classical. When Gadamer addresses the classical, it is specifically cited as an *example.* It refers to the way the discipline of philology has been unable to maintain a clear distinction between the classical as, on the one hand, a stylistic description particular aesthetic forms (e.g. the sculptures of 'classical' Greece) and, on the other, a *normative* concept referring to texts that are deemed worthy of attention. His point is that "the most important thing about the concept of the classical … is the

[267] TM 292; 299.

[268] Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 106.

normative sense."[269] In fact, the classical *qua* stylistic description is grounded in its normative sense, because the application of the former to particular texts or forms – 'classics' – proceeds from a normative judgment of value *about* them. This is why the classical is supposed to function as an example. It exemplifies the tension within historical consciousness which, unless it becomes hermeneutical consciousness, does not recognize the way that its inquiry is driven in advance of particular (pre)judgments about the past.

If this is the case, it should be clear that Gadamer's use of the classical is not actually intended as a defense of 'classical antiquity.' In fact, by insisting on the normativity inherent in every reference to something 'classical,' Gadamer actually rules out any straightforward advocacy for the 'classics' on an objective historical or aesthetic basis (which ironically brings him quite close to the position of many of his critics). It is much easier to grasp Gadamer's point by divorcing the discussion of the classical from that of 'classical antiquity' or the Western canon entirely, by way of a different example. Consider the case of musical genre, often the site of precisely the same tension. Genres – and it is relevant in this context that genres are often described as 'traditions' – have 'classics': "Blowin' in the Wind" (Bob Dylan) is a classic song in the folk tradition, *Kind of Blue* (Miles Davis) a classic record in the jazz tradition, and so on.[270] When we refer to a 'classic,' we tend to mean that it is genre-defining in a particular way. It is taken to be representative of what a given genre *is*, and this eliminates its historical distance from other works within its genre. "Hellhound on My Trail" (Robert Johnson, 1937) and

[269] TM 288.

[270] Bob Dylan, "Blowin' in the Wind," recorded July 1962, track 1 on *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, Columbia Records; Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue*, recorded March and April, 1959, Columbia Records.

"Blues at Sunrise" (Albert King, 1968) can both be blues classics, despite the historical distance between their respective releases as well as the historical distance between either of them and present-day listeners.[271]

Gadamer writes that "this is just what the word 'classical' means: that the duration of a work's power to speak is fundamentally unlimited." Even when we understand that it is temporally and culturally distant, we also understand ourselves in "ultimate community and sharing with the world from which a classical work speaks."[272] As Heidgger writes in "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes" – a significant text for Gadamer – the work "is present in, and only in" the world that it opens up by itself.[273] Once separated from the connotations that attend the 'classics' of Western history, Gadamer's point is revealed to be significantly wider in scope. The question of the classical, he writes, "claims no independent significance," but rather serves to evoke the more basic question: does this "historical mediation … that characterizes the classical ultimately underlie all historical activity as its effective substratum?"[274] In other words, by dwelling on the concept of the classical, perhaps we have already begun to drift into the complex operation of tradition itself. To see how this is the case requires important distinctions to articulate the way that we might speak about some 'tradition' or another (or of exchange between 'traditions'), the way something might be said to be 'traditional,' and in what

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[271] Robert Johnson, "Hellhound on my Trail," recorded July 1937, Vocalion; Albert King, "Blues at Sunrise," recorded June 1968, track X on *Live Wire/Blues Power*, Stax.

[272] TM 301. Another example of this notion of the normative function of the classical in relation to genre is the evolution of 'classic rock' as a radio format in the United States, which now gathers songs from genres as disparate as 1970s glam, 1980s heavy metal, 1990s grunge, and even early-2000s pop punk under the same label. Perhaps an even more obvious example is nothing other than 'classical music,' a label that can refer both to a specific period and to the entire Western high-art musical tradition.

[273] UK 28.

[274] TM 302.

way Gadamer considers tradition to be a process of plural understanding, one that I argue forms something like a world. Though his critique leaves much to be desired, Eagleton offers a sound proposal: "It might be as well to ask Gadamer whose and what 'tradition' he actually has in mind."[275]

3.3.2 *Tradition and traditions*

To belong to history is to belong to tradition, and this belonging consists in being addressed. This is a central claim Gadamer makes about the way that we relate to history and inhabit it as a kind of world. But, as I have already noted [3.2.4], tradition seems to describe this address in a variety of ways. Moreover, as many of Gadamer's critics allege, this claim could be understood to mean that our understanding is always simply beholden to – and, perhaps, compromised by – the given tradition to which we belong. It is crucial, then, to recognize the ways that Gadamer refers to tradition and utilizes the concept in a variety of ways. Once these uses have been distinguished and related, it will become possible to refer to what I will call *traditionality,* the aspect of tradition that can be described as plural understanding.

There are two terms that Gadamer uses in *Truth and Method* and elsewhere to refer to tradition; together they form an important distinction – one which many responses to Gadamer tend to collapse. The first term is, aptly, *Tradition*. The Latinate term designates a *particular* tradition, which might be quite general or quite specific – the Christian tradition, the American jazz tradition, a family tradition, the German philosophical tradition, these are all traditions in this sense. It is perfectly consistent to

[275] Eagleton, 63.

speak of my tradition and your tradition, of traditions which might interact, merge, clash, overlap, begin, break off, and so on. When Arendt, for example, writes of the "breakdown of tradition" in the modern age, her reference is to the impotence and dissolution of the Western philosophical tradition and its concepts in contemporary political life.[276] In fact, Gadamer too refers to the "break with tradition that happened in our century"[277] This is *a* tradition – '*our*' tradition, for those who, like Arendt and Gadamer, speak from within it – and so it is possible to appraise it as something that has come to an end.[278]

Tradition as *Tradition*, then, refers to an *ontic* tradition. In keeping with my suggestion so far regarding Gadamer's translation of aspects of Heidegger's analysis, we might notice a parallel between this sense of tradition and the world of Dasein. If Gadamer's claims about tradition were restricted to *Tradition*, many of his critics' concerns would be justified. To advocate for a the content of a tradition simply because it is part of that tradition is just traditionalism, which Gadamer criticizes as a problematic reaction to Enlightenment rationalism, and one that remains beholden to its basic

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[276] Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt," in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, ed. Melvyn A. Hill (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 336. Without any clarification of the sense in which we are referring to 'tradition,' it would be easy to interpret Arendt's position in direct opposition to Gadamer's. Vasterling, for instance, argues that Arendt's essays on tradition in *Between Past and Future* should be understood as a rebuke of Gadamer. See Veronica Vasterling, "Postmodern Hermeneutics? Toward a Critical Hermeneutics," in *Feminist Interpretations of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. Lorraine Code (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2003).

[277] Gadamer, "The Old and the New," in SW1 56.

[278] We should hear in Arendt's comments about tradition an echo of Heidegger's notion of the 'end of metaphysics,' referring to the exhausting of possibilities within the philosophical tradition. Arendt carries this way of thinking into her appraisal of the Western *political* tradition. This view is further nuanced, though, by her assertion that before "the Romans such a thing as tradition was unknown." See Arendt, "Tradition and the Modern Age," in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 25. On the one hand, this comment reinforces the distinctiveness of the term *Tradition* – and might thus be rendered, before "the Romans such a thing as *a* tradition was unknown" – but, on the other hand, it suggests a more complex dynamic: our tradition is a tradition in which the concept of tradition arose, became dominant, and later diminished. Regardless, it remains the case that her view is perfectly consistent with Gadamer's sense of tradition as *Tradition*.

dichotomies. His own claims regarding tradition are quite different. They are not normative, as though he spoke on behalf of his tradition's deep insight and wisdom, but descriptive. His analysis calls attention not to the content of a given tradition, but to what is presupposed in *any* tradition, regardless of its merit or lack thereof. Although we may always find ourselves within a tradition – indeed, within traditions of many kinds – this is not the primary sense in which Gadamer claims we belong to tradition.

Gadamer reserves a different term for this latter sense: *Überlieferung.* Although it is appropriate to translate this as 'tradition,' its more literal sense is one of transmission: 'carrying over,' 'delivering over,' or 'handing down.' As Vessey notes, crucially, tradition in this sense does not refer to "some kind of entity," but instead functions as a collective name for whatever has been passed down in a given tradition.[279] Every *Tradition* presupposes *Überlieferung.* The latter describes the structure and operation of the former, such that a tradition always consists of that which has been handed down within it. Now, in his description of tradition as *Überlieferung*, Gadamer places a significant emphasis on the role of language. The "hermeneutical event proper," he writes, "consists in the coming into language of what has been said in the tradition."[280] This "hermeneutical event" is nothing other than the event of understanding, since language "is by itself the game of interpretation that we all are engaged in every day," a process that "takes place whenever we 'understand.'"[281]

As Gadamer himself reminds us, all interpretation is highlighting, emphasizing some aspects of the text to the detriment of others. So far, I have not emphasized the role

[279] David Vessey, "Gadamer on Tradition," in *The Gadamerian Mind*, ed. Theodore George and Gert-Jan van der Heiden (New York: Routledge, 2022), 117.

[280] TM 463.

[281] Gadamer, "The Scope of Hermeneutical Reflection," in PH 32.

of language in this account. Even so, it has become clear that the transmission that takes place in tradition as *Überlieferung* is one that is linguistic in character. As Risser puts it, the "very possibility of having a tradition [i.e. as *Tradition*] depends on the fact that we can transmit language to ourselves," a transmission that "cannot bring itself before itself," except through itself, that is, through language.[282] But rather than turn directly to the question of language (a discussion of language in relation to judgment follows in Part IV), I want to highlight another aspect of *Überlieferung* that reveals its plural – and thus political – character.

3.3.3 *Traditionality as Plural Understanding*

> Any given tradition [*Tradition*] depends in advance on the transmission [*Überlieferung*] of what has been said in the past, as that which is 'delivered over' to us in its "coming into language."

It is on this basis that I have described this aspect of tradition as a kind of understanding. But what kind of understanding? Or, *whose* understanding? When he describes understanding tradition in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer tends to utilize the classic model of interpreter and text, in which a present-day interpreter seeks to understand a text within her own tradition across a significant historical distance. That this binary relation appears to be a kind of paradigm is not surprising given that an important goal of *Truth and Method* is to re-establish such a model on the basis of historical belonging rather than historical alienation. However, it also threatens to overshadow one of Gadamer's key insights: the process of understanding that takes place in the transmission of tradition is not binary, but distinctly

[282] Risser, *Life of Understanding*, 39.

and unavoidably *plural*. Tradition is something that "*we* produce … in inasmuch as *we* understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves."[283] It is not just that tradition refers to its character of being handed down. It must also refer to the *activity* in which 'we' understand and thus hand down what is handed down. I refer to this activity as *traditionality*.

Traditionality is not a term that Gadamer uses, but it is helpful to name this aspect of tradition because it plays a remarkably important role in his account. This is most apparent in his treatment of authority, which serves as a transition from his critique of the Enlightenment into his positive account of tradition proper. Recall that the Enlightenment developed an antithesis between reason and authority, and especially the authority of tradition. Here, Gadamer writes that "that which is sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless."[284] The nature of this authority is twofold. It means, first of all, that tradition *as such* has an authoritative role in understanding, since it provides the prejudices according to which things are understood. The passage just quoted goes on to say that "the authority of what has been handed down … always has power over our attitudes and behavior," and in context this must be understood as a reference to prejudices.[285] In this sense, the authority of tradition serves to summarize Gadamer's opposition to the abstract antithesis set up by the Enlightenment.

However, the authority of tradition has another meaning, which depends on the nature of authority itself. It means that what is handed down in tradition has been handed down precisely *because* it has been recognized as authoritative. To recognize an authority

[283] TM 293. My emphasis.

[284] TM 280.

[285] TM 280.

is not an act of "blind obedience," but of "acknowledgement" – it is a judgment of the reliability of the authority in question, such that "what the authority says … can, in principle, be discovered to be true."[286] It is not something that can be decreed or bestowed. Still less can it be coerced – even if violence or the threat of violence can prompt submission or obedience, such a scenario only ensues because the 'authority' in question has eroded, or was never recognized or legitimated in the first place. It is ironically the lack of authority that brings about situations of authoritarianism. This position brings Gadamer quite close to Arendt, who similarly argues that authority precludes the use of coercion and has already revealed itself to have failed in situations of force or violence.[287]

> The authority of any tradition [*Tradition*], then, depends on the authority that has been recognized in what has been handed down in it [*Überlieferung*]. But the handing down *itself* is a process that results from the activities of those who belong to it. *What* is handed down is handed down by virtue of the authority that is acknowledged and upheld by the plural members of a tradition. Gadamer calls this activity the "element of freedom" in tradition. A tradition is nothing other than that which has been preserved and "needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated."[288] These are not activities that can take place individually, but rather testify to a whole context of political relations, in which 'we' understand and thus affirm, embrace, cultivate, preserve, and hand down. Indeed, it

[286] TM 279; 280.

[287] Dallmayr notes the similarity between Gadamer and Arendt on authority, though without elaboration. See Fred R. Dallmayr, "Borders or Horizons? Gadamer and Habermas Revisited", *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 76, 2: 830n22. There is significant overlap, though Arendt's treatment is far more extensive and diverts from Gadamer to some degree. See Arendt, "What is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006).

[288] TM 281.

is by virtue of the same activity that the voices from history long ignored or forgotten can come to speak anew. Tradition *is* the multifariousness" of the "variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard."[289] And we might add that it is not just the multifariousness of these voices, but also of those who hear and interpret them.

Traditionality, the plural activity of interpretation that creates a tradition – a world – from what it understands and hands down, lies at the basis of Gadamer's account of tradition and historicity. Belonging to tradition consists in both the embeddedness of our understanding in a particular tradition, but also the contribution of our understanding, with others, to the formation of that very tradition. Moreover, this reciprocal relation between understanding and tradition, which concerns and involves a plurality of interpreters, is precisely what Arendt describes as the political world. Although she does not thematize the hermeneutical or historical aspects of this account, it should be clear from this detour through Gadamer's hermeneutics that tradition as traditionality plays an important implicit role in her account. The *political* world names the *site* of this plural interpretive activity, which participates in a tradition that is both presupposed and produced by the very activity in question. Having established the central role of traditionality for both Gadamer and Arendt, it is now possible to return to the latter's account of how this plural understanding takes place in the exchange of plural judgments and gives rise to the space of appearance that is the political world, reinterpreting her concepts of action and speech in a more hermeneutical key.

[289] TM 296.

4.0 PART IV

THE HERMENEUTICAL UNIVERSE OF ACTION AND JUDGMENT

> For my experience has been that my own power of judgment finds its limits, and also its enrichment, whenever I find someone else exercising his own power of judgment. That is the very soul of hermeneutics.
>
> – Hans-Georg Gadamer[290]

4.1 ARENDT'S APORIA OF JUDGMENT

4.1.1 *From Heidegger to Kant?*

In the postface to *Life of the Mind*, the writer Mary McCarthy reflects on her experience as an editor of Arendt's work. The two were close friends as well as collaborators, and McCarthy recalls many discussions about the proper word choice in English to translate Arendt's native German. Often, Arendt would cede to McCarthy's judgment, but the latter recalls one instance in which this was not the case: "Sometimes we argued … this happened over her translation of Kant's *Verstand* as 'intellect'; I thought it should be 'understanding' as in the standard translations. But I never convinced her and I

[290] Gadamer, "Interview: The 1920s, 1930s, and the Present: National Socialism, German History, and German Culture," in EPH 153.

yielded."[291] It is, of course, a matter of speculation as to why Arendt was insistent about this word, especially given the scant reference to 'understanding' in her later work. But if one were to speculate, one might consider Arendt's early interest in hermeneutics and recall that, in "Understanding and Politics," she identifies 'understanding' with a different concept: *judgment*.

It would be easy to see Arendt's early interest in hermeneutics as a Heideggerian vestige that was discarded and superseded by her increasing interest in Kant's aesthetic judgment. But this would be a mistake. Although it is undeniable that Arendt's theory of judgment develops and changes in important ways, there is a strong continuity between these early hermeneutical works and those written near the end of her career. Perhaps this continuity explains her hesitancy to make an implicit identification between what Kant refers to as the intellect [*Verstand*] and the hermeneutical concept of understanding. In any case, Arendt's remarkably unusual interpretation of Kant's third Critique and its influence on her own account of judgment belies an abiding concern with understanding, and specifically the uniquely plural understanding that takes place within the political world.

Above I argued that Gadamer provides a model in which there is a reciprocal relationship between understanding and tradition that mirrors, indeed translates, the relationship between what Heidegger describes as understanding and world. This translation is crucial for an understanding of the *political* world because Gadamer's framework makes it possible to account for the way that this reciprocity takes place by virtue of the *activity* of a plural community. The handing down of tradition proceeds on

[291][291] LM2 244-245. Alas, I have not been able to locate this argument in their published correspondence. See Arendt and McCarthy, *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy: 1949-1975*, ed. Carol Brightman (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995).

the basis of the concrete action and interaction of interpreters who negotiate together about what aspects of the past will be preserved and recognized as valuable and authoritative. I have called this activity *traditionality*, and argued that it provides a way to understand Arendt's (implicit) claim that the exchange of plural judgments *about* the world also *create* a world. For Gadamer, tradition serves as the source of prejudices, which provide the starting place for understanding, even as these prejudices are modified in the activity of understanding itself.

So far, I have emphasized the way that Gadamer sees the role of prejudice in understanding as an irreducible part of our belonging to history and tradition. More fundamentally, though, this transformation of our prejudices is not simply a feature of historical understanding, but of understanding as such. It is the encounter with what is *other* – including what is other about our own distant history – that reveals the inadequacy of prejudices and expands our perspective to understand differently. In what follows, I show how Gadamer's discussion of interpretation, prejudice, and traditionality reveals the hermeneutical model of understanding at the heart of Arendt's theory of judgment. Not only does it provide a throughline between Arendt's early and late theories of judgment, it serves as an explanation for the way she characterizes the relationship between action and judgment, and ultimately the political world itself.

First, I show that Arendt's earliest treatment of judgment arises directly out of her early hermeneutical interest in understanding, by way of an extended account of the relationship between prejudice and judgment. Like Gadamer, Arendt uses the language of prejudice to describe the hermeneutical circle of understanding. I argue that this early link that Arendt attempts to develop between understanding and judgment remains a concern

even in her later turn to the model of Kant's aesthetic judgment of taste. After a brief analysis of the background role of φρόνησις, I turn to Arendt's use of the term δόξα. I show that Arendt consistently uses δόξα to refer to the *discourse* proper to the political world, Finally, I turn to Arendt's interpretation of Kant's aesthetic judgment, laying out in a summary way the key concepts as they appear in the third *Critique*. I argue that although they diverge in their respective readings of Kant, Arendt and Gadamer share a common interpretation of judgment and its relationship to the political world, one which I propose is best understood with reference to what Gadamer calls the fusion of horizons.

4.1.2 *Arendt's 'hermeneutical' theory of prejudice*

The fragmentary material published as *Was ist Politik?* provides a helpful glimpse into the way that Arendt's approach to judgment relates to her earlier, more explicitly 'hermeneutical' work on understanding. In it, Arendt provides an extensive treatment of prejudice and its relationship to judgment, which in many ways bears a resemblance to Gadamer's influential treatment of the same [3.2.3]. Arendt distinguishes prejudice from several other phenomena. What each of them have in common with each other, and with prejudice, is that they are not susceptible to definitive proof. First, prejudice is not a personal idiosyncrasy. Highly individual, essentially private preferences are similar to prejudice in that they cannot be proven true or false, but they are not political and have nothing to do with human affairs, in the broad sense of what takes place in the "in-between" space of human plurality. That I like hot, black coffee in the morning but iced coffee with cream and sugar in the afternoon is not a prejudice. Although these sorts of characteristics might differentiate me from others, they do not reveal anything

particularly meaningful about me and my capacity to be a unique individual among others. Second, prejudice is not "mere small talk" or "stupid chatter."[292] Like prejudice – and unlike personal idiosyncrasy – this is a broadly political (or, more properly, social) phenomenon. But unlike prejudice, which has definite meaningful content, mere chatter does not make any real claim to authority and remains basically meaningless. Finally, prejudice is not judgment. Nevertheless, these two are very closely related, and it is here that Arendt moves from a negative to a positive account: a prejudice is a "previously formed judgment which … evolved into a prejudice only because it was dragged through time without its ever being reexamined or revised."[293]

With this definition of prejudice and the ensuing account of its relation to judgment, Arendt again takes up her earlier concern with the hermeneutical circle of understanding [3.1.2]. Recall that, for Arendt, understanding moves from an initial preliminary understanding, which supplies the concepts according to which a phenomenon is grasped, to a 'true understanding,' which is not confined to the initial conceptions of a thing, but lets itself be guided by the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the phenomenon itself. Here, the preliminary understanding is given the name prejudice [*Vorurteil*], which (like Gadamer) Arendt uses in large part to articulate its connection with judgment [*Urteil*]. Because old concepts reflect old understandings, it is the task of true understanding to understand present phenomena anew when the concept structuring the pre-understanding is not sufficient. This, Arendt argues, is the work of *judgment*,

[292] IP 100; 152. The "mere small talk" here translates "*Gerede,*" and the resonances with Heidegger's account of the same are clear. For Arendt, as for Heidegger, idle talk names a discourse that speaks but does not communicate, since it remains detached from understanding (which, for both, begins with prejudice).

[293] IP 100.

which in this context is closely related to understanding: correct judgment proceeds from a true understanding of what something is.

"Understanding and Politics" already alludes to this connection between understanding, prejudice, and judgment. In fact, Arendt goes so far as to claim that (true) understanding and judgment are essentially synonymous. In support of this claim, Arendt cites Kant's definition of judgment. Given the enormous influence of Kant's third *Critique* on Arendt's mature theory of judgment, this is perhaps not surprising. What *is* surprising, however, is that this reference is specifically to Kant's definition of determinate judgment in the first *Critique*, with no mention at all of the third. And so Arendt writes, "Is not understanding so closely related to and inter-related with judging that one must describe both as the subsumption (of something particular under a universal rule) which according to Kant is the very definition of judgment?"[294]

Given Arendt's argument in the essay, one can see the attractiveness of this model of determinate judgment, because she describes the problem of understanding as a problem of subsuming particular phenomena under universal categories or rules. The experience of tyranny, for example, gives rise to a concept that allows future phenomena to be judged as tyrannical, subsumed under the universal concept 'tyranny.' But totalitarianism is a genuinely new phenomenon, which cannot be adequately described in terms of the existing concept of tyranny. As a standard to guide reliable determinate judgments (e.g. "*this* is tyrannical"), the concept has broken down, and so the creation of a new standard is required in order to genuinely understand the phenomenon in question

[294] IP 313.

on its own terms. In these situations, (preliminary) understanding relies on existing standards to make sense of new experience: prejudices.

However, there is a significant problem in this account if it remains limited to Kant's determinate judgment. It is one thing to describe understanding as a constant reevaluation of historical categories to make sense of the particularity and novelty of ever-changing experience. But if judgment (and understanding) only refers to the subsumption of particulars under universal standards, it cannot adequately describe the situation Arendt is most interested in: the judgment which gives rise to the standard in the first place. The move from preliminary understanding to true understanding is predicated on the ability to judge a given phenomenon *apart from* the pre-given conception that governs its appearance, in terms of the particular *qua* particular, the thing itself. In other words, Arendt's eminent case of judgment (and understanding) is the situation in which the universal standards are either not given or woefully insufficient to do justice to an experience. What can a determinate judgment do in the absence of determining standards?

Arendt seems aware of this problem, and by the time of *Was ist Politik?* her use of judgment has shifted to account for it. Now the relation of prejudice and judgment is such that the former refers to a past judgment *qua* standard (for 'judging' particulars), while the latter refers to the judgment that gives rise *to* the standard (or reaffirms an existing standard on the basis of its suitability in light of the particular itself). Prejudices have an "inherent legitimacy," insofar as they are grounded in a real experience and judgment (however out of step with present reality they may be).[295] To put things more

[295] IP 99; 152.

succinctly, prejudice is the *de facto* standard of judgment in everyday life. Even in situations where a new judgment is required, the prejudice is not simply discarded. Rather, it is corrected when we "discover the past [judgment] contained within," which has been covered over, and "reveal whatever truth lies" therein.[296] This in turn serves to reveal "the experiences which are contained within them and from which they first sprang."[297] Arendt claims it is the task of politics to dispel prejudice, but by this she means that politics is the realm in which it is possible to understand and judge, rather than simply accept the legitimacy of whatever standards happen to exist.

We should note here that this process of judging and uncovering the judgments contained in prejudices describes the same process that I refer to as *traditionality*. In a lecture given several years after *Truth and Method* was published, Gadamer describes the engagement with the past that takes place in tradition in precisely the same terms. There he argues that concepts are not "arbitrary tools" but instead grow directly from experience and "predelineate … the course of experience." Every concept is therefore a "pre-decision … whose legitimacy we no longer verify." In uncovering the original context in which the pre-decision and concept arose, we uncover "prejudices [*Vorurteile*] under which the question … already stands."[298] Legitimacy, in this context, means something like, appropriateness for present experience, because decided concepts "articulate our understanding of the world" and determine experience beforehand. If they are illegitimate, they no longer deserve their claim to determine experience because they are no longer sufficient or appropriate to it. Or, to put the point differently, the concepts

[296] IP 101.

[297] IP 152.

[298] Gadamer, "Is There a Causality in History?" in SW1 6. Note the Vandevelde and Iyer translation renders "*Vorurteile*" "pre-judgments."

handed down in tradition as prejudices lose their authority when they are challenged by present experience. The only clear difference, of course, is that Arendt describes the "pre-decision" in question as judgment.

It is telling that in her modified treatment of judgment, Arendt makes reference to Kant. But this time, she makes a distinction between two ways the term 'judgment' can be used, which "ought to be differentiated" and "mean something totally different."[299] Judgment sometimes means subsuming a particular under a universal, in which case "only the individual case is judged, but not the standard itself." Here, judgment is based on a prejudice, because "at some point, a judgment was rendered about the standard," but now is only "a means … for rendering *further* judgments." But, sometimes judgment means judging a case in the absence of standards, because the situation is unfamiliar or the phenomenon is new. The thing being judged supplies its own standard; it can "appeal to nothing but the evidence of what is being judged."[300] The former – which refers to determinate judgment – is thus entirely dependent on the latter, which refers to what Arendt takes as judgment proper. Tellingly, she now refers to Kant's third *Critique*, where she claims that Kant treats judgment proper in the context of aesthetics and taste.

From this point forward, Arendt's writings refer to judgment with increasing frequency and in terms drawn almost exclusively from Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, which she read with a new enthusiasm in 1957, according to a letter to Karl Jaspers.[301] Her dismissal (and increasing suspicion) of determinate judgment as derivative and

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[299] IP 102.

[300] IP102. My emphasis.

[301] Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Hannah Arendt—Karl Jaspers Correspondence 1926–1969,* ed. Lotte Köhler and Hans Saner, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 316-319.

secondary remains a consistent theme: she associates it with the dangers of non-thinking in "Truth and Politics" and explicitly subordinates it to her own concept of judgment in *Life of the Mind*.[302] As Gadamer writes, the "capacity that matters here is precisely not the mere application of rules," but how we operate in "situations in which a decision has to be made, but in which we cannot consult the experts and in which the experts cannot even help us in any way."[303] This, Gadamer argues, is the essence of practical philosophy. The word given by Greek philosophy to describe such a capacity is φρόνησις – *judgment.*

4.2 THE DISCOURSE OF THE POLIS

4.2.1 Φρόνησις: *Action as a mode of understanding*

It is curious that Arendt does not turn explicitly to φρόνησις in her work on judgment, given both her proficiency in ancient Greek philosophy and her emphasis on *action*. For Aristotle, φρόνησις is the intellectual virtue that corresponds with *acting* [πρᾶξις], as τέχνη corresponds with making [ποίησις]. Wellmer suggests that Arendt did not move in the direction of developing a "modern, post-Kantian equivalent …[of] φρόνησις" because her conception of action is devoid of content.[304] Dostal is more convincing when he argues that Arendt considers the concept of φρόνησις to be tainted by the Greek

[302] TP 178; LM1 69.

[303] Gadamer, "History of the Universe," in SW1 39-40.

[304] Wellmer, "Hannah Arendt on Judgment: The Unwritten Doctrine of Reason," in *Judgment, Imagination, and Politics*, ed. Ronald and Jennifer Nedelsky (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 168.

prioritization of the contemplative life of the philosopher over the life of the polis.[305] In the text he references, Arendt identifies φρόνησις with judgment, but also implies that its meaning is too narrow. She suggests that Aristotle capitulated to the prevailing opinion of his contemporaries when he set the φρόνησις of the statesman in opposition to the wisdom of the philosopher.[306]

In any case, that Arendt does not develop her theory of judgment in terms of φρόνησις is no reason to discount its influence. After all, it is uncontroversial that Aristotle's conceptual pairing of ποίησις and τέχνη is of great importance to her account of work, even though she does not make explicit appeal to those terms. In the same vein, we should expect this to hold for the pairing of πρᾶξις and φρόνησις as well. In its traditional sense, φρόνησις refers to the wisdom that enables one to act well in a concrete practical situation. Or, put differently, it refers to one's judgment, to judge not only *what* to do, but *whether* to do it, *how* to do it, and *why*. Even in the context of its classical use, then, φρόνησις (judgment) underlies πρᾶξις as the mode of understanding that makes action possible. Having taken a detour through Gadamer's hermeneutics, we are in a better position to see that this understanding does not take place through the methodological application of rules, but through traditionality, which describes the *plural* understanding of the public world.

Action is the name that Arendt gives to the basic activity that corresponds to the basic condition of human plurality. As an existential structure of disclosedness, action understands beings in terms of plurality, in contrast to work, which understands in terms of worldly instrumentality. Just as the latter should be seen in connection with τέχνη

[305] Dostal, "Judging Human Action," *The Review of Metaphysics* 37, 4 (1984): 748-749.

[306] CC 218n14.

[2.2.2], so the former should be understood in connection with φρόνησις. Now, when Arendt describes action in *Human Condition*, she consistently connects it with speech, such that it becomes difficult to differentiate between them. I argued [2.3.2] that her reference to speech should be understood as a reference to *judgment*. Why is this the case? In this context, Arendt is not primarily concerned with describing ontic *actions* or their structure.[307] Nor is she claiming that action in her sense *is* speech (e.g. speech acts with illocutionary force or something like that). Rather, she is concerned with describing the way that action is *disclosive,* as an existential structure. The 'who' of someone is disclosed to others in their actions, and it is also disclosed to others in their speech about the common thing-world. In both cases, the disclosure only takes place *in* speech, with and between the others before whom one acts and with whom one shares the world.

Φρόνησις, then, and its pairing with πρᾶξις describes the plural understanding that Arendt associates with the political world, which can only be articulated in speech with others. In one direct reference to φρόνησις, Arendt translates it as "insight," the ability of a human being to "orient himself in the public realm, in the common world."[308] Increasingly Arendt uses judgment to describe this phenomenon, but when describing the *discourse* that articulates plural understanding, she often turns to another term pulled from the history of Greek thought: *δόξα*. In what follows, it is precisely discourse – that is, the activity of communication in language – that serves as the space of appearance that is the political world.

[307] Elsewhere Arendt does speak to the question of the structure of political action, understood not as a basic activity but as a structure of ontic actions. In *Was ist Politik?,* she describes four elements of action in this sense: its end, its goal, its meaning, and its "principle," what it "sets into motion. See IP 191-200.

[308] CC 218.

4.2.2 Δόξα *as fame and opinion*

For Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit*, discourse describes the articulation of understanding that is expressed in language [1.3.2]. The inauthentic understanding he calls publicness is articulated in the discourse of idle talk, which covers over and misunderstands that which it discourses about. It is in the same vein that Arendt uses δόξα to refer to the discourse that corresponds to the political world, though unlike Heidegger, this discourse should not be understood as idle talk. In a lecture from 1954, "Philosophy and Politics," Arendt says that *δόξα* is the "formulation in speech of what *δοκῶ μοι*, … what appears to me" – it "comprehend[s] the world as it opens itself to me."[309] But the understanding associated with δόξα requires a plural context: a *dialogue* in which δόξαι are exchanged by the dialogue partners. Arendt argues that what is understood in such a dialogue is the "truth inherent in the other's" δόξα. But by this she does not mean that the other's δόξα is revealed to be truth; rather, this understanding discloses the way that the world *appears* to the other – their unique δοκῶ μοι – and "reveals δόξα in its *own* truthfulness."[310] Anticipating her later translation of φρόνησις, Arendt describes this as the "political kind of *insight* par excellence."[311] It is this understanding of the other's δόξα, and consequently of the world in terms of other *δόξαι*, that Arendt will later call judgment.

Δόξα is the Greek word for *opinion*. Arendt is keen to dismantle some of the philosophical preconceptions about that word, as we will see in the following section. But it can also be translated as *fame*. Arendt accounts for this – in clear anticipation of her

[309] PP 80.

[310] PP 81. My emphasis.

[311] PP 84.

discussion of action in *Human Condition* – by uniting them in their shared disclosedness: to assert an opinion is to disclose oneself, "to be seen and heard by others."[312] This is how Arendt accounts for the unity of action and speech, since she argues that the meaning of *action* can only be revealed within the *speech* – the discourse – that takes place between those by whom the action is judged. The δόξα (fame) of the actor (i.e. what can be understood in their action) is dependent on the δόξα (opinion) of the spectator. But this dependency cannot be understood as a *subordination* of the one who acts under the one who judges. Rather, Arendt means to connect both δόξα as opinion and δόξα as fame to the *understanding* that takes place in both, which she calls judgment.

It is just this subordination of actor and spectator to the common disclosedness of judgment that underlies Arendt's 1970 lecture course on Kant's political philosophy, which represents her most thorough engagement with Kant's thought. Although Arendt is often enthusiastic in her adoption of Kantian terminology to describe her own theory of judgment, this text endeavors to show that Kant's own political thinking runs aground due to his inability to reconcile the distinction between actor and spectator. In the Kant lectures, Arendt frames her discussion around Kant's reflections on the French revolution and what she perceives as the conflict that it generates between the actor and the spectator. Kant himself occupies the position of spectator, joining the rest of Europe's reading public as they watch the world-historical events unfolding in France. Arendt argues that for Kant, the meaning of these events is determined by the sympathetic spectators, "in the *opinion* of the onlookers who proclaim their attitude in public."[313] In other words, it is in the interpretive *δόξαι* of the spectators that the significance of the

[312] PP 80.

[313] LKP 46.

revolution is disclosed. And for Kant, the significance is a hopeful one: the judgment of the spectators, who interpret the revolution as a positive historical development, "proves the 'moral character' of mankind."[314]

But, on Arendt's reading, this is a problem. Though Kant gives a positive appraisal of the *meaning* of the revolution as a spectator, his moral philosophy makes it impossible to justify the actions of the revolutionaries themselves. For Kant, the protection of human rights is intrinsically good, but this protection cannot be achieved as an end if the means of its achievement are immoral. Among these immoral means is revolution, which he holds "is at all times unjust."[315] Arendt sees this discrepancy as "the clash between the principle according to which you should act," which is a moral principle that prohibits revolution, "and the principle according to which you judge," which supports it. "Kant condemns the very action whose results he then affirms with a satisfaction bordering on enthusiasm."[316]

Kant's own solution, Arendt argues, lies in the criterion for the spectators' judgment. The meaning of the "spectacle" of human history is interpreted *not* according to the culmination and completion of the event in question – as it would be for a Greek spectator of a drama, who judges the actions after the drama has ended – but according to an ideal principle: Progress. To judge according to this criterion ensures that the meaningfulness of what happens in history does not lie in the actions and events themselves, but rather in the hopeful conviction that it will all have turned out for the better in the future. Kant describes the situation like this:

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[314] LKP 46.

[315] LKP 47.

[316] LKP 48.

> it is a sight most unworthy … to see the human race from period to period taking steps upward toward virtue and soon after falling back just as deeply into vice and misery. To watch this tragedy for a while might be moving and instructive, but the curtain must eventually fall. For in the long run it turns into a farce; and even if the actors do not tire of it, because they are fools, the spectator does, when one or another act gives him sufficient grounds for gathering that the never-ending piece is forever the same.[317]

Arendt is deeply suspicious of what we might call Kant's hermeneutical model in this passage. In order to *understand* the actions of the revolutionaries, the spectators must invoke an ideal principle to make sense of what the actors are doing. Without doing so, Kant seems to say, the δόξα (opinion) of the spectators would have to be content with the δόξα (fame) of the actors themselves, which runs the serious risk of making history into a farce. In order to make sense of what happens, the spectators must impose their δόξα (opinion) from outside the realm of action, with reference to an extra-historical principle. The δόξα (fame) of the actors and their actions – the things themselves, the matters [Sachen] about which the opinions are supposedly given – remain covered over.

In *Life of the Mind*, Arendt returns to this criticism of Kant. Here, she writes, the position of Kant's spectator outside the acting realm is supposed to make it possible to understand the meaning of the 'play.' Although Kant is right to recognize that actors depend on spectators to interpret the meaning of their actions in light of the whole, he fails to realize that the actors and spectators are mutually entangled, since the former depend on the judgment of the latter. The δόξα (fame) of an actor's action depends on the δοκῶ μοι of the spectator to whom it appears, which is articulated in their δόξα (opinion).[318] To divorce the one from the other is to misunderstand the peculiar kind of understanding that takes place within the political world, to which belongs actor and

[317] Kant, "On the Proverb: That May be True in Theory, But Is of No Practical Use," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 305.

[318] LM1 94.

spectator alike, united in the communicability of their δόξαι. Arendt is explicitly critical of Kant's reliance on the ideal of Progress as the "ruse of nature," writing that Kant forgot that "even if the spectacle were always the same and therefore tiresome, the audiences themselves would change from generation to generation." By virtue of the ever new exchange of δόξαι, a perpetually "fresh audience" would not "be likely to arrive at the conclusions handed down by tradition as to what an unchanging play has to tell it."[319]

In this, Arendt makes an implicit connection between the ever-changing exchange of δόξαι, the ever-changing discourse about the world, in which it is understood, and *tradition*, as the past. Even if the world itself were unchanging, Arendt seems to say, the understanding *of* the world would always be one that, as Gadamer puts it, "understands *differently*."[320] It becomes possible to see the disclosive exchange of δόξαι as traditionality, the activity of plural understanding. This identification becomes even more apparent when Arendt describes δόξα's peculiar mode of validity in contrast to truth, in her essay "Truth and Politics," to which we now turn.

4.2.3 Δόξα *as interpretation*

The essay "Truth and Politics" takes up the question of the role of truth – and, correlatively, the role of opinion – in the political realm. Though Arendt does not use the Greek term, the context makes clear that opinion refers to δόξα in contrast to truth (ἐπιστήμη), a dichotomy that she attributes to Greek philosophy in general and Plato in particular. Her starting point is the idea contained in the phrase *Fiat iustitia, et pereat*

[319] LM1 96.

[320] TM 304.

mundus ("Let justice be done, though the world perish"), which she interprets to mean something like, 'Let the truth win out, even if it means we lose the world in the process.' What follows is an attempt to do justice to the *world*, and offer an alternative to the rigid dichotomy between (unworldly) truth and (worldly) opinion.

Early on, she establishes a distinction between rational truth, which includes mathematical, scientific, and philosophical truths, and factual truth, which refers to facts and events. Most of the essay is concerned with the latter, especially historical events, which are "the invariable outcome of men living and acting together" and which "constitute the very texture of the political realm."[321] At the outset, it is important to note of the way that the distinction between rational and factual truths is one that Arendt adopts self-consciously from what she calls the "modern age," which assumes that truth is something "produced by the human mind" rather than "given" or "disclosed."[322] She explicitly disregards any analysis of the legitimacy of this conception of truth, because such a task belongs to philosophical, rather than political, inquiry.[323] To say the least, this is a significant qualification for everything that she goes on to say about truth, and a warning against interpreting her comments as overly beholden to the subjectivist impulses of modern philosophy.

The truth of factual truths consists primarily in what Jankélévitch refers to as *quodity* – their 'that-ness,' the fact *that* they happened.[324] To use an example of Arendt's, a factual truth is that a man name Trotsky played a role in the Russian revolution – a truth

[321] TP 227.

[322] TP 226.

[323] TP 227.

[324] Jankélévitch, *Forgiveness*, trans. Andrew Kelly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 45-47.

that is threatened when his image is erased from photographs during Stalin's purge. In this situation, we witness a conflict between truth and politics, whereby the former is assaulted by widespread and deliberate lies, for political ends. Arendt finds it curious that, in the context of Greek philosophy, the conflict between truth and politics played out instead in the contrast between truth and *opinion*, in which the latter was treated not as deliberate falsehood, but *error*.[325] Specifically, this contrast was conceptualized as that between the philosopher, who has solitary access to (rational) truth, and the citizens of the polis, the many, who have a confused and erroneous version of the truth: opinion.

Arendt argues that this antagonism between truth and opinion continued to dominate modern philosophy, even as there was a turn *toward* the legitimacy of opinion, as can be seen in Enlightenment era calls for freedom of speech and publication. In Arendt's genealogy, this shift toward public opinion and the "public use" of reason is itself justified on the basis of the old antagonism – it cedes the point that truth is preferable with opinion, but holds that if humans must be content with 'mere opinion' most of the time, it should at least be made as reliable as possible. In other words, the shift does not abandon the dichotomy, but takes the side of 'mere opinion.' Arendt thinks that this shift was so decisive – in part because of the increasing political irrelevancy of philosophy – that the antagonism between truth and opinion is barely present in contemporary life at all.[326]

An easy misreading of this essay would be to understand Arendt as taking the side of opinion and asserting its legitimacy over and against truth. But this is far too

[325] TP 228. Here, as elsewhere, Arendt's reading of ancient Greek philosophy's view of the relation of the philosopher and the polis runs the risk of simplifying a more nuanced account, especially in regard to Plato.

[326] TP 231. In a related point, Arendt claims that the 'philosophies' of her time have also capitulated to this shift toward opinion, in that they abandon claims of rationality in favor of open ideology.

simplistic. Rather than adjudicate between the old antagonism between the philosopher and the polis, Arendt actually means to question the basis for this antagonism, which applies to both opinion and truth the same "mode of asserting validity."[327] What does this mean? Truth, Arendt claims, is *coercive.* If something is true, its truth cannot be changed by political means. It is, politically, despotic. For a regime that itself aspires to despotism, this coercive power of truth is a genuine threat when it conflicts with their political goals. The recourse for the despot in such a situation is not to create a competing truth; it is, rather, to lie. Even so, truths remain incontrovertible short of a worldwide "power monopoly" that endeavored to erase them entirely.[328]

Opinion does not operate on this terrain of truth and falsehood, and to equate it with error (in the way that Arendt claims the Greek philosophical tradition has done) is to make a category mistake, because opinion has its own mode of validity. Whereas truth demands assent, opinion demands *consent* – it seeks agreement, a political category based in the being-together of many within a common world. But the relationship between opinion and truth is more complicated. While they are opposed in their mode of validity (truth and falsity on the one hand, agreement and disagreement on the other), opinion nevertheless belongs together with *factual* truth, insofar as they both belong to the political realm. What is the relation of factual truth to opinion? Arendt claims that the former "informs" the latter. Factual truth "is established by testimony" and "exists only to the extent that it is spoken about."[329] Opinions take factual truth as their subject matter – they are *about* truth – but they are not themselves truths. They refer to the way that

[327] TP 235.

[328] TP 235.

[329] TP 234.

factual truths are organized and related to each other, in short, the way that facts are meaningful.

In other words, opinion here refers to *interpretation*, which takes its starting point from the world as it is – it is the 'facts' of the world, the 'objective' thing-world as it appears to me [δοκεῖ μοι]. Schwartz is correct to a point when he argues that Arendt aligns truth with work and the thing-world – truth tellers like scientists are "workers" adding facts to the objective world.[330] For Arendt, facts are not political in themselves, and the truth teller who shares facts (or other truths) is politically impotent. Truths are meaningless apart from the "interpretive context" in which they are placed.[331] This context is created and maintained by opinion, the plural exchange of interpretations about the world. In the event that factual truth is destroyed by widespread falsehood and lies, what is destroyed is not properly the facts themselves, but the interpretive context in which they occur: it is the loss of the political world.

The description of the interpretive context of opinion that gives factual truth its meaning and political relevance aligns precisely with Arendt's claim in *Human Condition* that the world in its "object- or thing-character" alone – its factuality – remains a "non-world" without the 'web' of human relationships that comes about when human beings speak and act together.[332] And the threat of its loss aligns with her description of the fragility and intangibility of that space, which collapses when there are no common interests to bind it together. Δόξα, then, is interpretation – specifically, it is interpretation *in* discourse with others, that creates an interpretive context that allows the world to be

[330] Schwartz, 181.

[331] TP 245.

[332] HC 9.

understood. And here it is possible to establish a clear connection to Gadamer: the interpretive context in which factual truth appears as meaningful is tradition, and the exchange of δόξαι within this political world is traditionality. The handing down of historical truth takes place as plural interpretation and plural understanding, judgment communicated within the political realm of opinion.

4.3 JUDGMENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE POLITICAL WORLD

4.3.1 *Arendt's turn to Kant's aesthetic judgment of taste*

Arendt writes in *The Life of the Mind* that judgment deals with "particulars and things close at hand."[333] Moreover, it is closely associated with history, since the past, "being past, becomes subject to our judgment."[334] Although much has been made of the apparent transformation of Arendt's theory of judgment over the course of her corpus, this association of judgment with making sense of the particularities of human experience has been a constant thread. As I argue above, Arendt's earlier work defines the movement from prejudice to judgment as a movement from an initial and implicit pre-understanding, pre-given on the basis of traditional fore-conceptions, to an *understanding* which holds the thing itself in view.

Like Gadamer, Arendt associates prejudices with tradition, since it is the judgments of the past, those ways in which phenomena *have been* understood that are

[333] LM1 193.

[334] LM1 216.

affirmed and passed down, that become the prejudices that form the preliminary understanding of any given phenomenon. Just as the movement from preliminary understanding to 'true' understanding must be understood as a hermeneutical circle, as two aspects of the same continuous process, so prejudice and judgment must be understood together as part of the circular structure of understanding. Judgment, at every point within Arendt's corpus, can be defined as the plural understanding of the public world, which arises from – and is communicated in – the exchange of δόξα. Since judgment involves the continuous renegotiation of historically pre-given prejudices – tradition – it should come as no surprise that Arendt sees it as intrinsically connected to δόξα, which I have associated with traditionality. Δόξα is related to judgment as discourse is to understanding.

It is precisely this connection that leads Arendt increasingly to Kant's third *Critique*. In it, she claims to have discovered the language and concepts that account for the uniquely plural character of judgment, the way it takes place in and through the exchange of δόξαι about the public world and gives rise to the standards according to which phenomena can be understood *as* what they are – "right from wrong, beautiful from ugly."[335] Why is this the case? We have already seen that Arendt claims to uncover a significant limitation in Kant's determinate judgment, which applies pre-given standards to particulars, but is unable to account for the formation of these standards in the first place. Moreover, she holds that this limitation is a significant political and moral danger: one who is accustomed only to the "possession of rules under which to subsume particulars," without any examination of their content and phenomenological legitimacy,

[335] TM 160.

may find it very easy to accept radical changes in standards, so long as there is a clear code for their application. This is, Arendt argues, the danger inherent in "nonthinking," which she associates closely with totalitarianism, especially following her experience of the Eichmann trial.[336]

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Arendt finds a different notion of judgment, one which does not involve the determination of a particular by a universal rule, but instead is operative in cases where the particular must be judged on its own terms, when the rule is not given. For Kant, this kind of judgment – aesthetic judgments of taste – applies specifically to objects judged to be beautiful, since the experience of beauty is such that it seems to involve a normative claim without also having recourse to a determining concept. Arendt's turn to Kant, though, has little to do with the particularities of his theory of judgment or the role of judgments of taste within his system. As we have already seen, she argues that he did not recognize the political implications of his theory. Instead, it has to do with her own aims, to do justice to what is distinctive about the plural understanding that takes place in the exchange of δόξαι. Accordingly, she lifts specific aspects of Kant's description while leaving others aside.[337] The aspects she finds helpful in Kant for her own concept of judgment are as follows.

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[336] TM 178.

[337] I am deliberately leaving aside the question of whether Arendt's interpretation does justice to Kant's account, and even if it is attempting to do so. I am inclined to think she is instead appropriating aspects of Kant's account within an entirely different systematic framework, namely a hermeneutical one. To fully defend that claim would require a project of considerably more extensive scope. It also assumes that Kant's system is unamenable to hermeneutics on its own terms, which has been challenged, for instance in the work of Rudolf Makkreel. See especially Makkreel, "Gadamer and the Problem of How to Relate Kant and Hegel to Hermeneutics," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 53, no. 1 (1997); *Orientation and Judgment in Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); "Tradition and Orientation in Hermeneutics," *Research in Phenomenology* 16 (1986). See also John Sallis, *Kant and the Spirit of Critique*, ed. Richard Rojceqicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020).

First, judgment is distinct from private preference, or, in Kantian parlance, judgments of beauty (i.e. of taste) are distinct from judgments of the agreeable. The latter refers to what is pleasing to me personally, while the former is, as Kant puts it, *disinterested*. For Arendt, the disinterestedness of judgment refers to the ability, characteristic of *political* thinking, to understand something apart from one's own private interests. Such interests include personal preferences – what she refers to as "idiosyncrasies" in her earlier account of prejudice –but also relationships of usefulness. Kant makes this distinction too, distinguishing judgments of beauty from judgments of the good, which includes both that which is "good for something (the useful) that pleases only as a means," as well as that which is "good in itself."[338] But for Arendt, the stress is clearly on the useful, since this is precisely the distinction that delineates between the mode of disclosedness of *work* (which reveals beings according to their usefulness *for* a given end) and that of *action*. She thus understands disinterestedness in a distinctly political way, as referring in part to the ability to understand the world in a way that takes the plural opinions of others into account. She describes this, using another concept lifted from Kant, as an enlarged mentality, on which I elaborate below.

Second, and closely related, judgment makes a claim to *general validity*. That is, judgment involves an expectation of the agreement of others, in a way that cannot be said of private preferences. For Kant, to judge that something is beautiful involves something more than the expression that it is agreeable *to me*, however disagreeable it might be to others. Rather, it is to say this *is* beautiful, and so expect anyone else to judge it

[338] KU 207. Arendt does not include the moral good in itself as distinct, since she holds that judgment extends to moral judgments as well as 'aesthetic' ones.

accordingly.[339] It is important to note here that this is precisely the connection Arendt recognizes between judgment and δόξα, since the mode of validity of δόξα, in contradistinction to truth, is non-coercive. To assert an opinion is to put forward an interpretation that articulates the way that the world appears to me. This opinion cannot be proven, since it cannot make an appeal to any criteria (i.e. to a universally valid concept) that would determine the matter conclusively. As Beiner notes, although translations of Kant often refer to judgments of taste as claiming '*universal* validity' [*Allgemeingültigkeit*], Arendt consistently translates *allgemein* as 'general': a judgment is "never universally valid," since such a mode of validity could only belong to truth, not opinion.[340]

To do this, judgment depends on communicability. If not universally valid concepts or established external rules, to what criterion does judgment make its appeal? Kant describes taste as "the faculty for judging that which makes our feeling in a given representation *universally communicable*, without the mediation of a concept."[341] For Arendt, this means that judgment always takes place "in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement."[342] Unlike thinking, which Arendt consistently describes – with Plato – as a private and interior dialogue between me and myself, judgment takes place in communication. And, unlike personal preference or idiosyncrasy, it is not merely expression. Rather, to judge is to

[339] Of course, Kant would limit this to the beautiful, while Arendt applies it much more generally.

[340] LKP 163n155.

[341] KU 295.

[342] CC 217.

"woo" or "court" others, to put ones δόξα into dialogue with the δόξαι of others about the public world that appears in common to everyone

Finally, third, because it is concerned with the appearance of the world in *common,* judgment can be described as a community sense, a *sensus communis.* Kant writes that taste "takes account … of everyone else's way of representing in thought, in order as it were to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole," rather than remain bound to "subjective private conditions."[343] To be able to take leave of the private conditions of judgment is to occupy a general standpoint [*allgemeinen Standpunkte*] and reveals an enlarged or expanded mentality [*erweiterter Denkungsart*], rather than a "narrow" one.[344] Kant holds that this sense refers to a formal, reflective operation whereby one "abstract[s] from the limitations that attach to our own judging," a description that even he acknowledges might seem "much too artificial" to be compelling as a description of the "*common* sense."[345]

What does Arendt find so promising about this description? Although she sometimes borrows Kant's reflective and representational language to describe judgment, what she discovers in his account of the *sensus communis* is a way to describe judgment's unique mode of disclosedness:

> Common sense … discloses to us the nature of the world insofar as it is a common world … [an] 'objective' world which we have in common and share with others. Judging is one, if not the most important activity in which this sharing-the-world-with-others comes to pass.[346]

[343] KU 293.

[344] KU 295. Note that this translation renders it "universal standpoint" and "broad-minded way of thinking."

[345] KU 294.

[346] CC 218.

To have a *sensus communis* is to have an awareness of the world insofar as it appears to others. Moreover, Arendt argues that in judging the world, "a person discloses to an extent also himself, what kind of person he is, and this disclosure … gains in validity to the degree that it has liberated itself from merely individual idiosyncrasies."[347] This links judgment closely with Arendt's previous descriptions of action, as that according to which not only the world but human beings are revealed in their uniqueness. Or, recalling the way this problematic emerges for Heidegger, judgment as *sensus communis* refers to what is understood by Dasein as being-with (i.e. plural understanding) *and* to the way other Dasein are disclosed to each other as Dasein, rather than innerworldly beings [1.4.2; 1.4.3].

It is for *hermeneutical* reasons, then, that Arendt turns to Kant's theory of judgment, to do justice to the way that plural exchange of δόξαι is disclosive of both the common thing-world and those who interpret it. All that remains is to show the way in which this activity of plural understanding reveals a *space of appearance*, the political with-world understood – to borrow Heidegger's language – "as that 'in which' Dasein 'lives'" not in the singular, but in the plural, as being-with.[348] Gadamer, again, emerges as an indispensable interlocuter.

4.3.2 *Gadamer's critique of aesthetic consciousness*

In *Truth and Method,* Gadamer devotes the early sections of his text to a critique of aesthetic consciousness, as a way to explain, historically and philosophically, the

[347] CC 220.

[348] SZ 64.

transformation of hermeneutical understanding in the turn to methodology. Part of this argument concerns the transformation – in fact, the depreciation or emptying-out – of concepts within the humanistic tradition, that had served as bulwarks for the legitimacy of sources of truth other than scientific methodologies. These concepts include taste, judgment, and the *sensus communis*. For Gadamer, by the time these concepts appear in Kant's third critique, their scope has been severely diminished, and their relevance to human understanding sharply curtailed. To be sure, Gadamer's purpose is not to advocate a return to a previous era (e.g. of Renaissance humanism). Rather, it is to recognize the phenomenological basis for these humanistic concepts, namely the experience of understanding that takes place within, and not apart from, tradition.

Without recounting Gadamer's conceptual genealogies in detail, it is important to note that his conclusions are remarkably similar to Arendt's. Of taste, Gadamer writes that it, historically and phenomenologically, implies a mode of understanding that is operative within a plural community. Moreover, it does not refer to the assimilation of one's taste to what is in fashion within a given community. To conform oneself to "what everybody does" in this way would be to withhold or forgo *judgment* and simply accept the community standards as given.[349] This recourse to existing standards `is what Arendt describes as prejudice as opposed to judgment in her early work. Gadamer emphasizes that taste operates within a community, but does so in a way that keeps the concrete particulars – not merely the "empirical universality" of fashion – in view.[350]

In this, taste presupposes a "communal sense" – a *sensus communis* – that Gadamer describes as a "concrete universality represented by the community of a group,

[349] TM 37.

[350] TM 37.

a people, a nation, or the whole human race."[351] When trained and cultivated, the *sensus communis* yields knowledge, a sense of how to live and act well within a given community. But this knowledge is distinct from theoretical and methodological knowledge. Rather, it refers to φρόνησις: practical knowledge, which for Aristotle does not merely know how to correctly or cleverly apply universal rules to concrete situations, but presupposes both an awareness of the "totality of 'ethical virtues'" within the community, as well as a self-directedness, a concern for one's own virtue.[352] It is φρόνησις that determines "the moral and historical existence of humanity, as it takes shape in our words and deeds," and thus, for Gadamer, a robust notion of the *sensus communis* serves as a legitimation for the truth claims of tradition and historical knowledge.[353]

As the modern period went on, Gadamer argues that the *sensus communis* was gradually deprived of its moral and political sense. As 'common sense' in English-speaking philosophy it retained a social connotation (and was associated with things like sympathy, humor, and so on). But the German Enlightenment shed this connotation, and only carried forward a diminished notion of judgment, as that faculty which subsumes particulars to universals.[354] After Baumgarten, who interprets judgments of the particular in formal terms, as judging on the basis of internal coherence, the agreement of the parts

[351] TM 21.

[352] TM 22.

[353] TM 22-23.

[354] TM 30. Gadamer notes here that this picks up on the related, but distinct, use of *sensus communis* in medieval Scholastic philosophy to refer to the faculty that unifies the impressions of the five physical senses into a common sense impression within the soul. Arendt, for her part, attempts to link her political reading of the *sensus communis* with its role in the relation between sense perception and thought, in reference to the Scholastic usage of the term. See LM1, 45-53. Moreover, Schwartz notes that both senses of the term, and their ambiguous relation, have an origin in the Latin reception of Aristotle. See Schwartz, 157.

with the whole, the judgment of taste is almost entirely alienated from any social, historical, or political sense. For Gadamer, this is the state of affairs that lies behind Kant's account of aesthetic reflective judgment in the third critique. Like Arendt in her lecture course, Gadamer criticizes Kant for his removal of ethical judgments from the political realm of the community. The only role for judgment that remains related to the *sensus communis* is relegated to the limited sphere of 'aesthetics.'[355]

Although Gadamer's critique in the early sections of *Truth and Method* is primarily directed at Kant, his real target is the understanding of aesthetic consciousness that Kant's account of aesthetic judgment belies, one that really became dominant after Kant, beginning with Schiller. On this view, the experience of works of art entails the abstraction of the work of art from its world and creates an autonomous and independent realm of purely 'aesthetic' experience. Gadamer calls this abstraction *aesthetic differentiation*: aesthetic consciousness "differentiates what is aesthetically intended from everything that is outside the aesthetic sphere," abstracting from "all the elements of content that induce us to take up a moral or religious stance towards it, and presents it solely by itself in its aesthetic being."[356] In other words, aesthetic differentiation is an alienation, one that severs the work of art from its situatedness in the world and thereby restricts its meaning to itself alone, as something "significant in itself" [*Eigenbedeutsamkeit*][357] Here we can see that Gadamer's critique of aesthetic consciousness is much more fundamental than a disagreement about the nature of aesthetic experience. Rather, it concerns the nature of experience as such: Can aesthetic

[355] TM 34.

[356] TM 85.

[357] TM 89.

experience – or, for that matter, *any* experience – be separated from the world in this way? Is it not in the nature of experience itself to be *worldly*, that is, to *understand* what is experienced within the meaningful relational context of the world?

The reference to significance [*Bedeutsamkeit*] and the notion of significance-in-itself is especially telling in this regard. Recall that significance, for Heidegger, is the term for the referential character of relations between innerworldly beings within the world. Understanding 'sees' a being in its significance, *as* something, according to its place in a totality that is organized by its relevance for the sake of Dasein's own possibilities [1.2.4]. Perhaps with this analysis in mind, Gadamer points out that to experience something as significant in *itself* [*eigenbedeutsam*], as opposed to significant in *relation* to something else [*fremdbedeutsam*], is to dissociate it "from everything that could determine its meaning."[358] It could not, in other words, be understood *as* something, in a referential relation to other beings and the totality of those references or, crucially, to Dasein's existential possibilities. And yet, all understanding is understanding-as: "an articulation of what is there, [that] looks-away-from, looks-at, sees-together-as."[359] To accept the possibility of a genuinely self-contained, self-significant experience is to misconstrue or deny the possibility of understanding.

Gadamer's opposition to the aesthetic differentiation that dominated the 19th century view of aesthetic consciousness, then, is rooted in a more basic commitment to the hermeneutical character of experience. Indeed, he describes his position in terms of the contrast between two different ways to construe experience itself. For aesthetic

[358] TM 90.

[359] TM 91. Here Gadamer gives credit to Heidegger, and to *Sein und Zeit* in particular, writing that Heidegger pursued "this criticism of the theory of pure perception, undertaken on the basis of pragmatic experience, …to its foundation."

consciousness, the experience of a work of art is one that is self-contained, differentiated and discontinuous with our everyday experience of the world. It *an* experience [*Erlebnis*], a singular event, which, although it can be added to the collection of a sum total of experiences [*Erlebnisse*], is properly a cohesive whole within itself. In this sense of the term, one might describe an exciting, dangerous, or out-of-the-ordinary event as an 'experience.' Or one might say that they prefer to spend their money on 'experiences' rather than things.[360] By contrast, Gadamer argues that experience is hermeneutical: it is experience [*Erfahrung*] as a continuous process of self-understanding in relation to the world. To say, for example, that someone 'has a lot of experience,' or is 'experienced' begins to capture this deeper sense of the term. It is cumulative, rather than *ac*cumulative. It experiences things always within the wider context of one's existential projects and the world in which one is thrown, integrated into an ever-changing whole. In short, Gadamer's critique is that an understanding of aesthetic experience as *Erlebnis* prevents us from doing justice to the experience as *Erfahrung*.

Gadamer's criticism of Kant regarding judgments of taste is twofold. First, he argues that Kant significantly reduces the *scope* of judgments of taste. Second, as a result, he "denies taste any significance as knowledge," since these judgments are no longer accorded any legitimacy when applied to the concrete particulars of our moral and political experience with others, that is, within the political world. [361] A more robust account of judgment (i.e. a hermeneutical one), for Gadamer, would recognize that *all* judgments – logical, legal, moral, as well as 'aesthetic' – involve an element of taste,

[360] Such an example gets right to the core of Gadamer's critique, since to make such a claim is to implicitly reduce both experiences and things to the category of consumer goods, which itself presupposes an ontology that construes beings as a collection of discrete entities [1.2.1].

[361] TM 43

since to subsume a particular case under a universal is always also to recognize the *remainder* in the particular, such that it is not simply a case of a universal rule.[362] Furthermore, it would recognize that judgment always maintains a relation to pre-judgments or prejudices, which form the basis for judgment's embeddedness in the tradition of a community *and* are put into open question in the event of understanding [3.2.3]. This judgment, understands the world in such a way that recognizes the *other's* claim to meaning, that is, the δόξαι of the plural others with whom one shares the world in common.

In substance, then, Gadamer and Arendt have a remarkably similar view of judgment. Like Gadamer, Arendt argues that taste is inherent in all judgments, since even in the case of determinate judgments there is no rule to guide the *application* of the rule. What Kant calls an aesthetic reflective judgment only makes "obvious" what happens in judgment as such, moving from particular to universal in the absence of rules.[363] Further, Arendt does not restrict judgment to 'aesthetic' experience, but argues that it refers to the understanding of what is "right and wrong" no less than what is "beautiful or ugly." Indeed, she describes taste as that which goes beyond the "indiscriminate, immoderate love of the merely beautiful … [and] gives it humanistic meaning."[364] And, crucially, Arendt understands the role of the *sensus communis* in judgment to be concrete, not ideal and abstract: to judge is always to "judge as a member of *this* community," with *these*

[362] TM 39

[363] LM1 69.

[364] CC 221. In this essay, Arendt quite clearly associates 'mere' beauty with the technical qualities of a work of art, as the product of work, in contrast to meaning, which she associates with the judgment of those products within the political world. In this, she continues a theme from *Human Condition*, in which she writes of the "meaninglessness" of work in contrast to the realm of speech and action, which I have mentioned previously [2.2.1].

others, one might add, and within *this* tradition, even if such a concrete community might encompass the whole of the earth.

How does this plural understanding take place? As we have seen, Arendt describes this phenomenon using the Kantian language of a general standpoint and an enlarged mentality, both of which – when read hermeneutically – can be understood as metaphors for a way of 'seeing' or disclosing the *political* world: understanding the with-world in the mode of being-with. There is a sense, however, in which Arendt may be limited in her description by the parameters of Kant's account, specifically in her appeal to what she calls 'representative thinking.' In the following, final section, I propose that Gadamer's use of the phenomenological concept of *horizon*, and of what he calls the 'fusion of horizons,' is a better way to explicate what Arendt means by an enlarged mentality that judges in accordance with the *sensus communis*, and describes the space of appearance of the political world.

4.3.3 *The political world as a fusion of horizons*

For Arendt, as we have seen, judgment names an understanding of the public world that arises from, and is communicated in, the discursive exchange of opinions – δόξαι – *about* the public world. To *judge*, on this account, is to form and communicate an opinion according to one's sense of the public world (i.e. *sensus communis*), the awareness of the interpretive context in which one judges with others. This opinion, Arendt argues, has a greater – that is, more general [*allgemein*] – degree of validity according to the extent it occupies what Kant calls a general standpoint [*allgemeinen Standpunkte*] and proceeds from an enlarged, rather than narrow, way of thinking. In this sense, Arendt consistently

uses the Kantian notion of an 'enlarged mentality' to refer to the condition for *good* (i.e. generally valid) opinions.[365] The difference between judging solely within the narrow confines of pre-given rules and judging according to an enlarged mentality is precisely the difference between prejudice and judgment proper.

How, then, does Arendt describe the development of this understanding? In several places, she describes an enlarged mentality as what results from *representative thinking*, a distinctly "political" way of thinking that takes into account the others who also inhabit and judge the world by "making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent," re-presenting them.[366] She describes it as follows:

> This process of representation does not blindly adopt the actual views of those who stand somewhere else, and hence look upon the world from a different perspective; this is a question neither of empathy, as though I tried to be or to feel like somebody else, nor of counting noses and joining a majority but of being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not.

This sort of thinking is representative, not only in that it involves the re-presentation of the standpoints of others, but because with it "I can make myself the representative of everybody else." It is just such an ability that results in an enlargement of my thinking and improves the validity of my opinion, which increases in tandem with the number of "standpoints I have present in my mind."[367]

What should we make of this description? It could be justifiably interpreted as a procedure – a method – for judgment, such that the one who develops the skill of

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[365] Note that Arendt does sometimes slip between two closely related uses of the term 'judgment.' It primarily refers to plural *understanding*, the mode of understanding which 'sees' the world according to the plurality of interpretations communicated by all the others within it. But she also uses 'judgment' to refer to the *opinion* that arises from such an understanding (i.e. *a* judgment). If, as I have argued, opinion is simply the *discourse* that attends this mode of understanding, and so one would expect them to be related in such a way that the distinction is sometimes superfluous.

[366] TP 237.

[367] TP 237.

imaginative transference into a greater and greater variety of perspectives will be equipped to produce better and better judgments. Moreover, it could be interpreted as fundamentally idealistic, an operation of the mind that Arendt explicitly says can take place in total isolation. If this is the case, it would be distinctly at odds with the Gadamer's description of understanding, and more generally with the hermeneutical ontology I have been associating with Arendt's work. Accordingly, Risser argues that Arendt's representative thinking is "a marked departure from what we find in Gadamer's hermeneutics," since "Gadamer is not suggesting that we can form a general view even with the aid of imaginative projection."[368] In one sense, this is absolutely correct – one can readily imagine Gadamer bristling against the idealist and subjectivist implications of Arendt's language, especially the apparent call to "reflect from a universal standpoint."[369] Moreover, this account of representative thinking is not particularly convincing phenomenologically, as a description of the way plural understanding actually takes place.

Even so, I would like to provide an alternative way of reading Arendt on this point and suggest that despite genuine differences in terminology and description of the *process* of plural understanding, Arendt and Gadamer have substantially the same view of understanding itself. To do so, I propose an interpretation of Arendt's account that makes use of the phenomenological concept of *horizon*. Such an interpretation is not without precedent. Held, drawing primarily on Husserl's phenomenology, argues that

[368] Risser, "Task of Understanding," 154-155.

[369] Risser, "Task of Understanding," 154. Gadamer was consistently allergic to the language of subjectivity. In response to an interview question about intersubjectivity, for example, Gadamer responded, "Oh, please spare me that completely misleading concept of intersubjectivity, of a subjectivism doubled!" See GC 59-60.

Arendt provides an account of judgment that bridges between the "closed" horizon of my own particular 'world' – which he also identifies with the natural attitude – and the political world, which provides a space in which "the many horizonal worlds" can appear.[370] Loidolt, also drawing on Husserl, notes the influence of the notion of world as the unthematized "horizon of all horizons."[371] But Gadamer himself makes use of the concept of horizon in his own account of historical understanding, which he describes as a *fusion of horizons* [*Horizontverschmelzung*].

Gadmer's appeal to the concept of horizon first occurs within his discussion of historically-effected consciousness in *Truth and Method*, and the encounter with the unfamiliar past that comes down to the present in tradition. Gadamer describes horizon as the "range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point."[372] In this context, an historical text from the past has a particular horizon – a range of what it 'sees' from its 'standpoint' – and the historian reading the text has her own horizon in the present. A historicist approach to tradition, which Gadamer rejects [3.2.4], would hold that an interpretation of the historical text is successful insofar as the historian is able to leave behind her own present horizon and successfully transpose herself into the alien horizon of the past, understanding that historical 'world' on its own terms. Implicit in this view of the historicist is the assumption that horizons are fixed and immobile perspectives, bounded by the insuperable limits of history and culture.

Against this assumption, which he calls "a kind of Robinson Crusoe dream of historical enlightenment," Gadamer instead asks if it even makes sense to speak of a

[370] Held, "Toward a Phenomenology of the Political World," 449; 451.

[371] Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality*, 94.

[372] TM 302.

"closed horizon" at all. Historical understanding "does not entail passing into alien worlds unconnected in any way with our own. Rather, "everything contained in historical consciousness is in fact embraced by a *single* historical horizon."[373] As Vessey puts it, the horizon does not properly refer to a "standpoint which limits what we can see," but to "what is graspable within particular limits."[374] Conceptually, even in non-technical uses of the term, a horizon refers to a background awareness that changes according to one's standpoint, moving and shifting in tandem with one's own moving and shifting. To look to the horizon means to "look beyond what is close at hand – not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and truer proportion."[375] When historical understanding takes place, then, not as a successful emigration from one's own present horizon to a foreign historical one, but rather the "fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves."[376]

The language of 'fusion' can be misleading. If there is but one open horizon, why speak of a 'fusion' between apparently distinct horizons? Gadamer repeatedly stresses that to do so is only to formally distinguish "one phase in the process of understanding," and specifically historical understanding, in which the horizon of the past is deliberately foregrounded over and against that of the present.[377] In fact, he argues, the interpreter's "understanding already includes a mediation of both horizons," because in understanding the two apparently distinct horizons are taken up [*aufgehoben*] in the form of "a new

[373] TM 304. My emphasis.

[374] Vessey, "Gadamer and the Fusion of Horizons," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, 4 (2009): 532.

[375] TM 305. The implicit reference to circumspection in Heidegger seems clear here.

[376] TM 306.

[377] TM 306.

historical horizon."[378] This not only takes place in the encounter with tradition (e.g. by an historian with historical texts), but in the very development of tradition itself, which emerges from the continual interpretation of what comes down from the past, that is, in traditionality [3.3.3]. Elsewhere, Gadamer concedes that his term 'fusion of horizons' is to some extent a concession to the limitations of language, in which it can be difficult to find the words to communicate.[379]

A horizon, then, is always in motion. The *fusion* of horizons actually describes the *movement* or expansion of a horizon to include a wider context in which something can be understood; indeed, it is only because horizons are not fixed in place that understanding is possible at all. When Gadamer describes this motion, he does so in reference to prejudices: horizons "are in motion because our prejudgments are constantly put to the test."[380] As we have seen [3.2.3], the continual testing and transformation of prejudices does not aim for the elimination of prejudices in favor of 'truth' or 'knowledge.' Instead, the view – the fore-sight [*Vorsicht*] – from which a given subject matter [*Sache*] is seen is transformed when the horizon, against which it is seen, is expanded. Such an experience – and here it is appropriate to understand experience as *Erfahrung* – is one in which the transformation of one's 'perspective' is in fact the transformation of the one who understands. It is in this sense that we can speak of "a kind

[378] GC 48.

[379] Gadamer, "Hermeneutics Tracking the Trace," in GR 384. Here he also mentions the 'historically-effected consciousness' (he notes Heidegger took particular issue with the apparent reference to 'consciousness') and Derrida's *différance* as examples of the way that the metaphysical assumptions latent in our languages are difficult to avoid without risking complete unintelligibility: "One cannot speak in a way completely different from the way one thinks."

[380] GC 48.

of progress" in the continued shifting and expansion of our horizon, but one "that always must be renewed in the effort of our living."[381]

Although most of Gadamer's references to the fusion of horizons occur in reference to the *temporal* horizon of history, and the 'fusion' between the horizon of the past (i.e. a historical text) and a present-day interpreter, it is clear that it refers to a more basic experience. Gadamer acknowledges that the concept arose from the everyday experience of conversation, in which dialogue partners do not seek to understand the other by simply disregarding themselves and inhabiting as much as possible the other's inner life. To "put ourselves in someone else's shoes," so to speak, to "transpose ourselves into a situation," requires that "we must bring, precisely, ourselves."[382] In contrast to empathy or assimilation, Gadamer suggests that a genuine discussion is one in which the partners adjust their understanding of the matter under discussion in the light of what the other has to say about it – that is, they expand their horizons.

The centrality of dialogue for Gadamer, which has received a remarkable amount of attention, sometimes threatens to render his account of understanding somewhat trite. The point is not to reduce all forms of understanding to the model of conversation. Rather, the example of a conversation directs our attention to two closely related aspects of understanding itself. First, understanding – whether a traditionary text or another person – is a process of communication, and thus of *language*. A conversation does not quite get off the ground if the conversation partners are speaking past each other, and still less if they are speaking entirely different languages. The fusion of horizons can be understood as "the entering into the communication in such a way that the tension

[381] Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy," in *GR*, 244.

[382] TM 305.

between the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader is resolved."[383] This transformation takes place in language, the medium in which "the order and structure of our experience itself is originally formed and constantly changed."[384]

Second, and here the comparison with Arendt becomes more pronounced, the fusion of horizons takes place within a *common* language. There is an irreducibly political element in Gadamer's account of understanding in language, because he stresses both that the fusion of horizons involves the risk of alterity – that the other may be *right* about the matter in question – *and* that this risk can never be taken without the community between self and other that is created by the mutual participation in a common language. As Gadamer puts it,

> Language is a *we*, in that we are assigned our place in relation to each other, and in which the individual has no fixed borders. This means, however, that we all must overstep our own personal borders/limits of understanding in order to understand. … All living together in community is living together in language, and language exists only in conversation.[385]

To venture a sort of translation, an exercise in finding a common language, I submit that one might see in Gadamer's description of the communal life of conversation something like Arendt's realm of action and speech, in which speaking together about the public world lies at the heart of political activity as such.

And here too, perhaps, we may recognize in Arendt's description of the enlarged mentality something like Gadamer's fusion of horizons. For Arendt, the goal of representative thinking is not to abandon the fixed standpoint of the self and attempt to visit a wide variety of other fixed standpoints. Like Gadamer, she emphatically contrasts

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[383] Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation, " in GR 180.

[384] TM 357.

[385] GC 56.

this process with empathy, "as though I tried to be or to feel like somebody else," and with the simple substitution of one 'perspective' with another. It is rather a matter "of being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not."[386] This is a sort of transposition, but one in which "we bring precisely *ourselves*," one which presupposes our own horizon.[387] Moreover, representative thinking as Arendt describes it is concrete: it is implicitly bounded by the perspectives – the 'horizons' – of which I could actually become aware in the concrete community of which I am a part (i.e. *sensus communis*), which is a linguistic community formed by the exchange of δόξαι about the public world.

What emerges from representative thinking, is an enlarged mentality. It emerges from a thinking that "is truly discursive, running … from one part of the world to another, through all kinds of conflicting views, until it finally ascends from these particularities to some impartial generality."[388] This generality is a general standpoint, one which understands the world according to the plurality of opinions about it. Gadamer, too, describes the outcome of the fusion of horizons in these terms, not only as an *Aufhebung* of particular 'horizons,' but as a common perspective. He writes, "we are continually shaping a common perspective when we speak a common language and so are active participants in the communality of our experience of the world."[389] Beneath the Kantian terminology of a 'universal standpoint,' Arendt has quietly undertaken a remarkably hermeneutical reinterpretation: this 'universal standpoint' is actually an expanded horizon on the world, made possible through the concrete engagement with the particularities of

[386] TP 237.

[387] TM 357.

[388] TP 238.

[389] Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy," in GR 244.

one's community and tradition. The political world – that is, the world disclosed according to the others with whom one shares the world, as well as the world within which these others are disclosed *as* who they are – refers to this broader horizon. It is only such a horizon, the horizon of *judgment*, which serves as the space of appearance in which the public world can appear in the activity of speech and action.

CONCLUSION

The political world, as treated by Arendt and Gadamer, arises out of discourse. It is the space opened by plural communication, and the basis for political community. It presents the possibility and the promise of an authentic being-with [*Mitsein*] and the proper kind of objectivity [*die rechte Sachlichkeit*]. Prior to and presupposed in the establishment of political institutions, forms of organization, and legal and juridical frameworks is the plural being-together of human beings, sharing a world in common.

As Arendt reminds us, this world is fragile. It is not a given that such a space arises, even when the conditions are present. When it does, it is continually exposed to the possibility of closure and collapse – from loneliness and isolation, from the anonymity of mass society, from violence and the radicality and banality of evil, from forgetfulness. The consequences are potentially dire: "to be thrown back [onto] natural givenness, … mere differentiation," to lose all significance.[390] Today, there is a growing sense that the institutions of modern political life, particularly within liberal democracies, are under threat of erosion. But even the most robust political institutions could not withstand the evaporation of the political itself from their midst, the "world-withdrawal" and "world-decay" of the political world.[391]

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[390] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973).

[391] UK 26.

Gadamer too fears for the fate of human community under the conditions of modern life. The technocratic manipulation and bureaucratic administration that has attended the growth of modern science has resulted in a crisis of responsibility. The task of judgment, of plural understanding, is increasingly ceded to experts. The encroachment of technical expertise on human community makes itself known in the programmatic and diminished forms of political participation, and the attending statistical exactness with which political actions and judgments can be predicted, measured, and employed toward purely instrumental ends – τέχνη at the expense of φρόνησις. These are experts in government, but also in the realms of business, science, and technology. In an ironic transformation, the Internet – the most widely accessible institutional public in history, once viewed as the realization of a truly free and open discursive space – has become a catalyst for unprecedented levels of mass isolation, a wasteland of monetization and consumption, fragmented and devoid of authentic community. "During three centuries of an ever-increasing frenzy of making and being able to make," Gadamer writes, "we have been less concerned than we should have been to keep alive the consciousness of our own responsibility as citizens and members of society."[392]

Nevertheless, in a deeper sense, the conditions that make the space of the political world possible are not lost. As Gadamer writes in *Truth and Method*, even in catastrophic conditions, "where life changes violently … far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows."[393] The recognition of the common, the awareness of "unchanging and enduring realities – birth and death, youth and age, native and foreign land, commitment and freedom – demand the same

[392] Gadamer, "Limitations of the Expert," in EPH 191.

[393] TM 281.

recognition from all of us."[394] The basic conditions of human life – the unavoidably cosmopolitan human condition – provide a foundation for the possibility of the political world, even when it remains unactualized amid the concrete realities of present life. Arendt shares the conviction of the Greeks, that the space of action and speech can emerge at almost any time and any location, anywhere that human beings exist together: "Wherever you go, you will be a *polis*."[395]

[394] Gadamer, "Notes on Planning for the Future," in EPH 180.

[395] HC 198.

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