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THE MORAL THINKING OF MACBETH

In her article, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," Hannah Arendt provides a provocative approach to the question of evil by suggesting that banal evil—the most common kind—may arise directly from thoughtlessness.[1] If that is so, thinking may provide an antidote to evil. Learning to think would then offer the individual and society protection against the dangers of thoughtless evil. She further suggests that thinking may clear the way for a form of judging that "when the chips are down" may turn people toward right rather than wrong, beauty rather than ugliness. In this essay I address her claim by noting an example of apparently thoughtless evil, the murder of Duncan by Macbeth, and by showing how this event clarifies Arendt's thesis, including both its weaknesses and its strengths. The use of *Macbeth* will amount to a sketch of certain features of the play particularly relevant to this ethical issue, followed by an analysis of ways Arendt's thesis connects with the murder of Duncan.[2]

Arendt, in fact, makes passing reference to a connection between Eichmann (her paradigm of banal evil) and Macbeth. She briefly connects the thoughtless evil actions of Eichmann to three characters from Shakespeare: Iago, Macbeth, and Richard III.[3] Her claim is that, unlike them, Eichmann is not wicked, merely deficient in thought. We will see in my comments below, however, that Macbeth may be more like than unlike Eichmann, at least in the ease with which he is persuaded that the evil deed is obviously the right one.

Briefly, Macbeth receives a prediction that he will be king, which prepares him to respond to the suggestion of Lady Macbeth that he take matters into his own hands by murdering King Duncan in his sleep. Macbeth struggles with his "conscience" but finally does the

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deed. Afterwards he is haunted by a voice that cries, "Sleep no more; Macbeth hath murdered sleep."

Following an analysis of Macbeth's thinking and judging in *Macbeth*, particularly in Act I, Scene VII, I will discuss thinking and judging as Arendt conceives them and suggest an extension of her description that further attends to the needs of acting in human community. The question I intend to address through the thinking of Macbeth is: Does thinking make an ethical difference or does it fall short, at least in the case of Macbeth, of motivating to the good, even when, as Arendt would say, the chips are down?

The analysis of Macbeth's thinking can set aside but must not forget that this particular act of thinking operates within a dramatic context; that is, that it moves into our discourse by way of a tale told. This seems to set it apart from the events of everyday experience that we might otherwise look to for an understanding of ethical thinking. Yet upon further examination we discover a hidden similarity between Macbeth's dramatic situation and everyday life. The everyday incidents that we might take as examples of ethical thinking also come to us as a tale told. For if we listen to someone describing thinking that has taken place or if we recount an experience of thinking we observed or took part in, we operate in the context of recounting, of telling a tale—with appropriate dramatic movement, form, and content, which makes of the instance an example of thinking rather than merely an unpunctuated stream of consciousness.

We must be aware of the function of the dramatist's art in the speeches of Macbeth, but also in more ordinary instances of ethical thinking. One difference from our ordinary experience of thinking that we might expect in the analysis of Macbeth would be the effect of knowing the conclusion of the tale—that, despite whatever thinking goes on, the deed is done; yet that too is a common element in the telling and retelling of the stories of everyday life. The tales of everyday life are told in part for the way in which they expose a particular movement of living, a sequence of thinking, acting, and judging that we have come to prize or fear, that relates as a model, map, or myth to our overall understanding of life. So, we are already dealing with the dramatist's art when we examine examples of ethical thinking in any case, whether taken from ordinary living or from literature. Differences can be seen between the polished form of literary tales and stories told between friends over a beer, but they are not the difference between art and the artless.

Act I, Scene VII of *Macbeth* begins with the thinking of Macbeth, a speech to himself. He considers the deed of murder, already introduced in his thinking after his meeting with the witches, who had proclaimed that he would be king, and made explicit by Lady Macbeth. He thinks about this deed. Specifically, he thinks of it as later he will come to know it, in terms of consequences. He says,

> If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
> It were done quickly . . .
> —But in these cases,
> We still have judgment here; that we but teach
> Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
> To plague th' inventor . . .
>
> (1.7.1–2, 7–10)

If doing the deed ended the affair, or strictly speaking, if actions had only the consequences one chose and no others, then to act in the way Macbeth contemplates would immediately commend itself. If he could kill Duncan, the current king, and thereby become king and no other consequences would ensue, apparently he would do so, and do so quickly. "If it were done, when 'tis done" defines an imaginative ethical position that Macbeth would prefer to the actual position he faces. He has already, we see, decided to consider the deed. He now is thinking about it, considering not the deed in isolation but its consequences. And in that consideration he first of all becomes aware that actions have a self-reflexive character. A deed rebounds upon the doer, he declares. If "we teach bloody instructions which, being taught, return to plague the inventor," then our actions call forth similar actions from others. What one does, Macbeth acknowledges, sets forth a model for similar action. To do this deed is to declare it worth doing; to declare it worth doing is to imply that others may, and perhaps even ought to, follow one's example.

The first ethical consideration Macbeth acknowledges here is the reflexivity of action. To undertake an evil deed is to give that deed authenticity, to assign it a status in the world of values and the world of deeds dependent on those values. To act is to assign value to the deed; to value a deed is to commend it as worth doing, by others as well as by oneself. Thus, evil action is in part known as such for its power to rebound upon the doer. In one sense, Macbeth names an antecedent to the categorical imperative: by acting he would assign to his act, to the

maxim of his will, both a commendation to others and a universal value. He also anticipates Sartre's idea that in choosing, one chooses for all humanity.[4] Although Macbeth does not pursue the question this far, his ruminations move along the path later worked out in detail by Kant's idea of practical reason and, in another way, by Sartre's existentialist ethics.[5]

One could see how the ethical imperative of Kant is legitimated, though not in a Kantian way, by such considerations as those of Macbeth. To do one's duty under these considerations—as pure a motive as is needed for an action to have moral worth in Kant's eyes—is more than just an act done, as Kant would have it, for the sake of duty alone. To do one's duty is to save one's world from the consequences of similar actions declared valuable in the doing. The imperative of practical reason has more than pure rationality to commend it; it also provides a safe standard for avoiding the procreative abilities of action. Actions are not necessarily done when we conclude them. Not only do they have direct consequences, they also give birth to others of their kind. To act, Macbeth tells us, is both to recommend that same act to others and to turn that same act upon oneself. The parallel with Sartre's view and with the view taken by common sense seems obvious here. Sartre tells us that my action lays claim to the goodness of the kind of deed I have done, and in so doing, declares this principle of action to be a human value. In everyday discussion of why to act or refrain from acting, many people will point out the way in which an action sets an example for others to follow, even if no other seems likely to observe and mimic that behavior.

A second consideration commends itself as well ("He's here in double trust" [1.7.12]). Besides the fact that bloody deeds give credence to bloody deeds, Macbeth stands before the bar of trust. While the morality of the bonds of trust may be understood in a variety of ways, Macbeth here acknowledges the ethical demand placed upon him by certain particular potential consequences of the deed he is contemplating. As "kinsman and his subject" and as host, Macbeth recognizes the call upon him to protect and aid the king. Here he acknowledges responsibilities that haunt all human choices. The rule of kinship, of social structures, and of hospitality extends throughout human society. Kinship rules protect the most basic necessity of human culture and continuation of the species. If kinship bonds break there would be no one to take care of and acculturate the child. All other social bonds depend on this one. The metaphor of kinship flows through religion

(father and child relations of god and believer, for instance), through friendship ("she's like a sister to me"), and through the fiction and fact of societies (rulers have often referred to themselves as parents of the people, and of course the image of "Big Brother" remains relevant both to the caring and to the coercive aspects of political systems).

Social groupings depend upon the loyalty of group members. Social systems cannot stand without loyalty. Like kinship, trust forms a substratum of every social structure. As can be seen in the 20th century, political systems within which lack of trust is an acknowledged fact (as with election promises in the United States) become more and more encumbered with piled-up falsehoods and with apathy. The notion of kingship implies subjects—without the one the other collapses. When Macbeth contemplates killing the king, removing himself from the kingship-subject relation, he kills more than the king. This deed rends the fabric on which kingship depends. Anarchy results. When anyone may kill the king, there can be no king. (As when one may kill one's kin, kinship crumbles.) To kill the king to become king is to erode what one wants in the process of trying to reach it. Macbeth cannot justify killing Duncan, for to do so endangers the structure on which would rest his power as king to come.

The law of hospitality extends likewise across human cultures and inhabits, with the concerns over kinship and king-subject relations, a special region in human life. To play host is to take upon oneself a protective concern for the guest. (Macbeth is considering just that, whether he may only "play" host or whether he will accept the full responsibilities included in that status.) Kin, subject, and host all imply a certain relationship of trust. Macbeth sees the first two as one, and lists host as a separate category. He says, "First, . . . I am his kinsman and his subject . . . then, . . . his host . . ." (1.7.13–14). In a sense, host implies a function that transcends cultures and the other relationships mentioned above, for it is understood as more voluntary. One may not choose one's kinship or the state to which one is subject, at least by birth, but to welcome someone into your home stands not as a matter of fate alone but of the free extension of trust. So Macbeth brings to bear here the question of trust in its major ramifications. The "double trust" in which Duncan stands covers both the intimate relationships one does not choose but on which all human life depends and the chosen relations into which one enters with implicit trust in the good will of the other.

Macbeth first considered the "law" of moral reflexivity—whatever

one does enters the world as that which is worth doing and is commended "To our own lips" by our actions. Now he has brought to the fore the "law" of trust in human community. No action, he has said, proceeds in a vacuum. An action becomes a recommendation to others. We never act in simple subjectivity, for ourselves alone, for we are never "ourselves alone." We are undeniably part of relations of kinship, state and choice. Trust is not something out there in which we can choose whether or not to participate. Our choices imply a response to relations of trust within the community of which we are a part, from which we are never able to separate ourselves.

Also the king's virtues "will plead like angels" (1.7.19) against his murder. The final consideration raised by Macbeth against the deed he contemplates is the worth of the other. Decisions involve more than personal consequences and the web of relationships. They involve the concrete other toward whom they are directed. Kinship, state, and chosen commitments can become abstractions in the moment of action. The concrete other in this moment stands forth as well to plead against the doing of this deed. Whomever one would kill, whatever one would take, however one would manipulate or handle another to her hurt, the other faces one as potentially worthy of notice and care. Does Macbeth imply this in his final point against killing the king? Perhaps it is not as broadened as this; it is most clearly a plea from the specific virtues of Duncan against, as Macbeth puts it, "his taking-off." Yet whom would I hurt in whom some goodness or kindness, some concern for a good thing or, at the barest, a concern for life itself, would not plead for me to stay my hand? Macbeth does not generalize from Duncan, for instance, to his enemies in battle. Yet in recognizing the worth of this other he makes an implicit moral case for the worth of any other. In thinking this deed through to its full implications, Macbeth recognizes, as a final constraint, the worth of this particular other (and all others are 'this particular other' when the deed is at hand). As with those who sought to kill Hitler, the villainy of a particular other may plead against staying the hand, just as virtue may plead for it. Even in a case of great villainy, however, the good expected from ending a life must be great to counterbalance the evil of killing any particular other.

We can easily commend the ethical thinking of Macbeth. He marshals the forces of moral order well. Macbeth finds three arguments against this act: the relexivity of action, making this deed dangerous to the doer (a consideration some would not call ethical); the call of trust through kinship, social order, and hospitality; and the virtue of Duncan

and, perhaps, of any other toward whom one would act hurtfully. He thinks about what he is to do by stating what stands against the murder of Duncan, concluding,

> —I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
> And falls on th' other
>
> (1.7.25–28)

So against the marshaled forces of his ethical thinking, Macbeth has only one "spur" for his intent—ambition. His ethical thinking ends in a judgment. He has set the moral arguments against the act beside the impetus to act and found the former morally compelling. What is ambition, he says, when placed in balance with the reasons to refrain from this deed? Ambition does not measure up beside the call of these moral considerations. The spur is lacking, the motivation to act not strong enough to overcome these reasons not to act. Macbeth places his thinking and his desire side by side and finds, at least in this moment, that when he is "alone with himself" thinking wins the day.

In the conversation with Lady Macbeth that follows his monologue, Macbeth shows the results of his thinking by saying, "We will proceed no further in this business" (1.7.31). The ethical argument has apparently done its work. He has weighed ambition against reasons not to act and has settled on what most observers would call the right decision. What happens? At this point we might stop the play and ask first-time watchers, who do not know the plot, "what will Macbeth do?" He seems to have convinced himself; thinking seems to have done good work and convinced him, despite his ambition, to take the proper course. Yet we may notice that in his speech to Lady Macbeth he lists none of his moral arguments, only saying that Duncan has honored him and that he would not lose the "Golden opinions from all sorts of people" (1.7.33) that his recent good fortune has brought. The difference between the earlier ethical thinking of Macbeth and his explanation to Lady Macbeth may be an example of the difference between private and public reasons for action, the difference between the inner dialogue and what one is willing or able to state publicly of the conclusions of that dialogue.

Lady Macbeth performs the role of a dialogue partner here. We can take her as representing either the outward or the inward partner. She voices the other side of the ethical debate. She asks,

> Art thou afeard
> To be the same in thine own act and valour,
> As thou art in desire? Would'st thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
> And live a coward in thine own esteem
>
> (1.7.39–43)

Lady Macbeth continues what was begun in Macbeth's earlier ethical thinking. The genuine debate of thinking does not end easily. One's ambitions are not vanquished by thoughts of consequences or of the structures of relationship. Ambitions rise again. Something more than thinking may be necessary to break their reign. For to the thinking Macbeth accomplished earlier there comes, as if by nature itself, a rejoinder. Do you dare not act in your own behalf? Are you afraid of the courageous action necessary to accomplish your aim? This argument holds a special interest for us, because it resembles counsel often given by a friend. Be courageous, go for it, live out your true desires, do not hide from what you want, held back by fear. How is one to differentiate between that counsel to act on one's own behalf, to "seize the day," and the counsel of Lady Macbeth—or is there any difference?

The dilemmas of ethics, the moments of standing at the branching of two or more roads, cannot be concluded, we must suggest at this point, by thinking alone. Arendt retained a discomfort with the notion that thinking directly helped in acting. She did so for the best of reasons. The thinking that she espouses too often proceeds as if that internal dialogue operates in a vacuum. Arendt points to Socrates' claim that one must be able to be friends with oneself and that that need for inner friendship may give motivating power to an inner consistency appealing initially to intellect alone. Yet this inner dialogue frequently falls flat if thinking alone is its medium. The intellectual phrasing of our dilemmas presents only one aspect of their power. Mind, as the pragmatists would remind us, includes the emotional, the volitional, and the intellectual. Ethical thinking that appeals only to intellect—what most thinking amounts to—falls quickly before the power of feeling, desiring, willing, hoping, and fearing. The intellectual argument of Macbeth with himself proved strong only during the inner dialogue that isolated intellect from feeling and willing. The actual and effective "spur for his intent" appears in the emotional appeal of the counter-arguments of Lady Macbeth.

Those arguments move him to action. They reverse the effect of his

earlier attempts at ethical thinking. Such a reversal of the effects of thinking often meets with praise when it releases the courage to act in one's own behalf, to perform the deed that needs to be done. The difference between praise and blame must lie in one's own estimate of the deed to be performed. Often human beings fail in some great deed due to the advice of fear. Is there a structural difference to the thinking-acting process involved in failing to act in the one case rather than the other? Isn't it often true that the person faced with a major life choice has "no spur to prick the sides of [her] intent"? Macbeth's argument with himself involves the call of consequences, loyalty, and the intrinsic worth of what will be lost in this deed (Duncan's life). His thinking tells him that the reasons not to act are stronger than the reasons to act. Can he trust his thinking? Lady Macbeth tells him he cannot. This scene shows at least three factors preceding an act: reason or reasoning, ambition or desire, and the counsel of others. Between reasoning and desire, in the private setting, Macbeth's thinking seemed to have the upper hand. The voice of counsel or another's reasoning—guided by that other's linking of reason and desire—overcomes the results of Macbeth's private deliberations. A similar voice of counsel may, however, come from the person herself when no one else stands as opponent to the thought.

Macbeth begins to argue with Lady Macbeth, first by proclaiming that

> I dare do all that may become a man;
> Who dares do more, is none.
>
> (1.7.46–47)

We see here the power of counter-argument in ethical discourse, for she meets his every objection point for point, bringing him slowly to the opposite of his stated decision at the beginning of the discussion. Her first reply responds specifically to the content of his statement ("I dare do all . . ."). She reminds him that it was he that began the discussion of this act—a statement neither quite true nor quite false. He, indeed, told her of the predictions of the witches by which he became acquainted with the possibilities before him, and he did not say no when she broached the subject of lending fate a hand by removing the king. Yet she first begins to plot Duncan's death on her own without his encouragement. Clearly the early part of the play demonstrates Macbeth's willingness to listen to the voices of his ambition and to think of ways to

obtain the crown promised by the witches' predictions. On the other hand, Lady Macbeth thinks through one direct method by which this may be accomplished and seeks a way to persuade Macbeth to go along with her plans. She acts as, we might say, an evil conscience from the first.

Lady Macbeth says,

> When you durst do it, then you were a man;
> And, to be more than what you were, you would
> Be so much more the man.
>
> (1.7.49–51)

She plays off his self-righteous suggestion, the words by which he tries to maintain his earlier assertion that he will not do the harm they have discussed. She says in effect, "You will be a man when you take courage and act to bring about what we have been promised." The counter-argument then takes its cue from the virtues he espouses. What makes him valuable to the king? Courage. What can bring him what he desires? Courage. Thus a "virtue" is called forth to surmount his weakness of resolve, a virtue becomes part of the argument for doing the evil deed. In just such a way does thinking evolve when bent on destruction. Can we, as Arendt means to suggest, determine the difference between thinking bent on destruction and thinking bent on goodness?

Lady Macbeth concludes this speech with an analogy, saying that she would as soon have killed a baby at her breast as act as Macbeth now proposes to act. Again the structure of the argument holds a provocative interest. The use of strong analogy, of argument designed to move the listener to action could easily be co-opted by any moral or amoral standpoint. One need not have the right on one's side to proceed persuasively. Of course, the tales we tell, whether from our everyday lives or from the history of literature, often bear a moral within. Goodness wins so often, evil appears in such obvious guise that we may forget that evil consented to appears as, as the biblical phrase has it, "an angel of light." Macbeth was earlier persuaded by his own moral reasoning not to engage in what seems to the onlooker as an obviously evil deed. Yet now the persuasion runs the other way, and again with strength. Throughout her counterargument, Lady Macbeth uses Macbeth's own statements and reasoning to present her case. She urges courage in the face of the difficulties surrounding the desired end, just

as any true friend might. She uses powerful analogies of love, motherhood, and valor to provide a spur to his intent.

She is so persuasive in fact that Macbeth next asks merely "If we should fail?" (1.7.59). We notice here that the battle of ethical thinking has now shifted fields. He has moved from his adamant "We will proceed no further" to the practical question of success. Throughout his consideration of this deed Macbeth demonstrates a particular concern with "practical" reasoning, in the strict sense. His first words to himself in the earlier ethical monologue were concerned with the active consequences of the deed. Now he has returned to the same issue. The appeal to courage, the reader might guess, has joined forces with Macbeth's ambition to push his earlier ethical reasoning from his mind. I must be courageous and act in strength to get what I desire, he might be saying. But there is still doubt. What if we fail? Macbeth's recent honors will be lost if he tries this deed and fails in the attempt or even if he succeeds in killing Duncan but is caught at it and must suffer the consequences. Lady Macbeth proves here to be a strong counselor. She already has laid the necessary plans.

> We fail.
> But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
> And we'll not fail.
>
> (1.7.60–62)

Then she offers a detailed plan to accomplish the deed. Macbeth slowly backs away from his earlier moral convictions ("We will proceed no further" and "I dare do all") to a plaintive cry of "If we should fail" and finally to a recognition of the 'wisdom' of her plan, an acknowledgment that boldness carries the day.

To Lady Macbeth, he then asserts:

> Bring forth men-children only!
> For thy undaunted mettle should compose
> Nothing but males.
>
> (1.7.73–75)

He ends this discussion by participating in her analogy of motherhood. (The discussion of murdering Duncan reveals a series of assumptions concerning the supposed difference between men and women, beginning with Lady Macbeth's early cry to the spirits to "unsex me here" that

she may proceed without the compunction traditionally associated with being a woman.)

The thinking that precedes the deed may be said to end at the end of Act I. Macbeth says, "I am settled, and bend up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat" (1.7.80–81). Now we can proceed to see more specifically how Arendt's notion of thinking works in relation to the dilemma faced by Macbeth. According to Arendt, thinking functions by actualizing "the difference within our identity as given in consciousness" ("TMC," p. 37). This dialogue of the two-in-one (i.e., the two parts of the self involved in discussion with each other) calls for harmony with myself for its best functioning.

What does thinking do, actually? It seems likely that thinking is a form of dialogue, an inner analogue to outer conversation. But how can we have a conversation with ourselves? Arendt seeks an answer to that question in a saying attributed to Socrates in the *Gorgias*. He describes the danger that "I, being one, [might] be out of harmony with myself" ("TMC," p. 30). To be out of harmony, however, requires more than one. So thinking, Arendt tells us, is the actualizing of the two-in-one of consciousness, or the "difference within our identity as given in consciousness" (p. 30).

If this two-in-one is to realize its natural disposition to think, Arendt tells us (on the authority of Socrates), it must maintain harmony with itself. To recognize a villain in one's community or even in one's home is difficult, but at least one can go into one's room and shut the door. But if the villain is within, where can one go? The scene in *Macbeth* we are considering may be understood as a piece of ethical thinking that fails—at least as the audience sees it. Macbeth comes in a circle, from considering the deed in all seriousness, to thinking he should not do it, to resolving that it shall be done. The whole process proceeds on the basis of thinking: first in the inner dialogue during which he considers all the reasons not to kill Duncan, then in the dialogue with Lady Macbeth—which could be seen as analogous to an oppositional inner dialogue—in which the virtues of courage and action provide the impetus he needs to bolster his resolve. What differences can be discerned between the two arguments?

The thinking of Macbeth in his inner dialogue appeals to the consequences of action—especially as they return upon the one who acts—to the binding call of trust in its several manifestations and, finally, to the value of Duncan or, in general, of the other who must suffer the impact of one's deed. So his thinking takes account of the

social and personal dangers and consequences of his possible action. The counterargument offered by Lady Macbeth functions on two levels. It appeals to the virtue of courage, which seems to be of high value to Macbeth. And it works through analogy and the appeal to courage to add tinder to the flames of desire. The thinking of Macbeth presents the consequences of action in order to moderate desire's strength. The thinking of Lady Macbeth seeks to exacerbate that strength. Yet that distinction alone does not separate ethical from anti-ethical thinking. There seem to be two distinctions that differentiate these ways of thinking. The difference lies in the particular desire at issue and in the consequences considered.

Ambition is the desire over which the arguments wrangle. Macbeth finds a way to reduce its power over him, a way to cool its fires so as to proceed on a steady course. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, finds a way to appeal to his ambition and his pride so as to goad him on to action. Is ambition then the evil considered here? Does the issue finally come down to a need to stifle ambition? What tricky things such concepts are. Ambition may be considered as either a good or an evil motive. A decision about its moral character cannot be reached from the idea of ambition taken alone. We must consider what the idea amounts to in any particular case. The ambition of Macbeth leads to consequences that he rightly sees as undesirable, even wrong. Killing the king is quite clearly a wrongful act. One difficulty with moral deliberation is that often we must seek a way to demonstrate what we already know. Macbeth seems to have done this satisfactorily in his debate with himself. Killing the king is wrong because it sets the stage for further actions of its kind, because it ignores the connections of trust on which social structures rest, and because the life of Duncan holds value in itself. Ambition, in this case, will lead to destruction and Macbeth recognizes that fact during his inner dialogue. "If it were done, when 'tis done," and the only consequences were good ones, Macbeth's ambition would not be wrong. Lady Macbeth sees, on the other hand, only the specific consequences that she desires—that this act has the power to deliver the crown into their own hands. So she argues for the call of ambition seeing in it only the apparent good she seeks and in his lack of resolve mere cowardice.

The consequences considered by the two arguments fall into separate groupings. Macbeth considers the widest framework of consequences—to himself, to the realm, to the larger values on which life itself rests. Lady Macbeth knows only one set of consequences—will we

or will we not receive now what we have reason to believe is ours. The ethical difference in the arguments lies then in the motivation they seek to effect and in the consequences they anticipate and set forth to guide their deliberations.

The difference in thinking results in a difference in judging. The thinking of Macbeth, when he is alone and considering the ethical concerns facing him, shows a concern for the inner harmony Arendt (following Socrates) suggests may guide thinking in the direction of good judgment. The thinking of Lady Macbeth remains tightly bound around one particular desired end, an end that appears as good but that could not stand up to further questioning concerning its further aims and its structures. Thinking and judging run together in the working out of Macbeth's ethical decision.

"Our ability to judge, to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly" ("TMC," p. 37) makes manifest in the particulars of life the outcome of the inner harmony called for by thinking, Arendt says. If one responds to the claim of events and facts on thinking and to the claim of the two-in-one for inner harmony, the ability to judge "realizes thinking . . . in the world of appearances" ("TMC," p. 37). The end Arendt reaches goes beyond the dissolution of aims and ideals resulting in banal evil. Thinking may dissolve the false certainties by which evil works in the thoughtless. But more than that is needed. What of goodness?

Goodness presents a genuine problem for Arendt, as it does for the Socratic claims upon which she builds. It cannot be based on a new set of rules, a new code of expression and conduct that takes into account the world contemporary to the thinker. As we can see in the approach taken by Socrates, upon which Arendt's discussion depends, the examined life and the thinking that such a life demands will deconstruct any such rules. It is just this Socratic kind of thinking, Arendt says, that prepares the way for the faculty of judgment. But how does this faculty function? This question goes beyond the scope of her essay, yet she offers a hint in section III of her essay and at the essay's end.

The harmony needed for the proper working of thinking's dialogue, the two-in-one of which Arendt writes, leads to outward results through the faculty of judgment. The judging of right from wrong and, as Arendt suggests, perhaps also beautiful from ugly, proceeds on the basis of protecting, caring for, or restoring this inner harmony thinking needs for its work. So, the process of thinking provides its own criteria of judgment through the need for thinking to maintain its own integrity. Its integrity is held together by fulfilling its basic need for

inner dialogue, upon which its possibility rests, through keeping at least a modicum of inner harmony. Without such harmony, dialogue descends into a disorganized shouting match of disconnected parts. As Arendt puts it, ". . . if you want to think you must see to it that the two who carry on the thinking dialogue be in good shape, that the partners be friends. It is better for you to suffer than to do wrong [as Socrates claims] because you can remain the friend of the sufferer . . ." ("TMC," p. 33).

The faculty of judgment moves the process of thinking from the unseen inner dialogue to the arena of common life, the everyday world of human relationships, communities, and corporate tasks. Judging takes the silence of thinking, that hidden inward questioning, out of the realm of inner subjectivity and brings it into the light of human relating. In thinking we may remain alone with our thoughts but they never remain ours only. They work their way out in the world, for evil or for good.

"The manifestation of the wind of thought," Arendt says, "is no knowledge; it is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly" ("TMC," p. 37). Thinking clears the way and provides the ethical and aesthetic justification for that faculty of judgment which "may prevent catastrophes, at least for myself, in the rare moments when the chips are down" ("TMC," p. 37). Arendt never tells us specifically what thinking will do for us; she dare not provide us with particular truths, since each such truth must itself come under the ongoing critique of the thinking self. What we find, however, hidden under the suggestion of the ethical and aesthetic power of thinking, is a fallible but significant guiding rule. Partial truths (such as the important but not ultimate claim of ambition) and pragmatic considerations (such as the search for the means to fulfill one's short-term interests) must never overcome the need of thinking to promote an inner unity of consciousness that will not allow us to forget the larger requirements of long-term consequences, of social trust and obligation, and of the worth of another's life and purposes.

In the end, the evil of Macbeth arises from thoughtlessness; he is persuaded, despite his earlier moral thinking, by the "thoughtless" reasoning of Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth is thoughtless, in Arendt's terms, because she sees only the immediate gratification of one set of desires and rejects Macbeth's attempts to examine the larger picture. Arendt provides a provocative approach to the question of evil by suggesting that banal evil—the most common kind—may be associated

directly with thoughtlessness. If that is so, then thinking provides a potential antidote to evil. To learn to think would offer both the individual and the society protection against the dangers of thoughtless evil.

The tale of Macbeth may further indicate that evil in many of its manifestations, even those that one might consider cases of wickedness rather than mere banality, arises from a failure to think, more specifically, from an unwillingness to enlarge the scope of thinking to cover the greater issues and wider concerns called for in making fully human decisions. If thinking is one of humankind's ultimate activities, and thinking demands the inner harmony to be had only when one has thought through the issues at hand, then thinking offers the most likely safe haven for a human community that cannot depend on authority and obedience to fend off the myopic drive of desire.

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1. Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," *Social Research* 51 (1984): 7–37; hereafter abbreviated "TMC."

2. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Nicholas Brooke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1990).

3. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), pp. 3–4.

4. See, e.g., Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotion* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1985).

5. See, e.g., Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981).