ETHICS AND MORALITY: AN INQUIRY INTO HANNAH ARENDT'S POLITICAL THOUGHT OF ACTION

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Abstract / Résumé

Arendt's concept of political action invites long-standing criticisms concerning its seemingly amorality on the one hand, and admiration regarding her aestheticism as a way to recover meaning in a disenchanted world on the other. Recent scholarship tends to ascribe an ethic of plurality to Arendt and I will join this trend. Drawing upon Paul Ricoeur's distinction between ethics and morality, this essay offers a new response to these worries about amorality by identifying Arendt's ethical and moral commitments about politics, while attempting to value Arendt's deep concern for plurality without sacrificing her emphasis on the revelatory character of action. From the perspective of political ethics, it does so by explicating Arendt's statement that action arises out of "the will to live together with others"; the inherent plurality underpinning Arendt's notion of narrative and "a web of relationships"; Arendtian principles characterized with affective components; and common sense understood in its Aristotelian heritage as a coordinating sense. I argue that Arendt's principled action refers to acting with others in a space of appearance constituted by individuality and distinctiveness. From the perspective of morality, flagging the identity-constitutive role of promising and the logic of forgiving, I contend that both address action. Without a personality underlying the deed, there is no forgiveness. Thus the redemptive power of forgiving is not morally problematic.

Le concept d'action politique d'Arendt a fait l'objet de critiques en ce qui a trait à son apparente amoralité. Ce concept a aussi reçu de l'admiration en raison de son approche esthétique visant à retrouver le "sens" dans un monde désenchanté. Des travaux récents tendent à associer Arendt à une éthique de la pluralité, et je me rangerai à cette interprétation. En me servant de la distinction que propose Paul Ricoeur entre éthique et moralité, j'offre dans cet essai une nouvelle réponse aux critiques qui soutiennent que la théorie de l'action politique de Arendt est non éthique ou amorale. Cet essai vise également à mettre en valeur l'emphase arendtienne sur le caractère révélateur de l'action. Du point de vue de l'éthique politique, je m'y prendrai en expliquant l'énoncé d'Arendt selon lequel l'action émerge "de la volonté de vivre ensemble avec les autres", la pluralité inhérente à la base de sa notion de narratif et de "toile de relations", les principes arendtiens caractérisés par des composantes affectives ainsi que le sens commun tel qu'entendu dans l'héritage aristotélicien, soit comme un sens coordinateur. Je soutiens que l'action raisonnée renvoie à cet agir avec d'autres dans un espace d'apparence constitué à la fois par l'individualité et la spécificité. Du point de vue de la moralité, pour Arendt, la "personnalité" implique déjà une notion de qualité morale. L'acteur politique agirait moralement dans le sens où il fait et garde ses promesses, car il sait que le pouvoir émerge de l'action concertée, cette action étant basée sur la conscience de la pluralité de l'action et du respect des personnes. Le

pouvoir rédempteur du pardon n'est pas moralement problématique, en ce sens qu'il n'y a pas de pardon s'il y a absence de personne.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the result of a year-long exploration with Hannah Arendt's political thought. When I read *The Human Condition* for undergraduate research a few years ago, I could not fully understand what Arendt was talking about. At McGill, I took two seminars with Professor Levy and Professor Roberts, and we read *On Revolution* for purpose of thinking about constitutionalism and revolutions in the twentieth century respectively. The more I became familiar with Arendt's work, the more I appreciated the originality of her thought. In particular, while I admired the revelatory nature of Arendt's theory of political action, I felt that her seemingly agonistic account of action still harbors ethical and moral commitments. Later, I went to a seminar taught by Professor Fiasse, where I was introduced to Paul Ricoeur's work. I thought Ricoeur's paradigm of ethics and morality could be a fruitful avenue of my inquiry into Arendt's political theory of action.

My thanks go first and foremost to my supervisor, Professor Jacob T. Levy, for his generous support and guidance, his patient explanation regarding course materials, his kind encouragement through the writing process and helpful advice with my written work. I'm also grateful for Professor Roberts's mentorship and care. I've been very privileged and fortunate to study political theory at McGill, to participate in the *Research Group on Constitutional Studies*, and to have met professors, colleagues and friends I've met. Thank you to my family, for their love and support. I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother who has always believed in me, even when I didn't believe in myself.

Chapter One

1.1 Introduction

A careful consideration of Hannah Arendt's oeuvre reveals that what concerns her throughout is the fundamental predicament of modernity, which she refers to as "world alienation," denoting the loss of a common world shared with others.[1] Without such a common world, for Arendt, we could no longer look at things from different perspectives and thus cultivate a shared common sense of reality.[2] Politics understood as speaking and acting in a public space no longer carries with itself the shining forth through which human beings are able to acquire immortality in this world.

Motivated by this concern, Arendt presents a political theory of action to salvage human dignity by asserting that action is closely interwoven with the human condition of plurality. For Arendt, plurality suggests that men are all distinct by nature and thus need speech and action to disclose *who* they are rather than *what* they are. In this theory, *who* refers to the uniqueness of a person, while *what* is linked to specific personal abilities or skills, and, as a result, "the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom and […] this freedom is primarily experienced in action."[3] Arendt asserts that action, unlike human behavior, is not subject to moral standards. Because action is unique and *sui generis*, it reaches into the extraordinary and can only be judged by the criterion of greatness.[4]

This account of action, however, has elicited a wide range of responses. On the one hand, it attracts admiration for Arendt's aestheticization of action as a way to recover meaning in a disenchanted world. On the other hand, because Arendtian actors seem to be solitary glory-seekers who distinguish themselves by fierce contests in the *agora*, many scholars have criticized Arendt's theory for being ethically unrestrained or morally problematic.

Responding to these criticisms, my thesis investigates the ethical and moral aspects of Arendt's theory of action. I will draw upon Paul Ricoeur's distinction between ethics and morality (without concerning myself with his emphasis on the primacy of ethics over morality) to facilitate my inquiry. According to Ricoeur, ethics is associated with Aristotelian teleology and morality is defined via Kantian deontology.[5] Since Arendt uses the term "morality" to refer to different kinds of morality, and her critics often use various

[1] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 248.
[2] Ibid.,252-53.
[3] Arendt, "What is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 149.
[4] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 205.
[5] Paul Ricoeur and Kathleen Blamey, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University. of Chicago Press, 2008), 170.

terms to discuss the ethical and moral dimension of her theory, Ricoeur's paradigm will help elucidate Arendt's concepts.

My contention is that Arendt's political ethics is characterized by its deep concern for meaning. Her notions of narrative and principles of action suggest the ethical dimension of her political theory. Arendt's political morality, thus, lies in her notions of the two moral faculties: promising and forgiving, which equally suggest respect for others as equal persons. At the same time, while I appreciate Arendt's deep concern for plurality and her emphasis on the revelatory character of action, I also counter a completely agonistic reading of Arendt's political thought. I hope to demonstrate that underlying Arendt's blunt condemnation of morality is her substantially normative concerns about political action and public life.

My thesis is comprised of four chapters. In Chapter Two, having outlined Arendt's account of action, I first unpack the challenge of a lack of normativity by discussing the agonal aspect of her conception of action. Afterwards, I address normative resources to refute the critique by referring to the deliberative aspect of Arendt's conception of action. Chapter Three proceeds to examine these normative commitments in her theory from the perspective of political ethics. By presenting *narrative action* as an analytical tool, I contend that spectators' narration of action indicates the relationality among actors and spectators, and then I analyze Arendt's incorporation of Montesquieu's conception of principles and the ethical commitments they maintain. In Chapter Four, having examined Arendt's criticism of three types of moral standards, I consider her theory of action from the perspective of political morality. I discuss two moral faculties: promising and forgiving, arguing that they suggest respect for others as equal persons.

1.2 Literature Review

Arendt's theory of political action makes some commentators worried about its lack of normative foundations. George Kateb claims that Arendt is "playing with fire," since Arendt's Greek theory seem to provide no moral limits upon action and she apparently rejects moral motives for action.[6] Likewise, Seyla Benhabib argues that what is missing from Arendt's "factual-seeming description" of human condition is an account explicitly stating why individuals should respect each other as moral equals. She contends that there is a normative lacuna bridging "the anthropological plurality of the human condition to the moral and political equality of human beings in a community of reciprocal recognition."[7]

Responding to the charge of lack of normativity, a number of researchers ascribe an inherent political ethic to Arendt's theory of action due to her phenomenologically oriented approach to political theorizing.

[6] George Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1984), 32–3.
[7] Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Arendt* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 196.

Contrary to Benhabib's criticism of using the merely "anthropological plurality of the human condition" to ground normativity, they argue for the ontological role of plurality as the condition of action in providing the basis for political ethic. Arising from the phenomenological description of plurality, this political ethic is not associated with external foundational constraints, but rather arises in the political realm itself. This political ethic underscores that while the uniqueness and individuality could be secured through the mediation of plurality, actors owe a responsibility to the common world, namely the political realm, which is constituted by different perspectives of opinions.

Alice MacLachlan contends that a political "ethic of plurality" can be identified in Arendt's thought by discussing the moral faculty of forgiving and its role in terms of guaranteeing the shared political realm.[8] By releasing actors from their deeds, forgiveness resends actors back to the political realm. MacLachlan continues to analyze Arendt's notion of principles since they are the standards that determine whether action can be forgiven. MacLachlan briefly concludes that such a criterion to assess principles can be drawn from Arendt's commitment to *amor mudi*, namely care for the world. Nevertheless, MacLachlan's analysis of the criteria for judging principles is cursory: there is a gap between evaluative criteria for principles and care for the world. Though MacLachlan laconically mentions that a shared public world is possible only when men act in concert, she does not elaborate on concerted action, and the closely related concept—power and hence ethical possibilities they contain.

Tracing Montesquieu's legacy in Arendt's work, Lucy Cane argues that they both understand principles as worldly rather than personal, which means principles animate actions in a public space of appearance.[9] While MacLachlan seeks for criteria to evaluate principles, Cane classifies principles into degenerative and (re)generative ones. Unlike universal moral standards, worldly principles work as guide spots for retrospective judgment rather than provide determinate prescriptions upon action and thus they are open to rearticulation. Cane fails to recognize, however, that there are two types of judgment made by actors and spectators respectively. While actors think representatively and demonstrate principles, spectators deliver reflective judgment and narrate the meaning of action. Moreover, Cane risks replacing the role of political action with political judgment in terms of constituting the common world by emphasizing the "worldly" characteristic of principles. Spectators' reflective judgment *per se* by no means gives rise to the common world.

Sophie Loidolt argues that an implicit political ethic, "actualized plurality," lurks in Arendt's thought through a phenomenological approach. In contrast with Cane's focus on the potential of principles as ethical evaluative standards, Loidolt primarily finds ethically relevant elements in promising and forgiving, and she

[8] Alice MacLachlan, "An Ethic of Plurality: Reconciling Politics and Morality in Hannah Arendt," In *History and Judgment*, eds. A. MacLachlan and I. Torsen, Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conferences, Vol. 21.
[9] Lucy Cane, "Hannah Arendt on the Principles of Political Action." *European Journal of Political Theory*, Vol. 14 (2015), 63.

identifies alterity within Arendt's notion of plurality. Loidolt asserts that Arendt's theory of reflective judgment mainly involves communicability and sociability that emerge in a "commonly shared 'care for the world'"[10] and "a phenomenological form of practical reason."[11] By "care for the world", Loidolt means that the stability of the world relies on everyone's constant judgment. Drawing upon Husserl's characterization of practical reason, Loidolt holds that "a phenomenological form of practical reason" refers to "an active rational stance of feeling" appealing to both situational context and affective responses.[12] While MacLachlan illustrates that forgiveness can lead to a political ethic because it is rooted in plurality, Loidolt further explains that the faculty of forgiving is also rooted in the condition of natality, and promising not only reflects both conditions of plurality and natality, but also is essential in constituting the selfhood. Like Cane, however, Loidolt does not distinguish two kinds of judgment in Arendt's thought. Consequently, it is misleading to identify political ethics grounded in plurality with political judgment. Such an interpretation inevitably misses Arendt's point that it is actual communication between plural men, rather than judgments rid of subjective inclinations that constitute the common world.

[10] Sophie Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 249.
[11] Ibid,. 250.
[12] Ibid,.

Chapter Two: Action

Hannah Arendt holds a unique view of what is the political. Arendt begins with the dichotomy between private and public realms. In a private household, men lived together out of necessity. By contrast, the public realm shelters equality and freedom. Politics, for Arendt, is action in the public realm. This chapter will elucidate a sketch of Arendt's account of action in section 2.1. Afterwards, in Section 2.2, I will unpack the challenge of a lack of normativity by discussing the agonal aspect of Arendt's conception of action. Section 2.3 addresses possible ways to refute the critique via turning to the deliberative aspect of Arendt's conception of action.

2.1 Action: overview

Arendt confers dignity on political action, in opposition to the philosophical tradition that prioritizes the *vita contemplativa* over the *vita activa*. While it is philosophers who seek for knowledge of eternity in the *vita contemplativa,* ordinary people strive for immortality through speech and action in the *vita activa.* Arendt holds that there are three kinds of fundamental human activities in the *vita activa*: labor, work, and action, and these activities correspond to three human conditions: life, worldliness, and plurality.

To grasp the conception of action, I will briefly discuss labor and work, and then closely examine action to see what makes it distinct from the other two activities. Labor is the activity that human beings participate in to sustain the necessity of biological life and is related to reproduction and consumption. Due to its close affinity with necessity, labor stands at the bottom of the hierarchy of the *vita activa* and is the most animal-like human activity. Work creates objects that outlast the fabrication process and thus it can achieve permanence to some extent. In addition, work is marked by its instrumental character. For Arendt, the fabrication process is meant to carry out existing models or blueprints.

In contrast with labor and work, action occupies the highest position in the *vita activa* because it is self-contained and it can manifest freedom. Action is self-contained due to its revelatory character, which is closely connected to the condition of action: plurality. Arendt asserts, "Men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world."[13] Because we are all distinct by nature, Arendt maintains that we need speech and action to disclose *who* we are rather than *what* we are. *Who* refers to the uniqueness of a person, whereas *what* is linked to specific personal abilities or skills. In this vein, Arendt cautions us that distinctness is different from

[13] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998),7.

otherness. Arendt understands otherness as multiplication of inorganic objects, whereas she emphasizes that it is only human beings who can express their distinctness through speech and action.

As the condition of action, plurality is of crucial importance in Arendt's theory of action, for it constitutes a space of appearance, which occurs between acting and speaking men. "The space of appearance comes into being where men are together in the manner of speech and action."[14] Actors always need others to serve as audience before whom they can be seen and heard. Such a space of appearance, however, does not necessarily exist whenever men live together in a community. It requires the presence of plural men and the "in-between" space between them.[15] In totalitarian regimes where men are indeed squeezed into one man, there exists no space of appearance. Besides, what happens in a space of appearance constitutes reality. In a world of appearance, Arendt claims that what a person perceives as reality demands others perceive as he or she does. Indeed, she further argues that reality is confirmed by three-fold commonness: the common object, the common context, and agreement on the identity of the object as a result of utterly different perspectives.

The affinity with freedom is another factor that makes action distinctive from labor and work. Arendt presents us with a unique conception of freedom: it is the capacity to begin something new. Contrary to philosophical freedom—free will, for Arendt, the capacity to enjoy political freedom is primarily manifested in action. "To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin, to set something into motion."[16] Such an account of freedom corresponds to the condition of action: natality. Arendt thinks that every new birth has this capacity to begin something new and thus "the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable."[17]

So far, I have illustrated Arendt's account of action. For Arendt, the public realm is the political realm. Action taking place in the public realm is political action, which is further connected to Arendt's understanding of freedom. Such a view of free action, however, might be challenged as being amoral. I will analyze what particular aspect of Arendt's theory of action accounts for such criticism in the next section.

2.2 Action: the agonal aspect

Having illustrated Arendt's account of action, I will explain the problem posed, namely, why Arendt's theory of action is accused of a lack of normativity. Expanding on the revelatory character of action, and the meaning of free action, I will show why the agonal aspect of Arendt's conception of action accounts for the critique.

[14] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199.
[15] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 52.
[16] Ibid., 177.
[17] Ibid., 178.

First, action in the public realm is highly individualistic and revelatory. "In the form of the so-called agonal spirit, the passionate drive to show one's self in measuring up against others that underlies the concept of politics prevalent in the city-states."[18] Indeed, Arendt even claims that action is extraordinary, as she writes:

> Unlike human behavior—which the Greeks, like all civilized people, judged according to "moral standards," taking into account motives and intentions on the one hand and aims and consequences on the other—action can be *judged only by the criterion of greatness* because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and *reach into the extraordinary*, where whatever is true in common and everyday life no longer applies because everything that exists is unique and *sui generis*.[19]

Unique and *sui generis* as action is, it reaches into the extraordinary and could be judged by the criterion of greatness.[20] It seems that actors are solitary glory-seekers who distinguish themselves by fierce contests in the agora, which makes Arendt's account of action seem to be ethically unrestrained.

Second, Arendt contends that "the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, which is primarily experienced in action."[21] She believes that the meaning of freedom is best illustrated by "virtuosity" for politics strongly resembles the performing arts.[22] This novel idea of freedom as virtuosity, however, is ambiguous. In *What Is Freedom?*, Arendt explains:

> Freedom as inherent in action is perhaps best illustrated by Machiavelli's concept of *virtu*, the excellence with which man answers the opportunities the world opens up before him in the guise of *fortuna*. Its meaning is best rendered by "virtuosity," that is, an excellence we attribute to the performance arts (as distinguished from the creative arts of making), where the accomplishment lies in the performance itself and not in an end product which outlasts the activity that brought it into existence and becomes independent of it.[23]

In this passage, drawing upon Machiavelli's pairing of *virtù* and *fortuna*, Arendt seems to think that freedom corresponds with Machiavelli's concept of *virtù*, which is commensurate with "virtuosity." For Arendt then, Machiavelli's concept of *virtù* refers to a kind of excellence as what we see in performative arts. This kind of excellence is virtuosity. What exactly does virtuosity mean? It is worthwhile thinking about Arendt's

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[18] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 194.
[19] Ibid., 205. The emphasis is mine.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Arendt, "What is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, 149.
[22] Ibid.,152.
[23] Ibid.

distinction between performing arts and the arts of making. Her contention is that politics resembles performing arts in the sense that it neither is the result of a designer or a maker, nor does its accomplishment lie in "end product which outlasts the activity." Consequently, virtuosity, namely Arendt's understanding of Machiavelli's concept of *virtù* in this essay refers to resilience, flexibility, and all kinds of other skills could make performance excellent. The emphasis lies on the way in which action is presented.

In *What Is Authority?*, Arendt makes another comment on Machiavelli's concept of *virtù.* She says:

> The *virtù,* on the other hand, which according to Machiavelli is the specifically political human quality, has neither the connotation of moral character as does the Roman *virtus*, nor that of a morally neutral excellence like the Greek άρετη. *Virtù* is the response, summoned up by man, to the world, or rather to the constellation of *fortuna* in which the world opens up, presents and offers itself to him, to his *virtù.* There is no *virtù* without *fortuna* and no *fortuna* without *virtù*; the interplay between them indicates a harmony between man and world—playing with each other and succeeding together—which is as remote from the wisdom of the statesman as from the excellence, moral or otherwise, of the individual, and the competence of experts.[24]

Here, on Arendt's view, Machiavelli's concept of *virtù* is a concept distinguished from Greek άρετη and Roman *virtus*. In the history of political thought, we could briefly identify three concepts of virtue: Greek άρετη, Roman *virtus* and Christian virtues. If Arendt thinks *virtù* is not one of them, according to the conventional interpretation of Machiavelli's political thought*, virtù* points out to personal skills that prince will employ to sustain its state, which could be operated in a completely evil fashion.[25] In this vein, *virtù* refers to such excellence as independence, decisiveness and the tactic to use violence. Hence, political realm is where deceit or manipulation is practiced and free action may seem to be amoral.

But *virtù* understood as virtuosity in *What Is Freedom?* does not indicate a similar affinity to violence. Moreover, for Arendt, violence is inimical to political realm since its instrumental character may curtail the political actor's capacity to self-disclosure. Although Arendt says that Machiavelli's concept of *virtù* is different from Roman *virtus,* I think she actually regards *virtù* as Roman *virtus*. Following Civic Republicanism's interpretation of Machiavelli, I claim that *virtù* is closely connected to Roman concept of excellence, a kind of virtue still harbors "the ethical implications of locating oneself within historical duration."[26] As J.G.A. Pocock remarks:

> In this context the relation of *virtus* to *fortuna* became as the relation of form to matter. Civic action,

[24] Arendt, "What is Authority?" in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, 137.
[25] Nederman, Cary, "Niccolò Machiavelli", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/machiavelli/.
[26] Mira L. Siegelberg, "Things Fall Apart: J.G.A. Pocock, Hannah Arendt, and the Politics of Time," *Modern Intellectual History*, 10, 1 (2013), 131.

> carried out by *virtus*—the quality of being a man (*vir*)—seized upon the unshaped circumstance thrown up by Fortuna and shaped it, shaped Fortuna herself, into the completed form of what human life should be: citizenship and the city it was lived in. *Virtus* might be thought of as the formative principle that shaped the end, or as the very end itself.[27]

For Pocock, Machiavelli's thesis is that thrown upon the contingency of *fortuna* in a secular world, a republic nonetheless could acquire stability by relying on its citizens who share civic virtues. I argue that Arendt's understanding of Machiavelli's pairing of *virtù* and *fortuna* resonates Pocock's interpretation. While for Pocock, it is clear that civic virtue defined in the republican tradition calls for participatory citizenry; the emphasis of participation in politics also looms large in Arendt's conception of political freedom. For Arendt, participation in public space makes the disclosure of self and constitution of reality possible. This point could be further supported if we turn to the deliberative aspect of Arendt's theory of action.

2.3 Action: the deliberative aspect

Since the rest of paper will discuss the normative commitments in Arendt's theory, I will briefly elucidate the deliberative aspect of Arendt's theory of action signifying possibilities to refute the challenge in this section. I will show that while the revelatory character of action may lead to agonism, it depends on not mere togetherness, but togetherness resulting from men acting *with* others. Besides, Arendt's conception of power suggests that Arendt is equally concerned about deliberation, cooperation and formal structures in politics.

First, in contrast with the agonal aspect of action, Arendt contends that action also entail coordination, mutuality and institutionalization. She claims that "the space of appearance comes into being where men are together in the manner of speech and action."[28] Moreover, action unfolds in "a web of relationships and enacted stories"[29] "The disclosure of the 'who' through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web."[30] Furthermore, Arendt praises "the interconnected principle [*sic*] of mutual promise and common deliberation" venerated by America's Founding.[31] These statements all reveal that Arendt is not unaware of normative commitments of action.

While recognizing Arendt's stress of concerted action, I want to argue against the interpretation made by Jürgen Habermas characterized with justificatory practices of discursive reason.[32] By overemphasizing the

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[27] J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Movement: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 40.
[28] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199.
[29] Ibid.,181.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 206.
[32] Jürgen Habermas, "Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power" *Social Research* 44, no. 1 (1977): 3-24.

role of rationality inherent in communication in Arendt's thought, Habermas pushes Arendtian action too far to turn it into "agreement-oriented communication to produce consensus."[33] In doing so, Habermas ignores that Arendt recognizes that it is opinions rather than truth that occupy the political realm and hence it is acceptable to persuade multitude through rhetoric.

Second, Arendt claims that "power is generated when people gather together and 'act in concert'"[34] and "power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence."[35] In contrast with the dominant definition of power in the history of political thought, which refers to the force to constrain and to maintain the relationship between ruler and the ruled, Arendt argues that power arises whenever people act in concert and therefore power is empowerment.

This concept of power corresponds to Arendt's statement that action springs from "the will to live together with others." It also connects with Arendt's notion of solidarity and "it is out of solidarity that they establish deliberately and, as it were, dispassionately a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited."[36] All these elements lay the foundation of a political community with an ethical orientation in Arendt's political thought. I will further my exploration of this topic in next chapter.

[33] Ibid., 213.
[34] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 244.
[35] Ibid., 200.
[36] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 78.

Chapter Three: Political Ethics

In section 3.1, I will investigate Arendt's notion of narrative, and explain how it suggests the ethical dimension of her political theory. In section 3.2, having acknowledged Arendt's debts to Montesquieu's thought, I claim that the animating force of Arendt's conception of principles of action rests on its emotional basis, and contend that Arendt's principled action is "acting with others," which suggests that principled actions are orientated toward sustaining the condition of action: a common world. In section 3.3, I assert that principles can serve as standards to judge action in the public realm, and that spectators' judgment constitutes another part of Arendt's political ethic.

3.1 Narrative Action

I have argued that Arendt's account of action has an agonal aspect. Arendt claims that men are all distinct by nature. Men disclose their unique personal identities by speaking and acting in the public space. For Arendt, action is highly spontaneous and individualistic, and because it is unique and *sui generis*, it reaches into the extraordinary.[37] Arendt claims that "in the form of the so-called agonal spirit, the passionate drive to show one's self in measuring up against others that underlies the concept of politics prevalent in the city-states."[38]

At first glance, it seems as if actors are solitary glory-seekers who distinguish themselves by fierce contests in the agora, which would thus make Arendt's account of action seem to be ethically unrestrained. Nevertheless, I argue that Arendt's notion of narrative suggests the ethical dimension of her political theory. I propose to use "narrative action" as an analytical tool to understand Arendt's conception of action. In Arendt's writings, we can identify three types of *narrative action*: 1) the life story of the actor, 2) historical narrative, 3) and factual truth in politics. Correspondingly, we have three different kinds of spectators: storytellers, historians, and other witnesses of the same events in ordinary public life. Arendt attributes to narration political implications in terms of revealing unique identities of political actors, creating and revitalizing memories of exemplary actions, as well as constituting the factual truth in politics. I will discuss each successively in what follows.

The first type of narrative action concerns the life story of the actor. At the very beginning of the chapter on "action" in *The Human Condition*, Arendt cites Isak Dinesen's words: "all sorrows can be borne if

[37] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 205.
[38] Ibid.,194.

you put them into a story or tell a story about them."[39] This quotation reflects the unifying character of storytelling that, for Arendt, makes sense of heterogeneous elements of a life. It is this sensemaking quality of storytelling that interests her as she notes that "action reveals itself fully only to the storyteller, that is, to the backward glance of the historian, who indeed always knows better what it was all about than the participants. […] Even though stories are the inevitable results of action, it is not the actor but the storyteller who perceives and 'make[s]' the story."[40] In this quote, Arendt identifies two groups of people: actors and spectators. While the former undertakes the action, the latter reveals the meaning of action. Arendt asserts that the "unchangeable identity of the person, though disclosing itself intangibly in act and speech, becomes tangible only in the story of the actor's and speaker's life."[41] What is revealed here is *who* somebody is, which is not commensurate with a universal account of human nature. "Action," according to Arendt, "can be judged only by the criterion of greatness," and greatness is related to human beings' capacity to produce works, words and deeds, which enables mortal men to acquire a sense of immortality by leaving traces after death.[42]

Related to this view on personal identity is Arendt's understanding of history as characterized by contingency and frailty, which are related to the second type of narrative action. As storytellers fit diverse parts into one unified life story, historians weave unrelated events into a fabric about the experiences of speaking and acting men. The historical narrative for Arendt, however, is not to be understood as an encompassing whole or as a process; instead, the emphasis lies in "single instances and single gestures."[43] With the exemplary interruptions occurring in the otherwise circular movement of daily life, men achieve immortality in this world. Here, immortality refers to immortal fame, and "the human capacity to achieve this [is] remembrance."[44] Furthermore, to be immortal requires a public and institutional realm like the Greek *polis* where such historical narratives can be made and told repeatedly. Only by historians' narratives can the actions of heroic actors become eventually heroic and memorable.

When it comes to historical narratives, Arendt argues that they should be created in an impartial way. The exemplars in Arendt's mind are the poet Homer and historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides. Impartiality is illustrated by Homer's decision to present the deeds of the Trojans and those of the Achaeans evenhandedly; it also appears in Herodotus' glorification of the actions of the Greeks and the barbarians; it is further echoed by Thucydides' depiction of the standpoints and interests articulated by all parties engaging in wars. The point is that all three never favor any single party of historical events, but rather impartially express the opposing positions and views of both parties.

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[39] Ibid.,175.
[40] Ibid., 192.
[41] Ibid., 194.
[42] Ibid., 205.
[43] Hannah Arendt, "The Concept of History," in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 42.
[44] Ibid., 43.

Connected with the stress on impartiality implicit in historical narratives is Arendt's observation about factual truth in ordinary politics. This stress leads to the third type of narrative action. In *Truth and Politics*, Arendt proposes a distinction between rational truth and factual truth. Rational truth is mathematical, scientific, and philosophical, whereas factual truth, always related to other people, "concerns events and circumstances in which many are involved; it is established by witnesses and depends upon testimony; it exists only to the extent that it is spoken about, even if it occurs in the domain of privacy. It is political by nature."[45] The political realm is the site that houses narratives of men living and acting together. Once some narratives successfully withstand contestations and prove their objectivity, they attain the status of factual truth. Indeed, here Arendt recalls Homeric impartiality again and names Herodotus as the first factual truth teller.

Underlying each of these three kinds of narrative action is the relationality among a plurality of men and "the will to live together with others in the mode of acting and speaking."[46] I want to stress two points. First, for Arendt, actors need spectators. The "backward glance" of spectators is necessary to release actors from worries about the consequences of their deeds. Consequently, as discussed in chapter two, we have the agonal account of action associated with unpredictability and irreversibility. Arendt clarifies that the meaning of an action is unseen by the actors themselves and that spectators' judgments complete the action. As I will argue in section 3.3, however, this does not lead to the conclusion that spectators' judgments create the common world in which an action could take place, but rather, spectators need actors. Actors' actions provide the raw materials for spectators to judge.

Second, Arendt constantly emphasizes that the practice of narration should value objectivity or impartiality as noted so far. To begin with, Arendt introduces the concept of "objectivity" when she talks about "work," where objectivity emerges in the man-made world established by artifacts. Arendt emphasizes objectivity in the sense that the concrete "object" is out there. She often uses the table metaphor, according to which, the fact that people view the same table from different positions does not result in "the table thereby ceasing to be the object common to all of them."[47] In terms of narrative, objectivity is different from "the allegedly absolute objectivity and precision of the natural science."[48] Arendt carefully distinguishes two slightly different yet possible senses of objectivity in terms of historical narrative. As natural scientists inevitably introduce "subjective" prescriptions upon conditions under which they can conduct scientific investigation, any attempt to select materials made by historians inevitably interferes with the history. As a result, what objectivity means for historian is not non-interference, but rather non-discrimination. They are

[45] Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics," in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 234.
[46] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 246.
[47] Ibid., 87.
[48] Arendt, "The Concept of History," in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, 48.

supposed to tell stories impartially as Herodotus does.

Objectivity is possible only on the condition of the presence of plural perspectives. Arendt's narrative of a political person like Gotthold Ephraim Lessing proves this point. Living in dark times, Arendt believed that Lessing's polemicism was very precious because he insisted that "truth can exist only where it is humanized by discourse"[49] and because he was "concerned solely with humanizing the world by incessant and continued discourse about its affairs and the things in it."[50] Such a world of course rests in different points of view. Hence, Lessing never fears disputes and would not sacrifice the "light and illumination which only the public realm can cast" for the sake of "warmth of intimacy."[51] As Arendt concludes, Lessing, political man as he is, "wanted to be the friend of many men, but no man's brother."[52] Consequently, the underlying ethical orientation here is that the need to protect the condition of plurality is the primary task for political life. "The will to live together with others" is not mere togetherness of any kind, but it specifically refers to the life in the mode of acting and speaking, and it is the life aspiring for immortality in the *polis*.[53]

Returning to Arendt's recognition of the interference historians make in selecting materials, on which Arendt does not elaborate, it is worthwhile to mention that all narratives are not ethically neutral. Any interference rests on a set of evaluative standards. The quotation from Isak Dinesen reveals that Arendt regards narrative as the medium through which the coherence and meaning of a life story could emerge. All sorrows, however, will not become bearable without the help of any intentional and imaginative effort to collect them and organize them in a meaningful way, which is why Arendt claims that greatness is the single standard to assess action in *The Human Condition*. In fact, she also asserts that principles are the guiding criteria by which action is to be judged in the public realm in another essay, "Montesquieu's Revision of the Tradition." In the next section, I will explain Arendt's notion of principled action and demonstrate its ethical orientation.

3.2 Principles of Action

This section will investigate Arendt's incorporation of Montesquieu's conception of principles and the ethical commitments it maintains, which is further divided into three parts. In section 3.2.1, I argue that apart from appealing to rationality, Montesquieu's natural law has a particular emphasis on passion. Principles understood as public passions, therefore, are able to animate corresponding forms of government. Section 3.2.2 turns to Arendt's adaption of Montesquieu's thought: her contention that principles inspire action in the

[49] Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, [1st ed.]. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 31.
[50] Ibid., 31.
[51] Ibid., 30.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 246.

public space. Section 3.2.3 ultimately explains that the ethical commitments of Arendt's account of principles lie in that principled actions are orientated toward sustaining the condition of action: a common world.

3.2.1 Principles in Montesquieu's Thought

Arendt never hesitates to invoke Montesquieu whenever she emphasizes that free action is inspired by a principle in opposition to a prescribed goal or will. In *What Is Freedom?*, Arendt writes: "Action insofar as it is free is neither under the guidance of the intellect nor under the dictate of the will—although it needs both for the execution of any particular goal—but springs from something altogether different which (following Montesquieu's famous analysis of forms of government) I shall call a principle."[54] Because, Arendt directly borrows the concept of a "principle" from Montesquieu to describe her idea of action, I will thus analyze principles in Montesquieu's thought before I elaborate on Arendt's conception of principles.

To understand Montesquieu's conception of principles, we need to examine its basis: Montesquieu's conception of law. According to Arendt, Montesquieu stands out in the Western tradition, for he alone understands law as man-made relationships, namely those which "concern the changeable affairs of mortal men—as distinguished from God's eternity or the immortality of the cosmos."[55] Arendt admits that Montesquieu also assumes there is a divinity above man and speaks of natural law, but the point is that such "natural laws" have nothing to do with a divine authority but only refer to "rules" between men.[56] For him, there is no higher law with absolute validity.

In addition to Montesquieu's non-hierarchical understanding of law, which Arendt remarked upon, I argue that Montesquieu's conception of law is also distinctive regarding another point: his natural law encompasses passion. Though Arendt does not articulate this point, it is closely connected to Montesquieu's idea of principle and underlies Arendt's own notion of principled action. In opposition to the natural law tradition exemplified by Grotius and Hobbes, Montesquieu's natural laws are based on passion and informed by reason. While Grotius grounds natural law in human beings' rationality and the need for self-preservation, Hobbes considers laws of nature as hypothetical imperatives or precepts of reason that articulate to us the most effective means to self-preservation. Both Grotius and Hobbes regard natural law as fundamentally related to the rationality of human beings.

For Montesquieu, law amounts to something more than rationality and refers to the passions of human beings.[57] He speaks of pleasure, rather than utilitarian thinking like the Hobbesian dictates of reason.

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[54] Arendt, "What is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, 151.
[55] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind, Vol. II, Willing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 200.
[56] Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 178.
[57] My analysis is inspired by Sharon Krause's interpretation of Montesquieu. See Sharon Krause, "Laws, Passion, and the Attractions

"As a feeling creature," Montesquieu constantly maintains, man is subject to "a thousand passions."[58] The first natural law speaks of the feeling of inferiority, the second deals with the need for nourishment, and the third talks about the attraction sparked between two sexes. Without exception, in Montesquieu's account of natural law, we find an overwhelming emphasis on the role that the passions play in terms of establishing society. Of course, he does not totally preclude reason from his account of law when he says men also "succeed in gaining knowledge."[59]

Montesquieu's conception of principles builds on such an account of law. Montesquieu distinguishes the nature of government from its principles: "the one is its particular structure, and the other is the human passions that set it in motion."[60] Montesquieu further claims that principles spring from political communities, and he ties various principles to specific types of political regimes accordingly. He enumerates four principles: political virtue in democracy, moderation in aristocracy, honor in monarchy, and fear in despotism.

I argue that Montesquieu's conception of principles should be understood as public passions. To begin with, principles relate to passions and hence they acquire inspiring force. Montesquieu explains, "virtue, in a republic, is a very simple thing: it is love of the republic; it is a feeling and not a result of knowledge; the lowest man in the state, like the first, can have this feeling."[61] Moreover, principles are public because Montesquieu views principles and the social context from which they emerge as mutually dependent. He claims that "love of equality and love of frugality are strongly aroused by equality and frugality themselves."[62] For instance, if a man lives in a good democracy, he is very likely to have virtue and aspire for equality; in turn, his virtuous action contributes to setting up a well-ordered democracy. In a similar vein, Montesquieu notes that "in monarchies and despotic states, no one aspires to equality," because "the idea of equality does not even occur."[63] Hence, Montesquieu's principles should be understood as public passions, which acknowledge the social embeddedness of individual consciousness.[64] The animating force of Montesquieu's principles rests on its emotional basis.

3.2.2 Principles in Arendt's Thought

Arendt's conception of principles should also be understood as public passions, and this conception

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of Right Action in Montesquieu." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 32, no. 2 (2006): 211-30.

[58] Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat, Anne M Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone. *The Spirit of the Laws* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 5.

[59] Ibid., 7.

[60] Ibid., 21.

[61] Ibid., 42.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., 44.

[64] Rebecca Kingston, *Public Passion: Rethinking the Grounds for Political Justice* (Montréal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2014), 115.

also entails a sense of generalization, equality, and mutuality. For Arendt, principled action is concerted action, which reveals her conception of power. Power arises whenever men act together in the public space, which corresponds to Arendt's claim that action springs from "the will to live together with others."[65] The willingness of men to live together with others demonstrates the ethical orientation of Arendt's theory of action. I further argue that this ethical orientation can be specified as the maintenance of a common world and a common sense of reality by analyzing Arendt's claim that the substitute of principles of action is ideology. To substantiate my arguments, I will focus on the principle of solidarity in what follows.

As a principle of action, solidarity inspires action insofar as it arouses the feeling of empathy towards the suffering at a more general level without succumbing to excessive emotional influences. In *On Revolution*, Arendt notes that "terminologically speaking, solidarity is a principle that can inspire and guide action, compassion is one of the passions, and pity is a sentiment."[66] Here, Arendt specifies that the distinction she makes is terminological because each of these three concepts arouse very similar emotions.

Despite the fact that solidarity shares the common emotional basis with compassion and pity, Arendt clarifies that these three concepts are different on three points. First, by considering whether or not a concept includes reason, concerns generality, and can be conceptualized, we can differentiate solidarity from compassion. Arendt claims that solidarity "partakes of reason, and hence of generality, is able to comprehend a multitude conceptually, not only the multitude of a class or a nation or a people, but eventually all mankind."[67] It is because solidarity could be generalized that "it is out of solidarity that they establish deliberately and, as it were, dispassionately a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited."[68] Here, Arendt stresses how important it is to the principle of solidarity for reason to participate in it. By contrast, in Arendt's view, compassion "cannot reach out farther than what is suffered by one person"[69] and thus "comprehend only the particular, but [have] no notion of the general and no capacity for generalization."[70] The first criterion, however, cannot distinguish solidarity from pity because pity also could reach out to the multitude since it maintains the emotional distance between the one who shows pity and the one who is suffering.[71]

Second, we can differentiate solidarity from pity by positing another question, namely whether a concept assumes equality. Here, equality is understood as one of the two constitutive parts of plurality, which is the condition of action. For Arendt, action means political equality, which is not rooted in shared natural characteristics of men but is acquired in the artificial world when plural individuals enter into the public realm.

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[65] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 246.
[66] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 79.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., 79.
[69] Ibid., 71.
[70] Ibid., 75.
[71] Ibid., 79.

While solidarity does not squeeze the worldly space between men and thus respects the individuality of persons, pity discriminates between those who suffer and those who do not.

Third, we can differentiate solidarity from compassion and pity by pondering their political implications. I propose to use "acting as others," "acting for others," and "acting with others" as terms to understand the political differences between compassion, pity, and solidarity.[72] If men act out of compassion, they are "acting as others." Actors identify themselves with the one who is suffering. Politically, the "in-between" space of speaking and acting dissolves. For Arendt, since politics requires plurality, action cannot be based on compassion. If men act out of pity, they are "acting for others," which involves a sentimental distance between actors and those who suffer. Consequently, pity can appear in the public realm, but it cannot sustain politics because pity rests on the discrimination between those who suffer and those who do not. If people act out of solidarity, they are "acting *with* others." A person inspired by the principle of solidarity acts alongside others, which means the actor regards him or herself as participating in concerted action with other equal yet distinctive actors.

In light of these three terms, let us examine these three concepts' differing political implications more closely. Politically speaking, compassion is problematic because it abolishes the worldly space between men. According to Arendt, the crucial elements of politics are "wearisome processes of persuasion, negotiation, and compromise."[73] Compassion, however, guides men to act as others, replying directly to their suffering. Compassion shuts the door to communicative and argumentative interests, which is the content of politics. Since according to Arendt politics requires plurality, we therefore cannot premise action on compassion.

The problem of pity in politics, Arendt claims, lies in the fact that it may give rise to "emotion-laden insensitivity to reality."[74] For example, Arendt observes that during the French Revolution, the boundlessness of pity gave rise to revolutionaries' insensitivity to "reality in general and to the reality of persons in particular."[75] This insensitivity to reality is connected with what Arendt calls the "common rationalization of pity's cruelty."[76] Since pity will lead to acting for others, overwhelmed by the suffering of the multitude, revolutionaries too readily regarded themselves as the "clever and helpful surgeon with [their] cruel and benevolent knife[s]" and they "[cut] off the gangrened limb in order to save the body of the sick man."[77] Pity, in this example, was able to cause the loss of the sense of reality, which led to the glorification of suffering and the exaltation of cruelty as the means to restore humanity.

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[72] My analysis of Arendt' principles is inspired by Christian Volk's intrepretation of Arendt's concept of power. See Christian Volk, "Towards a Critical Theory of the Political: Hannah Arendt on Power and Critique," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 2016, Vol. 42(6) 549–575.
[73] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 77.
[74] Ibid., 80.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

In terms of their political implications, principled actions guided by solidarity, on the other hand, manifest the deliberative aspect of Arendt's theory of action, which entail coordination and mutuality. Arendt claims that "the space of appearance comes into being where men are together in the manner of speech and action."[78] Moreover, action unfolds in "a web of relationships and enacted stories,"[79] and "the disclosure of the 'who' through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web."[80] Furthermore, Arendt praises the "interconnected principle [*sic*] of mutual promise and common deliberation" observed in the founding of America.[81] These statements reveal that Arendt is concerned about deliberation and cooperation, and her principled actions are concerted actions.

While recognizing Arendt's emphasis on concerted action, I argue against the interpretation made y Jürgen Habermas that concerted action is characterized by justificatory practices of discursive reason.[82] By overemphasizing the role of rationality inherent in communication in Arendt's thought, Habermas pushes Arendtian action too far in order to turn it into "agreement-oriented communication to produce consensus."[83] In doing so, Habermas ignores that Arendt recognizes that it is opinions rather than truth that occupy the political realm, and thus persuasion of the multitude through rhetoric is acceptable in politics.

Connected to this account of concerted action is Arendt's conception of power. Arendt claims that "power is generated when men gather together and 'act in concert,'"[84] and that "power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence."[85] In contrast with the dominate definition of power, which refers to the force to maintain a domination-submissive relationship between ruler and the ruled, Arendt argues that power arises whenever people act in concert and hence power is empowerment. This conception of power corresponds to Arendt's statement that action springs from "the will to live together with others," which points out the ethical orientation of Arendt's account of principled action.[86]

To specify this ethical orientation, we need to leave aside the principle of solidarity I have explored so far and turn to Arendt's remarks on the relationship between principles of action and ideology. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt holds that "the substitute for a principle of action, is the ideology."[87] She continues to clarify that "the preparation of victims and executioners which totalitarianism requires in place of Montesquieu's principle of action is not the ideology itself—racism or dialectical materialism—but its

[78] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199.
[79] Ibid., 181.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 206.
[82] Jürgen Habermas, "Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power" *Social Research*, 44.1 (1977): 3-24.
[83] Ibid., 213.
[84] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 244.
[85] Ibid., 200.
[86] Ibid., 246.
[87] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 468.

inherent logicality."[88] These remarks suggest that for Arendt, totalitarian regimes preclude any facts and experience that are solid foundations of life that men used to understand as reality. Consequently, for Arendt, a life living together with others is on the condition of a genuine sense of reality and a common world we shared with others. In the next section, I will explore the meaning of both the concepts of common sense and a common world. In doing so, I will strengthen my arguments that Arendt's political ethics originates from her account of principled action.

3.2.3 Common World and Common Sense

In her essay "Understanding and Politics," Arendt writes:

> The chief political distinction between common sense and logic is that common sense presupposes a common world into which we all fit, where we can live together because we possess one sense which controls and adjusts all strictly particular sense data to those of all others; whereas logic and all self-evidence form which logical reasoning proceeds can claim a reliability altogether independent of the world and the existence of other people.[89]

This passage not only illustrates Arendt's emphasis on common sense understood as a coordinating sense organ, it also points out that common sense requires the presence of a common world. I will examine these two terms closely in the following passages.

Common sense is a central theme in Arendt's works, and it is closely tied to what constitutes reality, and thus it insures a common world shared by others. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt elucidates that "under the conditions of a common world, reality is not guaranteed primarily by the 'common nature' of all men who constitute it, but rather by the fact that, differences of position and the resulting variety of perspectives notwithstanding, everybody is always concerned with the same object."[90] Here, Arendt suggests that the commonness of a "common world" does not entail a "common nature," rather, it relies on different positions and various perspectives resulting from the consideration of the same object. One may wonder, what does it mean that a common world is constituted by diverse opinions? Why does Arendt contend that the destruction of a common world "is usually preceded by the destruction of the many aspects in which it presents itself to human plurality."[91]

In her last treatise, *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt explains:

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[88] Ibid., 472.
[89] Hannah Arendt and Jerome Kohn, *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 318.
[90] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 57-58.
[91] Ibid.

> In a world of appearances, filled with error and semblance, reality is guaranteed by this three-fold commonness: the five senses, utterly different from each other, have the same object in common; members of the same species have the context in common that endows every single object with its particular meaning; and all other sense-endowed beings, though perceiving this object from utterly different perspectives, agree on its identity. Out of this threefold commonness arises the sensation of reality.[92]

In this quote, there are three points to which particular attention must be drawn. First, according to Arendt, "against the subjectivity of men stands the objectivity of the man-made world," and what makes such objectivity possible is human artifacts. Without a common world filled with artifacts, men would no longer be related to each other by tangible things.

Second, the common context here refers to a space of appearance, in which men can distinguish themselves through words and deeds, while also discussing common affairs. While this concept may sound phenomenological, I argue that the concept of "space of appearance" actually corresponds to an institutional concept of a "public space." Additionally, what makes a "public space" public signifies both the quality of publicness, as well as a common world.[93] In *The Human Condition*, Arendt claims that "the space of appearance comes into being where men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government."[94] According to this passage, it seems that a "space of appearance" does not necessarily need to be a public space. Following this logic, Seyla Benhabib has argued that a private salon held by *Rahel Varnhagen* could also be counted as a space of appearance.[95] Yet in her later essay *What is Freedom?*, Arendt makes it clear that a space of appearance is primarily modeled on the Greek *polis*, which is a public realm. She writes: "Such a space of appearance is not to be taken for granted wherever men live together in a community. The Greek *polis* once was precisely that 'form of government' which provided men with a space of appearance where they could act, with a kind of theatre where freedom could appear."[96] Such a space of appearance needs to be the public realm because it is only within a public realm "where freedom is a worldly reality." For Arendt, it is a public space that "words which can be heard, in deeds which can be seen, and in events which are talked about, remembered, and turned into stories before they are finally incorporated into the great storybook of human history."[97]

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[92] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. I, *Thinking* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 50.
[93] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 50.
[94] Ibid., 199.
[95] Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Arendt*, 21, 127.
[96] Arendt, "What is Freedom?", 152.
[97] Ibid.,153.

Third, Arendt stresses that the reality is confirmed as a result of totally different perspectives in positing the same object. Men need a coordinating sense capacity—common sense—to perceive the sameness of the common objects. Arendt's idea of common sense seems to be indebted to two different traditions: Kant's idea of an "enlarged mentality" and Aristotle's conception of "common sense." Arendt occasionally discusses the Kantian idea of "enlarged mentality" through which people are able to make judgments by appealing to common sense in opposition to private feelings. Though Arendt does not explicitly refer to Aristotle, I argue that to what she actually is referring is the conception of common sense coined by Aristotle, and thus her understanding of common sense is actually borrowed from him.

For Aristotle, common sense is the sixth sense which is distinct from the other five senses and is what helps to synthesize all perceptions we perceive to fit them into reality. Arendt discusses this Aristotelian sense of common sense in *The Life of the Mind*, *Thinking*:

> The reality of what I perceive is guaranteed by its worldly content, which includes others who perceive as I do, on the one hand, and by the working together of my five senses on the other. What since Thomas Aquinas we call common sense, the *sensus communis*, is a kind of sixth sense needed to keep my five senses together and guarantee that it is the same object that I see, touch, taste, smell, and hear; it is the "one faculty [that] extends to all objects of the five senses." This same sense, a mysterious "sixth sense" because it cannot be localized as a bodily organ, fits the sensations of my strictly private five senses—so private that sensations in their mere sensational quality and intensity are incommunicable—into a common world shared by others.[98]

In *De Anima* Book III, chapter 2, Aristotle explains how the mind converts sense data from five other basic sense perceptions.[99] While the eye can see the color, the ear can hear the sound, and all five particular sense organs can perceive corresponding senses, it is the common sense that links the different senses in order to formulate a thought of the whole object. Arendt is exactly asserting the same concept here.

There are other passages, however, that seem to suggest that Arendt might have another concept of "common sense" in mind, different from what I have discussed above. In the essay "The Crisis in Culture," Arendt writes:

> [T]hat judgment may be one of the fundamental abilities of man as political being insofar as it enables him to orient himself in the public realm, in the common world […] The difference between this judging insight and speculative thought lies in that the former has its roots in what we usually call common sense, which the latter constantly transcends. Common sense—which the French so suggestively call the "good sense," […] discloses to us the nature of the world insofar as it is a

[98] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, *Thinking*, 50.
[99] Aristoteles and John L. Ackrill, *A New Aristotle Reader* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

> common world; we owe to it the fact that our strictly private and "subjective" five senses and their sensory data can adjust themselves to a nonsubjective and "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.[100]

In this quote, Arendt still addresses common sense in opposition to the five senses, which suggests that she is still directly discussing common sense in the Aristotelian terminology. On the other hand, Arendt also adds the element of judgment through which men are oriented toward the public realm. Judgment is a human faculty that enables men to adjust themselves to a nonsubjective common world. Though Arendt still links judgment to common sense in this passage, it remains unclear how these two faculties fit together with each other and the emphasis seems to shift from the role that common sense plays to that of judgment. In *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, invoking Kant's enlarged mentality, Arendt addresses "*sensus communis*," yet she also broadens this term from common sense to community sense. For example, she writes:

> One judges always as a member of a community, guided by one's community sense, one's *sensus communis*. But in the last analysis, one is *a member of a world community* by the sheer fact of being human; this is one's "cosmopolitan existence." When one judges and when one is supposed to take one's bearings from the idea, not the actuality, of being a world citizen and, therefore, also a *Weltbetrachter*, a world spectator.[101]

In this example, common sense understood as "community sense" reaches to a very abstract level and refers to "the fact of being human," which is achieved through reflections on the world via many different perspectives. As a result, common sense is established in the activity of judging and judgment attains political importance.

Given these variations of Arendt's account of common sense, I maintain that Arendt understands common sense in its Aristotelian legacy for four reasons. First, the passage about "community sense" is Arendt's commentary on Kant's philosophy, which should not be treated literally as her own thoughts. In her elaboration on Kant's idea of common sense, Arendt interprets his concept as community sense, which is invoked in the mental faculty of judgment, meaning that common sense becomes an *a priori* principle. Instead, for Arendt, common sense should be understood as the sixth sense with the coordinating function, which is inevitably linked to contingency and actual human activities outside mental faculties.

Second, from her essay "Understanding and Politics," circulated in 1954, to her most influential book *The Human Condition,* issued in 1958, to her last treatise *The Life of the Mind,* published in 1978,

[100] Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Culture" in *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 218.
[101] Hannah Arendt and Ronald Beiner*, Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), 76. The emphasis is mine.

Arendt consistently and clearly describes common sense as the coordinating sense that fits sense data collected by the other five particular senses together. It is common sense with an intersubjective nature that contributes to securing a common world. Admittedly, Arendt's understanding of common sense might have evolved over time. Since Arendt delivered the lecture on Kant's political philosophy in 1970, it is reasonable to argue that Arendt still regarded common sense as a "sixth sense."

Third, commentators who think that Arendt espouses the Kantian idea of community sense rely on an inaccurate understanding of Arendt's idea of judgment. I will expand more on this point in the next section, but for now I want to mention that the crux of Arendt's political theory is her emphasis on the idea of a common world, which is established through actual political action inspired by principles between plural persons, rather than emerging from the standpoints of others in the mental faculty of judging.

Fourth, if we consider Arendt's conception of freedom as beginning something new, it suggests that she uses the concept of common sense in the Aristotelian tradition. For example, she notes:

> Thus political freedom is distinct from philosophic freedom in being clearly a quality of the I-can and not of the I-will. Since it is possessed by the citizen *rather than by man in general*, it can manifest itself only in communities, where the many *who live together have their intercourse both in word and in deed* regulated by a great number of rapports—laws, customs, habits, and the like. In other words, political freedom is possible only in the sphere of human plurality, and on the premise that this sphere is not simply an extension of the dual I-and-myself to a plural We. Action, in which a We is always engaged in changing our common world.[102]

Again, Arendt makes herself clear that political freedom consists in I-can—I can live a life together with others characterized by concrete words and deeds, through which we constantly engaging in the building a common world.

To this point, I have discussed the meaning of the terms common sense and common world in Arendt's works. Let us return to the passage cited at the beginning of this section when Arendt contrasts principled action and ideology. Arendt tells us that the problem of ideology lies in its logicality, which replaces reality confirmed by different points of view under totalitarian rule. Under totalitarianism, men are squeezed into one man, and various points of view become impossible, causing Arendt to lament the loss of common sense. In a similar vein, when Arendt analyzes the conditions for terror, she points out:

> Loneliness, the common ground for terror, the essence of totalitarian government, and for ideology or logicality, the preparation of its executioners and victims, is closely connected with uprootedness and superfluousness which have been the curse of modern masses since the beginning of the industrial

[102] *The Life of the Mind*, *Willing*, 200. The emphasis is mine.

> revolution […] To be uprooted means to have no place in the world, recognized and guaranteed by others; to be superfluous means not to belong to the world at all.[103]

Loneliness may lead to detrimental political implications because, trapped in subjective experiences, "man remains in contact with the world as the human artifice; only when the most elementary form of human creativity, which is the capacity to add something of one's own to the common world, is destroyed, isolation becomes altogether unbearable."[104] The problem of isolation is that it undermines the common ground through which men not only connect with others by words and deeds, thus attaining a sense of reality, but also the acquisition of a sense of meaning through speaking and acting in a public space.

In contrast with the concept of ideology, Arendt shows us that principled actions are orientated toward establishing and maintaining a common world, in which men are able to act with others. In turn, such a common world is the condition of principled actions. We all bear a responsibility to secure a common world by guaranteeing the plurality of men and the "in-between" space that simultaneously joins and separates them. This task, however, does not take place in the activity of judging as some scholars argue.[105] While I agree with those scholars that Arendt recognizes the political importance of judging, I contend that the establishment of a common world is achieved by political action understood as actual words and deeds. I will expand on these issues in the next section.

3.3. Political Judgment

The last section explored the inspiring force of principles, and the political ethics arising from principled action. The present section concerns Arendt's claim that principles serve as standards to judge action in the public realm. To illustrate her argument, I will show that there are two sorts of judgment in Arendt's thought: actors exercise judgment via representative thought or enlarged mentality, and thus they judge in order to act, whereas spectators such as historians and storytellers render judgment retrospectively and hence judge in order to expound past history, in section 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 respectively. I argue that Arendt's conceptualization of the actor's judgment combines two traditions: the Kantian "enlarged mentality"

[103] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 475.
[104] Ibid.
[105] For example, insisting on Arendt's aestheticization of action, Dana Villa holds that Arendt's turn to a theory of judgment is intended to tame the otherwise unconstrained *agon*. For Villa, Arendt's political judgment completes her theory of political action by emphasizing its initiatory spirit rather than a consensus of action. Villa contends that, by her idiosyncratic appropriation of Kant's critique of judgment, Arendt is able to leave space for deliberation, thus preserving plurality. Likewise, Linda Zerilli contends that for Arendt, spectators create the public space, "in which the objects of political judgment, the actors and actions themselves, can appear." Zerilli articulates that the public realm and common world depend on not only views from different positions, but also people's ability to "think representatively and judge reflectively." See Dana Villa, "Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action" *Political Theory,* 20.2 (May, 1992), 288. And Linda Zerilli, "Value Pluralism and the Problem of Judgment." *Political Theory* 40, no. 1 (2011), 22.

characterized by impartiality, and the Aristotelian *phronê*sis characterized by particularity. The former tradition emphasizes the role of reason in morality, while the latter links moral judgment to the sense realm. With respect to the spectator's judgment, I argue that it largely resembles Kant's reflective judgment. Yet while Kantian aesthetic judgment characterized by exemplary validity resides in a transcendental humanity, Arendtian judgments exercised by impartial spectators resort to principles of specific political communities. After explicating two kinds of judgment in the first two sections, section 3.3.3 addresses the relationship between political action and political judgment in Arendt's thought. I argue that for Arendt political intersubjectivity hangs on political actors' words and deeds instead of their capacity to imagine different points of view that are not their own. Actors are not aware of the principles they might instantiate, whereas spectators are fully able to grasp principles, and thus they immortalize the meanings of actions through narratives. Spectators' judgment constitutes another part of Arendt's political ethics.

3.3.1 Actor's Judgment

In this section, I will discuss judgment exercised by the actor in Arendt's political thought, which seems to include two contradictory elements: a concern with particularity modeled on Aristotle's practical wisdom and a feature of universality originating from Kant's "enlarged mentality." Surveying Arendt's writings, I will elucidate conceptual nuances of the actor's judgment and then argue that ultimately it resembles Aristotle's *phronêsis*. The actor's judgment is future-oriented and its disinterestedness lies in the representation of different points of view. In what follows, I will address two slightly different accounts of the actor's judgment.

In Arendt's essay "Truth and Politics," there is a passage worthy of quoting at length when Arendt introduces the first kind of judgment:

> Political thought is representative. I form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent; that is, I represent them. This process of representation does not blindly adopt the actual view 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. The more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, *the stronger will be my final conclusions,* my opinion. (It is this capacity for an "enlarged mentality" that enables men to judge; as such, it was discovered by Kant in the first part of his Critique of Judgment…) The very process of opinion formation is determined by those in whose places somebody thinks and uses his own mind, and the only condition for this exertion of the imagination is disinterestedness, the liberation from one's own private interest. Hence, even if I shun all company or am completely isolated while forming an opinion, *I am not simply together only with myself in the solitude of philosophical thought*; I remain in this world of universal interdependence, where I can make myself the representative of

everybody else.[106]

Three points deserve our attention. First, given that Arendt is talking about opinion formation in politics here, she is addressing judgment from an actor's standpoint as a kind of political activity that provides guidance for action. This kind of judgment includes two elements: representative thought or enlarged mentality and the formulation of a final decision. Even if Arendt does not explicitly invoke Aristotle here, this kind of judgment clearly resembles the Aristotelian model of action. For Aristotle, action involves three parts: will, deliberation and choice. Concerning Arendt's elaboration, judging as a political activity here also include deliberation and choice. In formulating a political opinion, a political actor tries to represent as many as possible viewpoints. Ultimately, the actor's deliberation leads to action.

Second, Arendt introduces a conception of imagination, according to which one "can make [one]self the representative of everybody else" and thus achieve "liberation from one's own private interest."[107] Given this first account of imagination in Arendt's political thought, I argue that judgment is the capacity to represent perspectives of others in one's mind. Commenting on Kant's political philosophy, Arendt further elaborates that "enlargement of the mind" is defined as "comparing our judgment with the possible rather than the actual judgments of others."[108]

Third, this account of imagination is characterized by disinterestedness, in the sense that judgment "makes the others present and thus moves in a space that is potentially public," and "it adopts the position of Kant's world citizen."[109] Disinterestedness goes beyond self-interest by "'abstracting from the limitations which contingently attach to our own judgment,' of disregarding its 'subjective private conditions […] by which so many are limited'."[110] Building on this idea, Arendt insists that this activity of judging is different from solitude of philosophical thought for the actor is "in this world of universal interdependence."[111]

Given that judgment exercised by the actor is a combination of Aristotle and Kant's ideas, I want to emphasize that this conception of judgment considers particularity and ultimately results in a decision leading to action. This observation is clearer in Arendt's essay "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture," where she further breaks down the concept of judgment, whereby judging seems to become a distinctive faculty from that of thinking:

The faculty of judging particulars, the ability to say, "this is wrong," "this is beautiful," etc., is not

[106] Arendt, "Truth and Politics," 237. The emphasis is mine.
[107] Ibid., 237.
[108] Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy,* 43.
[109] Ibid., 43.
[110] Ibid., 44.
[111] Arendt, "Truth and Politics," 237.

> the same as the faculty of thinking. *Thinking deals with invisibles, with representation of things that are absent*; *judging always concerns participation and things close at hand.* But the two are interconnected. If thinking, the two-in-one of the soundless dialogues, actualizes the difference within our identity as given in consciousness and thereby results in conscience as its by-product, then judging, the by-product of the liberating effect of thinking, realizes thinking, makes it manifest in the world of appearances, where I am never alone and always much too busy to be able to think.[112]

In this essay, judgment is no longer a part of political life associated with representative thought or enlarged mentality. Imagination and its liberating effect are ascribed to the faculty of thinking. Here, Aristotelian heritage looms large, for judging becomes the faculty that deals with particular things at hand. I argue that thinking and judging addressed here are still viewed from the standpoint of the actor because this account of judgment is connected with the direct perception, in opposition to spectator's judgment delivered retrospectively from a distant position. Besides, "thinking" in this passage corresponds to "representative thought" or "enlarged mentality," whereas "judging" parallels the "final conclusions" in the cited passage at the beginning of this section. While thinking resides in the realm of soundless dialogue and withdraws from the world, judging realizes thinking and demonstrates the result of thinking in a world of appearance. Interconnected as they are, these two faculties formulate political opinions. Together, they constitute the actor's judgment as such.

3.3.2 Spectator's Judgment

This section focuses on judgment rendered by the spectator in Arendt's political writings, which is characterized as reflective, impartial, and meaning-endowing. I argue that for Arendt, the loss of common sense in the modern world sparks her thinking on political action and judgment. The spectator's judgment, for her, confirms our existence in the world, an existence which otherwise would be without meaning. In light of this, I will analyze two different accounts of spectators' judgment in Arendt's writings and argue that Arendt's spectator resembles Kant's world spectator with respect to the retrospective nature of their judgment. Consequently, an investigation of Arendt's reading of Kantian aesthetic judgment reveals that Kant's judgment of taste appeals to common sense understood as community sense stemming from transcendental humanity, whereas Arendt's spectator delivers his judgment by taking principles of a political community into consideration.

The essay "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture" cited in the last section illustrates that Arendt shifts from regarding judgment as a political activity to regarding judgment as a mental faculty. This shift, however, does not happen unexpectedly. For example, as early as her essay "Understanding and Politics,"

[112] Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture" *Social Research* 38, no. 3 (1971): 446. The emphasis is mine.

Arendt had another kind of judgment in mind, which she attributed to spectators such as historians and poets in opposition to the actor's judgment. I want to outline four characteristics of understanding as Arendt defined them in this essay. First, Arendt distinguishes knowing from understanding: the former relates to knowledge, the latter contributes to meaning. As I have already discussed in the previous section on the common world, confronting the modern world and the political disasters of the twentieth century, Arendt laments that "what is envisaged here is more than loss of the capacity for political action, […] it is the loss of the quest for meaning and need for understanding."[113]

Second, she asserts that the understanding of history is retrospective, which is distinctive from the kind of judgment passed by actors in the opinion formation process: "the understanding of political and historical matters, since they are so profoundly and fundamentally human, has something in common with the understanding of people: who somebody essentially is, we know only after he is dead."[114] Arendt further holds that understanding is quite remote from action when she claims that "action is to make a new beginning, then understanding becomes the other side of action" because action is future-oriented, whereas understanding is reflective and backward looking. This point is best illustrated when Arendt writes: "we can *understand* an event only as the end and the culmination of everything that happened before, as 'fulfillment of the times'; only in action will we proceed, as a matter of course, from the changed set of circumstances that the event has created, that is, treat it as a beginning."[115] By understanding, acting men come to terms with "what irrevocably happened and be reconciled with what unavoidably exists."[116]

Third, a second conception of imagination in Arendt's thought emerges when she refers to the faculty of imagination "which actually is understanding" as "the gift of [an] 'understanding heart.'"[117] Let me briefly recall that the first conception of imagination refers to representing different points of view. Given her distinction between knowing and understanding, Arendt cautions that "to distinguish imagination from fancy and to mobilize its power does not mean that understanding of human affairs becomes 'irrational.'" Instead, she points out that "on the contrary, imagination, as Wordsworth said, 'is but another name for [...] clearest insight, amplitude of mind, / And Reason in her most exalted mood'."[118] Consequently, Arendt suggests that understanding is accomplished in light of reason. What exactly does imagination mean here? Since action is beginning and in the modern world "we have lost yardsticks by which to measure," imagination is called upon to "to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the set of customary rules which is

[113] Arendt and Jerome Kohn, "Understanding and Politics," in *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, 317.
[114] Ibid., 309.
[115] Ibid., 319.
[116] Ibid., 321.
[117] Ibid., 322-323.
[118] Ibid.

morality."[119] Therefore, imagination is the capacity to cope with the unprecedented reality. To understand is to judge the past from the standpoint of the spectator.

Fourth, according to this account, the disinterestedness of judging is impartiality, which is achieved not by imagination and the representation of different points of view, but by maintaining a substantial distance between the object or event to be observed and the observer. Arendt explains, "This distance of some things and bridging the abysses to others is part of the dialogue of understanding, for whose purposes direct experience establishes too close a contact and mere knowledge erects artificial barriers."[120] In her lecture on Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, Arendt makes a similar observation, "the spectator is impartial by definition—no part is assigned to him. Hence, withdrawal from direct involvement to a standpoint outside the game is a condition *sine qua non* of all judgment."[121] This account of impartiality also strengthens the contrast that while it is spectator who is judging, the actor "[conducts] himself according to an innate voice of reason but in accordance with what spectators would expect of him."[122]

I argue that what Arendt means by understanding is judgment delivered by a spectator. Indeed, her terminology of understanding perfectly explains the meaning and importance of the spectator's judgment. Arendt singles out the meaning of action alone from the performance of action; the spectator's judgment takes up the task to explain the meanings of action, which is exactly what understanding means. As I argued in Section 3.1, storytellers bear ethical responsibility to make sense of lives of actors through their narratives. Likewise, historians are called upon to judge what happened in the past. In doing so, they help recollect endurance and immortalize the moments of human life haunted by finitude. This point is supported by Arendt's essay on the concept of history, her historiography, and her endorsement of Walter Benjamin's work. For Arendt, judging as understanding becomes a form of reconciliation of time and worldliness. To undertake such a kind of reflective judgment, as I will elaborate on later, spectators not only consult greatness, but also turn to principles of action. Since principles arise from particular political communities, I argue that for Arendt, the spectator's judgment is culturally contextualized and it speaks of fundamental values or beliefs that continue to evolve in specific political contexts.

Another account of the spectator's judgment in Arendt's political thought, however, appears to challenge culturally contextualized reflective judgment. According to this account, the spectator's judgment seems to be a mental faculty of judging that is more theoretically buttressed by Kant's aesthetic judgment reaching out to a universal humanity, which is illustrated fully in Arendt's lecture on Kant and her last book *The Life of the Mind*; however, I will explore these two sources and demonstrate the nuances of Arendt's

[119] Arendt and Jerome Kohn, "Understanding and Politics," 321.
[120] Ibid., 323.
[121] Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy,* 55.
[122] Ibid., 55.

conception of spectator's judgment. Although we do not have the chance to read her volume on judging, given the interconnectedness between thinking and judging, we could conjecture what she would have said about judging as a mental faculty by analyzing her finished volume on thinking.

In *Thinking*, drawing upon Kant's distinction between reason and intellect, Arendt asserts that reason relates to thinking, whereas intellect is tied to knowing. Accordingly, there is a distinction between the quest for meaning and the thirst for knowledge. For example, when we use reason to think invisible things, we use intellect to perceive things appear to us, and thinking is linked with thought processes, while knowing is associated with common sense reasoning. Furthermore, Arendt argues that "the need of reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same," which means that the "absence of thought is not stupidity; it can be found in highly intelligent people, and a wicked heart is not its cause; it is probably the other way round, that wickedness may be caused by absence of thought."[123] Such a contrast between reason and intellect enables us to consider Arendt's diagnosis of Eichmann's thoughtlessness. Thoughtlessness, it turns out, has nothing to do with forgetting good manners and habits, nor evil intentions, nor stupidity in the sense of deficiency of comprehension. Instead, it is owing to the inability to seek meaning through a constant questioning.

Based on such a mental faculty of thinking, I argue that understanding in the essay "Understanding and Politics" parallels "thinking" as a mental faculty in *The Life of the Mind* to a large extent, which is demonstrated by Arendt's consistent effort to associate reason with meaning-conferring tasks. There is also a third faculty of judging, however, suggesting that there might exist a new account of spectator's judgment rooted in the faculty of judging, which is distinctive from spectator's judgment as "understanding." Although we cannot read the volume on judging, we might glean some clues from Arendt's lecture on Kant's *Critique of Judgment* because it is often treated as her preparation for her own book.

Arendt remarks on Kant's aesthetic judgment that "the most surprising aspect of this business is that common sense, the faculty of judgment and of discriminating between right and wrong, should be based on the sense of taste."[124] I want to highlight three points about Arendt's analysis. First, Arendt interprets the judgment of taste as political judgment in Kant's thought. Embedded in Arendt's further elaboration of taste judgment is a third conception of imagination, writing that: "the three objective senses have this in common: they are capable of representation, of making present something that is absent. I can, for example, recall a building, a melody, the touch of velvet. This faculty—which in Kant is called Imagination—is possessed by neither taste nor smell."[125] She also claims that "imagination, the ability to make present what is absent, transforms the objects of the objective senses into 'sensed' objects, as though they were objects of an inner

[123] Arendt, *The Life of The Mind*, *Thinking*, 15.
[124] Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy,* 64.
[125] Ibid.

sense." As a result, unlike the two previous conceptions of imagination understood as "representative thoughts" and the "understanding heart," the third account of imagination is the capacity to represent an object that is absent.

Second, regarding the political implications of this account of the spectator's judgment, Arendt claims that "the public realm is constituted by the critics and the spectators, not by the actors or the makers. And this critic and spectator sit in every actor and fabricator."[126] This position is also manifest when she comments on Kant's observation on French Revolution, asserting that "it was precisely this sympathy that made the revolution a "phenomenon […] not to be forgotten"—or, in other words, that made it a public event of world-historical significance. Hence: What constituted the appropriate public realm for this particular event were not the actors but the acclaiming spectators."[127]

If an actor's judging activity is undoubtedly a part of political life, by contrast, spectators such as historians and poets perform their political function by delivering their judgment. Indeed, Arendt contends that strictly speaking, what actors undertake belongs to the political realm, whereas what spectators perform remains outside the political realm. In her essay "Truth and Politics," Arendt argues that "the [impartiality of the historian and the judge] differs from that of the qualified, representative opinion, mentioned earlier, in that it is not acquired inside the political realm, but is inherent in the position of the outsider required for such occupations."[128] The criterion for deciding communicability, Arendt maintains, is common sense.[129] Yet, she cautions that "common sense" used by Kant should be understood as "community sense" that "fits us into a community,"[130] asserting that for Kant, "one judges always as a member of a community, guided by one's community sense, one's *sensus communis*. But in the last analysis, one is a member of a world community by the sheer fact of being human; this is one's 'cosmopolitan existence.'"[131] In the latter quote, we see a kind of judgment reaching out to generality of a pretty high level. Indeed, the person who is judging is "a member of a world community by the sheer fact of being human."[132] This kind of judgment is delivered from the standpoint of spectator: "when one judges and when one is supposed to take one's bearings from the idea, not the actuality, of being a world citizen and, therefore, also a *Weltbetrachter*, a world spectator."[133]

The communicability inherent in the spectator's judgment leaves us with an important interpretive question: does Arendt deviate from the Aristotelian understanding of common sense and turn to a kind of judgment rooted in universal humanity? Admittedly, Arendt's impartial storytellers resembles Kant's world

[126] Ibid., 63.
[127] Ibid., 61.
[128] Arendt, "Truth and Politics," 255.
[129] Ibid., 69.
[130] Ibid., 70.
[131] Ibid., 76.
[132] Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy,* 76.
[133] Ibid.

spectator to a large extent, especially in the sense that both maintain impartiality resulting from a remote observing position. Yet, I argue that Arendt's account is more complex than a simple espousal of its Kantian counterpart. Taking up the universality inherent in Kant's judgment, some commentators argue that Arendt values the importance of political judgment because it is in judging that we citizens feel our freedom and thus realize political intersubjectivity.[134] However, it is my contention that these scholars fail to grasp crucial differences between Kant's idea and Arendt's appropriation of it. To begin with, Kant's concept of judgment is more abstract and formal, as well as grounded in imagination, and is thus devoid of substantially ethical content.

The communicability of Kant's taste judgment ultimately rests in common sense—community sense as Kant defined. The community sense points toward a "cosmopolitan existence," a world community of human beings. As I discussed in the previous section on common sense, however, Arendt understands common sense in the Aristotelian tradition. For Arendt, common sense is a coordinating bodily sense rooted in a particular community. Moreover, insisting on the second account of spectator's judgment, some scholars totally deny the first account of spectator's judgment as "understanding." For instance, Linda Zerilli contends that "spectators do not produce judgments that ought then [*sic*] serve as principles for action for other judgments."[135] This argument, however, does not take into account Arendt's theory of action, nor does it make the distinction between the judgment of the actor and the judgment of the spectator. Furthermore, this contention ignores Arendt's notion that the spectator produces judgment with reference to principles of action; by positing principles of action, the spectator's judgment demonstrates the ethical orientation of a political community.

Judgment rendered by Kant's world spectator eventually resides in a transcendental humanity, whereas Arendt's impartial spectators resort to principles arising from particular political communities. Consequently, I argue that Arendt's conception of a spectator's judgment receives its best formulation as understanding in her early writings. Consequently, scholars should neither interpret Arendt's theory of judgment independent of her writings on action and political culture, nor overemphasize her comment on Kant's aesthetic judgment characterized with universality without considering her fundamental anxiety about the loss of meaning in the modern world, and her understanding of common sense in Aristotelian terminology. For Arendt, the crux of the political task is to find a common ground in a world devoid of meaning. While action constitutes a common world, it is the spectator's retrospective judgment that illuminates the meaning of action. A spectator's judgment is not grounded in a community sense taking all human beings as its members; rather, the judgment appeals to particular principles originating from particular political communities.

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[134] See Linda Zerilli's arguments.

[135] Linda M. G. Zerilli, "We Feel Our Freedom": Imagination and Judgment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt, *Political Theory*, 33.2 (2005), 179.

3.3.3 Political Action and Political Judgment

In the previous two sections, I outlined two kinds of judgment in Arendt's political thought: one from the standpoint of the actor and another from the standpoint of the spectator. Consequently, two conceptions of judgment appear. The first is, judging as a kind of political activity, which is more closely connected to the actor's judgment, while second is judging as a mental faculty, which is more likely to be identified with the spectator's judgment. Moreover, while judgment as a political activity leads to a concrete final decision, thus guiding one how to act, judging as a mental faculty deals with past events without yielding any guidance for future action. Indeed, Arendt explicitly states that mental judgment as such is "on the other side of action."[136] Furthermore, I discussed three conceptions of imagination relevant to judgment: imagination as the capacity to represent different points of view in one's mind; the capacity to understand or to reconcile "a new reality in place of the one that exists;" and the capacity to represent an object that is absent.[137] The first conception of imagination is attributed to the actor's judgment, whereas the second and third are related to the spectator's judgment.

Considering these basic categorizations, in what follows, I will connect all of the ethical elements that I have already outlined and clarify the relationship between Arendt's theory of action and judgment, to demonstrate that for Arendt actions create a common world, and that the spectator's judgment discloses the meaning of actions by referring to principles of action.

To begin with, I want to argue against those who claim that Arendt's theory of action is "beyond good and evil" due to their problematic readings of Arendt's political thought. For example, insisting on Arendt's aestheticization of action, Dana Villa holds that Arendt's turn to a theory of judgment is intended to tame the otherwise unconstrained *agon*. For Villa, Arendt's political judgment completes her theory of political action by underscoring its initiatory spirit rather than a consensus of action. Villa contends that, by her idiosyncratic appropriation of Kant's critique of judgment, Arendt is able to leave space for deliberation, and thus preserves plurality.[138] Likewise, Linda Zerilli contends that for Arendt, spectators create the public space, "in which the objects of political judgment, the actors and actions themselves, can appear."[139] Zerilli articulates that the public realm and common world depend on not only views from different positions, but also people's ability to "think representatively and judge reflectively."[140] As a result, "judgments are by

[136] Hannah Arendt and Jerome Kohn, *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, 321.
[137] My analysis is inspired by Tyner's work. See Andrew H. Tyner, "Action, Judgment, and Imagination in Hannah Arendt's Thought," (Master's thesis, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014), 524.
[138] Dana Villa, "Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action" *Political Theory,* 20.2 (May, 1992), 288.
[139] Zerilli, "We Feel Our Freedom: Imagination and Judgment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt," *Political Theory* 33, no. 2 (2005), 179.
[140] Linda Zerilli, "Value Pluralism and the Problem of Judgment." *Political Theory* 40, no. 1 (2011), 22.

nature intersubjective."[141]

Both Villa and Zerilli, however, fail to recognize these two sorts of judgment in Arendt's political thought, while also misunderstanding the logic between Arendt's theory of judgment and action. Villa is right to emphasize that Arendt cherishes the initiatory character of action, but he fails to see that in order to guarantee the spontaneity of action, Arendt mindfully articulates that the meaning of action is hidden from the actor, and it is the spectator who weaves stories of what has been done. Moreover, without a clear distinction between these two kinds of judgment, Villa and Zerilli mistakenly contend that for Arendt plurality occurs and is maintained through judgment understood as representative thought rather than through concrete political action. Consequently, while Villa downplays "acting in concert" as a crucial part of Arendt's account of action, which she consistently discusses in her works, Zerilli elevates the status of reflective judgment to the extent that Arendt's theory of action becomes marginalized. Both scholars deviate from Arendt's idea that political freedom unfolds in a worldly reality generated by action rather than relying on judging understood as a mental activity. Furthermore, since Arendt provides us with an account of political theory, it is *political* in the sense that she has genuine concerns about the establishment of a public space based on speech and action. No matter how often commentators find Arendt's theory of political institutions thin, the common ground on which people live together in this world occurs when men act in concert, not in every individual's mind. Arendt not only writes about action reaching to the extraordinary in *The Human Condition*, but she also speaks of concerted action exemplified by the foundation of America in *On Revolution*.

Underlying this misapprehension of the logic of Arendt's theory of action and judgment is the misunderstanding of where her idea of political intersubjectivity falls in. Both Villa and Zerilli assert that Arendt analyzes intersubjectivity generated in judgment as the foundation or hope of political life. For Villa, Arendt's turn to Kant's aesthetic judgment and her elaboration on taste show that Arendt is concerned about the "intersubjective nature of both appearances and judgment."[142] Villa premises our capacity for judgment on "our feeling for the world," which requires "neither a transcendental ground for appearances nor universally valid criteria of argumentative rationality."[143] In a similar vein, Zerilli argues that "we feel our freedom," and that judging is the activity that ensures the flourishing of plurality in the political realm. Why does judgment have this enabling function? Zerilli not only holds that Arendtian political ideas rest in a worldly reality in which everyone sees and hears from a different position, but also that everyone has the capacity of imagination, and therefore they are able to think representatively and judge reflectively.[144]

For Arendt, however, political action is the medium through which intersubjectivity is reached. Villa

[141] Linda Zerilli, "We Feel Our Freedom": Imagination and Judgment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt, *Political Theory* 33, no. 2 (2005), 165.
[142] Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 106.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Linda Zerilli, "Value Pluralism and the Problem of Judgment: Farewell to Public Reason," 22.

and Zerilli are correct in claiming that Arendt fixes her attention on our sense perceptions. In particular, her lecture on Kant's aesthetic judgment reveals her concern with "the structure of feeling."[145] Yet, Arendt's concept of common sense should be understood in its Aristotelian heritage. Building on this conception of common sense, the common world depends on a threefold commonness: the common object, the common context, and the agreement upon different views about common affairs. Coordinating five other bodily senses, Arendt's conception of common sense is different from its Kantian counterpart that is attained in thought alone. To rescue the lost common sense, the task for Arendt is to find a common ground through which a plurality of elements could be coordinated. If Aristotle's theory speaks of how five particular senses of a person work, the question Arendt takes up is how different senses of different people can possibly be communicated.

This question of communication leads to my second argument. While it is clear that the political realm for Arendt is intersubjective, I argue that it derives from actual communication and action rather than the purely mental activity of imagination. Unlike Husserl, Arendt does not appeal to a transcendental intersubjectivity. In other words, we cannot know from her texts whether the ego is already intersubjective and communal, but it is certain that Arendt constantly stresses the importance of actual communication.[146] Arendt's political intersubjectivity is not only a form of pre-reflective self-consciousness, but it also relies upon concepts and language. Here, I want to address Arendt's argument that speech is action. Considering the revealing character of action in *The Human Condition*, Arendt holds that "a life without speech and without action" is literally dead to the world.[147] Arendt further emphasizes that "speechless action would no longer be action."[148] Likewise, in her essay "Truth and Politics," Arendt also emphasizes that factual truth exists only if "it is spoken about."[149] For Arendt, factual truth and opinion belong to the same realm, and factual truth becomes truth only because it is confirmed by witnesses.

My emphasis on the communicative action in Arendt's political thought, however, does not go as far as Jürgen Habermas' attempt to articulate a kind of discursive rationality. Contrary to Habermas's claim that communicative action for Arendt is "agreement-oriented" and intended "to produce consensus,"[150] I contend that Arendt is aware that the political realm is where persuasion, negotiation, and compromise take place because Arendt specifically places persuasive speech among citizens in the *polis* in opposition to philosophical truth.[151] Politics is constituted by communication, but Arendt is never prepared to accept

[145] Linda Zerilli, "'We Feel Our Freedom': Imagination and Judgment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt," 159.
[146] Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, 106. See also Janet Donohoe, *Husserl on Ethics and Intersubjectivity: From Static and Genetic Phenomenology* (University of Toronto Press, 2016), 162.
[147] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.
[148] Ibid., 179.
[149] Arendt, "Truth and Politics," 234.
[150] Jürgen Habermas, "Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power," 213.
[151] Arendt, "Truth and Politics," 219.

rational discourse at the expense of plurality that is the very condition of action and the political realm. In other words, Arendt does not endorse the philosophical certainty underpinning Habermas' rationalist approach.

Holding an antagonistic view of philosophical truth, nevertheless, does not give rise to predominant coercion in politics because Arendt expunges violence understood as natural strengths from the political realm. Violence, in opposition to power, often springs from rage that is usually irrational or pathological. Arendt clarifies that the "absence of emotions neither causes nor promotes rationality."[152] Arendt's endorsement of passion in politics consequently brings us back to Arendtian principles and her phenomenological approach. Similar to Husserl and other phenomenologists, Arendt recognizes the affective components implicit in our emotional responses, which distinguishes her theory of action from a formal account often presented by Kantian theorists,[153] while at the same time, Arendt injects a rational element into principles of action as demonstrated in my discussion on the principle of solidarity.

To this point, I have argued against the agonistic interpretation of Arendt's political thought that risks undermining her fundamental concern about political ethics. In particular, I hold that this interpretation crucially misses Arendt's point that the promise of politics lies in actual discourses and actions rather than impartiality acquired in imagination resulting from political judgment. The question remains, however, why does Arendt confer an ethical dimension to action? To answer this question, I want to highlight Arendt's notion of the only "moral precept" of action when she writes:

> These moral precepts are the only ones that are not applied to action from the outside, from some supposedly *higher faculty or from experiences outside action's own reach.* They arise, on the contrary, directly out of *the will to live together with others* in the mode of acting and speaking, and thus they are like control mechanisms built into the very faculty to start new and unending processes.[154]

The autonomy of action, for Arendt, consists in "the will to live together with others." Such a will supposes a common world in which action expresses togetherness as the participation in obligations of a shared life, which is not only constructed through pure deliberation. No matter how heroic Arendtian action may look, whoever wants to offer an agonistic interpretation of Arendt's theory must keep in mind that she describes action as originating from a faculty, which is derived from a fundamental will to togetherness.

Following the understanding of the "inherent political ethic" rooted in a phenomenological account of plurality, I hope that I have elucidated the ethical dimension of Arendt's theory of action in my analysis of

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[152] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 160.
[153] See Drummond, John J., and Lester E. Embree. *Phenomenological Approaches to Moral Philosophy: A Handbook* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011); and Janet Donohoe, *Husserl on Ethics and Intersubjectivity: From Static to Genetic Phenomenology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).
[154] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 246. The emphasis is mine.

narrative in relation to "a web of relationships;" Arendtian principles understood as "acting with others," and the importance of a common world and the only "moral precept," which is "the will to live together with others." Furthermore, I hope that the ethical dimension of Arendt's theory of action can now be understood as intrinsic on three levels. On the first level, plurality is the condition of action. The logic of plurality, as I have elaborated in Chapter Two, invokes mutual ethical demands. The revelatory character of action gives rise to individuality and distinctiveness, which requires the presence of others. Actors demand spectators' judgments to reveal the meaning of their actions, whereas spectators need actors' actions as the raw material for their judgments. On the second level, Arendt contends that action as a faculty stems from the willingness to togetherness. In contrast with dominate view of power as a hierarchical and instrumental conception in the history of political thought, Arendt says that power keeps the public realm and insures the space of appearance, which entails everyone's responsibility to protect the political realm. On the third level, Arendt suggests that a meaningful life is a life in a political community, in which the meaning of action is hidden from the actor and thus motivates more free actions. Arendt further insists that actions are inspired by principles emerging from the community and understood as acting *with* others. The ethical commitments of Arendtian principles consequently orient principled actions toward sustaining the condition of action—a common world.

Chapter Four: Political Morality

From the perspective of morality understood as Kantian deontology, Arendt explicitly condemns moral standards over action and thus rejects a single and self-evident categorical imperative to mandate action. Nonetheless, I argue that Arendt leaves room for respect of others as equal persons. In addition, she is concerned with the dignity of other persons. Section 4.1 addresses what political morality is *not* by examining Arendt's criticism of three kinds of morality in the Western tradition: traditional morality as well as morality arising from philosophical and religious thought. In section 4.2, I will discuss two moral faculties taking part in political morality: promising and forgiving. In explaining the identity-constitutive role of promising and the logic of forgiving, I contend that these two faculties depend on mutual respect between persons.

4.1 What Political Morality Is Not

Arendt's experience with Nazi Germany sparked her thinking on the issue of moral agents and their responsibility in politics. Following her mentor Karl Jaspers and other intellectuals of her generation, Arendt takes up the problem of "German guilt" and provides a rigorous analysis of political morality. In her essay "Collective Responsibility," Arendt claims that "in the center of moral consideration of human conduct stands the self; in the center of political consideration of conduct stands the world."[155] Out of this distinction between self and world, Arendt suggests that morality concerns self, whereas politics relates to world. Specifically, moral concerns are associated with concepts such as guilt and fault, and responsibility is connected with political citizenship.

I will analyze Arendt's books, in particular, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and the *Thinking* volume of the *The Life of the Mind*, and three short essays including "Some Questions in Moral Philosophy," "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship" and "Collective Responsibility." In doing so, I will argue that Arendt's critique of moral standards is more complicated than a blunt rejection at first appearance. While Arendt rejects the tendency of such moral standards to value the personal soul over the fate of a political community, she does not completely abandon the habit or capacity of thinking closely associated with philosophical conscience. Thinking as a kind of activity not only manifests itself in the form of refusing evil-doing and thus attains political significance. For Arendt, it is also of crucial importance for every citizen in ordinary politics to perform their political duties. In other words, while Arendt is cautious of Socratic conscience defined as

[155] Hannah Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," in James W. Bernauer, *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Boston: M. Nijhoff, 1987), 47.

non-contradiction, and its modern articulation as the Kantian Categorical Imperative may jeopardize the political realm, she does not lose sight of the value of them in terms of cultivating citizens who do not obey rules unreflectively. Indeed, Arendt is equally worried about normalized behaviors of people under the modern bureaucracy. What she calls for are citizens undertaking genuine political actions and hence demonstrating political morality.

4.1.1 Arendt's Critique of Morality

Surveying the history of morality, Arendt identifies three sources of moral standards: traditional mores, philosophical thought, and religious prescriptions.[156] In what follows, I will examine three kinds of morality criticized by Arendt from the standpoint of self and world. World, for Arendt, is "the community or the world we live in."[157] Tracing the etymological origin of "morals" and "ethos," Arendt describes the first kind of morality as "manners, customs, and habits."[158] The familiarity inherent in these moral standards allows people easily to accept them, but it also enables them to change them. In pondering the rise of totalitarianism, Arendt laments that such moral standards "collapsed almost overnight" and "could be exchanged for another set with hardly more trouble than it would take to change the table manners of an individual or a people."[159] Specifically, Arendt observes that this is demonstrated by the fact of "how easy it was for the totalitarian rulers to reverse the basic commandments of Western morality—'Thou shalt not kill' in the case of Hitler's Germany, [and] 'Thou shalt not bear false testimony against thy neighbor' in the case of Stalin's Russia."[160] Western society has accepted traditional morality so unreflectively that people habitually conform to whatever social norms are presented to them.

The danger of behavioral conformism lies in the risk of curtailing moral agency. Arendt believes that personality *per se* entails a sense of moral quality in contrast with the "individual properties, gifts, talents, or shortcomings" of a person.[161] Being a person for Arendt means, first and foremost, having the capacity to think independently without uncritically submitting to universal or prevalent moral standards. Conversely, by Arendt's logic, Eichmann represents the exact opposite of a person. With an obsessive obedience to the law of the land, Eichmann readily accepted the moral certainty arising from moral clichés at the expense of being thoughtless. In other words, Eichmann turned himself into a perfect cog by an incessant identification with

[156] I'm inspired by Alice MacLachlan's analysis. See Alice MacLachlan, "An Ethic of Plurality: Reconciling Politics and Morality in Hannah Arendt." In *History and Judgement,* eds. A. MacLachlan and I. Torsen, Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conferences, Vol. 21, 11.
[157] Hannah Arendt, "Some Questions in Moral Philosophy," in Hannah Arendt and Jerome Kohn, *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 79.
[158] Arendt, "Some Questions in Moral Philosophy," 75.
[159] Ibid., 50.
[160] Arendt, "*Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture,*" 436.
[161] Arendt, "Some Questions in Moral Philosophy," 79.

objectified rules and relinquishing all personal feelings and self-interests. Hence, when there is no *person* (in the Arendtian sense) out there, there is no remaining *self*.

Likewise, merely following traditional morality could leave behind the world as well. The problem of traditional morality is that it may give rise to moral indifference under the cover of moral certainty. In analyzing the success of totalitarian propaganda, along with the "radical loss of self-interest" and "the cynical or bored indifference in the face of death or other personal catastrophes," Arendt points out that people ultimately tend to develop "general contempt for even the most obvious rules of common sense."[162] As I discussed in Chapter Three, for Arendt, common world is based on the common sense shared by people of a community. Owing to the lack of self, self-interested modern masses make themselves vulnerable to the lure of consistency stemming from purely logical reasoning and "a mysterious irrational wholeness in man.".[163] This further leads to the breakdown of a common world and thus the traditional morality is unsuitable for politics.

The second type of morality addressed by Arendt is Christian goodness, and she observers that "Christian ethics, based on the faculty of the will, puts the accent entirely on performing, on doing good."[164] Yet Arendt's view of Christian goodness and its relation to self are a bit ambiguous. She claims that religious prescriptions, like philosophical thinking, also turn to self as the ultimate standard. For instance, they appeal to moral precepts such as "Love thy neighbor as thyself," or "Don't do unto others what you don't want done to yourself."[165] At another point, however, she seems to suggest that morality as goodness demands selflessness, for "the ultimate criterion for positively doing good, on the other hand, we found to be selflessness, the losing of interest in yourself."[166] I think Arendt ultimately contends that Christian morality does not emphasize care for the self, because the otherworldliness of Christianity condemns the value of life in this world, and its moral precepts are non-human or superhuman.

When it comes to its relation to world, morality as goodness is inherently associated with worldlessness, as it requires distance from the public realm, which inevitably contradicts the logic of politics. In *On Revolution*, Arendt contends that argumentative reasoning and the arts of persuading are the essence of politics. On the contrary, "the moment a good work becomes known and public, it loses its specific character of goodness, of being done for nothing but goodness' sake. When goodness appears openly, it is no longer goodness."[167] In other words, to ensure pure goodness, good works need to be forgotten instantly once they

[162] Arendt, *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, 316.
[163] Ibid., 337.
[164] Arendt, "Some Questions in Moral Philosophy," 123.
[165] Ibid., 68.
[166] Ibid., 123.
[167] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 74.

are finished and they "[harbor] the tendency to hide from being seen or heard."[168] Thus, good works "can never become part of the world; they come and go, leaving no trace. They truly are not of this world."[169] Goodness echoes action on the point that both demand active performance. Yet, while action occurs in the public realm, goodness as understood by Arendt belongs to the private realm. Ultimately, morality as goodness is not political morality.

The third kind of morality under scrutiny attracts Arendt's most elaborate analysis: morality as conscience arising from philosophical thinking. Unlike the two previous types of morality, morality as conscience turns out to be self-evident. It distinguishes itself as "I *can't* do" instead of "I ought (not) do", which means it is purely negative. In her essay "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," by navigating its etymology, Arendt points out that conscience is consciousness, the faculty by which we become aware of ourselves. Because of the ability to be the witness of ourselves, Arendt thinks that it allows us to avoid hidden crime. She explains it by referring to the exemplar of conscience, Socrates. It is through Socrates that we find "agent and the onlooker, the one who does and the one to whom the deed" was "contained in the selfsame person."[170] Hence, someone like Socrates who is capable of thought always carries with himself "a witness from whom he could not escape; wherever he went and whatever he did, he had his audience, which, like any other audience, would automatically constitute itself into a court of justice, that is, into that tribunal which later ages have called conscience."[171]

The Socratic conscience does not cease to be influential in the history of philosophical morality and it receives its modern adaptation in Kant's moral philosophy. While conscience, for Socrates, means living with yourself and thus avoiding self-contradiction, Kant claims that conscience signifies self-respect. As Kant argues that "I can be said at all to obey the categorical imperative, it means that I am obeying my own reason, and the law which I give myself is valid for all rational creatures, all intelligible beings no matter where they may have dwelling place."[172] Like the Socratic conscience, the Kantian categorical imperative is "not a matter of concern with the other but with the self, not of meekness but of human dignity and even human pride."[173] Unlike the Socratic conscience, Arendt underscores that the Kantian categorical imperative carries with it a sense of absoluteness and thus is undeniably inhuman, as "it is postulated as absolute and in its absoluteness introduces into the interhuman [*sic*] realm—which by its nature consists of relationships—something that runs counter to its fundamental relativity."[174]

While Arendt claims that philosophical conscience as morality may give rise to political implications

[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid., 76.
[170] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 92.
[171] Ibid., 92.
[172] Arendt, "Some Questions in Moral Philosophy," 69.
[173] Ibid., 67.
[174] Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 27.

under extreme conditions, which I will analyze in the next section, she argues that, "as citizens, we must prevent wrong-doing because the world in which we all live, wrong-doer, wrong-sufferer, and spectator, is at stake; the City has been wronged."[175] For Arendt, what matters is not personal integrity, but rather the community as a whole. From the standpoint of the world, Arendt would have replied to Socrates, "what is important in the world is that there be no wrong; suffering wrong and doing wrong are equally bad. Never mind who suffers it; your duty is to prevent it."[176] The internal plurality inherent in the intercourse of man with himself, however, does not parallel plurality as the condition of action. Thinking as an activity fundamentally contradicts action. Arendt recognizes that thinking "lacks all outward manifestation and even requires a more or less complete cessation of all other activities, it constitutes in itself a highly active state."[177] Yet thinking by nature is completely stillness and signals withdrawal from the world, which belongs to the *vita contemplativa* instead of the *vita activa*.

4.1.2 Philosophical Conscience As Political Morality

I have discussed Arendt's critique of three kinds of morality due to their self-centered character. Though Arendt criticizes philosophical conscience as morality in politics owing to its exclusive focus on self, she admits that it may have political importance because it urges people to think critically without submitting to the rule of government in a way that may ultimately sabotage the political realm. This type of morality becomes political insofar as the result of thinking motivates actors to care for the common world. Moreover, I will argue that even though Arendt explicitly claims that "in the center of political consideration of conduct stands the world,"[178] she indeed demands that political actors have the ability to care for *self* in the first place. As I already mentioned above, in discussing traditional morality, Arendt articulates that personality *per se* supposes moral status, which is rooted in a person's capacity to think. Thinking is a two-in-one dialogue, and moral agency indeed requires caring for the self. In other words, Arendt does not draw a clear line between care for the self and concern about the world concerning morality. She actually holds a dialectic view on the relationship between self and world in terms of political morality.

Undoubtedly, the task to understand Eichmann's role in one of the most excruciating political catastrophes in the twentieth century on the one hand, and his shallowness and bureaucratic emptiness on the other spurrs Arendt to find out the political implication of philosophical conscience under extreme conditions. To begin with, Eichmann's defense of his deeds based on cog theory is invalid for what is on trial is not the

[175] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, *Thinking*, 182.
[176] Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," 47.
[177] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 291.
[178] Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," 47.

political system but a person with body and soul. It is true that the imputability of crimes arises from evil intent and Arendt observes that Eichmann does not have evil motivations, as she says that "inclinations and temptation are rooted in human nature."[179] Nonetheless, Arendt contends that Eichmann should be accountable for his deeds. Contrary to Eichmann's claim that he was the perfect harbinger of the Kantian categorical imperative by adhering to the moral rule consistently, Arendt would have responded to Eichmann by saying that he totally misunderstood the categorical imperative. Because philosophical conscience demands reflective thinking and remembrance, which means people "would still be able to live in peace with themselves after having committed certain deeds."[180] For those under the Nazi regime who chose not to cooperate, "they refused to murder, not so much because they still held fast to the command 'Thou shalt not kill,' but because they were unwilling to live with a murderer—themselves."[181] Arendt insists that Eichmann is imputable because of a banal kind of evil, which is understood as thoughtless from the standpoint of philosophy rather than radical evil emerging from human nature.

I want to show, however, her explanation of why philosophical conscience as morality may prevent evil-doing is controversial. In *The Life of the Mind*, in figuring out what makes us think, Arendt says that Socrates would reply: "The quest for meaning causes men to think."[182] Since "thought's quest is a kind of desirous love" and men love what they lack, the objects of love are beauty, wisdom and justice etc. By contrast, the ontological status of evil consists in nothingness and thus they are not objects of thinking. Following this logic, Arendt argues that no one would commit evil voluntarily. It is in this sense that anyone who can think like Socrates would be convinced that it is better to suffer wrong than to do it. But we must be careful, as Arendt premises this conclusion on the condition that "*you are in love with wisdom and philosophizing,* [and] *you know what it means to examine*."[183] While the examination is further characterized as a silent two-in-one dialogue with oneself and thus prevents men from doing evil, I am going to illustrate that Arendt deviates from her initial assumption that the love of wisdom prompts men to think.

To find "the possible interconnectedness of non-thought and evil,"[184] Arendt is unsatisfied that Socratic conscience needs to rely on some noble nature, namely, the love of wisdom. Instead, she firmly believes that there must be something inherent in thinking itself that could hinder evil-doing. Out of consciousness, "his solitude actualizes his merely being conscious of himself."[185] The duality of oneself makes thinking a dialogical activity. Arendt adds that, "the self, too, is a kind of friend."[186] Talking with

[179] Arendt, "Some Questions in Moral Philosophy," 62.
[180] Hannah Arendt, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship," in Hannah Arendt and Jerome Kohn, *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 44.
[181] Ibid., 44.
[182] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Thinking, 178.
[183] Ibid., 182.
[184] Ibid., 179.
[185] Ibid., 185.
[186] Ibid., 189.

oneself just like talking with a friend. The criterion for dialogue carried among friends, Arendt remarks, is "Do not contradict yourself."[187] Why should you not contradict yourself? Arendt cursorily suggests that this means one is able to live with himself in peace, in other words, "being one" or maintaining the harmony of the soul. But she never clearly explains what is "harmony." Consequently it remains equivocal how this two-in-one dialogue could give rise to moral judgment and moral conduct accordingly.

Considering her attempt to link Socratic dialogue to Kant's Categorical Imperative defined as "consistency of thought,"[188] Arendt seems to suggest that the harmony of soul refers to the rule of reason understood as logical thinking. This conception of reason is different from what Socrates calls "the quest for meaning." Arendt's attempt to ascribe evil-doing to thoughtlessness by referring to the lack of two-in-one dialogue belies the assumption that self-evident moral convictions such as the love of wisdom occurs to person like Socrates. For her argument to be valid, Arendt has to admit that there are some positive moral beliefs and then the merely formal examination of consistency of thought could prevent one from committing evil.

If we return to Arendt's characterization of Socratic conscience noted above, non-contradiction means that men "in love with wisdom and philosophizing" will not do something that contradicts their moral convictions. It is thanks to love of wisdom that men as such will not seek the nothingness—evil. In the essay "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," Arendt explains that moral propositions are self-evident so they cannot be proved.[189] And "with sufficient reason before you, you cannot fail to act accordingly."[190] So the process runs likes this: first, there are some self-evident moral precepts that could tell you right and wrong;[191] second, those who are capable of thought will have a dialogue within themselves and they will act without contradiction to what appeals to them as moral propositions. Therefore, the rule of non-contradiction rely on the reason of myself and the self-evident moral truth occurs to me.

Accepting this explanation of a rule of non-contradiction associated with moral convictions, a problem arises. What if self-evident moral truths held by individuals become conflictual? It remains ambiguous how potentially contradictory moral truths could coordinate with each other toward the common good of a community. When Socrates says, "it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong." what he means is that it is better to suffer wrong from the standpoint of the law of the land rather than to do wrong from the standpoint of my conscience. On the one hand, Socratic conscience could prevent evil deeds because the internal self-evaluation prevents one from doing evil even if the crime might be hidden from others or legalized by the state. In the same respect, those who think critically will act according to "something which

[187] Ibid.
[188] Arendt, "Some Questions in Moral Philosophy," 67.
[189] Ibid., 77.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid., 75.

was self-evident to them even though it was no longer self-evident to those around them" and "they never doubted that crimes remained crimes even if legalized by the government."[192] On the other hand, Socratic conscience is dangerous in the sense that it may lead to moral uncertainty. Thrown back upon themselves, Athenian youth find they are stripped from the comfort of obeying traditional beliefs unreflectively. Instead, they are called upon to think and judge according to what dawned on them as moral truths. Socrates is guilty of corrupting the Athenian youth for he lets them no longer obey the traditional values of the *polis*.

So far, my analysis reveals that since philosophical conscience relies on self-evident moral truths and concerns self rather than world. When hese moral precepts held by individuals are beneficial for the permanence of a common world, they attain political influence and become political morality. Under "boundary situations," Arendt elucidates:

> When everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join in is conspicuous and thereby becomes a kind of action. In such emergencies, it turns out that the purging component of thinking (Socrates' midwifery, which brings out the implications of unexamined opinions and thereby destroys them—values, doctrines, theories, and even convictions) is political by implication.[193]

Thinking ceases to be a politically indifferent activity under political emergencies, for it encourages people to refuse to follow rules blindly and hence it prevents people from evil-doing that may ultimately damage the political realm. Thinking becomes political morality by calling upon people to take responsibility of insuring the common world. It is at this point that thinking ceases to be purely self-centered and becomes closely connected to the world. In other words, for Arendt, ideal political actors must be moral agents instead of thoughtless people. They are able to think independently and adhere to their own moral convictions, which may raise questions against the positive law of the city and thus challenge the endurance of the city on the one hand, but on the other hand, also secure the political realm when it has been contaminated by political evil.

Therefore, ideal political actors for Arendt are good citizens who hold self-evident moral convictions yet also are aware that concern for a common world must trump care for the self under most conditions. But it remains ambiguous when the right moment comes. Arendt seems to be pretty optimistic that political actors are able to judge when existing morality should take precedence over the harmony of their souls, and when they should withdraw their support for the government and adhere to their own conscience "governed by neither legal nor moral nor religious strictures."[194]

I have to caution, although Arendt recognizes that philosophical conscience may take on political

[192] Ibid., 78.
[193] Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, *Thinking*, 192.
[194] Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 29.

implications, this by no means suggest that she abandons her fundamental position that what constitutes the political realm are discourses instead of silent thinking process alienated from this world. Thinking is solitary and passive by nature. By contrast, politics for Arendt is based on actual communication and diverse opinions. Hence, philosophical conscience may have political implication under extreme conditions but it is not politics *per se*. Actors need to take responsibility for their deeds only when they perform them in the public space. The result of thinking in solitude must be communicated among men, which is unequivocally demonstrated by Arendt's discussion about discourse in dark times. She says:

> However much we are affected by the things of the world, however deeply they may stir and stimulate us, they become human for us *only when we can discuss them with our fellows*. *Whatever cannot become the object of discourse—the truly sublime*, the truly horrible or the uncanny—may find a human voice through which to sound into the world, but it is not exactly human. We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human.[195]

Clearly, when Arendt points out the political implication of conscience as morality, she nonetheless is cautious that politics is constituted by communication rather than via silent thinking. The importance of speaking lies in that it serves as the vehicle not only for making the results of our thinking "sound into the world" but also laying the foundation for us to confirm worldly realities. To conclude, Arendt criticizes traditional morality, morality stemming from philosophical conscience and religious precepts because they are all concerned with self rather than world. They are relevant to what occurs inside rather than what happens between individuals. The next section will discuss what constitutes political morality for Arendt by focusing on her writings on two moral faculties: promising and forgiving.

4.2 Promising and Forgiving

In addressing Arendt's refutations of traditional moral standards and Christian goodness, and her qualified approval of philosophical conscience, my investigation suggests that she envisages political morality concerning *both* self and world, in opposition to her explicit statement that morality relates to self whereas politics deals with world. In this section, I will argue that the problem of political morality for Arendt is how plural individuals are able to maintain and share a common world by dissecting her accounts of the two moral faculties: promising and forgiving. Section 4.2.1 investigates the faculty of promising, which derives its

[195] Ibid., 24. The emphasis is mine.

validity as moral standard from the mere fact that "men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world."[196] It is *political* in the sense that it does not appeal to any transcendental values associated with philosophical ideas or perfection of soul linked to religious precepts. It imposes *moral* obligation upon actors because Arendt believes that human beings are innately responsible persons and are able to see the possibility of promise—power. In section 4.2.2, I will explore the faculty of forgiving, which attracts some commentators' worry that such a redemptive power may lead to irresponsible actions. On the one hand, Arendt claims that forgiving eliminates unnecessary burdens on actors and thus guarantees the initiatory character of action. On the other hand, forgiveness is the relationship in which "what was done is forgiven for the sake of *who* did it."[197] The constitution of a *who* requires to show respect for other persons in the public realm.

4.2.1 Promising

In this section, I will argue that the promise rooted in plurality suggests that for Arendt there is mutual respect among persons in the framework of Kantian deontology. Contrary to a Kantian norm that could be applied unconditionally to individuals sharing universal reason, Arendt stresses the recognition of other persons as distinctive subjects from oneself. The recognition of plurality indicates the possibility that men could bind themselves into a community by making and keeping promises. For Arendt, men not only owe respect to other equal persons but can further see the mechanism of power that arises when "men join themselves together for the purpose of action" and thus would like to bind themselves via promising.[198] Arendt emphasizes the power created by plural persons, exemplified by America's Founding. The foundation of America is based on mutual promise and common deliberation among a plurality of persons, which demonstrates the "world-building capacity of man in the human faculty of making and keeping promises."[199] In sum, Arendt's conception of promising shows her attempt to consider morality through a phenomenological approach and echoes Kant's concept of respect for person; thus Arendtian action is not morally unconstrained.

Before I turn to Arendt's notion of promising, I will elaborate on the Kantian deontology that will illuminate the moral commitments of Arendt's theory of action. From *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, we know that Kant expounds his view of morality as a categorical imperative and holds that we must "act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal

[196] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7.
[197] Ibid., 241.
[198] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 165.
[199] Ibid., 165.

law."[200] Kant further argues that "the will is thus not merely subject to the law but is subject to the law in such a way that it must be regarded also as legislating for itself."[201] Here we encounter Kant's version of philosophical conscience that resembles the Socratic non-contradiction rule, which is closely linked to the possession of autonomy. Being moral means to be autonomous. Moral agents are those who have a rational will that could impose moral rules characterized with universal validity upon themselves, and have the capacity to self-legislate and act out of respect for the moral law.

Regarding such an account of the categorical imperative alone, Arendt is antagonistic toward its absoluteness and its application at the interpersonal level. Because "the categorical imperative is postulated as absolute and in its absoluteness introduces into the interhuman [*sic*] realm" and "runs counter to its fundamental relativity."[202] Kant also maintains that "man, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will. He must in all his action, whether directed to himself or to other rational beings, always be regarded at the same time as an end."[203]

In light of Ricoeur's analysis, I argue that the notion of "existing as an end in itself" suggests that moral agents should treat other persons as equals. Every person is an end in himself, and consequently we should respect the distinctiveness and diversity of other persons. It is at this point that respect for persons tends to be in conflict with respect for the moral law rooted in autonomy that relies on a universal rational will, because the former values plurality yet the latter eliminates any room for otherness.[204]

Now I will discuss Arendt's notion of promise. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt introduces the faculty of promising and discusses its two important characteristics from the perspective of phenomenology. Making and keeping promises assumes our identities, because "[w]ithout being bound to the fulfillment of promises, " Arendt says, "we would never be able to keep our identities."[205] Because of the darkness of the human heart, we cannot escape contradictions without making promises in the presence of others and adhering to promises we made accordingly. Keeping one's word, as I illustrated in discussing the revelatory character of action in Chapter Two, denotes the permanence of selfhood in the flow of time. Out of some voluntary effort, we express our willingness to remain the same person by being loyal to our own words and selfhood.

Arendt further argues that promising, in addition to being identity-constitutive, becomes the remedy for unpredictability associated with action. "Binding oneself through promises," Arendt states, "serves to set up in the ocean of uncertainty, […] let alone durability of any kind, would be possible in the relationships

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[200] Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals,* transl. by J.W. Ellington, introd. by W.A. Wick (Indianapolis, Hackett, 1994), 30.
[201] Ibid., 38.
[202] Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 27.
[203] Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 35.
[204] Paul Ricoeur, *One Self as Another*, 226.
[205] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 237.

between men."[206] Such an account of promise is future-oriented and it may challenge the conception of freedom. If one promises to do something in future, would it inevitably curtail his or her ability to begin something new? Arendt is not unaware of this potential problem posed by promise. Meanwhile, she does not want action to be so unpredictable that it is totally stripped of reliability. She reminds us that to promise is not to decide the course of the future, as "when this faculty is misused to cover the whole ground of the future and to map out a path secured in all directions, [the broken promises] lose their binding power and the whole enterprise becomes self-defeating."[207] Ultimately Arendt values human beings' capacity to take initiative and is cautious about the danger of a self-perpetuating process without any space for future action, although she recognizes the importance of agreement among plural persons.

More importantly, Arendt reminds us that the faculty of promising closely corresponds to the human condition of plurality. Making promises "rests on experiences which nobody could ever have with himself" and is "entirely based on the presence of others."[208] Otherness denotes fundamental distinctiveness that cannot be reduced to one single rational will. The emphasis on otherness suggests a mutual respect toward a distinctive Other. Respect of plurality means respect of person. Therefore, although Arendt rejects a universal standpoint, she moves away from the Kantian categorical imperative defined as a supremely authoritative standard applying to every rational being. Her own notion of promise is rooted in plurality, and hence it does not sacrifice respect for persons.

So far, my analysis of Arendt's conception of promise seems to be at interpersonal level and all we have is her emphasis on plurality that I interpreted as respect for persons. How, then, is this account going to operate in the political realm? Speaking of political morality, Max Weber has famously noted that politicians must strike a balance between "the ethic of conviction" and "the ethic of responsibility" in his piece *Politics as a Vocation*.[209] Defining the state as a monopoly of power, Weber favors the ethics of responsibility for politicians. Most recently, Michael Walzer frames the problem as "dirty hands," which refers to the dilemma that modern politicians encounter when they find that they cannot govern while being innocent at the same time.[210]

Having briefly introduced the context to situate my own analysis, I would argue that the problem of "dirty hands" is not the issue that bothers Arendt, if we investigate political morality from the standpoints of self and world. The worries of Weber and Walzer suggest that they are troubled by the "dirty hands" problem for they think politics from the standpoint of self. The reason why both see the tension between a good man and a competent politician is that they presuppose the existence of some types of morality external to the

[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid., 244.
[208] Ibid., 237.
[209] Max Weber et al., *The Vocation Lectures* (Indianapolis (Ind.): Hackett Pub., 2004).
[210] Michael Walzer, "Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 2, no. 2 (1973), 161.

political realm.

Instead of considering the issue from the standpoint of self, as I argued above, Arendt ponders the issue from the standpoint of world. Therefore, there is no such tension between the politics of virtue versus the politics of interest. Yet this does not preclude the possibility for us to identity a mode of political morality. For Arendt, political morality is rooted in plurality. In accordance with Kantian deontology, I contend that it means respect of persons. Then the question we should ask is why individuals would bind themselves with others through mutual promise? Where does this binding force come from? In other words, we could anticipate that the problem associated with political morality for Arendt is not how political actors could avoid committing evil while doing the right thing. Rather, the question is why would political actors choose to enter into mutual promises and then keep them accordingly. It is a *moral* question not in the sense of how to justify the need that politicians may have to "dirty their hands," but rather in the sense that political actors give their words and consequently constrain their future actions. Arendt's emphasis on plurality implicit in a phenomenological account of promise demonstrates its political implications fully in her valorization of the America's Founding, to which I turn to explain what does *political* morality exactly mean for Arendt.

Arendt's secular interpretation of America's Founding is an exemplary case of "the human faculty of making and keeping promises" resting on mutuality, reciprocity and equality.[211] It turns out that the binding force of mutual promises means that actors should not only not lose sight of respect for other persons while binding themselves to promises, but also envision the possibility of the constitution of power by fulfilling promises. In *On Revolution*, comparing the different views on human nature held by French and American revolutionaries, Arendt comments that the Founding Fathers were wise:

> They could afford to be realistic and even pessimistic in this matter because they knew that whatever men might be in their singularity, they could bind themselves into a community which, even though it was composed of 'sinners', need not necessarily reflect this 'sinful' side of human nature. Hence, the same social state which to their French colleagues had become the root of all human evil was to them the only reasonable life for a salvation from evil and wickedness at which men might arrive even in this world and even by themselves, without any divine assistance.[212]

Clearly Arendt believes that men could bind themselves without requiring them to have integrity, because "the hope for man in his singularity lay in the fact that not man but men inhabit the earth and form a world between them. It is human worldliness that will save men from the pitfalls of human nature."[213] No matter whether men are innocent or not, they are able to establish a bond among themselves without appealing to

[211] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 166.
[212] Ibid., 165.
[213] Ibid.

transcendental ideas or religious precepts. But the question remains: why will political actors make and keep their promises in the first place?

Arendt holds that power emerges whenever men act in concert: "Binding and promising, combining and covenanting are the means by which power is kept in existence."[214] Indeed, she further claims that the force or possibility of this kind of binding resides in "the world-building capacity of man in the human faculty of making and keeping promises."[215] Before I elaborate on the logic of promising and its relation to power, one passage deserves quoting at length:

> The grammar of action: that action is the only human faculty that demands a plurality of men; and the syntax of power: that power is the only human attribute which applies solely to the worldly in-between space by which men are mutually related, combine in the act of foundation by virtue of the making and the keeping of promises, which, in the realm of politics, may well be the highest human faculty.[216]

On the one hand, "the grammar of action" refers to plurality as the human condition of action. Action is available as long as other people are present. This recognition of otherness means political actors show their due respect to other persons. On the other hand, "the syntax of power" reflects the idea that power unfolds in the worldly in-between spaces when men act together. Mutual promising is a way in which men act together, and founding is the action that further solidifies the outcome of mutual promises. The reason why political actors bind themselves to each other is because of the outcome of concerted action—power. In other words, while power is the result of concerted action, it also is the force that spurs political actors to bind themselves with others through concerted action such as mutual promising. The concerted action is based on their recognition of plurality as the condition of action and respect for persons. Arendtian morality is *political* in the sense that it concerns itself with the establishment of a common world.

Alternatively, one may ask, what if political actors lose their faith in the creation of power and hence act immorally, in the sense of refusing to keep mutual promises? This is the case Arendt tackles when she comments on civil disobedience. She regards civil disobedients as a group of people who take a stand against the government through their concerted action. Insisting that it is conducted in spirit of the "art of associating together," Arendt claims that civil disobedience represents a form of voluntary association established horizontally.[217] These activists may break the law and disobey legal authorities. But politically, their actions demonstrate "the world-building capacity of man."[218] In this respect, by withdrawing their support from the

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[214] Ibid., 166.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Hannah Arendt, "Civil Disobedience," in *Crisis of the Republic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 94.
[218] Arendt, *On Revolution*, 166.

existing political authority, political actors as such are destroying something by breaking positive laws. On the other hand, their actions are creating something, just as the American Founding Fathers did. Admittedly, political morality as such is pretty volatile and poses problems for the stability of a political regime. But this is an element embedded in Arendtian political morality, which makes itself resemble a revolutionary spirit to some extent. It provides some predictability towards the future insofar as there is still room for free action. This idea entails that Arendt's theory of politics is a particular form of politics that relates to the constitution of a political community, which concerns how to house a space of appearance in which men could present themselves through words and deeds. Given Arendtian political morality understood as such, if one asks how is it possible for politics to avoid violence, we could answer that Arendt indeed recognizes that violence is inevitably associated with foundation. As the foundation of Rome that Arendt thinks highly of, the founding moment of a regime is inevitably violent to some extent. But the point is, Arendt instructs us to view politics as something fundamentally different from either domination or a mere strategic power struggle. Indeed, she envisions politics as concerted action, through which the actors regard each other as equal persons and thereby realize the dignity of human beings.

4.2.2 Forgiving

If Arendt's account of promising corresponds to the Social Contract tradition regarding the foundation of political obligation, her endorsement of forgiveness in politics becomes problematic, because it may release actors from their obligations. What if the agonistic aspect of Arendt's theory of action gives rise to violence or morally irresponsible action? If we accept the faculty of forgiving inherent in action, will it necessarily free agents from the inexorable consequences of their actions? I will argue that Arendt understands forgiveness in two different senses: forgiving as one of the two faculties that "do not arise out of another and possibly higher faculty" but represent "one of the potentialities of action itself,"[219] and forgiving as a kind of action that "acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it."[220]

While as a faculty, forgiving, according to Arendt, insures the initiatory character of action by releasing actors from unintended consequences. Arendt also argues that this embedded mechanism of action not only serves as the remedy for irreversibility of action, but also is one of the *moral* faculties because it resends actors back into the political realm. Political actors are responsible for speaking and acting in such a way that they bear a collective responsibility with other fellow citizens to establish and maintain the political realm. Rooted in the condition of plurality, forgiving as a kind of action is prompted by "regard for the person

[219] Ibid., 236-237.
[220] Ibid., 241.

from the distance" instead of love, which is often regarded as making forgiveness possible.[221] For Arendt, forgiveness's *political* potentiality is grounded in respect. She maintains that respect does not entail intimacy, whereas love eliminates the in-between space between plural individuals.

Arendt's theory of action, as I have argued, responds to the malaises of modernity. Among the political issues of concern to her are the phenomenon of political evil and the question of "imprescriptibility" of crimes against humanity after the Second World War. I think these issues propelled her to specify the political potential of forgiveness. In *The Human Condition*, recognizing the irreversibility of action arising from its interruptive character, Arendt introduces the faculty of forgiving by emphasizing its role of releasing actors from consequences of their actions. That the ability to forgive mitigates the tragic nature of action echoes my previous argument that Arendt is aware of the structural violence embedded in political action. The remedy, however, runs the risk of losing sight of serious past wrongs and incurring further irresponsible actions and ultimately rendering justice absent. Moreover, one may wonder, is forgiveness conditional or unconditional? Are all wrongs or political evils forgivable? What is the relationship between forgiveness and responsibility?

To answer these questions, we should pay attention to the political perspective of Arendt's account of forgiveness in contrast with a broader philosophical approach. Jacques Derrida asserts that there is forgiveness, yet pure forgiveness "in the face of the impossible," is exceptional and extraordinary.[222] For Derrida, forgiveness actually means to forgive the unforgivable.[223] By unpacking the meaning of forgiveness from the religious heritage and legal conception of imprescriptibility, Derrida suggests that forgiveness amounts to an idea exceeding the institutions of law and politics. Derrida's deconstruction of the concept of forgiveness implies that his transcendental idea of unconditional forgiveness very much resembles divine grace in theology. It remains unclear whether forgiveness is suitable in politics.

By contrast, Arendt provides us with a political conception of forgiveness. According to Arendt, the faculty of forgiving arises out of the faculty of action, which depends on the condition of plurality. Since it is associated with the human capacity to act, forgiveness is called upon to respond to trespasses in everyday life by which actors can be released from wrongs unknowingly committed.[224] On the one hand, this conception of forgiveness is clearly mundane, and it focuses on the role that forgiveness plays in ending the misdeeds. Although Arendt is aware of the redemptive power of forgiveness in assuaging resentment by contrasting forgiveness with vengeance, she is less concerned with the emotional suffering of victims and relies upon the possibility of forgiveness in re-establishing relationships between perpetrators and victims. Arendtian

[221] Ibid., 243.
[222] Jacques Derrida, "On Forgiveness." in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, transl. by M. Dooley and M. Hughes, with a preface by S. Critchley and R. Kearney (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 32.
[223] Ibid., 33.
[224] Ibid., 240.

forgiveness is political in the sense that it attends to restoring the common world that both perpetrators and victims share.

On the other hand, such an understanding does not abandon the interruptive characteristic of forgiveness cherished by Derrida, for Arendt further reminds us that "[f]orgiving, in other words, is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven."[225] Unlike Derrida, Arendt ascribes an extraordinary character to forgiveness, as it relates to concrete everyday transgressions rather than to an absolute exceptional ideal. While pure forgiveness for Derrida is to forgive the unforgivable, Arendt holds that we see the unexpected nature of every action of forgiveness. Her understanding of forgiveness is political because it does not relate to some abstract theoretical idea but rather is a kind of action.

Unlike Derrida for whom pure forgiveness is unconditional and seems never to be fulfilled, Arendt asserts that forgiveness is conditional, since "it does not apply to the extremity of crime and willed evil."[226] In this respect, while forgiveness responds to ordinary misdeeds, Arendt thinks that God will take care of rare crimes and willed evil at the Last Judgment, where it is just retribution rather than forgiveness that will operate. I want to caution, however, that Arendt's invocation of Jesus of Nazareth is not religious. She writes, "certain aspects of the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth […] are not primarily related to the Christian religious message but sprang from experiences in the small and closely knit community of his followers."[227] Here, Arendt clearly highlights that Jesus of Nazareth's recovery of the political implication of forgiveness should be interpreted in a secular sense, namely, it is not the Christian religious message but that of "closely knit community." While God will take care of things unforgivable, for Arendt forgiveness *per se* is a human experience.

This secular aspect of forgiveness demonstrates itself fully when Arendt claims that it is not out of love that we forgive. Contrary to Christian belief that "only love can forgive,"[228] Arendt holds that love is too narrowly circumscribed, and it squeezes the "in-between" space between individuals. In criticizing the unworldly nature of love, Arendt is no longer addressing forgiveness as a faculty but as a kind of action that "acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it."[229] Only inspired by other principles will the action of forgiving take place in the public space.

On Arendt's view, the inspiring principle of forgiving is respect, which operates "in the larger

[225] Ibid., 241.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Ibid., 239.
[228] Ibid., 242.
[229] Ibid., 241.

domain of human affairs."[230] Being a person is the necessary condition of respect. The person we respect is the person we will forgive. In addition, Arendt also tells us, "the same who, revealed in action and speech, remains also the subject of forgiving."[231] Respect, according to Arendt, resembles friendship in the Aristotelian sense, which has nothing to do with intimacy or closeness. It is "a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us."[232] "Respect, at any rate, because it concerns only the person, is quite sufficient to prompt forgiving of what a person did, for the sake of the person."[233] The logic of forgiveness for Arendt is that we forgive the deeds for sake of *who* did it.

The fact that the object of Arendtian forgiveness is the person and the inspiring principle of forgiveness is respect signals Arendt's positive account of political morality. The crux of this kind of morality is respect for persons. I argue that there are two components of Arendt's account of personhood. First, a person is a *who,* depending upon plurality in order to disclose his or her unique selfhood in a common world. The disclosure of a *who* not only confers meaning on action, but also invites respect from others. Second, a person is a *who* who has the capacity to think independently. In addressing "personality" in the section on "Arendt's Critique of Morality," I have pointed out that for Arendt, personality *per se* denotes moral sense because it requires the capacity to think critically. Arendt's concept of *who* refers to selfhood (as in my interpretation of Arendt's narrative action in *The Human Condition*) and personality (as in Arendt's short essay "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy".)

Such an understanding of personhood inevitably requires respect for persons. Since political action depends on the condition of plurality, otherness is constitutive of a person's selfhood. Although Arendt does not explicitly use the term "alterity", according to which one has responsibility to respond to the call from the vulnerable other[234], her conception of plurality shows that the *who* is constituted through social encounters with others. More importantly, Arendt's emphasis on the identity-constitutive role of promise and mechanism of forgiveness illustrates that the *who* acquires its identity only if he or she can keep promises with and forgive other people. It is through speaking and acting with others that political actors learn what it is to be responsible. Conversely, the ability to be responsible is constitutive of being a person. Responsibility is something a person has to own to become a *who*. The conception of responsibility not only refers to the moral rules or principles an actor could refer to, it also demonstrates that to be a person requires "respect for persons" in the first place. For Arendt, political actors are innately responsible. In this regard, Arendt remarks, "in granting pardon, it is the person and not the crime that is forgiven; in rootless evil there is no person left

[230] Ibid., 243.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Emmanuel Levinas and Philippe Nemo, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2011).

whom one could ever forgive."[235] With this exclusive focus on the person, I think it is at this point that Arendt's notion of respect makes her theory of political morality stand close to Kantian deontology.

This account of political morality distinguishes itself from a juridical model of responsibility associated with consequential ethics. Following the juridical model, to be responsible means one is to be liable for the harm done. In the context of criminal law, it means to be punished, whereas in civil law, it refers to one having to pay compensation or make reparation. Within both contexts, the juridical concept of responsibility seeks to connect the agent with the action that has already occurred. Two considerations mark this concept of responsibility. First, responsibility is retrospective and it concerns past harmful deeds instead of some possible future effects may prove to be detrimental. Second, holding an agent accountable presupposes that an action can be clearly imputed to him or her. As Ricoeur's quotation goes, "to impute an action to someone is to attribute it to him as its actual author, […] to make him responsible for it."[236]

Now it is clear that the worry concerning Arendt's account of forgiveness, that it may free agents from the inexorable consequences of past actions, is posed from the perspective of the juridical concept of responsibility. But to criticize Arendt's theory of action through this juridical perspective faces a series of problem. First, contrary to the framework of juridical responsibility focusing on past harmful action, the object of Arendt's forgiveness is the person rather than any wrongful deeds. Second, we cannot identify the agent of action. Arendt contends that, while the life story reveals an agent, "nobody is the author or producer of his own life story" and "this agent is not an author or producer."[237]

[235] Arendt, "Some Questions in Moral Philosophy," 95.
[236] Paul Ricoeur, 'The Concept of Responsibility: An Essay in Semantic Analysis' in *The Just*, trans. (D. Pellauer, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 14.
[237] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 184.

Conclusion

I began this thesis by suggesting that we could find normative commitments in Hannah Arendt's political theory of action. In attempting to defend this argument, I draw upon Paul Ricoeur's paradigm of ethics and morality, which helps us to identify scattered elements in Arendt's writings. I outlined Arendt's theory of action (Chapter 2), and explained that Arendt regards action as distinctive from labor and work because it is self-contained and it is the activity through which human beings realize freedom. On the one hand, I argued that the revelatory character of action and Arendt's novel idea of freedom justify the critique that her theory of action is unethical or amoral. On the other hand, in contrast with the agonal aspect of action, I found Arendt's account of action has a deliberative aspect, which underscores deliberation, cooperation and mutuality. Her conception of power corresponding to "the will to live together with others," and the principle of solidarity also suggest the possibility to refute the charge concerning normativity.

From the perspective of political ethics (Chapter 3), firstly, I argued that, for Arendt, life is a narrative that is not written by actors themselves but rather by storytellers and historians. The way in which a story is narrated inevitably relies on ethical standards. Secondly, by elucidating Arendt's incorporation of Montesquieu's conception of principles understood as "public passions," I contended that Arendt's account of principles imply that principled actions are orientated toward sustaining a common world in which action unfolds. Thirdly, while actors exercise judgment through representative thought and enlarged mentality, I maintained that spectators make ethical judgments about action and reveal the meanings of action. These three parts constitute the ethical commitments of Arendt's theory of action.

From the perspective of political morality (Chapter 4), firstly, I argued that underpinning Arendt's blunt critique of moral standards is her concern with the dignity of other persons. Surveying Arendt's critiques of three kinds of morality that are unsuitable for politics due to their self-centered character, I argued that Arendt does not draw a clear line between care for the self and concern about the world, but she holds a dialectic view on the relationship between self and world concerning political morality. For Arendt, ideal political actors are good citizens with self-evident moral convictions, who care about themselves but also know that assuming the responsibility for the common world is their paramount task. Secondly, I argued that for Arendt, both the faculties of promising and forgiving are rooted in the condition of plurality. Men not only owe respect to other equal persons but are further able to see the possibility of power when "men join themselves together for the purpose of action" and thus would bind themselves via promising. Forgiving as a kind of action is prompted by regard for other persons instead of love. The *political* potential of forgiveness is grounded in respect.

I hope my paper will reveal the possibilities that Arendt points out in terms of constructing a political community that harbors a sense of responsibility to the common world derived from different points of view. Arendt's theory of action could facilitate our thinking about the tension between unity and difference within a political community, while providing us with an illuminating model of political imaginary.

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