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HANNAH ARENDT AND THE ISSUE OF RESPONSIBILITY

by

GORDANA DASA DUHACEK

A Dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School-New Brunswick

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

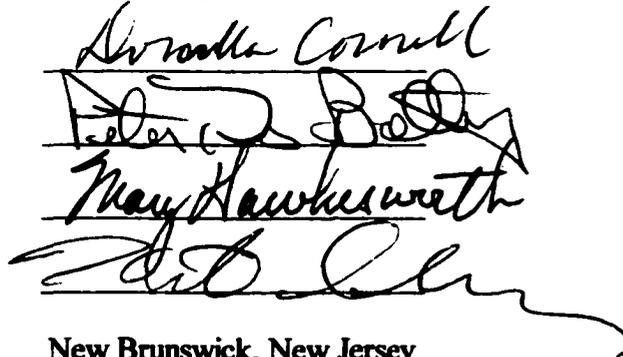
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Professor Drucilla Cornell

and approved by



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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Hannah Arendt and the Issue of Responsibility

by GORDANA DASA DUHACEK

**Dissertation Director:
Drucilla Cornell**

Hannah Arendt has designated the twentieth century as the century of totalitarian policies of evil. As if detached from this responsibility, being primarily an ethical category, has not been analyzed as a political issue. This text attempts to situate responsibility within the political. The aim is to use Hannah Arendt's political philosophy as a framework and extract relevant categories and arguments so as to set the parameters for the concept for political responsibility.

Although the text is written against the backdrop of the recent history of the Balkans, it is primarily focused on theoretical queries: the relevance of Arendt's theory today; the difference between guilt and responsibility; the scope of personal responsibility/guilt. The text addresses a significant issue of collective responsibility; and, if it does exist, how is it to be construed.

Therefore the thesis brings together all the issues relevant to responsibility, the most significant being the category of judgment, but includes also forgiveness and time, refugees and space. The text is geared toward the construction of citizenship as the bearer of responsibility and the primary guarantor of the future.

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INTRODUCTION

Aim of the thesis

The central theme of this text is the issue of responsibility. The aim is to search through the work of Hannah Arendt, a foremost uncompromising political theorist of our time, and extract relevant categories and arguments in order to set the parameters for the concept of political responsibility.

Responsibility has so far either been discussed as an ethical category, or has been underlying the political analysis of evil. In the first case the analysis – although having benefited from the philosophical approach - has primarily been focused on the individual, her immediate concerns that do not necessarily constitute the relevance of the political. More importantly, in the second case the analysis - undoubtedly politically relevant, since it addressed head-on the policies of evil - did not focus on the issue of responsibility; rather, this was obscured and buried in the overwhelming presence of the evil. It is my contention that in reference to the burning problems of our world neither approach will suffice.

Hence the aim of this work is to indicate the elements and point to the direction for a politically relevant theory of responsibility. Hannah Arendt's political theory, though incomplete in some critical points, has come far in setting the parameters for political responsibility. However, in this particular aspect the interpretations of her work have not, for the most part, fully made use of it.

The main advantage of Arendtian approach is not only the possibility of highlighting *political* responsibility - and thus adequately addressing the issue as such – but also emphatically connecting it to judgment. Arendt's theory also provides landmarks

for a full understanding of these categories since their comprehensive analysis requires that they be placed within the main coordinates in our world of political action: time and space.

Background, Serbia 1987-2000

The following vignettes are only pieces of a mosaic; they are a part of anecdotal material, and as such can only serve as an initial query, a point of departure for research.

Scene One: A Portrait on the Wall

It is the tradition of the Serbian rural and even a would-be urban population to decorate the furniture with embroidery. In some parts of the country there exists a special tradition to weave portraits as small tapestries following a blueprints that circulate among the women. Before the WWII the portraits on the wall were of King Alexander, a monarch of Serbian dynasty, and a king of Yugoslavia. In the decades after the WWII one could find portraits of Tito thus weaved and embroidered. Towards the end of the 80s and well into the last decade in many houses these were taken down and women had taken to weaving portraits of Slobodan Milosevic. These were to hang next to the patron saint of each home.

Under those portraits oftentimes, the 'man of the house' would in a political discussion before, or in the wake of any of the numerous elections, indubitably thoroughly dissatisfied by the state of affairs in his country - where he was cheated out of his crop which almost had no market value, and where his son was on some battleground - ask the question, if not Milosevic, *who* then?

The concept of the country without a strong personified leadership, without a portrait on the wall was, and, in many homes still is, beyond comprehension.

Scene Two: A Musical Concert

In 1994 in Belgrade Djordje Balasevic, a local singer, gave a musical concert, described as “the last musical defense of Belgrade”, referring, among other things, to the tension between the rural and the urban, the representative of the former being in this case the city of Belgrade, which thus took the side and symbolically stood up for Vukovar, Sarajevo, Mostar. The magazine reporter spoke of “16 000 unarmed musical fans”¹, an audience which found its specific form of resistance to the current official policy and within that articulation managed to gather a number greater than most anti-war manifestations. The reporter goes on to say:

“It is possible that the atmosphere of hopelessness...the sum of despair, made the concert hall an island which was forbidden to the madmen of all shapes and sizes... It is possible that this was the last trace of Europe in these parts, the moment we buried all our illusions or, finally, it was possible that the audience may have recognized in his old songs completely new messages and in the drunken state of nostalgia for the peace believed in the salvation, which will never come... The painful recognition of the past through his peacetime songs seemed like collective psychotherapy; words like sea, train, travel were synonyms of the amputated country, of the space, which is today as close to us as any twilight zone... And when through the darkness his song *Travel on, Europe* was heard:

We are the guilty ones

.....

We are the guilty ones for letting them

.....

Not all those infantile ones, who dreamt of the guns

We are the guilty ones for retreating

The guilty ones are not the depressive, the mad

The psychos who destroyed and now offer us shovels

We are the guilty ones

Not the sedatives which failed to restrain them

¹ Petar Lukovic, “Putuj, Evropo”, *Vreme*, Belgrade, No 169, pp. 48-50.

*We are the guilty ones for not speaking out
Travel on, Europe...*

.....there was not a person in the concert hall that did not take his message literally as the political diagnosis of Serbia as it is, far away from any life (...). Such a concert could easily be imagined in Paris or London – but never could it happen in those cities that four concerts became the essence of life ... as if with *Travel on, Europe* we said goodbye to all our neighbours and friends...²

Scene Three: Women in Black

Since October 9, 1991, from the very beginning of the war in Croatia, starting first as a small group, and then growing in numbers, Women in Black, dressed accordingly, stood in silent protest, holding unambiguous anti-war slogans in plain sight of downtown Belgrade. This highly charged political activity has been taking place *every* Wednesday, without fail, regardless of weather or the political climate, making it the only continuous protest against the war. While making a material statement, by their bodily presence, they have exposed themselves to public abuse and accusations of betraying their national interests. Their intent was a conscious act of subversion. "Identification with the states, with male militaristic states means to assume the role of an accomplice in war and war propaganda," writes Stasa Zajovic in one of the texts that has come to be known under the telling title, *I am disloyal*; she further explains that "Self determination of the state has nothing to do with women's self determination; it means I accept that the so called national leaders speak in my name, in the name of the nation. The national militarists have appropriated our cultural heritage. I believe that we can redefine [it], so that we do not renounce our women's heritage, but retain a sense of belonging *based on choice*, not imposition."³ Stasa Zajovic is one of the first Belgrade feminists, decisive and persuasive,

² Ibid.

³ Stasa Zajovic, "I am Disloyal" in *What Can We Do for Ourselves*, Belgrade, 1994, p. 51.

she is the *spiritus movens* of Women in Black. Her pacifism is unshakable and recognizes no exceptions.

The activities of Women in Black are central to the process of constructing the political subjectivity of women on the public scene, by raising the issue of accountability. "...[w]ar came from here. ...[o]ur female presence has been saying to the Serbian regime - your policy is death, disaster and sorrow for those in whose name you are speaking and 'nation's interests' are nothing but means of exerting power and creating destruction."⁴

*

This material invokes not only questions but also points to a direction relevant for research on responsibility. Namely, it is the aim of this text to open and probe the issue of political responsibility, this being understood as responsibility of the citizen's. It is I believe less problematic to raise the issue of the responsibility of the elite, the governing structures, and the military; but despite the mass support of regimes held liable for crimes against humanity it still remains highly problematic to raise the issue of responsibility of any collective. The problem therein is not only about the past but very much so concerns all our futures.

⁴ *Women against War*. Belgrade, Fall 1994, no. 2, pp. 9-10.

The Danger of Unreflected Nostalgia

This thesis is written against the backdrop of the most recent history of the Balkans – a story retold many times.⁵ ‘In the region’, there is a phrase in circulation, though dying out, that refers to a category of people - the Yugonostalgics they are called. The phrase was coined and turned up after the break up of former Yugoslavia. Since then almost five million people were displaced, over half a million wounded and disabled, over two hundred thousand killed and tens of thousands raped.

It appears that nostalgia is not only a sporadic individual occurrence; it spreads and has in the seventeenth century even been considered a disease, although at that time, a curable one. “Nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed to the future. (...) Nostalgia ... is an abdication of personal *responsibility*, a guilt-free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetical failure (...) At first glance nostalgia is longing for a place, but actually it is yearning for a different time – the time of our childhood (...) The nostalgic desires to obliterate history ... to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition (...) Yet the sentiment itself, the mourning of displacement and temporal irreversibility, is at the very

⁵ See select bibliography on this subject, especially the recent publications: Misha Glenny. *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers 1809-1999*. Penguin USA, 2000; Eric Gordy. *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1999; Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2000; Tim Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge*. Yale: Yale University Press, 2000. Also, for background interdisciplinary approaches: Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*. Yale: Yale University Press, 1998.

core of the modern condition.”⁶ Whatever the case may be, one thing is highly probable and that is, importantly, that “unreflected nostalgia breeds monsters.”⁷

Therefore, and on a personal note: Arendt’s work allowed me first and foremost to mourn, and to be angry; to get over, and move on; to forsake and renounce certain times once and for all, and yet remain within those times; her writing made me see that it was possible to stay in a place and to finally leave it - at the same time; to critically look upon and recognize my whole world for what it was - as it was falling apart. I am not sure I would have had the same experience had I an opportunity to hear her in person and I am not sure I would have even liked her, but I am sure her words would have spoken to me - as they do now.

The (Methodological) Problem of Analogy (in History)

My assumption is that for the citizens of Serbia there is a lesson to be learnt from the history of Germany from 1933-1945. Hannah Arendt based the part of her political theory that pertained to her analysis of evil - more specifically, political evil - among other things, on her own experiences of those times. My objective is to attempt to answer if Arendt’s theory can be used as a point of departure for the analysis of what has happened in the Balkans. Although the last fifty years of the 20th century are not lacking in conflicts, war atrocities, political evils and the like, it is my contention that Serbia would greatly profit primarily from the lessons in German history. The lessons from other areas of conflict, such as from the events in Rwanda, South Africa, Northern Ireland, Israel,

⁶ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books, 2001, pp. xiv-xvi.

⁷ *Ibid.*

and, sadly, from many more which can be named – all of these, though by no means irrelevant, would be less beneficial for the citizens of future Serbia.

The difference between, these particular cases, and a 1933–45 Germany is in the following. The areas of conflict named here were involving two sides within a single state (or, two aspiring states); consequently in the aftermath they were/are primarily in need of a reconciliation process within a society split in two (violence, totalitarian elements, and a necessity for truth notwithstanding); a 1933–45 Germany, on the other hand, was a totalitarian regime, confronting the whole world, subsequently facing many countries as its enemies, and finally, responsible for crimes against humanity; which is why German society, when reconstructing itself after 1945 was, first and foremost in need of truth about itself in order to be able to become a part of the world again.

All this is, of course, just in the degree of emphasis and therefore only sets the initial course of research. One can hardly deny that Balkans were - and still are – what I here designated as an area of conflict, involving in its different parts, two sides; in that respect the manifold truths still have to be told, including substantial contributions from the international community.

However, my emphasis is precisely in redirecting this focus toward a process of *self-reflection within Serbia*. If Serbia - as a part of Balkans and, indeed, part of the world - is to grow as a civil society, then all those who aspire towards constituting its citizenship have to face the truth about the deeds committed *in their name*, recognizing that this implied, in the least, tacit consent (assuming first, that active participants in these deeds will with efficiency be dealt with in criminal procedures). Moreover, it is my contention that what construes complicity ensued purely by virtue of that citizenship,

because only by way of accountability and civic responsibility can the political maturity of a citizenship be recognized and attained.

The aim of my research is going to be to use the texts of Hannah Arendt and from them, as well as from interpretative and other texts she has inspired and provoked, to offer a possible, theoretically and politically relevant, understanding of the evil that took place in the Balkans - long after Arendt's comprehensive analysis of the evil of totalitarianism of her own time had settled in. I believe that a politically relevant understanding of evil can be justified only with a view to the complex issue of responsibility – and this issue is going to be the key question of my research.

Having laid out the background of the research, let me state that specific accounts of the recent political history of the Balkans are *not* going to be the topic of my research; it should rather be the underpinning, a theoretical grid, which will allow me/us to begin to understand, to comprehend what has happened. In Hannah Arendt's sense of the word, "Comprehension does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalizations that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt. It means, rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century [time] has placed on us – neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality – whatever it may be."⁸

As noted, Hannah Arendt expressly states that she is highly suspicious of 'analogies and generalizations', which may be an argument in favor of not making any

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism, Preface to the First Edition*, New York: The World Publishing Co., 1958, p. viii; also published as *The Burden of Our Time*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1951.

parallels. However, should an offer of an analogy between Germany from 1933-1945 and Serbia from 1987-2000 arise, we should bear in mind that although analogy is by far the least perfect way to draw conclusions, it is the one we most often have to and do resort to, since the conditions for the conclusions that can be attributed a higher degree of certainty can rarely be met. If one is to make use of Arendt's texts as, for example, relevant to subsequent appearances of evil, and in the spirit of her methodological suggestions, it should be in a form of judgment that always already pertains to the particular. In claiming 'exemplary validity' Arendt holds that an "exemplar is and remains a particular that in its very particularity reveals the generality that could otherwise not be defined."⁹

Relevant to Arendt's methodology is her explication of totalitarianism, as an example of the policy of evil: it deploys neither mainstream analysis of 'causes' (and effects), nor a traditional concept of knowledge - what was at work were elements which according to her "by themselves never cause anything. They become origins of events if and when they crystallize into fixed and definite forms."¹⁰ It is precisely this format of unorthodox understanding, which can lead to the question of responsibility, raise the issue, and begin to search for an answer. Within this framework historical events, social and political structures lose their oftentimes abstract self-presentation, assumed loftiness, come to ground and disclose themselves as our own handiwork, as the handiwork of mankind. Only within this context it becomes plausible to pose the question of responsibility.

⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. by Ronald Beiner, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 77.

¹⁰ "Nature of Totalitarianism", unpublished lecture, cited in Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *For the Love of the World*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 203.

Preliminary Remarks

The concept of responsibility can be traced to its connections to concepts of obligation, consent, duty and other attributes of citizenship, within the mainstream liberal tradition. “No body doubts but an *express Consent* of any Man, entering into any Society, makes him a perfect Member of that Society, a Subject of that Government. The difficulty is, what ought to be look’d upon as *tacit Consent*, and how far it binds, *i.e.* how far any one shall be looked on to have consented, and thereby submitted to any Government, where he has made no Expressions of it at all. And to this I say, that every Man, that hath any Possession, or Enjoyment, of any part of the Dominions of any Government, doth thereby give his *tacit Consent*, and is as far forth obliged to Obedience to the Laws of that Government, during such Enjoyment, as any one under it; (...); and in Effect, it reaches as far as the very being of anyone within the Territories of that Government.”¹¹ What Locke states here is, more or less present in other arguments articulated later on concerning the topic: responsibility of a citizen to the government (and its responsibility to the citizens) is a part of a relationship between the citizens and their respective governments; and although there is no mention of the responsibility citizens are to undertake *for the government* they gave ‘express’ or ‘tacit’ consent to, there is no other conclusion to be drawn: citizens are the ones who should bear that responsibility. To date ‘*consent legitimates government*’ and the ‘ballot box’ is “the mechanism whereby the

¹¹ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. by Peter Laslett, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960, c. VIII, § 119, pp. 347-8.

individual citizen expresses political preferences and citizens as whole periodically confer authority on government to enact laws and regulate economic and social life.”¹²

One of rare authors that attempts to expand the ethical to the political concept of responsibility is Hans Jonas. In his book *The Imperative of Responsibility*, however he devotes most of his attention to the dangers of technological development of our civilization.¹³

Having noted the possibility of locating the issue of political responsibility within broader concept of citizenship, as well as the fact of the absence of that issue in mainstream political theory, let me return to the main line of research that is going to be followed here: responsibility is going to be extracted from Arendt’s political theory. It needs to be extracted or extrapolated because responsibility appears seldom in Arendt’s texts. Namely, Hannah Arendt has not articulated a theory of responsibility, or developed a corresponding category; such as she did with categories of action, the political, totalitarianism, revolution and even with judgment. Responsibility does not in itself occupy a privileged or even a conspicuous place in her theory, as does, for example, the complementary concept of evil. Nor have there been interpretations of Arendt’s work that have constructed a theory of responsibility; at best they have underscored, or, just mentioned the category of responsibility but only while dwelling on other concepts and arguments.

¹² David Held, “Democracy: From City-states to a Cosmopolitan Order?” in Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit, eds., *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998, p. 86. This issue is exemplified in the fact that the official judiciary system in Serbia had not only limited the indictment of Slobodan Milosevic to the crimes he had committed against the citizens of his own state, but had not even included all the ethnicities within its territory.

¹³ Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility. In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

It can, of course, also be argued that Arendt's whole concept of the political is built on the concept of responsibility; the claim then would be that the central Arendtian idea, the idea of the political - as developed in her work such as the *Human Condition*, *On Revolution*, *Between Past and Future* - has not only the 'love of the world' as its underpinning; but is also geared toward building the responsibility that all who inhabit the world have for sustaining it in the shape of the human world that it is.

While not closing off that avenue of analysis, I will primarily focus on a more readily identifiable concept of responsibility derivative from its original meaning, as an ethical term; it can consequently be used to raise politically relevant issues. Analysis of responsibility, understood in this way follows from and pertains to a particular manifestation of evil. It is the perceptive claim of Arendt's interpreters that the pivotal in her analysis, and, what singles her out from entire Western political thought, is that she identifies that evil as *political*.¹⁴ Moreover, facing the totalitarianism of 20th century, she formulates the parameters by which we can define '*evil as a policy*'; and in that she fulfills the task of a theorist, which is, delineating and thus making visible "the process through which total domination is achieved".¹⁵ Therefore, although Arendt does not have a theory of responsibility she does have a highly developed political analysis of evil within which the 'crystallizing' elements for the category of political responsibility can be distinguished.

Political theorists for the most part, also emphasize the analysis of evil in the work of Hannah Arendt. It can be argued that the concept of evil forms a trajectory connecting a whole line of inquiry in Arendt's work, from the early *Origins of*

¹⁴ George Kateb, "On Political Evil" in *The Inner Ocean*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992, and Dana Villa, *Philosophy, Politics and Terror*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

¹⁵ Dana Villa, *Philosophy, Politics and Terror*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. p. 23.

Totalitarianism (1951) at least to *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) if not all the way to *The Life of the Mind* (published posthumously, 1977). In that interpretation, her work presents all the nuances in the analyses between the phenomena that she first named 'radical evil' to the approach she also introduced, evil in its banality. However it is my argument that the concept of evil cannot be fully developed without an explication of responsibility, a theoretical explication that should not be left up to the appearance of self-understanding. Moreover, the issue of responsibility in itself leads to other equally important questions, such as: what is the space of responsibility in connection with Arendt's other, more outstanding political terminology, such as freedom, political action and, indeed, the concept of the political itself?

Arendt's preoccupations, theoretical and otherwise, have a single concern, a care for the world – in view of the evils endangering it - with two outcomes, both highly and primarily relevant for the political: one, directly following from 'her fears and concerns' expressed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and I argue, in *The Life of the Mind*; the other flow originates from within the same concern, but can - and has been – assessed independently, since it is the foundation of a novel political theory as laid out in *The Human Condition* and its modern supplement, *On revolution*. My text will focus on the first venue of Arendt's work.

Four collections of essays (two of which published posthumously) that fall under the same rubrics, are either an illustration or an otherwise formulated expansion of the same themes, *Men in Dark Times*, *Between Past and Future*, *Jew as a Pariah*, and *Essays in Understanding*.

There are two texts that were both written by 1933, but translated and published considerably after 1945: *Love and Saint-Augustine* and *Rahel Varnhagen*; this work, though it belongs to what some might call 'a pre-Arendtian' Arendt, she herself has in fact returned to time and again; so that it has been incorporated into and has become a part of her most important trajectories.

Arendt's correspondence deserves special attention in that it is a significant supplement to her theoretical standpoints and arguments; but it also best illustrates her dilemmas and queries (correspondence with her teacher and friend, Karl Jaspers, her husband Heinrich Blücher, her friend Mary MacCarthy and many more) to the extent that some of her correspondence has become a site of heated controversy (correspondence with Martin Heidegger, Gerschom Scholem, etc.).

Hannah Arendt explicitly addresses the issue of responsibility only in a small number of short essays.¹⁶ These were first written either during, or in the years immediately following the WW II and some followed later. These short essays accompanied her two major works, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, where the analysis of evil, and not responsibility *per se*, is in the forefront. The two books published more than ten years apart, share the interpretations of the events difficult to comprehend as well as to bear. The evil Hannah Arendt grappled with in the years of writing *The Origins of Totalitarianism* she named the absolute or the radical evil; and, when reporting of the Eichmann trial, she perceived the evil on hand as no more than banal. In the texts concerning responsibility Hannah Arendt does not hesitate to enter into

¹⁶ "Approaches to the 'German Problem'", "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility", "The Aftermath of the Nazi Rule in Germany", in *Essays in Understanding*, ed. by Jerome Kohn, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994; "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship" in *Listener*, August 6, 1964.

contested issues such as collective guilt, discernment of political as opposed to personal responsibility, the question of responsibility in relation to morality, as well as the law; and finally she leads us from the issue of responsibility to the concept of judgment.

Interpretations of Arendt's Opus in view of the issue of responsibility

It is a truism that Arendt's work defies any classification.¹⁷ Margaret Canovan names her 'one of the great outsiders of twentieth-century political thought'.¹⁸ "She was always something of an outsider – 'a conscious pariah'."¹⁹ Following a direct question concerning the matter of her alliances, she categorically refused any, enumerating specifically a whole list of those, including liberal, socialist. It was on this occasion that in response to the designation of 'groundless thinking' she retorted: "I have a metaphor which is not quite that cruel...I call it thinking without a banister. In German *Denken ohne Gelande*."²⁰

When Hannah Arendt died in 1975 and for more than decade that followed, relatively little was written of her work. Although undoubtedly a public figure of notable and sometimes uncomfortable presence, she was not acknowledged as a major political theorist; being mainstream, canonical was never her intention. Nevertheless, the consequence is that her work had to go through a tiresome process of legitimization in order for its fruitful potential to be put to full use.

¹⁷ Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, p.1.

¹⁸ Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt. A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.1.

¹⁹ Richar Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, p. 1.

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt" in Melvyn A. Hill, ed., *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public Space*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979, p. 336.

The ‘dizzying proliferation of Arendts’²¹ during the last decade produced a great number of interpretations the significance of which is what Hannah Arendt would have probably valued the most, an understanding of the world we share.

Since all interpretations are appropriations and in case we cannot quite fit a theoretical stance into our little compartments the result is often as Dana Villa perceptively notes ‘a Rorschach test the interpreter’. The reason for an emphatic presence of the interpretation may also be something that should be judged altogether differently from ascribing pigeonholes; namely stemming from a particularity, or even more accurately, a singularity of our own (theoretical) problem, that makes each instance of interpretation a case that is the exact opposite of theoretical stereotyping. This type of analysis is precisely what Arendtian approach lends itself to.

Margaret Canovan was among the first theorists who wrote a full-length book on Arendt, only to return to Arendt after almost two decades in a study that she still considers because of the vast material offered by her writing, only a beginning of the much-needed reinterpretation of Arendt. Since her first book on Hannah Arendt was written in 1974, M. Canovan’s revisiting Arendt’s work was concerned to consider all her published and unpublished work, and thus result in a more comprehensive analysis. Here she wanted to rectify the commonly held opinion that *The Human Condition* held such a central position in Arendt’s opus that it could be interpreted solely on its own terms. What Margaret Canovan emphasized was the significance of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and the fact that “the entire agenda of Arendt’s political thought was set

²¹ Dana Villa, *Politics, Philosophy and Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 4.

by her reflections on the political catastrophes of the mid-century.”²² This point of entry into the work of Hannah Arendt and the emphasis on the ‘call to respond’ to the world has resulted in the fact that M. Canovan’s interpretation is one of the rare where the concept of responsibility is explicitly recognized in Arendt’s work. “The political message with which Arendt emerged from these formative experiences, therefore, was a humanist message of political commitment: commitment to take responsibility for what was happening in the world ...”²³ Margaret Canovan does not think that this was a straightforward unwavering stance, inasmuch as thinking, which involved a ‘withdrawal from the world’, interfered with this need to respond to it. Moreover she contends that in Arendt’s work these two needs often clashed to the point where they were not compatible with each other. “The subject of this debate [i.e. never-ending internal dialogue a thinker has with herself], and one of her major preoccupations was the relation between thought and action, philosophy and politics.”²⁴ M. Canovan should be commended for her acute presentation of the whole ‘thinking business’ in Arendt; and, primarily for being one of the rare interpreters who have named the problem as ‘philosophy’, instead of blurring the distinctions by expressing them as ‘theory’, ‘thought’ or reflection, or, using a recourse to *vita contemplative* – all this, where they allow for, and invite, clarity. Arendt’s relationship to philosophy is presented not only through her famed and unambiguous dismissal in reference to the political as stated in *The Human Condition*. By drawing on numerous, including unpublished material, and piecing together Arendt’s relations to different philosophies, M. Canovan records this relationship in more detail. Besides ‘the myth of the philosophical Fall’ in the wake of Socrates’ trial and execution, where the

²² Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt. A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*. p. 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

polis was unable - or unwilling - to provide him safety, there are ahistorical, inherent reasons for the tension between the political and philosophy. Thinking requires withdrawal from the world, a solitude that may prove to be irreconcilable with the political which is grounded in plurality of human beings; moreover, this requirement for peace may lead to an inclination toward strong government and a 'possible link between philosophy and totalitarianism.'²⁵ This, claims Canovan, is in Arendt's interpretation more of an 'occupational hazard of philosophy' than its innate characteristic.

A point of resolve may be offered in the category of judgment which is a theoretical reflection, and therefore a philosophy, and is at the same time indubitably connected to the world; and, although Canovan underscores that possibility, she withdraws from concluding that Arendt has brought philosophy to bear on the political.

However there is another important connection that M.Canovan perceives: "The most urgent is perhaps her message about responsibility for politics: our duty to be *citizens*, looking after the world and *taking responsibility* for what is done *in our name*."²⁶

Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves in his comprehensive presentation of *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* – while not addressing the issue of Arendt and philosophy – highlights its four major themes: concepts of modernity, action, judgment and citizenship. Modernity carries for Arendt a primarily negative connotation of rise of the social committed to preserving a purely biological existence consoled by consumption, as exemplified in the victory of *animal laborans* over *zoon politikon*. Categories of action and judgment are well chosen, since action is the central Arendtan category, which encapsulates her vision of the process of the political, whereas judgment, although

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 276. (emphasis added)

undeveloped, may have been one of its ideal outcomes. D'Entreves' singling out Arendt's emphasis on the artificial construct of the political and the category of citizenship is especially insightful: "A further consequence of Arendt's stress on the artificiality of political life is evident in her rejection of all neo-Romantic appeals to *volk* and to ethnic identity as the basis for political community. She maintained that one's ethnic, religious, or racial identity was irrelevant to one's identity as a *citizen*, and that it should never be made the basis of membership in a *political* community."²⁷

The issue of identity besides being one of the most challenging issues of contemporary philosophy and political theory is also one of the most controversial issues of Arendt's thought. Without going into the intricacies of the matter, and assuming that identities are places of belonging, Arendt had an array of identities that could be addressed. Relevant for our themes are two that have been discussed, her Jewish identity and the fact that she was a woman. And although both identities have been a source of Arendt's vulnerability, it appears that her Jewishness has had more of a political consequence.

This aspect of her theoretical placement has been addressed by Seyla Benhabib, Dagmar Barnow, Bat Ami Bar-On, and in Richard Bernstein's *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*. The last study mentioned comes out of years of engagement with Arendt's work, an engagement that has produced texts on other relevant topics of Arendt's theory.

While, as a Jewess, witnessing the rise of the Third Reich from within, Hannah Arendt had been driven to leave the safe grounds of exploring early medieval philosophy and had brought herself, through a consciousness-raising work on a biography of a

²⁷ Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, p. 16.

Jewess, not only closer to her Jewish identity, but first and foremost closer to the political. As a result of this proximity that she remained within all her life, Arendt first assessed the 'Jewish question' as a political question. "This seems to be the underlying skeletal structure of Arendt's belief that in the modern age the Jewish question is primarily a political question."²⁸ It was of primary importance to Arendt - being decidedly a secular Jew - to "argue[d] that Jewish emancipation could only be achieved by political action if the Jewish people would fight for their rights *as Jews*."²⁹ As for her identity, she states in a letter to Gershom Scholem that she regards her 'Jewishness as one of the indisputable factual data' of her life. No less and no more. From *Rahel Varnhagen*, and the early essays, *The Jew as a Pariah*, *We Refugees* culminating in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem* Arendt had addressed the Jewish question with a clear political statement and with an underlying 'basic gratitude for everything that is as it is'.

"Understanding Arendt adequately on questions of women is of one cloth with understanding her properly on the Jewish question. These seemingly theoretically marginal but existentially crucial categories of identity - a woman and a Jew - or, more correctly as a German Jewess in the twentieth century, are the sources out of which Arendt's thought flows..."³⁰ Whereas there is ample evidence that Arendt's thought has been if not diverted then directed by the historical appearance of totalitarianism - which she defined by anti-Semitism - there is no visible trace that she ever considered the fact that she is a woman as in any way relevant to her way of thinking. I can only share in

²⁸ Richard Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, p. 186.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁰ Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1996, p. xxxiv.

Seyla Benhabib's lament that "the sheer facts of her life and the brilliance of her intellectual achievement make us want to reappropriate her for feminist thought..."³¹ Benhabib is one of the rare theorists who has thoroughly and with subtlety read *Rahel Varnhagen* so as to weave it into all the relevant stages of Arendt's development. Of course in reference to Benhabib's reading of Arendt this is just a particle. Her journey through Arendt's theory is basically set chronologically; thematically it addresses the most complex and controversial issues: action, evil, judgment, public space, rise of the social. Benhabib does not miss the issues seldom highlighted or inadequately interpreted: methodology, modernity, labour movement, race and issues of identity; Arendt's relationships to Karl Marx, Martin Heidegger, or vice versa, the relationship others had to her work, i.e. Jurgen Habermas.

Benhabib and Bernstein share another significant element in the interpretations of Arendt: the category of evil. This issue of Arendt's different approaches to the analysis of evil had in fact been raised earlier: namely, R. Bernstein³², traced the different uses of the concept of evil and concluded that Arendt had stayed by her original findings, elaborating, but not changing them. Seyla Benhabib³³ contends that the Arendtian contribution is not only about the narrative of the evil - radical or banal; what Hannah Arendt will be remembered by is not so much the concept of the evil but a profoundly significant way of thinking about it: in that it will ultimately lead to the possibility of judging the evil, i.e. naming its concrete appearances, its manifestations as 'crimes against humanity'³⁴.

³¹ Ibid., p. xxxiii

³² Richard Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*.

³³ Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*.

³⁴ Ibid. p.

Benhabib is at times transparently irritated by Arendt, sometimes fascinated by her, but always highly critical, extending her theory beyond Arendt in the best philosophical tradition to what she perceives as the needs of our time. She designates Arendt unquestioningly a part of that philosophical tradition. Somewhere along those lines she notes a tension and misplaces it:

“It is only when we place her [Arendt’s] more philosophical reflections on action, identity, and plurality in the context of her development of her political thought as a whole that we note the persistence of the central tension in her work: between her moral and political universalism in thinking through the issues of this century from Zionism to imperialism to the fate of the stateless people and the Eichmann trial, and her continuing allegiance to the philosophical ethos of Greek thought as transmitted via Martin Heidegger’s 1924-1925 lectures. It is this tension that makes Hannah Arendt a reluctant modernist.”³⁵

The tensions in Arendt’s writings do not originate in her untimely reflections, thinking, in her reluctance to come to terms with modernity, but with the fact that she constantly questions her disciplinary allegiances, her relationship to philosophy.

The greater problem in Benhabib’s interpretation of Arendt is - despite noting ‘existentialist and anti-foundationalist impulses’. - her search for and persistence to establish the foundations of Arendt’s work, “Hannah Arendt’s thinking is deeply grounded in a position which I shall call ‘anthropological universalism’.”³⁶

Mining through Arendt’s texts and their interpretations I discovered somewhat of a parallel; namely, many significant issues - some of which are points of contention - arising from Arendt’s work are present in feminist theories: the need for foundations, the pain of theory/practice divide, the desire to belong not only to places but times, have an identity, which is not exclusionary towards the other; but most importantly constant re-

³⁵ Ibid., p. 198.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 195.

examination characteristic of raising the issue of responsibility. Needless to add, feminist theories do not nurture a pretense of having resolved any of these.

On the other hand feminist reception of Arendt offers much less of an analogy: it is diverse in that it ranges from open hostility to admiration.³⁷ Historically – since there is a history here – it dates from the publication of *The Human Condition* and a now well-known venomous attack of Adrienne Rich, based on a straightforward ideological feminist postulate which states that personal is political and that therefore there is no negotiation about Arendt's clear cut distinctions of public and private: "To read such a book by a woman of large spirit and great erudition, can be painful because it embodies the tragedy of a female mind nourished on male ideologies."³⁸ A. Rich and Mary O'Brian marked what Mary Dietz named the stage of the 'Phallogentric Arendt' which was followed by the stage of 'Gynocentric Arendt'; here, among other arguments, Nancy Hartsock, Jeane Bethke Elshtain, etc., highlighted Arendtian concepts of natality, birth, human capacity for new beginnings; both interpretations are gendered, concludes M. Dietz, but then turns to 'more promising' receptions of Arendt's thought; she presents in a juxtaposition Benhabib's associational model of public space to Bonnie Honig's view of agonistic politics, both being the substance of Arendt's theory.³⁹

Within the feminist framework, another study deserves to be noted, that of Lisa Jane Disch. She examines and weighs arguments and advances essentially methodological re-conceptualizations concerning Arendt's work. As an issue, it has been

³⁷ See Kirstie McClure, "The Odor of Judgment: Exemplarity, Propriety and Politics in the Company of Hannah Arendt" and Kimberley Curtis, "Aesthetic Foundations of Democratic Politics in the Work of Hannah Arendt", in Craig Calhoun & John McGowan, eds., *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

³⁸ Adrienne Rich, "Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women," in her *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*, New York: Norton, 1979, p. 212

³⁹ Mary Dietz could not have taken into account Benhabib's book on Arendt, since it was not yet published; however, apart from the richness and breadth of analysis, the general perspective remained the same.

addressed before, but primarily in terms of content and not as a *methodos* which is subversive of the whole (philosophical) tradition. Storytelling is here not just recorded, but contextualized, confronted with 'Archimedean thinking', and followed through as an approach specific to Arendt and her subversive intentions. Archimedean norm entails a standing recourse to impartiality and objectivity as well as to power as leverage.⁴⁰ The problem however is that the whole approach is constructed - despite somewhat inconspicuous disclaimers⁴¹ - so as to counter philosophy, indiscriminately designating it as 'Archimedean thinking.' I hold Arendt's relationship to philosophy to be more complex.

However, juxtaposing traditional methodology, while using philosophy as a paradigm, to Arendt's methods proved to be highly productive. Among other significant venues explored (understanding, judgment, 'crystallizing', imagination, 'visiting', and many more) the metaphor of the banister - used initially by Arendt in a brief response without elucidation at the time - is here highlighted as perfectly coupled with the explanation from Arendt's text on responsibility: "She calls banisters 'categories and formulas that are deeply ingrained in our mind, but whose basis of experience has long been forgotten and whose plausibility resides in their intellectual consistency rather than their adequacy to actual events.'"⁴²

The approach that uses Arendt, even if *against Arendt*, to explore, subvert, press critical matters forward, in short - begin a new, has in the best Arendtian tradition has announced its presence: "Thus Arendt was right to insist...that what we need is politicization, the arousal of the now subjected, withdrawn, or irresponsible people to

⁴⁰ Lisa Jane Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, pp. 18-19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29, footnote 24.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 144; Hannah Arendt, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship".

their own real capacities, needs, and *responsibilities*. Politicization here implies neither increased managerial intrusion into people's personal lives nor dutiful submission to official authorities, but on the contrary, *responsible* and effective participation in self-government that addresses people's real troubles and needs."⁴³

Hanna Pitkin has attempted to trace Arendt's construction of the 'social' as it is unfolded primarily in *The Human Condition*, but taking into account a whole set of intricate circumstances, as well as Arendt's theoretical responses, their rhetoric, their psychological grounding, and dialectic abstraction. This unraveling that only partially indicates the problem has taken H. Pitkin back to some of the early authorial constructs and metaphors that remained with Arendt throughout her theoretical evolution: pariah and parvenu. Admiration for Bernard Lazare's conscious choice of making a political statement by being a 'pariah' and critical viewing of Rahel Varnhagen's parvenu stages in life as she succumbed to the assimilation so as to be accepted socially, has probably lead Hannah Arendt to first and foremost make the choice being a pariah herself while despising the parvenu, but also to associate the pariah with the political, with action and the parvenu with the social. Hanna Pitkin maintains that the rise and the (out)growth of the social has in Arendt's theory taken on such gargantuan proportions that engulfed and are spreading elements of evil, that has lead her to designate it a 'Blob'. Although concluding that Arendt is here amiss, H. Pitkin draws our attention to the fact that Arendt is not thrusting forward an altogether wrong diagnosis. Something is wrong. And since "the social is not a Blob. The task is not slaying an alien monster but reconstituting

⁴³ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Social*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 283 (emphasis added).

ourselves: reorganizing institutions, reforming character, contesting ideas. (...) *We are depressingly the problem; we are encouragingly the solution.*"⁴⁴

As did the author of the first book on Arendt, Dana Villa also wrote two books; the first one entitled *Arendt and Heidegger, The Fate of the Political* focused its analysis on the central category of Arendt's political theory, the category of political action. It is rewarding to analyze Arendt in the context of Western philosophical tradition (Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Nietzsche, etc.) and to carefully discern what it is that she built her concepts and arguments on from what she discarded; and if Arendt is juxtaposed to Heidegger, himself, a major re-evaluator of traditional philosophy this approach is all the more rewarding.

Villa's contribution, besides offering insightful reading of philosophy and general erudition, follows what may be construed as being faithful to Arendt's intent of taking her (initial) philosophical stance seriously, or, which amounts to the same, taking Arendt seriously: namely, exploring, in detail the content of intricacies in the relationship between Heidegger's *philosophical concepts* and Arendt's thinking; and not the influence of a Heideggerian or, for that matter, Heidegger's, standpoint. This meant not pitting Arendt against Heidegger, but working through their respective philosophies.

According to D. Villa, following the full implications of Nietzsche's announcement that 'God is dead!' and in the wake of the crisis of authority, that she herself had analyzed, Arendt's concepts of 'groundless action and judgment' lead to a curious 'faith in action' that functions in a peculiar way so as to only "reflect[s] a continuing wonder at the fact that political action persists in the various 'defeated

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 284 (emphasis added).

causes'...Public spaces continue to be 'cleared' and 'islands' of freedom continue to pop up, only to submerge once again. For some, this state of affairs may continue to be a source of untempered regret; for Hannah Arendt, however it signifies loss *and* hope."⁴⁵

Following this conclusion, in his next book on Arendt, *Politics, Philosophy and Terror*, Dana Villa, looks more closely at the nature of totalitarian terror, and the statement on the banality of evil, and inevitably at the relationship between philosophy and politics - topics closer to the theme of this text.

The underwritten framework of D. Villa's approach to Arendt resonates with Nietzsche's dismantling some of the banisters for finding our way in the world that we (and philosophy) have been holding on to. I argue that - terrifying as it may be - this is the only way towards assessing political responsibility. This becomes painfully obvious in the limit situations, cases of extreme horror such as those brought about by totalitarian policy of evil. It then becomes paramount to "show a clear trajectory away from an idea that an abysslike evil requires an author of similar depth and proportion."⁴⁶ The idea of evil thus conceptualized, with a theological ring to it is not conducive to – moreover, it runs absolutely contrary to - the concept of political responsibility. It not only fails to perceive '*man's* genuine capacity for evil' but consequentially, fails to realize that that "capacity cannot be reduced to an original sinfulness or resolved into teleology of good and evil, one in which *the ultimate triumph of the good is divinely guaranteed*,"⁴⁷ – or, for that matter, guaranteed at all.

⁴⁵ Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger. The Fate of the Political*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 270.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57 (emphasis added).

Dana Villa claims that Hannah Arendt did in fact shift the focus of her work and somewhat alter her views; her point of departure changed and she was “ready to face the problem of evil in entirely secular terms”⁴⁸. It should be noted, in reference to mainstream philosophy, that the overwhelming presence of the theological conceptualization of evil, (and the adjacent concepts of sin and guilt), render it highly desirable and important to demarcate the meaning of evil that comes by way of theology from the politically relevant meaning of evil grounded in our contemporary reality. The preference derives from the fact that only the political evil can be of relevance to responsibility for the human world.

My disagreement with Dana Villa concerns another issue, namely Arendt’s final judgment of relationship between philosophy and politics, thinking and acting. It is his claim that thinking and acting are not only distinct, but also consistently severed one from the other throughout her work, and that not even the category of judgment can serve as a ‘bridge’. Furthermore Villa concludes that for Arendt “philosophical life (and the alienation it presumes) has at best an instrumental importance, one which does not fundamentally transform the experience of citizenship, but which merely facilitates it.”⁴⁹ Openness and complexity of argument in Arendt’s work can rarely be matched by corresponding interpretations, which is why Dana Villa falls under the rubrics he has created when criticizing some of the interpretations of Arendt’s work. Had Arendt wanted to construe *an either/or philosophy* that would make a demand for opting for the consistent and exclusive supremacy of either the political or philosophy, Dana Villa would be absolutely on the mark, since the political, as conceptualized within her theory -

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 58.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

held a great value for her, and philosophy was a questionable approach for the better part of her life. I would however like to argue that already in *The Life of the Mind* and especially in *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, theory as practice is not as blasphemous for Arendt as Villa would have us think and, at least thinking becomes indispensable to acting.

Overview and Thesis Layout

The exposition of the text follows the image of concentric circles, where the first one in the order of appearance is the central circle, followed by the one immediately surrounding it and so on; this means starting not only from the central issue and thus using the approach of *in medias res*, so to speak, but also positing as a point of departure the most concrete issue and then attempting to generalize, or contextualize it within more comprehensive arguments. This exposition of the text applies to the text as a whole as well as to its parts.

The first and the central issue of this work is the issue of responsibility, being also politically speaking the most concrete and urgent on the agenda of political theory; but, certainly incomplete without the explication of judgment. Presenting either of them, however, without accounting, for example for the fact of our mortality, or the need to belong to a place and how these and similar issues play out within the problem of political responsibility is a partial endeavor.

Responsibility discussed here should not be discussed solely as the outcome when we turn toward the past evil: responsibility should become inherent part of our thinking about the future; and establish itself as we make judgments in the present.

The question of responsibility in Arendt's work can be followed along two paths: one, as an underpinning to her analysis of evil that has passed and is already a part of past times, a part of history (no matter how recent); here responsibility is raised as an issue after the fact, so to speak; and, two, the unfolding of responsibility towards the suspension of any future 'crystallization' of elements so as to lead to yet another totalitarian regime; the potential for this suspension lies in the Arendtian category of judgment. So, while for the purpose of analysis these paths can be followed separately, we can also recognize that the issue of responsibility leads to the problem of judgment.

Finally, in order to present Arendt's analysis of responsibility in reference to the past (evil) and future (judgment) I believe that it will be prove to be theoretically productive to explicate these elements of her political theory in terms of time and space.

Therefore, this study is going to revolve around the following concepts: responsibility, judgment, and, time and space. These concepts will constitute the chapters, respectively.

Responsibility and Judgment

Responsibility addressed here is not a legal matter, or a moral issue, though it goes without saying that it should be thematized as both. It is here addressed as an indispensable attribute of the political

Other texts will be recognized as contemporaries of Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism*, which also address the same issues, as does her work, the most notable of which is Karl Jaspers' *Question of Guilt*⁵⁰. This text is going to be placed parallel to her analysis, conceptually, and as much as the analysis requires contextually. It was Karl

⁵⁰ Karl Jaspers, *Question of Guilt*, New York: Dial Press, 1947.

Jaspers who not only addressed but also designated the issue of political responsibility. Consequently, it will also be necessary to present conceptual differences within relevant terminology such as guilt and responsibility.

The first chapter presents a detailed analysis of Arendt's work that has any bearing on the issue of responsibility, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and *The Life of the Mind*, as well as the essays, "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility", "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship and "Collective Responsibility". All these texts highlight the concept, phenomenon, appearances, manifestations and attributes of evil, importantly political evil. I argue that there is a difference in emphasis between the texts Arendt wrote before and after the Eichmann trial, in that she continues to clarify not only personal as opposed to collective responsibility, but also includes the issue of making politically relevant decisions and taking responsibility for them – in short, judging.

The last part of chapter is an overview of the philosophical analysis of evil and concludes with a need for this theoretical endeavor to be secularized.

As opposed to the issue of responsibility, judgment has been thematized by interpreters of Arendt's work. Most of them have included the category of judgment in their comprehensive presentations of Hannah Arendt's opus.⁵¹ Ronald Beiner claims that Hannah Arendt has viewed and assessed judgment from two different perspectives, those being: first, *vita activa* and then, *vita contemplativa*. According to this interpretation H. Arendt has analyzed first, judgment from the perspective of the political actor, or, judgment as needed within the process of action itself; and only later she approached the

⁵¹ The aforementioned Richard Bernstein, Seyla Benhabib, Dana Villa; also Lisa J. Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy*.

category of judgment as a part of an assessment undertaken *post factum* after the event, as if acknowledging the Hegelian notion of the 'owl of Minerva'.⁵²

The title of the work Arendt intended to write, but never did, was *Judging*. It was to be the third part of her last major text *The Life of the Mind*, a text that should, regardless of Arendt's views to the contrary, be rightfully placed within philosophy. The part on *Judging* was to follow parts entitled, *Thinking and Willing*. The three parts of Arendt's text followed the pattern of three Kant's critiques, *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, and *Critique of Judgment*. It was Arendt's contention, explicated in lectures she gave on Kant's political philosophy, that (Kant's) political theory is best grounded in what he initially named *Critique of Taste*, and later changed to *Critique of Judgment*.

Arendt's own text, *The Life of the Mind*, originated according to its opening statements at the trial of Adolf Eichmann, which was instrumental to probing the category of judgment. The concept itself will be analyzed primarily in relation to Kant's philosophy, as Arendt had constructed it.

The chapter includes the main parameters of judging which in fact turn out be more of an exposition of the theoretical problems rather than their solutions – all in constructing a political judgment. These theoretical problems call for providing the context of Arendt's complex and ambiguous, but extremely instructive relationship to philosophy.

⁵² Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, London: Routledge, 1994, also claims two models of judgment in Arendt's work.

Time and Space

The concepts of time and space have always occupied a central position in any philosophical, metaphysical (or anti-metaphysical, i.e. Kant) project, however they have only fairly recently been directly connected to the issues of political theory. “Every political theory that has aimed at a measure of comprehensiveness has adopted some implicit or explicit propositions about ‘time’, ‘space’ ...”⁵³

A possible query within ‘politics of time and space’ is: what is the political relevance of the ontological primacy of time over the space, and, consequently, of the fact that one may be derivative of the other? Henri Bergson has revolved his whole discussion of time around the fact that throughout the history of philosophy the treatment of time is dependent on our experience of space, as a consequence of which we fail to acknowledge the continuity of time and impose upon it the discontinuities that are characteristic of space. Regardless of Bergsonian analysis, whenever we name temporality - beyond the elementary modalities of past, present and future - and attempt to uncover the nuances we do fall back on spatial designations (e.g. linear and circular time).

Concerning Arendt’s political theory it is my claim that she, a one time Heideggerian student -and *nota bene* at a time when he was writing *Being and Time* - has throughout the process of unfolding her own political theory oftentimes formulated it through the lens of time and space; even her initiation into philosophy, her dissertation, was written on Augustine who is rightly considered one of the key philosophers of time.

⁵³ Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision. Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1960, p. 15.

Therefore to view her political theory from that perspective may prove to be revealing, and not only concerning the issue of responsibility and the category of judgment.

The last chapter will briefly legitimize its presence in this text, but will then proceed to illustrate how the central concepts of political theory are constructed within temporal and spatial frameworks as well attempt to posit what some of the consequences may be.

Conceptualizations of time and space spread over a vast area, and modern philosophy has added to the classical statements of Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine many more perspectives (those of Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, and others). However, our modern world has also brought horrifying experiences for humankind and with them hopes for and, fears of what those concepts designate. In the words of Hannah Arendt's friend whose death she deeply mourned: "This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage...a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings...The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris grows skyward. The storm is what we call progress."⁵⁴

To conclude: this study will with the issues of time and space, come full circle to the problem of responsibility. The problem of space leads to what Adrienne Rich articulated as location, meaning, a highly politically charged concept precisely because it brings forth as the primary attribute of the 'politics of location' the issue of accountability.

⁵⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, 1969, p. 257.

Each of the above concepts does, of course, deserve to be addressed on its own terms, but what can hold them together is a possible – if still only partial - answer to the question: which set of elements - and how - crystallized to produce, once again, the evil of totalitarianism; and since the appearance of any future similar set of circumstances cannot be prevented, this work is ultimately being written with a minimum of an underlying hope that if any part of the analysis is plausible it will have some bearing on suspending its outgrowth.

This moderate optimism is why the conclusion other than stating the basic parameters for the issue of responsibility remains fraught with so many questions.

CHAPTER ONE

Responsibility

In 1945/46 only a few months apart two texts appeared, *Schuldfrage*¹ and *German Guilt*²; the first was authored by Karl Jaspers and the second by Hannah Arendt; both responded to the same reality and both texts, through the mutual efforts of their authors, appeared in German³ and in English. Hannah Arendt's continuous research on the issue, remained within the framework of the statement she pronounced: that "the problem of evil will be the fundamental question of postwar intellectual life;"⁴ whereas Jaspers pursued the subject to a lesser extent.⁵ Besides the obvious differences between the authors, Jaspers was German and Arendt "politically a Jew", at least "whenever the circumstances forced"⁶ her to give her nationality. Their postwar communication was an extension of a prewar teacher student relationship, as a result of which they shared not only somewhat of a philosophical affiliation, but also a language and a culture. At the time in question they were on their way towards forging not only a fruitful collaboration, but also a lifetime friendship. All of this, to some extent, accounts for an array of aspects they shared in approaching the subject of politically assessing their common yet devastated world.

¹ Translated into English as *The Question of German Guilt*, New York: The Dial Press, 1947.

² First published in the *Jewish Frontier*, January 1945, pp. 19-23, later published under the title, "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility" in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*, ed. by Jerome Kohn, New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1993; and in *The Jew as a Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, edited and with an introduction by Ron H. Feldman, New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1978.

³ Arendt's text appeared in *Die Wandlung* 1, (1945-46): 333-44.

⁴ "Nightmare and Flight" in *Essays in Understanding*, p. 134. See also Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt. A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

⁵ Karl Jaspers, *The Future of Germany*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.

⁶ *Hannah Arendt-Karl Jaspers: Correspondence 1926-1969*, ed. by Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1992 p. 70.

Jaspers and Arendt in their correspondence assured each other that the basis of their agreement on the subject was broad – and undoubtedly it was so; perhaps that was precisely the reason why their exchange on the disagreements was not only possible, but was also open and nuanced. Consequently for us it is theoretically provocative and all the more valuable.

I shall therefore proceed from the heart of the matter, i.e. from the texts of Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt following for the most part the order of their appearance. Since for Hannah Arendt the problem of evil is in the forefront, I will attempt to draw out and highlight the issue pivotal to the political, that of responsibility in all its different aspects.⁷ In case of Arendt's texts there are two focal points of presenting the issue of responsibility: one, around *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, and two, stemming from *Eichmann in Jerusalem* but reaching as far as *The Life of the Mind*. I would then like to explore the more concrete proposals on the issue of responsibility to be found in Arendt's political theory; and, here some queries and difficulties will surface. Finally, I shall turn to the problem of evil in order to contextualize responsibility as it has been immersed in the appearances of evil, oftentimes to the point beyond recognition.

Jaspers, *Schuldfrage*

In his pioneering work on the subject Karl Jaspers makes significant distinctions that are to the purpose; he distinguishes between criminal, moral, political and metaphysical guilt. Criminal guilt is a result of individual's violation of laws; moral guilt is a consequence of individual deed which is in conflict with the personal sense of (moral) responsibility; political guilt, according to Jaspers, is a process of collectively bearing the consequences

⁷ The texts considered here will be assessed only in reference to the issue of responsibility.

of statesmen's *and* citizen's deeds; metaphysical guilt ensues from the co-responsibility for every injustice in the world; and may be felt by all those who lived through and survived the wrongdoing. As follows when discussing the question of guilt, what further distinguishes between the different aspects of guilt are, among other things, instances of jurisdiction, those being: court, conscience, victor and God, respectively.

Jaspers' distinctions helpfully and correctly create two rubrics, one of publicly relevant guilt, that being criminal and political guilt, and, two, privately considered guilt, which is moral and metaphysical. However theoretically speaking, it profits more to differentiate among these aspects of guilt those that can be viewed as unequivocal, from the ones that remain open to raising further issues. Criminal guilt is, or should be - once the rule of law is established - a relatively simple legal case of public concern. Moral guilt, although a somewhat more complex issue, is apparently presented by Jaspers within the boundaries of the expected: it is therefore left up to every individual's conscience and always already a private matter of personal concern.

Assessing the two remaining aspects of guilt, metaphysical and political, is in this context theoretically more productive. The presupposition of the existence of metaphysical guilt may from the outset lead to a conceptual confusion. It can be argued that God, as the jurisdictional instance here, may just point to impending inevitable guilt, or perhaps more precisely sin and, therefore preclude the issue of responsibility. The whole matter, since it follows from mere survival appears to escape the real options in one's life's choices; unless, of course we choose to posit life and death as the choice itself. This renders this whole aspect of guilt as non-political; although metaphysical guilt undoubtedly has significance in the context of the appearance of evil as well as in relation

to individual self-examination. The point here is that if any reference to the political is to be made it has to be within a secular framework.

Finally, the discussion of political guilt is one of the key issues. It appears as if Jaspers undertook this whole elaboration of distinctions to be centered around this one, critical concern; deeply troubled, he wrote to single it out, highlight and differentiate it from other aspects of guilt; to attempt to salvage it from confusion, so as to present it theoretically purged to those who shared in the undoubtedly desperate position of postwar Germany.⁸ Instead, in discussing the political Jaspers insisted on the pivotal role of the victor. Hence, in this context, the adequate use of the term guilt and the absence of the concept of responsibility. This however cannot lead to the outcome of political maturity, which is a prerequisite for the status of citizenship.

The political is also the pivotal issue that Hannah Arendt had in mind when writing to Jaspers. To anticipate: much later, as if she had in mind the positions, her own and that of Jaspers, she articulated the following two concerns, just stating the differences between them and not judging the precedence of one over the other in any absolute, but perhaps only on her own terms: "In the center of moral considerations of human conduct stands the self; in the center of *political* considerations of conduct stands the world."⁹

At this point in time, neither of them dwelt particularly on the key concepts they used when explicating or debating the issue; Arendt used both terms, responsibility and guilt, but later almost dropped the term guilt, whereas Jaspers primarily adhered to the term *Schuld* (guilt, debt) and only occasionally, for clarification purposes, used co-

⁸ There are differences in the approaches of Theodor Adorno, Herman Broch, Thomas Mann, Gottfried Benn, to name just a few.

⁹ "Collective Responsibility," in *Amor Mundi. Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, ed. by James W. Bernauer, S.J., Boston, Dordrecht, Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987, p. 47 (emphasis added).

responsibility and liability; and one cannot help but wonder how is it that one so meticulous with words, as Jaspers was, assigned the term guilt – as if the only issue remaining was pronouncing and coming to terms with the verdict and not analyzing the process of judgment, especially since the point of departure was “drafting a scheme of distinctions that will serve to clarify our present German situation”.¹⁰ This extended even to the unequivocal cases where a collective was under consideration: “...no one is guiltless...”¹¹ he claimed.

Elizabeth Young-Bruehl testifies to the disagreements Hannah Arendt and her husband, Heinrich Blücher both expressed in reference to Jaspers' *Schuldfrage*.¹² In the correspondence between Blücher and Arendt these are stated much more sharply by Blücher, both in respect to the level of disagreement but also in terms of clarity: guilt, stormed Blücher, “serves the purpose of extirpating responsibility. This has always been its function beginning with sin. People were prepared to cower in the dust before God, incessantly guilty as long as they could pin the blame to Him. Jaspers' whole ethical purification babble leads him to solidarity with the German National Community...” He then reaches the high pitch of indignation as well as the point of clarification: “If Jaspers is searching for the nature of the true German, he will never find the true German conflict that has always existed in the liberal republican will of the few against the cossack-serf tendencies of the many. Germany finally had the opportunity to make clear the fronts of

¹⁰ Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, p. 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹² Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt. For the Love of the World*, pp. 215-6.

the real civil war of our times, republicans against the Cossacks, in other words the battle of the *Citoyen against the Barbarian*... ”¹³

Just some of those comments were conveyed to Jaspers by Arendt, as she wrote in ‘first person plural’. Their expectations, she said, were that “assuming responsibility has to consist of more than an acceptance of defeat...has to be accompanied by a positive political statement of intentions *addressed to the victims*”.¹⁴ And although Jaspers agrees with Arendt *completely*, as he states, in his response at the same time he “sense[s] the impossibility of this in Germany today”¹⁵

There are two critical issues in Arendt’s and Blücher’s critical comments: the first one, the significant matter here metaphorically designated as the urgency to recognize the civilizational benefit of the option of ‘citoyen’. Blücher’s letter to Arendt was an explosion of anger and vitriolic remarks about Jaspers’ text. Jaspers is seeking a pitiful way out by creating a complete confusion as to the purpose – that being ‘the true German’ - as well as the means, which is ‘Christian/pietistic/hypocritical nationalistic’ road. This however will not do it. Leaving ‘the inner cleansing’ to Jaspers, Blücher, who is *nota bene*: a German, announces the politically relevant principle: “For me the outer cleansing is more important. The Germans don’t have to deliver themselves from guilt, but from disgrace. I don’t give a damn if they’ll roast in hell someday or not, as long as

¹³ *Within Four Walls. The Correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Blücher 1936-1968*, edited and with an introduction by Lotte Kohler, New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt, Inc, 2000, pp. 84-5 (emphasis added). The comments here stated speak to many conflicts of our contemporary world, and could very well refer to the diagnosis of the recent ones in the Balkans.

¹⁴ *Hannah Arendt-Karl Jaspers: Correspondence*, p. 53 (emphasis added).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62 (emphasis in the original).

they are prepared to do something to dry the tears of the degraded and the humiliated... Then we could at least say that *we have accepted responsibility...*"¹⁶

The second issue is a matter of concrete content, or rather a lack of it, a lack of a desired statements in Jaspers' text; namely, the remark is that there is no 'positive political statement of intentions' addressed to the victims; somewhat obscured by this lack of the desired content is a significant one of form: not only was a 'positive political statement' missing, but there were *no statements whatsoever addressed to the victims*. Addressing the victims, facing up to them is probably the most difficult act following the eruption of evil. Responsibility for one's deeds, misdeeds or the absence of deeds, becomes concrete and assumes a face. And " ...access to the face is straightaway ethical."¹⁷

Schuldfrage was not addressed to the victims, but it was addressed to the culprits, so to speak, or to put more emphasis on the matter to the 'perpetrators'. Not only the victims, but also the rest of the world was excluded; moreover, the whole text is written in the 'first person plural' and therefore was inclusive of the author: it was about 'us – Germans'. This is especially highlighted in the 'introduction' which is, importantly, an address to the students, the generations who are entrusted with the future, 'called upon' to frame it, as Germans. Furthermore, Jaspers is making a continuous effort to define "what we are and should be – what is *really* German ...?"¹⁸ and thereby keeping open a Pandora's box of nationalism.

¹⁶ *Within Four Walls. The Correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Heinrich Blücher 1936-1968*, pp. 85-6. (emphasis added)

¹⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity. Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1997, p. 85.

¹⁸ Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, p. 23 (emphasis added).

The tone of the text pointed not toward the responsibility for the suffering of the victims nor did resonate with an awareness of that suffering; but, it was focused toward the necessity to yield to the pressure of defeat, to recognize 'success' of the political victor; this victor is the embodiment of the jurisdictional instance for the presumed political guilt of the Germans. Consequently, it may appear that had there been no defeat, no ensuing pressure as a jurisdictional instance for the issue of the political, there would have been no guilt; the awareness of responsibility does not appear to be the issue whatsoever. This text, though undoubtedly arrived at by deep self-reflection, as Blucher stated, leaves much to be desired for.

Hannah Arendt, toward *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

After the fall of the totalitarian regime that she had experienced Hannah Arendt wrote:

"They [peoples] instinctively felt that the idea of humanity, whether it appears in religious or humanistic form, implies the obligation of a general responsibility which they did not wish to assume. For the idea of humanity, when purged of all sentimentality, has the very serious consequence that in one form or another men must assume responsibility..."¹⁹

It appeared as if her first text on this subject was almost focused on the dispensation of the German population of any collective guilt, forcefully arguing that any such claim would be congruent with nothing less than the Nazi strategy itself. This strategy was in the service of the goal to save the ideology (of fascism) and, if need be, to sacrifice the (German) nation to that end. "It is the central thesis of this Nazi political

¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility", in *Essays in Understanding*, ed. by Jerome Kohn, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994, p. 120.

strategy that there is no difference between Nazis and Germans (...) and the implications of this thesis is that there is no distinction as to responsibility, that German Anti-Fascists will suffer from defeat equally with German Fascists...”²⁰ Guilt of the Germans as a collective was therefore being ‘organized’ by the Nazi claims Arendt. The strategy was to consciously identify the whole German people with the Nazis so that it would, among other things, prove difficult if not impossible to single out those who are guilty and thus raise the probability of survival of individual members of the Nazi movement.²¹

On the other hand Arendt was fully aware that it would indeed be a ‘trial’ to “...confront[ing] a people among whom the boundaries dividing... the guilty from the innocent, have been so completely effaced that nobody will be able to tell in Germany whether in any case he is dealing with a secret hero or with a former mass murderer.”²² This however did not obscure the distinctions Arendt herself made between the guilty and the responsible, and even estimate that the number of those who are both ‘responsible and guilty was relatively small,’ as opposed to a far greater number of those who ‘share responsibility without visible proof of guilt’ and those “who have become guilty without being in the least bit responsible”.²³

²⁰ Ibid., p. 121.

²¹ In another text of the same period, Arendt lays out – albeit in a somewhat far fetched fashion - what she claims was the strategy of the Nazis: once the defeat was obvious, to pull the whole German nation into the abyss of total destruction; the reason, to aid the survival of the underlying ideology. Hannah Arendt claims that Nazism, contrary to its slogans was only minimally – if at all – a nationalist movement, which is why the total destruction of the nation was, in the case of the defeat in the war acceptable, since “a mere *defeat* of Germany would mean the ruin of the fascist movement; but on the other hand the thorough *destruction* of Germany offers fascism to turn the outcome of this war into a merely temporary defeat of the movement” (“The Seeds of the Fascist International”, in *Essays in Understanding*, p. 145).

²² “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility,” p. 125.

²³ Ibid.

One could interpret this distributive approach in a number of ways: for example, the population of Germany could, for the most part, almost evenly be divided between those who planned and those who executed the mass murders; or, another interpretation would assume that there is a substantial overlap between these two groups – although it covers the majority of the population, anyway. Within this latter case the term ‘responsibility’ means the responsibility in the preparatory building processes of Nazism in Germany, and could include the citizenship of Germany that allowed it to spread, grow roots - before the atrocities themselves began to take place; it could also mean the elite that supported the process. If this is the case, Arendt being very careful *not* to use the phrase ‘collective guilt’ does place a population, a collective under a finely conceptually devised scrutiny; and, thus raises the issue of responsibility; along the way she develops different shades of meaning in her terminology. “The extreme horror with which persons of good will react whenever the case of Germany is discussed is not evoked by those *irresponsible co-responsibles*...It is, rather, the product of that vast machine of administrative mass murder in whose service not only thousands of persons, not even scores of thousands of selected murderers, but *a whole people could be and was employed*.”²⁴ The point Arendt is making here concerns a multitude that undisturbed went about their business while employed in mass extinction.

It is in this text and as early as in these times that Arendt makes a well known statement towards constructing political responsibility, by sharing in it : “For many years now we have met Germans who declare that they are ashamed of being German. I have often felt tempted to answer that I am ashamed of being human.”²⁵ However, it is very

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126 (emphasis added).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

important to note that this is not an abstract statement of false and misguided solidarity, it is an already articulated political goal, grounded in a realization 'of what man is capable of' and furthermore that this 'is indeed a precondition of any modern political thinking.' As opposed to the indiscriminately, 'evenly' distributed and therefore, 'organized' guilt, which may serve the purpose of preserving the ideology of fascism, Arendt is building a political strategy of universal responsibility.

Although this text will, along with many others, serve as a point of departure for Arendt's (re)search on the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, there is an emphasis in terms of the issue of responsibility. Overwhelmed by the scope of horror Arendt is turning to the concept of evil, at the expense of assessing responsibility. The concept of evil does in itself retain the question of responsibility, but only as an underlying issue that then needs to be recovered. The theoretical problem looming is that the concept of evil is not conducive to a secular, i.e. a political understanding of responsibility.

The most comprehensive – though by no means final - theoretical grapple and emotional wrestle with evil is her work on *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. The preparation and writing has taken almost a decade and during that period the text has passed through different stages, she has re-conceptualized the project many times, changed the titles, the potential ones being *The Elements of Shame*, *The Three Pillars of Hell (Anti-Semitism, Imperialism, Racism)*; the book was even published - in England – as *The Burden of Our Time*. Finally after the book came out, as if dissatisfied with the ending of the story, she added different version of its conclusion. The highest and the most complex methodological requirements that Arendt had set out for herself in this

work, she was in fact not able to meet entirely. Moreover, her methodology lacked unambiguous and clear exposition on her own part.²⁶

It was her first book in a new world,²⁷ and it grew “out of shock and horror and out of an even deeper grief.”²⁸ It was a history that by far exceeded the requirements of any historical presentation, a sociological analysis on a grand scale; in fact, it is a political theory in the making – and all this written by a philosopher with a lingering sense of allegiance to philosophy.

The elements – that crystallized into a totalitarian structure - and therefore the elements under scrutiny here were the people, members of all social strata, of numerous political or non-political convictions, different educational backgrounds, from a full spectrum of all religious persuasions, atheists included; and, finally it was also inclusive of all European nations, though the text was certainly primarily focused on Germans. In order to attempt to answer her own burning question: how were such horrors possible, Arendt used her own lens and reconfigured the world that she was trying to comprehend; and what she saw were the bourgeoisie, the mob, the masses, leaders, and elites.

Most people who played a part in building the Nazi empire and committed the crimes against humanity that it was in fact built on, were ‘because of the sheer numbers’ a part of what Arendt called the masses. These masses constituted the first support system of Nazism. The primary ‘illusion of democracy’ was that majority took an active part in the government through political organizations, or party affiliations, or that the majority

²⁶ Elizabeth Young-Breuhl, *Hannah Arendt. For the Love of the World*. pp. 202-3.

²⁷ The other two books written before (*Love and Saint Augustine* and *Rahel Varnhagen*), although both have certainly found their rightful place in the context of everything she has subsequently written, belonged to another world and another time line.

²⁸ George Kateb *Hannah Arendt. Politics, Conscience, Evil*, Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld Publishers, 1983, p. 52.

in any other politically relevant form exercised its presence in the public life; however, it turned out to be “that a *citizen's duties and responsibilities* could only be felt to be a needless drain on his limited time and energy.”²⁹ This state of affairs rendered the hitherto un-political, inactive majority, which was under unprecedented economic pressure with all social and psychological safety nets withdrawn, easy prey to totalitarian ideology. These individuals in unbelievably great numbers responded unconditionally to the claims on their individuality, pledged ‘total unrestricted loyalty’, never demanding concrete political programs or any aspect of accountability on part of the movement leaders. In fact they tacitly complied, succumbed to the total domination on part of the apparatus that built its whole system of control not so much on violence as on ‘total domination from within.’ Therefore in effect, the majority gave their *consent to the policy of evil*. This is the key analysis that should be carried into issues on responsibility and translated as a statement to that effect. Hannah Arendt however did not make use of the theoretical apparatus she herself had installed; instead, mystifying this along non-secular lines she chose to designate this an element in crystallizing political evil.

The fact that the elites and the leaders, in comparison to the majority of the population, are those who are responsible *and guilty* is obviously not to be questioned; but, *politically speaking*, it is the majority that should be held politically responsible, or better said, politicized in regard to their civic responsibility. And their responsibility lies in holding the elites and the leaders answerable - held in an obligation to answer to, respond – to the population they are assumed to represent.

However, Arendt’s analysis of the *Origins of Totalitarianism* though in absolute awe before the ‘crimes men can neither punish or forgive’ culminated in the arrival at an

²⁹ Hannah Arendt *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 313 (emphasis added).

“unpunishable, unforgivable, absolute *evil* which could no longer be understood and explained...”³⁰ It appears that Hannah Arendt in a somewhat desperate attempt to understand, revolved around the concepts of absolute or radical evil; and although the concept itself had limitations in its political relevance, in terms of its content it was on the mark: “There is only one thing that seems to be discernable: we may say that radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which *all men have become equally superfluous*.”³¹

It appears that from then on the concept of evil has carried the weight of not only Arendt’s but also of the concerns and preoccupations of her interpreters, thereby outweighing the issues of responsibility. However let us consider her central remarks on the concept of evil in *The Origins* where she reflects: “It is inherent in our entire philosophical tradition that we cannot conceive of a ‘radical evil’, and that this is true both of Christian theology, which conceded even to the Devil himself celestial origin, as well as for Kant, the only philosopher who, in the word he coined for it, at least must have suspected the existence of this evil even though he immediately rationalized it in the concept of a ‘perverted ill will’ that could be explained by comprehensible motives.”³² It would appear that Kant reveals more political astuteness than Arendt on this occasion. But the preceding thoughts of Arendt should be juxtaposed to a later sharp articulation of a question: “How can we approach the problem of evil in *an entirely secular setting*?”³³

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 459 (emphasis added).

³¹ *Ibid.*, (emphasis added).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Quoted from Jerome Kohn, “Evil and Plurality” in *Hannah Arendt. Twenty Years Later*, ed. by Larry May and Jerome Kohn, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press, 1997, p. 155 (emphasis added).

With this rephrasing Arendt is once more moving along a clearly politically defined trajectory.

Significantly, for my analysis, her conclusions not only led to a grounding of the concept of radical evil, but were to a large extent also motivated by an insight that “[T]otalitarian solutions may well survive the fall of totalitarian regimes in the form of strong temptations which will come up whenever it seems impossible to alleviate political social or economic misery in a manner worthy of man.”³⁴ This grim outlook placed on the concluding pages was never quite counterbalanced either by reality or by Arendt’s attempt to send a hopeful message in ending paragraphs: “every end in history necessarily contains a new beginning; this beginning is the promise, the only ‘message’ ...”³⁵

Therefore Arendt’s approach in conjunction with a historical warning lends itself to reading *The Origins of Totalitarianism* from the perspective of responsibility. The comprehensive classifications and the bold strokes of this long history of infamy have all the advantages of a birds-eye view; what Arendt’s perspective will gain in time is the complementary perspective and with it include an insight into the individual responsibility conceived of responsibility of a citizen.

The issues of evil and responsibility for its political appearance both reappeared forcefully in Arendt’s texts more than a decade later; and only then could the issue of political responsibility be actually and fully placed on the agenda.

³⁴ Hannah Arendt *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 459.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 479. An example of the ‘temptations of totalitarian solutions’ is undoubtedly the policy of the Serbian regime in the 90s.

Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

If there is any consent among Arendt scholars it is on the unprecedented scope of what came to be known as ‘Eichmann controversy’; I would also claim that in this controversy, Arendt was misunderstood and consequently judged too harshly. The points of contention referred to were both critical issues: the position of the victims (exemplified through the question of Judenräte) and the role of the perpetrators (exemplified in the person of Adolf Eichmann). I will consider only the latter.

Hannah Arendt suspended all her activities in order to give priority to attend the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961. : “I missed the Nuremberg trials, I never saw these people in the flesh and this is probably my last chance.” Therefore “[t]o attend this trial is somehow, I feel, an obligation I owe to my past.” But, first and foremost “it was she said in retrospect her *cura posterior*”³⁶

In the heated polemic which followed when she published her first reports in *The New Yorker* many of her public – as well as private - relationships were called into question, during the course of which she was interrogated about her political alliances, her Jewishness, morality, public presence, and so on - a lot of which had come out of the one phrase: the banality of evil. This phrase overtook the space that had hitherto, in her work belonged to the concept of radical evil, and whereas we may be sure of the origin of the first, the concept of radical evil, which is Kantian, we can only guess as to the origin of the second. The term appears in the correspondence with Karl Jaspers in reference to the evil of totalitarian regime(s), where Arendt’s perspective, threatening to attribute magnitude to the appearance of evil, was checked by Jaspers. He warned Arendt to be

³⁶ Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt. For the Love of the World*, p. 329.

careful not to ascribe to a war criminal any attribute of greatness, be that in evil, or in any other respect, because “[b]acteria can cause epidemics that wipe out nations, but they remain merely bacteria.”³⁷

What was brought about when facing Eichmann, was in fact *cura posterior*: as if a balloon of horror had suddenly lost its volume and shrunk into an insignificant piece of garbage. Eichmann turned out to be ‘a little man’ in every respect. But in the process of Arendt’s understanding, her comprehension of the evil of totalitarianism he had not only served his purpose, he had in fact served a major purpose, for the pivotal thesis was not so much about the banality of evil as it was about thoughtlessness: “There was no sign in him [Eichmann] of firm ideological convictions or of specific evil motives, and the only notable characteristic one could detect in his past behavior was ...something entirely negative: thoughtlessness.”³⁸ This, though just the initial perception, is what subsequently led Hannah Arendt to further probe the issue in outlining the trajectory from *Eichmann in Jerusalem* to *The Life of the Mind* - setting the course for the elucidation of thinking, willing and, finally, judging. The Eichmann trial had posed the right question and thereby had pointed toward some possible answers: “Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever comes to pass...could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing...?”³⁹

Arendt was most clearly *faced* with the issue of personal responsibility at the trial of Adolf Eichmann. While following, observing, and reporting directly from where the

³⁷ Hannah Arendt-Karl Jaspers: *Correspondence*, p. 62.

³⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1978, p. 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 5.

trial took place, for a substantial period of time, she confronted an embodiment of evil in, what she later came to judge as, all its banality. The debate and the controversy, her assessment of every aspect the proceedings raised, all speak to the complexity of the issue of responsibility; but also stem from a pivotal perception. Arendt at one point emphasized that: "...in a courtroom there is no system on trial, no history or historical trend, no 'ism', anti-semitism for instance, but a person (...) an individual, with name, date and place of birth, identifiable and therefore not expendable, (...)"⁴⁰ The designation of a 'courtroom' can be translated as a spatial metaphor, understood even as metaphorical placement of any process of judgment, which is always already about the individual.

This matter deserves attention: the individual, the personal, is to be used as a point of departure and from it, all other distinctions follow. Whenever responsibility is under scrutiny it is first and foremost about the individual; furthermore, responsibility of a plurality of individuals would always already necessitate to be grounded in the individual. Therefore, following any events which constituted manifestations of the policy of evil, regardless of whether we attempt to assess responsibility or guilt, regardless if the concern is moral, metaphysical or just criminal it is always already about the individual and only subsequently can it concern a collective.

Precisely in terms of this issue that I want to highlight as the kernel of assessing responsibility, i.e. the individual - there is, after the fall of the totalitarian regime, a sustained attempt to shake off any personal responsibility, to pronounce remoteness of, almost total disconnectedness with any decision making process in the construction of the policy of evil; this is attempted time and again, by claiming one's own minor, ineffective, practically non-existent role. Surely there is a distinction here: between the elites as the

⁴⁰ "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship," *Listener*, August 1964., p 1.

centers of political power (leaders in Arendt's terminology) and those that are not members of political or any other elite. In reference to Eichmann's self-justification Hannah Arendt indicated a 'cog theory'. "When we describe a political system (...) it is inevitable that we speak of all persons used by the system in terms of functionaries, hence of cogs and wheels..."⁴¹ The 'cog theory' came alive during the Eichmann trial. "We heard the protestations of the defense that Eichmann was after all only a 'tiny cog' in the machinery of the Final Solution,"⁴² Politically speaking a strange and ugly process of reversal takes place: when the expected victory turned into absolute defeat, those who had hitherto considered themselves key political actors start posing as mere 'cogs'. The argument that participation in evil was just a consequence of following and obeying orders - and, hence as such, may even be considered a virtue - this argument is actually made along similar lines. Careful to maintain her position of assigning individual responsibility, Arendt not without irony said: "It is the grandeur of the Court proceedings that even a cog can become a person again."⁴³

Her counter-argument analyzes obedience and translates it into what this particular choice of active participation in effect was: *support*. "What is wrong here is the word 'obedience.' A child obeys; if an adult 'obeys' he actually supports (...) it would make much more sense to look upon the functioning of the 'cogs' and wheels in terms of overall support for a common enterprise..."⁴⁴ Questions however remain: is there a way to effectively withdraw support for a system that is engaged in a policy of evil? What are the parameters for measuring the effects? And, does that then spell resistance to the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴² Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965, p. 289.

⁴³ "Collective Responsibility," p. 44.

⁴⁴ "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship" p. 6.

system? What is the requirement here: to risk life? Or, to leave the space of political jurisdiction?

It was therefore an individual's choice for which s/he should – as a rule - be held responsible, and, it was a choice to support the system of evil. Furthermore, no leader, no hierarchical structure can stand without the support of a plurality of individuals, and each one of the individuals had to make a personal choice to do so. This is the key perspective on the issue of political responsibility; and it can be established following Arendt.

Hannah Arendt, though decisively less consistent and often less precise than Jaspers, primarily makes the differentiation between: on the one hand, individual, personal and on the other hand, collective responsibility. Underlying her brief assessments of these issues, there is also an assumption of another important conceptual distinction, namely the one between guilt and responsibility. The difference in the approaches Arendt and Jaspers had can also be noted in this respect. As opposed to Jaspers, who emphasized the term guilt, in Arendt's work, there is an obvious precedence assigned to the term responsibility -since, without it, there is no concept of the political – as well as the use of the two distinct terms that was present in her work from the outset.⁴⁵

At a later date, she was somewhat urged to acknowledge this distinction more precisely, and at that time she explicated it in the following way:⁴⁶ “My agreement [with Mr. Feinberg's paper] concerns his firm distinction between guilt and responsibility. ‘Collective responsibility,’ he says, ‘is a special case of vicarious responsibility; and there can be no thing such as vicarious guilt.’ In other words there is such a thing as

⁴⁵ See “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility”.

⁴⁶ The distinction was made by Feinberg, to whose paper Hannah Arendt responded with the text “Collective Responsibility.”

responsibility for things one has not done; one can be held liable for them. But there is no such thing as being or feeling guilty for things that happened without oneself actively participating in them.”⁴⁷.

It appears that the criterion for this distinction was, the im/possibility of the attribute of vicariousness: whereas in responsibility lies the possibility of vicariousness, guilt could never be transferable or distributive. Namely, “responsibility exists for things one has not done...”⁴⁸ whereas with guilt, the case is precisely the opposite, it is meaningless in the absence of a particular act one is being accused of. From the way differentiation between guilt and responsibility was made – and apparently hitherto in Arendt’s work implicitly understood – it follows that Arendt, as opposed to Jaspers, claims there is no such thing as collective guilt: “Where all are guilty, nobody is.”⁴⁹

Responsibility, on the other hand, lends itself to being both, individual and collective, and as such it is critical for the concept of the political. Arendt makes the claim - that one can be held *responsible without acting in person* - significant for another issue: this is the ground for collective responsibility. Discussing collective responsibility requires careful investigation into the term ‘collective’ and - to limit the broadening, the overflowing of the theme - what constitutes a collective that can be held responsible, that is liable? When and in which way can I talk as a ‘we’?

Although she had on many occasions expressed decisive impatience with what she referred to as ‘misplaced feelings of guilt’, from everything stated it follows that therefore this Arendtian dictum ‘where all are guilty, nobody is’ does *not* mean that the issue of collective responsibility is dismissed from her analysis. On the contrary, in

⁴⁷ “Collective Responsibility”, p. 43 (emphasis added).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Arendt's texts the collective – besides being analyzed as a political concept – this collective is also under scrutiny specifically for its political responsibility; and, it is for the most part considered in reference to a concrete 'collective' i.e. German citizens. Both analyses, the abstract and the concrete, speak to and are relevant for political theory.

Having delineated collective responsibility H.Arendt underscores: "I don't know when the term 'collective responsibility' first made its appearance, but I am reasonably sure that not only the term, but also the problem it implies owe their relevance and general interest to political predicaments as distinguished from legal or, moral ones."⁵⁰ Arendt then formulates that, beside the condition, already stated – to be held responsible for something I haven't done – the second one to be met in order for collective responsibility to be present is "membership in a group (a collective) which no voluntary act of mine can dissolve..."⁵¹ Moreover this applies to all political communities, and is true even for revolutionary governments. She repeatedly⁵² affirms the existence of "political responsibility which every government assumes for the deeds and misdeeds of its predecessor and every nation for the deeds and misdeeds of the past;" and, she adds: "When Napoleon Bonaparte became the ruler of France he said: I assume responsibility for everything France has done from the times of Charlemagne to the terror of Robespierre."⁵³ The closest to articulating the *political* criteria here is that "we are always held responsible for the sins of our fathers as we reap the rewards of their merits."⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 44.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 45.

⁵² In both texts, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship" and "Collective Responsibility" there is the same statement, to the letter.

⁵³ "Collective Responsibility" p. 45.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

The only ones, reminds Arendt, who are exempt from this responsibility are the ones who have been denied the opportunity to 'reap the rewards' - the refugees and the stateless. The price of being displaced and losing a space of belonging is much higher than the burden of collective responsibility

All the questions of responsibility - regardless of whether individual or collective - have been throughout political theory, Arendt's included, dispersed and immersed into the concept of evil, which is abstract and, as such often perceived as beyond the human reach.

From here using Arendt's texts means dispersion of issues and leads us in three directions all of which will subsequently be followed, the first two in the remaining two sections of the first part and the third issue will be addressed in the second part of the thesis. The first direction is to probe as far as possible the concrete proposals stemming from Arendt's discussion on the possibilities of political action in the dark times; the second will require that we look into the dark, face the evil, so as to place the discussion of responsibility within its context; and finally the third path is to move on from the thesis on thoughtlessness and follow Arendt in her exploration of how thinking can - if at all - take on political responsibility; in other words, to consider the category of judgment.

Answers to policy of evil: non-participation and resistance

The essay "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship" is one of the most condensed texts that Arendt wrote. It addresses, besides the aforementioned thesis on the primacy of individual responsibility, another pivotal issue: it articulates a possibility for an alternative to evil. Since this alternative resides with "the only ones who dared *judge* by

themselves”⁵⁵ the capacity to reach one’s own decisions, to judge for yourself is formulated as the premise, a prerequisite for this choice. It does not require a high level of sophistication, but just entails a need for self-reflection, and is grounded in an assumption that some need to ‘be able to live in peace with themselves’.⁵⁶ Therefore following an alternative path was, as she said, for ‘doubters and skeptics’, for those who would not rely on ‘customs and mores’ since those are easily susceptible to change; instead they rely on the ability *to judge* for oneself. What constitutes this part of the process is to be discussed further along the line.

The alternative to evil is only partly taken by making an independent judgment. From assessing aspects and levels of complicity with totalitarian evil, Arendt articulates her expectation further; it is an ethical demand issued to each individual: a request of non-participation.⁵⁷ This request is expanded on in another text though not consistently.

This request resonates with two ethical theories: Socratic and Kantian. In its form it is basically Kantian in that it falls into the format of the categorical imperative as an elementary ethical expectation that is no blueprint for heroes and can therefore be met. In its content, the expectation also appears as modest, lean precept, reminiscent of Socratic *daimonoin*, inner voice that only prescribes withdrawal.

However, this ethical requirement does not apply indiscriminately, not even by Arendt’s standards: namely the minimal ethical expectation of non-participation could not suffice for those political actors already operational within a greater scope of consciously assumed public responsibility. Hannah Arendt in her text, with a telling title

⁵⁵ “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,” p. 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

The Deputy: Guilt by Silence,⁵⁸ among other issues, underscores the question of responsibility of Pope Pius XI, the question posed by R. Hochhuth's play *Deputy*. "The facts themselves are not under dispute (...) No one has denied that the Pope did not even raise his voice in protest when, during the German occupation of Rome, the Jews, including the Catholic Jews, (...) were rounded up, right under the windows of Vatican, to be included in the Final Solution."⁵⁹ Non-participation of the Vatican spelled, in the least, tacit consent, if not - as it was undoubtedly interpreted by the powers that be, who unhindered went about their grim business - loud and clear approval. Therefore, non-participation, in this case, could hardly constitute an ethical approach; quite the contrary, the fact of non-participation was precisely what was unethical about it.

The Arendtian political expectation of non-participation in the public life orchestrated as a policy of evil is also expanded within its Socratic moment. At closer look, Arendtian expectations, again relying on Socratic ethics, actually reach and overflow far beyond the prescription of non-participation: "...we are left with a Socratic proposition: It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong, (...) and a presupposition that I live together not only with others but with my self..."⁶⁰ Significantly, Arendt, finally translates all this into a 'political answer' which although she designates it as merely an answer to the 'Socratic proposition' is the core of Arendt's prescriptive approach: "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; *it is your duty to prevent it*."⁶¹ Therefore the ethical expectations which collapse both, Kantian form and Socratic substance into

⁵⁸ See also *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

⁵⁹ "The Deputy: Guilt by Silence", in *Amor Mundi, Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, James Bernauer, ed., Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987. p. 51.

⁶⁰ "Collective Responsibility", p. 47.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, (emphasis added).

interpreting Arendt's concept of responsibility prove to be a far greater demand than non-participation in public life - bearing in mind 'a duty to prevent wrong'.

To do justice to Arendt, she does differentiate between the many causes for non-participation. The first distinction follows from the governing regime. There is the option of non-participation in what she names free countries, that too is either a freedom not often taken into account as a freedom *from* politics, or, another form articulated as resistance, again, thinks Arendt present more or less 'only for free countries'; she notes on the other hand, a possibility of active resistance in countries of real -socialism⁶²; although she did not live to see the mushrooming of that resistance.

Let us further probe Arendt's briefly presented ethical demand of non-participation: in dictatorships and totalitarian systems. There as opposed to 'a matter of course' position of 'participation, which meant complicity with crimes'⁶³ - the criterion is based on making a conscious decision of non-participation in public life.

If the expectations remain strictly within the confinement of non-participation, Arendt does allow that 'the marginal situation', or 'isolation and powerlessness' constitute a valid excuse for absence of action; then, in itself, the decision for non-participation appears to be more of a means 'to save the soul' than an effective political action. It is an individual moral decision that appears to have no substantial political consequence.

The step of making a decision not to participate - to which Hannah Arendt prescribes critical value - cannot in itself amount to 'preventing wrong' nor can it

⁶² I choose not to designate these as either communist much less socialist, despite Arendt's terminology; the first term creates a conceptual confusion in relation to Marx's use, and the second has inadequately been appropriated even more; the specification real is more of a German derivative than an English word.

⁶³ "Collective Responsibility", p. 48.

constitute resistance. However if we take into account a plurality of human beings, a multitude making a similar, or even the same decision, especially as a concerted effort, then it may well constitute a form of resistance, rare as it may be.

Nevertheless there is not only the potential but also corresponding realities of introducing the critical step from the decision of non-participation made by many to the coordination of a plurality of such decisions; this step undoubtedly constitutes a political action. The substance of this action is non-activity that is not only a public announcement – made oftentimes by demonstrating it - but a public outcry denying any consent taking away legitimacy of a government, a leader, a regime to represent in each and every way. Non-participation is always already first and foremost an individual act and only subsequently can it become a matter of collective responsibility or not.

There are two possible criteria for terminating the relationship that can later be construed as carrying responsibility; both entail renouncing or severing from the polity in question, first, physically, and second, legally.

The first possibility is open for numerous queries. Does the decision to reside within a territory necessarily spell support of the regime? Residence within a territory governed by certain regime rarely leaves the possibility of openly, substantively and effectively breaking the laws under the jurisdiction of which the said territory is – at least not as a long term individual strategy. At the outset of determining the political consequences of the decision whether to stay within a territory where the regime is increasingly shaping itself as a dictatorship or totalitarianism – what should be clear at the outset, is that anyone having the possibility to decide already has a privilege not shared by everybody. Namely many have become stateless, not as a result of their own

choice. Therefore the first distinction within this option is to differentiate between a freedom of choice and a necessity.

The second criterion is introduced by Hannah Arendt when she states: "If I obey the laws of the land, I actually support its constitution, ..."64 Do the support of the constitution and abiding by law necessarily constitute the support of the actual regime (e.g. Third Reich)? Does citizenship as manifest by legal documents (such as passport), obligations (e.g. tax paying) or rights, metaphorically put as 'the rewards we reap' (e.g. voting) – does citizenship constitute responsibility not of government toward me, or my responsibility toward the government, but *responsibility of the citizen for the government*.

I would like to propose a parameter concerning the issue of responsibility. Since this is a *post factum* claim there is a pivotal concern here: pronouncing *now* who is responsible should be grounded in an answer to the following question: what collective do we want to build in this process, or better said, contribute to building, for the *future*, *by assessing the past*. By stating who should be held responsible, or, by proclaiming liability of the people confused between severe distortions about ethnic loyalties, or religious commitments, vague political ideas, but clear social needs, we contribute to building a citizenship based on civic responsibility for a political space; that way perhaps the past can be carried into the future, but as a burden, consciously carried.

The Context of Responsibility: Evil

What our philosophical tradition certainly attests to almost throughout its history is a sustained, painful, Herculean labor to face the evil. There is one pivotal point that this

⁶⁴ "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship" p. 6.

task has always carried: it is a self-reflective process. The second critical moment has found its way into relevant texts only fairly recently, in our own time: to be part of the political. Both of these have been targeted by our contemporary, the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who would have the appearance of evil as a 'mode of interrogation' about myself. Perhaps what may be added to Ricoeur's insights is that the only way this is to be done is by conceding to spill venom into, and out of, the "question [that] I had become to myself"⁶⁵ There is seldom any other way.

Ricoeur, who after WWII had joined the ranks of intellectuals for whom in the words of Hannah Arendt 'the problem of evil was a fundamental question', approached this problem by way of philosophy, or more specifically speaking, in terms of the methodological approach, through hermeneutics. He conceived of his comprehensive philosophical work on the subject as a speculative endeavor, a fundamental ontology that nevertheless "...cannot afford to neglect political philosophy when one has witnessed or taken part in the horrifying events that led to the hecatombs of concentration camps, to the terror of totalitarian regimes, and nuclear peril..."⁶⁶ This is precisely the significance of Ricoeur's thought: in bringing together philosophical thought in its apparently most abstract form, as an ontology, and a critical political agenda.

The extensive work, planned as a three volume text, revolves around issues of guilt, fallibility and evil; here Ricoeur is set on deciphering the evil by analyzing the transition from its possibility to its reality; this analysis should proceed by 'surprising' the process of "transition in the act by 're-enacting' in ourselves the confession of ...[the

⁶⁵ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971, pp. 76, 223.

⁶⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1986, p. xiv.

evil]”⁶⁷. This re-enactment is based on the fact that it is an ‘utterance of the man himself’, that there is the language of confession, the phenomena of which lays bare the complexity of the issue and thus may bring us as close as possible to the manifestation of evil. The road of hermeneutics may prove to be productive, but since it is beyond the scope of this work, the multi layered research into the symbolism of Hebrew and Greek mythology in reference to the appearance of evil will be set aside. In its stead let us turn to the Western philosophical canon.

The problem of evil has not captured the minds and the imagination of either Plato or Aristotle; for the greatest minds that laid the foundations of mainstream Western philosophy, it appeared not to be of any interest.⁶⁸ However in both their philosophical systems it was present in another guise. The very fact that Plato had conceived of two worlds – one of Ideal Forms and the other, its declining, transitional image – must have led him, and his student Aristotle, to consider an ideal (world) in relation to its divergence, the pale copy, the ever unsatisfactory replica. This relationship was therefore thematized as a critical concern in both their philosophies, and as a theoretical impasse was never resolved.⁶⁹ It was finally successfully tackled and subsequently theoretically resolved once it became one of the pivotal concerns of Christian philosophy but this too was certainly grounded in mainstream Greek philosophy, namely in Platonism. Among others, Hannah Arendt, a one time student of philosophy and a would-be-student of theology underscored this in one of her early works: “The reason that Plotinus was so important for Augustine’s thought is that Plotinus, in contradistinction to his ancient

⁶⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Neither Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* nor Plato’s *Theory of Forms* contain a reference to evil; however it could be argued that their epistemology - primarily Plato’s - is, on the whole, built so as to counter evil; it bears direct reference to the trial and execution of Socrates.

⁶⁹ See Plato, *Parmenides*.

predecessors is primarily interested in the fate of man in his everlasting cosmos. Hence, Plotinus raises the question of the origin of evil, which is of no great interest to either Plato or Aristotle but is of compelling significance to Augustine. (...) Plotinus's notion of evil that one should 'not think it to be anything but...a lesser good and a continuous diminution' echoes through most of Augustine's discussions on the question."⁷⁰

Plotinus interpreted the world as the emanation of One, emanation being the designation of the process which did not and could not in any way diminish its source, but allow for a possibility to reach unevenly - or even not to reach - every particle of the world thus created for the better. This theoretical presupposition not only overcame the problem haunting Plato's ontology, Theory of Forms, which was so perceptively discussed and opposed by his student Aristotle, but was welcomed by Christianity as a way of resolving the burning issue which could seriously undermine the central dogma of Creator: the seemingly insurmountable gap between the Good and the Almighty Creator and the oftentimes undeniably defiled Creation of the World and even more so of the Mankind.

The resolve was the theoretical derivative of the philosophy of Plotinus, a neo-Platonist, formulated by Augustine: evil is privation, lacking a substance of its own; it is a lack, an epitome of lack. Central to Augustine's exposition on evil are his *Confessions* as testimonials to the way that holds the highest probability of arriving at an acute awareness of the evil in ourselves. The way is an ongoing self-reflection with a full understanding that no way can foreclose evil with certainty; the believers have, or believe to have (which amounts to the same thing), an additional source of support.

⁷⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 65.

Ultimately, after a painful self-probing there remains, in Augustine's claim that evil is privation, a sustainable theological underpinning. Augustine, though setting a foundation for the conceptualization of evil in Christianity, has when claiming it can only be understood as privation, left a void which could have subsequently only been filled by the responsibility of individual human action. The Augustinian concept of evil runs like a thread through the history of philosophy, from Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* to the *Theodicy* of Leibnitz

Even Kant places his writing on evil within *Religion Within Mere Reason Alone*, retaining thereby the framework of theological concerns.⁷¹ To be sure, Kant makes every attempt to reach beyond this framework, because then another postulate of great significance would be – or is, as matters stand - at stake, and that is freedom of the will. This framework is in every aspect supported by conceptualizing evil as natural in, and innate to human beings, thus rendering it, as is the original sin, ultimately inescapable.

Jaspers' concept of metaphysical guilt is reminiscent of theological concerns: it is, as is sin – predestined and therefore inescapable; so it is highly unlikely to be politically relevant. What was necessary so as to make a politically relevant analysis, or, to bring *theoria* to bear on *praxis* is to secularize the category of evil. Arendt also notes a “difficulty which comes from the opposite side, as it were, namely from the side of religion. That moral matters concern such a thing as the well being of a soul *rather than that of the world* is of course part and parcel of the Hebrew-Christian heritage.”⁷² Secularization is possible only by seriously asking the question of responsibility as well

⁷¹ See Jerome Kohn (“Evil and Plurality” in *Hannah Arendt, Twenty Years Later*) who has a different view on relationship of evil to man in Kant's work.

⁷² “Collective Responsibility,” p. 46.

as laying the foundation for answers. Metaphysical musing, or theological dismay and horror are not the way.

There is an approach within contemporary philosophy stemming from the same intellectual tradition as Hannah Arendt and, if not congruent, then certainly complementary with Arendtian understanding of politics – it is the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas.⁷³ This philosophy denies ontology its privileged position – a position initially inherited from metaphysics, as *prote philosophia*, an Aristotelian concept of the undisputed highest position among the theoretical (i.e. philosophical) disciplines. And, since philosophy itself oftentimes assumes to be on a highest pedestal of human knowledge, this *prote philosophia*, this first philosophy has from Parmenides to Heidegger presented itself as the kernel of ultimate truth. Levinas saw these assumptions as based in the ‘egoism’ of ontology, as an echo of the philosophy of power and injustice. “Wisdom of the first philosophy was self-consciousness”.⁷⁴ Levinas reminds us that the concept of metaphysics – problems notwithstanding – precedes ontology not only temporally but ethically in a sense that it recognized the incommensurability of the Self with the Other.

This is what Levinas denies and places ethics in the stead of ontology, the reason being that: “The human is the return ... to its capacity to fear injustice more than death, to prefer to suffer than to commit injustice, and to prefer that which justifies being over that which assures it.”⁷⁵ This ethical concept is centered around *my* responsibility for the Other and does not respond by questioning the responsibility of anyone for myself,

⁷³ Richard Bernstein, “Listening to and Responding to Levinas”. (Paper delivered as a keynote address at a conference “Ethics After the Holocaust”, which was held at the University of Oregon in May, 1996.)

⁷⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics as First Philosophy”, in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. by Sean Hand, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989, p. 78.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

because as Levinas tirelessly repeats – for some outrageously - that this “intersubjective relation is a non-symmetrical relation”⁷⁶

Using phenomenology as his method – and in that akin to Heidegger – Levinas forcefully places in the foreground of his philosophy, as its distinguishing mark, the *face*: “There is first the uprightness of the face, its upright exposure, without defense. The skin of the face is that which stays most naked, most destitute. (...) The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what forbids us to kill. (...) The face and the discourse are tied. The face speaks. ...it is discourse or more exactly *response or responsibility* which is this authentic relationship.”⁷⁷

At first glance, the concept of metaphysical guilt in the philosophy of Jaspers may appear close to this stance of Levinas. The difference however improbable it may seem, is that Levinas is easily translatable into the political concerns whereas Jaspers’ concept of metaphysical guilt is not. There is in the Jaspers’ concept an underlying impotence; despite the anguish, *weltschmerz* and although understandable and undoubtedly present in the wake of the limit-situations, it leaves little in the way of political action. Levinas’ authentic concern for the Other, as opposed to this, is almost without any remainder transferable into the political action

Towards a Conclusion

Arendt was driven by her concern for the public realm, for the world. Thrown into the epicenter of where it was in danger of being obliterated, she designated that danger as evil. As the elucidation of that evil developed it took on the format of first being named

⁷⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 98.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 86-8 (emphasis added).

radical in order to be rearticulated later on as banal. The controversy still present among her interpreters if Arendt had changed her mind in the process of renaming the evil misses the point. The issue is not the evil, radical or banal. In renaming the evil as banal she was in fact almost abandoning the concept of evil altogether. The issue is in inherent problems of using the term evil. It carried too much of a moral religious (non-secular) tone and, as such, would go not only against the issue of responsibility, but also counter to her political theory of action

When Arendt introduced the term ‘banality of evil’ in the stead of ‘radical evil’ the truth of the matter is that notion of evil that rendered us, mortals, helpless started to shrink, until responsibility emerged. The ultimate point in the analysis of evil and Arendt’s positioning within that analysis is that “she showed herself ready to dispense with the Devil, ready to face the problem of evil in entirely secular terms.”⁷⁸ And that is precisely why she is relevant for the issues of political responsibility.

The debate among Arendtian scholars as to where the ‘true’ Arendt is on this particular issue concerns – as is the case with any great thinker - the interpreters themselves as well as the requirements of their own (political) times and spaces. It is not about Arendt, because she offers it all: political theory, history, philosophy, even theology; she offers insights into the philosophy of evil, bordering, especially at the beginning of her intellectual development, on theological issues, but, from the outset, from these very beginnings with a deep care for and a sense of the world. This care, that lies anywhere between the love of thy neighbor and the love of the world, was also from

⁷⁸ Dana R. Villa, *Philosophy, Politics, and Terror*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 58.

the outset political. This is why when specifically focusing on Eichmann she could not have lost sight of her understanding of the Augustinian concept of evil.

The apparent difference in conceptualization of this problem does not involve a cut, a sudden and unexpected turn, it is rather an unfolding in many directions all inclusive of the insights already acquired. Moreover her last – and sadly, unfinished - words on the subject present the most consequent application of some of her own methodological recommendations, such as ‘crystallization of elements’ or ‘thinking without a banister’.

From abstract and sometimes confusing formulations of the comprehensive project to understand *The Origins of Totalitarianism* through the ordeal and theoretical implications of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* Arendt comes through as a most mature political thinker on the issues of responsibility for all the instances when evil becomes a policy.

CHAPTER TWO

Judgment

Probing the issues of responsibility lead Hannah Arendt to the perception of thoughtlessness, a lack of capacity to judge for oneself; therefore understanding responsibility requires an analysis of the category of judgment.

Perhaps it is understandable that judgment, the one major category of Hannah Arendt's theory that she did not fully explicate, provoked such a great number of explanations, definitions, classifications, and, even closures. Most would agree that one of the initial interpretations, the one by Ronald Beiner, is an excellent comprehensive statement on the subject. He claims that the category of judgment has appeared in two main guises, one as a desirable tool of a political actor, and two, as a necessary attribute of spectator's assessments.¹

Although this, undoubtedly prevailing, classification can be further expanded in many directions, and is yet to be fully explored, in contradistinction to it, there is another venue, which I find interesting to follow. Somewhat dissonantly, Lisa J. Disch claims that this interpretation would fall under what she calls an Archimedean thinking about Arendt as opposed to the position of true heroes of her theory, namely the pariahs.

According to L.J. Disch what defines Arendtian theory is thinking from the margins, and that approach would disavow 'the dilemma of spectatorship versus membership on the judgment writings'² What Disch claims further, as a point of departure in discussing the problems of judgment, is crucial to defining oneself from

¹ Ronald Beiner, "Hannah Arendt on Judging" in Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. by Ronald Beiner, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989, p.92.

² Lisa Jane Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 143.

within - or for that matter from without – Arendt's theory: judgment is to be understood first and foremost as 'thinking without a banister', *denken ohne geländer*.

In contrast to this framework, Seyla Benhabib's interpretation of judgment leads from her conclusion on the tension between thinking and judging to an explication on the 'missing normative foundations' of Arendt's concept of the political. At closer look Benhabib and Disch practically claim the same of Arendt's theory, *they just judge it differently*, since the normative foundations which are 'missing' would precisely construct the banisters that Arendt in fact consciously 'lost'.³

However I would like to argue that the tension between thinking and judging is not in and of itself the primary one, inasmuch as judging *is* thinking. I also argue that the major tension in Arendt's work is the tension between the political and philosophy. It is an unresolved tension for no other reason than that it is irresolvable, precisely by virtue of Arendt's approach of thinking without the banisters.

I shall therefore proceed by outlining the main parameters of Arendt's presentation on judgment and conclude with the assessment of interpretations of Arendt's theory of judgment; I will finally explore her relationship to philosophy so as to ground and provide the context for her theory of judgment.

Sociability and Plurality of Men

Judgment is last of the three mental activities Hannah Arendt intended to explore in her work *The Life of the Mind*, the first two being thinking and willing. As opposed to these, she did not carry out her intention. She died, before she started the actual writing of the

³ Melvyn Hill ed., *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, p. 336.

part on judging. The story goes that she had finished the difficult part on willing some days prior to her death; and when she died there was, in her typewriter, a page with just a title - judgment - and two epigraphs. According to her statement writing was the ultimate process of understanding: "Certain things get formulated,"⁴ she explained. The category of judgment did not go through that process in Arendt's theory. As Michael Denny in the earliest, and an insightful, analyses of Arendt's understanding of judgment said: "It is our great misfortune that Hannah Arendt did not live to explore these matters and it is our great fortune that she pointed the way."⁵ Although her work on these complex matters is partial, at best unfinished, and according to some inconclusive, I think that she did more than point the way, she paved a good portion of it.

Luckily we are not confined to a blank page – the significance of epigraphs notwithstanding – because on the subject of judgment there are some texts: the most relevant are her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, also a short *Postscriptum* to 'Thinking', the first part of her volume *Life of the Mind*; and, as before Hannah Arendt wrote articles during the time she prepared the extensive material for the book, the significant ones being "Thinking and Moral Consideration", "Philosophy and Politics", etc. They deserve attention since they are the only material relevant to judging that was prepared for publication during her lifetime. In all these texts the category of judgment is slowly unfolded; as Mary McCarthy perceptively states: "Each of her works is an unfolding of definitions which of course touch on the subject and more and more enlighten it as one distinction unfolds (after another)."⁶

⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954*, ed. by Jerome Kohn, New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1993, p. 3.

⁵ Melvyn A. Hill, ed. *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, p. 266.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

The extensive work on the *Life of the Mind* was motivated by the trial of Adolf Eichmann. Reporting from the trial, Hannah Arendt singled out the one overwhelming impression of Eichmann, his *thoughtlessness*, and although she perceived him as ‘terrifyingly normal’ she was struck by the shallow parameters of his mental activity that went no further than producing clichés. She saw no exemplar of ‘radical’ or ‘absolute’ evil, just a sniveling, banal figure incapable of any autonomous thought, ultimately a person of poor judgment. The question therefore was: “Might the problem of good and evil, our faculty for telling right from wrong, be connected with our faculty of thought?”⁷ The answer was in exploring different venues, corridors, side tracks, sometimes dead ends. These comprise *The Life of the Mind*.

Throughout the process of unfolding the category of judgment, Kant is invoked. He is the ‘only major thinker’, claims Arendt who has taken a stand on this subject. For Arendt, Kant’s third *Critique*, *The Critique of Judgment*, once called the *Critique of Taste*, is a point of departure. However, it should be noted that *The Life of the Mind* is written against the backdrop of the political that retained a strong presence in Arendt’s work, regardless of her return to issues of the mind. Therefore judgment - that the analysis of thinking and willing were leading to - was, without a doubt, to be politically relevant, as were, I argue, both of the preceding categories also.

The fact that Kant’s category of judgment was deployed in aesthetics was no obstacle. Kant’s political philosophy is not what Arendt relies on. She repeatedly states that Kant’s political texts are of no consequence, not only to her but generally speaking,

⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1981, p. 3.

to political theory as well as Kant's own work. As opposed to this it is primarily, though entirely not limited to, his *Critique of Judgment* that can in some of its categorial unfolding serve as a model for critical elements in political philosophy. The fact that it was unintentional on Kant's part also does not present a problem. Moreover, this category of judgment is developed in such a way in his *Critique of Judgment* that the topics are "all of them of eminent political significance": the faculty of judgment in reference to both points of reference, the particular, as what is to be the object of judgment and the sociability of men, i.e. those who judge.⁸ Kant is invoked because he readily provided Arendt with a model of thinking about the particular and though somewhat less easily, but definitely allowing for, the other element so significant to Arendt, namely 'the sociability of men'.

The category of judgment has to overcome difficulties in order, not only to be articulated within a demanding theoretical format, but also to be politically valid. Hannah Arendt practically outlined the primary difficulties when enumerating the above stated Kantian topics.

Let us start by what she introduced as the Kant's insight into the 'sociability of men'. It is based on an awareness that no man can live alone; this in the realm of the political is an analytic statement – to use Kantian terminology - and therefore follows from the concept of the political; however, it pertains not only to the political but also to the exercise of the faculties of the mind, and therefore to the highest faculties of humankind. In his *Anthropology* Kant states that "[C]ompany is indispensable for the thinker."⁹

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Although Hannah Arendt presents this insight, as what Kant allowed for, it is in fact one of the pillars of her own political theory: it is her famed claim that men exist in the plural, that “this plurality is specifically *the* condition – not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* - of all political life”,¹⁰ or better said, it is the *reason for* political life. In a word, there is no hope for a political theory to survive any theoretical scrutiny or present itself of any practical relevance if it is not based on the recognition that “[P]lurality is the condition of human action, because we are all the same, that is human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live.”¹¹ Arendt makes a great effort to convince us that Kant had made this recognition. The extensive presentation of Carazan’s dream, “a fearful kingdom of eternal silence, loneliness and darkness” serves well as the alternative to this recognition.

In order to make full use of Kant’s philosophy Arendt singles out the critical elements, the key one being the plurality of men. In reference to Kant she reminds: “In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant insisted upon a different way of thinking...which consisted of being able to ‘think in the place of everybody else’ and which he therefore called an ‘enlarged mentality’ (*eine erweiterte Denkungsart*).”¹²

This ability constitutes one of the maxims that ‘serve to elucidate the fundamental propositions’ of the Critique of Taste: “...we have got quite into the way of calling a man narrow (*narrow* as opposed to being of *enlarged mind*)...But the question here is not one of the faculty of cognition, but of the *mental habit* ... This...indicates a man of *enlarged mind*: if he detaches himself from the subjective personal conditions of his judgment,

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹² Hannah Arendt, “Crisis in Culture” in *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993, p. 220.

which cramp the mind of so many others, and reflects upon his judgment from the *universal standpoint* (which he can only determine by shifting his ground to the standpoint of others).”¹³

Although Hannah Arendt for Kant’s political philosophy falls back on the *Critique of Judgment*, and repeatedly states that political philosophy as such is absent from Kant’s opus, she frequently draws from a number of essays which Kant wrote toward the end of his life and which comprise what is today commonly agreed upon as his political philosophy. In his “Conjectural Beginnings of Human History” Kant again turns to ‘sociability’ as the ‘highest end intended for man’. This interdependence of men includes not only the elementary needs, but also mental faculties, of understanding and judgment that extend to the creation and production of everything that is to be subject to judging, such as things of art and beauty.

This communicability (of judgments of taste) is ‘*conditio sine qua non* for the *existence* of beautiful objects’ because ‘the *judgment* of the spectator *creates the space* without which no such object could appear at all’: furthermore ‘the very originality of the artist (or the novelty of the actor) depends on making himself *understood* by those who are not artists (or actors).’¹⁴ The spaces where the beautiful, or the miracles of political action can be judged, the spaces which make their appearance possible are created in the communicability of men, are therefore grounded in their sociability, or in their plurality. This has been so since the Pythagoreans and equally applies to the spectators, to those who watch the spectacle of the world, those who opted for *theorein*, theorists or philosophers if you will. “They [philosophers] would have to accept in something more

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1969, p. 153.

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, p. 63 (emphasis added).

than the resignation of human weakness the fact that “it is not good for man to be alone.”¹⁵

Therein lies the main tension in Arendt’s theory for judgment. It is not in assigning to both the actor and the spectator the power of judgment, as Beiner would claim; it is not reflected as much in the primacy of the methodological postulate of *selbstdenken*, or a lack of normative foundations, as Benhabib contends – although this is nevertheless important; the main tension remains between the political and philosophy.

It is precisely owing to this tension that the Kantian maxim of ‘sociability’ for judgment or the Arendtian demand for the recognition of plurality is the one that meets with the most difficulty.

The condition of plurality sets the parameters for making a judgment, any judgment, whether it is reached by the political actor or by a spectator, i.e. a thinker made in retrospect to any course of (political) action. Whereas the former (plurality in political action) could hardly be a matter of dispute it is the latter (plurality in spectatorship) that can be contested; in Arendt’s theory this deserved special attention, given the fact that judgment is grounded in, and is a form of a thinking process; and, that according to Arendt herself, as such, it required a withdrawal from the world of appearances in order to make its appearance. In addition to this, another theoretical complexity needed to be accounted for: thinking process and by extension the process of judging had to be wrenched from under the absolute authority of philosophy; and this Arendt set herself to do in such a way that philosophy was not to be discarded indiscriminately, but to the contrary, made use of. To conclude, the problem appeared to be in constructing an almost oxymoronic process: on the one hand, judgment was derivative of the thinking process

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt “Philosophy and Politics”, *Social Research*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Spring 1990), p. 103.

but, on the other hand, was – and very much so - politically not only relevant, but indispensable. To accomplish this Arendt required an ally in the ranks of philosophers, and she found him in Kant.

“That the capacity to judge is a specifically political ability in exactly the sense denoted by Kant, namely the ability to see things not only from one’s own point of view but in the perspective of all those who happen to be present.”¹⁶ Here in one of her earlier texts on the subject of judgment, Arendt, besides introducing it as a topic, also introduces Kant, his *Critique of Judgment* and a preliminary presentation of taste as a phenomenon where reaching a decision, a judgment, is analogous to the realm of the political: “the faculty of judgment in its proper perspective ... implies a political rather than a merely theoretical activity.”¹⁷ In her later work she analyzed judgment with a decisive emphasis on the decision making process, or judging, of a spectator. Her *Lectures in Kant’s Political Philosophy* almost entirely revolve around the position of the spectator, the onlooker. This shift in emphasis, however, was not of primary concern to Arendt. What she considered her primary task is to construct the parameters of judgment so that it may reflect all the complexities *irrelevant of where it is to be deployed*, action or spectatorship, politics or story telling, present or past. The fact that judgment was more thoroughly treated as the judgment of the spectator rather than the actor may be attributed to a number of things, ranging from the obvious fact, that Arendt did not finish her work on the subject, to the more subtle issue, that certain points in dealing with judgment could have been held to be more controversial when approaching the judgment of the spectator than that of the actor; the most notable being the plurality of men.

¹⁶ “Crisis in Culture”, *Between Past and Future*, p. 221.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

The category of judgment has significance throughout the times of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and *The Life of the Mind* and although there is shift in emphasis the meanings are complementary and *not* contradictory.

Judging (on) the Particular

Kantian analysis of taste in his *Critique of Judgment* lends itself much more easily to the other Arendtian expectation for judging: namely it has to pertain to the particular. “Judgment in general is the faculty of thinking the particular...”¹⁸ and that, Arendt notes, is the main difficulty because the thinking process is by definition generalization; but to think politically - as an actor or a spectator of events already in the past - and in a relevant way, while relying on generalizations may lead down the dangerous road; or, in the least, is likely to reveal history as a ‘haphazard, contingent, melancholy’ business. What Arendt perceptively highlights is that it was Kant who having stated the problem, also points toward the solution. The difficulty arises not when the universal (rule or a principle) is given; this would make the process of judging *determined* by subsuming the particular under the universal. “If however only the particular is given and the universal has to be found for it, then the judgment is simply *reflective*.”¹⁹

Operation of reflection is required as well as the use of imagination, in order to tease out of the judgment of taste all that is relevant to it as the judgment of the particular, so as to make it applicable to the political. In her earlier unfolding of judgment Hannah Arendt writes: “Kant was disturbed by the alleged arbitrariness and the subjectivity of *de*

¹⁸ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Introduction, section IV, p. 18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

gustibus non disputandum est ...for the this arbitrariness offended his political and not his aesthetic sense.”²⁰

When Arendt introduces taste she refers to it as ‘an active relationship to what is beautiful’; later when developing the details of judging the particular she relies on the sense of taste. It is ‘the *inner*’ the subjective sense as opposed to the sense of sight for example. This determination of the sense of taste render it most easily susceptible to *de gustibus non disputandum est*, because as Arendt says it affects one directly and no amount of persuasion will make one yield to what does not appeal to her. Two mental operations, first imagination that will aid in bringing to presence what is absent, and only then reflection which is the core of judgment but under conditions which do not affect one directly and yet allow for representation. Thus impartiality is also established.

Analyzing all this as a thinking process Hannah Arendt finally gives precedence to the outcome, to Kant’s solution of *exemplary* validity, where a particular may be deemed to be ‘the best possible example’ as to how something should be, “example comes from *eximere*, ‘to single out some particular’”²¹ When the aesthetical is translated into the political this particular is every individual human being, “man’s dignity demands that he be seen (every single one of us) in his particularity.”²² This of course is congruent to one of Kant’s formulations of his categorical imperative, where it is underscored that a man is an ‘end to himself’ which is why he must never be treated as a means. It is also designated by the face, the metaphor of singularity in the writings of Levinas.

²⁰ “Crisis in Culture”, p. 222.

²¹ *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, p. 77.

²² *Ibid.*

Kant states that the first maxim of 'common human understanding' that can, as the other maxims, just 'elucidate the propositions of the Critique of Taste' is the maxim of 'unprejudiced thought; in its elementary bare form it pronounces a reminder: "to think for oneself."²³ It is succinct formulation of a famous Kantian dictum on the expectations of his time, "*Enlightenment is a man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another.*"²⁴ What Arendt builds around these statements are their *political implications*, or more precisely 'political implications of critical thinking', which is what she underscored as the Kantian approach. "To think critically," she said, "is to blaze a trail of thought through prejudices, through unexamined opinions and beliefs..."²⁵ This what Arendt also called *Selbstdenken*, again, to think for oneself.

The political implications of this way of *thinking* is to bring out into the open, expose it to public, while sustaining the same courage which a political actor must have whenever she is to leave the safety of the private, the protection of the four walls; the Socratic act of appearing 'unprotected in the marketplace', presenting his thoughts publicly, engaging in an exchange during the course of which he has not only to be answerable but to in effect answer for each word he has spoken; this is an *act of a thinker*.

Arendt places Socrates as the first critical thinker and Kant as the only modern representative. What Socratic approach made possible was taking responsibility for one's opinions, and "holding oneself and everyone else responsible and answerable for what he

²³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 152.

²⁴ Immanuel Kant, "An answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" in *Kant. Political Writings*, ed. by Hans Reiss, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 54.

²⁵ *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 36.

thought and taught."²⁶ Arendt reminds us that the term *logon didanoi*, meaning to give an account for, was primarily applicable in the political life of Athenian democracy, and referred to the demands of the citizens made on the politicians; by extension it included responsibility that was a part of any public presence, regardless of the form.

As Kant is the epitome of judging, in Arendt's theory, Socrates was the embodiment of thinking, its practical worthlessness, but also its relentless grip, and its uncompromising, tantalizing nature; it is a force that can only be explained by its unavoidability, since it cannot present itself as useful. "An unexamined life is not worth living"²⁷ is the only explanation for what Arendt claims Socrates was capable of, which is continuing appearances in open, public spaces with no protection other than speech and argument. This is why he could serve as a parameter for responsibility - he was answerable to the public in a palpable way. This is also why Arendt could say the following: "...it is clear that the art of critical thinking always has political implications."²⁸

The only way that one could - and Socrates probably did - rely on, in order to endure the pressure he chose to expose himself to was to follow the insight deriving from his experience: "It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and aloud with discord and that the multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than that I, *being one*, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict *me*."²⁹

²⁶ *Ibid.*, (emphasis added).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37. This is of course applicable to Augustine, Kierkegaard and perhaps also to small number of thinkers and teachers.

²⁸ *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 38.

²⁹ Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture", *Social Research*, 38/3 (Fall, 1971), p. 439.

The problem is to navigate the sailing of judgment between the Scylla of one's own standpoint and the Charybdis of the opinions of others; sometimes – though not necessarily - in retrospect we underline whatever the events under consideration *post factum* offer as a fit emphasis: the necessity to judge for yourself or, equally important, the necessity to consider the opinions of others. Even including this aspect does not exhaust the complexity. Thinking, as *theorein*, which should have the benefit of being wise in the hindsight, the advantage of a spectator's perspective or, the perspective of Minerva's owl does not hold any guarantees either.

Critical thinking, therefore, means making a stand, taking one's own, my own stand, but in way which is inclusive of foreseeable and unforeseeable objections, standpoints of the other. Arendtian emphasis on the meaning of the term 'standpoint' can offer some direction ('place where one stands, conditions one is subject to, which are always different'); but the point is precisely that as she would say, 'when the chips were down', there is no other way but to take the step and, importantly, the responsibility that it carries, that is built into every act.

Ideal of Certainty vs. a Defeated Cause

We can only guess if Arendt's completion on her work concerning judgment would have considerably altered some of the interpretations, or perhaps even foreclosed the many harsh judgments on the matter. As it is, they cover an array of different interpretations. Some of them are so different that they seem to be coming from mutually excluding perspectives. Perhaps some of these assessments are best approached if juxtaposed one against the other. Bernstein writes that Arendt's work is not fully successful, because it is

underdeveloped, whereas Albrecht Wellmer appears to see it as a futile attempt altogether. The unsatisfactory work of explicating the category judgment is a view in part shared by Bernstein and Benhabib in that they would both prefer a clear distinction between thinking and judgment as well as a fitting relationship between them. Lisa J. Disch sees a methodologically advantageous approach precisely in the absence of a clear cut and definitive concepts.

Although not focused as much on the issue of judgment, those that are, among feminist theorists, appear to cover much of the extremes in interpretations, from especially venomous presentations of Arendt, to creative applications of her theory of judgment that would have pleased Arendt greatly.³⁰ Otherwise, feminist approach to Arendt's work is concentrated more on issues of political action, the difference between the social and the political, and the like.³¹

The first interpretation of Arendt's incomplete theory of judgment was presented by Michael Denny, who had the advantage of being present at the lectures later to constitute the only texts we rely on regarding judgment, although these were not yet published. He proceeded from the two epigraphs found under the title 'judgment' in Hannah Arendt's typewriter after her death, the first Cicero's dictum "The defeated cause pleases Cato," and the even more somber second one from *Faust* "...were it worth the pain to be a man"; he leads up to the core of the problem which presents itself in "...the tendency in philosophical ethics that allows one, having proved evil is conceptually

³⁰ Kirstie McClure, "The Odor of Judgment: Exemplarity, Propriety, and Politics in the Company of Hannah Arendt", in Craig Calhoun and John McGowan, eds., *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 53-85, and Kimberly Curtis, *Our Sense of the Real. Aesthetic Experience and Arendtian Politics*, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1999.

³¹ Bonnie Honig, ed. *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.

impossible or that theft is a contradiction in terms, to disregard the fact that people continue to go around murdering and robbing each other.”³² Hannah Arendt faced the burning issues and did not choose to ignore them, and the issue of judging is as close as one can get. It is not always about the result, the effect, especially its *determination*; sometimes it’s about the process. *Reflection*, a thinking business, as Arendt would put it, may bear results, which is why she turned to the Kantian concept of reflective (as opposed to the determinate) judgment.

Michael Denney noted that the subjects she was dealing with are not of technical nature and no expectations of concrete procedures were in order. Most of these expectations in the interpretations of Arendt’s judgment that followed could not be satisfied with Cato’s pleasures with defeated causes; they appear to be closer to the ideals of Hegel and German idealism in general of which Hannah Arendt had to say: “Pursuing the Cartesian ideal of certainty as though Kant had never existed, they believed in all earnest that the results of their speculations possessed the same kind of validity as the results of cognitive processes.”³³

Wellmer perceives Arendt’s grounding in Kant’s theory generally and aesthetic theory specifically – as Dana Villa sometimes does with the influence of Heidegger – as the framework that should set defined theoretical limitations as if Arendt is not expected to venture beyond Kant or anyone else, for that matter. What deserves even more considerations is that Arendt’s theory of judgment is reduced down to just another type of a rationality discourse, which would consequently have to be supported, as well as constrained, by the banisters traditionally conceptualized by rationality. “Such a concept

³² Michael Denney, “The Privilege of Ourselves: Hannah Arendt on Judgment” in Melvyn Hill, ed., *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, p. 263.

³³ *The Life of the Mind*, p.16.

of *rationality* would have to be located...in between the formal *rationality* of logical demonstrations and the speculative rationality of what she called 'thinking' – in between, that is, *rationality* of the intellect and *the rationality* of reason. For Arendt, what is in between these *rationalities* or one might even say what mediates between them is the *rationality* of judgment."³⁴ Although Wellmer realizes that '[t]his means' that 'the formalistic constraints imposed on the idea of rationality' 'would have [to be] exploded', he then proceeds in his analysis from the assumptions of (Kantian) rationality.

Benhabib notes the Kantian two-world theory as a problem in Arendt's appropriation of his philosophy for her theory on judgment. And whereas she is right generally speaking about the problems of differentiating between the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds - especially concerning human action - what she loses sight of is the fact that it was Kantian analysis of reason, his *Critique of Pure Reason*, that, precisely by making this distinction and by the analysis that lead to it – that this, Kantian critique was instrumental in any future dispensation of two-world frameworks.³⁵ However, there is in reference to Benhabib's reading of Arendt an opening into the problem that is the heart of the matter. Benhabib perceives that "Arendt *fails to convince* that an attitude of moral reflection and probing (...) and the Platonic emphasis on unity and harmony of the soul with itself can be reconciled."³⁶ This leads Benhabib to conclude that there is a tension between thinking and judging in Arendt's theory and that Arendt 'at best' could establish 'a tenuous link' between them. Perhaps what Benhabib is trying to convey is basically similar to Bernstien's critical approach to the same issue: "...I do not think that Arendt

³⁴ Abrecht Wellmer, "Hannah Arendt on Judgment: An Unwritten Doctrine of Reason", in Larry May and Jerome Kohn, eds., *Hannah Arendt. Twenty Years Later*, pp. 38-9 (emphasis added).

³⁵ See Sheila Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, esp. pp 185-93.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 191 (emphasis added).

ever gave a *fully satisfactory* answer to the questions she raised about the relations of thinking and evil.”³⁷

I don't think that it was ever Arendt's intention to *convince or provide a fully satisfactory* answer the complex problem of relating thinking to (moral) judgment (of evil). Moreover, I do not think it is possible to give a fully expanded, a fully laid out answer. What one can expect of political theory in the wake of totalitarian horror is: to define the problem, to have the boldness to say that the direction to be taken should and has to bring together thinking and judgment. If the parameters for that analysis are set and even if only so as to pinpoint to the problems, such as *plurality* and the *particular*, nothing to say of the attempts to put this mosaic together *in one of the many possibilities* – what more can we ask for? The problem is that in matters as complex as these if one pushes the issue even if a little too far toward one extreme one is in danger of losing the perspective, or in Arendt's own words - albeit in a completely different context - ‘what do we lose if we win?’

For example, Benhabib correctly perceives that “...in a world in disarray an attitude of moral alienation may be more at home in the world than an attitude of simple harmony with oneself.” However what she sees as a closure with an impasse of Arendt's theory, I see as Arendt's acute awareness of the problem that could not be resolved without compromising the issue of judgment on the crux of its key points, particularity and plurality.

³⁷ Richard Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, p. 171 (emphasis added).

Arendt and Philosophy

Although Arendt cites Socrates as '*the figure of the philosopher*' she mentions another model of philosophic thinking: the model that created the hierarchy of schools, teachers as figures to be revered, a model that was probably built into future institutions of learning. However, the thinking Arendt has in mind is critical thought that is 'in principle anti- authoritarian'.

There are probably many nuances as well as clear differences that Arendt ascribes to the term thinking. However, there are at least two distinct meanings: one is thinking, inasmuch as it is philosophy, and the other, all other, non-philosophy thinking processes. The existence of former cannot be denied and Arendt of course did not attempt it. The latter stems from a, one is tempted to say, justified, act of rebellion against the assumption that philosophy claims to have jurisdiction over the thinking process.

Confronted with the betrayal on part of philosophy in worldly affairs Hannah Arendt struggled with two strategies throughout her life, one to leave it, let it be and the other to attempt to salvage from under its control what she would not do without. The first strategy marks the period until the late 60s, and the second strategy was probably recognized in the wake of the Eichmann trial and definitely adopted as the more appropriate one from the late 60s on, i.e. especially while preparing and writing the *Life of the Mind*. When she spoke of philosophy it was not only to state that philosophy is at odds – to say the least – with the political, but that it actually did not live up to the standards of the political. In *Lectures on Kant* she singles out the anecdote of the Pythagoreans, placing the emphasis on their way of organizing as a closed off community of the learned ones, the anointed ones; this Arendt writes served as the model for

philosophy schools to come (and in the case of Plato's Academy she may have been historically correct). Furthermore, within such a closed community the rule of conduct was *magister dixit*, something that Arendt does not allow us to forget.

"We all start out as dogmatists in one way or the other;"³⁸ explains Hannah Arendt; this pertains to a number of givens, or frameworks we unquestioningly and often passionately accept at the outset; the choices we make are the attempts to approach some of them as we come of age (metaphorically and otherwise speaking); these givens, such as our disciplinary commitments, much like the political spaces we reside in, loom large in our consciousness and, regardless whether merely dissatisfied or completely betrayed, we can either leave or attempt to wrench from it what we can.

The opening question to Hannah Arendt in an interview she gave to Gunther Gaus is: "...does she perceive 'her role in the circle of philosophers' as unusual or peculiar because she is a woman?"³⁹ Here two issues are collapsed into one question and, amusingly, presented in such a way so as to reveal two misconceptions on Arendt's own self-perception: first on her place in philosophy, and second on her gender awareness.

Arendt corrected both, one by one: : "I do not belong to the circle of philosophers(...) I neither feel like a philosopher, *nor do I believe I have been accepted in the circle of philosophers* ...you say that philosophy is generally thought to be a masculine occupation. It does not have to remain a masculine occupation! *It is entirely possible that a woman will one day be a philosopher...*"⁴⁰ As for herself she concludes with an assertive statement: "I have said good bye to philosophy once and for all."

³⁸ *Lecture on Kant's Political Philosophy*, pp. 32-3.

³⁹ "'What Remains? The Language Remains': A Conversation with Gunther Gaus" in Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*, p. 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2 (emphasis added).

Whatever her private reasons may have been - if any – here, as elsewhere, she offers a conceptual explanation for the divorce between philosophy and the political, as well as what dovetails - her choice to side with, if you will, or perhaps better said remain with(in) the political (theory): she wanted ‘no part in the enmity against all politics in most philosophers’. “There is a vital tension between philosophy and politics,” she goes on, “philosopher (...) cannot be objective or neutral with regard to politics.”⁴¹

Arendt’s perspective on philosophy has been explicated some years prior to this conversation as a part of her approach to *vita contemplativa*. This concept played the originating role - despite ‘certain doubts that had been plaguing’ her - for her major concern *vita activa*. “I had been concerned with the problem of Action ...and what had always troubled me about it was that the very term ...*vita activa*, was coined by men who were devoted to the contemplative way of life...”⁴²

These demarcations made their major public appearance in what is still considered by most Arendt’s major work in political theory, *The Human Condition*, also published elsewhere as *Vita Activa*.⁴³ Concentrating on political action, her main subject, Arendt draws on events and characters from the stories of Greek philosophy to make the delineations she perceives as necessary to further pursue the primary issue of her interest. Along the way she uses as an unquestionable point of departure the trial of Socrates and the ensuing ‘conflict between the *polis* and the philosopher’ in order to account for the differentiation, made by our world, of the two *bioi* (*theoretikos* and *politikos*), the two *vitae* (*contemplativa* and *activa*). “[w]hen the philosophers discovered (...) that the political realm did not as a matter of course provide for all of man’s higher activities,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴² *The Life of the Mind*, p. 6.

⁴³ Germany, Croatia.

they assumed at once, ...that they had found a higher principle to replace the principle that ruled the *polis*.”⁴⁴ The principle that Hannah Arendt highlights is establishing the highest position in the hierarchy of human faculties, and the enthronement of *theoria*, and *bios theoretikos* later to be translated into *vita contemplativa*, into that position. Arendt does not question the differentiation as much as she underscores as problematic the hierarchy in question; in its absolute overwhelming presence this hierarchy led to ‘blurring of distinctions within the *vita activa* itself’, to such an extent that even when modernity brought about a reversal in this hierarchical order ‘the conceptual framework’ she claims was left intact inasmuch as there is an underlying assumption that all human activities must be judged according to *one* principle. In this highly perceptive evaluation Arendt precedes in drawing the consequences from the critique of metaphysics, position of meta-narratives, and the like. “The modern reversal [is]...neither superior nor inferior to the central concern of *vita contemplativa*.”⁴⁵

This is an example of what Arendt’s critical assessment of mainstream philosophy and her sweeping statements oftentimes achieved: she could pinpoint to theoretical trajectories where we could - and have - run amiss not only in what is sometimes referred to as the spheres of learning and (high) culture but in the way these spill over, unnoticed, into every aspect of the political.

This relationship between philosophy and polis or, by extension, the political continued to be an underpinning in her work. It was more closely examined in an article, “Philosophy and Politics” part of a 1954 preparation for a lecture to be delivered at Notre Dame University, therefore probably around the same time that Arendt was in the process

⁴⁴ *The Human Condition*, p. 18.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

of writing *The Human Condition*. The thrust of the argument is directed toward a revalorization of what mainstream philosophy has traditionally denigrated, the opinion, the category of *doxa* (maintaining the unquestionable superiority of *episteme*). When defending himself before the Athenian citizens Socrates had no truth to offer that would have carried more weight, or resulted in more effective persuasion, because his truth did not transcend a mere opinion and was thus perceived as one of the many (opinions). Plato's belated remedy in case of Socrates, or preemptive for philosophy to come - but certainly directly derivative of that experience - was the notion of truth that in its singularity was eternal and the one guarantee of philosopher's immortality that no *polis* could or would secure for him. Philosophy, defeated in the affairs of the world introduced the truth, which tyrannized opinions, and ultimately scorched the space of the political where the multitude of opinions can reappear. The rift was immanent. Philosophy no longer took upon herself any responsibility for the city or for citizens.

Hannah Arendt throughout her texts while denying that she is a philosopher relied for support in concepts and arguments for most of her analysis on two philosophers whom she declared to have been exceptions, Socrates and Kant. Socrates did not presume to be in possession of any truth, but did aspire to make 'the city more truthful' and to make the 'citizens more truthful' to themselves by aiding them to bring out the truth from within themselves. It is well known that he often alluded to his mother's calling of a midwife and claimed to be able to assist in births of ideas; also according to Plato and Xenophon he spoke of himself as a gadfly, he aspired to be thought provoking irrespective of how unfavorably it may be perceived; and he compared himself to an electric ray, to illustrate the perplexity that coming from him induces perplexity in his

interlocutors – they, to stop and think. Hannah Arendt places Socrates not as an intentional benefactor of Athenian citizens, though they did profit from his activity, but it was more a case of a choice that ‘an unexamined life is not worth living’; she adds: “then thinking accompanies living when it concerns itself with such concepts as justice, happiness, temperance, pleasure, with words of invisible which language has offered us to express the meaning of whatever happens in life ...”⁴⁶

In the introductory pages of her major last work, *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt as a matter of course includes in her analysis an understanding that philosophy has come to an end, and –much like the Nietzsche with his thesis on the Death of God - moves on to consider the consequences. I would like to step back a little: philosophy is often in Arendt’s text uncritically tied to metaphysics and defined as the framework that is grounded in what she calls two world theory, meaning the world of appearances and the world of true Being. She does not take into account that this theory has been discarded *within* philosophy and that many who still count themselves among philosophers would support this fact: to name a few: Sartre, by self-perception an existentialist, announces it in the opening pages of his *Being and Nothingness*; phenomenology is based on this disavowal; Carnap, whose work Arendt is familiar with, a positivist would not condone it. Hannah Arendt correctly locates some modern ‘deaths’ at the turn of the century, collapsing the abandonment of a single – albeit significant - theoretical proposition and philosophy into one. What Arendt finds difficult to accept is that philosophy has for the most part itself dealt with the business of two-world theory (exceptions noted), and she therefore finds herself knocking on an open door. However, to state in her defense, two issues deserve attention here: one, there is no guarantee that

⁴⁶ “Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture”, pp. 436-7.

these and similar assumptions may not return by way of a back door, and as a matter of fact they do, every now and then, and two, their translation into the political means the acknowledgment, not only of the divorce between philosophy and the political – which Arendt does not have a problem with – but an additional lack of awareness that thinking may not necessarily have a link with, or a function within the political; or, for that matter, the ethical. And that is precisely the point of origin of her work on *The Life of the Mind*. “Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass, or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually ‘condition’ them against it.”⁴⁷ Nonetheless, having thus buried philosophy, Arendt finds it of utmost importance to underline that ‘what’s to be done’ now is: “... to insist, rather, on a simple fact, that however seriously our way of thinking may be involved in this crisis, our *ability* to think is not at stake; we are what men have always been, thinking beings.”⁴⁸

In an effort to distinguish – and separate - thinking from philosophy, Arendt encourages us ‘to do more with this ability than use it as an instrument for knowing and doing’. The distinction between thinking and knowing has in a strictly philosophic format been made through the terminology of reason and intellect in Kant’s groundbreaking *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁴⁹ In its cognitive and, undoubtedly necessary, function intellect sustains the philosophic alliance with truth; which leaves thinking to pursue what is its unending quest for meaning. This is why in Arendt’s interpretation Hegel, as well as

⁴⁷ *The Life of the Mind*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11 (emphasis in the original).

⁴⁹ Hannah Arendt insists on using the term intellect for the German original *Verstand*, explaining it by Kant’s translation of the Latin *intellectus* (*Life of the Mind*, pp. 13-4).

Fichte and Schelling, German idealism on the whole have continued as if ‘Kant had never existed’.

What works to our advantage along this newly discovered potential of thinking processes, and an endless path of uncovered meanings, is that we may again sift through the past experiences, look at them anew as the ‘treasures’ they are, ‘unguided’, ‘unburdened’, and therefore, unbound. Also, “[T] his age-old distinction between the many and the ‘professional’ thinkers (...) has lost its plausibility and this is the second advantage in our present situation.”⁵⁰

The passages in *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* on the relationship between philosophy and the political serve as a reminder of the way Arendt has times before presented her case for the defense of the political and/or against philosophy. The core argument of this condescend version is that philosophers, ‘all of them’ – and once again, exceptions noted – “would have agreed with Plato: Do not take this whole realm of human affairs too seriously.”⁵¹ As if attempting to drive a lasting wedge between philosophy and politics Arendt unforgivingly reminds us of “Pascal’s words on these matters, [that] (...) may have exaggerated the matter a bit but did not miss the mark: ‘If they [Plato and Aristotle] wrote on politics it was as if laying down rules for a lunatic asylum; ...’”⁵² Arendt here lists a number of philosophers (beside the above mentioned, Spinoza Hobbes) who though devoting their concerns to the political did that primarily so as to protect the realm of philosophy.

Drawing primarily on Plato and quoting his dialogue *Phaedo* that Arendt claims as a text that can hardly have any comparison in terms of the influence, she proceeds to

⁵⁰ *The Life of the Mind*, p. 13.

⁵¹ *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, p. 21.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 21-2.

assert that philosophy, being matter of the soul rather than the body--though if between soul and mind, it's about the mind--definitely alienates the philosopher from the body.⁵³

This alienation cannot but reflect itself on the issues of life and even more so on the approach to death. "Death being the separation of body and soul is welcome to him [philosopher]; he is somehow in love with death, because the body with all its demands constantly interrupts the soul's pursuits."⁵⁴ Philosopher's closeness to death, what she referred to as 'general Greek pessimism', and subsequently a 'melancholy disposition' is in part present in Kant's philosophy; however, there are elements of his thought that set him apart from this prevailing tendency within philosophy. Here Hannah Arendt slowly builds her case: Kant does not seek the company of 'fellow philosophers', but 'men, like you and me' (sic!)⁵⁵ and as far as perceptions of our world are concerned 'this ordinary man' is to be trusted. Everything leads up to the same conclusion, Equality. It is rooted *and* it manifests itself in the need to use one's reason, the need to think, which--as Kant had already distinguished--is not the same as the need to know. And "it does not oppose the few to the many."⁵⁶ All this concludes Arendt opens further the place for Kant in political philosophy.

As for Arendt's relation to philosophy, she passed as her hero Kierkegaard, stages in the life's way that constructed the framework of her theoretical journey. The first brief stage was a blissfully somewhat ignorant appreciation of philosophy; the second--and the

⁵³ "The more a philosopher becomes a true philosopher the more he will separate himself from the body; and since as long as he is alive such separation can never actually be achieved, he will try and do what every free citizen in Athens did to separate and free himself from the necessities of the life: he will rule over his body as a master rules over his slaves. If the philosopher attains rulership over the city, he will do no more to its inhabitants than he has already done to his body," claims Arendt in "Philosophy and Politics" (p. 93).

⁵⁴ *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 22.

⁵⁵ Hannah Arendt apparently used the term 'men' in a generic sense.

⁵⁶ *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, p. 29.

**longest in duration--is marked by a severance of relationship with philosophy; and last--
mostly contested--is her return to critically assessed philosophy's political potential.**

CHAPTER THREE

Time and Space in Arendt's Political Theory

Political theory, always grounded in an assumed or announced ideal, is essentially a utopia.¹ As such it is set within temporal framework. The ideal, a not-yet, belongs to the future. However if we take a closer look into the term utopia, and its etymology – to say nothing of the way it came into being - it loses its temporal outfit and becomes a spatial metaphor: *topos* meaning place (and *u* meaning non). Therefore, utopia points to the temporal designation of the future, but also to a non-existing place; either way it is nothing - yet; but precisely for that reason it holds a promise of starting anew. Although Hannah Arendt did not perceive of herself as a utopian theorist, for her, this would have been relevant.

The point here is, that temporal and spatial lenses allow for an additional theoretical perspective that would otherwise be absent. These frameworks offer an interpretative grid for all phenomena of our world: "...there are as principles of *a priori* knowledge, two pure forms of sensuous intuition, namely, *Space* and *Time*."² In terms of specifically political phenomena, and 'not... to question the significance of histories of such entities' such as "kings, parliaments, labor unions, big cities, bourgeoisie, Christian churches, diplomats or navies (...) but only to point out that they are not universal. Time

¹ The term 'utopia' I understand to mean what is close to its original meaning deriving from Sir Thomas Moore, i.e. a political ideal that is not yet achieved, and not – as has often inadequately built into it - an unachievable goal; also, oddly, some contemporary theorists (George Kateb, etc.) understand utopia to include 'negative utopias', such as "Brave New World" and the like.

² Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965, pp 20-21.

and space are. All people everywhere in all ages have a distinctive experience of time and space and, however unconscious some conception of it.”³

The possibility of universal application of the time-space grid is not the primary reason for sifting elements of Hannah Arendt’s political theory through it. On the one hand Arendt’s political theory on the whole invites that representation; but even more importantly, on the other hand, this approach to Arendt’s work allows for a reconfiguration of the issue of responsibility. In the history of political thought, if appearing at all, responsibility is first and foremost addressed *only in the aftermath of an evil as a policy*. Given the way the issue is raised - if at all - it is then skimmed over and finally brushed aside. In public affairs it is at most - and in a politician’s inconsequential parlance – addressed as an abstractly formulated danger for the future. However, the issues of responsibility and judgment stare at us, one from the past the other from the future, whereas we stand in “[t]his small non-time-space in the very heart of time(...) [This gap] can only be indicated, but cannot be inherited and handed down from the past; each new generation, indeed every new human being as he inserts himself between an infinite past and an infinite future must discover and ploddingly pave it anew.”⁴

I will therefore proceed from what I think is the kernel of the matter by presenting key concepts of Arendt’s political theory – responsibility and judgment included - by way of placing them on the time-space axes. Then I will broaden the perspective: namely, I will not resist the challenge to briefly consider the issues of time and space through the history of philosophy, restricting myself however, to those that specifically lend

³ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 4.

⁴ Hannah Arendt, “Preface: The Gap Between Past and Future” in *Between Past and Future*, p. 13 (emphasis added).

themselves to the political; this will turn out to have been, for the most part, laid out by Arendt herself, since, not only are her key concepts compact histories of philosophy, but are often unfolded against the backdrop of time-space axis. To these key concepts belong besides political action, primarily the explications of *The Life of the Mind*; namely, Thinking, Willing and Judging are woven into the complexities of time and space.

Mortality and Action

Arendt's *Human Condition* initiates in her work the use of the Greek *polis* as a comprehensive metaphor for the political and thus, by extension the deployment of its attributes for the grounding of her political theory. Within that context, she highlights the perception that men are 'the only mortal things in existence'; as a point of reference she uses on the one hand the immortality of gods - whose mythical existence is precisely based on the characteristic of immortality - and, on the other hand, the immortality of nature; nature's creations that only exist within a species, as non-individuals, are guaranteed immortality, as a species, merely by virtue of procreation. Only men positioned between nature and gods are mortal. "Imbedded in a cosmos where everything is immortal, mortality became the hallmark of human existence."⁵ What is clearly underscored here so much so that it appears as a challenge - the acceptance of which results in the formation of the political - is finitude, human mortality; oftentimes it hovers threateningly over humankind's existence rather than merely being an underlying assumption.

⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 18.

In Arendt's political theory time sets the parameters as an inevitability – in a word, time presents us with a puzzle; and in Arendt's case oftentimes space may - or may not - provide the solutions but it certainly has a place of significance in her attempts to do so.

“The mortality of men lies in the fact that individual life, with a recognizable life story, from birth to death, rises out of biological life. This individual life is distinguished from all other things, by the *rectilinear course of its movement*, which so to speak, *cuts through the circular movement of biological life*. This is mortality: to move along a rectilinear line in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves along a circular order.”⁶

According to Arendt, and still remaining in the context of the Greek *polis*, men (who) confront mortality (do so) in two ways: either they embark on a quest for immortality within this world, or, by way of philosophers' life glide into eternity. The latter is disassociated from the true political by stepping out of the realm of human affairs, their price being the voluntary loss of this world in their lifetime; they ceased to be among men and, in experiencing the eternal, actually chose to experience 'a kind of death'.⁷

It is the former choice however that is interwoven with the political at its best. For those who care for the world there is a latent promise of immortality. In their quest for immortality, the Greeks, for example, had undertaken the glorious deeds of action, which, for Hannah Arendt, mark the only truth of the political and these deeds were what secured them immortality. To clarify: immortality, writes Arendt, is 'endurance in time' and as such it was the attribute of either gods or nature. Since each human being possesses individuality they cannot be counted among the species that acquire their immortality solely by procreation. Humankind opts for immortality knowing full well

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19 (emphasis added).

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.18-20.

that the immortality we strive for will tantalizingly - since only asymptotically - bring us close to gods, but never quite get us there.

Immortality is first and foremost secured within a space of political action, a space, the creation of which is initiated by virtue of men's appearances; the mere act of appearance, however will not suffice, since what is paramount is that these appearances occur among men, i.e. *before each other*. Arendt clearly states that political action is the only human activity that takes place without any intermediaries in terms of things; it is therefore contingent on the one condition, that being the condition of plurality, or to be precise, on "the fact that men, not Man live on earth and inhabit the world."⁸ In order to appear to each other men need to create space, which in turn is in fact created precisely by the appearances of men to each other. The place of space so to speak is at the same time the condition and the consequence of this highest form of human activity. This space although by some thought to be modeled after a concrete, existing political experience of the Greek *polis* and represented by it, is in fact "not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose..."⁹

The function of the *polis*, which remains the multifaceted metaphor for the space of appearance, is the one that directly addresses and wrestles with temporality, as represented by the Aristotelian form of passing away, or, Arendtian term mortality. It is (this) space that can rescue humankind from (the passing of) time. "The *polis* was to

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

multiply the occasions to win 'immortal' fame..."¹⁰ This remains its primary function. However, "...the chances that a deed deserving fame would not be forgotten, that it actually would become 'immortal' were not very good."¹¹ Therefore, the second function of the *polis* was also 'to offer a remedy' for this frailty of human action. Human act - political action very much included - for the most time, takes place in what Arendt often recognizes as a 'fleeting moment'. The potential of political space to secure immortality will have become *contradictio in adiecto*, a contradiction in terms, in that it would have proven itself as merely *temporary* appearance, therefore exceedingly subject to the passing of time – unless it were to undertake an extension of its function, namely the additional task of storytelling; thus we can hope that the deeds of political actors can - if not survive - then at least transcend the immediate passing of time.

This distinction between the functions of space of appearance in the public sphere as presented by Hannah Arendt is not the same distinction that Seyla Benhabib discusses.¹² Following Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves, who distinguished between expressive and communicative action, in Arendt's work, Benhabib referred to the same differentiation, with some modifications, as the one between agonal and narrative models of action.¹³ The expressive, or, according to Benhabib, the agonal model is characterized by 'confirmation of the uniqueness of the self' the almost essentialist representation of 'who one is', whereas the communicative, or, again according to Benhabib, better said, narrative model of action, while also undoubtedly revelatory of one's identity, gives priority in representation to the story through which an identity is in fact being

10 Ibid., p. 197.

11 Ibid.

12 Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, pp. 123-130.

13 Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, pp. 84-85.

constructed. The point here is that these two models of action correspond not only to the two types of politics – one the heroic model of republican elite, and the other of ‘democratic or associative politics’ of ‘ordinary citizens’ – but also to the two types of spaces that Arendt apparently conflates: the first one is the phenomenological ‘space of appearance’, that Benhabib argues, can even be extended to occur in the everydayness of private and intimate relationships, and the second one is the ‘public space’ that requires a limelight and as such is ‘episodic and rare’. Although Arendt’s text gives rise to this differentiation of action, politics and political spaces, it is in her text somewhat more blurred and consequently does not absolutely hold, since “[T]he *polis* was to multiply the occasions to win ‘immortal’ fame, that is to multiply the chances *for everybody* to distinguish himself, to show in deed and word who he was in his unique distinctness.”¹⁴

Therefore, whereas Arendt’s distinctions are constructed more in the direction of discerning two functions of one space – these two being *theoria* and political *praxis* – it appears that d’Entereves and Benhabib are more inclined to see two types of spaces reserved for different citizens.

The potential of space to accommodate not only for the act itself, which in itself is an incision into time, but also for further expansion of that space, is in Arendt’s case a celebration of freedom, however short lived that freedom may be; because this freedom is freedom from the determination of time.

¹⁴ *The Human Condition*, p. 197 (emphasis added).

Forgiveness and Promise

One of the most important ways Arendt positioned political action on the time-space axis is the way she confronted irreversibility (of the past) and the lack of predictability (of the future); apart from being revealing for the category of action, central to her political theory, it has significantly brought to bear on the issue of responsibility. All human fundamental activities have what Arendt names as 'predicaments' but these also have remedies; labor finds its remedy in work and work, in turn, its remedy in action. The predicaments of action stem from the inescapability of temporality, they derive from the fact that the past is irreversible and the future unpredictable. Human action, once completed, slips into the past, and action that is yet to happen awaits in the future; the former is therefore irreversible and the latter unpredictable. Action is set within the time framework that is a determined given. Humankind has to conform and reconcile itself according to those parameters. The space of action created by humankind holds the possibilities to override its own 'predicaments' that come out of its placement within time. "[T]he remedy against irreversibility and unpredictability of the process started by acting does not arise out of another or possibly a higher faculty, but is one of the potentialities of action itself."¹⁵

The remedy against the irreversibility of the past is the power to forgive and the remedy for the unpredictability of the future is the power to make and keep promises. "Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we could

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 236-7.

never recover (...)”¹⁶ The consternation that results from the simple fact that we cannot undo some of our actions, because we cannot reverse the time, and, that some deeds, regardless of how much we would want them obliterated, are there to stay only because they are already a part of the past - this pain can only be eased by forgiveness; however, *nota bene*, forgiveness for a misdeed, cannot come from the doer of the deed, that is, I cannot forgive myself - forgiveness can only come from others. What is necessary therefore is the space created by human relationships where these insertions into time, these rectifications, no matter how insufficient – as belated - they appear to be, or how minimal they effectively are, can, nonetheless, take place.

Arendt whose experience of evil chronologically preceded her theorizing on totalitarianism and the horrors it entailed, was the one who placed the issue of forgiveness on the agenda.¹⁷ However, when moving out of political theory into the political action, the practice of forgiveness has, in relation to Arendt’s initial statement, required additional steps since it responded to many complexities.¹⁸ The most significant provision being that between the acts, which fall under the policy of evil, and the act of forgiveness on part of the ones who were the victims, *there must be a full disclosure of the evils perpetrated and recognition of responsibility on part of the perpetrators.*¹⁹

Therefore if the past is to be faced, addressed, dealt with and finally laid to rest, taking on *responsibility* as a political stance emerges as the first and critical step. In a somewhat similar fashion – though undoubtedly with different complexities to be

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Hannah Arendt was quoted as the only theorist who considered forgiveness a legitimate political instrument. See Joan Tronto, “Time’s Place” (unpublished paper).

¹⁸ The best known instance was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.

¹⁹ In recent political theory, the secular mode of forgiveness slowly emerges and gains the right of citizenship. The fact that it is a secular mode needs to be underscored since the undertaking – as is also evident from Arendt’s explication of the topic – has generally been under the auspices, so to speak, of religious approaches; as such it is not relevant to the political.

accounted for – *judgment*, while retaining its position in reference to the past, emerges also as a part of the process of looking toward the future. These distinct paths in reference to time are followed, one by the spectator, be she a storyteller, a poet, a historian, and the other by the political actor.

Analogous to irreversibility, time creates the condition of unpredictability; and, also, in response to this humankind creates a web of human relationships; in this space promises are given, treaties are signed, covenants are made. Consequently, judgment of a political actor is based on assessments made in the format of temporality.

“ The remedy for unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future, is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises (...) Without being bound to fulfillment of promises ...we would be condemned to wander helplessly and without direction in the darkness...which only the light shed over the public realm through the presence of others, who confirm the identity between the one who promises and the one who fulfils, can dispel.”²⁰

Along those lines, another aspect of overriding time in the Arendtian perception of political space is that when setting forth attributes of political action, or in retrospect *judging* it, she explicitly rejected all criteria that ultimately do so within and from the perspective of a time framework; in that sense she explicitly rejected the teleological, Aristotelian *causa finalis* of an act. “[T]he innermost meaning of the acted deeds and the spoken word is independent of victory and defeat and must remain untouched by any eventual outcome, by their consequences for better or worse (...) Greatness, therefore, or the specific meaning of each deed, can lie only in the performance itself.”²¹ Hence the significance and the necessity of a (public) scene, or a stage, where the disclosure of one(self) to the other(s) is to take place. This approach to judgment of (political) action,

²⁰ *The Human Condition*, p. 237.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 205-6.

not only opposed the long sustained judgmental parameters of Aristotelian teleology, but can also be interpreted as a continuation of Nietzschean efforts of revaluing all our evaluations; ultimately it is a part of a mosaic within which Arendt states that politics - even if metaphorically - be 'defined as an art'.²²

Within and Beyond the Traditional Concepts of Time and Space

The preceding placement of Arendt's theory onto the time-space axis revolves around the category of action, and is drawn to a large extent from *The Human Condition*. However, some aspect of temporality has been present in Arendt's philosophy even before she thought of herself as a political theorist: since the time when she wrote on Augustine, a philosopher to whom she returned time and again.

Most theorists who enter the ontological field of time-space, strictly reserved for philosophers, finally opt for the primacy of one of the modalities of temporality, past, present or future. That is also the way Hannah Arendt initially addressed those issues in her work on Augustine, here in the guise of mortality, or *finis vitae*.

The focus in the analysis of Augustine's work was love; but the phenomena of love: craving, love of God, and the love for the neighbor, were placed and presented in temporal modalities: future, past and present, respectively. The tensions, first, between the craving (*appetitus*) and the love of God and, second, between the future and the past, have a potential of being resolved analogously: just as the tension between the craving and the love of God can be resolved in the love of one's neighbour, the tension between

²² Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future*, p. 153. As Arendt specifies, this analogy is of course restricted to performative art only.

the future and the past can be resolved in the present. The anticipation of death in the future, on the one hand and the turning toward the search for the origin of our Creation in the past on the other, can meet in the ‘fleeting moment’ of the present. Hannah Arendt underscored this Augustinian privileging of the present and in that placed herself closer to Augustine, than to her contemporaries, Heidegger, or Sartre, who for different reasons and in different frameworks both privileged the future as the time dimension. As for Augustine, of all the changeable modalities of time the present appeared to be closest to eternity. Although eternity is also and in an obvious way beyond the end, beyond the *finis vitae*, Arendt reminds us that “it is this Now that becomes Augustine’s model for eternity”.²³ “For a fleeting moment (the temporal Now) it is as though time stands still.”²⁴

Hannah Arendt maintains in her text on Augustine, that it is the *finis vitae* that directed Augustine in his meditations.²⁵ “There can be no doubt that death, and not just the fear of death, was the most crucial experience in Augustine’s life.”²⁶ In claiming this Hannah Arendt draws on the famous episode from the *Confessions* concerning the death of Augustine’s friend, regardless of the fact that in his later work, *The City of God*, Augustine also states: “Death is not to be regarded as a disaster, when it follows on a good life...”²⁷ It could be that when she is writing her text on St. Augustine, Hannah Arendt is sharing her theoretical preoccupations with one of her mentors who at the time has concluded writing *Sein und Zeit*. Her own explorations of time dimensions could have been driven by this immanence, as she designates death, the immanence that ‘lies at

²³ Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 15.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁷ St. Augustine, *The City of God*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984, p. 20.

the end of the road we keep walking all our lives'. From that perspective there is no future we can desire, or hope for; only the present. This present is 'the calm possession of life' and it is "[t]his present without a future"²⁸ which is also named eternity.

The concept of eternity is revisited in *The Human Condition*. However there are other conceptual links between the two texts. If we maintain that the celebrated *Human Condition* presents somewhat of a shift in the emphasis from a mainstream analysis, which is temporal, toward a spatial framework of world affairs, then we also claim that the terrain for this restructuring was well prepared for in the work on Augustine, since that is where Arendt says: "*Perhaps man possesses a 'space' where time can be conserved long enough to be measured, and would not this space which man carries with himself transcend both life and time?*"²⁹

Moreover, recognizing full well that temporality is an unavoidable given, it remains with Arendt throughout her writings on political theory; what could also be followed throughout those writings is that space gradually comes into its own place.

As opposed to this interpretation Jacques Taminiaux claims that: "[t]here is no doubt that time played a decisive role in her [Arendt's] analyses of the various roles of active life."³⁰ Jacques Taminiaux is one of the rare interpreters of Arendt who looks at her work from the perspectives of time and/or space, using as an entry point a remark that Arendt owes her attention to time to Martin Heidegger. All forms of human activity, labor, work and action when considered in temporal terms reveal, claims Taminiaux, a paradox of the human condition, since they are entangled in the eternal return of the same

²⁸ *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 13.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.15 (emphasis added).

³⁰ Jacques Taminiaux, *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker: Arendt and Heidegger*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997, p. 200.

(labor), stable (work) and fragile - albeit free – temporal modality (of action). Arendt's aim is not to resolve this paradox, but to face it, argues Taminiaux.

The thrust of his analysis is centered around the 'paradoxes of the mental life' as presented in Arendt's *Life of the Mind*. The tensions, presented at the outset of Arendt's analysis, between knowing and thinking, and between the mind and the soul, became more intricate by taking into account the variations of the mental activities, such as perception and intellect; the tensions build up within the faculties of the mind between willing and thinking; finally 'the redemption' of conflicts lies in action. Furthermore, judgment, even Kantian aesthetic judgment, is peacefully positioned at the intersection of all the tensions: between thinking, willing, knowing, and affections of the soul. However, let it be noted that judgment is a temporal resolve, by being here and now, it 'acknowledges the right of the present'; but, judgment also decisively recognizes the right of the past; moreover, concludes Taminiaux, "it is the past itself that launches an appeal to the invention of the new, i.e. of a future..."³¹ As insightful as this analysis is, it does no venture to reach beyond the concept of time; even where space presents itself, such as in Arendt's question: *where* are we when we think, Taminiaux, dismisses the possibility of a more comprehensive view; it does not include references to the political *per se*. Arendt's own text, though undoubtedly full of tensions in reference to time, if followed along the time-space axis is far more inclusive, meaning primarily more inclusive in reference to the category of space.³²

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

³² The texts referred to here are *The Life of the Mind* and "Preface: The Gap Between Past and Future".

Time and Space of (Political) Thinking

In her last work Hannah Arendt set out to make peace with philosophy by overtly turning to the thinking process, allegedly under the exclusive jurisdiction of philosophy. This was by no means to be done at the expense of political action, the political *praxis*. What Arendt thought was necessary was to provide a link between *theoria* and *praxis*. For judgment as well as issues of responsibility that is critical.

At the closing of the part on 'Thinking' she opens up to the meta-perception of her own writing – emphatically stating that 'the basic assumption of [this] investigation' is the following: it is the *thinking* process that can salvage what would otherwise remain irretrievably lost, and remain only a part of the broken 'thread of tradition'. Although what is being retrieved can only be a '*fragmented* past' it has undergone a 'sea change' and is now 'rich and strange' in that it has turned into 'coral' and 'pearls'. These gems are a part of a 'lost treasure of revolutions' and are most probably to be found in the treasure chests of freedom. This is "age-old treasure, which ...appears abruptly, unexpectedly, and disappears again, under different mysterious conditions, (...) Unicorns and fairy queens seem to possess more reality than the lost treasure of the revolutions."³³ The fragments of political fairy tales - told by Arendt who is also quick to ascertain that she "does not attempt to design some utopian future"³⁴ - are in fact an underpinning to weaving a relationship between thinking and action. Thinking is the kernel of mental activities and political action is the most precious of all human activities; this, Penelope's task was to weave them in so that the knots, and the tensions would be smoothed; in

³³ "Preface: The Gap Between Past and Future" p. 5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Arendt's political theory *and* philosophy: both, *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* would work toward the same goal. The tension itself however cannot even be fully addressed without the placing it on the time-space axis.

Hannah Arendt repeatedly reminds us that the text in *The Life of the Mind* can only pertain to the thinking process, or to the 'thinking ego' whose 'greatest enemy is time'. Time, perceived independently of human considerations, is an indifferent continuous flow that – if the thinking ego is to have a full, comprehensive overview - needs to be both, intercepted *and* accounted for. What we need therefore is “a timeless time in which men are able to create timeless works with which to create their own finiteness.”³⁵

Looking into the face of the evil, as a part of her *cura posterior*, at the Eichmann trial, Hannah Arendt concluded that thoughtlessness constitutes the primary lack of someone who committed the hitherto unheard of atrocities. She explicitly states that the 'immediate impulse' for her preoccupation with *The Life of the Mind* has come as a consequence of attending the Eichmann trial. The process of analyzing thinking - as a part of the *Life of the Mind* - has revealed that it requires, or more accurately, necessitates a withdrawal of the 'thinking ego' from the world of appearances. There is no reason not to extend this so that it applies to any thinking process, even more so to the process of judgment inasmuch as it is also a thinking process; from this, the judgment of a political actor is not excluded; moreover, she necessitates a withdrawal as an indispensable attribute of any process of judging.

Referring to the same urgency, and the same need – albeit in a different context - within any life of the mind, which recognizes both its functions of pure and practical

³⁵ *The Life of the Mind*, Part One, p. 211.

reasoning, Seyla Benhabib convincingly writes: “(...) is there ever any chance to stop the performance for a while, to pull the curtain down (...)”³⁶ There is a cruel indifference in the flow of time and everything it pulls along, that does not recognize this pain; and there is no recognition of the exigency to stop if even for a moment. This need is precisely what both theorists, Benhabib and Arendt, fully recognize.

I argue - running the risk of falling into the trap that Bergson warned against, of spatializing time - that the withdrawal from the flow of time, this ‘gap in time’ that Arendt is going to great lengths to expound on, is in fact a space. The significance of this argument I believe is the fortification of grounding the central Arendtian political concern, the concern for freedom: because for us mortals, time is a determination and spaces are insertions into time. Space is a material location of free and responsible human action; as a metaphor, space represents the time we steal, so to speak, that allows us to stop and think as we make judgments.

Apart from the analysis of the thinking process, if we look only toward the business of everyday life ‘this thoroughgoing spatiality of our ordinary life’³⁷ is in, Arendt’s theory, undoubtful. In explicit terms, as Taminiaux correctly pointed out, Arendt retracted the question on the *topos* of thinking, concluding that the only possible answer would be ‘everywhere’ which is the same as ‘nowhere’, since the problem was just to insert the thinking ego into time. This insertion, between the past and the future, could not be confined to a mere incision of a ‘now’, or the present; it therefore required an expansion, which is why in her appropriation of Kafka’s parable, Arendt went one step further - the corrected image now represented a parallelogram of forces. “The advantage

³⁶ Seyla Benhabib, “Feminism and Postmodernism”, in S. Benhabib, J. Butler, D. Cornell, N. Fraser, eds., *Feminist Contentions. A Philosophical Exchange*, New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 21.

³⁷ *The Life of the Mind*, Part One, p. 205.

of this image is that the region of thought would no longer have to be situated beyond and above the world and human time.”³⁸ In another version of this text, Hannah Arendt is more explicit on this point: “Obviously *what is missing in Kafka’s description of this thought-event is a spatial dimension* where thinking could exert itself without being forced to jump out of human time altogether.”³⁹ Becoming a part of the world in fact resulted in acquiring ‘spatiality’.

Every instance of human action that starting something anew breaks a chain of events and its apparent inevitability is an act of freedom, and, as such is an insertion of space into time; it takes the risk of being placed within a web of human actions, and thus before the public.

Regardless of whether we are using space as a metaphor, even as a metaphor of time, the use of spatial designations locates the matters within the realm of human affairs, which then in turn renders them accessible to political action, human freedom, responsibility and judgment.

“Keep off time, time is untouchable, one must not provoke it. Isn’t it enough for you to have space? Space is for human beings, you can swing about in space, turn somersaults, fall down, jump from star to star. But for goodness’ sake don’t tamper with time!”⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid., p. 208.

³⁹ “Preface: The Gap Between Past and Future” p. 11 (emphasis added).

⁴⁰ Bruno Schulz, *Sanatorium under the Sign of the Hourglass*, quoted from Eric Alliez, *Capital Times. Tales from the Conquest of Time*, Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996 p. vii.

History of Philosophy on Time

In the introductory pages of his history of political philosophy, Sheldon Wolin writes that every political theory “aiming at some measure of comprehensiveness”⁴¹ presupposes a matrix of political time and political space and these in turn constitute a ‘metaphysic’ that is focused on political phenomena. Looking even further beyond this, at the categories of time and space that are not focused on political phenomena only, but constitute the axis of metaphysics and/or ontology, contemporary theory broadens the horizon of their relevance to the political in many directions and in a myriad of ways.⁴² From Greek to contemporary philosophy, time and space, in the course of establishing entry points into the political appear either as mutually intertwined or one distinct from the other.

At the borderline of *mythos*, they appear in conjunction. Time and space are a part of Plato’s story as told in his dialogue *Timaeus* of how the *cosmos*, the order and the beauty of our world came to be. It is the only dialogue in which Plato addresses this question, treats physical phenomena and explicitly develops the concepts of time and space. However, its significance in reference to political theory lies first in its placement within Plato’s works. It is only the first part of a trilogy - *Critias* and *Hermocrates* being the second and the third; this is based on Plato’s assumption that only *after* coordinates of time and space were set, could he proceed to present the political, and place it within those coordinates. “The *Timaeus* was [thus] written by way of preface to two politico-ethical dialogues.”⁴³ The two dialogues concerning the political *per se* are also set in a time framework, one in relation to the other. Subsequently, the question of the origin of

⁴¹ Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, p.15.

⁴² See Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*.

⁴³ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, volume I, Westminster: Newman Press, 1963, p. 244.

the political, in the first State of *Atlantis*, represents the *past*, the “fable turning to history” in the dialogue *Critias*, and the other, its complementary political counterpart being the proposed *future* in *Hermocrates*. “Thus the Utopian State or Socratic Republic would be represented in *Critias* as something realized in the past, while the practical reforms for the future would be proposed in *Hermocrates*”.⁴⁴ Even the fact that *Hermocrates* was never written resonates with the implication of the reality that is ‘not-yet’. Thus Plato set a precedent for utopian thinking: *Atlantis* is not the only *u-topos* thematized in his texts, since *The Republic*, as a whole, also presents the *eidos* of the *polis*.

Plato’s Demiurge constructs *cosmos* - as opposed to *chaos*. The concept of order includes temporality. Time comes into being with *cosmos*, and, what is even more important, *vice versa*; namely, there is no part of the *cosmos* that exist out of time. In *Timaeus* Plato writes: “Time then came into existence along with the Heaven, to the end that having been generated together, they must also be dissolved together, (...); and it was made after the pattern of Eternal nature (...); for whereas the pattern is existent through all eternity, the copy on the other hand is through all time, continually having existed, existing and being about to exist.”⁴⁵ The time of the ordered world follows the model of eternity. But eternity is beyond the power of Demiurge’s creation. While actually immersed in eternity, Plato appears to have recognized the ‘present’ as the only dimension of time that for him had any reality. Accordingly, he did not distance himself

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Plato, *Timaeus*, 38b, trans. by Rev. R. G. Bury, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961, p. 77 (emphasis added).

from the future, nor did he do so when turning to the past. "For we say that it 'is' or 'was' or 'will be', in truth of speech, 'is' alone is the appropriate term."⁴⁶

Plato's passionate ontology of Forms, non-fading, immutable, everlasting Forms can be regarded as a foundation for his political philosophy. The ultimate and apparently ontological criteria are in fact primarily *political* and only then ontological: Forms are those that exceed the passage of time. As such, the Forms – especially those of Justice and Good in the case of the political - can and do present a model, a paradigm that this changeable world has only to 'imitate' by the process of *mimesis*. Hannah Arendt claims that Plato, between the factors which, according to him, could comprise the universe: the maker, the model, and the product, would unwaveringly opt for the model, the choice being made by claiming that it is the model that has no beginning, and is, ultimately, everlasting. "It is only in Augustine that the 'imitation' indicates dependence on the Creator, whereas in Plato it indicates clearly the dependence upon the model that is above both the maker and his product."⁴⁷

Plato's concept of time is similar to the one Augustine develops. Importantly for political theory, the similarity is in the way all three dimensions of time are collapsed into the present. "If the future and the past do exist, ... at least I know that wherever they are, they are not there as future and past, but as present (..). From what we have said it is abundantly clear that neither the future nor the past exist, and therefore it is not strictly correct to say that there are three times, past present and future."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Plato, *Timaeus*, 38a.

⁴⁷ *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 63.

⁴⁸ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971, pp. 267-9.

Both, Saint Augustine of Hippo and Plato translate present into eternity; but it is from their concept of the eternity that the differences may be discerned. "You my Father are eternal. (...) Let them [men] understand that before all time began you are the eternal Creator of all time, and that no time and no created thing is co-eternal with you, ..."49 Augustine, therefore, claims that it is the Creator who is eternal, whereas Plato maintains the eternity of the *model* and not that of the maker. The pagan Demiurge could not carry the burden of eternity, as could the God of Christianity. "Try as they [people] may to savour the taste of eternity, their thoughts still twist and turn upon the ebb and flow of things in past and future time."50 The significance of Plato's position is precisely in that it created a privileged place for a *model*. With the 'death of God' the privileged position of the maker has been called into question; however, the model remained and its sanctity as an icon on the wall has yet to be challenged. Moreover the model of the model, so to speak is in philosophy privileged and perpetuated.

Importantly, time is for Augustine a part of the creation of the world and, regardless of his strive toward eternity, he is closer to the world of human affairs than may appear. Time is not a movement of the body - as in Aristotle - but an extension of the mind in its various functions: expectation, attention and memory. These functions are correlative with the dimensions of time, so that what we believe to be the past is just a function of memory, what we hold to be the future is a function of the mind in the process of expectation, while what we experience as the present Augustine designates as attention.⁵¹ Although each of these functions may render itself, albeit in different ways,

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 279.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.261.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 277.

relevant to political theory and issues of responsibility, the function of memory is immediately present.

Augustine also devotes considerable attention to probing the avenues of memory. “All this goes on inside me in the vast cloisters of my memory (...) In it I meet myself ...I remember myself *and what I have done, when and where I did it, and the state of the mind at that time.*”⁵² This process, often painful, ultimately, though not always aimed at self-examination involuntarily answers the question ‘Who am I’. Although memory is the process of recollection, from “a great field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images of all kinds...”⁵³ the way some of these images surface and present themselves unexpectedly to us and some, no matter how much we probe, will remain buried – all this opens up further questioning. How did all that I explore enter my memory, including ‘the innumerable principles’? Memory serves as a necessary means not abstractly in reference to the past, but to the deeds and actions of the past. It is therefore indispensable for the issue of responsibility.

Ancient and medieval concepts of time revolve around a limited number of theoretical options, whereas modernity brings about an array of postulates both on time and space. Taking this condensed but still chronological tour into the conceptualizations of time, it is significant to mark the Kantian approach, which relies on two claims, first: time is a ‘universal condition of the possibility of all appearances’ and second, that understanding, or intellect, as Arendt would have it, is based on “schemata of each category [which] contains and makes capable of representation only a determination of

⁵² Ibid., p. 215 (emphasis added).

⁵³ Ibid., p. 214.

time.”⁵⁴ Analogously, the schemata, so to speak, of Arendt’s political theory may also be grounded in the concept of time, as Ricoeur would have us believe.⁵⁵ Whatever the case may be with Arendt, Kant’s conception of time undoubtedly lays it out as an all-encompassing matrix of our own creation.

19th century made space for three significant theories of time: Hegel’s concept of linear time highlighted and immersed in historical time and announcing the time of history. Also, significantly, linear time is oftentimes either itself grounded in, or serves as grounding for, an uncritical assumption, the Enlightenment credence in progress. The second 19th century viewpoint on time is Nietzsche’s whose idea of Eternal Recurrence revived the idea of cyclical time; and finally Henri Bergson’s theory of duration, a reminder that in order to grasp time, we should not be dependant on spatial metaphors. These philosophers have found their way into *The Life of the Mind*. However it is important to note that Hegel’s concepts ossify the principle of the model as installed by Plato, and remind that it is Nietzsche who dismantles the status of the ‘maker’.

Our contemporaries raising issues in regard to time question the models of mainstream thinking. For instance, Peter Osborne introduces ‘politics of time’ which is or should be questioned as: “... all politics as centrally involving struggles over the experience of time. (...) What kinds of history do they make possible or impede? Whose future do they ensure?”⁵⁶ He states that it was Julia Kristeva’s essay “Women’s Time”⁵⁷ that was a pioneering text on the topic; and although criticizing it as “too schematic and

⁵⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 185.

⁵⁵ Paul Ricoeur, “Action, Story and History – On Rereading *The Human Condition*”, in Reuben Garner, ed., *The Realm of Humanities. Responses to the Writings of Hannah Arendt*, New York: Peter Lang, 1992.

⁵⁶ Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, London: Verso, 1995. p. 200.

⁵⁷ Julia Kristeva, “Women’s Time” in Toril Moi, ed., *Kristeva Reader*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

too loosely tied to traditional symbolic forms of gender representation to advance beyond identification of the issue”⁵⁸ he does nevertheless recognize it as the text that identified the issue. The text, of course, noted the absence women from linear time, from “time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding: time as departure, progression and arrival - in other words time of history.”⁵⁹ Kristeva’s almost classical statement can still be a point of departure on the (politics of) subject: “[W]hen evoking the name and the destiny of women, one thinks more of *space* generating and forming the human species than of *time*, becoming and history.”⁶⁰ Among the many issues she tackles, Kristeva does claim that women have inserted themselves into linear time; other theorists have also continued to expand on the same issues.⁶¹

The dictum of temporality, present throughout *The Life of the Mind*, but explicitly introduced between ‘Thinking’ and ‘Willing’, becomes most transparent in Arendt’s explication of the faculty of ‘Willing’. It is defined as ‘the mental organ for the future’;⁶² as such it is highly relevant for the political. The expounding lays out a history of philosopher’s bypassing and – if at all, then a - reluctant assessment of willing, holding freedom at bay. Greek philosophy did not perceive of ‘will’ or conceptualize of freedom. The Greeks conceptualized of temporality as circular and did not venture into eternity or tamper with time. Freedom only reached as far as the *polis*, but it filled all the public spaces and created a place for itself within a world of plurality. Modernity, on the other hand, conceptualized of temporality as rectilinear, reaching the climax of that perception

⁵⁸ Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, p. 19.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 190.

⁶¹ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 1984; Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion*, New York & London: Routledge, 1995.

⁶² *The Life of the Mind*, p. 19.

in the Enlightenment idea of Progress. Tampering with time, it had lost way and has thus forsaken the space of political action and the making of the human world. It is still in search for the treasure of freedom.

The crux of the matter does lie in the 'awesome *responsibility*' of freedom, the 'frightening notion' that for freedom, for each act - by definition a free one - 'nothing and nobody will be held *responsible* for it but myself'.⁶³ What makes it all the more hard to bear is that 'nothing that was done could be undone.'⁶⁴ Time is inexorable. According to Arendt, Nietzsche derives all evil precisely from this resentment of time. This cyclical time, that he named Eternal Recurrence, is in his *Zarathustra* designated, over the power of the will, as the unappeasable temporality. Finally this is why Nietzsche repudiates the will, or better said allows for its temporal override.

Nietzsche's philosophy, his explanation of the will and the will-to power is one of the entry points Heidegger uses to announce his *kehre*, the 'reversal' in his way of thinking. In the context of Heidegger's 'reversal' Hannah Arendt highlights and analyzes his appropriation of a one of the central fragments of pre-Socratic philosophy, the Anaximander's famous one: "That from which things arise also gives rise to their passing away, according to what is necessary; for things render justice and pay penalty to one another for their injustice according to the ordinance of time."⁶⁵ Using this aphorism as a point of departure, Heidegger argues that the existence of man is such that he is always already guilty for the 'disruption' of the order; man is by virtue of existence 'in debt', *schuldig*, after having been thrown in the world. The salvation comes only by anticipating the 'shelter of human existence'. In this essay, death is not mentioned, Arendt points out,

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 217, 196 (emphasis added).

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 168.

⁶⁵ Cited as translated in Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 189.

but the temporary transitory character of human existence is the only framework of thought. Within that framework, not only is -as Arendt underscores - everybody guilty and therefore everybody is as equally innocent, but, consequently, where little depends on individual judgment or action, raising any issue of responsibility appears to be absolutely pointless. Heidegger's philosophy, as paradoxical as it may seem, in this aspect falls under the rubric of traditional philosophical approach that passes judgment, and doesn't allow for a space where one may judge for oneself.

Without going into an unnecessarily detailed elaboration of Heidegger's philosophical path, suffice it to say that in Arendt's view the whole 'reversal' leads up to the 'Thinker', a 'ghostly Nobody', a personification of the 'age old tension between willing and acting' and, not without irony adds, "that now the fate of the world has come to depend' on this *solus ipse* of 'existential solipsism'.⁶⁶

As opposed to this approach of closure, Arendt presents Augustine's view: "God 'though Himself eternal and *without beginning*, caused time to have a beginning; and man, whom he had not made previously, He made in time."⁶⁷ The creation of man as *homo temporalis* was to assert the greatest of all the potentials, the *potestas* to create anew, to 'make possible a *beginning*'.

Arendtian privileging of the present is not confined to a detachment from the (Heideggerian) privileging of the future; Arendt takes it one step further since it is used to dislodge the traditional ontological privileging of time over space. "Whereas Heidegger defines this [philosophical] tradition essentially in terms of the tacit question of the *finitude* of the *Dasein*, from Arendt's very different perspective the theme of the *public*

⁶⁶ *The Life of the Mind*, p.187. See Jacques Taminiaux, on the "appropriateness of irony directed in *The Life of the Mind* at professional thinkers" in *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker*, p. 22.

⁶⁷ *The Life of the Mind*, p. 108.

world provides the touchstone for understanding this tradition.”⁶⁸ To clarify that point further: “In her work, the *public world*, is above all portrayed as a *symbolic communicational space - an interspace.*”⁶⁹ These statements as to the difference between Arendt and Heidegger are stemming from the different emphasis they give to time and space. Furthermore, in that respect Arendt can be regarded as the predecessor of the whole direction of political thought. “It is in the repressed spatial premises of the concept of modernity that its political logic is to be found.”⁷⁰

Space and Place

The critical point of ‘crystalization’ *en route* to constructing the totalitarian matrix was creating a system in which people have been rendered superfluous. There is an efficient means of materializing this goal. “The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the *deprivation of a place* in the world....”⁷¹ To displace someone means to take the ground from under their feet. In political terms, the status of citizenship is first taken away. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* this is treated with historical precision and political acuteness; just occasionally there springs out of the overwhelming data of figures and facts, or a telling phrase: ‘*apatride*, just a legal freak’.⁷² The blatant reality settles in most inhumanly and with ultimate cruelty precisely when they become ‘displaced persons’ or refugees, the unwanted and hence unprotected and

⁶⁸ J.A. Barash, “The Political Dimension of the Public World” in Larry May & Jerome Kohn, eds. *Twenty Years Later*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996, p. 258 (emphasis added).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 260 (emphasis added).

⁷⁰ Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, p. 16.

⁷¹ *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 296.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 278. And she continues: “To this group belong in chronological order millions of Russians, hundreds of thousands of Armenians, thousands of Hungarians, hundreds of thousands of Germans, and more than half a million of Spaniards – to enumerate only the more important categories.”

vulnerable. The compelling story, as always, is the one told in the first person: "In the first place we don't like to be called refugees (...) Before this war broke out we were even more sensitive about being called refugees... We declared that we had departed of our own free will to countries of our choice and we denied that our situation had anything to do with 'so called Jewish problems'... we had left our country because one fine day it had no longer suited us to stay... that was all."⁷³ The unbearable point of suffering is oftentimes blurred by denial in the understandable difficulty to comprehend the reality. The mark of dark times is for many people *a loss of a place in the world*. To lose your place in the world is the equivalent of the loss of the world. History of philosophy testifies to this.

*

Plato's conceptualization of space, *chora* in *Timeaus* states that space precedes the labor of *Demiurg* and is therefore a preexisting Receptacle. Aristotle's concepts of time and space are primarily addressed in the context of motion. In that context Aristotle had replaced the Plato's *chora* with *topos*, i.e. the cosmological option of space with a growing notion of a physical place. Moreover Aristotle, in his *Physics*, assigns to the category of place a pivotal role in explaining the phenomena of motion and, consequently, the physical world. Using the analogy of the vessel just as a point of departure, Aristotle brings the concept to completion: "That is what place is: the first unchangeable limit of that which surrounds."⁷⁴ In his detailed study of the histories of

⁷³ Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees", in *The Jew as Pariah*, p. 55.

⁷⁴ Aristotle, *Physics* 212a, 20-1., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

space and place, Edward Casey makes a strong case for the two claims this study is based on: first, this history is marked by the demise of the category of place, and the subsequent rise of the 'infinite space' and, second, to the category of place is – if not advantageous – then certainly indispensable for the understanding and acting in our world.⁷⁵ Although decisively not without problems, the category of place is an 'accommodating and yet a polyvalent model' that beside being an ontological grounding, "gives bountiful aegis – active protective support – to what it locates."⁷⁶ To sum it up: "Given the choice between Whitehead's two models of creation - "Immanence" versus "Imposition" - Aristotle, in a revealing contrast to Plato, opts unambiguously for a model of immanence."⁷⁷ However, importantly, the consequence, or the flip side of this stance, follows from another claim of Aristotle: "Everything remains *naturally* in its *proper* place."⁷⁸ This is where the complexity and the impasse of the problem lie: comforts of belonging appear inseparable from the assignment to a 'natural place'. With all that in mind, contemporary theorists are led to conclude: "When it comes to matters of space, we speak Aristotelian."⁷⁹

The category of space – and place – has a long meandering history, the main landmarks being, beside Plato and Aristotle, first, the beginning of modern philosophy and science in the work of Descartes, Newton, and Leibnitz – to name some – and, second, Kant. The first standpoint, differences within notwithstanding, posits space as an absolute, objective coordinate system, an infinite grid for the world of material objects. Kant, resolving the many tensions in the conceptualizations of knowledge within those

⁷⁵ Edward Casey, *The Fate of the Place. A Philosophical History*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998.

⁷⁶ Edward Casey, *The Fate of the Place*, p. 71. On the theoretical problems of the Aristotelian category of place, see pp. 69-70.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁷⁸ Aristotle, *Physics* 212b,34-5 (emphasis added).

⁷⁹ Michael Curry, *The Work in the World. Geographical Practice and the Written Word*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 88.

efforts declares that space is an *a priori* condition for our perception of all objects external to us and, it therefore resides in primarily –though not in contrast to reality- in our reasoning.

For most contemporary theorists of space our time leads not only to placing space in the stead of time, but also to a renewed recognition of place as a key spatial concept. And place has during the course of time, from a *topos* and a *locus* become ‘a location that has been given shape and form by people’ in many ways, through applying topology, naming, symbolically designating, allocating narratives and rituals.⁸⁰ The category has outgrown the Aristotelian confinement so as to accommodate Bachelard’s imagination, Foucault’s *heterotopoi*, even Derrida’s events as that which is *taking place*.⁸¹

Significantly for our line of research it is primarily this conceptualization of place that finally allows for such a space of political action that is grounded not only on accountable citizenship but also on the concept of responsible communities. These political options of responsibility have appeared as *Politics of Location*. “Recognizing our location, having to name the ground we are coming from (...) I began to experience ...a location for which *I need to take responsibility*.”⁸²

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-8.

⁸¹ Edward Casey, *The Fate of the Place*, pp. 337-9.

⁸² Adrienne Rich, “Notes Toward a Politics of Location”, in *Blood Bread and Poetry*, p. 219.

CONCLUSION

Hannah Arendt is a philosopher, the criteria being neither her own self-perception, nor the judgment she passed - and held on to for the better part of her life - on philosophy and philosophers; rather, my claim is based on a more general perception of philosophy which I see as more comprehensive and generous, and, consequently, fruitful.¹

Within those parameters lies the greatness of Arendt's philosophy – and it is (political) philosophy - in that it created a space for us all: while firmly standing her own theoretical ground, she provoked many, including mutually almost exclusive standpoints, and established different places of theoretical perspectives; her greatness is in that her texts will continue to do so.

There is an ongoing and sometimes an almost repetitive process of producing interpretative texts on Hannah Arendt's work. However for the most part they include a need, even a compulsion to understand, and comprehend, in Arendt's sense of the word a particular case or yet another human disaster. This understanding of my own issues required a journey through her texts and would hardly have been possible without them.

In the first stages of her own theoretical journeys after the Holocaust, Hannah Arendt - the central text of this focus being *The Origins of Totalitarianism* – detects and articulates issues of responsibility and guilt, but primarily revolves around the concept of evil; although she did not emphasize evil as necessarily secular, it is turned toward the affairs of the world, and therefore had an orientation to the political; it is this acute

¹ The dilemma of whether Hannah Arendt belongs to philosophy or not, appears to have been resolved with a decisive claim: "Arendt is now accepted as a full-fledged canonical figure in political philosophy." Dana Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 3.

awareness of the political that rendered it open to the possibilities of further probing and assessing issues of responsibility.

After the Eichmann trial – which I regard as a turning point – culminating in *The Life of the Mind*, the unfolding of Arendt's theorizing on the policy of evil and, consequently the issue of responsibility had an unquestionably secular underpinning; it also branched out into more than one direction: asserting primacy of individual responsibility and clarification of the concept of collective responsibility; but, most importantly, as a result of an in-depth analysis, as if by extension the issue of responsibility was dovetailed by the category of judgment.

Raising the issue of responsibility is a political matter the public significance of which is doubtless; probing the venues of judgment is thinking about the political relevance of the 'thinking business'. It is in the category of judgment that the political category of responsibility received its philosophical counterpart as in this the way the political received its fullest possible account; and philosophy was brought to bear on the political.²

This is an outline of Arendt's mapping the issues of responsibility clearly marking the road to judgment; it is a resume of what has been said stating that some of the main points along the way are secularization and citizenship; the claims as to their necessity are the outcomes of this particular attempt to understand; and they serve as the landmarks for a future research.

² Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt. A Reinterpretation of Her Thought*, p. 253.

Secularization, The political significance of

I argue that only by, with and through secularization of thought and thinking can the issues of responsibility be raised with theoretical seriousness and practical political effectiveness; that only by relying on a secular grounded judgment can we be the ones who judge at all. It is in this sense that the words of Goetz in Sartre's play *The Devil and the Good Lord* should be understood: "You see this emptiness over our heads? That is God. (...) Silence is God. Absence is God. God is the loneliness of man. *There was no one but myself. I alone decided on the Evil; and I alone invented Good.*"³

However positing the criterion for a secular view is a much more complex matter and need not necessarily fall under, or comply with, a religious vs. a non-religious opposition. Not only do philosophers such as Plato, Heidegger, and many others, actually present a non-secular view, but Augustine –albeit in the context of religious faith- as paradoxical as it may seem, is closer to a secular view; allowing for responsible autonomous thinking. I understand non-secular thinking or a direct extension of a theological discourse to be present wherever there is a principle –metaphysical or otherwise- to which mankind is subordinate in such a way as to render it non responsible for the happenings in the world.

Analysis of evil in the context of this theological discourse is alternating with and, was substituted by, every philosophical undertaking where –although professing to clash with the evil – it had in fact lost sight of the worldly affairs. Philosophy, in many of its concrete appearances and manifestations is complicit in sustaining a non-secular

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Devil and the Good Lord*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969, p. 141 (emphasis added).

framework; she does share with theology a common ground in apparently 'lifting the burden of responsibility' for the world off of the mankind; this however points the way and goes hand in hand with a drain of human freedom, precisely because responsibility is the flip side of freedom.

There is an (un)holy alliance of philosophy with a non-secular, or even religious hold over the world; especially between the Judeo-Christian tradition and Western metaphysical systems from Aristotle to Descartes, from Leibnitz to Hegel. It is manifest in the quest of philosophy for the One – or, however it may be designated - that single principle under which our whole reality can be subsumed and ultimately explained away; its purpose is aimed at the truth and, consequently, can only result from a 'revelation'. The devastating consequences of the whole discourse, metaphysical or theological, were convincingly exposed by Nietzsche.

As religious faith, among else, does serve as a psychological support system and social amortization, there is always the danger of moving, or at least blurring the dividing line between the 'limit situations', as Jaspers would put it, which can and those that cannot be humanly dealt with; this has and in the future may continue to have devastating results for the issues of political responsibility.

The fact that this has been brought up by the political agenda of modernity and especially Enlightenment, does not render the issues obsolete; quite the contrary, the evidence that it is still a requirement becomes even more convincing with time.⁴

⁴ The separation of church and state is, one of the practical political outcomes of recognizing the necessity of secularization in the course of building the citizenship of modernity; it is, according to some, an unquestionable result of modernity and Enlightenment projects. This however is an issue seriously questioned by the legal and educational authorities in Serbia who are in the year 2001 in the process of introducing compulsory courses in religion into all elementary and high schools.

Citizenship, format for political responsibility

Responsibility is primarily individual, because the individual is always already the one who judges - a collective 'judges' only metaphorically, or, constructs procedures for series of individual judgments to be perceived as collective ones. Namely, as hard as it most certainly is, each and every individual is answerable for herself, regardless of collective she or he belongs to.

Having said that, emphasizing the significance, the initiating power of individual responsibility, let me conclude that the policy of evil can rarely come about without a collective support, a support of the masses; ultimately, it is oftentimes the case of collective responsibility that needs to be assessed. One of the important questions is what is the collective? In order to be politically answerable we need to be fully aware of the complex ways we reach our decisions, therefore we need to be aware of when and by which mechanisms is it that 'I' becomes a 'we'. In the contemporary world, for lack of a principle more easily identifiable, those that form a collective which is the only one that can and therefore should be held collectively responsible is the citizenship of a designated political unit, a state.

The question that is almost forced upon us is: why do we not place the burden of responsibility on a collective that is most often targeted as the apparent 'beneficiary' of some of the most atrocious policies of evil, namely an ethnicity or a nation. There are at least two reasons, one from the past, the other pointing to the future: first, ethnicities and nations do function as *imagined* communities and therefore lack the formal format necessary for assigning and distributing political responsibility.⁵ However, much more importantly, placing the burden of responsibility even *post factum* can work toward the

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London and New York: Verso, 1991.

future, since it can be a significant - even if painful - part of building the status and the institution of citizenship; it can greatly contribute to the maturation required - in fact it can install it.

Responsibility

Ricoeur's designation of fragility points to a consideration similar to the one Levinas focused on when he wanted us to recall *a face*. This consideration takes into account the one/s we actually or potentially have the power over. Politically this consideration belongs to modernity and has, at least timidly, been present only as a rough contour from the inception of modern political theory; it is built into every measure taken to protect those who do not have access to power (such as system of political representation, transparency of decision making processes and the like).

However, in the face of those that are absolutely powerless and become victims, stands the intricacy of power relationships, which allows for responsibility to be brushed aside. The power relations are grounded in the fact that, albeit having different access and level of power, *all who have any power do and should share in the responsibility*. This answerability, response-ability, though unevenly distributed to every instance of power, still remains the ability to respond. Responsibility requires osmosis and a permanently open two-way communication between all those that have a direct access to power and those that do not, but do share in the responsibility. Consequently, there is an absolute urgency to place a greater burden than has historically ever before been placed on the shoulders of citizenry for what has been done *in their name*; because unless that burden sobers up the mankind, *the policy of evil will be implemented again and again*. And the

only way to minimize this probability is to alert the citizens not serve as a support system for a totalitarian policy of evil, not to mold into an obedient mass. “[r]esponsibility does not belong only to the intellectuals. *It is even more important that each citizen is aware of his or her own responsibility (...)* He or she must feel particularly responsible for the constitutive horizontal bond of the will to live together. In short, he or she must ascribe public safety to the vitality of the associate life which regenerates the will to live together.”⁶

The responsibility of the elite, in Arendtian parlance, falls at least into two categories: the political and the military elite the responsibility of which I perceive as less of a theoretical and more of a legal problem; however, when we turn to the second category of more intricate relationships and positions in the public space, which is built by media, academia, writers, poets, film makers, artists, teachers of all sorts, in a word, the intelligentsia, who do constitute an elite - then their responsibility is not only a grave problem in terms of the consequences, but is also a significant theoretical challenge: namely how do you charge someone for a spoken or a written word, without infringing on the very principles you want to build on?

Whatever the case may be, responsibility is always already secular, and equally so in reference to theological and metaphysical discourses; and its materialization in the contemporary world is best achieved in the format of citizenship.⁷

However, some questions remain. Given the fact that citizenship is a varied collective especially in its role in the creation of a policy is there a way to differentiate

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, “Fragility and Responsibility” in *Hermeneutics of Action*, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: SAGE Publications Ltd., 1996, p. 21. (emphasis added)

⁷ Etienne Balibar, “Citizen Subject” in J- L Nancy, E. Cadava, eds., *Who comes after the Subject*, New York: Routledge, 1991.

between the ones who resisted the policy of evil, the ones who were indifferent and finally the ones who supported the system? The question can be taken to its painfully extreme formulation when the citizenship of a polity includes the truly innocent ones, such as children who undoubtedly and necessarily share the consequences of any policy.

Judgment

Raising the issues of political responsibility means attempting to find a way through a complex maze of the paths taken so as to reach decisions of political consequence; therefore, when exploring the issues of responsibility political theory requires probing the venues of judgment.

In case of the work of Hannah Arendt, the unfortunate circumstances of a text unfinished for publication (i.e. *The Life of the Mind*) are entangled with the complexity of the problem and the categories involved. Some of the categories in the texts of Hannah Arendt fail to retain a constant meaning throughout her work. 'Thinking' in Arendt's terminology is a multifaceted term: firstly, it means the opening stage of the 'life of the mind' – the other two being willing and judging - secondly, it is also a common denominator for all three stages of the 'life of the mind'; thirdly, it shares a partial overlap with philosophy. Whatever the case may be, taking responsibility and judging is undoubtedly a 'thinking business'. If it were not so, Arendt would not designate *thoughtlessness* as basically making a wrong judgment.

Elucidating the category of judgment, Hannah Arendt brought together two planes, the both of which, connecting numerous points, required expounding on their own

terms: first, the plurality of men as it faces and concludes about the second, which is the particular, a world consisting of particularity.

Furthermore, the complexity of the matter points to the need to consider judgment both as the judgment of the political actor *and* the judgment of the spectator. Judgment of the actor though placed in the present, carries her act into the future; and, the judgment of the spectator is not only assessing the past, but is in fact passing judgment, which by virtue of its aspirations aims to surpass temporality. In order for responsibility to cease being an issue pertaining only to the past, and become relevant for the future, judgment becomes the key.

Space/Place and Time

Responsibility is a stance, although usually raised as an issue only in the aftermath of an evil, *post factum* it is and should be spread throughout *all the modalities of time*. Its potential for challenging the policies of evil in the future is grounded in the political *space of freedom, which is equally a place of political responsibility*.

There are however, spaces that have no time to spread: the present, its 'fleeting moment' almost takes away the possibility to stop and think. Judging responsibly within the inexorable passing of time is an almost insurmountable obstacle. And this remains an unresolved issue.

If time is a restricting factor, a limitation, a simple given that humankind has no other option but to take into account, then space, or, better said place, is the designation of the possible, the human potential of freedom. An attempt to override time without the spatial incisions is analogous to revolving around the evil without raising the issue of

responsibility. If evil is to be approached from a political perspective it can only be done so through the lens of responsibility. Focusing on space allows for the choice, will and freedom of political action – and only within these parameters can we move from the abstract and comfortable elaboration of the causes of events, into an uncomfortable position of a spectator who makes claims and pronounces judgments.

In the wake of the policy of evil, there is the burning issue of declaring who were the perpetrators. Although power is the obvious clue, politically, time and space are of even greater importance; namely, at a given time in a particular place, whose judgment held sway, and, consequently who was responsible? Policies of evil are not elementary catastrophes, happenings beyond humankind and, complex as they are, they are *of our own doing*. Perhaps once that is clear then there is hope that policies of evil will not continue to spin as hard, and spill over. Questions thus formulated hold a promise of starting anew. For Arendt, this promise of starting anew was what she did hold on to - it was a promise that in the dark times when the whole world falls apart, not all is lost and the only way out depends solely on us.

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CURRICULUM VITA

Gordana Dasa Duhacek

Education:

B.A. from University of Belgrade, Department for Philosophy (1975)

M.A. from Rutgers University, Women's Studies Program (1996)

Ph.D. from Rutgers University, Department of Political Science (expected, 2002)

Principal Occupations:

Director of the Belgrade Women's Studies Center

Lecturer in Feminist Philosophy, CEU, Budapest, 1997/98

Deputy Executive, Alternative Academic Educational Network (AAEN)

Publications:

"Women's Time in the Former Yugoslavia" in Nanette Funk & Magda Mueller, eds. *Gender Politics and Post-Communism*, New York: Routledge, 1993.

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