

# **Hannah Arendt's Theory of Freedom: A Reinterpretation**

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## Abstract

Freedom is undoubtedly a central concept employed by Hannah Arendt in her political thought, yet I believe that it remains open to further interpretation. This thesis attempts to outline what Arendt means by the term and the implications of it for her thought more broadly. Advancing a nuanced methodology which seeks to understand the relationship between Arendt's primary concepts, this thesis examines how a large body of terms come together to form her unique and heavily politicised theory of freedom. These ideas are often related to Arendt's philosophy of speech, which draws heavily upon ancient Greek political understanding. The thesis proceeds with reference to her critique of totalitarian language and the problems that she associates with it, which is then compared specifically with the Greek account of rhetoric. From here the thesis proceeds toward Arendt's ideal of political discourse which it is suggested also is heavily grounded in the German hermeneutic tradition. Combining the Greek and German influences, I conclude that Arendt's account of freedom should be labelled *freedom as rhetoric*. Building upon this observation it is then claimed that Arendt is best understood as advancing a form of *hermeneutic republicanism*.

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## Abbreviations

EJ: *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

EU: *Essays in Understanding*

HC: *The Human Condition*

JP: *The Jew as Pariah*

K: *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*

MDT: *Men in Dark Times*

OT: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

OV: *On Violence*

PAP: *Philosophy and Politics*

PP: *The Promise of Politics*

RJ: *Responsibility and Judgment*

T: 'Thinking' in *The Life of the Mind*

TMC: *Thinking and Moral Considerations*

W: 'Willing' in *The Life of the Mind*

### **A Note**

Arendt supplied highly gendered language, often referring to humanity as 'man' or 'mankind'.

For the sake of staying true to Arendt's language, I have not attempted to change this. I hope that this will not be interpreted in a negative manner.



**The Greek *polis* will continue to exist at the bottom of our political existence...for as long as we use the word 'politics'**

Hannah Arendt

*Men in Dark Times*

## Introduction

This thesis seeks to examine what I believe to be the most important term for the writings of German political theorist Hannah Arendt (1906-1975): freedom. Within the following chapters I proceed with an analysis of the concepts that feed into her understanding of freedom, with the intention of granting the term further clarity. Throughout the thesis I attempt to show how her account of freedom is influenced by various observations regarding both the totalitarian phenomenon and traditional philosophy as founded by Plato. One of the central claims which influences proceedings is the vast influence that her theory of speech exerts over her thought, which culminates in my final description of Arendtian freedom as *rhetoric*. Using this account of freedom as rhetoric I then question how this impacts our understanding of Arendtian politics, focussing in particular on her republicanism. In this introduction I introduce Arendt's philosophical method and then use this as a means of generating an appropriate method for the task of this thesis, which I label *gravitational*. Following this, I provide a quick summary of the arguments made throughout these pages.

### 0.1 Understanding Arendt's Philosophical Method

Close friend of Hannah Arendt, Mary McCarthy, has provided two of the most revealing descriptions of Arendt's writings. The first emerged during an exchange at a conference in Toronto, 1972:

This space that Hannah Arendt creates in her work and which one can walk into with the great sense of walking through an arch into a liberated area and a great part of it is

occupied by definitions. Very close to the roots of Hannah Arendt's thinking is the *distinguo*: 'I distinguish this from that. I distinguish labor from work. I distinguish fame from reputation.'...I think that the chance of invigoration and oxygenation does combine with some sense of stability and security. And that is through the elaboration, the marvellous, shall we say, unfolding of definitions. 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) (McCarthy, 1979: 337-338)

In response, Arendt acknowledged that she always initiated the study of topics via a definitional process. The second quotation is from McCarthy's eulogy 'Saying Goodbye To Hannah' published in *The New York Review of Books* a month after Arendt's sudden death in 1975:

If I understood her, Hannah was always more for the Many than the One...She did not want to find a master key or universal solvent...The proliferation of distinctions in her work, branching out in every direction like tender shoots, no doubt owes something to her affection for the scholastics but it also testifies to a sort of typical awe-struck modesty before the world's abundance and intense particularity (2006: 33)

Both quotations centre around Arendt's literary method of definition and distinction, identifying a practice which remains curiously ignored in the vast body of literature surrounding one of contemporary political theory's most divisive names. Examples of this structure abound: most conspicuously, it is found in the categorisation of the human activities in *The Human Condition* and the mental faculties in *The Life of the Mind*; In both cases, the definition of terms configure the development of the text with each term analysed separately; the main body of *The Human Condition* is comprised of three chapters corresponding to 'labour', 'work', and 'action' (which, incidentally, succeeds a chapter on the public-private distinction), just as *The Life of the Mind* is a trilogy split between 'thought', 'will', and

'judgment'. On a condensed scale, some of the 'exercises in political thought' collected in *Between Past and Future* bear the hallmark of this approach; for instance, the chapter 'The Concept of History' clearly develops around the distinction between objectivity and impartiality (BPF: see pages 48-53). What this displays is a manner of political thinking consciously directed by a method of definition and distinction, and for this reason Mary McCarthy has revealed a particularly fruitful interpretative resource. To phrase it directly, Arendt very clearly thinks terminologically. I believe, therefore, that the abundance of terms which Arendt employs is her core strength, and is the source of interest for many people in her writings. Similarly, it is hard to find commentaries which are not led to a large extent by her terminological structures.

As far as I am aware, it seems that only one commentator, Seyla Benhabib, has cared to properly address this topic - albeit in a seemingly less exultant manner than McCarthy. Her suggestion, drawing upon some of the criticisms levelled at Arendt by others such as Jürgen Habermas and Hannah Pitkin, is that Arendt's "art of making distinctions often obscured rather than illuminated the phenomena at hand", and she traces the source to the "more basic dimension of her philosophical methodology, namely, her 'phenomenological essentialism'" (Benhabib, 2000: 123). Driven by the philosophical inheritance of Husserl and Heidegger which attempts a recovery of original experience and constrictively believes that "each human activity has its proper place in the world" (ibid: 172), Arendt's 'art of making distinctions' "frequently leads her to conflate conceptual distinctions with social processes, ontological analyses with institutional and historical descriptions" (ibid: 124). Despite these claims Benhabib's book misses an opportunity to investigate the broader question of Arendt's approach, and focuses instead on Arendt's much maligned distinction between the 'political' and the 'social', largely because the book is geared as much towards critique as interpretation. Throughout her text, Benhabib oscillates between praise and condemnation of Arendtian distinctions; on the one hand, she recognises the importance of definition and distinction for

political theory - "we can question the perspicacity of the distinctions we make, while admitting that all thought means distinguishing and connecting at the same time" (ibid: 131-132) - and on the other she castigates its authority within her political analysis as a Heideggerian perversion. Even if there are problems with Benhabib's analysis, she does write of Arendt that:

For her, political philosophy became a method of narration to 'cull meaning from the past,' an exercise in establishing distinctions that would enable us to think the meaning of our times and our actions, to 'think what we are doing'... My thesis is that the greatness of Hannah Arendt's political philosophy and its continuing contemporary import lie precisely in the controversial distinctions that she creates and the tensions that she identifies in the Western tradition of political thought (ibid: 118)

By this quotation, we can see that there is more in common between Benhabib and McCarthy than Benhabib's criticism would suggest.

Arendt was not one to spend much time discussing her own philosophical method, and such intentional disregard has caused significant difficulties for her interpreters. This question of definition and distinction is no difference. The subject does arise, albeit briefly, in an unlikely source: her chapter 'What is Authority?', in *Between Past and Future*. She writes:

It is obvious that these reflections and descriptions are based on the conviction of the importance of making distinctions. To stress such a conviction seems to be a gratuitous truism in view of the fact that, at least as far as I know, nobody has yet openly stated that distinctions are nonsense. There exists, however, a silent agreement in most discussions among political and social scientists that we can ignore distinctions and proceed on the assumption that everything can eventually be called anything else, and that distinctions are meaningful only to the extent that each of us has the right 'to define his terms' (BPF: 95)

Arendt continues,

Yet does not this curious right, which we have come to grant as soon as we deal with matters of importance - as though it were actually the same as the right to one's own opinion - already indicate that such terms as 'tyranny,' 'authority,' and 'totalitarianism' have simply lost their common meaning, or that we have ceased to live in a common world where the words we have in common possess an unquestionable meaningfulness, so that, short of becoming condemned to live verbally in an altogether meaningless world, we grant each other the right to retreat into our own worlds of meaning, and demand only that each of us remain consistent within his own private terminology? If, in these circumstances, we assure ourselves that we still understand each other, we do not mean that together we understand a world common to us all, but that we understand the consistency of arguing and reasoning, of the process of argumentation in its sheer formality (ibid: 95-96)

It is clear from these statements that the question of making distinctions goes further than a strictly methodological concern. The issue at hand is the capacity for mutual understanding, and the modern age, Arendt repeatedly asserts, is an age which - for various reasons which will be the subject of certain chapters in this thesis - frustrates our capacity for understanding one another's words as well as our ability to appreciate distinct and novel events. The above passage comes straight out of Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology, where a phenomenon is conceived as "*that which shows itself in itself*, the manifest" (Heidegger, 1962: 51); the naming of a phenomenon 'lets something be seen', makes manifest "in the sense of letting something be seen by pointing it out" (ibid: 56). Our hermeneutic situatedness - that is, the linguistic 'world' which we are born and raised into - creates the possibility of reciprocal understanding through recognition of the *same* phenomenon at hand. Acts of definition and distinction, therefore, allow us to recognise the 'otherness' of different phenomenon as they

manifest themselves. The common linguistic world provides the ground of understanding, and its perceived loss amounts to the destruction of the signposts necessary for shared experiences. The rejection of the act of distinction, where we tacitly assume that 'everything can eventually be called anything else', creates significant political problems. Arendt, we must be aware, is conscious of the malleability of language, and this is not an argument on behalf of the (impossible) entrenchment of words with meaning. Correspondingly, her writings on 'reflective judgment' promote a conception of judgment which does not view our hermeneutic situatedness as determinate, but recognises that judgment always occurs from a prior situation. This bears similarity with what Gadamer calls a 'prejudice'. Politically speaking, the authority of our political tradition (in language) maintains these prejudices that enable us to have the same objects in view, and a shared position through which to experience 'events'. As her analysis of totalitarianism suggests, the loss of the common world can blind us to the reality of events at hand; at best, this leaves us open to impotence and inaction, at worst, it creates the conditions for the unconditional adoption of fictional ideologies.

Before we explore this claim, let us examine how to relate this back to the question of definition and distinction. The chapter from which the above quotations are taken will serve the point well. In order to understand the term 'authority', Arendt claims that we must trace its emergence to the experience of a phenomenon - as the term emerged as a response to *something*. "What were the political experiences that corresponded to the concept of authority and from which it sprang?" (BPF: 104), she asks. The structure of this question, incidentally, we find mirrored throughout her writings; for example, the question 'what were the political experiences that corresponded to the concept of politics and from which it sprang?' would not be out of place in *The Human Condition*. This approach is different from pure etymology because it places precedence in the context of the experience of phenomena. She identifies the experience of authority as such:

At the heart of Roman politics, from the beginning of the republic until virtually the end of the imperial era, stands the conviction of the sacredness of foundation, in the sense that once something has been founded it remains binding for all future generations...It is in this context that word and concept of authority originally appeared. The word *auctoritas* derives from the verb *augere*, 'augment,' and what authority or those in authority constantly augment is the foundation (ibid: 120-122)

A 'binding force' of 'extraordinary strength and endurance', authority carries influence completely alien to command or coercion and takes the form of 'authoritative' advice. Institutionally, the Roman senate was considered the seat of authority.

In the manner we expect of Arendt, she distinguishes between tradition and past, which is best understood as a distinction between, respectively, ancient and modern forms of historiography. The idea of past is tied to modern time-consciousness as sequence, which thinks of history in terms of an engulfing process. By this world-view, "nothing is meaningful in and by itself" (ibid: 63), and meaning is only granted to history if the particular moment can be subsumed into a general process of causality. On the other hand, "Greek and Roman historiography, much as they differ from one another, both take it for granted that the meaning or, as the Romans would say, the lesson of each event, deed, or occurrence is revealed in and by itself...causality and context were seen in a light provided by the event itself, illuminating a specific segment of human affairs" (ibid: 64). This gives us a good idea of the link between authority and tradition, i.e. that which makes authority 'authoritative'. Roman history was considered as something akin to a "storehouse of examples taken from actual political behaviour, demonstrating what tradition, the authority of ancestors, demanded from each generation and what the past had accumulated for the benefit of the present" (ibid: 65). Authority, we can conclude from this opening analysis, is inherently tied to the remembrance of human actions which create the 'web of narratives' that bind us together



in the common world and provide what Arendt describes as "depth in human existence" (ibid: 94) and our "measure of dignity and greatness" (ibid: 140).

Arendt identified similar attempts at authoritative founding in the revolutions in America and France at the turn of the nineteenth century, of which only the American example was 'successful'. Testament to this observation is the permanent presence of the founding fathers in American political discourse, within a culture of unparalleled constitutional patriotism. In light of this, Arendt suggests that the 'founding' of the founding fathers successfully maintained the "remembrance of the *event* itself...in an atmosphere of reverent awe which has shielded both event and document against the onslaught of time and changed circumstances" (emphasis added, OR: 204). We must be careful at this point to recognise that Arendt is not celebrating a kind of political stasis; the strength of political authority is derived from its capacity for augmentation, not consolidation. In constitutional terms, this translates as the capacity of amendment. As Arendt would confirm, "the amendments to the constitution augment and increase the original foundations of the American republic; needless to say, the very authority of the American Constitution resides in its inherent capacity to be amended and augmented" (ibid: 202).

The terminology which Arendt employs in her reflections on authority can serve a purpose for us in considering the wider issues surrounding the question of definition and distinction. Consider the following quotation:

Authority, resting on a foundation in the past as its unshaken cornerstone, gave the world the permanence and durability which human beings need precisely because they are mortals- the most futile and unstable beings we know of. Its loss is tantamount to the loss of the groundwork of the world, which indeed since then has begun to shift, to change and transform itself with ever-increasing rapidity from one shape into another, as though we were living and struggling in a Protean

universe where everything at any moment can become almost anything else (BPF: 94-95)

The discussion of authority bears a striking correspondence with the prior claim by Arendt that the modern mistrust of distinctions denotes the loss of the common world where the 'words we have in common possess an unquestionable meaningfulness'. The tacit assumption in present times 'that everything can eventually be called anything else' belies a Protean world-view which undermines the 'otherness' of phenomena - that "curious quality of *alteritas* possessed by everything that is", the reason why "we are unable to say what anything is without distinguishing it from something else" (HC: 176). I believe that Arendt locates the loss of the authority of language, that is, our language has ceased to be an meaningful 'authoritative' foundation for the analysis of human affairs. The loss of the authority of language amounts to the loss of faith in shared meanings as the two are mutually dependent.

The mistrust of definition and distinction represents a much more fundamental crisis of the interrelationship between language and the intersubjective experience which it discloses. If we have reached the point in political analysis where we simply 'define our terms' and 'retreat into our own worlds of meaning, and demand only that each of us remain consistent within his our private terminology' then does it not imply, by extension of Arendt's analysis, that the subject under investigation (and the language we use to study it) has lost its characteristic of being derived from common experience? Our mistrust of definition and distinction "testifies to an age in which certain notions, clear in distinctness to all previous centuries, have begun to lose their clarity and plausibility because they have lost their meaning in the public-political reality- without altogether losing their significance" (BPF: 101). Returning to the present example, the term 'authority' changed as the experience it referred to vanished, and the latter half of Arendt's chapter is devoted to understanding this process of terminological transformation rooted in political events. The concept of authority is now

widely considered associated with Weberian power, where authority is located in the institutional ability to influence others for a desired goal. This displays an absolute change in the meaning of the term which goes much further than semantic augmentation, and the complete transformation of the term 'authority' displays the complete cessation of the originary experience from the modern world. These comments must be seen as part of Arendt's broad critique of modernity as the age of subjectivism, which is the topic of the second chapter in this thesis. Arendt's argument that we allow definition and distinction only as long as it pertains to the 'consistency of arguing and reasoning, of the process of argumentation in its sheer formality' is derived from the observation that in the modern age "what men now have in common is not the world but the structure of their own minds" (HC: 283). The principle of Cartesian doubt (where everything is doubtful) has facilitated the construction of a modern world-view in which everything exists only as a subjective object of consciousness, and this is evident in the loss of the meaningful authority of political language.

McCarthy's argument that the 'chance of invigoration and oxygenation does combine with some sense of stability and security' solicits similar sentiment. Even if it was not Arendt's visible intention to return solidity back to political terminology, we might argue that her proliferation of definitions and distinctions can be interpreted as an attempt to revitalise the stagnating discipline of Western political thought. Grounding our interpretation in a question of definition and distinction can greatly advance our understanding of Arendt's thought.

Certain thinkers such as Ben Berger have recently sought to counter a perceived inconsistency in Arendt's terminological pool (Berger, 2009). He believes that we should renounce 'literal' readings of her works, and favour the incorporation of 'figurative' interpretations so as to draw out a more 'cautionary' form of political theory that doesn't treat Arendt's texts as 'constructive' outlines of how politics should look. These figurative readings, such as in the writings of Mary Dietz (see Dietz, 2000) seek to balance Arendt's language

within a context of a broader philosophical vocation, thus softening the potential literal implications of her language.

Whilst Berger does not completely reject literal readings of Arendt, he does not properly outline the extent to which we should mute her more provocative statements. The inspiration to undermine Arendtian terminology seems to be pervasive within the literature surrounding her, and is obviously due to a collective unease among many of her readers that a commitment to her terminology opens her up to “charges of hypocrisy, blindness or radical inconsistency” (Berger, 2009: 171). There is an apologetic tone to this perspective, and seems to me to harbour a belief that Arendt somehow ‘went too far’ in some of her writings. The problem that I see with this is that it undermines the care that Arendt actually spent on the activity of definition and distinction, regardless of whether these concepts sometimes change over time. It does a disservice to some of the important claims which she repeatedly makes, largely because we disagree to the extent to which we believe her. I also find figurative interpretations (or hybrid interpretations such as Berger’s) to be lacking, primarily because they fail to account for the historical tradition of the terms which Arendt borrows. The meaning behind the word ‘freedom’ is not plucked out of thin air, but is part of a tradition that Arendt never sought to hide. If one accepts literal readings as being problematic, then this thesis will probably not please the reader – not because I attempt to outline an exact blueprint of Arendtian politics, but because I do not consider it the job of an interpreter to discard important terms if we find them unpalatable.

Interestingly, Berger links this question of interpretation with the activity of labelling Arendt. He states that literal interpretations of Arendt tend to push toward viewing her as a civic republican, and castigates them for taking her words at ‘face value’ (ibid: 157). For Berger, “the civic republican reading holds an untenable position” (ibid: 171), and it is clear that his mistrust of the literal Arendt is largely due to perceived issues with her civic

republicanism, which he believes is undeniably elitist. However, Berger seems to ignore the hermeneutic elements of Arendtian political theory, something which will be constantly referenced throughout this thesis, and which can be used to counter the claim of Arendtian republican elitism. Berger's strength, however, is in his desire to "identify a dichotomous pattern of lesser-known, but equally important and integrally connected, concepts and metaphors that appears throughout Arendt's works" (ibid: 159). With this in mind, we shall now turn to the question of how this insight may be used regarding this thesis' method of interpretation.

## **0.2 A Basic Method of Terminological Analysis**

What kind of method can an interpreter employ which remains open to Arendt's distinctive form of terminological analysis? Before I attempt to answer this there is an interpretative problem which we will have to address. The first is what can be described as the *holism* of her thought. This is elaborated concisely by Canovan as such: "the trains of thought she herself spun linked themselves together as if of their own accord into an elaborate and orderly spiders-web of concepts, held together by threads that were none the weaker for being hard to see...this means that one cannot understand one part of her thought unless one is aware of its connections with all the rest" (1992: 6). This has direct implications for the task of interpretation, especially one which attempts to focus on the definition and distinction of specific terms. This is further complicated by the fact that Arendt's pool of interconnected concepts is not unveiled in a systematic manner. This is partly the result of the fact that she did not consider herself to be undertaking the organized task as found in traditional philosophy; her texts are rather reflections and exercises of thought - "invitations to think with her", as Minnich puts it (2001: 125). But this is also simply an after-effect of how prolific a

thinker she was. Bluntly, if she had attempted to clarify her thoughts in the manner of systematic philosophy she could not have written half of that which she did. It does, however, make her thought a rich resource for further investigations, and the increasing variety of topics to which her writings are applied suggests as much. I hope to aid such enterprises in this thesis specifically with reference to freedom.

The introduction of definitions and distinctions often does not take place within a clear textual ordering. A good example of this is the term 'principle', which, as is explored later in the thesis, is intimately connected with her theory of action, though it is not introduced in *The Human Condition* - containing her most complete reflections on action. She also has a tendency to quickly flit between terms, premising her arguments on others which may not be immediately apparent to the reader. And again, Arendt often introduces definitions or distinctions of great importance, yet does not spend much time clarifying them or explaining precisely why they have been introduced. The term 'principle', which is the subject of chapter four, for example, only appears in a handful of pages and is not touched upon again. These are the basic reasons why interpreters and commentators tend to stick to those definitions and distinctions which are most coherent within the texts.

There is also a further dimension to this, one which it is suggested we should analyse in more detail. It is worth returning to a sentence within one of the quotations by Mary McCarthy which this introduction opened with: '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).' The latter half of the statement is particularly interesting: 'more and more enlighten it as one distinction unfolds'. Arendt's thought, it has been maintained throughout, proceeds via the introduction of definitions, and the text develops around these. The expansion of the text operates in a similar manner - with the progressive introduction of sub-definitions and sub-distinctions which develop from the original

definitional distinction(s). What we can draw from McCarthy's insight is that these sub-terms are of equal importance as the parent term, and that understanding them is of great worth given the holism of Arendtian thought. In order to qualify the implications, I propose that we divide Arendt's conceptual apparatus into *primary terms* and *satellite terms*, which I am labelling the *gravitational* method. The word satellite has been chosen because it emphasises the interconnectivity of the terminology, which I feel is similar in nature to the gravitational relationship between celestial bodies. Just like the power of a moon upon its planet, focussing strongly on satellite terms means that our understanding of the primary term (such as freedom) is drawn into a different interpretive position than if we analysed it independently of its satellite. Thus, what this means is that interpretation must be just as aware of the influence of related terms as that which is specifically under investigation.

Traditionally, interpreters operate in the manner of progression from primary term to satellite term, with far greater emphasis placed on the parent term. Of course, this often seems like the most coherent manner of investigation, though in lieu of this discussion we should consider another approach. This thesis suggests that we reverse this method of interpretation and instead work backwards from the satellite(s) to the primary term. A close analysis of the satellites can potentially reveal more about the nature of the primary term than is often thought. The following chapters will follow this method, asking the question: how does the satellite alter our understanding of the parent term? Each chapter in this thesis has a primary term which is under investigation: speech, friendship, judgment, principle, and finally, freedom; these are then analysed with reference to satellite terms. The intention is that the terms explored in the first four chapters come to resemble satellites of the culminating chapter on freedom.

It goes to say that the purpose in highlighting satellite terms is not a broad statement on interpretative method, but is specific to Arendt. I am not attempting to promote a general

method which can necessarily be exported, rather, a practical solution to a problem found in the work of one individual. It may be that this might be of use externally, though I have not written this with that in mind. Furthermore, the intention is not so much of providing a conclusive reading of her work, but to show how some of the ignored aspects of her thought can provide valuable interpretative insights, enabling us to judge her writings better, and open up extra avenues with which to approach her thought. This is not, properly speaking, a rigorous 'method' as we might know from analytical philosophy; of course, there will be moments where the discussion moves away from a strict application of this method - though that should not stand as an indictment of it as device through which we can gain a better understanding of terminology. A close analysis of these satellites can help provide a richer interpretative experience. All of this will be done in an attempt to aid our understanding of Arendt's theory of freedom and the constitution of a free body politic.

### **0.3 Thesis Summary**

The first chapter is concerned with understanding the broad politics of speech in Arendtian political theory, locating in her writings a linguistic critique of totalitarian ideology as well as traditional forms of (post-Platonic) philosophy. I introduce her engagement with the examples of Socrates and Karl Jaspers who are linked with her celebration of Greek political culture, specifically, the role of the concept of *isēgoria*, which has no equivalent English word. *Isēgoria* was introduced as the specifically Athenian way of thinking about freedom, which is attained through the equal participation of citizens in the sharing of their opinions through speech and rhetorical persuasion. This was contrasted with the form of speech that Arendt observes in totalitarian language which I term *clichégenic*.



Chapter two builds upon this idea with reference, once again, to an ancient Greek term: friendship (*philia*). It is suggested that Arendt attempts to distinguish between ancient and modern forms of friendship in order to emphasise what has been lost and its implications for our notions of citizenship and political association. According to her analysis of modernity, Arendt asserts that the modern individual lives largely in a condition of loneliness, described as a kind of alienation from one's peers. This kind of loneliness is linked to her analysis of the loss of the world and the subsequent rise of meaninglessness which has come about through certain modern events, reaching its political apogee in the totalitarian movements of the twentieth century. I argue that Arendt located the ancient spirit of friendship in the manner which Socrates and Jaspers sought to communicate with their peers, forming a basis upon which Arendt would come to think of authentic political citizenship and true political community.

In Chapter three it is argued that Arendt locates the source of political responsibility, which had been so evidently lacking in the totalitarian era, in the presence of friendship. I distinguish between personal and political responsibility, basing this distinction in Arendt's critique of traditional morality. Our ability to 'tell right from wrong', it is claimed, lays in something greater than our own sense of guilt (the basis of personal responsibility), and this faculty is rooted in our capacity for judgment. The capacity to judge is dependent upon the presence of world, which creates a sphere in which the objects that we encounter are intelligible and meaningful. For Arendt, borrowing language from Kant, the necessary component for judgment is common sense - our ability to grasp the multifaceted perspectives regarding the objects that comprise the world. Central to this worldly insight, I argue, is *understanding*. Because of this, I claim that her political theory has a particularly hermeneutic element to it, as found in her accounts of citizenship which is dependent upon citizens being able to understand each other with reference to the world. Drawing upon theories of rhetoric as found in Gadamer and Perelman, I argue that Arendt believes that rhetoric enables

understanding through its disclosure of shared assumptions about the objects in the world, thus creating the foundation of political community. Following this, I return to the examples of Socrates and Jaspers as individuals who were aware that true responsibility can only be brought about through rhetorical communication as it fosters a recognition that we are not just responsible to ourselves for our acts and deeds but also the world.

The fourth chapter examines the role that the concept of principle plays in Arendt's thought, a term which I argued has been largely ignored by commentators. The chapter opens with a discussion of what Arendt understands by the term through distinguishing it from other constituent elements of action. I suggest that principles are the hermeneutic prejudices which are necessary for judgment to take place. I then distinguish principles from values in Arendt's writings, with values understood as something which lacks a basis in worldly phenomena, but have become the predominant 'inspiration' for action in the modern age. Principles, on the other hand, are always built upon the past action of others and the communication of that action among the present political community. I then apply Arendt's theory of principle and critique of values to her theory of totalitarianism, and it is suggested that Arendt's account of totalitarianism is dependent upon her distinguishing it from despotism, of which a theory of principle is necessary. Following this, I analyse the importance of her theory of principle for her analysis of the American and French Revolutions, which I argued are her greatest application of the topic. I conclude that Arendt strongly believed principles to be the necessary basis of a free politics, setting the argument for chapter five.

The final chapter focuses on the main concept under investigation: freedom. Bringing together the arguments of the prior chapters which often concern the politics of speech, I seek to reinterpret Arendtian freedom as rhetoric. I argue that Arendt's account of freedom is established with reference to physical movement, from which she critiqued the post-Platonic philosophical tradition of freedom which identifies it in the mental faculty of willing. Following

this, I argue that this notion of movement is the base for her prominent theory of action, which she in turn identifies as the source of all political association. Section three explores the idea of founding as the highest manifestation of movement and Arendt's grappling with issues surrounding it. I introduce Arendt's underexplored notion of the 'relatively absolute' as her response to some of these issues, and particular attention is paid to her claim that authentic founding requires a strong consciousness of tradition, so that the founders view their activity as a fresh restatement of the old. This is then linked to the topic of the previous chapter - principle, and I argue that it is principles which are the content of the historical consciousness required for founding. I seek to wed this notion of principle with Arendt's theory of judgment and her theory of friendship. It is argued that principles form the hermeneutic bedrock upon which judgment can take place and political community is achieved. Drawing upon the term *isēgoria* from chapter one, I argue that when principles inform judgment, freedom emerges, and I label this account of freedom: *freedom as rhetoric*. Thinking of freedom in this way, I propose, can help us to bridge the gap between different interpretative positions relating to action. The final section examines the implications of this move for our labelling of Arendt. I propose that Arendt's theory of freedom as rhetoric necessitates a re-evaluation of her thought in hermeneutic terms. I finally suggest that she is best represented as endorsing a unique form of *hermeneutic republicanism*.

## Chapter One

### Politics, Freedom, and Speech

It was noted in the introduction that Arendt constructs a theory of freedom which is closely connected to an account of speech. In this chapter we expand upon this claim, exploring this important association. This chapter opens with a brief introduction into the key debate surrounding Arendtian speech and examines its implications for her political thought more broadly. It continues with a historical account of what influences her prioritisation of speech through a distinction between the ancient Greek and Roman terms for freedom, claiming that Arendt emphasises the Greek concepts of *eudemonia* and *isēgoria*. We then consider two critiques: one of the tradition of post-Socratic political philosophy, and the other of the modern age and totalitarianism. It is suggested that Arendt presents two very different articulations of speech: one which is tied to the ancient concept of *rhetoric*, and the other which is tied to the modern condition of what I term *clichégenic* language. The examples of Adolf Eichmann and Socrates are used to present this distinction through human examples. The chapter concludes with the statement that Arendt presents us with a political theory shaped by the attempt to think about a 'politics against cliché'.

#### 1.1 The Puzzle of Political Action

We shall begin this thesis with reference to one of the most difficult and puzzling elements of Arendt's thought. Any person with a cursory knowledge of Arendt will recognise a core claim of hers: politics is the realm of action. Yet the mode of this action is left deliberately vague.

George Kateb, one of the first serious commentators of her writings, phrases the puzzle in the following manner, and supplies his answer:

What is political action? Arendt frequently distinguishes between words and deeds, or between talking and doing, as the basic modes of action. But given all that she excludes as not properly political, the distinction cannot stand. It must collapse, with the result that there is only one true mode of political action, and that is speech (1984: 15)

The observation that political action is carried out through the mode of speaking has become a staple of the literature surrounding Arendt, and with this line of thinking we shall proceed with this thesis. In the following pages of this chapter we shall examine what speech means for Arendtian thought, so that we may continue to build upon it throughout successive chapters, culminating in her account of freedom.

Kateb is intensely sceptical of equating action with speech as he believes that it leaves the content of action particularly empty, limited to the activities of constitutional founding or defence (ibid: 17). He does recognise that Arendt imbues speech with further properties, though he argues that the apparent vagueness of her scattered writings on this issue frustrates any attempts at casting the net further. The result, he argues, is this limited account of political action as constitutional establishment, an account which remains open to the charge of immoralism. Kateb suggests that the way to move past this problem is to retain the equation of action with speech, but purge it of its existential-revelatory base through which the individual is disclosed. Once this has been achieved, we could revise Arendtian action "to create a view of the citizen as public actor whose will to act is accompanied by a moral sense that is not absolutist, yet although ordinary, may be more tested and complex than the ordinary morality of daily life, precisely because it is public" (ibid: 39).

This task has been picked up by two major commentators of Arendt's thought: Maurizio Passerin D'Entrèves, and Seyla Benhabib. They attempt to imbue the idea of action as speech with Habermasian themes, and have been somewhat successful in doing so. Building upon Kateb's comments, D'Entrèves formally splits Arendt's theory of action into two models: the 'expressive', action which "allows for the self-actualization or self-realization of the person"; and the 'communicative', action which is "oriented to reaching understanding" (1994: 85). In so doing, D'Entrèves attempts to answer many critics of Arendt - such as Kateb and Martin Jay (see Jay, 1986) - who he believes have overly emphasised the existential-expressive dimension of action at the expense of the communicative. D'Entrèves constructs an interpretation of Arendt as a thinker whose thought matures progressively toward communicative action, despite never being able to properly resolve the tension between the two. In the end, he claims, Arendt came to see politics as a sphere "based on mutuality, solidarity, and persuasion" (D'Entrèves: 11), and action as a process of deliberative decision-making.

Seyla Benhabib converts D'Entrèves' language into a distinction between 'agonal' and 'narrative' models of action. She describes the distinction as such:

Whereas in the first model action appears to make manifest or to reveal an antecedent essence, the 'who one is,' action in the second model suggests that the 'who one is' emerges in the process of doing the deed and telling the story.

Whereas action in the first model is a process of discovery, action in the second model is a process of invention (Benhabib, 2000 :126)

Benhabib identifies this tension in Arendt's writings between the influence, on the one hand, of ancient Greece, and on the other, modern politics; creating a tension between "the philosopher of the polis and of its lost glory", and "the modernist, the storyteller of revolutions, and the sad witness of totalitarianism" (Benhabib, 1990: 196). It is the interplay of

these two poles, Benhabib argues, which makes Arendt a 'reluctant modernist', as the title of her book indicates. For Benhabib, as with the previous two thinkers mentioned, the narrative form of action simply must be emphasised over the agonal, as the agonal is always at risk to descending into a theory of intensive political competition and acclaim. The choice is stark: embrace a reading of Arendt where the "presence of common action [is] coordinated through speech and persuasion", or embrace a politics driven by "a guarantee against the futility and the passage of all things human" (ibid: 193-194).

Ultimately, this discussion reveals a distinction between our attitude toward two different kinds of speech: performative and deliberative. Dana Villa attempts to illustrate the performative variety, as he attempts to provide an alternative interpretation of Arendt to the Habermasian (i.e. Kantian) positions outlined above. His criticism is that Benhabib (et al) lacks an understanding of "the intrinsic value of politics as an activity" (Villa, 1996: 77), instrumentalising action in the search for consensus and legitimacy. He agrees that "genuine political action is nothing other than a certain kind of talk, a variety of conversation or argument about public matters" (ibid: 31), but disagrees as to whether the performance of speech must have a specific end - in this case, as a means of uncovering ideological language, or the 'force of the better argument'. Arendt, he contends, "rejects as unpolitical any conception of deliberative politics that desires to replace the 'bright light' of the public realm with the more controllable illumination of the seminar room" (ibid: 73). Villa's outline of his version of Arendtian speech is driven by a study of her appropriation, by way of Heidegger, of the Aristotelian *praxis/poiēsis* distinction - between acting and making. Action, and hence, speech, is a 'self-contained' phenomenon, unlike the activity of fabrication, it has no goal or clear end. This leads Villa to promote his performative interpretation as follows:

deliberative speech in the political arena is never merely technical (as it is in the administrative sphere), since the 'good' to be attained is articulated concretely only in

the medium of debate about possible courses of action. Where all are agreed on the end, debate can take place, but it ceases to be political. Political debate is end-constitutive: its goal does not stand apart from the process, dominating it at every point, but is rather formed in the course of the 'performance' itself (ibid: 32)

Clearly, Villa contrasts this purified account of speech with Benhabib, outlining the key differences between speech aimed at consensus and agreement, and political speech proper. For him, the Habermasian interpretation of speech falls into the category of fabrication, not action. The very notion of freedom as Arendt understands it is at risk, as "freedom resides in the self-containedness of action" (ibid: 25). The danger is that politics becomes a stale, dispirited form of logical argumentation which views the rhetorical performance with suspicion, always on the verge of calling it blatant manipulation or a kind of heroic display of aesthetic greatness.

What we have, therefore, is a disagreement about speech which contrasts two interpretations and perspectives concerning Arendt's broader political ideals. I do not intend to provide an answer to this 'puzzle', as I have called it, as I address this issue in later chapters. In the following sections I will only attempt to provide a context to Arendt's discussions concerning speech, so that we may proceed with this in mind throughout subsequent chapters. A central claim of this thesis is that Arendt's theory of freedom is bound up with her theory of speech, so we will refrain in the meantime from deriving strong conclusions until the account of freedom has been fully explored. As the analogy of the conceptual satellites intends to convey, it is very difficult to fully appreciate the meaning of many of the concepts without adequate recourse to others.

## **1.2 Speech in Antiquity**



We shall now turn to the source from which Arendt's theory of speech is derived: the language of ancient freedom. In fact, the vast majority of Arendt's conceptual language is drawn from ancient Greece and Rome; the central distinction within *The Human Condition* is Aristotelian, with the view that Aristotle was representing broader Greek cultural accounts of politics. This distinction, of course, is between the *bios politikos* and the *bios theoretikos*, the political and contemplative life. Whilst Greece certainly dominates in many of her discussions about politics, as was explained in the introduction to this thesis, Arendt is primarily interested in how and why certain concepts come into being, and this means situating the language within a broader context, the language of politics itself is rooted in the experiences of ancient Greece, or more specifically, in the formation of the *polis*, and carried over into the *res publica*.

It has been repeatedly suggested that Arendt displays a certain romanticised Greacophilia (see Pitkin, 1981; Kateb, 1984) though this is a somewhat hasty analysis. In fact, as Taminiaux has convincingly pointed out (see Taminiaux, 2000), for all her celebrations of Greek political culture, Arendt held the example of Rome in equal, if not higher esteem. Her turn to Greece is by no means as final as some would have us believe, even if it does provide the phenomenological basis upon which her thought is shaped. The bond with Rome is developed through a discussion of authority, or *auctoritas*, and its relationship with freedom and the act of founding, which is examined closely in chapter five of this thesis. We will not, for the moment, be discussing this manifestation of freedom in Arendt's writings, but will be committing this chapter specifically to speech. We can best proceed with reference to her statement in *Between Past and Future*:

Let us therefore go back once more to antiquity, i.e., to its political and pre-philosophical traditions...because a freedom experienced in the process of acting...has never again been articulated with the same classical clarity (BPF: 163-164)

As we have acknowledged that action is best thought of as a kind of speaking, the antique freedom which Arendt refers to must be related to a freedom brought forth in speech.

Both Greeks and Romans thought of their freedoms as rights acquired by citizenship, not as innate rights of the sovereign body. Neither, furthermore, construed their freedom as a tension between the individual and the collective - such a way of thinking would have been alien to them. Ancient freedom of the Greek and Roman kind was, in effect, a civic right attributable to citizens of the *polis* or *res publica*; as Arendt remarks, "in Greek as well as Roman antiquity, freedom was an exclusively political concept, indeed the quintessence of the city-state and of citizenship" (ibid: 156). An individual who existed outside of these communities, or more specifically, the individual who was not a legal citizen of them, would never have been considered a free person. In both accounts, for example, slaves could never be said to have been free persons despite their residence within a Greek or Roman state. There are, however, crucial differences between the Greek and Roman accounts of freedom, and Arendt's thought would be greatly shaped by their differences and similarities, something which has been ignored by her interpreters.

The Greeks had a general term for freedom, *eleutheria*, which Aristotle comments was the end - or *telos* - of democracy. Prior to Aristotle, the Attic orator Lysias claimed that the Athenians established a democracy because they believed that the 'freedom of all is the greatest consensus', emphasising its cultural importance. *Eleutheria*, Arendt argues, was derived from *eleuthein hopōs erō*, meaning 'to go as I wish', a early form of what we would now refer to as a negative right, the foundation of all free movement, and hence, action. The term had become commonplace in Greece from the fifth century BC, and would quickly become a term of eminent importance: in a decree in Priene, probably of the late third century, it was declared that 'nothing is better for the Greeks than freedom'. *Eleutheria* was principally a freedom found in the self-determination of popular government, and nothing

could have been more important for the rise of *eleutheria* as a concept than the establishment of democracy in Athens in 508 BC. It was primarily an egalitarian notion of freedom prefigured on the equal rights of citizenship. The Greeks, furthermore, had a closely related term, *autonomia*, understood primarily as the independence of a city-state from external domination. The Spartans, according to Thucydides, used the *autonomia* of Greece as the principle for war against rising Athenian imperialism. We have, therefore, a conception of freedom based on the self-government and independence of a collective people. Greek freedom was inherently bound to the presence of a space characterised by internal, as well as external (i.e. inter-state), equality.

The Athenians would develop this understanding of freedom to incorporate speech, of which they developed two key terms: *isēgoria*, and *parrhēsia*. *Isēgoria* denoted the ability of all citizens to speak in the public forum of the Assembly and Council (claiming the positive right of *ho boulomenos*), and *parrhēsia* was the ability to speak about anything one wished, free from hindrance. Athenian freedom, therefore, could be seen to have comprised both a positive and negative right concerning speech. However, this is slightly misleading, particularly with the case of *parrhēsia*, which was, as D.M. Carter describes it, "a characteristic of citizens, an attribute" (2004: 198). *Parrhēsia* seems to have been a more general attitude to speech more generally, and could be used outside of the confines of citizenship (where it meant to speak with frankness). It was definitely not a legal right, for any citizen could be tried for any statements deemed too outlandish, for example, in the trial of Socrates. But despite this, *parrhēsia* tended to carry a great deal of political weight behind it as a 'characteristic of citizenship'; for example, one cannot imagine the extent to which Athenian playwrights ridiculed their statesmen occurring in many other contexts in the classical period (non-Athenians considered this a very strange phenomenon), or the occurrence of the philosophical revolution instigated by the Sophists. Of the two terms, however, *isēgoria* is a much more influential concept for Arendt's political theory; what attracts her to it in particular is its

fundamental connection with the equality of participatory citizenship as evident in the culture of the *polis*. Strictly speaking, *parrhēsia* is a freedom which needs no reference to shared citizenship and is a freedom perfectly compatible with other forms of government - even of a tyrannical character.

After the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951, Arendt started writing a book called *Introduction into Politics*, with the intention that it be a political complement to Karl Jaspers' recent philosophical work regarding the experience of communication. It was never published in her lifetime, though many of its core themes would come to form the basis of *The Human Condition*. *Introduction into Politics* is by far the most revealing of Arendt's posthumously published writings, and the reason for this is that she approaches the phenomenon of politics with a far greater directness than any of her other publications - even *The Human Condition*. Within it, in a section entitled 'The Meaning of Politics', she directly references *isēgoria* whilst discussing *isonomia*, the Greek term for a free constitution, which "all have the same claim to political activity, and in the polis this activity primarily took the form of speaking with one another. *Isonomia* is therefore essentially the equal right to speak, and as such the same thing as *isēgoria*" (PP: 118). Free constitutions are understood in spatial terms, as spaces of equal participation in speech: "the crucial point about this kind of political freedom is that it is a spatial construct" (ibid: 119). We shall be repeatedly drawing upon the pages of this text throughout this thesis.

The Roman concept of freedom, *libertas*, is definitely not the same as *eleutheria* and its corresponding terms. *Libertas* designates an equality before the law, binding for plebeians and patricians alike; it was constituted by a collection of personal liberties, supported by law, based on the distinction between slave and non-slave. Its greatest institutional manifestation was the office of tribune, whose job it was to check the power of the senate and magistrates. No such process existed in Greece. In this sense, we can say that Roman liberty was orientated

far more toward the right of the individual rather than the right of collective self-determination. The Roman republic was never a democracy as the Greeks would have identified it, and the limited meaning of the term *libertas*, when compared to *eleutheria*, highlights this difference. Whilst *eleutheria* comprises rights of equal participation, *libertas* does not; as Wirszubski notes, in Rome "the right to govern was not considered a universal civic right" (1950: 14).

The simple fact is that Arendt never really discusses *libertas* in her considerations of political freedom, and when she does, she is dismissive of it: "this freedom of the political man, which in its highest form was coincident with discerning insight, has next to nothing to do with...the Roman *libertas*" (PP: 169). Thus, we can conclude that her conceptual appropriation on this matter owes much more to the Greeks than the Romans, primarily because of the role of language. I believe that Arendt distinguishes between two different types of freedom based entirely upon her distinction between the public and private realms, with the Greek form of freedom corresponding to the public realm, and the Roman to the private. The 'liberal attitude' of the Romans, Arendt argues, meant that "unlike the Greeks, [they] never sacrificed the private to the public, but on the contrary understood that these two realms could exist only in the form of coexistence" (HC: 59). When we compare *eleutheria* with *libertas*, we have what Arendt might call a division between the freedom of politics, and the freedom of society to act in self-interest. And when we view it like this, Arendt's reflections of Greece form more of an attempt to understand the phenomenon of politics in its most isolated form rather than a mere Greacophilic pining. Of course, as I have attempted to express, this means recognising the centrality of speech. Arendt is in fact highly critical of *libertas*, the theoretical representative of liberal freedom as non-interference, insofar as it is seen as synonymous with political freedom. This, she believes, is the acquired belief of the modern age, which in its early stages demanded a freedom of the individual from politics, and in a later (proto-totalitarian) form the freedom of productive and consumptive society from

impediment. These claims will be expanded upon in subsequent chapters, particularly chapter five.

### 1.3 Speech and the Tradition of Political Philosophy

By highlighting *eleutheria*, Arendt is laying the foundations for a radical critique of the tradition of post-Socratic political philosophy and what she considers its central theme of 'speechlessness'. Freedom is no longer found in the give and take of linguistic interplay, but in speechless wonder. In *The Human Condition*, Aristotle is undoubtedly the most visible influence, despite her insistence that he appropriated the Platonic aversion to politics. However, she turns to Aristotle as the principal source in understanding the *bios politikos* because he "only formulated the current opinion of the *polis* about man and the political way of life" (HC: 27). Thus, building on Greek political self-understanding, he can be seen as a philosopher who documented the "experience of the polis...the most talkative of the bodies politic" (ibid: 26). In his *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle supplied us with a rudimentary definition of man as 'communal animal'. A community is found wherever there is commonality of interest, but this is not a specifically human trait; a bee, for example, can be said to be a member of such a community. It is important to note that this relationship is instrumental in character. Aristotle's famous definition of man as 'political animal' emerges later in his *Politics*, in which speech serves as the interest of the political community; man is a political animal insofar as he is a 'living being capable of speech'. Obviously, this is not to suggest that those who existed outside of politics (barbarians and excluded groups such as women and slaves) did not have the capacity to speak, but rather that they were deprived "of a way of life in which speech and only speech made sense and where the central concern of all citizens was to talk with each other" (ibid: 27). The implication of this distinction between the two communities (political

and non-political) is that a non-political community's interest is homogenous, whereas a political community's interest is found in the plural heterogeneity of speaking. Arendt bemoans the latinisation of 'political animal' as 'social animal' because it fails to adequately distinguish between these two communities; in her words it "indicated an alliance between people for a specific purpose" (ibid: 23). Accordingly, the mistranslation loses the significance of the non-instrumental relationship between speech and politics. Likewise, the notion of the human individual as a 'living being capable of speech' soon became a 'rational animal', substituting speech for intellect - whose chief characteristic was that "its content cannot be rendered in speech" (ibid: 27), a perspective that she believes that Aristotle would in fact come to prioritise.

The supersedure of speech to intellect is a theme which animates Arendt's wider critique of the tradition of political philosophy. She locates this turn in Plato's fierce response to the failure of Socrates to persuade his peers of his innocence of the charge of impiety and the corruption of youth, for which he was soon executed. Persuasion held an elevated position within Greek political culture, and *rhetoric*, the art of persuasion, was considered as the supreme political art:

To be political, to live in a polis, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence. In Greek self-understanding, to force people by violence, to command rather than persuade, were prepolitical ways to deal with people characteristic of life outside the polis (ibid: 25-26)

Even those sentenced to execution would be persuaded to take their own life, a notion which seems ludicrous today. The command, in distinction to persuasion, amounts to an act of violence which "is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues" (OV: 51). Thus, Arendt's emphasis upon speech serves the function of promoting a vision of politics strongly distinguished from instrumental

rationality, whose logic pervades the non-political sphere. This notion of the relationship between rhetoric, freedom, and politics will be developed throughout the subsequent chapters.

Plato's reaction to Socrates' unsuccessful attempt to persuade the Athenian citizen-judges was to reject the entire basis of a politics centred around opinion and rhetoric. The orator would come to be seen as an individual who speaks, at best, with style over substance, and at worst as a linguistic performer whose main intention is the manipulation of an audience. In his allegory of the cave, Plato distinguishes between the realm of opinion and the realm of truth, and at this point authentic speech is overcome by authentic vision. One does not require persuasion in the face of truth. Speaking becomes meaningless when one has seen the truth because the truth requires vision, not words, it is 'unspeakable', and this is key moment in the post-Socratic development of the tyranny of truth upon politics. Intellect was the mark of those fit to rule over the polis, and requires abstention from the noisy 'unquiet' of a politics composed of opinion, as "the philosopher's experience of the eternal...can occur only outside the realm of human affairs and outside the plurality of men" (ibid: 20). The result was an understanding of the ideal political order as stasis, one in which the philosopher would be able to practice their pure thinking activity unhindered by the apparent arbitrariness of opinions. This was a (non-)political condition in which "every movement, the movements of body and soul as well as of speech and reasoning, must cease before truth" (ibid: 15). With this move, the polis has become a truly safe haven for philosophising, to the detriment of political freedom itself. Arendt, whose political thought sets itself against this attitude, rejects the positive role of truth in the political space because

all truths- not only the various kinds of rational truth but also factual truth- are opposed to opinion in their mode of asserting validity. Truth carries within itself an element of coercion, and the frequently tyrannical tendencies so deplorably obvious



among professional truth-tellers may be caused less by a failing of character than by the strain of habitually living under a kind of compulsion (BPF: 235)

Truth is compulsive because once the truth is placed in public it becomes just another opinion. And as the very notion of truth sets itself against opinion, it is in its nature to avoid the difficulties of persuasion, and therefore seeks to assert itself over others. As a result it becomes intrinsically tyrannical. Even truth-tellers of the saintly variety, Arendt maintains, are set against the human condition of plurality as authentic speaking is sidelined by the compulsion of engaging the truth at hand.

If Plato rebelled against the ability of Socrates' prosecutors to influence his judges, then he must seek to found a space in which the inherent malleability of opinions cannot broach. In order to ensure the freedom of the Academy and secure the life devoted to contemplative truth, philosophers "had to be freed from politics in the Greek sense in order to be free for the space of academic freedom...liberation from politics was a prerequisite for the freedom of the academic" (PP: 131-132). The foundation of *eleutheria* resides in the positivity of equal rhetorical intercourse, and when this is sidelined by the appearance of professionals and experts (as is the ultimate conclusion of the Platonic community) the participatory element of politics is lost and politics becomes a closed sphere open to a very different kind of danger than Plato delineated. Certainly, factual truth can be used as a weapon against tyranny, but "the modes of thought and communication that deal with truth, if seen from a political perspective, are necessarily domineering; they don't take into account other people's opinions, and taking these into account is the hallmark of a strictly political thinking" (BPF: 237). In this manner Arendt claims that truth can be the bearer of a truly 'despotic character'.

#### **1.4 Speech in Modernity**

Arendt's critique of the post-Socratic tradition of political philosophy is only half the story of this chapter. Her account of speech is shaped in equal - if not greater - measure by her critique of totalitarianism, and bridging these two critiques is a highly charged description of the modern age and its flaws. As we have seen, much of the repulsion toward rhetoric that we find in various thinkers is directed at its ability to move fellow individuals to action through deception and linguistic trickery. In essence, the problem identified is that language can be used as a tool through which personal agendas can be advanced, and the truth of the matter at hand all too easily concealed. History is rife with examples of this nature, and the problem, as we know, was deemed by Plato to lay in the manipulability of opinion itself. Arendt, to a certain extent, accepts this problem. However, instead of indulging in the total opposition between speech (which discloses opinion) and thought (which discloses truth) which animates Platonic philosophy, Arendt takes aim at a very particular kind of speech. It is this kind of speech which she believes to be the dominant form of speaking in the modern age, and which she would develop further after her experience of totalitarianism and, more specifically, the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. Heidegger calls the form of speech in question 'idle talk' (see Heidegger, 1962), and whilst Arendt does not directly reference this term, she sometimes speaks of the language of clichés, which we shall refer to as *clichégenic speech*, whose character is very similar to idle talk. Whereas Plato castigates the ease at which one can deliberately deceive through rhetorical devices, clichégenic speech is quite different insofar as it is a form of non-deliberate self-deception. And whereas Plato identified the tyranny of mass opinion as the natural condition of the *demos*, Arendt considers it to be unnatural. It is this key difference which shapes their entire respective political outlooks. Let us explore this point further.

As one commentator has correctly noted: "virtually the entire agenda of Arendt's political thought was set by her reflections on the political catastrophes of the mid-century" (Canovan, 1992: 7). And it is my contention, which will be stated throughout this thesis, that her theory of speech is crucial to understanding the totalitarian 'catastrophe'. In her various writings on totalitarian governance, which preoccupied a significant part of her early writings, Arendt is undoubtedly interested in how totalitarian bureaucracy destroys personal responsibility. Bureaucracy, the 'rule of nobody', works much like a machine with a system of human cogs: "each cog, that is, each person, must be expendable without changing the system, an assumption underlying all bureaucracies, all civil services, and all functions properly speaking" (RJ: 29). If the system one operates within eschews personal responsibility in favour of robotic functionalism, the capacity for the crimes of totalitarianism moves closer to hand. It was this shortcoming of responsibility which facilitated the complicity of individuals who were not committed ideologues within the totalitarian system of total terror.

Repeatedly, Arendt grapples with the question 'Who is responsible?', and emphasises the difficulties of providing a clear answer, primarily because "everybody...from high to low who had anything to do with public affairs was in fact a cog, whether he knew it or not" (ibid: 30). She would argue that tracing the path of murder from the concentration camps leads to only to the bureaucracy itself, problematic because if one simply blames the system then either *all* or *no-one* can be deemed responsible. This legal quandary became evident immediately with the advent of the Nazi war trials, with many of the defendants declaring "not I but the system did it in which I was a cog" (ibid: 31). To which Arendt asks, "and why, if you please, did you become a cog or continue to be a cog under such circumstances?" (ibid). Furthermore, in her analysis of the post-war trials we encounter an Arendt perplexed by how so many of the defendants seemed completely comfortable with themselves; she exclaimed: "those who are guilty of something real have the calmest consciences in the world" (EU: 259). These were not individuals bereft with guilt and regret, "their conscience [was] cleared

through the bureaucratic organization of their acts" (ibid: 129), and "unlike the villain, he never meets his midnight disaster" (PAP: 445). Often they voiced outright confusion as to their situation, displaying a "horrible innocence that transforms itself into a persecution complex" (EU: 259-260). Why them? Why prosecute the 'small fish'?- they frequently asked. The finger would predictably be pointed higher up the bureaucratic ladder, a ladder which frustrates any judicial attempt at "establishing responsibilities and determining the extent of criminal guilt" (RJ: 241). Arendt paints a portrait of the mindset of the bureaucratic jobholding functionary, whom she also refers to in her early texts as 'bourgeois':

When his occupation forces him to murder people he does not regard himself as a murderer because he has not done it out of inclination but in his professional capacity...If we tell a member of this new occupational class which our time has produced that he is being held to account for what he did, he will feel nothing except that he has been betrayed. But if in the shock of the catastrophe he really becomes conscious that in fact he was not only a functionary but also a murderer, then his way out will not be that of rebellion, but suicide (EU: 130)

Perhaps, Arendt insinuates here, the phenomenon of mass suicides which gripped Germany in 1945 as the system crumbled, responsibility was forced back upon them, and the reality of their actions apparent. They were no longer participants in a criminal system, but simply criminals.

It is with the problem of personal responsibility in totalitarian bureaucracy in mind that Arendt travelled to Jerusalem in order to report on the trial of the Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann, who by all accounts displayed the curious qualities outlined above. The ultimate 'desk murderer', Eichmann oversaw the completion of many of Nazi Germany's most heinous crimes. As had struck Arendt in her early analyse of the bourgeois, Eichmann seemed the epitome of normalcy, and he took pains to emphasise his 'lack of prejudice' towards the

victims of Nazi crime. Again, the threadbare defence of earlier trials was regurgitated; "He did his *duty*, as he told the police and the court over and over again; he not only obeyed *orders*, he also obeyed the *law*" (EJ: 135). In essence, the subject on trial was an individual who did not fit the characteristic mould of an evildoer, yet his complicity had enabled gross criminality. This claim grounds her notorious conceptualisation of the 'banality of evil', which in her words,

meant no theory or doctrine but something quite factual, the phenomenon of evil deeds, committed on a gigantic scale, which could not be traced to any particularity of wickedness, pathology, or ideological conviction in the doer, whose only personal distinction was a perhaps extraordinary shallowness...not stupidity but a curious, quite authentic inability to think (TMC: 417)

Arendt would devote much of her time to analysing Eichmann's purported 'thoughtlessness' beyond the pages of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, culminating in her unfinished *Life of the Mind* (1971).

I believe the key observation of Arendt's reflections on the near total cessation of responsibility under totalitarianism to be the *self-deception* of those involved. We are dealing, therefore, with a different phenomenon than that which informs the Platonic critique of rhetoric, which centres on conscious, premeditated deception. Whereas the crowd which Plato attacks is deceived by another speaker, I think that Arendt identifies that the deception is rooted in our own internal forms of speaking. As mentioned before, Heidegger's notion of idle talk is crucial to recognising this claim. According to Heidegger, in order to be understood, language must always have a base level of 'average intelligibility' with which we communicate. We are born into a linguistic world, and its basic rules we must adopt in order to speak and be understood. Language has already been given to us, so to speak. When we communicate "we have *the same thing* in view, because it is in *the same* averageness that we have a common understanding of what is said" (Heidegger, 1962: 212). This is the foundation of our everyday

understandings of ourselves as a Being and of the world we inhabit. In itself this is not problematic, as Arendt herself notes when she claims that "popular language, as it expresses preliminary understanding, thus starts the process of true understanding" (EU: 312). Popular language is therefore of the utmost importance. When Heidegger introduces the label of 'idle talk', however, Heidegger critiques this language, the language of *das Man*: the 'they', the 'anyone', the 'one'. These idle talkers fail to move beyond preliminary understanding, they become mired in the everyday averageness of language; for Heidegger, Idle talk is "the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one's own" (1962: 213). It is the understanding of the mass, not the individual. Idle talk is, basically, speech mired in cliché: it is the recycling of words which are not your own. We should think of cliché as a form of repetitive speech which limits the individual's capacity to engage properly with the objects of the world, including politics.

It is important to recognise that Heidegger's account of idle talk is set against the background of the broader existential question of the *authenticity of the Self*. How can I claim to live a life that is authentically 'my own' rather than 'theirs'? How can I exist, as he phrases it, in 'mineness'? Heidegger makes it evident that authenticity is a desirable quality, something which is lacking among the inauthentic 'They', and he attempts to prescribe a means of escape. Whereas Heidegger seeks answers to the demands of authenticity through the elucidation of concepts such death and guilt, Arendt, on the other hand, points to the realm of politics. She takes up this idea of mass man and politicises it in a way which Heidegger does not, buoyed by her analysis of the totalitarian mass movements. We might consider this the question of how one differentiates oneself authentically from the political mass, a question which guides *The Human Condition* in its attempt at uncovering the conditions under which we can speak of authentic political action. Through the recycling of clichés the individual blocks their own potential to engage in authentic forms of speaking, and hence, acting. Eichmann,

Arendt maintains, is such an individual, and she attempts to understand whether this has a connection with the deference of responsibility and the conditions in which banal evil occurs.

Arendt opens 'Thinking and Moral Considerations' with the following description of Eichmann, which it is worth citing at length:

He functioned in the role of prominent war criminal as well as he had under the Nazi regime; he had not the slightest difficulty in accepting an entirely different set of rules. He knew that what he had once considered his duty was now called a crime, and he accepted this new code of judgment as though it were nothing but another language rule. To his rather limited supply of stock phrases he had added a few new ones, and he was utterly helpless only when he was confronted with a situation to which none of them would apply, as in the most grotesque instance when he had to make a speech under the gallows and was forced to rely on clichés used in funeral oratory which were inapplicable in his case because he was not the survivor. Considering what his last words should be in case of a death sentence, which he had expected all along, this simple fact had not occurred to him, just as inconsistencies and flagrant contradictions in examination and cross-examinations during the trial had not bothered him. Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking attention which all events and facts arouse by virtue of their existence. If we were responsive to this claim all the time, we would soon be exhausted; the difference in Eichmann was only that he clearly knew of no such claim at all (TMC: 417-418)

The key thing which struck Arendt about Eichmann, as evident in the above passage, was his predisposition for speaking in clichés, epitomised in the 'grotesque silliness of his last words':

"In the face of death, he had found the cliché used in funeral oratory. Under the gallows, his memory played him the last trick; he was 'elated' and he forgot that this was his own funeral" (EJ: 252). The implication of this is huge, because what Arendt locates is the concealing character of speech, or, to phrase it differently, the ideological character of cliché. The "grotesque silliness of his last words" (ibid: 252) which had left him visibly 'elated', seems to represent the greatest manifestation of what she called his "great susceptibility to catch words and stock phrases, combined with his incapacity for ordinary speech" (ibid: 86). She continues: "It was as though in those last minutes he was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us - the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying *banality of evil*" (ibid: 252). This statement is of great importance because it recognises the link between the phenomenon of banal evil with clichégenic language.

The portrait that Arendt paints of him is that of an individual who completely bypasses any reflection upon the language he uses. Eichmann himself recognised this, proclaiming that "*Officialese* is my only language" (as cited by Arendt, EJ: 48). His words emerged almost as automatic responses without thought, and Arendt again describes him with morbid curiosity:

officialese became his language because he was genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché...[there was a] striking consistency with which Eichmann, despite his rather bad memory, repeated word for word the same stock phrases and self-invented clichés (when he did succeed in constructing a sentence of his own, he repeated it until it became a cliché) each time he referred to an incident or event of importance to him...what he said was always the same, expressed in the same words. The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most



reliable of all safeguards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such (EJ: 49)

Eichmann's 'adherence to conventional, standardized codes or expressions' manifest in cliché, Arendt repeatedly states, has the effect of inhibiting the 'reality' of the world. Ultimately, this is a sign of this 'thoughtlessness', his inability to question the received words of others and reflect upon his own appropriation of language. This insight has been touched upon before by some commentators. Maloney and Miller correctly (albeit briefly) note that clichés act as 'short-circuits' for proper judgment (a theme developed in this thesis in chapter three), and that "Arendt often used cliché as a window into the public understanding of an event or social problem" (Maloney & Miller, 2007: 10). The idea behind this is that an analysis of clichégenic language can gather insights into areas of political discourse that has degenerated into mass thoughtless, and examples such as the Vietnam War are given.

For Arendt, thought and speech are inherently interlinked. To state that one has a causal effect on the other would be misrepresenting her, as they both emerge together; thought is as dependent on speech as speech is on thought. Arendt would state the political importance of thinking in the following manner:

Non-thinking...By shielding people from the dangers of examination, it teaches them to hold fast to whatever the prescribed rules of conduct may be at a given time in a given society. What people then get used to is less the content of the rules, a close examination of which would always lead them into perplexity, than the *possession* of rules under which to subsume particulars. If somebody appears who, for whatever purposes, wishes to abolish the old 'values' or virtues, he will find that easy enough, provided he offers a new code, and he will need relatively little force and no persuasion- i.e. proof, that the new values are better than the old- to impose it. The more firmly men hold to the code, the more eager will they be to assimilate

themselves to the new one, which in practice means that the readiest to obey will be those who were the most respectable pillars of society, the least likely to indulge in thoughts, dangerous or otherwise, while those who to all appearances were the most unreliable elements of the old order will be the least tractable (Arendt, T: 177)

It was one of those strange features of totalitarian government that its leaders were by all appearances respectable individuals - loving family members and earnest jobholders. The banal evil of totalitarianism emerged when the normalcy of the given code of judgment, with its obedience, turned against the human condition of plurality and made anonymity itself part of the desired social will. In addition, the code creates a structure for the individual to relate and respond to that which was happening around him, just as Eichmann was able to perform the roles required of him at the time. The cliché structures our relationship with the phenomena which we encounter, and therefore "destroys our authentic relation to things" (Heidegger, 1959: 13-14). In other words, it means that we respond to political experiences without reflection and in a habituated manner, aping the responses to experiences that are deemed normal at the time. When the totalitarian arose - a specifically new political phenomenon which required a specifically new response - thoughtless individuals were unable to authentically relate to that which was happening around them. These exceptional moments that arise require us to think and then respond in a manner which we have not done before. Clichés generate resistance to this necessary responsiveness because they fail to facilitate destructive thinking. In certain circumstances this can all-too-easily result in tragedy. As with Heidegger, I believe that Arendt provides a narration of the decline of authentic speaking in the modern age. We will examine this claim in greater detail in the next chapter, and for the mean time it is suffice to say that the totalitarian inability to think is the result of the forces of modern world alienation.

In his article entitled 'The Political Theory of the Cliché', Jakob Norberg attempts to link the topic with a critique of social psychology and its application of criteria of normalcy to its subjects, whilst also protecting Arendt from the criticism that she is overly concerned with an ultimately superficial phenomenon (Norberg, 2010). Clichéd speech might at first glance appear to be an odd phenomenon to focus ire upon - particularly given the context of the holocaust - and it would seem that this was a factor in some negative responses to Arendt's analysis. Norberg offers a strong defence of Arendt on this issue, correctly contextualising the discussion of cliché through Arendt's political commitment to plurality, stating that "the problem with someone who only speaks in clichés and therefore hardly speaks at all is of course not that he is not normal, but that he is only normal and nothing else" (ibid: 88). The manifestation of cliché, he argues following Arendt, points to a "blindness to the plurality of views...the source of Eichmann's guilt is his impenetrable ignorance of the plurality constitutive of politics" (ibid: 87). In his article, Norberg criticises the positivity of normalcy that orthodox psychology promotes, declaring that this perspective is at odds with politics and the plurality of perspectives that constitutes the political realm. Clichés help to maintain a normalcy which limits the scope of potential thought and action through closing the space of reflection. "In politics as Arendt conceives of it", he continues, "there can be no normality, only viewpoints whose differences crystallize within a multiplicity that emerges through deliberation and contestation" (ibid: 89). Norberg's interesting article helps to shed light on an under-studied of Arendt's thought, and is correct in its claims that the concept of the cliché is a fruitful resource in understanding the broader questions surrounding speech and the political realm.

### **1.5 Socratic Speech**

We have been investigating Arendt's connection between clichégenic speech, thoughtlessness, and banal evil. Now we must turn to her proposal of how clichégenic speech may be countered, and to do so we have to explore her description of Socrates, a thinker who she believes had discovered the capacity to instigate thought amongst his fellow Athenian citizens. In her reflections on the activity of thinking Arendt repeatedly singles out Socrates as the model, 'purest' thinker, who significantly (according to Aristotle) also discovered the 'concept'. The important point for her is to note what Socrates did once he discovered it. Plato's early Socratic dialogues (which Arendt maintains are representative of the historical Socrates rather than the Platonic Socrates) centre around an attempt to understand the meaning of a word, of which our concepts are comprised, they "deal with very simple, everyday concepts, such as arise whenever people open their mouths and begin to talk" (TMC: 429). The presumption in this task is that the word "*is something like a frozen thought which thinking must unfreeze, defrost as it were, whenever it wants to find out its original meaning*" (ibid: 431).

These words, used to group together seen and manifest qualities and occurrences but nevertheless relating to something unseen, are part and parcel of our everyday speech, and still we can give no account of them; when we try to define them, they get slippery; when we talk about their meaning, nothing stays put anymore, everything begins to move (ibid: 429)

These early Socratic dialogues are aporetic - that is, they do not go anywhere; at the end of the text we are left just as puzzled as we were at the beginning. They do not tell us what knowledge or piety *is*. At times, the word in question can even seem meaningless after the discussion. The dialogues are the Socratic extension of the thinking activity: they are destructive, and they do not yield tangible results. This is the basis of Heideggerian thinking as the hermeneutic movement 'from the clear into the obscure', to "take what has become obvious and make it transparent" (Heidegger, 2003: 7). The process of unfreezing the frozen

words which we can all-too-easily unthinkingly accept, Arendt likens to a battle, and "this battle can be refought only by language" (T: 115). The remarkable quality of Socrates is that the seeming lack of results of this 'battle' did not stop him from continuing this endeavour. This 'battle', if we may translate, was the battle against the cliché. It should be noted that in presenting Socrates in this manner Arendt seems to be adopting the distinction between the historical and Platonic Socrates, of which Plato's early Socratic dialogues are considered the best example of the individual that was Socrates, rather than being a literary vessel for the voice of Plato himself.

In these texts of Plato's, Socrates describes his philosophic function in various ways: as a 'midwife', helping to 'deliver' the authentic thoughts of others; and as a 'gadfly', constantly biting his peers through his relentless questioning so that they can be accountable to what they believe, forcing them to examine their opinions. The most pertinent portrayal of Socrates is that of the 'electric ray': "the electric ray paralyzes others only through being paralyzed itself. It isn't that, knowing the answers myself I perplex other people. The truth is rather that I infect them also with the perplexity I feel myself" (as cited by Arendt, TMC: 431). Arendt claims that this paralysis has two effects: it creates the interruptive and reflective 'stop and think', and a 'dazing after-effect', the feeling "unsure of what seemed to you beyond doubt while you were unthinkingly engaged in whatever you were doing" (Arendt, T: 175). It is through Socrates' thinking-through words with others that wonder is brought forth. Wonder opens up the terrain of language as the source of enquiry, and thus enquires about the foundations on which our linguistic ontology is built. Because wonder enables thought, and as thought is a form of mental speaking, wonder makes possible our thinking *through* words and *about* words. Language becomes the source, object, and medium of thought and speech. When Socrates claimed that he causes perplexity through uncovering the slipperiness of words to others, Arendt claims, he "sums up neatly the only way thinking can be taught" (TMC: 431). The thinking about language that wonder brings:

inevitably has a destructive, undermining effect on all established criteria, values, measurements of good and evil, in short, on those customs and rules of conduct we treat of in morals and ethics. These frozen thoughts, Socrates seems to say, come so handily that you can use them in your sleep; but if the wind of thinking, which I shall now stir in you, has shaken you from your sleep and made you fully awake and alive, then you will see that you have nothing in your grasp but perplexities, and the best we can do with them is share them with each other (T: 175)

In this manner, Arendt considers Socrates to be the person who understood the Greek political self-consciousness which was outlined earlier as well as any. For it was the sharing of words which they cherished - words were the bridge between what appears to each individual, for no one individual holds the key to absolute knowledge. Persuasion is important because it recognises that one's thoughts are malleable, not crystallised. Arendt places a great deal of trust in the personality of Socrates. So much, in fact, that much of her vision of politics relies upon it. In the Socratic dialogue she locates the spirit of political speech of *eudemonia* introduced earlier, and in this sense Arendt thinks of Socrates as the pre-eminent philosopher of the *polis*. In distinction with Plato, Socratic thinking is very much part and parcel of rhetorical speaking.

Arendt believes that personal responsibility is bound to the individual's capacity for thought. The 'two-in-one' of thought, where 'I am both the one who asks and the one who answers', is analogous to the development of what we call conscience. She credits Socrates with the discovery of conscience, for whom "the duality of the two-in-one meant no more than that if you want to think, you must see to it that the two who carry on the dialogue be in good shape, that the partners be *friends*" (ibid: 187-188). "Conscience," she details, "is the anticipation of the fellow who awaits you if and when you come home" (ibid: 191). In sum, a thinking individual of conscience will display a sense of personal responsibility because one

holds oneself accountable to oneself. The choice, therefore, for an individual of conscience in the deliberation of action or non-action is between self-respect or self-contempt. "Who would want to be the friend of and have to live together with a murderer? Not even another murderer" (ibid: 188), she claims. The murderer could only be at peace if they do not have conscience - if they were not aware of themselves as a murderer. A condition of thoughtlessness is analogous to a lack of conscience, and this helps explain Eichmann's and many other defendants' visible lack of guilt and constant deferral of responsibility.

On the other hand, Arendt looks at the example of non-participants existing amongst the 'deep moral confusion' of Nazi Germany:

the nonparticipants were those whose consciences did not function in this, as it were, automatic way...Their criterion, I think, was a different one: they asked themselves to what extent they would be able to live in peace with themselves after having committed certain deeds; and they decided that it would be better to do nothing, not because the world would then be changed for the better, but simply because only on this condition could they go on living with themselves at all. Hence, they also chose to die when they were forced to participate (RJ: 44)

The non-participants Arendt is talking about - conscientious objectors of society, possessed the personal responsibility which demands that the individual holds themselves to account for their own actions. As should be clear from this discussion, the individuality of thought brings about the individuality of personal responsibility, and so long as clichégenic speech inhibits the internal conversation of the mind that is thinking, then personal responsibility will continue to be largely absent. Socrates' insight shows how internal dialogue can only come about through the external influence of the language of others.

## 1.6 Politics Against Cliché

What we have now is a polarity between two dominant forms of speech: rhetoric and cliché. One provides the basis of a free and equal politics, and the other, a politics of ideological constriction. It is hard not to accept the claim of D'Entrèves that Arendtian action is based on 'mutuality, solidarity, and persuasion', or Benhabib's that the 'presence of common action [is] coordinated through speech and persuasion', though I fear that they risk alienating certain important aspects of it when they criticise the influence of Greece. The choice is not quite so clear cut as they present it, and Arendt's attempts to draw upon concepts such as *eleutheria* prove as much. These concepts, it should be said, aided her in her attempt to understand and critique the phenomenon of totalitarianism and the experience of 'thoughtless' mass man. As her repeated turns to Socrates suggest, the question of how to regain a trust in a politics of rhetorical intercourse and the abandonment of clichégenic linguistic fiction is crucial to understanding the intention of Arendtian political thought. *The Human Condition*, a book which clearly celebrates political action does not aim at inspiring political action, but thought: "what I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing" (HC: 5). The book itself is based around a select core of words such as politics, public, private, action, work, and labour, as are her other books where we encounter thought, will, judgment, freedom, authority, morality (and so on...). Her writings *insist* exploration of these words upon the reader. As Socrates attempted within the walls of Athens, Arendt implores us to experience the perplexing nature of these words within the confines of the text. Arendt's writings are an assault upon our political clichés; those clichés of speech which result in the ideological cliché of the mind. They are words which stand against ideology and the mass codes of judgment brought about by thoughtlessness. She voiced admiration for Lessing's understanding of *Selbstdenken* - self thinking - which requires us to think without a 'banister',



and sought through her writing to disclose the misrepresentations of much of our dominant political language since Plato.

We have introduced the notion that clichégenic speech is the dominant form of speech in the modern age much to the detriment of political association, and in the next chapter we shall build upon this observation. The stage is set for Arendt's confrontation with the question of what she calls the 'living-together of men' which consists in our relationship with our peers. As she consistently declares, the modern age constantly frustrates our capacity for human connection, resulting in what she terms 'world alienation'.

## Chapter Two

### Modernity and Friendship

We closed the previous chapter with the claim that Arendt promotes an account of politics against cliché, motivated by a dual critique of post-Socratic political philosophy and totalitarianism. In the following chapter we further examine what the foundation of non-clichégenic political language is, and in order to do so we must again return to the topic of totalitarian mass man as a means of analysis. The chapter proceeds with an examination of the political sociology of totalitarianism, in which we compare three prominent terms: solitude, isolation, and loneliness. The first two of these terms correlate in Arendt's thought with different kinds of physical and mental activities, whereas the third is purely negative and is not associated with any activity properly speaking. Particular attention is paid to loneliness because Arendt considers it to be the most influential social circumstance of the modern age, which she believes has profoundly influenced our understanding of politics, rooted in what Arendt calls the process of world-alienation. In Arendt's thought, it is argued, loneliness is opposed to friendship: if loneliness is connected to worldlessness, then friendship is connected to worldliness. Following Arendt, I argue that her notion of friendship expressly political, it being based on a kind of discursive equality, examples of which she borrows from classical philosophy as well as her observations regarding her friend and one-time teacher Karl Jaspers. The kind of discourse which Arendt identifies as truly political takes place among friends, and it is only from within this sphere of friendship that freedom can be actualised. Recognising the importance of the relationship between the above terms, it is argued, is crucial to understand Arendt's critique of modern politics, as well as her cautious belief in free future possibilities.

## 2.1 Loneliness and the Totalitarian

Arendt identifies the driving question of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* as "what kind of basic experience in the living-together of men permeates a form of government whose essence is terror and whose principle of action is the logicity of ideological thinking" (OT: 474). As we have explored so far in this thesis, the examination of the thinking activity and its relationship to a free politics is of huge importance to Arendtian political theory - to such an extent that it shapes her self-proclaimed intention of getting us to "think what we are doing" (HC: 5). It has been suggested that Arendt highlights speech as being of crucial importance in the fight against ideological thinking, which is referred to as a "self-compulsion...[which] ruins all relationships with reality" and as a "self-coercion...[which] destroys man's capacity for experience and thought just as certainly as his capacity for action" (OT: 474). The 'basic experience in the living-together of men' which Arendt is speaking of in this context is that of loneliness. Whilst Arendt does not consider loneliness to be an explicitly modern phenomenon, she does consider it to be the significant socio-political phenomenon of modernity. For Arendt, loneliness is "the common ground of terror, the essence of totalitarian government" (ibid: 475) and therefore is of critical importance for any post-totalitarian political analysis. Yet despite such a sweeping claim, Arendt only devotes a few pages to the term itself. Because of this we might conclude that Arendt never properly fleshes out a complete analysis of loneliness, and its relative disregard in Arendtian literature suggests that this is a common view among her commentators (Margaret Canovan, for example, dedicates only a couple of pages to the concept in her discussion of Arendt's theory of totalitarianism; see Canovan, 1992: 91-92). However, such a position should definitely be avoided, mainly because the question of loneliness in *Origins* develops into the question of world alienation in

*The Human Condition*. And undoubtedly, the concept of world alienation plays a vital role in any attempt to piece together a picture of Arendt's understanding of the modern, led by the succinct quotation: "World alienation...has been the hallmark of the modern age" (HC: 254). But before we analyse this important aspect of her writings, we must ground it through an exposition of loneliness itself, and to do so we will need to distinguish it from two other terms that Arendt utilises which relate to the phenomenon of being alone.

The final section of *Origins* - in which we find Arendt's reflection on loneliness (though the term does appear intermittently throughout) - was added a few years after the book's initial publication. Holistically, it acts as a bridge between the *Origins* and *The Human Condition*, which suggests that the culminating socio-political claim of loneliness in the *Origins* prefigures and prepares the philosophical reflections we encounter in *The Human Condition*. Certainly, some of the key terms explored, such as the private-public distinction and the 'rise of the social' are derived in part from this central issue of loneliness. The final chapter, entitled 'The Vita Activa and the Modern Age', can also be seen as the culmination of the philosophical ruminations surrounding loneliness and modernity.

Totalitarian movements, according to Arendt's analysis, are "mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals" whose "most conspicuous external characteristic is their demand for total, unrestricted, unconditional loyalty of the individual member" (OT: 323). Contrary to the trend of describing totalitarianism as a quasi-religious phenomenon, the totalitarian bond differs from the religious - whose loyalty is to the textual foundation of the religion itself - and therefore displays a certain regularity and predictability in action. By comparison, the Marxist-Leninist program, despite being clearer in intention than that of religious texts, was never an accurate guide for political behaviour in Russia, as the idiosyncratic interpretations generated by the leadership rendered the theoretical base completely disingenuous. And in the case of Nazi Germany, Hitler's 'greatest achievement' was

his unburdening of the Nazi movement from its early program (for example, the espousal of socialist sentiment), so that the party was used to a constant state of mobilisation as goals were set at will. The total slipperiness of totalitarian intentions hints toward a loyalty which goes beyond moral codes or political conditions, and points towards the allure of membership, as Himmler's phrase "My honour is my loyalty" (as cited by Arendt, *ibid*: 324) denotes. "Such loyalty" Arendt proclaims, "can be expected only from the completely isolated human being who, without any other social ties to family, friends, comrades, or even acquaintances, derives his sense of having a place in the world only from his belonging to a movement, his membership of a party" (*ibid*: 323-324). The crucial phrase here is 'place in the world'. Why does Arendt consider worldliness to be so important? And how does it relate to totalitarian loneliness? The answer to these questions can be gleaned from the following terminological analysis.

There are three terms Arendt employs which relate to the state of individuation: solitude, isolation, and loneliness. And, whilst the language is similar, each term denotes a very different experience. Let us first examine solitude. It is clear that Arendt links solitude with the thinking activity; defined as "to be with one's self" (HC: 76) it is the "human situation in which I keep myself company" (T: 185), as found in the 'two-in-one' of thought. Contemplative in nature, solitude posits a removal from the world and into the privacy of the thinking mind, and for Arendt the solitudinous experience is most apparent amongst philosophers, who she sometimes disparagingly refers to as 'professional thinkers'. The solitudinous individual freely chooses to remove themselves from the world; even the socialite Socrates, we are told, still found it necessary to withdraw himself from the company of others into the solitude of his home to think, and he was known to stand in public, immobile and unresponsive to others - in order to maintain his presence in the 'wind of thought'. One cannot enter into the internal dialogue of thought at the same time as one maintains dialogue with

the external other. In its extreme, this solitudinous withdrawal from the world can result in ignorance, apathy, or annoyance regarding the noisy goings on of the worldly space.

Isolation, in distinction, lacks the company of solitude - where the thinker shares company with themselves. It does allow, however, for the connection between the individual and the world. Unlike solitude, one can be isolated and still be a part of sensory shared world. Furthermore, isolation "not only leaves intact but is required for all so-called productive activities of men" (OT: 474) which create the 'objective' man-made artificial space of *homo faber*, and grants humanity physical permanence beyond the biological life-process. And in this sense, like solitude - isolation is freely chosen by the individual, for "man insofar as he is *homo faber* tends to isolate himself with his work", as the activity of fabrication "is always performed in a certain isolation from common concerns" (ibid: 475). In philosophical terms, the fabricator requires isolation because the idea, the "mental image of the thing to be" (HC: 161), is apparent only to the singular mind of the creator. The best example of this is probably found in the production of a work of art - where the input of others can serve only to move the artwork further from the original idea of the artist. Even when the finished product requires the conjoined specialisation of skills, the work is completed in isolation and organised into a whole afterwards: just as the medieval armament would have required the singular skills of armour smith, weapon smith, bowyer, fletcher, saddler etc. In art and craftsmanship, the widespread presence of the 'makers-mark' or signature certifies the individuality of this experience. Dissimilarly, the division of labour, the "multi-headed subject of all production", is specifically a joint enterprise as it "possesses the same togetherness as the parts which form the whole, and each attempt of isolation on the part of its members of the team would be fatal to the production itself" (HC: 161-162).

Isolation, however, is not to be strictly limited to the activities of *homo faber*, just as solitude is not limited to philosophers; the point is that it is in these specific fields that the

particular individuality of the experience is most lucid. Arendt often intends the term to be interpreted politically, and this is where the term discloses its significance, often highlighted through its relationship with the public sphere. *Homo Faber*, Arendt tells us, has his own public realm - the exchange market, "where he can show the products of his hand and receive the esteem which is due him" (HC: 160). In the "assemblage of shops" (ibid: 160) of the bazaar and medieval market districts, the individual is free to produce, display, and purchase worldly objects, yet this is a public space which is strictly concerned only with private interests and desires - narrowed to the limited freedoms of manufacture and exchange. Interestingly, Arendt notes, it was the repeated desire of the Greek tyrants to transform the politicised *agora* into the non-political public sphere of the orient - the illustrious bazaars. This is the public space characteristic of pre-totalitarian tyrannies: worldly, yet isolated. The public world which is disclosed is strictly limited to the objects of human hands, not common affairs - which are conducted behind closed doors amongst trusted counsel:

political contacts between men are severed in tyrannical government and the human capacities for action and power are frustrated. But not all contacts between men are broken and not all human capacities destroyed. The whole sphere of private life with the capacities for experience, fabrication and thought are left intact (OT: 474)

Politically speaking, isolation is a state of powerlessness and political 'impotence'; it is finding oneself "in a situation in which I cannot act, because there is nobody who will act with me" (ibid: 474). This is because the isolated public space is an extension of the private space, and, lacking the shared common world of speech and action required for political judgment - "nobody can any longer agree with anybody else" (HC: 58). This situation, Arendt claims, is fertile for the use of violence as a political means, as fear pervades. Continuing with this question of the 'basic experience in the living-together of men': tyranny is based on the experience isolation.

Both solitude and isolation are necessary for the maintenance of the common public space: solitude for thought (which, as we saw in the last chapter is of the utmost importance), and isolation for building a shared 'objective' space. However, there is an inherent vulnerability towards *loneliness* in both of these experiences. The solitudinous individual becomes lonely "when I am alone without being able to split up into the two-in-one, without being able to keep myself company" (LTM: 185). And similarly: "In isolation, man remains in contact with the world as the human artifice; only when the most elementary form of human creativity, which is the capacity to add something of one's own to the common world, is destroyed, isolation becomes unbearable" (OT: 475). This loss of creative input means that the individual leaves no ontological trace. This condition, which Arendt refers to as *superfluousness*, "means not to belong to the world at all" (ibid: 475). In both cases, the existential significance of private individuation itself has been lost. Add to that the deprivation of a public space of action and articulation, and the circumstance, Arendt believes, becomes toxic. Presence within these spaces are important for the sense of a fulfilled life - the desire of which emerges as a brutal shock with the comprehension of the looming fact of death, and which no amount of struggle can suppress. For, Arendt explains, "loneliness concerns human life as a whole" (ibid: 475). Lacking the dignity of being able to distinguish oneself apart from others (the mark of being human), the lonely individual feels anonymous. These individuals face a kind of 'homelessness'; uneasy in private and public, unable to situate themselves comfortably in either. The lived-experience of loneliness is crucial for understanding world alienation and its political effects; whilst the terms are not one and the same, they are intrinsically related.

Totalitarian domination, Arendt argues, "bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man" (OT: 475). Within a space of three pages, Arendt provides a highly effective description of loneliness: it is finding oneself in a "situation in which I as a person feel



myself deserted by all human companionship" (ibid: 474), "the experience of being abandoned by everything and everybody" (OT: 476), and also, following the philosopher Epictetus, "the lonely man (*eremos*) finds himself surrounded by others with whom he cannot establish contact or whose hostility he is exposed" (ibid: 476). 'Desertion', 'abandonment', and 'hostility' - these are all responses centring around our human counterparts (one can only feel deserted, for example, if there is someone doing the deserting), and because of this, loneliness "shows itself most sharply in company with others" (ibid: 475). Loneliness is visible as this intersubjective, interactive deficit, and Arendt considers this to be the very condition of mass society, in which the constituent members are "all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience" (HC: 58). When each experience becomes disproportionately prominent among the living-together of men, the emergence of loneliness as a mass phenomenon becomes ever more likely as people join together in what she at one point describes as 'negative solidarity', invoking a sense that totalitarian mass movements represent something of an alliance of the damned.

Worldlessness and loneliness are, as briefly mentioned before, counterparts of modernity itself. Totalitarianism is, according to Arendt, an unprecedentedly new - and particularly modern - phenomenon, primarily because it is derived from loneliness. Up till the modern age, loneliness had no major role to play in common affairs as it was a marginal phenomenon felt most strongly by the elderly. In *Origins*, Arendt briefly argues that loneliness has become so encompassing because of the "uprootedness and superfluousness which have been the curse of modern masses since the beginning of the industrial revolution" (OT: 475). This argument is not properly dealt with in *Origins*, but it is systematically analysed in the final chapter of *The Human Condition*, which reads as a historical narrative of modernity. Within this chapter, the problem, in contrast to the above statement, does not lay at the feet of industrialisation but with processes brought about by certain related events. This claim deserves much greater attention, which we shall now grant it.

## 2.2 The Path Toward Loneliness

We know that loneliness is not a phenomenon specific to the modern age, though Arendt claims that its reach has been intensified due to the creeping loss of worldliness that accompanied the transition to the modern. She points directly at three specific events that mark the process of the loss of the world: the discovery of America, the Reformation, and the invention of the telescope. All three of these pre-modern events, Arendt asserts, have contributed in their own way to the recondite process of world alienation, and they are "still happening in an unbroken continuity, in which precedents exist and predecessors can be named", even if they do not display the "peculiar character of an explosion of undercurrents" (HC: 248). Of particular concern for Arendt is how each of these events contributed to the constitution of modern individuality, whereby the modern individual is 'thrown back upon themselves'. The initial process which these events engendered was earth alienation, the disconnection of the individual with the prior surety of sensory perception, embodied in the universal, cosmic stance of the Archimedean point of a modern science grounded in mathematics. The study of mathematics, considered as the mind's intrinsic form of measurement, has an existence completely dependent upon the mind; and following Heisenberg, Arendt asserts that in the scientific world-view, with its emphasis upon instruments and measurement, "man only encounters himself" (ibid: 261).

Her point is clearly not to attack the strides of science in recent centuries. Her wish is to disclose how, as she phrases it: "both despair and triumph are inherent in the same event." (ibid: 262). On the one hand, modern science had opened the potential of mankind to ever greater models of explanation, the benefits of which are self-evident. And yet, the implications of modern science lead us onto a path towards the nightmarish conclusion that "man had

been deceived so long as he trusted that reality and truth would reveal themselves to his senses and to his reason if only he remained true to what he saw with the eyes of body and mind" (ibid: 274). The emergence of this modern nightmare "was almost inescapable once the true implications of the modern world view were understood" (ibid: 277), and for this reason Arendt identifies pessimism as the hallmark of modern philosophy - with its clearest incarnation in the principle of Cartesian doubt. Everything becomes doubtful, even the existence of the human mind, for it is "the outstanding characteristic of Cartesian doubt is its universality, that nothing, no thought and no experience, can escape it" (ibid: 275). Descartes' conclusion was that if nothing was certain, then perhaps doubt itself carried its own certainty, and as such the process of doubting became a reliable standard unto itself. This process, however, was enclosed with the limits of the subjective mind, and anything outside of it could not be certified in a similar manner.

Following on from this, she observes the correlation between modern philosophy and subjectivism, claiming that the hallmark of world-alienation can be observed in the vast majority of thinkers of the age. The move toward mental processes as the object of philosophical enquiry means that all sensory objects become objects of consciousness: "the 'seen tree' found in consciousness through introspection is no longer the tree given in sight and touch, an entity in itself with an unalterable identical shape of its own" (ibid: 282). The objects we encounter, Arendt notes, therefore occupy the same reality in consciousness as an imagined object, or a memory. "Nothing could perhaps prepare our minds better" for later scientific revelations such as mass-energy equivalence, "than this dissolution of objective reality into subjective states of mind or, rather, into subjective mental processes" (ibid: 282). Instead of a shared common world of sensory experience, which allowed man to think of his vision as a guide to the visible world, "what men now have in common is not the world but the structure of their minds, and this they cannot have in common, strictly speaking" (ibid: 283).

The Cartesian shift toward introspection, "the sheer cognitive concern of consciousness with its own content...must yield certainty, because here nothing is involved except what the mind has produced itself; nobody is interfering but the producer of the product, man is confronted with nothing and nobody but himself" (ibid: 280). The above phrase - 'man is confronted with nothing and nobody but himself' - is replicated in various forms within the pages of this chapter, and as such can be taken as one of its most significant statements. Introspection, however, is not the same as loneliness. Many of the following sections of the chapter in *The Human Condition* are a dense narrative history of how introspection becomes transformed into loneliness. At this stage it is important to recognise that introspection, brought about by the experience of earth alienation as found in scientific activity, started the process of man's disengagement from his peers that Arendt is so keen to document. Arendt's argument in 'The *Vita Activa* and the Modern Age' is breathtakingly sweeping and grandiose in intent, even by her standards. Over about fifty pages Arendt documents the speed at which modern introspection led a transition between two 'victories': the victory of *homo faber*, and then later, the victory of *animal laborans*. These transitions occur through several stages, taking place over approximately 300 years, and Arendt uses philosophical trends as a means of investigating these changes - in a similar manner to how she uses Descartes as the symbol of introspection.

Cartesian doubt, when taken as representative of the emergence of world alienation, highlights the turn from the prior philosophic attempts to understanding nature and Being, towards "things that owed their existence to man" (ibid: 298). And as certainty could only be found in the process of doubting, it was the very notion of process itself which came to dominate, observed most visibly in the supremacy of the experiment. Derived from our asking 'how' (as opposed to 'why' or 'what'), the scientific experiment's power is located in its ability to properly document the process unfolding under its specified conditions. If we cannot truly grasp the 'thing itself', we can at least know its processes. And how do we determine the

correctness of a scientific claim? Look at how that claim works in practice. Nothing validates something better than witnessing it in action, and it would be absurd to argue against such a position. As Arendt phrases it: "In order to be certain one had to *make sure*, and in order to know one had to do" (ibid: 290). The experiment is therefore an act of fabrication, creating the conditions under which processes can be observed with the intention of gleaming knowledge. Furthermore, the instruments of measurement necessary for experimentation need to be produced by an individual with a certain technological expertise and nous: someone capable of seeing utility in an otherwise useless body of matter. The experiment is inherently tied to fabrication in the twin facts that it requires specialist fabrication to exist, as well as being an act of fabrication in of itself. For this reason, the activity of fabrication is among the "highest ideals and idols of the modern age" (ibid: 296), driven by the assumption "though one cannot know truth as something given and disclosed, man can at least know what he makes himself" (ibid: 282). According to *homo faber*, only that which can be measured can be judged, and hence the activity of contemplation, the basis of philosophy, comes to be seen as a redundant activity of charlatans or the misguided. As *homo faber* is inclined to bestow meaning and significance upon those phenomena that have a function within the process of fabrication itself, philosophy has increasingly been ascribed the value of meaninglessness in the face of the physical and theoretical triumphs of a modern science. This phase of modernity, the victory of *homo faber*, signifies the victory of isolation over solitude, destroying the prioritisation of thinking that came with Cartesian philosophy and raising the activity of making in its stead. I believe that it is best to read 'The Vita Activa and the Modern Age' as a narrative history documenting the movement from solitude to isolation, and then to loneliness; it begins with the radical solitude of Descartes as found in introspection, then the isolation of *homo faber*, and finally, to the loneliness of *animal laborans*. This transition, based in the three types of individuation, is crucial to understanding Arendt's dual critique of modernity and the totalitarian.

How did work become supplanted by labour? Arendt argues that the change is based on a further radicalisation of process itself, or as she phrases it, in the development of an “even more modern principle of process” (ibid: 308), and the generation of the ‘self-evident truth’ that human “life, and not the world, is the highest good of man” (ibid: 318). Insofar as the activity of work is connected to the world through the creation of objects that are designed to last, labour is not: “their consumption barely survives the act of their production...although they are man-made, they come and go, are produced and consumed, in accordance with the ever-recurrent cyclical movement of nature” (ibid: 96). Objects of labour are designed for consumption or else they decay, and this grants labour a ‘destructive’ character when compared with work. Arendt remarks that work is used in speech as a verb and noun whereas labour is strictly a verb, suggesting the non-objective quality of the labouring activity exemplified in the phrase ‘the fruits of our labour’, compared to the objective ‘work of art’ - a tangible, worldly object as well as an activity. Both have, of course, their immutable place in the human condition alongside action. The labouring mentality draws upon life itself as its ultimate point of reference, for the sustenance of life is the very basis of the activity itself. And the elevation of life as the ‘highest good’ in modern society means that everything is subservient to human life, measured according to its place in biological maintenance and development. This anthropocentric belief leads to the belief that “the ultimate standard of measurement is not utility and usage at all, but ‘happiness,’ that is, the amount of pain and pleasure experienced in the production or in the consumption of things” (ibid: 309).

The radicalisation of process under labour is based on a change in the basis of instrumental logic. *Homo Faber*, Arendt argues, considers the object which they created as an ‘end in itself’, “an independent durable entity with an existence of its own” (ibid: 157). The fabricator considers the process of fabrication to be over. However, under conditions of cyclical labour which is tied to the repetitive rhythm of biological life, the entire notion of an

end-point to the activity is complicated. Production is viewed simply as a precursor for consumption, and the proper distinction between the two is destroyed. What we are faced with is the perpetual process of production and consumption as no worldly object exists outside of it as an end in itself. We experience constant process, the “limitless instrumentalization of everything that exists”, a state of worldless flux in which nothing lasting and meaningful truly exists, faced with a “process of growing meaninglessness where every end is transformed into a means and which can be stopped only by making man himself the lord and master of all things” (ibid: 157).

With the victory of *animal laborans* the stage is set for loneliness. As the activity of labouring has no connection to worldliness it can be recognised as facilitating the feeling of superfluosity that Arendt identified in modern totalitarian mass man. She would claim that "a peculiar loneliness arises in the process of labor...this loneliness consists in being thrown back upon oneself; a state of affairs in which, so to speak, consumption takes the place of all the truly relating activities" (EU: 21). In *Origins*, she describes the transition between isolation and loneliness - which should be read historically as the modern transition between *homo faber* and *animal laborans* - in the following manner:

In isolation, man remains in contact with the world as the human artifice; only when the most elementary form of human creativity, which is the capacity to add something of one's own to the common world, is destroyed, isolation becomes altogether unbearable. This can happen in a world whose chief values are dictated by labor, that is where all human activities have been transformed into labouring. Under such conditions, only the sheer effort of labor which is the effort to keep alive is left and the relationship with the world as a human artifice is broken. Isolated man who lost his place in the political realm of action is deserted by the world of things as well, if he is no longer recognized as *homo faber* but treated as an *animal laborans* whose

necessary 'metabolism with nature' [Marx] is of concern to no one. Isolation then becomes loneliness. Tyranny based on isolated generally leaves the productive capacities of man intact; a tyranny over 'laborers,' however, as for instance the rule over slaves in antiquity, would automatically be a rule over lonely, not only isolated, men and tend to be totalitarian (OT: 475)

Loneliness is not terroristic in of itself, though it is always potentially terroristic as it is characterised by a negative relationship with others as explained in the previous section. To become terroristic it needs to tie itself to a language of hope and meaning, both of which the lonely individual lacks and desires. Modern ideologies, which we discussed in the previous chapter concerning clichégenic speech, offer themselves directly to lonely mass man. The mantric clichés of the totalitarian language of community and designable futures occupies the space which the world previously occupied. A substitute world is constructed, one which has no basis in 'objective' reality and assumes the status of fiction. The implication of Arendt's analysis is that under worldly conditions, when loneliness is a marginal phenomenon, totalitarianism could not flourish.

Arendt's controversial notion of the 'rise of the social' is based on the narrative of modernity and the different forms of being alone as described in the rise of the society of labourers and the subsequent rise of loneliness. The 'theoretical glorification of labour' led by individuals such as Smith and Marx "has resulted in a factual transformation of the whole of society into a labouring society" (HC: 4), and hence a lonely society. The individuals in this social formation think of what they do purely in terms of sustaining their consumption; their profession is treated purely as a source of income, and even those at the top consider it their job to maintain this situation. Society takes the form of a single functional organism with productivity and wealth accumulation as the primary collective interest. The interests of the 'household' become synonymous with the public concern, and according to Arendt's analysis,



therefore, worldlessness becomes *de facto* public policy. What is lost is the public realm as Arendt understands it, and little can exist independently of this economic bureaucratisation. Under these circumstances the individual is, to use Arendt's repeated phrase, 'thrown back on themselves' in lonely alienation. Sadly, the role that loneliness plays in Arendt's broader thought has been ignored among her commentators; for example, one of the greatest critics of Arendt's concept of the 'social', Hannah Pitkin, eschews any mention of the concept of loneliness, wrongly casting a discussion of alienated labour in terms of isolation (see Pitkin, 1998: 167). As I have hoped to have shown, careful distinction is required when we discuss many of Arendt's terms as these distinction form the foundation of her political outlook.

### **2.3 Re-thinking Modern Friendship**

Up to this point we have been tracing the connections Arendt draws between the modern age, loneliness, and totalitarianism. Now we must look at how Arendt responds to these observations, which centres, I argue, around her attempt to re-think the concept of friendship. In order to do this she attempts to draw upon the classical experience of citizenship in order to advance a politicised account of friendship, a kind that stands in stark contrast to loneliness. The form of togetherness characterised in the spirit of friendship of the classical era is a kind of friendship very different to what we commonly understand the term to mean now. This difference is key, as it represents for Arendt the profound movement toward loneliness in modernity. The clearest difference between the two can be summarised in the following manner: classical friendship is public, and modern friendship is private. Modern friendship is closely linked with intimacy, manifest as a close emotional bond between two persons. She does not believe that the desire for intimacy is negative, or that it is a modern phenomenon in and of itself - rather, she wants to understand precisely why the exaltation of intimacy

emerged so strongly in the modern era. In this way, Arendt's analysis of intimacy should be read as an attempt to understand a symptom of a deeper crisis of the individual in the modern age as identified in mass loneliness and the 'rise of the social'. She describes the crisis in the following manner:

Since the rise of society, since the admission of household and housekeeping activities to the public realm, an irresistible tendency to grow, to devour the older realms of political and private as well as the more recently established sphere of intimacy, has been one of the outstanding characteristics of the new realm (HC: 45)

Let's examine this claim further with reference to friendship.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is considered by Arendt as the first philosopher to react to the growing force of society with recourse to intimacy. Modern privacy, which intimacy is related to, is invoked functionally as a protection of the intimate, a sheltering from the penetrative gaze of increasing mass society. Rousseau, we are told, rebelled against society's "unbearable perversion of the human heart, its intrusion upon an innermost region in man which until then had needed no special protection" (ibid: 39), and this would become a theme which would even inflect his theory of the general will, in which inside each individual is his or her own antagonist. For Arendt, Rousseau's rebellion of the heart perfectly represents "the modern individual and his endless conflicts, his inability either to be at home in society or to live outside it altogether, his ever-changing moods and the radical subjectivism of his emotional life" (ibid: 39). The decline of the 'public arts' such as architecture, and the 'astonishing flowering' in the modern era of intimate art forms such as poetry and music, as well as the dominance of the novel as the literary form, all testify to the "close relationship between the social and the intimate" (ibid: 39) and the flight of modern man into his or her private emotive condition and away from the world. What united Rousseau and the Romantic movements of the modern era was a 'rebellious reaction against society', against the levelling conformism

perceived within it. Arendt would certainly empathise with this sense of defiance. But whilst modern intimacy arose to protect the individual from society's inquisition, it does so to the detriment of one's worldliness, as "the intimacy of the heart...has no tangible place in the world" (ibid: 39): it cannot be made manifest in public, it can only be felt. Certainly, we can witness people acting in an intimate manner, but we can never experience their intimacy for ourselves as it is a strictly private phenomenon. Always "a flight from the whole outer world into the inner subjectivity of the individual" (ibid: 69), intimacy has been celebrated so strongly in the modern age because the private realm, intimacy's home, has been increasingly penetrated by social coercion and, hence, conformism - as found in the notion of the 'rise of the social'.

Our common understanding of friendship reflects this reactionary movement to intimacy; a friend is someone whom we have grown close to and share the intimacy of an emotional bond. There is nothing modern or unnatural about this. However, Arendt is keen to emphasise that the primacy of this subjective bond of the heart in accounts of friendship has come to shape human relations for the worse. In *Men in Dark Times* she qualifies this point:

We are wont to see friendship solely as a phenomenon of intimacy, in which the friends open their hearts to each other unmolested by the world and its demands. Rousseau...is the best advocate of this view, which conforms so well to the basic attitude of the modern individual, who in his alienation from the world can truly reveal himself only in privacy and in the intimacy of face-to-face encounters (MDT: 24)

Loneliness, if we remember, is not a condition of being alone - it is an alienation from our peers, characterised by emotions such as desertion and hostility. It seems natural enough, then, that the closing of the sphere of friendship to those who we are intimate with is a result of world alienation and loneliness. Under conditions of mass loneliness, intimacy is grasped as the only answer; Rousseau's notion of the indivisible will, for example, was built upon the

experience of the bonds of love, kinship, and intractable companionship. Intimacy, however, is a fleeing from the dilemma at hand. It is cast as a form of escapism, with society in general as the object that we wish to hide from. "How tempting it was," Arendt remarks of her German peers, "simply to ignore the intolerably stupid blabber of the Nazis" (ibid: 23) and shield oneself from the persons and views that we encounter in the world.

The epitome of intimacy is obviously love, and love therefore represents the purest form of worldlessness. Arendt often speaks of love beside the language of fire: "love...is killed, or rather extinguished, the moment it is displayed in public" (HC: 51). Elsewhere, she describes love and modern friendship as a moment in which "the world goes up in flames" (PP: 202). The equation with love as fire seems particularly apt because it conveys the intensity of the emotion as well as its worldless intangibility. In her texts Arendt consciously attempts to fight the conflation of love with political community. This is best observed in her response to Gershom Scholem's claim that she lacks love for the Jewish people: "I have never in my life 'loved' any people or collective...the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons" (JP: 246). Attempts to elevate love to the status of the political bond are heavily criticised in her book *On Revolution*, in which she argues that the failure of the French Revolution is due in large part to the overwhelming feeling of compassion among the revolutionary elite toward the French people, in reaction against the prior indifference of high society. But "because compassion abolishes the distance, the worldly space between men where political matters, the whole realm of human affairs, are located, it remains, politically speaking, irrelevant and without consequence" (OR: 86). In this sense compassion is closely related to love in the way that they are both manifestations of worldless intimacy. It is with this compassionate revolutionary tradition in mind that Arendt describes love as "perhaps the most powerful of antipolitical human forces" (HC: 242). Following this, one cannot help but connect the demands of totalitarian ideologies for total loyalty with the unbreakable bond of love - a bond desperately fetishized by mass society in general.

To conclude, the elevation of modern friendship is negative because it is modelled on a singular experience. For this reason it is inherently opposed to the plural existence of political community. With her reflection on the intimate and the social, Arendt paints a picture of the modern individual stuck in a rut: with the increasing depersonalisation of society through labour the individual craves intimacy, which in turn facilitates the very depersonalisation which they are reacting against as they turn away from what little is left of the world. Her response to this quandary is to highlight a form of friendship which is not intimate: what Aristotle called *philia politikē*, which demands a “kind of ‘friendship’ without intimacy and without closeness; it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may admire or of achievements which we may highly esteem” (HC: 243). To be clear: Arendt does not want to banish intimate friendship, her critique is based on an analysis concerning the destruction of public friendship as described in the above quotation, and the subsequent belief that intimate friendship corresponds with political community.

In order to supply us with a new account of friendship that moves beyond intimacy and loneliness, Arendt turns to classical philosophy. Certainly, there is little to be gleaned from modern political thought, where the notion of friendship has been largely absent. Its presence can perhaps be felt in contractualist philosophy; in Kantian morality and in the model rationality of reciprocal relationships as found in Hobbes and Locke. Yet without a doubt, this is insignificant in comparison to the interest in the relationship of friendship displayed by Classical thinkers. Of particular relevance is Greece, in which an account of friendship (*philia*) developed which undoubtedly is alien to the modern reader, and which Arendt’s reference to Aristotle conveys. What is shared by every account of friendship, however, is the basic recognition of the equality necessary for individuals to be friends. This seems to have aroused some interest in recent commentary on Arendt: Danielle Celermajer, for example, has argued recently that Arendt’s concept of friendship harbours a strong ethical component (Celermajer,

2010); Marguerite La Caze has also promoted something similar, recognising that political friendship is the site of respect, forgiveness, and promise in Arendtian thought (La Caze, 2010). What is lacking in both accounts, however, is a proper grounding of the discussion in relation to its classical sources, which I believe are paramount to understanding the proper nature of what it means to be friends in Arendt's terms.

Friendship was an important topic for the Greeks. By all accounts, the Greeks valued friendship as highly as any culture since. Friendship was a constituent part of heroic culture and drama, which usually took place within a group of friends, often centring on two great individuals (examples include Theseus and Pirithous, Orestes and Pylades etc.). It was generally displayed as a passionate relationship between men,

each supporting the other in his best efforts and aims, mind assisting mind and hand in hand, and the end of the love residing not in an easy satisfaction of itself, but in the development and perfecting of the souls in which it dwelt (Dickinson, 1947: 186)

This idea is clearly related to Homeric legend and soon became an institution in and of itself, sometimes manifesting itself in the very constitutions of communities, Sparta being the most obvious example. Greek philosophers considered the question of friendship a topic as important as almost any other; the Epicureans, to use but one example, considered it to be the most important human quality, a foundation for distinguishing between human and animal. It was the Athenian politicisation of friendship, though, that Arendt found most compelling, as represented in Aristotle's *Politics*.

Fifth century Athens underwent a linguistic revolution that completely changed its political landscape. A new kind of civic discourse emerged in which, as W. Robert Connor convincingly argues, "the individual's relation to the *polis* comes to be spoken of in ways that had formerly been reserved almost exclusively for his relations to persons" (Connor, 1971:100). One of the constituent elements of this form of friendship was their duty to the

city, which was as much an important expectation as the personal relationship between friends themselves. And for individuals such as Socrates, it seems, private and public friendship were totally compatible notions. This linguistic move, as practiced by individuals such as Pericles and Cleon, was based on an attempt to move beyond the factionalism of prior Athenian politics, and publicise politics away from secretive wrangling for power and influence. Now, the politician was *rhetor*, public individuals who "led by their eloquence" (ibid: 116) in speaking. This revolutionary notion of friendship cast a wide net to incorporate the interpersonal bond found in shared political citizenship.

We cannot be certain as to whether this linguistic change was a result of broader cultural attitudes, or whether it was instigated by the rhetorical strategies of Athenian politicians. Similarly, we can never be sure of the sincerity of such proclamations of conveying friendship to the *polis* at large, or whether it was a strategic method. Though whether the orators meant it or not, one thing is clear: the *demos* felt a strong connection with the language being used, and it became appropriated within the political culture of Athens and beyond. Centuries later, Cicero, the famous Grecophile, would articulate such a stance in his discourse on friendship, *De Amicitia*. Now, we shall explore what I believe Arendt draws from the classical account, and why she sees it as the opposite of loneliness, the source of totalitarian terror.

## **2.4 Classical Friendship**

Shin Chiba explores in a brilliant article the complexity of Arendt's philosophical engagements with the concept of love, arguing that she uses it as a base for thinking about a new public bond (Chiba, 1995). This new bond is apparent in two of Arendt's concepts - forgiveness and

friendship - of which the latter is the primary consideration, stating that "friendship should be looked upon and understood as a root metaphor for public activities" (ibid: 519). Central to this observation is that friendship incorporates a philosophy of 'resistance' insofar as it is opposed to hierarchy, and hence, notions of rulership. What Chiba correctly notes is that friendship is fundamentally a "fellowship based on debate and deliberation", and represents a "unique *discursive sphere*" (ibid: 519-520), one which should be considered separate from the modern affiliation with the social realm. I agree with what I consider to be her most significant statement in the article, that "friendship for Arendt is the due attention and regard with which friends or peers hold one another. There-fore, friendship embodies for her, as well as for the ancient Greeks, *a unique discursive reality and its sphere*" (ibid: 522). Let's consider further this connection with classical friendship.

Central to Arendt's notion of friendship is speech, as examined in the previous chapter through words such as *isēgoria*, the attribute of equal citizenship created through collective discussion. She argues that for the ancient Greeks, whose political culture she explicitly draws upon, "the essence of friendship consisted in discourse. They held that only the constant interchange of talk united citizens in a *polis*. In discourse the political importance of friendship, and the humanness peculiar to it, were made manifest" (MDT: 24). Friendship was viewed from the perspective of political community, not from the individual. In other words, Arendt attempts to re-think friendship as a spatial relation beyond simply those in which we have a purely subjective emotional connection. The public realm, consequently, is thought of as a space of intersubjective friendship based around speech. Against the ideal of intimate human friendship she argues that "humaneness should be sober and cool rather than sentimental... humanity is exemplified not in fraternity but in friendship... that friendship is not intimately personal but makes political demands and preserves reference to the world" (ibid: 25). One of the problems with equating friendship with intimacy is that its spatial quality is limited; for example, political movements based on brotherliness and fraternity, the bond between group



members is personalised, and creates a wall between the members of the group and those considered outside of it. This understanding of friendship is opposed to the Greek spirit of friendship represented in the term *philanthropia* - the love of man - which "manifests itself in a readiness to share the world with other men" (ibid: 25). We don't need to delve far into the annals of history to provide examples of how an unwillingness to share a space with others can end in monstrous evil.

Whilst Arendt delights in the political culture of Ancient Greece, she was also aware of the tensions within the *polis* and the moments in which it veered from its ideal. Ancient Athenian democracy was famously agonal, and she bases Socratic philosophy within this context: "Socrates seems to have believed that the political function of the philosopher was to help establish this kind of common world, built on the understanding of friendship, in which no rulership is needed" (PAP: 436-437). The idea that Arendt appropriates from such a notion is that friendship is the very foundation for equal self-governance, and that this form of equal friendship can only be achieved through authentic communication. When one enters into discourse, as with Socrates, the dialogue is not educational in the sense that it does not aim at the expression and impartation of knowledge, but at the uncovering and contestation of opinion. The very manner in which this discourse is orientated prefigures a certain civic equality:

The equalization in friendship does not of course mean that the friends become the same or equal to each other, but rather that they become equal partners in a common world- that they together constitute a community (ibid: 436)

At this point it is helpful to turn to Arendt's chapters on Karl Jaspers, who represents to her one of the rare individuals to embody the essence of Classical friendship. She would state of him that

where Jaspers comes forward and speaks, all becomes luminous. He has an unreservedness, a trust, an unconditionality of speech that I have never known in anyone else...That was really my most powerful postwar experience. That there can be such conversations! That one can speak in such a way! (EU: 22)

His central influence upon Arendtian thought is the idea of *humanitas* (Arendt also sees a similar *humanitas* in the thought of Kant, which we will discuss in the following chapter).

When asked to write a eulogy for Jaspers, what we have is a tangible display of Arendt's confidence in the public person and the spirit of togetherness among friends. The form of a eulogy, Arendt proudly proclaims, harks "back to an older and more proper sense of the public realm, a sense that it is precisely the human person in all his subjectivity who needs to appear in public in order to achieve full reality" (MDT: 72). Contrast this with the modern obituary, which tends to be a far more technical textual experience. Drawing a line between the 'individual' that was Jaspers and the 'person' that was Jaspers. The individual constitutes the 'subjective' element of the Being, whereas the personality is the 'objective' quality. It is the latter which interests Arendt, and, in-keeping with her thought she removes sentimentality from the eulogy - even though her affection is obvious. Recognising that she herself has not become a public figure like Jaspers she declares

we are all modern people who move mistrustfully and awkwardly in public. Caught up in our modern prejudices, we think that only the 'objective work,' separate from the person, belongs to the public; that the person behind it and his life are private matters, and that the feelings related to these 'subjective' things stop being genuine and become sentimental as soon as they are exposed to the public eye (ibid: 72)

Her attestation of timidity aside, Arendt is speaking about the pervasiveness of modern intimacy. Jaspers, she contends, fought against this public prudity through his 'venture into the public realm', aware that "personality is anything but a private affair" (ibid: 72). He 'dared to

be naked' in front of others, willing giving himself over to public scrutiny. To elucidate this claim, Arendt turns to the Greek idea of the *Daimon*, the "personal element in man, [which] can only appear where a public space exists; that is the deeper significance of the public realm" (ibid: 73). Socrates is the perfect example of this: he wrote nothing, produced nothing, yet he stands as one of the strongest personalities of ancient history, still perplexing us today. Simply with the utterance of his name his personality almost seems to speak to us from the grave. Another individual might publish prolifically, but their person remains distant (think, perhaps, of Heidegger or Plato). *Humanitas*, the Roman spiritual equivalent of the *Daimon* represented the "very height of humanness because it was valid without being objective" (ibid: 73) and could only disclose itself in the light of the public space. *Humanitas*, we might say, is the human form of objectivity. This is because "*humanitas* is never acquired in solitude and never by giving one's work to the public. It can be achieved only by one who has thrown his life and his person into the 'venture into the public realm'...Thus the 'venture into the public realm,' in which *humanitas* is acquired, becomes a gift to mankind" (ibid: 73-74). Surely, the 'gift' of Socrates would never have been given if he had remained in the shadows outside the public realm. And we can be sure that a great many people over a great many centuries have considered Socrates a gift.

Disclosure of one's person is a courageous act, especially in the modern condition of subjective intimacy. In Arendt's words, Jaspers not only 'was' but 'appeared'. Jaspers' willingness to disclose himself was marked by a mindful resistance to the modern 'inner emigration' "from public life to anonymity" (ibid: 22). Not a constructed self, as this would be a shallow showmanship dependent on social mimesis, but a willingness to allow exposure of one's *daimon* with a "a confidence that needed no confirmation" (ibid: 76). This appearance is human, objective, *real*, and stands against the exactly scientific understanding of the individual which has pervaded modern society and shaped our political relations. Nobody is strictly aware of the person as they appear to others - that person can only be disclosed in

action and speech. However, one can take responsibility for how one acts and how one speaks. Jaspers did not claim to be "representing anything but his own existence" (ibid: 76), and this is illustrative of what responsibility really means for Arendt. Arendt, through her use of the Socratic invocation 'living together with others begins with living together with oneself' seems to be saying that the willingness to disclose oneself publicly, to truly take responsibility for oneself, creates a space in the spirit of togetherness. This is brilliantly articulated in a sentence concerning the 'light' of the public sphere:

Whatever stands up to light and does not dissolve in vapours under its brightness, partakes in *humanitas*; to take it upon oneself to answer before mankind for every thought means to live in that luminosity in which oneself and everything one thinks is tested (ibid: 75)

As should hopefully be apparent, this posits an understanding of friendship and togetherness very much in opposition to the 'negative solidarity' of the totalitarian movements and their basis in the phenomenon of modern loneliness.

As we know, friendship "to a large extent, indeed, consists of this kind of talking about something that the friends have in common", and "by talking about what is between them, it becomes ever more common to them" (PAP: 435). Jaspers referred to authentic communication as a 'loving struggle', the reason being that the constituent part of true speech is found in the assertion of a distinction between each other whilst also accepting themselves as being united through language. Through the activity of speaking in a non-clichégenic manner, in which one converses with a willingness to be responsible for your own actions and opinions without falling back upon common obscurant tropes, a certain worldly community comes about. One section is particularly meaningful:

Community is what friendship achieves...The political element in friendship is that in the truthful dialogue each of the friends can understand the truth inherent in the

other's opinion. More than his friend as a person, one friend understands how and in what specific articulateness the common world appears to the other, who as a person is forever unequal or different. This kind of understanding- seeing the world (as we rather tritely say today) from the other fellow's point of view- is the political kind of insight par excellence (ibid: 436)

What Arendt is alluding to here is our faculty of judgment, with its demand for non-intimate critical distance, which will be the topic of the next chapter.

## **2.5 Friendship and Political Association**

We should now have a good understanding as to why and how Arendt appeals to classical friendship - what she was writing against, and what she was writing for. For her the modern predicament is stark. I have tried to sharply distinguish between the situations of loneliness and friendship in order to convey a further dimension to her political writings. When we read into her theory of friendship, one finds a key concept that shapes the direction of her theories of action, power, and freedom, because all of these are prefigured on our capacity for true intersubjective association. I believe Arendt's reflections on friendship are crucial to understanding the 'sociological' criteria (if we may call it that) required for freedom to be objectively manifest, which will become increasingly important as the argument of this thesis develops. As Chiba notes, "friendship is the basis of Arendt's vision of citizens' politics of freedom" (Chiba, 1995: 531), and we will explore this idea in greater depth shortly.

As I have hoped to have displayed throughout this chapter, Arendt carefully separates out certain forms of individuality - all of which are either anti, or a-political, and form the bedrock of her critiques of both the post-Platonic philosophical tradition and totalitarianism.

In both of these cases which are based respectively in solitude and loneliness, the individual is not a part of the world and therefore lacks a proper relation to their peers. I have focussed on Arendt's support for the human and theoretical example of Jaspers because he seems to articulate a certain way of being in public which offers an alternative to these two distinct forms of individuality. This alternative is driven by the belief that communication is the central driving force of true political community, building upon the ancient Greek understanding of the equality of citizenship in the polis. In the next chapter we will examine further the content and effect of this form of communication, how it achieves this community bond and its world-building capacity. A large part of it will be devoted, therefore, to how *rhetoric*, the art of persuasion, creates a responsible and judging collective of individuals - of friends.

## Chapter Three

### Judgment and Political Responsibility

In the past two chapters we have been concerned with connecting Arendt's concept of speech with her critique of totalitarianism: firstly, through an analysis of clichégenic speech, and secondly, through an analysis of modern loneliness. It has been argued that Arendt's thought reacts strongly against these two interconnected phenomena toward an ideal of political community prefigured on communication. In the following chapter this idea will be connected to Arendt's concept of judgment. The chapter opens with a discussion of Arendt's critique of morality with reference to her observations regarding the totalitarian phenomenon; she was interested in basing our faculty for 'telling right from wrong' and our sense of political responsibility in something other than the application of moral principles, and to do so she turned to developing a theory of judgment. Central to this is the concept of understanding, which she argues is the basis of political community. Because of this it is argued in this chapter that Arendt's account of judgment, and hence her political theory, is profoundly hermeneutic. The chapter then briefly examines what aspects of Arendt's theory of judgment can be considered hermeneutic, focusing particularly on her description of citizenship and rhetoric, which is compared with the thought of Hans Georg Gadamer. It is then briefly argued that a certain form of rhetoric is encouraged by Arendt, one fostered toward reaching and articulating understanding: *epideictic* speech, a form of pluralist rhetoric which discloses shared assumptions about the world. Following this, a distinction is drawn between personal responsibility and political responsibility, with the latter being considered the principal outcome of authentic judgment and understanding. Again, the examples of Socrates and Jaspers are promoted as enshrining the spirit of political responsibility through their

endeavours to foster accountability among their peers through rhetorical communication. This manner of speaking, it is claimed, promotes the development of a communal responsibility, the loss of which Arendt believes underpins many of the problems encountered in the modern era.

### **3.1 The Moral Lessons of Totalitarianism**

So far in this thesis we have broached the topic of totalitarianism several times given its importance in Arendtian theory and her frequent attempts to base theoretical discussions in what she would refer to as ‘factual’ experiences. If you recall from Chapter One, Arendt’s most pressing concern regarding the totalitarian was comprehending the reasons behind the lack of personal responsibility displayed at large, particularly among the defendants of the Nazi war trials such as Eichmann. Of particular interest was Arendt’s claim that totalitarian evil was the result of mass thoughtlessness, aided by what I termed clichégenic speech, the expression of ideological language. Thinking, according to Arendt, is always destructive, and hence is the natural enemy of ideology. Under conditions of cliché, when words are adopted unthinkingly, moral and political principles can be shifted and changed with ease as the individual is not concerned with the content of these principles, only that they follow something. Modern loneliness, too, has facilitated the creation of the ‘bourgeois’ jobholding functionary, an individual whose concern is primarily personal and who is particularly susceptible to thoughtless social acquiescence. Being such an individual is not, in itself, a problem; it might carry all the existential baggage well documented by the philosophers of the period, but an element of conformism is necessary to live any social life. Similarly, it would be ‘exhausting’ (as Arendt phrases it) to attempt to constantly subject everything to the scrutiny of thinking.



Problems arise, however, in those moments when, as Arendt liked to phrase it, ‘the chips are down’, instances in which unprecedented events occur which require unprecedented responses. In these moments the constitution of community is fundamentally tested, and sadly, based on the experiences of the twentieth century, Arendt has little optimism for the capacity of modern mass society to adequately respond. The obvious example that Arendt has in mind is Nazi Germany, her analysis of which led her to claim “witness to the breakdown of the whole structure of morality” (EU: 328). She argues that Germany underwent a slow moral disintegration, “hardly perceptible to the outsider” (RJ: 25), which would suddenly descend into total moral collapse with the onset of war. Specifically, Arendt is speaking about the loss of the Christian moral code as found in the Ten Commandments which had imparted upon society seemingly immutable principles such as ‘Thou shalt not kill’ and ‘Thou shalt not bear false witness’. The softening of moral principles which took place with the early ‘Gleichschaltung’ created the conditions for the imposition of a radically new moral code through the manipulation of the woes of modern man, who proved willing to sacrifice all belief, honour, and human dignity for economic relief and stability (EU: 128); and “each time society, through unemployment, frustrates the small man in his normal functioning and normal self-respect, it trains him for the last stage in which he will willingly undertake any function, even that of hangman” (ibid: 129). It took the “Satanic genius of Himmler” (ibid) to recognise how the dehumanising element of modern superfluosity could make a mockery of moral constraint.

With the Gleichschaltung, the Nazi regime fabricated a set of principles and structured a legal system around them with relative ease, suggesting to Arendt that “that everybody was fast asleep when it occurred” (T: 177). When she discusses the moral collapse under Nazism she often likes to employ the metaphor of sleep to emphasise the nature of thoughtlessness (which she also referred to through the metaphor of sleepwalking) as well as the speed at which the transition occurred, which felt like it had happened overnight. This was further

demonstrated with the 're-education' of Germany after the totalitarian event, of which denazification was in fact the exact same phenomenon happening in reverse. Society adopted the new principles and "believed in the 'new order' for no other reason than that that was the way things were" (RJ: 43). A nation that had acquainted itself with the Nazi bureaucratic system seemed unnaturally comfortable with its loss - in a period of just over ten years a country had twice seemed to metamorphose itself completely with little difficulty. Because of all this, Arendt argues that traditional ways of thinking about morality have proven to be inadequate in comprehending what occurred during the totalitarian moment. We are not dealing with criminality and responsibility as it has existed before, we are dealing with the "intrusion of criminality into the public realm" (ibid: 24). The notion that what had happened in Germany could have been halted if the Germans had been 'more moral', is a notion that Arendt thinks completely disproved; given the radically new nature of totalitarian evil, the capacity for traditional morality to constrain evil has been fundamentally eroded.

Furthermore, she observes that the individuals who claimed fealty to a moral code were in fact the most susceptible to moral transformation under conditions of cliché and loneliness because what they actually valued was the *possession* of the code, not the specific content of it. Those who, for whatever reason, chose to reject moralistic strictures were the least easily assimilated into the new structure, with non-participation acting as their silent form of rebellion. Thinking has a curious protective quality in Arendtian thought: the philosopher attempts to shield themselves from the noise of the world through solitude, and the rebel attempts to shield themselves from complicity through non-participation in those 'dark times' "when everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does" (T: 192). Arendt claims that the latter can be a political act in itself in times of crisis because of its 'freezing' effect, the 'stop-and-think' of the Socratic 'electric-ray'. The fact remains, however, that because thinking is a negative enterprise, it can only really prevent the individual from following an action. It stops the individual from making choices which they would not be

comfortable with, though it cannot prescribe what to do. When thinking becomes political it always adopts the form of restraint, either in the manner of stopping an individual from being an actor or participant through introspection, or in the manner of slowing or stopping others from pursuing an act through thoughtful conversation; thinking “does not create values; it will not find out, once and for all, what ‘the good’ is” (ibid: 192).

At certain points Arendt proclaims that traditional morality is now meaningless in the face of banal evil and its “crimes which the Ten Commandments did not foresee” (EU: 242). We know from chapter one that Arendt believes morality to be the side-effect of the broader activity of thinking because it creates conscience, with Arendt describing the activity of thinking as a kind of internal conversation between ‘me and myself’, of which conscience is a by-product as the individual holds themselves accountable, and no individual wants to harbour internal conflict between these two entities. Hence, morality exists in close proximity to philosophy due to the contemplative nature of conscience, and she argues that this is the very foundation of personal and moral responsibility. It is no surprise, then, that in the age of thoughtless mass society a bureaucratic system built on the structural exemption of responsibility would develop. The constraining nature of widely-held moral principles held no real power over the action of individuals; and in fact, moral principles had in their own way exacerbated the problem by normalising their possession. True morality requires thought, and it would be wrong to think that mere obedience to societal norms constitutes a moral choice. In an age characterised by thoughtlessness, morality is by no means a protection against evil because the very basis of all authentic moral decision-making has been eroded. Traditional morality designates that the evildoer intends to do wrong, and as she wrote of Eichmann, he “*never realized what he was doing*” (EJ: 287).

There is a further reason why Arendt considers traditional morality to be inadequate, which is related to the above point. Morality always concerns the “individual qua individual”

(T: 95) because the fundamental moral question is ‘what ought I to do?’, prefigured by the implication as to “whether I shall be able to live with myself in peace when the time has come to come to think about my deeds and words” (ibid: 191). And as we know from the previous chapter, such individualistic considerations are deemed non-political to Arendt because they concern the individual in a solitudinous private rather than public sense. The personal experience of conscience and guilt is not something which is shared between individuals, it may act as a protection against thoughtless action, though it does nothing for the creation of political community through the fostering of friendship and mutual understanding. The mental activity which performs this political role is judgment, the faculty of the mind in which we come to a shared understanding of worldly phenomenon “without being able to fall back upon the application of generally accepted rules” (RJ: 37). Such a faculty is clearly hugely important for Arendt if she wishes to provide an alternative form of politics from totalitarianism and its ideological clichégenics, as well as being an attempt to provide an alternative to the philosophical tendency toward the supersedure of morality over politics; most of Arendt’s texts which touch upon the faculty of judgment tend to be instigated with reference to the predicament of being an individual in a mass society dominated by clichégenic speech; as she phrases it: “how can I tell right from wrong, if the majority or my whole environment has prejudged the issue? *Who am I to judge?*” (ibid: 18). Judgment, which Arendt describes as our capacity to ‘tell right from wrong’ and ‘beautiful from ugly’, is brought about by the destructive element of the thinking activity; she refers to the activity of thinking as a kind of ‘liberation’ in the sense that it is the foundation for individuality against automation, though this individuality requires judgment to be made manifest (T: 193). Whereas thinking is dependent upon the individual and is by nature frustrated by the presence of others, judgment can only come about through the presence of others through the activity of authentic communication. Because judgment is communicative it can only concern shared phenomena and how these phenomena appear to us, and it therefore seems consistent that

her reflections on judgment would focus upon the aesthetic with reference to Kant's third critique, the *Critique of Judgment*. As she writes, Kantian judgment's "point of departure is the World and the senses and capabilities which made men (in the plural) fit to be inhabitants of it" (as cited by Beiner, 1992: 141). It is the question of how we can arrive at standards of action which retain a sense of worldliness and human interpretation rather than ideological consistency or philosophical introspection which is paramount to her political theory. It is important to recognise that the form of communication required for judgment is the kind of rhetorical conversation that occurs between friends, but before we broach the topic of rhetoric it is important to examine what judgment actually is, and what its requirements are. After we have done this, I suggest that Arendt paves the way toward a new form of responsibility, moving focus from personal morality to the sphere in which political activity is situated.

### **3.2 Judgment as Political Understanding**

It is very clear from the prior chapters of this thesis that Arendt identifies a patent crisis of judgment in the modern age, which the totalitarian phenomenon makes manifest in various ways. In order to illuminate this mental faculty, Arendt turns to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. We will leave aside questions as to whether Arendt supplies an accurate reading of Kant. The *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* - Arendt's most complete reflections on judgment that we have available to us, proceed from the identification of two basic interpretative premises: Kant's method of philosophical *critique*, and his belief in the inherent *sociability* of man. These lectures are founded upon the attempt to link these two aspects together, through judgment, into a political philosophy. The Age of Enlightenment, for Kant, was the Age of Criticism. As he famously remarked: "Our age is, in especial degree, the age of criticism, and to such criticism

everything must submit." (as cited by Arendt, K: 32). The Enlightenment, understood as Humanity's emergence from immaturity, extols the motto *Sapere aude*: dare to know. Thus, the Enlightenment revolves around a 'negative spirit of criticism' resulting in "liberation from prejudices, from authorities, a purifying event" (ibid: 31). Kantian philosophical critique, developed conspicuously in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, seeks to discover the 'sources and limits' of reason, and therefore scatter the doctrinaire philosophies which constrain the mind's capacity for self-enlightenment. Through promoting within philosophy the method of critique, "he had actually *dismantled* the whole machinery that had lasted, though often under attack, for many centuries, deep into the modern age" (ibid: 34). Therefore, Kant's critical method was acutely political; "the result of such criticism is *Selbstdenken*, to 'use your own mind'" (ibid:32), and therefore, "critical thought is in principle anti-authoritarian" (ibid: 38). The parallels with Arendt's analysis of Socratic speech, which we examined in depth in chapter one, is very strong; she comments of Kant that,

to think critically, to blaze the trail of thought through prejudices, through unexamined opinions and beliefs, is an old concern of philosophy, which we may date, insofar as it is a conscious enterprise, to the Socratic midwifery in Athens. Kant was not unaware of this connection. He said explicitly that he wished to proceed 'in Socratic fashion' and to silence all objectors 'by the clearest proof of [their] ignorance' (ibid: 36)

Opposing metaphysical dogmatism and its converse, scepticism, Kant walked his thought along a critical pathway which demanded that we "succumb to neither" (ibid: 32), and simultaneously "analyse what we can know *and* what we cannot" (ibid: 33). This is the critical spirit of Kantian and Socratic philosophy that Arendt wishes to preserve, motivated in part by her observations of modern clichégenic language.

Arendt continues by linking critique with sociability through a discussion of Kant's understanding of political freedom, which at all times is construed as 'to make public use of one's reason'. It is through this principle of publicity (which presupposes human sociability) that Kantian critique garners further political merit. Arendt quotes him:

how much and how correctly would we think if we did not think in community with others to whom we communicate our thoughts and who communicate theirs to us!

Hence, we may safely state that the external power which deprives man of the freedom to communicate his thoughts *publicly* also takes away his freedom to *think* (as cited by Arendt, *ibid*: 41)

This, as Arendt notes, contrasts with Spinoza's understanding of political freedom as *libertas philosophandi*: the freedom to philosophise - a progeny of Platonic anti-politics. For Kant, the freedom to think (and, therefore, philosophise) depends on the "freedom to speak and to publish" (*ibid*: 39), for "'without the test of free and open examination,' no thinking and no opinion-formation are possible. Reason is not made 'to isolate itself but to get into community with others'" (*ibid*: 40). Our capacity for thought is intrinsically tied with language (see chapter one), and insofar as we can publically communicate, we can understand and examine these thoughts, we can critique. Thinking, as we are aware from our discussion in chapter two, is by nature solitudinous. "Yet," Arendt asserts,

unless you can somehow communicate and expose to the test of others, either orally or in writing, whatever you may have found out when you were alone, this faculty exerted in solitude will disappear. In the words of Jaspers, truth is what I can communicate...What it must have, what Kant demanded in the *Critique of Judgment* of judgments of taste, is 'general communicability.' 'For it is a natural vocation of mankind to communicate and speak one's mind, especially in all matters concerning man as such.' (*ibid*: 40)

From this, we can gather a strong sense of how this thesis has laid out the foundations for a proper investigation into judgment: from thought and language, to sociability (or friendship), and now to judgment with its basis in 'general communicability'.

For Arendt, and following Kant, the judgment of objects is dependent on two faculties: imagination and common sense (the *sensus communis*). Imagination, "the faculty of having present what is absent" (ibid: 66) *re*-presents through representation the object to the 'eyes of the mind' after the original sensory experience has passed. The object concerned transfers from the 'outer senses' through imagination to the 'inner senses'. What is important is the distance which imagination brings between the originary experience and the imagined representation that we remember (memory, as well, depends on the *re*-presentation of imagination):

one now has, by means of representation, established the proper distance, the remoteness or uninvolvedness or disinterestedness, that is requisite for approbation and disapprobation, for evaluating something at its proper worth. By removing the object, one has established the conditions for impartiality (ibid: 67)

Whilst it may be tempting to bracket imagination as a mental faculty that operates solely alongside judgment, it is in fact more closely tied to the thinking activity; imagination 'de-senses' objects and transforms them into 'thought-objects' such as the concept or idea. It is the imaginative activity, therefore, which enables the move from thought into judgment, and is why the faculty of judgment is dependent upon the faculty of thought. Imagination, through the process of de-sensing an object into a mental representation, prepares the object for 'the operation of reflection', which "is the actual activity of judging something" (ibid: 68). In chapter two we discussed Arendt's critique of modern intimacy, being comfortable around only those who we have a close emotional bond, and the distance formed through proper judgment is the way in which the positivity of intimacy is further challenged within her



philosophy; intimacy means that the impartiality required for judgment, the removal of the object away from the realm of subjectivity, is blocked.

Before we attempt to analyse what Arendt means by the term 'reflection', we must first examine her use of the term 'taste', which appears throughout her Kant lectures. Taste is based upon the initial experience of a particular sensation, it is "immediate, unmediated by any thought or reflection" (ibid: 66) and the "it-pleases-or-displeases-me is immediate and overwhelming" (ibid: 64). 'Discriminatory by nature', it says 'I like this' or 'I don't like this'. Therefore, taste is characterised by its *choosing* - we say that we either have a taste for something or we don't. We may have a taste, say, for oysters, whereas plenty of others do not. In this sense, taste alone deals with a strictly individual response to something, and our taste amounts to a personal idiosyncrasy. It is the prospect of overcoming the intrinsic subjectivity of taste that interests Arendt so much: "No argument can persuade me to like oysters if I do not like them. In other words, the disturbing thing about matters of taste is that they are not communicable" (ibid: 66). This point becomes particularly salient in the context of our aesthetic judgments concerning the beautiful, in which we express our taste for an object of beauty. Kant, Arendt asserts:

was highly conscious of the public quality of beauty; and it was because of their public relevance that he insisted, in opposition to the commonplace adage, that taste judgments are open to discussion because 'we hope the same pleasure is shared by others,' that taste can be subject to dispute, because it 'expects agreement from everyone else.' (BPF: 218)

The key phrase here is 'being subject to dispute'. If I declare that 'writing a thesis is the greatest joy', I must be able to communicate why I believe it to be so, rather than leaving it there. Arendt is not content to consider our faculty of judgment limited to the subjective mire of idiosyncratic choices - if that were the case, our tastes would not be subject to dispute at

all. And it is our capacity for reflection, brought about by the imagination, which enables us to overcome the subjectivity of taste; "Private conditions condition us; imagination and reflection enable us to *liberate* ourselves from them and to attain that relative impartiality that is the specific virtue of judgment" (K: 73).

Reflection takes matters of taste and enables us to take a further step away from the object: we can now subject our taste to critical 'approbation or disapprobation'. Kant supplies an example: "The joy of a needy but well-meaning man at becoming the heir of an affectionate but penurious father" (as cited by Arendt, *ibid*: 69). The man in question finds satisfaction in the situation due to the alleviation of the monetary burden which the father placed on him. This pleasure, in hindsight though, may displease him: we have the immediate 'taste' - the pleasure at the father's death - and then, after reflection, the subsequent disapproval at the earlier reaction. Or, to use another example, a widow might later approve of the initial displeasure she felt in her partner's death. In other words, "one can approve or disapprove of the very fact of *pleasing* [or *displeasing*]" (*ibid*: 69). What has happened here is judgment. If, in an ideal situation, we approve of taking pleasure in something (the writing of a thesis, perhaps):

at the time...you may be vaguely aware that you are happy doing it, but only later, in reflecting on it, when you are no longer busy doing whatever you are doing, will you be able to have this additional 'pleasure': of approving it. In this additional pleasure it is no longer the object that pleases but *that* we judge it to be pleasing (*ibid*: 69)

The imagination, which brings about a certain uninvolved 'remoteness' through the de-sensing the object of one's pleasure and displeasure into a representation, allows to us judge. Arendt then asks the question: what is the measure for our choices between approval or disapproval (approbation and disapprobation)? In asking this question, Arendt is attempting to comprehend the observations made earlier: how can we judge right from wrong? Arendt

answers as such: the medium is communicability (language), and the standard is found in the *sensus communis* - the community sense - "an extra sense - like an extra mental capability- that fits us into a community" (ibid: 70). The *sensus communis* is an 'enlarged mentality' which unchains the human mind from its subjective shackles and, as she eloquently phrases it, trains the imagination to go visiting. "Judgment", she continues,

always reflects upon others and their taste, takes their possible judgments into account. This is necessary because I am human and cannot live outside the company of men. I judge as a member of this community and not as a member of a supersensible world (ibid: 67)

Judgment presupposes the presence, and hence, perspectives of others, and because of this it fits quite neatly into Arendt's well known desire to reconcile politics with pluralism, "the fact that men, not Man, live on and inhabit the world" (HC: 7). She does not mince her words when dealing with the significance of the *sensus communis*: "it is the very humanity of man that is manifest in this sense...[it] is the specifically human sense because communication, i.e., speech, depends on it" (K: 70). Through the medium of language, which enables us to hold the same objects in our mind's eye, we can communicate our very personal perspectives to another, and therefore claim a validity beyond ourselves, that is, towards something of an intersubjective position. One never completely leaves the subjectivity of one's position, but it enables the creation of an 'objective', 'real' world to open up between individuals, a world which, to borrow the language of the previous chapter, is synonymous with communal friendship.

We have spoken throughout this thesis about Arendt's preoccupation with the relationship between politics and speech, and her account of judgment is obviously inseparable from such considerations. Her reasons for the political interpretation of Kant's understanding of aesthetic judgment now become apparent. Similarly, it puts into context her

assertion in *The Human Condition* that politics operates within a space of appearance - that is, a worldly space in which objects become open to our judgment. It was noted in the first chapter of this thesis that Arendt took aim at clichégenic speech, and Arendtian judgment can imbue this claim further. Clichégenic speech is dangerous because it limits the plurality of perspectives necessary for judgment to take place, and in such instances the world is not authentically objectified as something open to question or debate. In spatial language it is as though everyone were observing an object while occupying the same position, rather than being separate individuals observing the phenomenon from distinct positions. Judgment is based on our capacity for mental transformation as found in the 'enlarged mentality' which allows the bridging of the chasm between individuals who occupy a unique position around the world as if it were a table. This should also make clearer as to why Arendt made such striking comments regarding the applicability of morality in the political sphere. Morality, as Arendt alleges, strictly concerns the self and is not other-regarding, and as such is not part of the world of judgments. Furthermore, as morality is necessarily introspective, it could never adopt the 'disinterested' stance required in judgments:

Taste judges the world in its appearance and in its worldliness; its interest in the world is purely 'disinterested,' and that means that neither the life interests of the individual nor the moral interests of the self are involved here. For judgments of taste, the world is the primary thing, not man, neither man's life nor his self (BPF: 219)

The requirement of disinterestness, which should never be mistaken for callousness, should be apparent as something which goes against the modern trend toward intimacy. Distance between individuals is the necessary component of the activity of critique as there are no external forces holding sway over your evaluation.

A further dimension to this discussion is found in the essay 'Understanding and Politics'. In it Arendt draws parallels between the faculty of judgment and our faculty of

understanding; "understanding [is] so closely related to and inter-related with judging" (EU: 313). We were speaking earlier of a crisis of judgment, and Arendt certainly also construes this as a crisis of understanding. In the introduction to this thesis we explored the idea that a term always emerges as a response to some kind of phenomenon which we share an experience of. This terminological formation highlights what it means to understand; understanding between individuals occurs not because you can directly experience what the other individual experiences, but because one shares an understanding of the language. Therefore, the act of reaching an understanding about a subject/object (totalitarianism, to use the example given before) can only come about through the medium of language. If we say that two people or a group are 'talking past each other', we mean that they have failed to understand each other because they have failed to each grasp the object of their discussion which exists between them. Understanding, just like judgment, is prefigured on what is communicable between persons. Again, imagination is at the core of the notion of understanding:

Imagination alone enables us to see things in their proper perspective, to be strong enough to put that which is too close at a certain distance so that we can see and understand it without bias and prejudice, to be generous enough to bridge abysses of remoteness until we can see and understand everything that is too far away from us as though it were our own affair. This distancing of some things and bridging the abysses to others is part of the dialogue of understanding, for whose purposes direct experience establishes too close a contact and mere knowledge erects artificial barriers (ibid: 323)

Note that understanding is referred to as a 'dialogue', as something which appears like a dialogue between imaginations. She continues,

Without this kind of imagination, which actually is understanding, we would never be able to take our bearings in the world. It is the only inner compass we have. We are contemporaries only so far as our understanding reaches (ibid)

The widespread inability to understand each other, therefore, results in feelings of alienation and loneliness. Clichégenic speech, too, fails as a substitute because it is not pluralistic, but based off a singular standpoint. Without understanding, we are separated by an unbridgeable divide, because the objects of our subjective consciousness lack any communal meaning, and the result of true understanding is the generation of meaning. It helps to orientate us in a world which would otherwise seem alien, and ultimately, unintelligible. The tendency within existential philosophy to focus on the apparent absurdity of the modern age is just another way of describing the lack of understanding in the modern age. As she would state with a particularly hermeneutic inflection, understanding is "an unending activity by which...we come to terms with, reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world" (as cited by Beiner, 1992: 94). We shall now examine this hermeneutic dimension of her political theory with reference to hermeneutics and seek commonality between her thought and this philosophical movement. In particular we will focus upon the similarities between their attempts to reclaim the notion of *rhetoric* from its strategic associations toward a community/world-building concept.

### **3.3 Hermeneutics and the Binding Power of Rhetoric**

Such a strong emphasis upon understanding as the foundation of friendship and political community inevitably means that Arendt's thought verges closely toward the discipline of hermeneutics, the study of interpretation. On the face of it, hermeneutics definitely does not

bear the traditional hallmarks of political theory, and strictly speaking it is not a political discipline. However, the implications of hermeneutic theory are of increasing interest to political theorists, especially since Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action and his conversations with Hans Georg Gadamer over the politics of language and critique (see Mendelson, 1979). If hermeneutics is characterised as the attempt to outline the conditions of interpretive understanding, then Arendt would certainly fit within its bracket - endorsing a radically politicised version of it, which Habermas in fact credits as the source of his communicative turn (see Habermas, 1980). We have already explored in this thesis' introduction how Arendt's approach to the study of political phenomena shares similarities with hermeneutics, placing emphasis upon preliminary judgment and prejudice. Not far removed from this philosophical stance is a further attempt, derived from her account of ancient Greek political culture, to outline how the political sphere is the primary space of human understanding and the necessary ground of our intersubjective experience. Arendt's intention is to relay how the notion of the political is inseparable from the notion of hermeneutic considerations - i.e. from the notion of understanding. For this reason, I believe that Arendt can be thought of as a *political hermeneuticist*. Where Arendt perhaps differs from other hermeneutic thinkers, perhaps, is that her argument is derived from political discussion rather than artistic as with Gadamer (see Gadamer, 2012) or epistemological such as with Rorty (see Rorty, 1979). This is apparent in her repeated attempts to unite understanding with the political responsibility that comes with citizenship which we will consider shortly.

We must be wary, however, of throwing Arendt into a philosophical conversation which she had no desire to partake in. The philosophical language of hermeneutics is not something which she wished her political theory to completely submit to. Yet, despite this, there is an unmistakable hermeneutic sensitivity to Arendt's writings which is too often overlooked in favour of the existential; certainly, the 'existential' elements of her thought are over-emphasised in comparison to her hermeneutics, often with reference to the influence of

Heidegger. But as Scott and Stark correctly note of her method: "In operational terms, the meaning of radicalism Arendt inherited from Husserl, Jaspers, and Heidegger was more of a hermeneutic than an *Existenz*, dedicated to removing textual obstacles to 'interpretation'" (Scott and Stark, 1996: 178). Of course, distinguishing hermeneutic from existential statements is no easy task, if not impossible at times. However, I still feel that the hermeneutic needs to given interpretive priority due to its focus upon the conditions of understanding rather than the conditions of authentic Self. There is one potential inconsistency in this claim which is found in the figure of Jaspers (a founder of existentialism), though this problem is lessened by the fact that Arendt considered him to be the exception rather than the norm.

Marieke Borren displays a rare awareness of the hermeneutic qualities found in Arendtian judgment, stating that "the neglect of Arendt's hermeneutic-phenomenological background has caused much confusion and misunderstanding" (Borren, 2013: 228). Borren is more interested in the implications of the hermeneutic reading of Arendt relating to transcendentalism and empiricism, rather than politics; however, certain statements are important. In particular, the following claim fits our present analysis: "the kind of validity that common sense judgments achieve is intersubjectivity, or what could be called situated impartiality, or representativeness" (ibid: 244). What is at stake in Borren's analysis is whether Arendtian judgment is open to the criticism of what this thesis has termed 'cliché', being dependent upon "the arbitrary rules of conduct prevailing in a particular community at a particular time" (ibid), as well as the polar opposite – the belief judgment has a very particular universal content. In response, Borren successfully argues that judgment is "something which emerges in the space between a plurality of actors and spectators, in our perceptual interaction with the common world, and which maintains the common world at the same time" (ibid: 248). We shall now examine how this intersubjective understanding relates to hermeneutics.



The cornerstone of Arendtian hermeneutics is found in rhetorical discourse. There is a strong similarity here with the writings of Gadamer, who argues that rhetoric:

from the oldest tradition has been the only advocate of a claim to truth that defends the probable, the *eikos* (verisimilar), and that which is convincing to the ordinary reason against the claim of science to accept as true only what can be demonstrated and tested! Convincing and persuading, without being able to prove- these are obviously as much the aim and measure of understanding and interpretation as they are the aim and measure of the art of oration and persuasion (Gadamer, 1997: 318)

Through advancing rhetoric, Gadamer draws a distinction between the truth disclosed in conversation and scientific knowledge. The conversational/rhetorical model that Gadamer proposes, derived from the Socratic dialectic, is based on the conviction "that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion" (2012: 361). This rhetorical interplay, where each individual submits their opinion to the questioning of the other, operates in a context within which the perlocutionary force of persuasion is the very foundation of the activity. Rhetorical intercourse is directed toward opinions, recognising the malleability of them, and shaping them into new forms. The conversational model is therefore fundamentally opposed to dogmatism. It does not intend toward conclusive proof but toward the maieutic quality of Socratic midwifery, what Arendt describes as giving birth "to what they themselves thought anyhow, to find the truth in their *doxa*" (PAP: 434). Every individual has their "own opening to the world" (ibid: 434), their opinion. The method of questioning, therefore, admits to the fundamental difference between individuals and their opinions and presupposes plurality of perspective. Despite this, our opinions are not fully formed outside of dialogue, as Arendt writes: "just as nobody can know beforehand the other's *doxa*, so nobody can know by himself and without further effort the inherent truth of his own opinion. Socrates wanted to bring out this truth that everyone

potentially possesses" (ibid: 434). This process of conversational questioning reveals opinion "in its own truthfulness", and Socrates sought to "make citizens more truthful" (PAP: 434). Thus for Socrates, Arendt claims, "maieutic was a political activity, a give and take, fundamentally on a basis of strict equality" (ibid: 434), an equality which comes to form the basis of *isēgoria* and friendship.

She describes this dialogue as something which arises between friends; and as we know, friendship "to a large extent, indeed, consists of this kind of talking about something that the friends have in common. By talking about what is between them, it becomes ever more common to them" (ibid: 435). Arendt categorically states that this was an imperative in such an agonistic political culture as ancient Greece, where the quest for glory could often be antagonistic in nature. What this friendly, rhetorical conversation achieves is what Gadamer calls the "coming-into-language of the thing itself" (2012: 371) where we, as speakers, recognise the reality, the objectivity, of the shared phenomenon - what the Greeks called the 'unity of an aspect'. As Gadamer states:

[In conversation] something is placed in the centre, as the Greeks say, which the partners in dialogue both share, and concerning which they can exchange ideas with one another...in a successful conversation they both come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community. To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were (ibid: 371)

Politics, as Arendt frequently asserts, takes place in and belongs to a 'space of appearance'. It is constituted and concerned with objects as they appear to us. She refers to this as the 'thing-character of the world', and the activity of 'placing something in the centre' is a task of rendering these things intelligible, to give them worldly tangibility and opening them up as

objects of judgment. A phenomenon always appears to us in uniqueness, but rhetorical conversation creates a bond of mutual agreement about its properties. Through speaking about phenomena the world is manifest; for "to live together in a world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time" (HC: 52). Through rhetorical conversation the bonds between subjective individuals are strengthened as is the objectivity and reality of the world they inhabit: "the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others, by its appearing to all...and whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream, intimately and exclusively our own but without reality" (ibid: 199). The risk of the world's loss, which amounts to the loss of common sense is found in "a noticeable increase in superstition and gullibility" (ibid: 209). Under conditions of alienation, which she considers the condition of modernity and the foundation upon which the totalitarian empires were built, no friendship can exist. To be equal is to exist in a space in which the inequality of rulership has been exorcised, as to understand another individual can only be realised in equivalent communion. Importantly, Arendt attributes the *bond of understanding with the bond of citizenship*.

Furthermore, in the political space of conversational friendship, the individual emerges in "his unique distinctness, appears and confirms himself in speech and action" (ibid: 207). This individual - the 'who' which she often references - can only materialise through communication. As she would say of Jaspers and of the Kantian judge: they engage in *humanitas* (see chapter two), acquiring the "very height of humanness because it was valid without being objective" (MDT: 73). Those who disclose their persona, aid the creation of a worldly space and become 'citizens of the world', performing functions similar to Socrates over two thousand years ago. This is not based on a 'will to disclosure', a false projection of the self, but rather a commitment to publicity, and hence, the political sphere. The willingness to enter the public sphere and engage communicatively through judgment and understanding

is to be true political citizen as Arendt would describe it; for understanding “makes it bearable for us to live with other people, strangers forever, in the same world, and makes it possible for them to bear with us” (EU: 322). As loneliness facilitated the desire for intimate uniformity, friendship rejoices in the positivity of prejudice that is embodied in the faculty of judgment. The idea is not to dissolve the space between us, but to be strengthened and connected through our very difference. She would phrase her stance beautifully in the following quotation:

The political element in friendship is that in the truthful dialogue each of the friends can understand the truth inherent in the other's opinion. More than his friend as a person, one friend understands how and in what specific articulateness the common world appears to the other, who as a person is forever unequal or different. This kind of understanding- seeing the world (as we rather tritely say today) from the other fellow's point of view- is the political kind of insight par excellence...If such an understanding- and action inspired by it- were to take place...then the prerequisite would be for each citizen to be articulate enough to show his opinion in its truthfulness and therefore to understand his fellow citizens (PAP: 436-437)

As her notions of common sense and worldliness suggest, individual judgment must be based on shared assumptions, and how these assumptions come to be shared is of great interest to us.

The kind of speech that fits with this ideal of communicative community is the form of rhetoric often described, particularly by Chaim Perelman (following Aristotle), as *epideictic* (see Perelman, 1979). This account of rhetoric is considered a kind of display which articulates shared judgments about the world to the audience, resulting in the “forming [of] a community of minds” (Perelman, 1979: 7). Kenneth Burke refers to this rhetoric as ‘identification’, “the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings” (1950: 43). The

performance of the orator is not a form of ornamental exhibitionism whereby the individual attempts to display skill. Instead, it is motivated by the desire to articulate the principles of a community so that these principles may be recognised as something shared, contested, or as an inspiration for further action. The disclosure of the individual through this form of rhetoric is borne from love of community and the potential political power latent within all communities of peoples. Perelman describes the political element of rhetoric in the following manner:

the goal of the orator in the epideictic discourse is to contribute to the enhancement of values, to create a spiritual communion around common values. This holds true whether they are abstract values such as liberty or justice, or concrete values, such as Athens or soldiers fallen in combat (Perelman, 1984: 131)

The greatest example of this kind of speech for both Arendt as well as Perelman is Pericles' funeral oratory as recounted in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Arendt writes that his exhortation of the "innermost convictions of the people of Athens" (HC: 205) was powerful enough to "inspire men to dare the extraordinary" (ibid: 206), and therefore his use of epideictic rhetoric became a form of political action without succumbing to the deceptive strategies that we associate with the rhetoric of today. Ultimately, the success of this kind of rhetoric is dependent upon the mutual understanding of the spectators - whether they share a common world which connects to the rhetorical appeals. Its strength lay in its capacity to inspire action among the audience with recourse to the shared principles of the political community, and as we shall examine in the next two chapters this quality of rhetoric is of the utmost importance for Arendt's account of freedom.

The risk with emphasising this form of speech is to blur the distinction between cliché and rhetoric, as the articulation of common ideals might be understood to bear similarity to modern clichégenic speech. The difference for Arendt relates to the ground upon which the

rhetorical conversation takes place, which in the classical context took place in a sphere comprised of pluralistic common sense and in the modern context takes place in a sphere without meaning and in which ideologies provide non-pluralist fictions. Furthermore, a rhetoric rooted in a common world makes judgment possible whilst not determining the outcome of the judgment itself. Under clichégenic conditions the opposite is the case: speech determines the perspective that the listener will adopt. One is open to contestation, whereas the other is not. Because epideictic rhetoric centres on the objects that we have in common and that we understand, it facilitates the growth of a kind of responsibility that differs from the personal responsibility that we recognise in our moral tradition. We shall now explore this notion of political responsibility, again with reference to the human examples of Socrates and Jaspers which we should now be well acquainted.

### **3.4 Responsibility for the World**

As was discussed earlier, Arendt was concerned by the destruction of personal responsibility in totalitarian bureaucracy, the peculiar form of government described as the 'rule of nobody'. Those who adopted a role within the totalitarian machine rarely accepted their responsibility, pointing up the bureaucratic ladder to the individual who gave them the orders, and such a ladder ultimately leads to the individual at the top. However, it is another one of those particular features of totalitarianism that no truly totalitarian leader would accept responsibility because they consider themselves to be merely instigators of a natural historical process (we will speak about this more in the following chapter). In other words, the leader's actions follow the strict logic of ideology. What we are left with is an entire form of government, from top to bottom, which is comprised of individuals unwilling to recognise their role as something consciously chosen. And for reasons discussed above, Arendt

dismissed the idea that a retrenchment behind moral principles was the answer to this modern phenomenon of wilful human mechanisation, since the following of a moral principle does not necessarily mean that the principle was chosen by a thinking individual.

Being responsible for oneself is obviously important and can have a protective quality in moments of crisis, however, it is clear that Arendt wants to move beyond its subjective limitations. "In the center of moral considerations stands the self; in the centre of political considerations of conduct stands the world" (RJ: 153), and with this in mind I would now like to emphasise a distinction that Arendt makes between personal and political responsibility, correspondent with a distinction between responsibility to the self and to the world. This distinction, I would like to argue, is crucial to understanding the kind of community that judgment achieves. However, we must recognise that personal responsibility is *the* necessary component of political responsibility; as she would state of Socrates, what he "was driving at (and what Aristotle's theory of friendship explains more fully) is that living together with others begins with living together with oneself" (PAP: 439). In other words, political responsibility is unlocked by personal responsibility. Before we look at this connection I think that we should examine the distinction itself first, which is best understood with reference to the idea of 'collective responsibility', which Arendt spoke about within the context of 'German guilt'.

The post-war proclamations in Germany of 'we are all guilty' concerned Arendt. What she believed was that the (well-meaning) language of shared guilt is actually a misunderstanding: one cannot feel guilt for something that one has not done, but one can feel responsibility. Guilt is a phenomenon of conscience, and thus the phrase 'we are all guilty' is actually "a declaration of solidarity with the wrongdoers" (RJ: 148). There is, however, "such a thing as responsibility for things one has not done" (ibid: 147), as found in collective, or political responsibility. This exists so long as we exist as members of a collective "which no

voluntary act of mine can dissolve" (ibid: 149), and "we can escape this political and strictly collective responsibility only by leaving the community" (ibid: 150), which is nigh on impossible. Political responsibility is defined as responsibility for the actions of one's peers, though this definitely does not imply guilt - one is a focus upon your own actions, and the other is a focus upon your community's actions. As actions and responsibility are always judged with hindsight, what we are talking about is the manner in which our collective history affects us: "we are always held responsible for the sins of our fathers as we reap the rewards of their merits; but we are of course not guilty of their misdeeds, either morally or legally, nor can we ascribe their deeds to our own merits" (ibid: 150). The negative side of this historical responsibility is collective shame, and the positive is found in the authority of tradition. The two examples of this that Arendt most frequently draws upon are Germany and America, respectively. Authority is an important concept here, though we will have to abstain from investigating it until the next chapter.

How can the individual practise worldly responsibility? The answer lies in the idea of public disclosure and judgment. Collective responsibility is of a different nature, it stems from the individual's entrance into the public sphere through word and deed, in other words, making their words and deeds an object of shared judgment. In the past chapter we introduced the idea that Jaspers represents for Arendt the true spirit of civic friendship in polar opposition to totalitarian loneliness, and now we must link it with the present discussion regarding judgment.

*Selbstdenken*, critical thought, is not something which is simply applied to external ideas and concepts - it must be internalised as well, because "it is precisely by applying critical standards to one's own thought that one learns the art of critical thought" (K: 42). The internal questioning of one's own convictions characteristic of *Selbstdenken* and the basis of critical thought,



presupposes that everyone is willing and able to render an account of what he thinks and says...*Logon didonai*, 'to give an account'- not to prove, but to be able to say how one came to an opinion and for what reasons one formed it...The term is itself political in origin: to render accounts is what Athenian citizens asked of their politicians, not only in money matters but in matters of politics. They could be held responsible (ibid: 41)

Arendt even goes so far to claim that Greek philosophy was the result of this political culture which demanded the "holding oneself and everyone else responsible and answerable for what he thought and taught" (ibid: 41). In turn, we can say that the pre-Platonic philosophy (exemplified by the Sophists and Socrates) we attribute to Classical Greece also fed back into the democratic and rhetorical qualities we associate with the political culture of the Greek polis. But it is not enough to state that intersubjective responsibility consists simply in being able to 'give an account' of one's opinions and actions, and here, judgment comes to the fore. Arendt's concept of judgment always lingers in the background as the example of Greek political culture is held up; with their

incessant talk the Greeks discovered that the world we have in common is usually regarded from an infinite number of different standpoints, to which correspond the most diverse points of view. In a sheer inexhaustible flow of arguments, as the Sophists presented them to the citizenry of Athens, the Greek learned to exchange his own viewpoint, his own 'opinion'- the way the world appeared and opened up to him *dokei moi* [sic], 'it appears to me,' from which comes *doxa* [sic], or 'opinion'- with those of his fellow citizens. Greeks learned to understand- not to understand one another as individual persons, but to look upon the same world from one another's standpoint, to see the same in very different and frequently opposing aspects (BPF: 51)

We have not, however, really touched upon how this 'incessant talk' resultant in the judging 'enlarged mentality' creates the intersubjective aspect of being truly responsible. This can only occur if we recognise the importance Arendt bestows upon *disclosure*. To understand what intersubjective responsibility means we need to commence from where the previous chapter finished - from her account of the reasons why she held such deep respect for Karl Jaspers, "the only disciple Kant ever had" (K: 7). If we recall, it was argued that Arendt builds her notion of citizenship upon the ancient Greek understanding of 'friendship' which is 'sober and cool' rather than intimate. This kind of friendship, the 'spirit of togetherness', manifests itself as a 'readiness to share the world with other men'. The spirit of togetherness, brought about through the amazing qualities of language, has the dual function of constituting true individualism (*humanitas*) and true community. What interested Arendt so much about Jaspers was his consistent emphasis and comfort in appearing in public, in disclosing himself.

Disclosure always operates in a space of appearance, and it is within this space of appearance that judgment operates. But Jaspers did not enter the public realm, give himself over to the public, for reasons that we might call selfish or shallow (for example, for political influence or fame). He did not project an 'image' of himself, instead, he gave himself over to the spotlight of public scrutiny, claiming not to be 'representing anything but his own existence'. Through doing so, he *revealed* himself as an individual; this revealing can only occur in public, the "revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them- that is, in sheer togetherness. Although nobody knows whom he reveals when he discloses himself in deed or word, he must be willing to risk the disclosure" (HC: 180). Jaspers recognised the role which the public realm plays in the constitution of true individuality. Philosophically, Arendt attempts to reconcile the individual with the community through stressing their absolute mutual dependence:

Wherever people judge the things of the world that are common to them, there is more implied in their judgments than these things. By his manner of judging, the person discloses to an extent also himself, what kind of person he is, and this disclosure, which is involuntary, gains in validity to the degree that it has liberated itself from merely individual idiosyncrasies (BPF: 220)

The most basic element of this is to hold one's own ideas to account, and expect the same of those others that join within the space brought about through communication.

Socrates, as we know, tirelessly questioned people about terms. Jaspers, too, saw his function as a facilitator of communication in a similar manner. These terms become objects of judgment, communicable between us, and a shared understanding arises from this, not just of the objects themselves, but of the importance of the plural contestation of those objects. The focus has shifted away from the specific objects of judgment and onto the space in which this communication occurs between unique spectators. As Arendt would state:

Under the conditions of a common world, reality is not guaranteed primarily by the 'common nature' of all men who constitute it, but rather by the fact that, differences of position and the resulting variety of perspectives notwithstanding, everybody is always concerned with the same object. If the sameness of the object can no longer be discerned, no common nature of men, least of all the unnatural conformism of mass society, can prevent the destruction of the common world, which is usually preceded by the destruction of the many aspects in which it presents itself to human plurality (HC: 57-58)

Her attacks on modern subjectivism and the desire for brotherly fraternity (where you and I view each other as the same) point to the dilemmas faced for anyone who thinks of the public realm in the manner of Socrates, Jaspers, and Arendt. The modern public space thought of as incredibly constrictive, disallowing space between people. The reality of the public space can

only be maintained by the constant presence of a plurality of perspectives which are given to us by the simple fact that we all each occupy a unique position as a physical and mental being.

Like Socrates, Jaspers cast himself as an example of responsible citizenship. His responsibility, we can say, was both to himself and the public. He recognised how articulating his opinions and the objects in his view created the conditions for communicable judgment and understanding. Through operating within this space, he set an example of intersubjective, worldly responsibility. Responsibility shifts away from concern with the self, and to a concern with the space in which the self becomes humanly intelligible to others; if the point of reference for subjective responsibility is the individual subject, then the point of reference for intersubjective responsibility is the world. His responsibility was always to himself, but ultimately it was also to the space within which this self was articulated. It is to see value in maintaining the space between people, so that "those who are gathered around...know they see sameness in utter diversity" (HC: 57). And in these situations the individual themselves become an example: "Responsibility, in its essence: to know that one sets an example, that others will 'follow'; in this way one changes the world" (Arendt as cited by Williams, 2007: 12). Garrath Williams adopts a similar stance, stating that there exists "an integral connection between the actor's self-disclosure and the responsibility for the world which, Arendt says, 'arises out of action'" (Williams, 2015: 38). What distinguishes Williams' work from others is his awareness of the distinct political psychology behind Arendt's theory of action and its connection with the human example - our acceptance that we as individuals set examples through our acts. This setting of an example "demands recognition that one will indeed be judged by others, as an actor in one's own right. By virtue of not knowing whom one discloses, the actor is beholden to others – who, seeing the world from their distinct perspectives, may act and respond on their own accounts" (ibid: 46). The Arendtian actor is an individual for whom publicity is critical, as accepting the disclosive nature of action implies a broader worldly responsibility beyond personal considerations. Williams and I seem to be in total agreement

that for Arendt, “willing appearance before others and concern for their judgment are elementary conditions of responsibility” (ibid: 45). A further implication of this I believe can be identified in the manifestation of principles, in which the stories that we tell about public action influence the development and awareness of communal bonds through the creation and maintenance of a common language based on human examples. We will discuss this statement further in the next two chapters.

Comparing Jaspers' form of communicable philosophising with the responsibility of the statesman, Arendt argues that

Jaspers's affirmation of the public realm is unique because it comes from a philosopher and because it springs from the fundamental conviction underlying his whole activity as a philosopher: that both philosophy and politics concern everyone. This is what they have in common; this is the reason they belong in the public realm where the human person and his ability to prove himself are what count. The philosopher- in contrast to the scientist- resembles the statesman in that he must answer for his opinions, that he is held responsible. The statesman, in fact, is in the relatively fortunate position of being responsible only to his own nation, whereas Jaspers, at least in all his writings after 1933, has always written as if to answer for himself before all mankind (MDT: 74-75)

Being politically responsible is the recognition that one sets a human example through the manner in which one acts and speaks and that this example becomes part of the world. Thinking about responsibility in this manner makes the individual not only accountable to themselves (through conscience) but accountable to our peers. This is based on the knowledge that our acts and language are a part of the world and will be judged, that our speech and deeds will still exist once we are gone, that our presence in the world will survive us and continue to have an influence. Acknowledging this fact is of the utmost importance because it

shifts emphasis away from our own sense of guilt and toward our lasting impact upon the world. If there is one aspect of Arendt's thought which we can take from this discussion it is this: it is the responsibility of citizens to be participants in the unending discourse of humanity. Her analysis of totalitarian irresponsibility insists as much. We might therefore be willing to accept Rorty's argument that it is the job of hermeneutic philosophy "to keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth" (Rorty, 1979: 377). In so doing we may come to promote a form of friendship which is in tune with a responsibility which takes the form of "citizens' dispassionate and yet dedicated commitment to the welfare of the world" (Chiba, 1995: 531-532).

### **3.5 Towards Connecting Judgment and Freedom**

Just as we have analysed distinctions in the previous chapter (rhetoric and cliché, loneliness and friendship) we have introduced a new one: between personal responsibility and political responsibility. The former is a subjective experience, and hence is a non-political form of being responsible, and the latter is an intersubjective experience in which the communal bonds between citizens produce a broader responsibility which incorporates politics. I have argued in this chapter that Arendt felt that the experience of the totalitarian phenomenon further necessitated this theoretical division on the grounds that the condition of the modern age has eroded not just political responsibility but also the personal, which often has a restraining effect upon the actions of individuals. As has hopefully been conveyed, and in keeping with the emphasis upon speech through this thesis, judgment is the means through which the worldly quality of political responsibility comes into being. The validity of our judgments is created and maintained only through recourse with the common sense, the pool of observations of past actions and events. The result of this worldly reference point is

understanding, understanding between persons with reference to the objects as they appear to us in the world. For this reason, I have argued that Arendt's theory of judgment is deeply hermeneutic insofar as it is concerned with the conditions through which understanding takes place. I have emphasised the importance of her theory of rhetoric for this point, pointing to Gadamer's ideas concerning conversation and Perelman's notion of epideictic speech. It is this ideal of rhetorical speech which underpins her ideas of community and friendship, and ultimately our ability to judge authentically. Following from this, I have argued that Arendt considers political responsibility to be the result of this manner of speaking, using the examples Socrates and Jaspers to highlight this. The cornerstone of political responsibility is a recognition that it is the duty of the members of a political community to create and maintain the sphere in which judgment takes place through discourse, and that the example one sets is not just of personal, but public interest. In the next chapter we examine the topic of political principles, which for Arendt are the basis of all free activity. These principles, it is argued, are prefigured upon our judgment of past human action. These judgments come to form prejudices which we hold and which form the basis of political tradition. Our sense of political responsibility, therefore, is crucial to the proper formation of these traditions.

## Chapter Four

### Action and Principle

The following chapter draws upon Arendt's understanding of 'action', "the political activity par excellence" (HC: 9). We have so far limited the use of the concept from our inquiry as we have been attempting to investigate specific terms such as modernity and judgment. Its importance, however, should never be understated, and any text of this nature must account for it, as the majority of interpretative or critical literature rightly does. Even this thesis, which claims freedom as the central term, cannot proceed without analysis of action and recognition of its formative role in Arendt's political thought. In keeping with previous chapters, we will analyse action by recourse to a secondary term: 'principle'. It is suggested that Arendt's theory of action is incomplete without a complementary theory of principles, and this chapter seeks to connect the two via a discussion of the primary role principles play in her understanding of totalitarianism and her analysis of the French and American Revolutions. Before we can do that however, we must carefully examine what a principle actually is - as the first section attempts to do. Political principles are distinguished from what Arendt deems to be the four constituent elements of action, and it is suggested that principles are best understood as the *hermeneutic prejudices* that are necessary for judgment to take place. In section two, these principles are related to Arendt's critique of social values, and it is argued that principles offer Arendt an opportunity to theorise an alternative to them. In order to ground the terminology in something more substantial, we then relate the concept of principle to her concept of totalitarianism; Arendt's theory of totalitarianism is dependent upon her distinguishing it from despotism, of which her theory of principle is necessary to include. Building upon this observation, section four analyses the importance of her theory of principle for her analysis of



the American and French Revolutions, and in so doing the strange nature of principles is better understood. I conclude that Arendt strongly believed that principles are the necessary basis of a free politics, a topic which is built upon in chapter five.

#### **4.1 Defining Political Principle**

In the previous chapter we were discussing how Arendt attempts to provide a basis for political responsibility in the *human example*, citing Socrates and Jaspers as illustrations of this. Their quests for publicity and public disclosure facilitated judgment among spectators, creating a worldly sphere of shared understanding and meaning prefigured on plural communication. As was argued throughout, Arendt intended to provide an account of what she considered to be a specifically political form of thinking, free of the coercion of philosophical truth or ideological logic, a quality of mind whose constitution was actually strengthened by the imperfection of human opinion and which unlocked a public sense of responsibility. Under scrutiny was the application of moral principles in the modern age, which developed into the provocative argument that morality belongs outside of the sphere of politics as it is a strictly personal, not public, phenomenon. It has been suggested that this attempt to think about politics and morality in separate spheres amounts to amoralism (see Kateb, 1984). It has also been suggested that Arendt is confused on these issues because the clarification of political, as opposed to moral judgment, is itself flawed (see Lasch, 1983: xi). Being able to give an account of what a principle *is*, addressing why this is an important concept for her, as well as emphasising the various contexts in which it is applicable, is of the utmost importance in contesting these claims. I believe that the concept of principle desperately needs to be recognised as one of the key concepts at play in Arendt's thought, not

just something which is nodded towards in passing. Lucy Cane has stated something similar to this, arguing convincingly that “for Arendt, principles of action are not brought to politics from without, to regulate or constrain it. Rather, the manifestation and contestation of principles *is* politics” (Cane, 2015: 72).

The reason why 'principle' has not been granted much space in Arendtian literature is obvious: Arendt never says that much about it. Most curiously, the term is absent from her intensive engagement with and re-conceptualisation of action in *The Human Condition*. Yet when she does address it, it is apparent that the term is of great significance to her political thought. There are two notable examples of this: the final pages of her 'Introduction *into* Politics', and the chapter 'What is Freedom?' in *Between Past and Future*. Both are concerned with the topic of the freedom and meaning of political action, and the discussion of political principle is prefigured by a discussion of ends and goals and their relation to politics. In particular, she is interested in distinguishing the political from the instrumental (and hence, violent), supplying a careful distinction between four constituent elements of political action: goals, ends, meaning, and principle. “[T]he goals of politics”, she states, “are never anything more than the guidelines and directives by which we orient ourselves...[goals] set the standards by which everything that is done must be judged” (PP: 193-194). Ends, in distinction, are the material conclusions of action - the product of the act itself. Both goals and ends are independent of the act itself: one is a related idea, and the other is the physical manifestation of that idea. Meaning, however, is tied to the act as a unique phenomenon; it is possible for goals and ends to be shared by individuals and groups who exist in different times or spaces, whereas it is impossible for the meaning of each act to be the same or shared as meaning is particular. The meaning of an act is created by the spectacle of the action and its interpretation among spectators as an object of judgment. It is something distinct from the goal or end, and as such cannot be planned or predicted by the actors themselves: “the specific meaning of each deed can lie only in the performance itself and neither in its

motivation nor its achievement" (HC: 206). The greatest example of this is located in the "backward glance of the historian, who indeed always knows better what it was all about than the participants" (ibid: 192). Furthermore, meaning is not dependent upon the goals or ends - acting does not have to reach a successful conclusion in order to be meaningful. The instrumental logic of identifying and measuring the meaning of an act according to its success strikes Arendt as the wrongful application of the logic of *homo faber* upon politics (see chapter two for a detailed discussion of this). For Arendt, the modern mind is predisposed to view political action simply in terms of goals and ends, of which meaning is subsumed within the relationship between the two - i.e. did the end match the goals? Theoretically, this movement occurred with Plato's terminological splitting-apart of political action in the *Statesman* into 'beginning' and 'achieving', in opposition to the prior Greek understanding which stressed their inherent interconnectivity. There those who begin, and those who achieve: "knowing what to do and doing it became two altogether different performances" (ibid: 223). This models action as a kind of fabrication, progressing in the following manner: "first, perceiving the image or shape (*eidos*) of the product-to-be, and then organizing the means and starting the execution" (ibid: 225). An individual or group dictates the political ideal, and the subjects act towards it; in this mode of thinking, "action has become the mere 'execution of orders'" (ibid: 223). Political action, therefore, is judged according to the level of success it has in manufacturing its end-product. To use a modern example: the revolutionary vanguard grasps the possibility (or, rather, inevitability) of a distant community through the material dialectic of history, and utilises the proletariat as executors of the given idea. If the workers are the motor, then the philosopher-revolutionary must be driver. It is no surprise then that Marx attempted to devise a philosophy of practical activity whereby theory exerts direct influence over action, with the task of the philosopher as that of world-changing revolutionary instigator.

Because the term 'action' is "loaded and overloaded with tradition" (ibid: 12), Arendt accepts that it is very difficult for us to understand what constitutes a free act - an act which is not dominated by the logic of fabrication. Her concern in *The Human Condition* with re-acquainting ourselves with the distinction between human activities (labour, work, and action) through an exposition of Greek political culture stems from a critique of the Platonic levelling of these distinctions and the modern obliviousness toward them. Her answer for thinking of action in terms not dictated by fabrication is found in the "fourth element [of political action], which, although it is never the direct cause of action, is nevertheless what first sets it into motion. Following Montesquieu...I would like to call this element the 'principle of action,' and in psychological terms, one might say that it is the fundamental conviction that a group of people share" (PP: 194-195). And as she writes in 'What is Freedom?':

Action, to be free, must be free from motive on one side, from its intended goal as a predictable effect on the other...Action insofar as it is free is neither under the guidance of the intellect nor under the dictate of the will- although it needs both for the execution of any particular goal- but springs from something altogether different which (following Montesquieu's famous analysis of forms of government) I shall call a principle (BPF: 150)

Crucially, she considers a principle to be that which allows us to think of action in its freedom, away from the instrumental 'mode of making' and the subsequent "degradation of politics into a means for something else" (HC: 230). This desire to think of action as something to be valued outside of a fabrication framework animates her entire political agenda, and informs her unwavering critique of the Western tradition of political philosophy. *Arendt and Heidegger*, by Dana Villa, is one of the most comprehensive interpretative attempts to seriously engage with this 'self-contained' (or as it sometimes described, 'neo-Aristotelian') understanding of action, within which he rightly claims that her theory of action "should be read as the sustained

attempt to think of praxis outside the teleological framework" (Villa, 1996: 47). However, Villa does not adequately address the role of principles in Arendtian thought, referring to them only in an endnote (see Villa, 1996: 251). The other pioneering book of this 'self-contained' nature, Jacques Taminiaux's *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker* (1997), excludes any mention of principles. Undeniably, Arendt's understanding of principles has been largely ignored by commentators. Canovan (1992: 195) and Disch (1994: 37) devote some time to the concept, though it doesn't play a key role in either of their arguments; Knauer (2006), is one exception, though he unfortunately conflates the concept of 'meaning' with 'principle'. As should hopefully become apparent, a focus upon principles can complement and advance this reading very well, for it is the principle which is the constituent element of action which makes it independent from instrumentalism. On the other hand, we should be careful not to fall into the trap which Habermas did when he wrote his influential critique of Arendt, arguing that she is opposed to combining politics with strategy (Habermas, 1977: 16). Recognising the importance of the distinctions she makes regarding these issues is necessary to move beyond this misrepresentation, as she certainly accepts strategy as part of the constituent elements of political action.

So, to be more specific, what *is* a principle? In order to answer this question it is best to look at the intellectual source of the term. It first emerges in Arendt's 1954 essay 'On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding', and is present in the final chapter of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* - with the latter derived in part from the former. In both instances, the term emerges out of a discussion of Montesquieu's classification of government-types and its relevance for her attempt at understanding the 'essence' and 'nature' of the distinctly totalitarian. Montesquieu, famously, was interested in what makes states act as they do, and developed the notion that each governmental form (republic, monarchy, and despotism) has an associated principle, described as the "human passions which set in motion" (Montesquieu, 1989: 3.1). The principle of republican government,

according to Montesquieu, is virtue, the love of equality; the principle of monarchical government, honour, the passion for distinction; and the principle of despotism, fear, the concern with personal security. These 'passions' or sentiments are essential to the effective functioning of the government, and whilst Montesquieu admits that in reality the constitution of the body politic is not quite so two-dimensional (in a monarchy, for example, there may well be individuals who act out of virtue, not honour, and *vice versa*), the relevant principle still holds the clue as to why individuals and governments act as they do - and even why they succeed or fail in their acts. "Formerly the wealth of individuals constituted the public treasure", he says of ancient democratic Athens, "but now this has become the patrimony of private persons" (ibid: 3.3). In other words, the decline of democratic Athens was rooted in the decline of virtue and the (un-republican) rise of ambition; the result being a certain kind of political contestation whereby the individual desires power over their equals and seeks control over public life rather than the pleasure that comes with political equality. Arendt is unequivocal in her commendation of Montesquieu's theory of principles:

Montesquieu's moving and guiding principles- virtue, honor, fear- are principles insofar as they rule both the actions of the government and the actions of the governed. Fear in a tyranny is not only the subjects' fear on the tyrant, but the tyrant's fear of his subjects as well. Fear, honor, and virtue are not merely psychological motives, but the very criteria according to which all public life is led and judged...He analyzes the public life of citizens, not people's private lives, and discovers that in this public life- that is, in the sphere where all men act together concerning things that are of equal concern to each- action is determined by certain principles (EU: 331-332)

A similar statement is found in *Origins*:

a 'principle of action'...different in each form of government, would inspire government and citizens alike in their public activity and serve as a criterion, beyond

the merely negative yardstick of lawfulness, for judging all action in public affairs (OT: 467)

Montesquieu describes principles as the 'human passions which set [action] in motion', and Arendt describes them as 'the fundamental conviction that a group of people share', 'a criterion for judging all action in public affairs'. Principles, importantly, must be understood as the *inspiration* of the act, though they are certainly not what she labels 'motivations' - of which goals and ends are categorised - which she considers too closely related to the phenomenon of human will. A motivation always works toward a particular end or goal and is exhausted once the end has been achieved, whereas the inspiration of an act "loses nothing in strength or validity through execution...the principle of action can be repeated time and again, it is inexhaustible" (BPF: 151). Similarly, "in distinction from its motive, the validity of a principle is universal, it is not bound to any particular person or any particular group" (ibid: 151). Unlike motivations (true knowledge of which is always limited to the actors themselves), a principle can be observed by non-actors and become a shared phenomenon. It is this quality which also sets them apart from concepts and ideas, which can be grasped by the mind without recourse to the external world. In distinction, principles can only appear to us through action, so their requirement *is* the external sensory world.

In comparison to personal motivations and objects of thought, a principle is a lot less fixed in nature. It should be understood as something broader and less well-defined; as Knauer puts it, a principle is "too general to prescribe (or cause) any particular goal (or act)" (2006: 296). While Arendt does not supply a strict definition of what a principle is, I think that it is best to think of principles as *hermeneutic prejudices* (or prejudgments), understood as conditions for judgment. This prejudice is not plucked from the sky but comes directly from the experience of action itself, or to be more specific, from the spectating of acts. These prejudices then enable and inform judgment of present and future acts. Principles are

essentially formed through repeated human action, and “the extraordinary significance of these principles is not only that they first move human beings to act but that they are also the source of constant nourishment for their actions” (PP: 195). This ‘constant nourishment’ is another way of thinking of political tradition, and the transferral of authority. Principles emerge against the backdrop (or ‘horizon’) of past acts, constantly reinvigorating and building upon something concrete that is shared between individuals. In this way, principles carry a strong *world building* element. In fact, for Arendt principles are the necessary element of the transferral of the conditions of all true political association. The question we must now turn to is why, according to Arendt’s analysis, we have reached a point in the modern era in which “principles of action no longer inform our thinking about politics” (ibid: 197).

#### **4.2 Principles and Values**

At this point it is necessary to also consider another distinction that Arendt makes: between political principles from moral principles and social values, and it is in making this distinction that the importance of her account of political principles further comes to light. According to Arendt’s analysis, one of the most distressing aspects of the totalitarian moment was the mockery it made of the prior belief in the inviolability of moral principles, which suddenly lost their power and “stood revealed in the original meaning of the word, as a set of *mores*, customs and manners, which could be exchanged for another set with hardly more trouble than it would take to change the table manners of an individual or people” (RJ: 50). Those moral principles which had seemed unshakably firm were being increasingly unsettled in the modern age, with the final certainty of this occurrence manifesting itself in the terror of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. “Were these things or principles,” Arendt asks, “from which all



virtues are ultimately derived, mere values which could be exchanged against other values whenever people changed their minds about them?" (ibid: 51). She refers to this world-changing moral phenomenon as the 'de-valuation of values', drawing from what Nietzsche commented upon with characteristic style in *The Antichrist* with his description of the 'trans' or 're'-valuation of Christian values.

The use of the term 'value' is important for Arendt because for her the phrase reflects an inherent moral relativity which is paralleled in the relativity of the exchange market, within which the value of an object is in a constant state of change in relation to the other objects available. Objects within the market hold no intrinsic value outside of exchange as their value is not self-evident, based as they are on the objects with which they can be exchanged. 'Value' serves to indicate "only the relationship between things" (HC: 166n). Obviously, thinking of moral principles in these terms as something with the status of relative value greatly undermines the force behind the inspiration of the principle itself. The transformation from moral principle to value means that it becomes just another "social commodity which could be circulated and cashed in in exchange for all kinds of other values, social and individual...[and] in passing from hand to hand they were worn down like old coins. They lost the faculty of arresting our attention and moving us" (BPF: 200-201). If we are to look upon the public realm as a market-place, which it is so commonly described as since John Stewart Mill used the metaphor, moral principles become just another collective object that one can pick up or throw away as though they were items.

If we may return to a statement from chapter one: "if somebody appears who, for whatever purposes, wishes to abolish the old 'values' or virtues, he will find that easy enough, provided he offers a new code" (T: 177). It is clear that Arendt considers the appeal to values as something fickle and amenable to sudden change, particularly under conditions such as those explored in chapter one. For this reason Arendt does not trust the role of values in

politics, as she perceives them to be relatively groundless. They are shown to wither under the spotlight of thinking (as shown in the example of Socrates), and they verge too close toward blind acceptance to be self-aware of their limitations. There is no cast-iron method for adjudicating between values, no 'standards and universal rules', and any attempts to provide such a method will ultimately falter. Such a realisation can lead one to nihilism, but Arendt's treatment of principles suggests a potential to move away from such a position. For Arendt's turn to principles of action is an attempt to revive the 'objectiveness' of intersubjective worldliness, as principles are always derived from the fundamental experiences of 'living together' (more on this topic shortly), and promote a solidity in those categories of thought. Principles, for this reason, represent the most 'real' experience from which we can be freely inspired to act and judge action. The superiority of principles is lost if we relegate them to 'mere' values which can be traded or discarded as easily as we can physical objects. It is as though she is clearing a space for the entrance of principles when she writes in *The Human Condition*:

The much deplored devaluation of all things, that is, the loss of all intrinsic worth, begins with their transformation into values or commodities, for from this moment on they exist only in relation to some other thing which can be acquired in their stead. Universal relativity, that a thing exists only in relation to other things, and loss of intrinsic worth, that nothing any longer possesses an 'objective' value independent of the ever-changing estimations of supply and demand, are inherent in the very concept of value itself...It is this loss of standards and universal rules, without which no world could ever be erected by man, that Plato already perceived in the Protagorean proposal to establish man, the fabricator of things, and the use he makes of them, as their supreme measure (HC: 165-166)

To consider principle as a 'social value' is to overlook its foundation in action itself and render it politically worthless and meaningless. Principles have a worldly 'objectivity' which Arendt

believes cannot be matched by anything else. The worth of a social value is dictated by its prevalence in society - which in the modern era, Arendt believes, will tend toward subjectivist political aberrations and result in either terror or public decay. The modern understanding of action which is shaped by the logic of fabrication undermines the capacity to discern principles from values, destroying the hermeneutic base which makes up the world and playing its role in the generation of loneliness as the predominant form of human association. Thus, the devaluation of values is very much tied to the condition of modern worldlessness. As we shall see in the following sections, the loss of principles through their transformation into values is a key part to understanding both her critique of totalitarianism and her analysis of modern revolution.

#### **4.3 The Principle of Totalitarianism**

Montesquieu's three principles - virtue, honour, and fear - should be primarily understood as interpersonal relationships with one's peers in the body politic. This means that Montesquieu's theory of principles is a kind of political sociology; in the words of Ramon Aron: "the theory of principle obviously leads to a theory of social organization" (1965: 21). The principle of virtue, Aron continues, "is dependent on a certain sense of equality" (ibid: 22), which lends itself to republican government because "a republic is a form of government in which men live by and for the group...the members of the group regard themselves as citizens and therefore, ultimately, as equals" (ibid: 22). On the other hand, honour - "the sense of what each man knows he owes to his rank and station" (ibid: 22), lends itself to monarchic rule because it is "based on discrimination and inequality" (ibid: 23). The social forms which accompany each principle highlight the incompatibility of, say, the inequality of honour with a

republican government (hence, by Montesquieu's analysis, the decline of Athens). In this sense, principles are not simply beliefs or opinions about governmental systems, they are related to certain core interpersonal values which go beyond ideas. It is this interpersonal dimension of Montesquieu's principles which really interests Arendt, and she approaches it in 'On the Nature of Totalitarianism' with her characteristically existential verve. Through this argument Arendt further develops Montesquieu's theory of principles and gives it a conceptual depth which it was clearly lacking before. This is evident in the following passage, in which she explains the reason for her positive consideration of principles:

The fundamental experience upon which monarchies and, we may add, all hierarchical forms of government are founded is the experience, inherent in the human condition, that men are distinguished, that is, different from each other by birth...The fundamental experience upon which republican laws are founded and from which the action of its citizens springs is the experience of living together with and belonging to a group of equally powerful men (EU: 336)

Likewise, she describes Montesquieu's classification of government types as 'authentic'

because the grounds on which their structures are built (the distinction of each, equality of all, and impotence) and from which their principles of motion spring are authentic elements of the human condition and are reflected in primary human experiences (ibid: 338)

The references to the 'human condition' are particularly revealing, and here we can identify the philosophical kernel which would come to underpin much found within the pages of *The Human Condition*, informing many of her concepts such as natality and plurality. Because of the chronology of these formative reflections upon principles it is possible to read her account of action as derivative of our present inquiry.

As we discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, Arendt often engages with issues concerning the 'living-together-of men' (a re-thinking of Heidegger's *Dasein*), and the terms which were discussed - solitude, isolation, loneliness, and togetherness - were drawn from the elucidation of principles in 'On the Nature of Totalitarianism' and *Origins*. In particular, they arise from an attempt to apply the question of principles to the totalitarian phenomenon through a highly original examination of the principle of despotism: fear, which, despite the implication of its name, is not characterised as a psychological emotion. This principle, Arendt argues,

is fundamentally connected to that anxiety which we experience in situations of complete loneliness...fear is the despair over the individual impotence of those who, for whatever reason, have refused to 'act in concert.' There is no virtue, no love of equality of power, which has not to overcome this anxiety of helplessness, without recourse to action, if only in the face of death. Fear as a principle of action is in some sense a contradiction in terms, because fear is precisely despair over the impossibility of action. Fear, as distinct from the principles of virtue or honour, has no self-transcending power and is therefore truly anti-political (ibid: 336- 337)

If we view honour and virtue as principles of action in a positive sense - where the individual or group is capable of action, fear is a principle of action in a negative sense - where the individual or group is incapable of action (impotent, as Arendt phrases it). The 'despair over the impossibility of action' means that fear is a subjectivist principle in which all genuine interpersonal relations with others are unattainable. Because of the individual's inability to construct 'objective' relations with their peers, the social condition of despotism is loneliness, and the individual is "imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience" (HC: 58). The result of this, Arendt asserts, is a culture of political hostility: "one man against all others does not experience equality of power among men, but only the overwhelming, combined

power of all others against his own" (EU: 337). Tyranny (or despotism in Montesquieu's writings) is the result of this socio-political condition:

Out of the conviction of one's own impotence and the fear of the power of all others comes the will to dominate, which is the will of the tyrant. Just as virtue is love of the equality of power, so fear is actually the will to, or, in its perverted form, lust for, power. Concretely and politically speaking, there is no other will to power but the will to dominate (ibid: 337)

Tyranny, therefore, is borne of the individual's polluted desire for action, and their fear of impotence due to the overbearing presence of others. To what extent, Arendt asks, does totalitarian governance conform to this principle of action?

Lucy Cane distinguishes between two types of principles, 'degenerative' and 'regenerative': degenerative principles have a "quality that makes politics 'destroy and alienate itself'" such as fear, and regenerative principles have a "quality such that they reinforce the vitality of the public realm in which they operate" (Cane, 2015: 67) such as virtue and honour. There is certainly a connection between totalitarianism and tyranny through the mutual base of social atomisation and the impotence of action, which suggests a shared degenerative type of principle at play even if they may not be exactly the same. Importantly, Arendt locates a considerable difference between the two in their relation to *laws*. The characteristic of tyranny is the arbitrariness of lawmaking, decided on the whim or (fearful) self-interest of the tyrant or tyrants. This is the fundamental distinction between tyrannies on one side, and republics and monarchies on the other, whose laws set limits upon the actions of those wielding power. Law is the essence of constitutional governments, be they monarchies or republics:

Montesquieu needed principles of action because for him the essence of constitutional government, lawfulness and distribution of power, was basically stable:

It could only set up limitations on actions, not positively establish their principles.

Since the greatness, but also the perplexity, of all laws in free societies is that they only indicate what one should not do, and never what one should do, political action and historical movement in constitutional government remain free and unpredictable, conforming to, but never inspired by, its essence (ibid: 343- 344)

For Montesquieu, principles support laws and are directly relatable to it; however it is not the law which is action-guiding, but the principle. In constitutional government, law permits the inspirational action-guidance of principles. In monarchies and republics the sources of authority grounding the positive laws of man, such as the Commandments of God, hold a permanent 'timeless presence'. Yet the laws which are derived from these permanent authoritative sources "remained distinct...from the actions of men" (ibid: 340), and therefore allow scope for modification with changing circumstances. Positive laws, as a result, denote "the framework of stability within which human actions were supposed to, and were permitted to, take place" (ibid: 341). In short, the field of action and human will is maintained with the practice of lawmaking in constitutional government.

We may be inclined to believe that totalitarian lawmaking is arbitrary, like that exercised in tyrannies; if this were the case, totalitarianism could be categorised as a modern form of despotism. Arendt, however, seeks to emphasise the 'lawful' nature of totalitarian governance, built around the influence of *ideology*, those "systems of explanation of life and world that claim to explain everything past and future, without further concurrence with actual experience" (ibid: 349-350). Operating under the process-driven influence of modern science (see chapter two), ideologies claim to explain the laws of nature or history by identifying the hidden motor behind human action. Going "straight to the sources of authority from which all positive laws...receive their ultimate legitimation" (ibid: 340), totalitarian ideology circumvents the positive laws of man completely. The totalitarian interpretation of

law is dominated by a concern with movement, and law becomes "the very expression of these motions themselves" (ibid: 340-341). Legitimation for the Nazi interpretation of law came from the belief that humanity is still in a state of genetic progress towards a higher species-being (the master-race), whereas the Marxian legitimation sprang from the historical movement of classes and the ultimate elimination of them through the complete victory of One. Totalitarianism, therefore, "operates neither without guidance of law nor is it arbitrary, for it claims to obey strictly and unequivocally those laws of Nature or of History from which all positive laws have always been supposed to spring" (OT: 461). Humanity is the bearer, the embodiment, of these laws of motion, and nothing, no legal framework crafted by the hand of fallible individuals, must stand in way of the human process:

Its defiance of positive laws claims to be a higher form of legitimacy, which, since it is inspired by the sources themselves, can do away with petty legality. Totalitarian lawfulness pretends to have found a way to establish the rule of justice on earth—something which the legality of positive law could never attain...It applies the law directly to mankind without bothering with the behaviour of men...Totalitarian policy claims to transform the human species into an active unfailing carrier of a law to which human beings otherwise would only passively and reluctantly subjected (ibid: 462)

The laws of monarchies and republics establish stable boundaries within which individuals operate. In totalitarian conditions, "every means is taken to 'stabilize' men, to make *them* static, in order to prevent any unforeseen, free, or spontaneous acts" (EU: 342). All agential capacity is suspended; and whilst we may be loath to accept that freedom exists in tyrannies, the tyrant is free in the restricted sense that they can still implement the wishes of their subjective will. In perhaps the sharpest contrast with tyrannical lawmaking, the totalitarian ideological individual "does not believe that he is a free agent with the power to execute his arbitrary will, but, instead, the executioner of laws higher than himself." (ibid: 346). As in



tyrannies, legality is completely hollow under totalitarian conditions, though this does not necessarily mean that it is arbitrary - there is an extraordinary form of logic to it.

No principle of action operates as inspirational guide under the totalitarian condition. The totalitarian leader is not inspired to limit the citizen's access to the public sphere out of fear, they do so because it is deemed redundant by ideology. And if we were to ask them why they annihilate the public sphere they might reply as such: why did we need the public sphere in the first place? Everything outside of ideology is deemed meaningless and can only represent a problem to be solved by destruction or control. A free space of speech and action is nothing but a hindrance. Totalitarian movement is completely driven by an endless cycle of ends, and action is merely an instrument in the fabrication of the laws of History and Nature towards that end. A principle, as Arendt understands it, has no end, and principles, therefore, are irrelevant to ideology. There is no place for principles of action in ideology; to the ideologist, principles are fumbings in the dark. "In a perfect totalitarian government", Arendt asserts,

where all individuals have become exemplars of the species, where all action has been transformed into acceleration, and every deed into the execution of death sentences- that is, under conditions in which terror as the essence of government is perfectly sheltered from the disturbing and irrelevant interference of human wishes and needs- no principle of action in Montesquieu's sense is necessary (ibid: 343)

Supplanting the "human will to action" in its entirety, and driven by the "craving need for some insight into the law of movement" (OT: 468), ideology occupies the space which principles of action had previously occupied. In previous chapters we noted Arendt's claim that totalitarian government is the 'rule of nobody' and that it protects against individual responsibility; her principle-driven approach to action matches this claim entirely.

Strictly speaking, the substitute for principles of action in totalitarianism is not ideology. Arendt is not concerned with the actual content of ideologies, whether they explain the historical movement of classes or races. The new principle of action is the logicity which underpins ideology. And logic - unlike virtue, honour, and fear - has no basis in the human condition, its standard lays in the abstraction of reasoning. The problem for Arendt is that logic has no connection to the human activities (labour, work, and action) or the non-cognitive mental activities (thought, will, and judgment). Hitler, Arendt notes, took great satisfaction in his "ice cold reasoning", and Stalin in the "mercilessness of his dialectics" and Lenin's "irresistible force of logic" (Hitler and Stalin as cited by Arendt, OT: 471-472). "This stringent logicity as a guide to action", Arendt continues, "permeates the whole structure of totalitarian movements and governments" (ibid: 472). Logic, despite its cognitive merit, always exists in a state of thoughtlessness. And thought, by Arendt's standard, seems to be opposed to logic in the way that it always emerges from a basic questioning without foundation. Logic, on the other hand, with its roots in the deductive process, must always proceed from an unquestionable premise towards a definitive answer. Without any source in the human psychical and mental qualities:

ideological thinking orders facts into an absolutely logical procedure which starts from an axiomatically accepted premise, deducing everything else from it; that is, it proceeds with a consistency that exists nowhere else in the realm of reality. The deducing may proceed logically or dialectically; in either case it involves a consistent process of argumentation which, because it thinks in terms of a process, is supposed to be able to comprehend the movement of the suprahuman, natural or historical processes (ibid: 471)

If one accepts the premise that the communist party is the legitimate vessel of historical transition between a bourgeois and classless society, to stand against the will of the party,

therefore, would mean standing against the will of History, which would mean that "you contradict yourself and, through this contradiction, render your whole life meaningless" (ibid: 473). And by the laws of logic there must be no contradiction. Hitler and Stalin, Arendt notes, were disposed to arguing in a logical manner: "you can't say A without saying B and C and so on, down to the end of the murderous alphabet. Here, the coercive force of logicity seems to have its source; it springs from our fear of contradicting ourselves" (ibid: 472-473). Arendt labels this fear of contradiction the 'negative coercion of logic', which controls the mind as if it were a straitjacket, compelling and pressing the individual mind "almost as violently as he is forced by some outside power" (ibid: 470). It is with this observation that the absolute difference between the principles of logic and authentic principles of action is patent, as compulsion and inspiration are two very different phenomena. Principles of action outline possibilities against a backdrop of human examples (as found in the authority of tradition), whereas principles of logic force action down a path with the compulsion of non-contradiction.

#### **4.4 Principles in the Great Revolutions**

Besides her analysis of totalitarianism, the other greatest application of Arendt's political thought is found in her comparative historical analysis of the French and American Revolutions, *On Revolution*. It is also the best account of how the notion of principles inform her wider political arguments, and how principles can be applied as a distinct form of political analysis. I hope to display how principles play a major role in the book's narrative, further offering clues as to Arendt's critique of modern social values, whilst also highlighting how principles set the stage for a discussion of freedom. *On Revolution* makes the following basic

historical claims: the American and French Revolutions were both inspired by a concern with public freedom; whereas the American revolutionaries were successful in maintaining this political impulse throughout the 'event' of revolution, the French revolutionaries' impulse to act shifted away from the political concern with public freedom and toward the 'social' concern with liberation - to its eventual demise. However, the American Revolution failed to maintain public freedom in the long-term, again, through the encroachment of private social concerns. As we shall see, Arendt's theory of principle is central to this argument.

Arendt makes it very clear that the American and French revolutionaries initially shared a similar inspirational principle of action:

If the men who, on both sides of the Atlantic, were prepared for the revolution had anything in common prior to the events which were to determine their lives, to shape their convictions, and eventually to draw them apart, it was a passionate concern for public freedom much in the way Montesquieu or Burke spoke about it (OR: 118)

This understanding of public freedom has something 'old-fashioned' about it in the sense that it shares much with the ancient republicanism of Greece and Rome, disclosing a "passion for freedom for its own sake" (ibid: 125). Both sets of revolutionaries devoured the same books of political and philosophical thought as each other - namely, the 'classics': "It was their search for political freedom, not their quest for truth, that led them back to antiquity, and their reading served to give them the concrete elements with which to think and to dream of such freedom" (ibid: 123). They were not, therefore, necessarily operating from competing philosophical positions, and the experience of each revolution cannot be explained away by emphasising a rigid difference in philosophical approach to politics; there is more connecting Locke and Rousseau than meets the eye. The revolutionist's account of freedom, Arendt explains, "could only exist in public; it was a tangible, worldly reality, something created by men to be enjoyed by men rather than a gift or a capacity, it was the man-made public space

or market-place which antiquity had known as the area where freedom appears and becomes visible to all" (ibid: 124). Freedom, by this understanding, is spatially determined; the individual is free insofar as they are able to speak and act within a space of publicity. By extension, this implies a participatory political forum, within which the citizen has "right of access to the public realm...to be 'a participator in the government of affairs' in Jefferson's telling phrase" (ibid: 127). This way of thinking about freedom is thoroughly intersubjective in the manner that its fundamental requirement is the space which exists between individuals. As we shall see, the encroachment of subjectivist passions (as opposed to intersubjective political principles) into each nation facilitated the revolutions' mutual failures - almost immediately in France, and shortly after the 'event' in America.

One of the most important things to note is that both sets of revolutionaries were initially very cautious about the path they were taking. Their early care suggests that they were not motivated by a political end - the idea of revolution was certainly not predetermined. The goal, in the awakening of the revolutionary spirit, was still unclear:

Public or political freedom and public or political happiness were the inspiring principles which prepared the minds of those who then did what they never had expected to do, and more often than not were compelled to acts for which they had no previous inclination (ibid: 123)

The revolutions proceeded not according to a predetermined course, but were spontaneous arousals to action brought about by the inspirational principle of public freedom. In this sense, Arendt's claims about the early stirrings of revolt and revolution is consistent with the 'self-contained' understanding of free action - in which action remains "free from motive on one side, from its intended goal as a predicable effect on the other" (BPF:150). The revolutionaries, according to Arendt, were both displaying the characteristics of a truly autonomous initiatory

form of political action. The narrative Arendt supplies of each revolutionary failure is intriguing because they highlight how delicate this understanding of principles is.

With the onset of violence in 1789 the French Revolution took a sharp turn away from the nature of the confrontations which marked its early stages. It is often remarked that this transition was precipitated by the poor harvest of 1788, set against a backdrop of an economic crisis, mass unemployment, and extreme rural and municipal poverty. A vast body of individuals moved by biological want was created and this mass of poverty-stricken individuals quickly became synonymous with *le peuple*, with their emergence as the vehicle of revolution further cementing this position. "Poverty", Arendt clarifies, "is more than deprivation, it is a state of constant want and acute misery whose ignominy consists in its dehumanizing force; poverty is abject because it puts men under the absolute dictate of necessity" (OR: 60). Of course, this level of poverty and misery was not an experience specific to the moment of the French Revolution, and therefore we must ask the question: why did misery become 'political' in France, 1789?

We are dealing with a modern event, perhaps *the* modern event, which for Arendt means that we are speaking of a moment when radical subjectivism begins to exert an increasingly recognisable influence upon politics; Arendt terms this transition 'the rise of the social'. One of the defining features of modern subjectivism is political intimacy, manifest as a desperate desire to destroy the space which exists between individuals and distinguishes them, in order to occupy a single space (see chapter two). For the French Revolution, the move to the intimate is displayed in two key areas: the shift in emphasis from the *republic* (that is, the political public space), to the *people* (representing the intimate space); and the shift from public freedom as the principle of action to *compassion*. Institutionally, the point of this turn in the French Revolution occurred with the rise of the Jacobins, who "believed in the people rather than in the republic" (ibid: 75); as Robespierre revealingly phrased it, "under the

new constitution...laws should be promulgated 'in the name of the French People' instead of the 'French Republic'" (as cited by Arendt, *ibid*: 75).

With the dramatic rise of the impoverished onto the French Revolutionary scene, what had started as a political revolution, one which aimed at the imposition of a constitution, now became a social revolution aimed at the alleviation of misery from the population of France. This led to its abrupt failure to create an authentic space for speech and action, and hence, public freedom:

the new republic was stillborn; freedom had to be surrendered to necessity, to the urgency of the life process itself...the revolution had changed direction; it aimed no longer at freedom, the goal of the revolution had become the happiness of the people (*ibid*: 60-61)

It was not the poor themselves which moved the Revolution to failure, but the reaction to their terrible condition by the Jacobin elite, stirred by a sentiment represented by Rousseau's modern belief in our "innate repugnance at seeing a fellow creature suffer" (Rousseau as cited by Arendt, *ibid*: 71). This sentiment Arendt labels as 'compassion', and with it the language of the French Revolution suddenly became inherently moral. Arendt identifies this transition in the manner in which *virtue* changed meaning from a 'love of equality' (as in Montesquieu) to complete *selflessness*. To be against the urgent needs of the people was to be against the will of the nation, and what this required was the total cessation of individual will and self-interest on the part of the revolutionaries. The revolutionaries now appeared to believe in themselves as martyrs, something which Arendt attributes to all revolutions since: "the value of a policy may be gauged by the extent to which it will contradict all particular interests, and the value of a man may be judged by the extent to which he acts against his own interest and against his own will" (*ibid*: 79). To the virtuous and selfless revolutionary, what mattered was the "capacity to lose oneself in the sufferings of others, rather than active goodness, and what

appeared most odious and even most dangerous was selfishness rather than wickedness" (ibid: 81). One need only skirt over the totalitarian justifications of violence to see the similarities here.

Rousseau "found compassion to be the most natural human reaction to the suffering of others, and therefore the very foundation of all authentic 'natural' human intercourse" (ibid: 80); and what Rousseau had elevated into political thought was now promulgated in the words and deeds of the Jacobins as they witnessed the cries of the poor around France. Compassion was a powerful revolutionary guide to action because it could be used to attack the previous feudal order, whose indifference to the plight of the starving masses amounted - under the new criterion of modern subjectivist reasoning - to a denial of humanity. Those wealthy who refused to selflessly dedicate themselves to the alleviation of poverty were, therefore, deemed to be wicked. A similar argument is recognisable in the denouncement of the bourgeoisie, who would quickly become the wicked class after the disintegration of feudalism in Europe. The subjectivism of compassion "abolishes the distance, the worldly space between men where political matters, the whole realm of human affairs, are located", and because of this "it remains, politically speaking, irrelevant and without consequence" (ibid: 86). The intersubjectivity of politics, based on the communicative distance of judgment, is extraneous to a body politic moved by compassion, because compassion is mute; it

speaks only to the extent that it has to reply directly to the sheer expressionist sound and gestures through which suffering becomes audible and visible in the world. As a rule, it is not compassion which sets out to change worldly conditions in order to ease human suffering, but if it does, it will shun the drawn-out wearisome processes of persuasion, negotiation, and compromise, which are the processes of law and politics, and lend its voice to the suffering itself, which must claim for swift and direct action, that is, for action with the means of violence (ibid: 86-87)



There is a great similarity between compassion as a guide to action and the totalitarian principle of logic: both are inherently *compulsive*, rather than inspiring. We should be careful not to confuse Arendt's criticism of compassion as a guide to action with a lack of interest in the concerns of the impoverished, as many commentators have wrongly accused (for a discussion of this confusion, see Pitkin, 1998). The problem with their argument is that they fail to recognise that her critique of the French Revolution (and the 'social' more generally) is based on her theory of principles. Arendt, in fact, points to a principle of action which can achieve these ends whilst maintaining political freedom: the principle of *solidarity*. Her thought actually lends itself to addressing poverty through her claim that biological necessity places the individual outside of human, political, associations. The poor, Arendt claims, cannot be free. The problem she identifies with standard approaches to poverty is that they tie the alleviation of poverty with non-political notions such as social justice or the destruction of politics altogether. Solidarity as a principle of action is recommended by her because it still remains tied to the human condition, that is, of the 'primary experience' upon which Montesquieu's virtue is founded: the 'experience of living together with and belonging to a group of equally powerful men'. Arendt's (sadly, brief) espousal of the principle of solidarity is discussed in distinction to pity, "the sentiment which corresponds to the passion of compassion" (OR: 88). "Terminologically speaking," Arendt differentiates, "solidarity is a principle that can inspire and guide action, compassion is one of the passions, and pity is a sentiment" (ibid: 89). With pity the distance between individuals is broken down and the space for judgment is closed as all judgment requires the ability to observe phenomena from multiple positions.

Arendt is rather more celebratory of the American revolutionary experience. For her, it remains one of the few instances of authentic political action, and is, sadly, the lost 'treasure' of the true revolutionary spirit. The American revolutionaries remained throughout

what the French could not: individuals moved by the political principle of public freedom.

What brought these individuals together in action

was 'the world and public interest of liberty' (Harrington), and what moved them was 'the passion for distinction' which John Adams held to be 'more essential and remarkable' than any other human faculty...The virtue of this passion he called 'emulation', the 'desire to excel another', and its vice he called 'ambition' because it 'aims at power as a means of distinction'. And, psychologically speaking, these are in fact the chief virtues and vices of political men (ibid: 119)

That the language of distinction is present suggests to Arendt a connection with the intersubjective human condition, which is the characteristic of political principles. And as with Montesquieu, the revolutionaries noted the fragility of the 'public-spiritness' of distinction and how easy it was for it to be corrupted by the concerns of the individual.

The greatest difference between the American and French Revolutions was the absence of the terrible extremities of poverty in America. There were, of course, poor Americans, though "what were absent from the American scene were misery and want rather than poverty...the laborious in America were poor but not miserable...they were not driven by want, and the revolution was not overwhelmed by them" (ibid: 68). Arendt describes the American Revolution as being conducted in something akin to an ivory tower, "into which the fearful spectre of human misery, the haunting voices of abject poverty, never penetrated" (ibid: 95). Not only was the American Revolution the only successful revolution of its kind, but it is also the "the only revolution in which compassion played no role in the motivation of the actors" (ibid: 71). For this reason, the American revolutionaries "remained men of action from beginning to end...their sound realism was never put to the test of compassion" (ibid: 95). And because the American revolutionaries never experienced the magnitude of a mass moved by the desperation that biological necessity brings, the idea of a people or populace united in the

manner which would usurp the French Revolution was alien to them. Terminologically, the "word 'people' retained for them the meaning of manyness, of the endless variety of a multitude whose majesty resided in its very plurality" (ibid: 93). The people were always understood as a collection of unique individuals in their plurality, and the negative elements of the social never encroached upon their commitment to their principle of action.

Arendt rightly concedes that the 'primordial crime' of slavery was a large factor in the absence of misery, as was also the case with the republics of antiquity. If we were to take into account the experience of African-American slavery then we would still have to concede that the "percentage of complete destitution and misery was considerably lower in the countries of the Old World" (ibid: 71). However, unlike the poor of France, the enslaved inhabitants of America were simply not able to make their presence felt in public, and thus never had a direct effect upon the outcome of the revolution. Interestingly, the criticism of the institution of slavery around the time of the American Revolution highlights how political principles are not as morally sterile as one might be inclined to believe. Those Americans such as Thomas Jefferson who wrote of slavery that they "trembled when [they] thought that God is just" (as cited by Arendt, ibid: 71) were saying so because "they were convinced of the incompatibility of the institution of slavery with the foundation of freedom, not because they were moved by pity" (ibid: 71). Of course, to be enslaved means that one cannot be a 'participator in government' which is the basic claim of public freedom, and thus public freedom can achieve the ends of liberation without necessarily being undermined by its sheer emotional force.

But whereas the French Revolution died at inception, the American Revolution failed shortly after its initial successes, for a reason not dissimilar to the former. There are, Arendt argues, two necessities for a successful, free, revolution - both of which the American Founding Fathers were acutely aware. They proceed chronologically: first comes the act of foundation, whereby a constitution is implemented with enough authority to ensure its

continuity; second, the maintenance of the revolutionary spirit and the continuation of the principle of public freedom. Whilst the American Revolution was successful with the former, the latter was never achieved, and the reasons for its failure are of interest to us. Arendt neatly phrases the predicament in the following manner:

even in America where the foundation of a new body politic succeeded and where therefore, in a sense, the Revolution achieved its actual end, this second task of revolution, to assure the survival of the spirit out of which the act of foundation sprang, to realize the principle which inspired it- a task which, as we shall see, Jefferson especially considered to be of supreme importance for the survival of the new body politic- was frustrated almost from the beginning (ibid: 126)

This failure is best understood through an analysis of two competing principles of action: public freedom and *private welfare*. There has always been disagreement as to whether the American Revolution was a political or economic revolution. Some consider political and economic freedom to be one and the same, perhaps both understood as negative freedoms. For Arendt, however, there is a sharp distinction between the two, and the blurring of this distinction in American political culture and in modern political theory is a cause of great concern for her. Ultimately, Arendt's identification of the failure of the revolutionary spirit in America is a critique of contemporary liberal democracies and the economisation of politics and political discourse rife in her time and ours.

The Declaration of Independence, which famously refers to the 'unalienable rights' of 'Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness', was, by author Jefferson's words, "intended to be an expression of the American mind" (as cited by Arendt, ibid: 130). It is, therefore, possibly one of the most reliable sources for understanding the principles which inspired the thirteen colonies to revolt. Arendt is interested in it for precisely that reason, and she proceeds in her analysis with a discussion of how the desire for 'happiness' which it proclaims was, and is,

interpreted. Arendt splits happiness between a 'public happiness' which is synonymous with public freedom (prevalent in the literature of the day) and participatory government, and a 'private happiness' which amounts to private welfare and the constitutional protection of economic rights. Jefferson, she claims, "was not very sure in his own mind which kind of happiness he meant" (ibid: 127), and the lack of clarity on his part proved to be, in hindsight, quite unfortunate. Certainly, he was a staunch proponent of the principle of public freedom, and Arendt concludes that Jefferson chose 'happiness' because he meant the term to be inclusive of both public and private concerns:

the Declaration of Independence, though it blurs the distinction between private and public happiness, at least still intends us to hear the term 'pursuit of happiness' in its twofold meaning: private welfare as well as the right to public happiness, the pursuit of well-being as well as being a 'participator in public affairs'. But the rapidity with which the second meaning was forgotten and the term used and understood without its original qualifying adjective may well be the standard by which to measure, in America no less than France, the loss of the original meaning and the oblivion of the spirit that had been manifest in the Revolution (ibid: 132)

What Arendt identifies in the one-sided interpretation of 'happiness' is the conquest of the political principle of public freedom by the social principle of private welfare. This has great repercussions for how citizens understand and relate to their government, and, fundamentally, the manner in which governments and citizens act and are judged.

Vivasvan Soni has argued that Arendt should be implicated in endorsing "a broad hermeneuticist structure that privileges freedom to the exclusion of happiness, placing emphasis on the forms of politics without regard for its ends and purposes" (Soni, 2010: 34). Soni instead offers an expanded notion of public happiness largely influenced by Solon, which prioritises "judgment about a life's narrative" and "implies a *concrete institutional site* where a

politics of happiness can find social expression through the act of biographical narration” (ibid: 41-42). I believe that Soni actually overemphasises Arendt’s exclusion of happiness with reference to modern revolutions, and that the kind of freedom articulated by Arendt actually incorporates a vision of happiness very similar to that which Soni attributes to Solon. Whilst I agree that “happiness is not merely political participation, virtue, comfort, pleasure, or security but an indeterminate and capacious idea that is the subject of public deliberation and available to public scrutiny and judgment” (ibid: 36), this distinction is taken too far, driven in part by a rather hasty reading of Arendt’s *On Revolution*. When Arendt talks about public happiness she is actually referring to the kind of public disclosure referenced by Soni, as spoken about in the past two chapters of this thesis. Arendt does not simply locate freedom in public participation, but also in the connection between disclosure and judgment (we shall speak of this notion further in the following chapter). I also feel that any discussion of happiness in Arendtian theory needs to have a strong grounding in Arendt’s critique of modern intimacy (see chapter two); a proper analysis of intimacy helps to close the gap that Soni locates between Arendtian happiness and freedom. Central to this is recognising the importance of the distinction that Arendt draws between public freedom and private welfare as we are presently discussing, and its relationship with her critique of the modern revolutions.

One of the biggest incongruities of the victory of private welfare is the irrelevance of republican government. The system of government matters little if all one asks of it is the protection of civil liberties. If the new government were to simply serve the in the interests of private freedoms, any non-tyrannical constitutional government would be legitimate, such as a constitutional monarchy. The distinction between these two understandings of happiness amounts to a discussion as to "whether the new government was to constitute a realm of its own for the 'public happiness' of its citizens, or whether it has been devised solely to serve and ensure their pursuit of private happiness more effectively than the old regime" (ibid: 133).

If we were to accept or prioritise the latter interpretation, the very foundation of republicanism - the 'equality of men' - is pushed to the side. By Montesquieu's theory of principles, the portrait that Arendt paints of post-revolutionary America does not fit the criteria befitting a true republic - it seems very similar to his analysis of the decline of Athens. Republicanism is redundant without due focus upon participation and the equality of this mode of 'living-together'. It is perhaps the case that civil liberties are a prerequisite of public freedom, however, they are by no means a guarantee of it (this issue is discussed in greater depth in the following chapters). Arendt's critique of private happiness is best understood if we consider the following quotation:

...public freedom, public happiness, public spirit. What remained of them in America, after the revolutionary spirit had been forgotten, were civil liberties, the individual welfare of the greatest number, and public opinion as the greatest force ruling an egalitarian, democratic society. This transformation corresponds with great precision to the invasion of the public realm by society; it is as though the originally political principles were translated into social values (ibid: 221)

We find a similar claim with the French experience as well:

the [French] revolutionists learned that the early inspiring principles had been overruled by the naked forces of want and need, and they finished their apprenticeship with the firm conviction that it was precisely the Revolution which had revealed these principles for what they actually were- a heap of rubbish. To denounce this 'rubbish' as prejudices of the lower middle classes came to them all the easier as it was true indeed that society had monopolized these principles and perverted them into 'values' (ibid: 221)

Here we arrive at the distinction between principles and values. In both instances the inspiration for action which drove the early revolution toward the grand demands for public freedom had been transformed and distorted into something very different. In so doing, the action of individuals degenerates into something that Arendt would call non-political, ultimately resulting in a failure to produce a sphere in which public freedom could be manifest.

#### **4.5 Toward Freedom**

Individuals insofar as they act lead through example, creating the exemplary validity which is the source of all political principles. I define these principles as hermeneutic prejudices which come to form the world upon which human action is judged and inspired. Notably, this prejudice is based (following Montesquieu) on the individual's relationship with their peers. The manifestation of principle is important for the creation of friendship and worldly responsibility, and its power is rooted in the authority of a tradition of action which inspires further action. I have argued that Arendt is keen to distinguish principle from value, and her reason for doing so is to grant principles a greater validity; values exist outside of tradition, they can be swapped and changed at whim without recourse to the past or the world. This condition, which Arendt associates with modernity, I have argued is central to her critique of totalitarian action, in which the certainty which the world had formerly granted is substituted with the cold principle of logic which needs no justification outside of itself. It is this substitution of principles of action with principles of logic which helps form the justification of totalitarian terror. I then built upon this analysis with reference to Arendt's narrative of the American and French revolutions and the perceived reasons for their failure. In both instances



Arendt argues that the principles which inspired the revolution were ruined by the subjectivist tendencies of modernity, resulting in the transformation of their revolutionary principles into social values. My hope in discussing principles has largely been to justify my belief in their significance for Arendtian political theory. However, it also serves a further purpose which will become apparent in a claim made in the next chapter: that Arendt's theory of principle is a necessary theoretical foundation upon which her particular account of freedom is built, an account which I term *freedom as rhetoric*.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Freedom as Rhetoric**

We are now nearing the end of the main body of this thesis, and so must turn toward the central concept of Arendtian political thought: freedom. I argue that the theory of freedom is the most unique aspect of her writings, clearly distinguishing her from other thinkers of the age who broached similar topics; it is therefore of the utmost importance to understand. As was outlined in the introduction, her account of freedom can be identified throughout all of her major political texts and draws together disparate strands of thought which at first glance do not seem entirely related. Precisely for this reason it remains her most difficult concept to appreciate given the breadth of its scope and the variety of elements which she draws together to give it form. I have sought in part to lessen this problem through the application of the terminological method through which we analyse the relationship between terms in order to provide a base from which a discussion of Arendtian freedom can occur. In the following pages various aspects of thought from previous chapters will be integrated into the discussion of freedom so as to grant the term a clearer sense of meaning. Central to my argument is the observation that Arendt closely connects freedom with rhetoric.

Section one briefly presents the importance of the term for Arendt and the reasons why she kept returning to it. In section two it is argued that Arendt's account of freedom is established with reference to physical movement, from which she critiqued the post-Platonic philosophical tradition of freedom which identifies it in the mental faculty of willing. Following

this, it is argued that this notion of movement is the base for her prominent theory of action, which she in turn identifies as the source of all political association. Section three explores the idea of founding as the highest manifestation of movement and Arendt's grappling with issues surrounding it. I introduce Arendt's underexplored notion of the 'relatively absolute' as her response to some of these issues, and particular attention is paid to her claim that authentic founding requires a strong consciousness of tradition, so that the founders view their activity as a fresh restatement of the old. This is then linked in section four to the topic of the previous chapter - principle, and I argue that it is principles which are the content of this historical consciousness is the emergence of principle. Section five seeks to wed this notion of principle with Arendt's theory of judgment and her theory of friendship. It is argued that principles form the hermeneutic base upon which judgment can take place and political community is achieved. Drawing upon the term *isēgoria* from chapter one, I argue that when principles inform judgment, freedom emerges, and I label this account of freedom: *freedom as rhetoric*. Thinking of freedom in this way, I propose, can help us to bridge the gap between different interpretative positions relating to action. The final section examines the implications of this move for our labelling of Arendt. I propose that Arendt's theory of freedom as rhetoric necessitates a re-evaluation of her thought in hermeneutic terms. It is suggested that she is best represented through the following term: *hermeneutic republican*.

## **5.1 Freedom as the Meaning of the Political**

It is generally accepted - validated repeatedly by her own statements - that Arendt's turn to political theory was triggered by witnessing the totalitarian phenomenon, something she felt urgently compelled to destroy. Our 'preliminary understanding' of totalitarianism (which is

based on the hermeneutic notion of prejudgment) 'decided', Arendt claims, that "our fight against it is a fight for freedom" (EU: 310). There are two key aspects to this: first, Arendt's political thought arose as a response to an identified threat to *freedom*; and second, she had in her grasp only a tentative understanding of freedom, with a true understanding of it yet to emerge. As Arendt's understanding of totalitarianism deepened, so too did her understanding of freedom, and their interdependence is crucial to understanding Arendtian political thought. It is this author's opinion that Arendt's thought and intent is best perceived within this context.

There are two elements to this, both of which are rooted in her advancement of the particularly German critique of modernity. The first can be referred to as the 'ideological critique' which addresses the totalitarian ideologies themselves. In this sense Arendt's thought complements the vast collection of thinkers in decrying the totalising tendencies within ideology. Her intervention pertains specifically to how the modern emphasis on *process* affects our understanding of freedom. Placing the process of historical development at the centre of politics, as the totalitarian ideologies did, results in the belief that freedom "is assigned to a process that unfolds behind the back of those who act and does its work in secret, beyond the visible arena of public affairs" (PP: 120). The products of freedom brought about by "human beings in their action and interaction" become nothing but a hindrance for the process of historical development: "the model for this concept of freedom is a river flowing freely, in which every attempt to block its flow is an arbitrary impediment" (ibid: 120). Freedom by the totalitarian account is a flow which must clear all human impediments.

The second element - which emerged as she expanded the ideological critique's theoretical foundation - addresses the understanding of freedom prevalent in modern philosophy; we might refer to this as the 'philosophical critique'. For this reason it is a more mature and immersive analysis which leads into the development of a unique theory of

freedom drawing upon Heidegger, Jaspers, Kant, Augustine, Duns Scotus, and Aristotle, among others. It is this philosophical critique which concerns us here, and much of the thought behind it has been explored in previous chapters. Modern philosophy is particularly applicable to Arendt's insights due to the resurgence and elevation of the concept of freedom within it. This resurgence, however, has been particularly one-sided in that it identifies the locus of freedom within the private sphere and not the public. It is the belief in the manifestation of freedom in private that unites liberal and the more socialistic accounts, despite their apparent differences; both negative and positive freedoms fall into the trap of locating freedom in the private interests of the person, and not in the public sphere - or world. One quotation stands out in this respect: "History knows many periods of dark times in which the public realm has been obscured and the world become so dubious that people have ceased to ask any more of politics than that it show due consideration for their vital interests and personal liberty" (MDT: 11). As we shall see, Arendt's theory of freedom is a highly complex mesh of concepts, a body of satellite terms which all feed into the notion of what it *is* and *means* to be free. As we shall see throughout this chapter, her response is a return to the experience of freedom in classical politics in an attempt to reposition the public realm into the centre of the phenomenon of freedom. When her attempt to understand totalitarianism inevitably moved onto more philosophical terrain, the question of freedom became the next locus for her investigations, shaping her entire theoretical agenda. For this reason the following chapter inevitably draws upon a wide selection of her texts in order to answer the question: what, exactly, *is* Arendtian freedom?

Anyone acquainted with texts such as *The Human Condition* and *Between Past and Future* will be aware of the close connection Arendt draws between politics and freedom; they "are related to each other like two sides of the same matter" (BPF: 147) as "the *raison d'être* of politics is freedom" (ibid: 145). "Freedom is exclusively located in the political realm" (HC: 31) insofar as the political realm is characterised by political equality, and freedom is defined

as the ability “to move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed” (ibid: 33). But there is much more to this topic than these brief quotations suggest, and we will need to explore the assumptions behind these statements in much greater depth. What we uncover is a definition of freedom derived from a heavily politicised phenomenology of movement, and it is the argument of this chapter that Arendt actually develops two accounts of movement, one rooted in the physical realm and represented in *action*, and another rooted in the mental realm, represented in *judgment*. These two movements come together in the activity of persuading, rhetoric. As Arendt writes:

The ability to see the same thing from various standpoints stays in the human world; it is simply the exchange of the standpoint given us by nature for that of someone else, with whom we share the world, resulting in a true freedom of movement in our mental world that parallels our freedom of movement in the physical one. Being able to persuade and influence others, which was how the citizens of the polis interacted politically, presumed a kind of freedom that was not irrevocably bound, either mentally or physically, to one’s own standpoint or point of view (PP: 168)

In the following section we shall examine the basis of this claim, and how in promoting this position she sought to counter certain accounts of what it means to be free.

## **5.2 Movement as the Basis of Freedom**

I suggest that Arendt's categorisation of the physical and mental activities under six names (labour, work, action; thought, will, and judgment) amount to *categories of movement*. At their most basic, I believe that these categories attempt to reveal the changes involved with the transition between a state of inactivity to activity. Conceiving of each activity in this

manner allows Arendt to comprehend each in their autonomy, and this is how her studies are structured in *The Human Condition* and *The Life of the Mind*. Despite this, the primary activities of labouring and thinking are the only two which can be truly independent in relation to the other activities, as Arendt is clear in the necessity of each prior activity to enable the latter. Thus, action requires both labour and work, as judgment requires thought and the will. In addition, action and judgment are so closely interconnected, bridging the physical and mental categories, that both must be present for the other. Arendt's categorisation of movement appears like two chains, both of a different elemental composition, linked at the top. As we move further up the chain, we move toward a genuine platform for politics as she understands it.

All of these activities assume a base level of freedom. We cannot labour, for example, if we are not physically free to do so. Indeed, all of the physical activities are presupposed on the freedom of moving from a physical state of inactivity to activity, just as the mental faculties presuppose a mental freedom. Arendt would translate this into the language of 'beginning' and 'initiative', for all movement - the transition from inactivity to activity - must be begun or initiated: "this sense of initiative...is inherent in all human activities" (HC: 9). Thus, Arendt considers movement to be not only the perfect metaphor for freedom, but the very founding experience upon which the notion of freedom itself is derived. She would make the following claims:

Freedom of movement, the power of moving about unchecked by disease or master, was originally the most elementary of all liberties, their very prerequisite (W: 200)

And,

Freedom, wherever it existed as a tangible reality, has always been spatially limited. This is especially clear for the greatest and most elementary of all negative liberties,

the freedom of movement...What is true for freedom of movement is, to a large extent, valid for freedom in general (OR: 275)

This, coupled with her account of the human activities suggests the primacy of movement as central to any account of human freedom. Negative accounts of freedom, therefore, seem particularly compelling because of their innate opposition to hindrance, as coercion and compulsion are restrictions upon free movement understood in the broadest terms. The ancient Greek word for freedom, *eleutheria*, Arendt maintains, is derived from *eleuthein hopōs erō*, meaning 'to go as I wish', and "there is no doubt that the basic freedom was understood as freedom of movement. A person was free who could move as he wished; the I-can, not the I-will, was the criterion" (W: 19). The use of the phrase 'I-can' is important here as it is her reply to the widespread equation of freedom with free will ('the I-will') and free thought, as opposed to an "accessory of doing and acting" (BPF: 163). Arendt's most intensive considerations of freedom lead her directly toward the topic of the 'will', which features initially in *Between Past and Future*'s 'What is Freedom?' and is further developed in the second book of *The Life of the Mind*. We will not be concerned in this chapter with criticising Arendt's notion of will as some have done, rather, I seek to counter trends such as that expressed by one commentator that "the concept of spontaneous will is quite expendable in Arendt's philosophy" (Jacobitti, 1988: 65). As we shall see, it is of the utmost importance for her theory of freedom, and by extension the meaning of the political.

Arendt is definitely not against the inclusion of the will in her considerations of freedom. Her writings on the will are actually an attempt at integration, a theoretical balancing of the 'I-can' on one hand with the 'I-will' on the other; for "only when the I-will and the I-can coincide does freedom come to pass" (BPF: 160). Her attempt is to extract the idea of freedom itself away from the strict theoretical confines of will and toward "an objective state of the body" (W: 19) prefigured on movement. Questions of freedom, Arendt asserts, have



been torn between the twin 'anti-political' influences of the Christian tradition and post-Platonic philosophy, of which two particular aspects trouble her: firstly, the will has repeatedly been placed under the control of reason, and secondly, it has repeatedly been rejected as illusory. In order to differentiate between the freedom of movement articulated in antiquity (the 'I-can' of doing and acting) and the later Christian/post-Platonic idea of internal freedom, Arendt describes two fundamentally divergent notions: philosophic freedom which emphasises the will, and political freedom which emphasises movement - a distinction drawn from Montesquieu, who clearly favoured the latter. Drawing upon the ancient tradition of the polis and republic, "it was obvious [to Montesquieu] that an agent could no longer be called free when he lacked the capacity to do" (BPF: 159). But political freedom was not divorced from the will; it incorporates it as part of action itself, meaning that political freedom actually consists in "being able to do what one ought to will" (ibid: 159), linking willing (I-will) with doing (I-can) so that "one could do as one pleased" (W: 19). It is essential that willing is not separated from movement.

Arendt traces the rise of philosophic freedom back to the Apostle Paul for whom it "was experienced in complete solitude" (BPF: 156). Paul, when reflecting on the teachings of Jesus, was wracked by the problem raised by Jesus' demand that one must not only do good deeds, but *want* to do good deeds:

It was the experience of an imperative demanding *voluntary* submission that led to the discovery of the Will, and inherent in this experience was the wondrous fact of freedom that none of the ancient peoples- Greek, Roman, or Hebrew- had been aware of, namely, that there is a faculty in man by virtue of which, regardless of necessity and compulsion, he can say 'Yes' or 'No,' agree or disagree with what is factually given, including his own self and his existence, and that this faculty may determine what he is going to do (W: 68)

Paul realised that he had the inner conviction or volition to say 'no', to go against that which demands obedience, and initiate the "fight between the I-will and the I-nill [the I will not]" (ibid: 69). He had discovered the human ability to break with obedience, the inner faculty which causes the individual to oppose external demands. In short, Paul recognised the individual's mental capacity and inclination toward being free:

the point is that every I-will arises out of a natural inclination toward freedom, that is, out of the natural revulsion of free men toward being at someone's bidding. The will always addresses itself to itself; when the command says, Thou shalt, the will replies, Thou shalt *will* as the command says- and not mindlessly execute orders (ibid: 69)

However, he conceived of it as a strictly internal struggle between 'willing and nilling' and in doing so divorced will from its natural sibling – movement - the 'I-can'. For Arendt the will must be connected to our capacity for physical movement, the 'I-can', otherwise willing becomes a kind of paralysis felt in solitude, a mere accessory of thinking "relevant only to people who live outside political communities, as solitary individuals" (ibid: 199). And as we know from chapter two, the solitary condition is opposed to friendship and worldliness.

In the opening pages of 'What is Freedom?' Arendt turns to the question of freedom and its relation to causality. Freedom, she maintains, will seem illusory if we consider all human acts as stemming from causal chains, such as in the thought of Hume or Spinoza. On the one hand we understand ourselves to be freely responsible for our own actions, and on the other as individuals subject to the principle of causality. Arendt repeatedly refers to how this tension was explored by Kant through the act of rising from his chair: upon his rising Kant created a 'new series' which constitutes an absolute beginning, yet it can also be interpreted as "the continuation of proceeding series" (Kant as cited by Arendt, ibid: 29). She refers to this as 'the problem of the new', a problem associated with the "power of spontaneously beginning" (ibid). This problem is the creation of *memory*, that is, our ability to reflect and

think about acts which have occurred. For this reason thinking and willing deal with two very different temporal phenomena: the past (as the object of thought) and future (as the object of will): "the willing ego, looking forward and not backward, deals with things which are within our power but whose accomplishment is by no means certain" (ibid: 37-38). "[E]very thought is an after-thought" because "all thought arises out of experience" (T: 87), and for this reason "thought itself...makes freedom disappear" (BPF: 144). In other words, objects of thought will always appear to be causally dependent, and will always be open to being understood as inevitable. As she phrases it:

In the perspective of memory, that is, looked at retrospectively, a freely performed act loses its air of contingency under the impact of now being an accomplished fact, of having become part and parcel of the reality in which we live (W: 30)

Philosophies of history conform to this triumph of causality brought about by memory and thought. As we are incapable of conceiving just how different reality could be, we believe that the phenomena which exist must exist *necessarily*. Thus the development of human history, from politics to the arts, is inevitably viewed in linear terms as a progression, with one phenomenon giving birth to the next; to use two established examples: capitalism as the parent of socialism, or romanticism as the parent of modernism. In both of these cases it is inconceivable that the latter could have spontaneously arisen without the former, just as it would be impossible to have spontaneously produced the quantum revolution without electrical science. Indeed, the equation of political development with scientific development, that is, as a kind of progressive technical sequence, represents the twilight of modern linear temporal thinking.

If philosophers place the will under the confines of causality and necessity (à la determinism) then they will unavoidably reject the notion of freedom as illusory. Thus, Arendt's writings on willing are an attempt, firstly, at defending the existence of the will, and

second, at emphasising that the will has the power to break with the laws of causality and initiate truly free and spontaneous action. "What will be at stake here", she claims, "is the Will as the spring of action, that is, as a 'power of *spontaneously* beginning a series of successive things or states' (Kant)" (ibid: 6). For the will "is either an organ of free spontaneity that interrupts all causal chains of motivation that would bind it or it is nothing but an illusion" (T: 213).

The most significant contribution of Arendt's to the discussion of this dimension of will is found in her reflections on Augustine. Despite Augustine's introduction of the apostle Paul's account of free will into philosophy (and a commitment to the idea of free will as the choice between 'willing and nilling' rather than spontaneous beginning), she credits him as "the first to formulate the philosophical implications of the ancient political idea of freedom" (BPF: 166). This is based on his statement that "to will and be able are not the same" (W: 87/ BPF: 157), the important point being that the two may come into tension with each other and that freedom cannot be isolated to the mental faculty of willing, as the above distinction between political and philosophical freedom suggests. It is no coincidence that Arendt's return to Augustine after her doctoral thesis was in *The Human Condition*, chapter 'Action'. What follows in Arendt's account of Augustine is a heavily existential reading of his *City of God* which concludes that Augustine pointed the way toward - but failed to properly acknowledge- that "the freedom of spontaneity is part and parcel of the human condition. Its mental organ is the Will" (W: 110).

Augustine, Arendt argues, was still an individual shaped by Roman experiences of politics, and his only strictly political text, *City of God*, broke from the equation of freedom with free will and conceived of freedom "not as an inner human disposition but as a character of human existence in the world. Man does not possess freedom so much as he, or better his coming into the world, is equated with the appearance of freedom in the universe" (BPF: 165-

166). Arendt coined a new term – *natality* - to reflect this stance, derived from Augustine's phrase: "that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody" (as cited by Arendt, HC: 177). Natalty represents the fact that each of us is born in uniqueness as a 'new beginning', that is, each of us is born an individual capable of willing and initiating a new chain of movement which breaks from the past. Each individual and their 'life story' comprised of speech and deed is unprecedented and cannot be foreseen prior to their insertion in this world. "Only if we rob the newborn of their spontaneity, their right to begin something new," Arendt states in her 'Introduction *into* politics', "can the course of the world be defined deterministically and predicted" (PP: 127). The spontaneous 'miracle' of natalty "saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, 'natural' ruin" (HC: 247).

Through the articulation of natalty Arendt attempts to create an ontological foundation for action, being "born into a world that was there before him and will be there after him" (PP: 113). Our birth is itself a beginning, and political action resembles something of a "second birth" (HC: 176), a reaffirmation of our own beginning. Action, it must be noted, is not the same as beginning, but all true action that breaks from causality must have a beginning, a break from that which preceded it. Arendt's point is clear: freedom is bound to our human capacity to act "because he is a beginning, man can begin; to be human and to be free are one and the same" (BPF: 166). Her intention is to supply an ontological basis from which to counter the mirage of absolute causality - what constitutes for her the ultimate denial of freedom and free action. For the "touchstone of a free act is always our awareness that we could also have left undone what we actually did" (W: 5), a recognition of our capacity to influence as an actor and not just as vessel for something beyond us.

### **5.3 The Act of Founding as the Relatively Absolute**

So far we have located two basic elements that dictate whether something or someone can be described as free or not: firstly, there needs to be a movement of some kind, and secondly, the movement must not have been pre-determined. We have yet to identify what form an act would have to take in order to satisfy these basic criteria, and in order to do so we must first elaborate on Arendt's celebration of pre-modern historical narrative as a documentation of spontaneous events. The greatest of these events is undoubtedly located in the act of founding, which results, in turn, in the creation of principles of action with which we were concerned in the last chapter.

Kant supplied a distinction between 'relative' and 'absolute' beginnings: between actions which can be recognised in causal and temporal terms, and actions which are *absolutely* new, divorced entirely from the causality of the past. Arendt locates a similar distinction between the relative and absolute in Augustine's *principium* and *initium*. Augustine reserves the term *principium* (from which 'principle' derives) for the creation of heaven and earth which exists outside of temporal considerations, reflecting the absolute; and *initium* for the creation of Man, who exists in temporality, the relative. In the case of natality, the newborn cannot fit perfectly within either the absolute or relative, for they are a product of the parents and hence the causal past, but they also constitute a new life and possibility as they represent someone who has never existed before, and will never exist again once they are gone. Arendt seems to suggest that it is through natality that this very distinction is reconciled, and she then uses it to introduce the idea of 'relatively absolute spontaneity':

had Kant known of Augustine's philosophy of natality he might have agreed that the freedom of a *relatively* absolute spontaneity is no more embarrassing to human reason than the fact that men are *born*- newcomers again and again in a world that preceded them in time (W: 110)

With this notion of the relatively absolute, Arendt is very clearly opening the space for the argument that new beginnings need a connection to the past, and that spontaneous action can be understood as being historically embedded at the same time as being profoundly new. The implications of the relatively absolute beginning has particular currency in Arendt's discussion of the great political act of foundation.

Arendt reserves a slightly underwhelming term for those rare instances of historical spontaneity: *events*, defined as "occurrences that interrupt routine processes and routine procedures" (OV: 7). By emphasising events Arendt is unreservedly arguing against the modern account of history as process and constant causality. It would be misleading, however, to think of events as characterised by randomness. Spontaneous action is neither random nor pre-determined, as both randomness and causal determinism inhibit the self-determination of the actor or actors, for to act randomly is to act as much without will as it would be to act out of sheer necessity. Her understanding of events draws upon the ancient form of historical narrative in which "the stress is always on single instances and single gestures...The subject matter of history is these interruptions- the extraordinary" (BPF: 42). This was the result of the ancient cyclical understanding of time, in which the natural biological world appears as a recurring cycle of life and death, with humanity alone capable of inserting some permanence against the constant fluctuation of the nature. Human events appear as a rectilinear intrusion into the natural circle, signifying the distinction between "the mortality of men and the immortality of nature" (ibid: 43) as well as the extraordinary nature of human action. The last major text to treat history in this manner, as a narrative of great acts and events was Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories*, located at the cusp of the modern era.

Arendt would say of the new philosophy of history as foreseen in Kant: "once you look at history in its entirety (*im Grossen*), rather than at single events and the ever-frustrated intentions of human agents, everything suddenly makes sense, because there is always at least

a story to tell" (BPF: 82). In essence, one can theoretically manufacture historical causation retrospectively, as practiced, for example, in the thought of Hegel. Arendt's theorisation of labour, to use the most relevant example for her own thought, suggests that if an individual commits themselves to the labouring activity then they fail to break out of the biological circle, taking their place amongst the ebb and flow of natural process. She remarks that it is a modern phenomenon to think of biological life as linear, reinforced by the Darwinian theory of evolution which maps and categorises genetic development, as well as our relatively new knowledge that the world as we know it has a definitive beginning and end.

In an attempt to uncover what was precious about the pre-modern account of historical events Arendt turns to the phenomenon of political foundation. There is no greater moment of foundation, politically speaking, than the act of forming a constitution, and the authentic act of foundation represents, for Arendt, the greatest spontaneous event of human history. It is within this discussion that she weds the concept of foundation to the above notion of the relatively absolute as found in natality. This idea is worked through both in 'Willing' and *On Revolution's* chapter entitled 'Foundation II: *Novus Ordo Saeclorum*', aptly headed by the quote from Virgil: "The great order of the ages is born afresh" (OR: 179). Importantly, Arendt argues that successful and authentic foundations are best built with a sense of historical tradition in mind, so that the founders are both looking backward for inspiration as much as they look forward to their future possibilities. This argument is best summarised in her statement that "foundation, augmentation, and conservation are intimately interrelated" (ibid: 201).

In order to clarify this point, Arendt turns to the Roman concept of authority, *auctoritas*, which she argues was built around the augmentation and the increasing power of the foundation through tradition, as a foundation is always the basis for something to be raised upon - whether a building, or, in this case, a unique political tradition. As she phrases it,



the "notion of a coincidence of foundation and preservation by virtue of augmentation...was deeply rooted in the Roman spirit" (ibid: 202). From this observation Arendt draws a comparison between the Roman foundation myth and the birth of the American republic, with the American Founding Fathers emulating the ancient republic in an attempt to found a 'New Rome', just as, according to Virgil, Rome was a 'New Troy'. Whilst there is a crucial difference between the government of the two - ancient Rome was 'political-advisory' and republican America is 'legal-interpretative' - both exhibit the similar characteristic of accepting that "permanence and change were tied together" (ibid: 201). This character of tying innovation with conservation is found in the original meaning of 'revolution' as a kind of restoration of a previous order, such as the experience in England, 1688, and in the backward gaze to Rome of the French and American Revolutionaries. And it is precisely this argument of Arendt's that makes her so difficult to pin to a radical or conservative disposition as she would not be willing to accept such a polarity.

One of Arendt's most important insights regarding the act of foundation is the way in which the great foundation legends of history (Jewish, Christian, and Roman) relate to temporality; how their "significance lies in how the human mind attempted to solve the problem of the beginning, of an unconnected, new event breaking into the continuous sequence of historical time" (ibid: 204-205). In effect, the act of foundation raises similar perplexities as that of Kant rising from his chair - in that he is both beginning and continuing a causal chain. What Kant found so difficult to comprehend was how an absolute beginning can occur, that is, a beginning completely divorced from the past, facing only forward. Arendt's 'solution' to this problem is found in the great foundation legends and how the Founders were "confronted with the riddle of foundation - how to re-start time within an inexorable time continuum" (W: 214). In the two great foundation legends of Western Civilisation, Roman and Hebrew, we come across a people *liberated*, "driven by the very momentum of the liberation process" (ibid: 210); in the first instance from the total destruction of Troy, and the second

from Egyptian slavery. What is important in this is that liberation, according to Arendt, breaks the causal chain, points to the 'abyss of freedom' (also referred to as the 'abyss of spontaneity') where there is "nothing left for the 'beginner' to hold onto" (ibid: 208). She refers to this moment as a 'hiatus' between past and future, a moment of stasis "between end and beginning, between a no-longer and a not-yet" (OR: 205). Liberation itself is no guarantor of freedom, though it is the necessary transition toward it. This mirrors the more existential slant of her argument in *The Human Condition* that freedom can only occur once one is liberated from the labouring activity, as in the case of slavery.

The act of revolution constitutes such a liberating hiatus, the most visible political manifestation of a transition, the "only political events which confront us directly and inevitably with the problem of beginning...not mere changes" (ibid: 21). The connection between revolution and 'the problem of beginning' is 'obvious' to Arendt. The hiatus is a moment in which a body of people have a radical break with that which preceded them, but have yet to claim that break from themselves in the act of foundation. The hiatus is represented in the wandering of the Israeli tribes in the desert, or, to use a modern equivalent, the so-called 'power vacuum' which immediately occurs with the overthrow of the previous political order such as the Ancien Regime. Arendt locates the 'hiatus' of the American experience in the 'colonial period': the "hiatus between leaving England and the Old World and the establishment of freedom in the new" (W: 206), an exodus not so dissimilar to the story of Aeneas or the Israelis, albeit not quite so fantastical or antagonistic. What connects all of these legendary acts of liberation is that the act of liberation is "told about from the perspective of new freedom" (ibid: 204), whilst also being concerned with "a future promise of freedom" (OR: 205).

The confrontation with the abyss of spontaneity is a fearsome position to be in for those actors who encounter liberation, for every act is open to the danger and prospect of

failure. Arendt suggests that the transition between liberation and the founding of new freedom needs something tangible to base itself upon or it is doomed to collapse. This sense of *responsibility* is to be found in all moments of authentic free action, a recognition that "whatever would be done now could just as well have been left undone", and that "once something is done it cannot be undone" (W: 207). In the case of the American hiatus, the Roman foundation myth as portrayed by Virgil made the revolutionaries aware "that there exists a solution for the perplexities of beginning which needs no absolute to break the vicious circle in which all first things seem to be caught" (OR: 212). When the Founders of a new order recognise the sheer 'newness' of their endeavour, "the start of something unprecedented" (W: 207), they turn to the past as a guide to the future in order to counter the radical 'arbitrariness' inherent in all beginnings. The Virgilian legend was one of rebirth and rejuvenation: Rome as a 'new Troy'. Arendt has this to say of the American Founding Fathers:

They were quite aware of course of the bewildering spontaneity of a free act. As they knew, an act can only be called free if it is not affected or caused by anything preceding it and yet, insofar as it immediately turns into a cause of whatever follows, it demands a justification which, if it is to be successful, will have to show the act as the continuation of a preceding series, that is, renege on the very experience of freedom and novelty (ibid: 210)

What we see here is a return to the notion of Augustinian natality, the potential "ontological underpinning for a truly Roman or Virgilian philosophy of politics" (ibid: 216), and the idea of the relatively absolute understanding of spontaneity. Authentic foundations, and their justification of the future through the past are never absolute beginnings, but relatively absolute beginnings, articulating an "understanding the *new* as an improved re-statement of the old" (ibid: 216). This is, of course, not the basis of an Augustinian or Virgilian philosophy of politics, but an Arendtian philosophy of politics. Thus, the American Founding Fathers turned

to Rome, as Rome turned to Troy, and "the great effort to reform and restore the body politic to its initial integrity (to found 'Rome anew') had led to the entirely unexpected and very different task of constituting something entirely new - founding a 'new Rome' (ibid: 207). The new growth of the body politic is directed toward the past, remaining new at the same time as being a continuum of something that has existed.

#### 5.4 Freedom and Principle

Arendt's reflections on the relationship between the act of founding and the relatively absolute are intrinsically connected to her theory of freedom. If you recall from the previous chapter, principles of action, understood as hermeneutic prejudgments of political relations, are what make an act free: "action insofar as it is free...springs from...what I shall call a principle" (BPF: 150). Principles are the basis of freedom because they initiate the movement that constitutes action:

Freedom or its opposite appears in the world whenever such principles are actualized; the appearance of freedom, like the manifestation of principles, coincides with the performing act. Men *are* free- as distinguished from their possessing the gift for freedom- as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to *be* free and to act are the same (ibid: 151)

I argued that these principles are rooted in the experience of public disclosure and how an individual embodies certain traits which inspire others and move them to judge and act according to what is disclosed. A principle is therefore inseparable from the 'spectacular' acts of individuals, what Arendt would describe as 'great' acts, which certainly do not require

grandiosity or aesthetic excess to be labelled as such. A great act can be as simple as the act of forgiveness when retribution is expected.

We have been interested so far in certain individuals - notably Socrates and Jaspers. Their action, which took the form of speech (more on this in subsequent sections), disclosed a principle by which human relations could be orientated. If you may also recall from the past chapter, principles are related to structural elements of the human condition; their validity is founded on certain basic elements of intersubjective existence such as human distinctiveness (upon which Montesquieu's account of honour was derived). The actions of Socrates and Jaspers, to stay with their examples, force the question of how to relate to one another as equal peers, as friends. A single individual acting in a manner that embodies a principle does not carry significance simply because of the spectacle; its significance resides in its ability to draw others into joint enterprise (or 'action in concert', a phrase of Burke's that Arendt was particularly fond of), its inspirational quality. Whatever this inspiring principle may be - whether virtue, honour, or perhaps moderation - it provides the basis for genuine human community and the construction of a plural 'We'. And in essence this is what foundation is, the "supreme act in which the 'We' is constituted as an identifiable entity" (W: 203).

No foundation can come about simply through the endeavours of a single person, it requires a collective effort, and through this collective effort the principle which initiated the political bond becomes greater, more observable, and finally becomes an inextricable element of the foundation itself. In other words, the emergence of the principle of action is tantamount to the emergence of *power*, "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert" (OV: 44) which is necessary for all foundation. Power is the same thing as the collective 'I-can' of the 'We' (to phrase it in Arendt's terms). And because the act of foundation is the greatest exercise of power, it represents the pinnacle of action and the greatest moment in which principles are actualised.

Every authentic beginning, according to Arendt, holds the potential for arbitrariness because for it to constitute a beginning it needs to break with causal precedent in some way, “it is as though it came from nowhere in either time or space” (OR: 206). Arendt’s discussions regarding action often touch upon the problem that arises the moment that an individual or collective recognise their own power after the ‘hiatus’ in which they come face-to-face with the ‘abyss of freedom’. In this moment there exists only potential freedom, and the misguided impulse to reach toward an absolute which explains action according to some external movement (such as class or race) is ever-present. To phrase it somewhat differently, the abyss of freedom confronts the individual with the responsibility that comes with all action; and ideology, with its historical narrative of predictive progression and its logical principles simply serves to relieve the individual from the demands of responsibility. Relying upon judgment requires, at base, a courage because all beginning involves risk of some sort, a “stepping out of our private existence...[toward a] realm of great enterprise and adventures that a man might embark on and hope to survive only if he were joined by his equals” (PP: 122). As we know from chapter three, the responsibility in this moment is not geared toward the individual but the world. Political courage is about grasping the ability to create and shape a world independently without recourse to something greater than those who are the actors, and not just about being brave in the face of fear.

It is within the context of the ‘problem’ of human freedom that principles aid us. Principles form the hermeneutic base upon which judgment can take place (as a pool of intersubjective understanding regarding the objects that we encounter in the world), and this judgment helps bring a certain stability which exists outside of the strict confines of cold logic. Judgment outlines possible options without certifying them. The final pages of Arendt’s discussion of foundation in *On Revolution* hold the following passage, which I consider to be one of the most remarkable and ground-breaking statements to be found within Arendtian thought:

the men of the American Revolution, whose awareness of the absolute novelty in their enterprise amounted to an obsession, were inescapably caught in something for which neither the historical nor the legendary truth of their own tradition could offer any help or precedent. And yet, when reading Virgil's fourth Eclogue, they might have been faintly aware that there exists a solution for the perplexities of beginning which needs no absolute to break the vicious circle in which all things seem to be caught. What saves the act of beginning from its own arbitrariness is that it carries its own principle within itself, or, to be more precise, that beginning and principle, *principium* and principle, are not only related to each other, but are coeval. The absolute from which the beginning is to derive its own validity and which must save it, as it were, from its inherent arbitrariness is the principle which, together with it, makes its appearance in the world. The way the beginner starts whatever he intends to do lays down the law of action for those who have joined him in order to partake in the enterprise and bring about its accomplishment. As such, the principle inspires the deeds that are to follow and remains apparent as long as the action lasts (OR: 212-213)

Principles become an object open to observation as long as the act lasts and later become part of the hermeneutic prejudice through the act of founding, thus informing future judgment and being a necessary part of world-formation. Because they are initially objects of intersubjective viewing due to the fact that they are part of the action taking place, they are distinct from ideas and concepts which are, by nature, subjective. This aspect of principles makes them both in a sense stronger and at the same time weaker than objects of thought; they are dependent upon a shared experience and thus have a greater validity than an idea because an object of thought cannot be shared in its idealised form, but at the same time this principle is easily lost when the action ends. The question of how the inspirational power of the principle can be maintained is one of the key topics of Arendtian politics: How can the freedom which comes

about through mutual action be retained after the act? Or as she phrases it: “should freedom in its most exalted sense as freedom to act be the price to be paid for foundation?” (ibid: 232). Her fear is that when the act of foundation has passed there would be no space left “for the exercise of precisely those qualities which had been instrumental in building it” (ibid) and that the privilege of freedom to act be subsequently limited. According to her analysis in *On Revolution*, no modern act of founding has adequately provided a space in which the exercise of freedom can be further enjoyed. The fact that principle requires constant action to remain visible is of great importance for understanding why Arendt is so critical of the revolutionary tradition, as it is the very inspiration behind the individual act of founding which disappears when the action ceases. The manner in which inspiration is transmitted is through the authority of tradition.

It is my contention that Arendt believes that the disappearance of principle is tantamount to the loss of tradition and authority. I believe that tradition for her is the authoritative force through which principles become part of the self-understanding of the citizens of a body politic. This relationship between these terms is displayed in the following statement of hers:

Authority, resting on a foundation in the past as its unshaken cornerstone, gave the world the permanence and durability which human beings need precisely because they are mortals- the most unstable and futile beings we know of. Its loss is tantamount to the loss of the groundwork of the world (BPF: 95)

Relating principles with authority is interesting as both concepts are based on a form of non-coercive persuasion - our acceptance of an inspiring phenomenon. The notion of authority admits an inherent hierarchy in which those or that which has authority is ‘above’ others. The authority of the Roman Senate (from which the term is derived) was rooted in the belief that they were augmenting the original foundation and drawing upon a tradition which provided a



world upon which action and judgment may take place. They were considered authoritative so long as they augmented the foundation of the Roman republic, being the necessary part of the constant nourishment and re-interpretation of tradition through action and the principles within it. The primary characteristic of Roman authority (from which the term is derived) was its non-coercion that goes beyond persuasion while at the same time retaining human freedom (ibid: 105). This does not mean that principles are untouchable, rather, it means that principles come to form the very fabric upon which persuasion and judgment takes place; they take the form of prejudices from which the world makes sense to us. In this manner, principles remain 'above' the power of persuasion. Once a principle has been established it forms a hermeneutic base which, whilst it certainly can still be challenged, influences the interpretative positioning of objects open to judgment. In the following section we explore further the importance of this hermeneutic foundation for Arendtian freedom as far as it enables persuasion.

## **5.5 Freedom as Rhetoric**

I would now like to turn to the 'question' that was introduced at the beginning of this thesis regarding the proper relationship between action and speech. Throughout this thesis it should have been apparent that every element of Arendtian thought is dependent in some shape or form upon her concept of language, linking together a variety of disparate concepts. To use an example, speech is the very foundation for the life of the mind; thought, will, and judgment are all based on phenomena disclosed through language. We *think* about phenomena that are made visible through naming, we *will* these things, and we *judge* the world according to them. For this reason Arendt writes that language is "the only medium through which mental

activities can be manifest not only to the outside world but also to the mental ego itself" (T: 102). It is "our mind that demands speech" (ibid: 98) in the sense that all thought is a conversation between 'me and myself' (see chapter one). Thus, speech is as crucial for the freedom of the mental activities as corporeal movement is for the physical activities, for without speech none of the mental activities are possible at all. Most importantly, all judgment of action and event takes place through language, and therefore the worldly community of friendship is dependent upon linguistic conditions. Deviations from this result in problems such as those explored in chapter one.

Of the three physical activities, it is clear that speech is tied to action, as labour and work can be performed in isolation. An individual, of course, does not require speech to act. However,

without the accompaniment of speech, at any rate, action would not only lose its revelatory character, but, and by the same token, it would lose its subject, as it were; not acting men but performing robots would achieve what, humanly speaking, would remain incomprehensible. Speechless action would no longer be action because there would no longer be an actor, and the actor, the doer of deeds, is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of words. The action he begins is humanly disclosed by the word, and though his deed can be perceived in its brute physical appearance without verbal accompaniment, it becomes relevant only through the spoken word in which he identifies himself as the actor, announcing what he does, has done, and intends to do (HC: 178-179)

The 'who' of action, whether it is an individual or collective 'we', must be articulated through language so that they become an object that can be understood. Otherwise, the action lacks true meaning. In *The Human Condition*, words pertaining to action are often paired alongside speech, highlighting the mutuality of their 'primordial' relationship. The closeness of these two

concepts has led to the rise of the notion that they are one and the same. George Kateb, whose argument was introduced in chapter one, phrases this question in the following manner:

What is political action? Arendt frequently distinguishes between words and deeds, or between talking and doing, as the basic modes of action. But given all that she excludes as not properly political, the distinction cannot stand. It must collapse, with the result that there is only one true mode of political action, and that is speech, in the form of talking or occasionally writing, as with the Declaration of Independence and other manifestoes or addresses to the world, writing that should be read aloud (1984: 15)

Kateb's claim has proven to be a highly influential, informing both Dana Villa and Seyla Benhabib's prominent interpretations of Arendt. Both, incidentally, categorise Arendt's theory of action along *deliberative* lines, with Villa stating that "genuine political action is nothing other than a certain kind of talk, a variety of conversation or argument about public matters" (1996: 31). His analysis of Arendtian action can be described as *performative-deliberative*, linking deliberation to a 'self-contained' vision of politics outside of instrumental concerns such as morality. Benhabib, on the other hand, advances a *narrative-deliberative* theory of Arendtian action based on how narratives are constituted through the activity of storytelling (for Benhabib's brief discussion of the two theories of deliberation, see Benhabib, 1996: xiv-xviii). Ultimately, their difference is based on the proper form of Arendt speech in the public sphere, branded by Villa as the 'bright light' of the *polis* (performative) vs the 'controllable seminar room' (narrative), or by Benhabib as classical vs modern notions of public freedom.

Such distinctions are commonplace within the literature surrounding Arendt. Underlying Benhabib's account is the idea expressed by Maurizio Passerin D'Entrèves that Arendtian action is split between two different models which he labels the expressive and

communicative. Central to D'Entrèves argument is the idea that these two models are incompatible (1994: 10). As is so often the case with competing philosophical positions, the reality is somewhere in between; even Benhabib accepts an element of artificiality in the very distinctions that she makes regarding Arendt (1990: 194). The reason why all of these distinctions are made can be traced to one unified concern: a major discomfort with Arendt's critique of the modern social realm and its impact upon politics proper. Emphasising the 'communicative' over the 'expressive' is often seen as a way of moving Arendt away from her fiery anti-modern language and toward the softer language of deliberative democrats. At play is also the labelling of the Arendtian public space as agonistic or consensus-based. Neither description fits adequately with Arendtian politics, as I hope to display in this section of the thesis, building on the discussion in chapter two. I agree wholeheartedly with Shmuel Lederman's recent claim regarding agonism and deliberation that

"for Arendt those elements of political action were not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary aspects that have to be brought together in order to recover the meaning of politics and freedom. In this sense, going back to a more nuanced reading of Arendt might serve us in overcoming some binary dichotomies that do not aid in advancing our understanding of politics and the possibilities for political action in the modern world" (Lederman, 2014: 335)

It was noted earlier that the physical and mental activities presuppose a certain freedom of movement insofar as they require the ability to move from a state of inactivity to activity or a transition from one activity to another. Action, it was claimed, represents the highest faculty of physical movement itself because it represents the ability to spontaneously begin, and as we have seen, this is the basis of power and freedom. There are, however, repeated instances in which Arendt writes about speech as a movement in very similar terms as she does action. There are two essential movements directly connected with speech: the first is its

*perlocutionary* character, most notably expressed in the act of persuasion; and the second is its ability to judge from another's standpoint, the 'enlarged' mentality as discussed in chapter three. Of course, the partial levelling of the difference between action and speech is not something unique to Arendt; it is no groundbreaking statement to suggest that words can be deeds given the amount of writing and interest in speech-act theory. If we look back upon many of the statements of this thesis we can see the relevance of the speech act in Arendtian thought; the political role of Socrates, for example, is profoundly perlocutionary in the manner that it affects the listener or partner in dialogue - such as bringing about curiosity, and hence thought. Similarly, rhetoric, the art of persuasion, is the basis of political life (see chapter one), and has an implicit perlocutionary effect if successful because you have actively altered the opinion of another through speech. The famous phrase regarding the United States: 'We, the people', is a performative speech act, whose 'act' is that of foundation. And, of course, foundation tends to be based on constitutionalism, a text; a text, furthermore, which binds people together through mutual promise, another act of illocution in what Searle would have categorised as both 'declaratory' and 'commissive'. This is not to say that speech acts are always political in the Arendtian sense, as speech acts can also come in the form of commands - a pre-political form of rulership that Arendt considers pre-political. If we accept that Arendt's theory of action is closely linked to a theory of speech, then our attempt to understand Arendtian freedom needs to take account of this shift. As almost all of Arendt's writings concerning speech and politics are written as part of a broader discussion on ancient Greek politics, this will be the focus. For the Greeks, speech was the constituent part of freedom, it would be impossible for them to speak of freedom without it, and Athenian politics represents the zenith of this understanding.

The broad Greek term for freedom, *eleutheria*, was derived from *eleuthein hopōs erō*, meaning 'to go as I wish', the foundation of all free movement, and hence, action (the 'I-can'). *Eleutheria* was closely tied to the collective self-determination of the *polis* and the equality of

shared citizenship and power. The term for a free constitution, *isonomia*, was understood in spatial terms, as a space of movement linked to equal participation through speech and persuasion - which was understood as a further account of freedom labelled *isēgoria*. The Greeks, as we know very well from chapter one, regarded speech as the triumph of civilisation, and it was *rhetoric*, the art of persuasion, with which they distinguished themselves from barbarians. Free political constitutions, Arendt claims, "all have the same claim to political activity, and in the polis this activity primarily took the form of speaking with one another. *Isonomia* is therefore essentially the equal right to speak, and as such the same thing as *isēgoria*" (PP: 118). Arendt's defence of this is rooted in a historical narrative of the development of action in Greece, starting with the Homeric epics, and is found in her 'Introduction into Politics'. She traces the notion of *isēgoria* and the free constitution (*isonomia*) to Homeric times and the "example of the magnificent experience of life's possibilities among one's equals" (ibid: 124) in Homer's epic poetry. The Homeric protagonists represent the 'We' of a pure collective action, leaving their homes for enterprise and adventure, and founded the *polis* "from the conjunction of great events in war or other deeds- that is, from political activity and its inherent greatness" (ibid: 124). She describes the birth of the *polis* in the following terms:

The point of enterprise and of adventure fades more and more, and whereas what before was, so to speak, only a necessary adjunct to such adventures, the constant presence of others, dealing with others in the public space of the agora, the *isēgoria* as Herodotus puts it, now becomes the real substance of a free life. At the same time, the most important activity of a free life moves from action to speech, from free deeds to free words.

This shift is of great importance and possesses greater validity within the tradition of our concept of freedom- in which the notions of action and speech are kept separate

on principle, corresponding, as it were, to two entirely different faculties of man- than was ever the case in the history of Greece. For it is one of the most remarkable and fascinating facts of Greek thought that from the very beginning, which means as early as Homer, such a separation on principle between speech and action does not occur, since a doer of great deeds must at the same time always be a speaker of great words- and not only because great words were needed to accompany and explain great deeds that would otherwise fall into mute oblivion, but also because speech itself was from the start considered a form of action (ibid: 124-125)

Could this be a clue to understanding the curious problem of the relationship between action and speech in Arendtian thought (see chapter one)? Is this an admission by Arendt that speech and action are one and the same, and that this is the insight upon which freedom rests? This remains, perhaps, the most interesting and difficult perplexity of Arendtian thought - she herself admits that the topic of free speech has an "odd ambiguity" (ibid: 128) - and it is unfortunate that she wrote very little on this topic. It is difficult to accept that a thinker who places the art of distinction at the centre of her philosophical method would allow such a conflation and confusion surrounding two of the most important terms employed in their conceptual canon. There are three possible conclusions we can reach here: firstly, that Arendt rejects the conflation of action and speech by the time of writing *The Human Condition*; secondly, that there is a deliberate tension between the two terms; third, that there is a problem with the consistency of her thought on this issue. For this author, all three of these conclusions are unacceptable, and I wish to propose another: that speech and action are separate concepts in Arendtian thought, each pertaining to a separate dimension of freedom as long as it is understood as a kind of movement.

Arendt's 'Introduction *into* Politics' often broaches the topic of judgment. As was explored in Chapter Three, communicability (speech) is the base requirement of judgment, the

root of all true understanding between persons. Understanding is crucial for the authenticity of the public realm and the togetherness engendered within it, for "we are contemporaries only so far as our understanding reaches" (EU: 323). In her 'Introduction *into* Politics' Arendt appears to link *phronēsis*, the specifically political form of wisdom described by Aristotle, with the 'enlarged mentality' she speaks about in her Kant lectures.

With the split between action and speech in post-Homeric Greece which was noted earlier, Arendt points to the institutionalisation of each activity in a correlative form of contest: athletics for action, and oratory for speech: "two elements that appear almost undifferentiated in Homer- the sheer strength of great deeds and the ravishing power of the words that accompany them and sway the assembly of men who see and hear them- can later be seen very clearly separated from each other" (PP: 166). Both athletics and oratory are public events, but it is the publicity of the latter which interests Arendt. With the rise of oratory came the Sophists, whose "importance in liberating human thought from the constrictions of dogma we underestimate if, following Plato, we condemn them on moral grounds" (ibid: 167). But for Arendt it was not just thought which was liberated, but also the public realm, "the realm in which all things can first be recognized in their many-sidedness" (ibid: 167). Oratory was important not because of the rigorous argumentation process, but because it enables "the ability to truly *see* topics from various sides...with the result that people understood how to assume the many possible perspectives provided by the real world, from which one and the same topic can be regarded and in which each topic, despite its oneness, appears in a great diversity of views" (ibid: 167-168). Human plurality, "the twofold character of equality and distinction" (HC: 175), the curious phenomenon that we are equal in our uniqueness, is the condition of judgment.

Free speech, *isēgoria*, must be understood in this context of Arendt's thought, the basis of which is fundamentally hermeneutic:



we know from experience that no one can adequately grasp the objective world in its full perspective, which corresponds to his standpoint in the world and is determined by it. If someone wants to see and experience the world as it 'really' is, he can do so only by understanding it as something that is shared by many people, lies between them, separates and links them, showing itself differently to each and comprehensible only to the extent that many people can talk *about* it and exchange their opinions and perspectives with one another, over against one another. Only in the freedom of our speaking with one another does the world, as that about which we speak, emerge in its objectivity and visibility from all sides (PP: 128-129)

What we have here is an early summation of Arendtian judgment and its hermeneutic properties (see chapter three). Her theory of judgment is an exploration of the relationship between politics and hermeneutics, the art of understanding, whereby the both the world and ourselves as individuals within it are authentically disclosed in 'objectivity'. Therefore, *Isēgoria* must be understood in the context of Arendtian political hermeneutics: "the freedom of the political man definitely depended on the presence and equality of others. A thing can reveal itself under many aspects only in the presence of peers who regard it from their various perspectives" (ibid: 169).

But what is the most important point for our investigation is her discussion of judgment and political hermeneutics through the language of movement:

The ability to see the same thing from various standpoints stays in the human world; it is simply the exchange of the standpoint given us by nature for that of someone else, with whom we share the world, resulting in a true freedom of movement in our mental world that parallels our freedom of movement in the physical one. Being able to persuade and influence others, which was how the citizens of the polis interacted

politically, presumed a kind of freedom that was not irrevocably bound, either mentally or physically, to one's own standpoint or point of view (ibid: 168)

What we clearly see here is Arendt's integration of the language of movement into her theory of judgment, informing her later comments on the 'enlarged mentality' - the capacity to represent another's opinion in one's imagination or 'mind's eye'. This, of course, requires the spatiality of *isēgoria* insofar as judgment requires a public space of equality in speaking. Through *isēgoria* and the faculty of judgment which it unlocks - the "insight that enabled him to consider all standpoints" - the citizen of the polis "enjoyed the greatest freedom of movement" (ibid: 169). Movement must always be partnered with spatiality, as any movement can only take place within a space, and a political space can only exist with reference to others, intersubjectively based in equal participation in speech. As Arendt would write:

Before freedom can become a mark of honor bestowed on a man or a type of men-  
Greeks, for instance, as opposed to barbarians- it is an attribute of the way human  
beings organize themselves and nothing else. Its place of origin is never inside man,  
whatever that inside may be, nor is it in his will, or his thinking, or his feelings; it is  
rather in the space between human beings, which can arise only when distinct  
individuals come together. Freedom has a space, and whoever is admitted into it is  
free; whoever is excluded is not free (ibid: 170)

The key to this is *isēgoria*, and the equality present within it.

Throughout this chapter we have repeatedly analysed the various concepts which feed into Arendt's reflections upon freedom with reference to movement. It has been suggested that Arendt supplies two versions of this account of freedom and movement: a physical account, and a mental account, which we can label as freedom of action and freedom of

speech. More often than not the two are spoken about in the singular, probably because it is difficult to juggle the large amount of conceptual baggage required as both draw upon different strands of thought. In the following quotation Arendt refers to political freedom as a freedom of movement, and distinguishes between the two versions of it:

This freedom of movement, then- whether as the *freedom to depart and begin something new and unheard-of* or as the *freedom to interact in speech with many others and experience the diversity that the world always is in its totality*- most certainly was and is not the end purpose of politics, that is, something that can be achieved by political means. It is rather the substance and meaning of all things political. In this sense, politics and freedom are identical, and wherever this kind of freedom does not exist, there is no political space in the true sense (emphasis added, *ibid*: 129)

To conclude, we have identified the freedom of action, represented in the will, natality and our ability to begin and found anew through power. This theory is quite intuitive simply because the very language of movement is borrowed from our experience of the physical realm. And second, we have freedom of speech, rooted in the ancient concept of *isēgoria* whereby one is admitted to a public sphere of equality, imbued with a further hermeneutic element derived from *phronēsis* and judgment. Both accounts of free movement are not mutually exclusive, but appear together in the political-public space.

There is, however, an overlap between the two when we consider rhetoric, the art of persuasion, and its perlocutionary force. Rhetoric is both a form of speech where one discloses one's own point of view as well as potentially affecting another's as found for example in our discussion of Perelmans's theory of *epideictic* speech in chapter three. It is with this understanding of rhetoric in mind that Arendt writes "political freedom...is peculiarly associated with action and speech insofar as speech is an act. This freedom consists of what

we call spontaneity, which, according to Kant, is based on the ability of every human being to initiate a sequence, to forge a new chain" (PP: 125-126). Significantly, Arendt describes freedom of speech in the following way in her Kant lectures: "the right of an individual to express himself and his opinion in order to be able to persuade others to share his viewpoint" (K: 39). The presence of the latter half of this statement is significant, for it roots the freedom of speech and opinion in rhetoric. As was mentioned earlier, freedom of opinion only becomes meaningful with the rhetorical context, that is, within the political sphere and not outside of it. When we divorce freedom of opinion from rhetoric we come to a solipsistic understanding of freedom such as that traditionally found within philosophy since the trial of Socrates.

## **5.6 Towards an Arendtian Theory of Hermeneutic Republicanism**

Throughout this thesis we have repeatedly encountered the importance of language in Arendt's thought, from her critique of ideological cliché and modern intimacy, to her theory of judgment and principle. Underlying all of this is a hermeneutic theory of understanding that emphasises rhetoric as the constituent element of freedom. In this final section I argue that Arendt's theory of freedom as rhetoric, when combined with the historical consciousness of her theory of principle, is a form of what we might call *hermeneutic republicanism*. Thinking of Arendt's thought in this way allows us to move away from the polarities associated with interpretations of Arendt and toward an inclusive reading which matches her existentialist elements with the communicative.

Hans Georg Gadamer's account of hermeneutic conversation, which was introduced and compared to Arendt's narrative of Socratic speech in chapter three, is a useful source for thinking through Arendt's theory of freedom. As all conversation is conducted through

language, it takes place in a site of embedded historical prejudices which grant the language meaningfulness. Conversation does not exist in a temporal vacuum; because it always involves historical interpretation, it is never simply the echoing of the past but a fresh form of creating meaningfulness for the present. Conversation results in an augmentation of the previous meaning to something new. Thus, language has something of a 'living' quality, requiring us to undertake what Gadamer calls transposition: "*To think historically* means, in fact, *to perform the transposition that the concepts of the past undergo* when we try to think in them. To think historically always involves mediating between those ideas and one's own thinking" (Gadamer, 2012: 398). The historically conscious speaker establishes a 'temporal distance' between themselves and the past - a recognition that the past exists in a perpetual state of interpretative motion, involving something of a loss of originary meaning and the gaining of the new. There is a great similarity here with Arendt's ideas of Virgilian politics and authentic founding in which "permanence and change were tied together" (OR: 201); Virgilian freedom is similar to what Gadamer call the 'fusion of horizons', the reclaiming of history and prejudice for our time.

I see harmony between Arendt's theory of freedom and Gadamer's stated attempt to proceed with the "rehabilitation of authority and tradition" (2012: 278). With this consideration in mind her fondness of the following phrase of Tocqueville's becomes clearer: "as the past has ceased to throw its light upon the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity" (as cited by Arendt, PAP: 453). Both Arendt and Gadamer see the Enlightenment attempt to deny the calling of prejudices as a form of historical alienation; from the vantage-point of the principle of Cartesian doubt - the bedrock of modern philosophy - tradition appears as something like an 'unfounded judgment', a mere romantic pining for the certainties of a past fiction, a turning to a mythological past. But with the loss of tradition and the language pregnant with it, we lose, as Arendt phrases it, the "guiding thread through the past and the chain to which each new generation knowingly or unknowingly was bound in its

understanding of the world and its own experience" (BPF: 25). The tradition imparted by the historical consciousness of the authority of principle is a necessary part of worldliness and communal friendship. The Kantian notion of absolute spontaneity which Arendt critiques in *The Life of The Mind*'s 'Willing' seems to suggest that tradition and freedom are incompatible. Does the commitment to tradition and principle undermine Arendt's statement that it is the quality of free politics to achieve the 'improbable and unpredictable' as found in the activity of beginning? Again, Arendt and Gadamer are similar in their response, as he asks a similar question: "Does being situated within tradition really mean being subject to prejudices and limited in one's freedom? Is not, rather, all human existence, even the freest, limited and qualified in various ways?" (2012: 277). Both thinkers embrace the recognition that free acts do not have to be completely divorced from the past. Freedom as rhetoric is Arendt's attempt to emphasise how tradition and freedom are mutually dependent and that freedom is not found in the absolute beginning, but the relatively absolute.

Modern political thinkers since Descartes genuinely "perceived their world as one invaded by new problems and perplexities which our tradition of thought was unable to cope with" (BPF: 27). Because of this, "reliance on tradition was no longer possible" (ibid: 25), and "only radicalization, not a new beginning and reconsideration of the past, was possible" (ibid: 27). Thus, modern political thought was tasked with the attempt to make sense of a world almost from scratch. This is best represented in the rise (following Kierkegaard) of the 'absurd' as a way of understanding the human condition and its supposed structural meaninglessness. There is, Arendt admits, validity in the absurdist response to modernity, as she sees it as a genuine reaction to the loss of meaning in the modern age. However, for her, absurdity is not an inherent part of the human experience but a response to the process of growing meaninglessness as a result of the death of the public sphere in which principle could inform judgment. The totalitarian phenomenon represents to her the absolute manifestation of worldlessness and the near total collapse of tradition as a source of meaning and

intersubjective understanding, strongly facilitating the growth of absurdism in the post-war era. The principles of totalitarian action were drawn from the universal principles of logicity, a construct from a sphere outside of human understanding and judgment. There was, therefore, nothing of an authentic history to the development of totalitarianism, which explains the repeated assertion by Arendt that totalitarianism is a phenomenon of total historical novelty. In an age in which the 'mind of man wanders in obscurity', the 'bannister' of totalitarian logic and clichégenic language provide a desperate respite, according to Arendt, from the loneliness of mass society.

How does Arendt suggest that the past speak to us in the manner she suggests so as to realise the freedom that comes about through judgment? Certainly, she has grave reservations about the capacity for success of such a task in the modern age, and much to say about the failing of previous attempts (though the American Revolution provides her with a case of limited accomplishment). Theoretically, one of the best accounts of this question is to be found in Arendt's essay on Walter Benjamin in *Men In Dark Times*. Benjamin, Arendt asserts, "knew that the break in tradition and the loss of authority which occurred in his lifetime were irreparable, and he concluded that he had to discover new ways of dealing with the past" (MDT: 193). She builds upon this observation with her well-known reference to Benjamin as a 'pearl diver'

who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral in the depths and to carry them to the surface, this thinking delves into the depths and to carry them to the surface, this thinking delves into the depths of the past- but not in order to resuscitate it in the way it was and to contribute to the renewal of extinct ages. What guides this thinking is the conviction that although the living is subject to the ruin of time, the process of decay is at the same time a process of crystallization, that

in the depth of the sea, into which sinks and is dissolved what once was alive, some things 'suffer a sea-change' and survive in new crystallized forms and shapes that remain immune to the elements, as though they waited only for the pearl diver who one day will come down and bring them up to the world of the living- as 'thought fragments,' as something 'rich and strange,' and perhaps even as everlasting *Urphänomene* [-pure phenomena] (ibid: 205-206)

This compelling quotation has chiefly been interpreted by Benhabib as a theory of historical narration, a treatise on the art of political storytelling which create the 'web of relationships' that bind a community (see Benhabib, 1996: 93-94). I have great sympathy for this perspective and I believe the central observation to be correct, however, I believe that far more can be drawn out from it. Benjamin's quest, or at least Arendt's analysis of it, can be understood as a recognition of the hermeneutic effort to re-discover language which has been misplaced or ignored for whatever reason. Through his meticulous collection of quotations, Benjamin was attempting a re-connection with something lost, and he realised that the only manner in which this association could be reinstated - however flimsy it may be - is through a re-connection with language and its historical meaning. As long as there is a 'sea' of language through which we can delve, there is always cause for optimism: "Any period to which its own past has become as it has to us must eventually come up against the phenomenon of language, for in it the past is contained ineradicably, thwarting all attempts to get rid of it once and for all" (MDT: 204). With such things in mind, Arendt smiles when asked in her interview with Günter Gaus as to what remains in the aftermath of the second world war, to which she replies: language (EU: 12). The theorist as pearl diver attempts to reclaim and re-interpret those moments and instances of past human grandeur and dignity, removing the past failures of interpretation, past misconceptions and erroneous derivations. We can witness this practice on almost every page of Arendt's texts, whether it be directed terminologically or at the differing forms of human togetherness both positive and negative. This is an activity of



terminological identification, cultivation, and preservation; and it can occur through the rather simple activity of retelling of histories. Here, I agree with Vivasvan Soni's assertion that "through an exercise in classical reception, by remembering what politics meant in the *polis* or the early American republic, we can secure for ourselves the space of the political" (Soni, 2010: 33). The act of re-interpretation through 'classical reception' certainly can allow us to "imagine once again, *in concretely utopian ways*" (ibid: 43).

I believe that Arendt thought that it is the role of the theorist to pursue communicative reflection upon past instances of the 'living together of men' as embodied in political principles. The peculiar form of historical narrative that the political theorist can employ, where the past appears as something mediated and unfixed, ripe for interpretation and appropriation is what results in the transposition of meaning - not the truth (as in traditional philosophy), or the causality of processes (as in modern history). Through doing so the theorist learns to re-think the past, critique the present, and inspire the future, without desiring conceptual and historical closure. As Lucy Cane correctly notes, "principles must be preserved in institutions, stories, political theory, poetry, and other cultural artifacts if they are to be kept vital" (Cane, 2015: 69), and our reception to this as theorists is vital. Of course, this does not mean that all historical discussion need be about principles. In the process of conversation we grasp a language which binds us and helps to shape the 'We' of political community, forming an agreement about the world and the objects within it. In this sense, historical conversation is as much about identity as it is about critique and freedom. Neither does it slip into the romantic yearnings of classicism; as Arendt states: "restoration is never a substitute for new foundation" (MDT: 11). But 'new foundation' does require the transposition of tradition.

It is with these insights that Arendt offers the base for a new form of republicanism based on an account of freedom as rhetoric and the shared understanding that arises from it.

This form of hermeneutic republicanism requires a re-familiarisation with the language of a tradition which is partially lost to us, and a deliberation on how this tradition can grant meaning for the present. Arendt does not provide the answers; instead, she attempts to provide a highly developed approach to understand a language which potentially can provide some solidity in an age which remains highly unsure of itself.

## Conclusion

### 6.1 Thesis Summary

We have been interested in providing an account of how certain terms and themes feed together into Arendt's theory of freedom. We started with an exploration of the role that speech plays in her thought in a broad sense, locating in her writings a critique of totalitarian ideology as well as traditional forms of (post-Platonic) philosophy. Her engagement with the examples of Socrates and Karl Jaspers were linked with her celebration of Greek political culture, specifically, the role of the concept of *isēgoria*, which has no equivalent English word. *Isēgoria* was introduced as the specifically Athenian way of thinking about freedom, which is attained through the equal participation of citizens through the sharing of their opinions through speech and rhetorical persuasion. This was contrasted with the form of clichégenic speech that Arendt observes in totalitarian language.

Chapter two built upon this idea with reference, once again, to an ancient Greek term: friendship (*philia*). It was suggested that Arendt attempts to distinguish between ancient and modern forms of friendship in order to emphasise what has been lost and its implications for our notions of citizenship and political association. Arendt asserts that the modern individual lives largely in a condition of loneliness, described as a kind of alienation from one's peers. This kind of loneliness is linked to her analysis of the loss of the world and the subsequent rise of meaninglessness which has come about through certain modern events, reaching its political apogee in the totalitarian movements of the twentieth century. I argued that Arendt located the ancient spirit of friendship in the manner which Socrates and Jaspers sought to

communicate with their peers, forming a basis upon which Arendt would come to think of authentic political citizenship and true political community.

In Chapter three it was argued that Arendt locates the source of political responsibility, which had been so evidently lacking in the totalitarian era, in the presence of friendship. I distinguished between personal and political responsibility, basing this distinction in Arendt's critique of traditional morality. Our ability to 'tell right from wrong', it was claimed, lays in something greater than our own sense of guilt (the basis of personal responsibility), and this faculty is rooted in our capacity for judgment. The capacity to judge is dependent upon the presence of world, which creates a sphere in which the objects that we encounter are intelligible and meaningful. For Arendt, borrowing from Kant, the necessary component for judgment is common sense - our ability to grasp the multifaceted perspectives regarding the objects that comprise the world. Central to this worldly insight, I argued, is *understanding*. Because of this, I claimed that her political theory has a particularly hermeneutic element to it, as found in her accounts of citizenship which is dependent upon citizens being able to understand each other through the world. Drawing upon theories of rhetoric as found in Gadamer and Perelman, I argued that Arendt believes that rhetoric enables understanding through its disclosure of shared assumptions about the objects in the world, thus creating the foundation of political community. Following this, I returned to the examples of Socrates and Jaspers as individuals who were aware that true responsibility can only be brought about through rhetorical communication as it fosters a recognition that we are not just responsible to ourselves for our acts and deeds but also the world.

The fourth chapter examined the role that the concept of principle plays in Arendt's thought, a term which I argued has been largely ignored by commentators. The chapter opened with a discussion of what Arendt understands by the term through distinguishing it from other constituent elements of action. I suggested that principles are the hermeneutic

prejudices which are necessary for judgment to take place. I then distinguished principles from values in Arendt's writings, with values understood as something which lacks a basis in worldly phenomena, but have become the predominant 'inspiration' for action in the modern age. Principles, on the other hand, are always built upon the past action of others and the communication of that action among the present political community. The chapter then applied Arendt's theory of principle and critique of values to her theory of totalitarianism, and it was suggested that Arendt's theory of totalitarianism is dependent upon her distinguishing it from despotism, which a proper theory of principle is necessary to achieve. Following this, I analysed the importance of her theory of principle for her analysis of the American and French Revolutions, which I argued are her greatest application of the topic. I concluded by stating that Arendt strongly believed that principles are the necessary basis of a free politics, setting the argument for chapter five.

The final chapter focused on the main concept under investigation: freedom. Bringing together the arguments of the prior chapters, I sought to reinterpret Arendtian freedom as *rhetoric*. I argued that Arendt's account of freedom is established with reference to physical movement, from which she critiqued the post-Platonic philosophical tradition of freedom which identifies it with the mental faculty of willing. Following this, I argued that this notion of movement is the base for her prominent theory of action, which she in turn identifies as the source of all political association. Section three explored the idea of founding as the highest manifestation of movement and Arendt's grappling with issues surrounding it. I introduced Arendt's underexplored notion of the 'relatively absolute' as her response to some of these issues, and particular attention was paid to her claim that authentic founding requires a strong consciousness of tradition, so that the founders view their activity as a fresh restatement of the old. This was then linked to the topic of the previous chapter - principle, and I argued that it is the emergence of principles which is the content of this historical consciousness. I sought to wed this notion of principle with Arendt's theory of judgment and her theory of friendship.

It was argued that principles form the hermeneutic bedrock upon which judgment can take place and political community is achieved. Drawing upon the term *isēgoria* from chapter one, I argued that when principles inform judgment, freedom emerges, and I label this account of freedom: *freedom as rhetoric*. Thinking of freedom in this way, I proposed, can help us to bridge the gap between different interpretative positions relating to action. The final section examined the implications of this move for our labelling of Arendt. I proposed that Arendt's theory of freedom as rhetoric necessitates a re-evaluation of her thought in hermeneutic terms. I finally suggested that she is best represented as endorsing a unique form of *hermeneutic republicanism*.

## **6.2 Considering Freedom as Rhetoric**

It is clear from Arendt's writings that she is attempting to counter three particular broad ways of understanding freedom: the first is the post-Platonic equation of freedom with free thought or will, which, as was explained in chapter five, locates freedom in the subjective mind without recourse to the outside world. This way of thinking results in the well-known theoretical problem of the happy slave, an individual who wills their own servitude, and thus is free. The inner freedom found in thought and will needs no reference point outside of it, which makes it something 'politically irrelevant' due to its solipsistic and worldless essence. Arendt associates this account with the traditional philosopher's desire for solitude and the early Christian's desire for spiritual contemplation, forming the basis of the medieval celebration of the *vita contemplativa* as the free life.

The second is the conventional liberal account of freedom as non-interference or absence of constraint - a 'freedom *from* politics' - characterised by a serious distrust and

suspicion of politics itself. In this way it is somewhat related to the above post-Platonic ideal, though instead of the focus upon the freedom of the mind its core is the freedom of the individual's property and person. Following Arendt, I think that we can distinguish between two distinct accounts of non-interference: one being tied to ideals of security (as found in the early modern writings of Hobbes, for example), and the other being tied to the high modern fascination with the "life process of society as a whole" (BPF: 149), as found in socialism and later varieties of liberalism. In both cases, security enables a kind of freedom that exists outside of the sphere of politics, though the emphasis is different in each example: in the former the individual is the subject of security, whereas in the latter it is society as a whole which is the subject. This distinction is important because it highlights historical changes that Arendt perceives in the modern mind (see chapter two) in which we move from a prioritisation of the individual to the process of social development. Arendt likens the latter to the freedom of a river, something bound with biological nature and totally removed from the specifically human world. Any intervention which is perceived to block flow of the necessary processes of production and consumption is considered to be an affront upon the freedom of human development and progress.

This leads us to the third idea, which is the doctrine derived from the philosophy of history that views freedom in terms of the correlation between the action of the individual with a predefined historical movement, evident in ideologies such as Nazism and Marxism. According to this position the individual is free insofar as they follow the principles of logic set out by the ideology toward a desired endpoint. If the prior ways of thinking about freedom are politically irrelevant then this way is most definitely politically disastrous because it actually seeks to destroy the world instead of simply ignoring or protecting against it. Arendt does not hold back in her scathing rejection of all three, though she obviously considers the third to be the most dangerous and indicative of totalitarian governance. What is underlying all of these accounts is a rejection of the positivity of politics, all of them are accounts of freedom that

have no positive reference to the world, and in one case is predisposed toward the destruction of the world itself. Freedom as rhetoric, I hope to have shown throughout this thesis, attempts to match freedom with worldliness. In an attempt to close the gap between freedom and politics Arendt emphasises how the freedom that comes about through collective action is inseparable from human speech - in particular our ability to understand and judge from another's perspective of shared objects of language.

How should we label Arendt's theory of freedom if we accept that it is fundamentally tied to rhetoric? In particular, I wish to focus upon two of the key debates regarding the classification of divergent forms of freedom as found in the writings of Benjamin Constant and Isaiah Berlin. Constant famously articulated the position that there is a distinction between classical and modern forms of freedom: classical freedom being related to the collective self-determination and popular rule of the citizens which no individual was truly protected, and modern (i.e. liberal) freedom is related to the security of civil society against authority so that citizens may advance their personal and private interests which should be of little concern to government. Whether or not we might define Arendt as an 'anti'-modern thinker is a highly contentious topic, spurred in part by Benhabib's influential text *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. As should have been clear throughout this thesis Arendt certainly draws more upon the classical form of freedom, which Benhabib admits with the use of the adjective 'reluctant'. Benhabib's critique of Arendtian anti-modernism focuses on the "categorical oversimplifications that stare at us from the pages of *The Human Condition*" (Benhabib, 1996: 139). Her argument is dependent upon the successful divorcing of Arendt's "complex historical-cultural analyses" (ibid) from her anti-modernist classicism, which is an impossible task given the interrelationship between her conceptual terminology and her historical analyses. One cannot exist without the other. What is at stake in side-lining the classicist elements of Arendtian thought (which I have hopefully shown to be so important to her) is the



very foundation of her philosophy. If we remove it we risk gutting her political thought of the terminology which makes her thought so profound and attractive to theorists today.

Underlying this attempt by Benhabib is a fear that Arendt's account of freedom remains open to the criticism of dangerous populism, a desire to return to the unfettered authority of the community over the individual that Constant sought to assign to ages past. It is easy to cast Arendt as a proponent of the *Verfallsgeschichte* narrative of a post-Roman human decline, and certainly her criticisms of the modern era feed into such depictions. Her critical tone is partly borrowed from the German tradition from which she heralded, but also from her personal observations as well as her philosophical constructs. But what these thinkers are ignoring is that the classical-modern distinction that Arendt employs is very different to that of Constant; for her, this issue is not about the extent to which the community can exert their will over the individual but about the extent to which citizens may participate in the formation and maintenance of a common world. It would also seem that much of the discourse on Arendt's anti-modernism misses this point, choosing instead to emphasise how concepts that she employs such as 'society' apparently harbour inherent elitist tendencies. Pitkin (1998) and Wolin (1983) accuse Arendt of unwittingly endorsing an elitist form of politics through an exclusionary vision of action. As I hope to have conveyed throughout this thesis, such a readings fail to account for the importance of equal participation through rhetorical speech which stands in stark contrast to traditional forms of elitism.

Berlin's distinction between positive and negative freedom would have us classify Arendt as a proponent of positive freedom, possibly falling into the neo-Aristotelian subset. If it can be classified in this manner then it may be open to the standard criticisms of positive freedoms, or the 'exercise' form of freedom as Charles Taylor labels it, whereby freedom is attained through the exercise of a certain act - in this case, rhetorical deliberation. Casting

Arendt's theory of freedom in this manner is perfectly acceptable, though it is possible to counter it, as Dana Villa does with reference to freedom's 'performative' nature in Arendtian thought. According to Villa, Arendt espouses "a freedom *prior* to negative and positive freedom, a freedom that is the condition of possibility for both. *This* freedom...[is] found in the 'engagement in the disclosure of beings as such'" (Villa, 1996: 126). What he means by this is that the freedom found in action does not concern 'absence of constraint' or 'readiness for what is required or necessary'; it concerns, as he puts it, "a freedom *for* the world" (ibid). Unlike the forms of positive and negative freedom as described by Berlin, Arendtian freedom as rhetoric is based not on the individual but the world. Moving the emphasis away from the individual toward the presence of a proper intersubjective space potentially sidesteps the problems with associating freedom with the individual participating in a specific activity. Certainly, the manifestation of world is based in individuals partaking in certain actions (i.e. speaking and judging), though it is possible to argue, as Villa does, that it is the world which is the condition of the very individuality necessary for negative and positive freedoms. It is, if you will, a freedom which exists 'between' them.

Finally, I wish to briefly examine what freedom as rhetoric means for the division between the agonistic (see Honig, 1993) and consensualist readings of Arendt (see Habermas, 1977). The former reading suggests that Arendt supports a heroic politics of individualistic disclosure, with the latter suggesting that Arendt emphasises the binding power of common deliberation. The agonist reading is easily countered by pointing to the emphasis that Arendt places upon the topics of understanding and friendship. On the face of it, freedom as rhetoric seems to fall into the consensualist category, however, I believe this to be slightly misguided; I am highly sceptical that Arendt would accept that speech should aim toward truth or that political discourse should attempt to promote resolution - two of the key assumptions underlying it. There is a gulf between dialogue which facilitates understanding and "the formation of a common will in a communication directed to reaching agreement" (Habermas,

1977: 4). Whilst there are definitely some similarities between Arendt and the speech-orientated and persuasion-based form of consensus politics, for her this rhetorical conversation must never aim at the conceptual closure necessary for agreement. The pluralistic nature of human understanding as experienced in worldliness is intrinsically opposed to such attempts.

### **6.3 Considering Hermeneutic Republicanism**

I now wish to explore the relationship between Arendt and republican political thought. Scattered throughout the various commentaries on Arendt are references to her republicanism which suggests that there is considerable agreement on her situation as a republican thinker, but not necessarily the specific content of it. And whether it is recognised or not, contemporary republican theory has been greatly shaped by Arendt's writings - her reception is somewhat divisive, with various thinkers happily accepting her influence whilst others deliberately position themselves against her. Yet despite this, it is generally agreed that Arendt has much to say on the topics which republicans generally concern themselves - in particular, the relevance of the relationship between freedom, citizenship, and political participation. But what I believe links her to contemporary republican philosophy more generally is the recognition that a radical change of political terminology is necessary for countering many of the assumptions which grip modern politics.

Maurizio Viroli is undoubtedly one of Arendt's most sympathetic republican theorists; in his book *From Politics to Reason of State* he manages to provide a forceful critique of a language and way of thinking about politics which still affects us today (Viroli, 1992). There are strong similarities between this approach and Arendt's: he attempts to re-claim away from

modern thought what politics actually *is* through the analysis of linguistic patterns and changes. All of this is pursued in the context of a broader attempt to restore dignity and praise upon political activity in the face of a perceived degeneracy. Viroli seems to be the republican thinker most willing to engage with Arendtian themes, describing her writings in the following way: "from the perspective of civil philosophy, Hannah Arendt's words are a sweet and familiar music" (ibid: 286). He correctly notes that "for her, genuine political action is 'conversation' between free equals, conversation that fosters deliberation on matters of public importance...only in political action, in direct participation in political conversation, can we attain freedom" (ibid: 285).

The emphasis which Viroli places upon civil philosophy is very much in tune with Arendt's criticism of philosophy as the contemplative life. It would be a very simplistic analysis of Arendt to believe that she conceives of philosophy as something completely apart from politics, and her analysis of Jaspers and Socrates highlights how she believes that philosophy can be brought back down to earth and serve a political function. In this conversational model of political thought, the thinker is very much a part of political discourse through their responsibility to worldliness and their contribution to the spaces in which understanding and friendliness can arise. Viroli's ideal civic philosopher appears very much like Arendt's 'citizen of the world'. The problem, as he admits, is very much a part of the linguistic tradition of politics which we have inherited, because the language of civil philosophy has "become [viewed as] a sort of language of nostalgia or utopia- a language apt to dream about republics of the past or to long for a republic to come" (ibid: 9). Through advancing a critical history of the tradition, with the intention of reviving the language of a tradition past, Viroli is performing a task very similar to Arendt: a reinvigoration of our capacity to understand certain historical moments and what they can mean for the present, without falling into the characteristic tropes of romantic classicism.

On the other hand, Philip Pettit, in his highly regarded text *Republicanism*, carefully distances his own theory of republicanism from the communitarian 'populism' of Arendtian politics which, according to him "may ensure the ultimate form of arbitrariness: the tyranny of the majority" (Pettit, 2010: 8). Clearly, Pettit's fear is that of mob rule, and warns against a theory of republicanism which treats democracy as a 'bedrock value'. While Pettit is not necessarily talking to or about Arendt here - more so at contemporary communitarians - this brings us to another topic of Arendt's thought: her relationship with democracy. As should have been apparent throughout this thesis, Arendt's thought is clearly opposed to mass forms of politics. She views the political mass as the result of radical socio-political individuation, and is acutely sceptical of democratic politics in the post-war period, which she labelled the 'society of labourers'. For sure, the isonomic democratic culture of ancient Greece is celebrated by Arendt, though more for its relationship with language and citizenship than its democratic structure as such. And she is equally venerating of aspects of Roman political language (such as authority) - its republican form a far cry from Athens. She is, however, undoubtedly no more fond of political elites, including those of classical republican eras.

Whilst Pettit's book consciously positions itself against Viroli and Arendtian themes, we see a very important premise: that contemporary political thought desperately needs to transform the language of politics, and that is best carried through by a re-acquaintance and modification of past traditions. What unites Arendt and these republican thinkers is a critique of modern political understanding, in particular, liberal conceptions of freedom as non-interference. They all supply, in different yet relatable ways, a narrative of misguided modernity. J.G.A. Pocock in his influential *The Machiavellian Moment* notes the importance of Arendt to this narrative and the subsequent re-emergence of republican language:

In terms borrowed from or suggested by the language of Hannah Arendt, this book has told part of the story of revival in the early modern West of the ancient ideal of *homo*

*politicus* (the *zōon politikon* of Aristotle), who affirms his being and his virtue by the medium of political action, whose closest kinsman is *homo rhetor* (1975: 550)

Just like *On Revolution*, a book to which I believe that several comparisons can be drawn, Pocock supplies a narrative of the rise of classical republican ideals in the Renaissance, its transformation in the Atlantic tradition, and its eventual deterioration. What he has achieved is a kind of historical transposition of tradition, one which grants due attention to how changes in language alter political action.

The practice of the historian, Pocock convincingly argues, is inherently linked with the criticism of tradition, and there was no tradition which he considered more necessary to critique than the tradition of political theory as Arendt would also have understood it. Taking up the task set by Pocock is Quentin Skinner, who in his essay 'Liberty Before Liberalism', describes his task as a historian is to "uncover the often neglected riches of our intellectual heritage and display them once more to view" (1998: 118-119). Drawing upon the Renaissance republican tradition, Skinner attempts to 'uncover' the classical Roman understanding of the master-slave relationship as a form of dependence - with the slave as a dependent agent. He labels this the 'neo-Roman' account of freedom, prefigured on an understanding of what it means to be un-free, firmly rooted in the notion of the self-determination of the city-state. Skinner, as with Pettit (who draws upon him), is keen to rebuke the classical liberal theory of freedom as non-interference founded by Hobbes, and rendered into its fullest account by Isaiah Berlin, which they believe have founded a political culture of excessive individualism and non-participation. Whilst the theory of freedom promoted by Skinner bears little conceptual similarity to Arendt's they are strikingly similar with respect to certain issues: they both emphasise that political participation is essential to freedom, and that the primary means of political participation is through rhetorical intercourse which promotes the "ethics of glory and the pursuit of civic greatness" (ibid: 64). As Skinner elsewhere states:

The appropriate model will always be that of dialogue, the appropriate stance a willingness to negotiate over rival intuitions concerning the applicability of evaluative terms. We strive to reach understanding and resolve disputes in a conversational way...This humanist vision has by now been so widely repudiated that the very idea of presenting a moral or political theory in the form of dialogue has long since lost any serious place in philosophy. I hope, however, that I may have succeeded in presenting more sympathetically the values of the early modern rhetorical culture against which the practice of modern philosophy was to rebel so successfully (1996: 15-16)

This statement could easily have been written by Arendt, easily matching her critical tone and linguistic eloquence. Arendt has a lot to offer republicanism because she articulates many of the deepest republican impulses through a hermeneutic language which contemporary theorists have often ignored. From her theory of friendship to her theory of political responsibility, Arendt offers a potential set of categories and terms which can be appropriated to convey the republican cause in different ways to the standard Anglo-American terminology. This is not to say that the writings of the individuals are lacking, but that Arendt is someone whose thought proceeds from similar observations and provides an opportunity to further enhance both our understanding and our response to them.

#### **6.4 Thinking About the Past for the Present**

It is no coincidence that many of contemporary republican theorists are also concerned with questions regarding the inheritance of past tradition: how can a language borrowed from a bygone era be of service for the present? This question, I believe, is *the* question which contemporary republicans must seek an answer. We might be content to advance

republicanism as a system of values to be chosen or rejected in the marketplace of ideas, set in particular against ideological rivals such as liberalism. But the task for republicans is and should be far greater than that: it is first and foremost an attempt at reacquainting ourselves with a language that has for some time been deprived of its meaning and relevance, but which we feel has something to offer to us as political beings. Skinner, borrowing the phrase from Foucault, refers to himself in his later writings as an archaeologist, “bringing buried intellectual treasure back to the surface, dusting it down and enabling us to reconsider what we think of it” (1998: 112). The risk is obvious: that we succumb to a classicist romanticism, and to use the words again of Skinner, use the “past as a repository of alien values to be foisted of on to an unsuspecting present” (ibid: 117). This is a problem for all republicanism, whose grand language of public virtue and humanism has become obsolete, particularly in an era in which politics and economics are inseparable, where the public and private have become blurred.

As we know from the introduction to this thesis, Arendt’s method of conducting political theory was guided by a close terminological analysis which often sought to contrast classical and modern political vocabularies. In so doing, Arendt attempted to give a voice to something which is largely lost, the loss of which she speaks of with profound sadness throughout her texts. I consider Arendt’s theory of principles to be an intriguing medium for exploring how past acts can speak to the present, particularly with reference to our understanding of terms such as freedom. According to Arendt, political language only has meaning and authority if it is tied to our experiences of human action; these concepts alone will lack proper political meaning unless they become embodied in the action of public individuals. Only then may they become principles of action and lay the foundations of a new political tradition. She believes that the principles of the past can only be reclaimed through the public action of individuals, not through the reading of texts in a university. She does not attempt to prescribe an answer in the traditional manner when confronted with the problem of the past; through opposing the role of traditional philosophy in politics she is limiting the



role of the theorist as the political authority. Her answer is rather simple: "answers are given every day, and they are matters of practical politics, subject to the agreement of many; they can never lie in theoretical considerations or the opinion of one person, as though we dealt here with problems for which only one solution is possible" (HC: 5). It would be very easy to leap to the conclusion that Arendt felt that philosophy had no role in politics. Arendt does in fact offer a proposal as to how the theorist can have a significant role - in fact, a necessary role - in the political realm. In order to do so, however, the theorist must renounce the stance which they have adopted for over two thousand years. The truth which the philosopher has sought to transpose upon the realm of politics bypasses persuasion entirely, frustrated with the fact that as soon as their thought is vocalised and appears as speech it becomes just one opinion among many. By emphasising rhetoric, Arendt appeals directly to an account of politics as a realm dissociated from violence and force which philosophers and bureaucrats have in various ways come into conflict with.

Drawing upon the Socratic qualities of midwifery, just as Jaspers did, the theorist must enter once again into conversation not as an expert but as a peer. Nothing is more dangerous for the political realm than technocratic capture, with its hierarchy and conditions of political entry; technocracy, in fact, is probably more of a worry for Arendt than the paradisiacal philosopher's kingdom. Conversation, of the sort which has been analysed within the previous pages, requires the theorist to be instigator and conserver. Drawing upon the Socratic qualities of midwifery, conversation enables worldly individuation, distinct from the individuation of solitudinous contemplation or fabrication. In the rhetorical-conversational model our opinions become open to contestation and amelioration, and Arendt conceives of the political forum as a site of conceptual contestation and judgment formation based on the plurality of perspectives correspondent with the human condition. I think that Arendt came to view the task of the theorist as someone who can, as she puts it, "help establish this kind of common world, built on the understanding of friendship, in which no rulership is needed" (PAP: 436-

437). Even if Arendt was not a public intellectual in the same way as Jaspers or Socrates, there is a strong sense of their world-building influence within her writings. When such a world exists, Arendt argues, political freedom becomes a reality, and power can truly oppose domination in its assorted forms.

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