Moral Performance, Shared Humanness, and the Interrelatedness of Self and Other: A Study of Hannah Arendt’s Post-*Eichmann* Work

by

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Abstract

This thesis is a critical discussion of political thinker Hannah Arendt’s moral thought, as developed in her works from EICHMANN IN JERUSALEM onwards. Arendt, I argue, sought to respond to the moral challenge she saw posed by the phenomenon of banal evildoing, as revealed in Nazi Germany. Banal evildoers are agents who, under circumstances in which their ordinary moral triggers and guides (conscience, moral habits and norms, the behavior of their peers, etc.) are subverted, commit evil despite having no evil intent. Such subversion of ordinary moral voices would appear to absolve these agents from moral responsibility for their acts, which led most commentators to reject claims to such subversion by Nazi collaborators. Arendt, who sees the phenomenon of banal evil doing as factually substantiated, set out to show that such agents possessed other mental capacities (namely, critical and speculative thinking, reflective judging, and free willing), more appropriate for moral decision-making, on which they could have relied even under Nazi conditions. It is for their disregard of such capacities that banal evildoers can be held morally responsible.
In this thesis I critically engage with this Arendtian argument. I show how the Nazi subversion of German agents’ ordinary moral voices was achieved. I then exegetically explicate Arendt’s (unfinished) analysis of the above mental capacities and of their moral role. I then argue for the addition of the capacities of empathetic perception and practical wisdom to this understanding of moral performance. In the course of this analysis I show that in responding to this challenge, Arendt develops a powerful argument regarding the moral dangers of overreliance on mental shortcuts in decision-making, a strong argument regarding the interconnectedness between morality and humanness, and implicitly, a novel conception of selfhood that sees otherness as interrelated and interconnected with selfhood, such that concern for others is part of what constitutes, and therefore is inscribed into, care for the self. I end by critically assessing the applicability of Arendt’s moral analysis to more ordinary decisional circumstances than those of Nazi Germany, and the insight this analysis points to regarding the relationship between moral and political decision-making.
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List of Abbreviations

**Hannah Arendt**

BPF  Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought
EJ   Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil
HC   The Human Condition
I    Imagination
JP   The Jew as Pariah
LK   Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy
LM   The Life of the Mind
LMT  The Life of the Mind Vol. I – Thinking
LMW  The Life of the Mind Vol. II – Willing
MDT  Men in Dark Times
OHC  On the Human Condition
OR   On Revolution
OT   The Origins of Totalitarianism
RJ   Responsibility and Judgment

**Zygmunt Bauman**

LF   Life in Fragments
MA   Modernity and Ambivalence
MH   Modernity and the Holocaust
PE   Postmodern Ethics

**Paul Ricoeur**

J    The Just
OAA  Oneself As Another

**Arne Johan Vetlesen**

PEJ  Perception, Empathy, and Judgment
Chapter 1
Banal Evildoing

Hannah Arendt’s later work on the mental activities of thinking, willing, and judging has engaged, inspired, and frustrated many leading contemporary political thinkers. The list of thinkers drawing on or responding to Arendt’s later work spans the gamut of approaches in contemporary political theory.¹ Their resulting work has made innumerable and invaluable contributions to our understanding of the dynamics, challenges, and rewards of contemporary political life, and of what is at stake in it. And in doing this, they have mined most if not all of what there is to be found in Arendt’s later work.

And yet, a gap remains. For the most part, political thinkers have approached Arendt’s later work through the lens of the political. Underlying their engagement with Arendt was the attempt to find direct insight into political thinking, choice, judgment, decision-making, or action. And indeed, the insights they have drawn and developed have been both penetrating and plentiful. But this was not the lens through which Arendt herself looked at thinking, judging and willing. For Arendt, an investigation into these mental activities was meant to respond to the challenges she saw posed by the phenomenon of banal evildoing. She therefore looked at these activities first and foremost through the lens of the moral, as contributing to agents’ ability to tell right from wrong. And though many of her readers acknowledged this fact, and some were even relatively attentive to it, few have taken this lens up themselves in their own engagement with Arendt.²

The present thesis seeks to rectify this. In the pages that follow I approach Arendt’s analyses of thinking, judging, and willing by considering their role in moral decision-making. Specifically I

¹ Some examples, to illustrate this point, would include Ronald Beiner, Seyla Benhabib, Richard Bernstein, Alessandro Ferrara, Nancy Fraser, Jürgen Habermas, Bonnie Honig, George Kateb, Susan Neiman, Dana Villa, Albrecht Wellmer, Iris Marion Young and Linda Zerilli. Relevant works by many of these thinkers will be cited throughout this volume.
² Susan Neiman being, perhaps, the most obvious exception.
wish to systematize these analyses into what I believe she was seeking in them – namely, a conception of moral performance that can legitimize moral responsibility-ascription in the wake of the lessons of Nazi Germany. This conception of moral performance is yet to be unearthed in the voluminous literature drawing on Arendt.

I believe that, with some fortification external to Arendt, her conception of moral performance holds much yet untapped promise for both moral and political thought. The Arendtian moral analysis, in my view, provides even more than a new understanding of how we make moral decisions and why we can and should hold ourselves and others morally responsible for them. It also contains important insights into the interrelationship between morality and humanness. As such, it opens promising avenues of investigation (which Arendt herself did not pursue) into the moral and political significance of sharing our humanness, into the role that moral considerations have in collective actions and political decisions, and therefore into the intersection and interrelatedness of moral and political life. Drawing these insights into the open is the other task of the present volume.

My systematization of Arendt’s analyses of thinking, judging and willing will take place in chapters 3-7 and 10. Chapter 3 will present a series of Arendtian discussions regarding the world in which human beings act and which they hold in common, and regarding our life and action in it. Chapter 4 will present a series of Arendtian discussions regarding the human agent, her senses, capacities, decision-making, and self. These will provide the background necessary for making sense of her actual analyses of thinking, willing, and judging, presented in chapter 5. Chapter 6 will then discuss the cooperation of these otherwise autonomous mental activities in the making of what I shall call a reflective decision. Chapters 7 and 10 will apply this discussion to the moral decision and will show what insight this provides into moral responsibility-ascription, the relationship of morality and politics, the constitution of the moral self, and the relatedness of selfhood and otherness.

Chapter 7, however, will also present an internal concern with the Arendtian moral project, to be addressed in chapters 8-9. These chapters will revisit the ascertainment of moral meaning (chapter 8) and moral judging (chapter 9) as Arendt understood them. There I will add empathy (chapter 8) and practical wisdom (chapter 9), both of which in my view are also required for successful moral performance, to the Arendtian conception of moral performance.
Chapter 11 will then assess the applicability of the Arendtian moral focus moral project to understanding moral decisions and acts in more ordinary circumstances than those of the Nazi example guiding Arendt’s own analysis. Chapter 12 will then revisit and deepen the contribution of the Arendtian moral project to understanding the relationship between morality and politics. By way of conclusion, in chapter 13 I will sketch out what I see as the major lessons learnt from the Arendtian analysis and the major avenues for further investigation it requires or invites.

But before delving into the Arendtian moral analysis itself, we must first understand the background from which it had sprung. In the present chapter I argue that this background was her ‘discovery’ of the phenomenon of banal evildoing while covering the Eichmann trial. In section 1.1 I explain what Arendt understood by this term. In section 1.2 I explain the challenge that she saw banal evildoing as posing to the traditional occidental thinking about evil. In chapter 2 I develop an account of the psychology of banal evildoing and of the moral failure that results in it. This will enable me both to defend Arendt’s concern with banal evildoing, and to set the direction of her attempt to meet this concern.

1.1

Though it had precursors in earlier work, the phenomenon of banal evildoing presented itself to Arendt at its clearest and most sustained in the example of Adolph Eichmann. Eichmann exemplified to Arendt the moral failure of other non-Nazi Germans under Nazi conditions, as well as the various roots of this failure. As revealed to Arendt in Eichmann, the Nazis had successfully effected in Germany, through a variety of means, a mass tranquilization of moral performance. In the decisional reality created by the Nazis, most agents’ internal moral compasses were either silenced or rendered too weak to alert them either to the fact that their complicity in Nazi actions was of moral concern or to the fact that an alternative and moral course of action was available to them. As a result, though they did not share in Nazi ideology,
such agents nonetheless partook in the Nazi crimes, feeling all along that they were, in fact, leading an adequately moral life.3

Such a pervasive and widespread subversion of moral performance may seem a farfetched and implausible suggestion. But upon considering Eichmann’s life, conduct under the Nazis and during his trial, and his own self-defense, Arendt was persuaded by it (a move I will defend in chapter 2). This acceptance did not make the acts Eichmann had participated in, or Eichmann’s participation in them, any less evil in her eyes. But this was, to her, a newly discovered kind of evildoing, different from that hitherto known to the occidental tradition. Needing a new term by which to refer to it, Arendt labeled this new brand of evildoing ‘banal’.

Of course, in calling Eichmann’s evil banal, Arendt “did not mean that what Eichmann had helped to perpetrate was banal or that the extermination of the Jews, and of other peoples, by the Nazis was banal” (Benhabib, 2000b: 74). Rather, through the term ‘banal’ Arendt sought to point to three specific qualities she saw evidenced in Eichmann: lack of evil intent (mens rea), ‘thoughtlessness’, and shallowness. The term ‘banal’ evokes all three qualities (though not in exactly the same sense of the term, a fact which Arendt downplays), which suggested to Arendt that they may be interconnected. The puzzle of their possible interconnectedness was to become the philosophical starting point for her investigation of thinking, judging and willing.

Eichmann’s lack of evil intent (wickedness is Arendt’s term) most obviously distinguished banal evildoing from evildoing as hitherto understood by the occidental philosophical, theological, literary, and legal tradition (LMT: 3-4; RJ: 159-160; Bernstein, 1996: 145). Unlike the great exemplars of evil in the Western canon, “nothing would have been farther from [Eichmann’s]...

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3 In this thesis, I am accepting Arendt’s implicit assumption that the majority of Germans under the Nazis were banal evildoers rather than ideologically Nazi. The question of just how widespread the phenomenon of banal evildoing actually was in Nazi Germany (as opposed to intentional evildoers masquerading as banal evildoers) is a matter of controversy among historians, and Arendt may, in this respect, be more charitable to her former compatriots than historically warranted. But it is also possible that at least some of the opposition to Arendt’s assumptions is itself driven less by fidelity to historical factuality and more by the fear, which in this thesis I argue is in unwarranted, that acknowledging banal evildoing as widespread would let most German evildoers off the moral hook. At any rate, I do not have the competence to adjudge this controversy without extensive research that would vastly exceed the confines of the present thesis (beyond my additional comment, emerging out of my own analysis, in chapter 2 footnote 22). I am thus satisfied by the verdict of Christopher Browning, one of the foremost historians of the Holocaust and not usually among Arendt’s defenders, but who nonetheless considers “Arendt’s concept of the ‘banality of evil’ a very important insight for understanding many of the perpetrators of the Holocaust” (2003: 3).
mind than to determine with Richard III ‘to prove a villain’” (EJ: 287). On the contrary, if we take seriously (as Arendt did) Eichmann’s (erroneous, as Arendt herself points out) recourse to Kant (EJ: 135-138) we must conclude that Eichmann’s moral motivation was, in fact, to lead a moral life.

For Arendt, this made banal evil doing even more challenging. Banal evil doing was not the result of a nihilist or amoral outlook any more than it was the result of an immoral one. Rather, it was committed by people who wanted to be moral but whose role in carrying out the Final Solution simply failed to strike them as running counter to their being moral. The obvious retort – ‘how could they not see the glaring contradiction?’ – could not, therefore, be taken as a rhetoric question or as a justification for dismissing Eichmann’s claims as implausible. It became a real question in need of an actual answer.

The other senses in which Eichmann proved to be banal – his ‘thoughtlessness’ and shallowness – seemed to her to point to such an answer. Under ‘thoughtlessness’ Arendt lumped together Eichmann’s inability (or refusal) to ‘think’ and hence to judge right from wrong, and his lack of ‘imagination’ (EJ: 49, 114, 287, 294-295; see also RJ: 18-19, 160). Arendt, however, used both ‘thinking’ and ‘imagination’ in very specific senses.

Arendt saw Eichmann’s inability to think in terms of an inability “to think from the standpoint of somebody else” (EJ: 49). She needed to make this specification because throughout his life Eichmann had consistently shown the ability to assess the implications of his own actions and of changes in external circumstances for his career. Thus, Eichmann was clearly capable of ‘reasoning with consequences’, but he directed it away from the consequences for the life, well being, or humanity of his victims, which should have morally mattered. This misdirection of mental capacities thus became another feature of banal evil doing, though one that remained mostly implicit in EJ.

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4 In chapters 4 and 5 we will see that Arendt eventually distinguished imagination, representative thinking, thinking proper, and judging, from each other. As a result, by the time of LM there are three different possible forms of ‘thoughtlessness’ in Arendt – failure in the internal thinking dialogue that provides moral triggering, a failure of the speculative thinking that ascertains moral meaning, and the inability to ‘look at things from the standpoints of others’ that results in a failure of judging. Eichmann’s ‘thoughtlessness’ is primarily of the first form, but brings with it ‘thoughtlessness’ of the other two forms.
Eichmann’s inability to think from the position of the other person, in turn, pointed to an inability to imagine oneself in the place of the other person (EJ: 47-49). This lack of imagination was indicated both in Eichmann’s conformism and in his constant recourse to banal (and often inappropriate) clichés and stock phrases (EJ: 48-49, 52-55, 131, 175, 232-233; see also RJ: 159-160 and LMT: 4). It thus raised two questions, which later became the hypotheses guiding her investigation of thinking, judging, and willing. Could the inability to judge right from wrong be related to the inability to imagine and think? And could both – could ‘thoughtlessness’ – be related to, perhaps even at the root of, the lack of evil intent characteristic of banal evildoing? (LMT: 3-5; see also RJ: 159-161).

Eichmann’s ‘thoughtlessness’, recourse to clichés and stock phrases, dedicated pursuit of a rather uninspiring bureaucratic career, in juxtaposition to the great literary villains, also betrayed, in Arendt’s eyes, his personal shallowness or ordinariness (EJ: 50-51, 131, 252, 287-288; see also RJ: 159-160; LMT: 4; Brightman, 1995: 152). This notion of shallowness (yet another sense of the term ‘banality’) thus served to strengthen both Arendt’s interlinking of lack of evil intent, thoughtlessness, unimaginativeness, and banality. But it also adds an additional dimension to them in that it shows Eichmann to be “emptied of whatever it is that distinguishes human beings as human” (Lang, 1991: 146). This implied link between being moral and being human will come to infuse the Arendtian moral analysis, as I will show throughout this thesis.

In sum, there are two key features to banal evildoing as understood by Arendt in EJ. First, banal evildoing is committed by agents who not only have no evil intent but in fact wish to be moral, yet fail to realize that their actions are morally dubious. Second, banal evildoing is somehow interlinked with, and possibly stems from, an inability or unwillingness to imagine, and therefore to think from the position of, other human beings. To these two key features we may adjoin two additional features, exemplified in Eichmann, but which relationship to the above two key features is as yet unclear. One is the shallowness (ordinariness) and conformism of the banal evildoer. The other is the misdirection of her mental capacities away from moral considerations.
Why did Arendt think it imperative to seek out the link between ‘thoughtlessness’, ‘lack of evil intent’, and the banal evil doing? The “immediate impulse” for her “preoccupation with mental activities”, Arendt explains, came from the discovery of banal evil doing in the Eichmann trial (LMT: 3). At the time, she “was dimly aware of the fact that it went counter to our tradition of thought – literary, theological, or philosophic – about the phenomenon of evil” (LMT: 3). The problem was that the tradition conceives of evil as committed by monstrous people with wicked intentions and motivations. Banal evil doing, by contrast, was committed by ordinary and even shallow people without evil intentions or motivations (LMT: 3-4). But what was it about banal evil doing’s break with the tradition that made this question so imposing for Arendt? The explanation for this is indicated, in my view, through Arendt’s explanation, in EJ, of the challenge of banal evil doing to another occidental tradition – the legal one.

For Arendt, “at the root of all the failings and shortcomings of the Jerusalem trial” was the failure to realize that the crimes involved were different in essence from earlier mass murders and anti-Semitic crimes (EJ: 267). This essential difference was twofold. The crimes themselves were unprecedented in that they were ‘crimes against humanity’ “in the sense of a crime ‘against the human status’ … an attack upon human diversity as such … without which the very words ‘mankind’ or ‘humanity’ would be devoid of meaning” (EJ: 268-269; see also EJ: 135, 275-276). And many of the perpetrators of the crimes were unprecedented in that they “were neither perverted nor sadistic” but rather “terribly and terrifyingly normal”, committing their crimes “under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for [them] to know or to feel that [they] are doing wrong” (EJ: 276).

This, for Arendt, made the normality of the criminals “much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together” when viewed from “the viewpoint of our legal institutions and of our moral standards of judgment” (EJ: 276). It is not surprising for Arendt, then, that the judges, in their faith in “the moral foundations of their profession” (EJ: 146), found themselves ‘conspicuously helpless’ when “confronted with the task … of understanding the criminal whom they had come to judge” (EJ: 276; see also EJ: 26-27, 293; RJ: 22-23, 41). “Foremost among the larger issues at stake in the Eichmann trial was the assumption current in all modern legal systems that intent to do wrong is necessary for the commission of a crime … [where] the ability
to distinguish between right and wrong is impaired, we feel no crime has been committed” (EJ: 277; see also EJ: 148).

In other words, what is challenged by banal evildoing is the legitimacy of holding its perpetrators responsible for their evildoing, legally and morally. Can one be held legally or morally responsible for evildoing she did not intend? If we draw on traditional occidental thinking about evildoing, Arendt tells us, the answer is no. The occidental tradition assumes that all (normal) agents have a conscience, an internal moral compass unaffected by external circumstances and superseding any external moral guides. This compass is presumed capable of alerting the agent to the risk of evildoing and of guiding her in telling right from wrong under any and all circumstances. As a result, failure to act morally is assumed always to be the result of refusing to heed one’s conscience – that is, the intended result of a deliberate choice for which one may be held responsible.

Obviously, this traditional reasoning collapses once we concede that it is possible for agents’ moral performance to be subverted such that they would commit evil unwittingly and unknowingly. Indeed, this was precisely one of the main lines of defense offered by Eichmann and other non-Nazi German collaborators on trial. Their participation in Nazi acts, they argued, was in good conscience and without evil intent. Their conscience, on which they were supposed to rely, was foiled under Nazi conditions, and this absolved them of moral and legal responsibility. And Arendt realized that to accept the notion of banal evildoing meant, on the terms of the occidental tradition, accepting this defense. Therefore, a new legitimation for moral responsibility-ascription was required if banal evildoers were to be held morally responsible for their evildoing. This was the challenge that Arendt saw posed by the phenomenon of banal evildoing.

In EJ, of course, Arendt did offer a resolution to this problem. At the end of the original version of the book she seeks to justify Eichmann’s death sentence through the fact that his crimes were crimes against humanity. In supporting through action “a policy of not wanting to share the earth with” certain groups of people, Eichmann abnegated, for Arendt, his own claim to humanness. As a result, she responds to Eichmann, “no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you” (EJ: 279).
This position shifts the focus of ascribing responsibility from the subjective states of the agent (such as intention) to the agent’s actions (that is, from mens rea to actus rea; see Neiman, 2002: 270-277, 298-304). For Arendt, this is justified because the crimes in question were so unprecedented that existing legal and moral categories could not have anticipated them (EJ: 273, 294). Without the ability to rely either on such categories or on their moral capacities, such agents could not develop mens rea. To retain the demand for mens rea is thus to excuse such agents of legal and moral responsibility for such patently evil acts. In those rare and extreme cases in which we face acts that are patently evil but also unprecedented, we can, for Arendt, justifiably base responsibility-ascription on actus rea as opposed to mens rea.

But almost immediately after EJ Arendt, without explanation, retreats from this position. Instead, she links the fact that banal evildoers “prove themselves unfit for intercourse with others” (RJ: 112) to “a definition of the agent, and how he did it, rather than of the act itself or of its final result” (RJ: 111). This shift back to a concern with the subjectivity of the agent stems, in my view, from a broadening of her concern compared to EJ. In EJ, Arendt was concerned strictly with what she labeled ‘legal responsibility’, that is, with justifying the trying and punishing of Eichmann and his like for their past actions. For this, actus rea seemed to her to suffice.

But after EJ, when she turned from the legal realm to the philosophical, religious and moral realms, Arendt’s concern could no longer be limited to acts past and to retrospective responsibility. The evil committed by Eichmann and his like, while unprecedented, was not unrepeatable (OT: 459; EJ: 273, 288-289). On the contrary, for Arendt, modern conditions were such that “the possibility of a repetition of the crimes committed by the Nazis” was in fact quite plausible (EJ: 273; see also OT: 459). She therefore had to broaden her concern to include

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5 It should be remembered that Arendt seems to have a rather narrow notion of the realm of legal, restricting it to weighing evidence, rendering judgment, and meeting out due punishment, in the interests of justice (EJ: 253, 285-287). Guiding future behavior seems to her to be very much a philosophical, religious and moral concern, but only a secondary aim of law and, if at all, a residual outcome of court trials. Indeed, she repeatedly criticized the prosecutors and the Israeli government in the Eichmann trial precisely for using it for such a purpose (EJ: 4-12, 19-20, 120-123, 207-209, 223-227, 253-254).

6 This, of course, suggests that one can be held morally responsible for one’s role in political and collective acts, and therefore that one should, and can be expected to, make such decisions morally rather than politically. This suggestion may seem to run counter to Arendt’s insistence in both her earlier and her later work on distinguishing and separating morality and politics. I address this issue in section 12.4.
possible future acts and prospective responsibility – the responsibility, that is, to act (or refrain from action) based on moral considerations when such are involved in a given decision.\footnote{My analysis here may seem to run counter to Arendt’s stress in \textit{Collective Responsibility} (RJ: 147-158) on the importance of \textit{mens rea} in both the legal and the moral realm, which suggests an affinity rather than an opposition between moral and legal responsibility. Note, however, that what Arendt is trying to do in this article is to draw “a sharper dividing line between political (collective) responsibility, on one side, and moral and/or legal (personal) guilt, on the other” (RJ: 150-151), so as to argue against the notion, absurd in her eyes, of ‘collective guilt’ (see also EJ: 297-298). In other words, what she is trying to stress is that moral and legal guilt is always personal, and unlike political responsibility cannot be collective (I return to this Arendtian move in section 12.5, and to her notion of political responsibility in section 3.4). But this distinction leaves aside precisely the categories I am using here, namely, legal and moral responsibility (as opposed to guilt). My distinction between moral and legal responsibility hangs not on whether they are personal or collective but on whether they are strictly retrospective (legal responsibility) or capable of being both prospective and retrospective (moral responsibility).}

Of course, the demand that agents refrain from choosing evildoing presupposes such agents are capable of recognizing their acts as evil – precisely the recognition Eichmann claimed impossible under Nazi conditions. To eschew this presupposition in favor of basing responsibility solely on \textit{actus rea}, \textit{especially} where circumstances are so uncommon as to render otherwise mundane actions unprecedentedly evil, is, from the perspective of the agent, to hold her responsible not for choice but for bad luck she could not control. Not surprisingly, this was another claim Eichmann made in his defense (EJ: 175, 247). And this is a claim that Arendt’s justification of responsibility-ascription through \textit{actus rea} cannot rebut (see May, 2005: 175-176).

Prospective responsibility-ascription thus requires of Arendt to reject Eichmann’s claim that it was impossible to tell right from wrong under Nazi conditions. What indicated to Arendt that such a rejection was possible and even warranted was the fact that there were, indeed, people who did manage to tell right from wrong even under Nazi conditions (EJ: 230, 232-233; RJ: 43-45). If there were people who could tell right from wrong even under Nazi conditions, and if what enabled them to do this were mental capacities that all human beings possess, then Eichmann’s claim can be rejected. As a result, his evildoing could legitimately be seen as the product of a personal choice – namely, the choice not to heed such capacities – for which he can
be held morally responsible. It was this that turned Arendt’s attention to the investigation of thinking, judging, and willing.\footnote{Thus, Arendt retains the traditional assumption that the fact that agents possess internal capacities that enable them to make a moral decision in a given set of circumstances suffices for indicating that the agent had a choice in the matter, and that therefore failure to act morally can be taken as indicating a deliberate choice against morality and in favor of evildoing. She merely seeks internal capacities in addition to conscience to serve in this role.}
Chapter 2
The Nazi Tranquilization of Moral Performance

In chapter 1 I argued that Arendt saw in banal evildoing under the Nazis a challenge to the traditional legitimation of moral responsibility-ascription. This legitimation assumes that conscience enables agents to realize that a moral decisions needs to be made, as well as to tell right from wrong, under any and all circumstances. But in Nazi Germany Arendt (in EJ) saw revealed a set of circumstances in which conscience was rendered unreliable for this task, not in a few aberrant individuals, but \textit{en masse}. And in traditional terms this meant that banal evildoers could not be held morally responsible for their evildoing.

Of course, this understanding of the challenge of banal evildoing accepts Eichmann’s claim that under Nazi circumstances his (and others’) conscience could not function properly. But is such acceptance warranted? Isn’t it outlandish to suggest that millions of normal and well-educated people who were socialized to believe in the superiority of conscience over state laws should the two happen to clash (RJ: 61), could so easily lose their conscience \textit{en masse}? And isn’t it especially naïve to accept such an outlandish suggestion when it is coming from a man fighting to keep the noose off his neck?

Arendt, indeed, was deeply concerned with Eichmann’s reliability, and not in the least because not only the prosecution but the judges and even his own lawyer dismissed these claims by Eichmann (EJ: 26-27). Moreover, Arendt could not deny, and in fact studiously highlighted and corrected, many of Eichmann’s inconsistencies, embellishments, omissions, and fallacies (EJ: 25, 29,40, 44, 46-47, 49-50, 54, 57-58, 61-62, 73, 76-78, 84, 94, 122, 164, 201). But she steadfastly refused to see this plethora of errors and ‘little lies’ as marking a ‘great liar’. In part this was because some of the sources contradicting Eichmann’s trial testimonies were themselves
unreliable (EJ: 51-54, 72, 86, 146, 203, 210-211, 236, 238). In large part, however, this was because of Eichmann’s own personality, as revealed in the trial (see especially EJ: 30-31, 51-55, 62-63, 80, 82, 242).

To Arendt, Eichmann appeared as simultaneously self-aggrandizing and boastful and shallowly self-absorbed. He had a felt need to fit himself into the environment in which he found himself at present and hence to the expectations of the people around him. Moreover, he vividly remembered selected moments of personal ‘elation’, achievement, or significance. Yet at the same time his memory cast away significant general dates with no direct bearing on his ego, ‘mundane’ aspects of otherwise personally ‘special’ events, and incidents harmful or irrelevant for his self-image. Most of Eichmann’s lies were, according to Arendt, attributable to one of these two personality traits. That some of his self-aggrandizing and selective forgetting was to the detriment of his own defense in the trial seemed to Arendt to confirm this. But the claim about his inability to tell right from wrong was clearly neither ego-flattering nor what his environment expected or wanted to hear from him, and therefore, for Arendt, not a lie.

Even if we remain unconvinced by this Arendtian reasoning regarding the believability of Eichmann’s claim with regard to himself, we need not discard it with regard to many other Germans of the period. For example, the eminent Holocaust historian Christopher Browning provides good reasons to reject Eichmann as a liar (2003: 4-11). Nonetheless, even he contends that many perpetrators of the Holocaust were, in fact, the banal evildoers that Eichmann was merely pretending to be (2003: 3-4). As a result, Browning considers “Arendt’s concept of the ‘banality of evil’ a very important insight for understanding many of the perpetrators of the Holocaust” (2003: 3). But even with this assurance by Browning we may still find it incredible that a subversion of moral capacity on such a mass scale was possible. In the present chapter I seek to explain how the Nazis were able to achieve such a subversion of moral capacity.

In order to explain this Nazi success, I develop in the present chapter an account of the psychology of banal evildoing. Arendt herself endeavored to present such an account, albeit

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1 Arendt particularly doubted the Nuremberg trial testimonies of Höss and Wicliceny, and Eichmann’s own interviews with the Nazi-sympathizing journalist and former SS-man Sassen.
exemplarily, through her biographical account of Eichmann’s life, deeds, and decisions. In this account, the functioning of Eichmann’s conscience is an unmistakable leitmotif, and it is in her remarks regarding Eichmann’s conscience that her insights into the psychology of banal evildoing are presented. As a result, however, these insights are scattered throughout EJ in a rather disorganized and underdeveloped fashion. In piecing it together, I therefore used as my guide the account of the psychology of the Nazi moral failure developed by Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman used many of the same historical sources as Arendt, and therefore points to most of the phenomena that Arendt does. But Bauman’s account of these phenomena is both more systematic and more elaborate.²

As Bauman points out, the Nazis realized very early that to carry out their murderous ideology they would have to rely on active participation, or at least silent non-opposition, from many non-Nazi collaborators.³ Moreover, the Nazis knew that they could not fully hide from such collaborators the fact that the end product of the collective effort to which they were contributing was the death of certain human beings. They therefore needed to ensure, as non-coercively as possible, that despite this knowledge such collaborators would continue to carry out their own assigned specific tasks within the collective act.⁴ But the Nazis also realized that most of their potential collaborators would normally see the acts resulting from their collaboration as morally repugnant (EJ: 105-106; MH: 73, 89-90, 94, 184-186, 188; see also RJ: 35, 43). The Nazis were thus faced with the challenge of subverting or counteracting such moral repugnance.

² In drawing on Bauman’s factual analysis, however, I do not wish to accept (nor do I wish to suggest Arendt would have accepted) his more problematic explanatory premise, which sees Nazi totalitarianism as the enactment, taken to the extreme (and hence, as a logical extension), of the regularizing anti-sentimental and hence anti-moral essential thrust of modernity (see especially PE: 98-165 and LF: 37-43, 148-152). I remain unpersuaded by Bauman’s overall understanding of modernity, both factually and theoretically, for reasons I have not the space to elaborate. Still, Arendt herself, of course, was critical of modernity in OT and HC, and parts of this critique may be read as pointing to aspects of modernity that helped make the appearance of both Nazi totalitarianism and banal evil a realistic possibility, as Villa (1999: 41) pointed out. That is a far cry, however, from Bauman’s suggestion that Nazi totalitarianism was an inherent, direct, and logical outcome of the heart of the modern project. For this reason I have, in what follows, tempered Bauman’s more excessive analyses with insights from Arendt and especially from the more moderate analysis of bureaucracy offered by former Arendt student Larry May.

³ The balance between active participants and silent non-participants, of course, had to be skewed in favor of the former. The latter could be tolerated only if there were enough of the former to ‘get the job done’.

⁴ Arendt’s exemplars of this, on top of Eichmann (see especially EJ: 86-96), are the senior bureaucrats at the Wannsee conference (EJ: 112-115) and the group conspiring to assassinate Hitler in 1944 (EJ: 97-105).
In this chapter I argue that three general strategies, with mutually reinforcing effects, emerge out of the plethora of means employed by the Nazis for this purpose. One was to make it seem to agents as if their actions raised no moral concern, such that seeking internal moral guidance regarding them was unnecessary (section 2.1). Another was to displace agents' internal moral guides as the decisional voices of morality (section 2.2). The third was to provide agents with strong disincentives to acting on the guidance of their internal moral guides even if recognized and consulted (section 2.3). In section 2.4 I then discuss the reasons for the effectiveness of these strategies, and point out how this sets the stage for the Arendtian moral analysis that occupies the remainder of my thesis.

2.1

Making it seem to agents as if their actions raised no moral concern was achieved through the dual effects of categorization and distancing, applied both to the objects of overall action and to the action itself. As Bauman correctly points out, categories are central to how (occidental) people ordinarily determine the reactions and concern they accord to others (PE: 146-147). In particular, we ordinarily distinguish between the category ‘person’ and the category ‘things’, according moral concern only to objects included in the former. For the Nazis this meant that their victims, human beings and therefore categorized by default as persons, had to be re-classified as ‘things’.

At first the Nazis tried to achieve this through direct dehumanization, referring to their intended victims in propaganda in non-human terms, for example, as insects or bacteria (MH: 68, 70-72, 113-114). However, this failed to materialize a change of heart rapid and widespread enough for

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5 Arendt’s own version of this will be discussed in sections 3.2, 4.4, and 5.3.
Nazi’ purposes (MH: 73, 189). They therefore turned, instead, to gradually depersonalizing their victims, in particularly Jews.6

The first step in this was to establish ‘the Jew as such’ as a distinct human category and to have it serve as the frame of reference for Germans’ encounters with individual Jews. This was achieved through the passing of laws requiring, in a variety of ways, that Jews, qua Jews, be treated differently than other human beings (OT: 447-448; MH: 187, 190-191). Jews were thereby established, as a group, as ‘different from other human beings’. At the same time, it also goaded non-Nazi Germans into conceiving of, and thereby treating, individual Jews they encountered as representative of the abstract category ‘Jew’ rather than as unique and individual persons. Such legislation enjoyed wide acceptance and even support (MH: 75-76, 186-187, 189), enhanced, as Arendt intimates, by its similar acceptance as legitimate for Germans by other countries (EJ: 268).

Obviously, the more Germans acted in accordance with such laws, the deeper was this re-categorization internalized as a frame of reference by individual Germans. This enabled the Nazis to gradually pass ever more radical legislation, deepening the gap between the treatment of Jews and the treatment of other human beings (EJ: 38; RJ: 37; MH: 190-192). As these laws and exceptions were acted upon, this increasingly radicalized distinction between Jews and ‘normal’ human beings was continually internalized and habituated, until it became ‘matter of course’, guiding action habitually, without further pause or reflection. This normalization and habituation of this Nazi re-classification of their victims was also catalyzed by lack of visible disobedience to, or even protest against, such laws from among agents’ peers.

The main obstacle to this faced by the Nazis was the fact that most Germans had Jews they were personally acquainted with, and whom they therefore still treated as unique persons (MH: 187-190). Notably, these ‘Jews next door’ did not serve to disprove the general category (the ‘Jew as such’) in the eyes of Germans. Rather, they were taken as the ‘one good Jew’ who was the

6 In what follows I mostly refer to Jews, as they were the Nazis’ primary target, and the one group in whose case all of the measures I will present were at play. I do not thereby mean to disregard the other groups – Gypsies, Poles, homosexuals, mentally handicapped, and others – targeted by the Nazis.
exception to the rule (ibid). The problem, as Himmler still complained as late as 1942, was that every German seemed to have their own ‘exceptional Jew’ (MH: 187; EJ: 133). One Nazi solution to this, still within the logic of categorization, was to create officially acknowledged categories of ‘exceptional Jews’, to be treated differently than other Jews. As Arendt perceptively realized, such exceptions served to further normalize the general categorization itself (EJ: 131-134, 135, 171-172).

But the more fundamental Nazi response to this obstacle was to pass legal measures to first physically distance, then distinguish, and eventually remove Jews from Germans’ sphere of daily interactions, sight, and eventually presence (EJ: 155-161; MH: 105; 188-192). This was effective in part thanks to the human tendency to accord higher moral concern to the familiar, visible, ‘near and dear’, than to the unfamiliar, invisible, and ‘out of sight’ (PE: 217-218, following Hans Jonas). Once no Jews were left in the presence of Germans, the general category ‘Jew’ remained free to shape the overall behavior of non-Nazi Germans towards Jews. And again, proceeding without protest or question, as if there was nothing out of the ordinary in the ‘Judenreinness’ of one’s immediate environment, this ‘Jewlessness’ became normalized and habitualized until it (alongside the absent Jews) no longer raised moral concern.

Once the Nazi murders were bureaucratized, these depersonalization and distancing effects were enhanced even further. By its nature, bureaucratic action depersonalizes and distances from the agent both the objects of bureaucratic action and the action itself. Only a few of the agents partaking in the overall bureaucratic action ever come into face-to-face contact with the people at

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7 This was the gradual transition from anti-commerce and anti-miscegenation laws, through the ‘Yellow Badge’, to internment in ghettos and later faraway camps. Following Raul Hilberg, Bauman sees these as the early stages in a gradual process of dehumanization continued in the camps themselves (MH: 190-192).

8 My discussions of bureaucracy in the present chapter draw primarily on Bauman and Larry May. For both May and Bauman Nazi bureaucracy exemplifies the moral dangers of bureaucracy, and both are indebted – May more thoroughly as well as more explicitly – to Arendt’s insights into Nazi bureaucracy. Moreover, May’s and Bauman’s discussions point to many of the same characteristics of bureaucracy as morally dangerous (though Bauman does so more comprehensively). However, May is much more careful in his analysis and restrained in his language than Bauman as far as their assessment of bureaucracy in general is concerned. In particular, Bauman paints Nazi bureaucracy as paradigmatic of bureaucracy in general, to the point of presenting the morally pernicious aspects of Nazi bureaucracy as immanent characteristics of bureaucracy per se, whereas May, more correctly in my view, sees them as ever present dangers which are not all evinced by all actual bureaucracies, and which bureaucracies can nonetheless be made to avoid.
the receiving end of such action, or otherwise witness the outcomes of overall action firsthand (LF: 196). As a result, most participants in the Nazi murder machine (though not Eichmann) never witnessed actual murders. As a further result, also typical of bureaucratic action, they never themselves encountered their victims directly as unique persons, but only in the depersonalized form of collected statistical data (MH: 76-77, 99, 102-103, 192-195; PE: 127; May, 1996: 86, 89).

Similarly, the overall act of mass murder was also distanced from, and thus disowned (and in this sense, depersonalized) by the agents carrying it out. As is typical of bureaucratic action, most agents were not party to, nor had any influence over, the murder bureaucracy’s choice of either aims or means. Moreover, a multitude of other bureaucrats and bureaucratic layers stood between most agents and both the point of decision and the point of actual murder. As a result, the overall action of the bureaucracy appeared to agents to be beyond the reach of their will, hence of their responsibility, and therefore of their concern (JP: 232; RJ: 31, 57-58; MH: 98-100; May, 1996: 86, 97; in general terms see PE: 125-129; LF: 196-198, 260-261). As it seemed to many such agents, all they could concern themselves with were the specific and mundane tasks entrusted to them as part of the overall murder machine. Responsibility for the murders themselves was thereby seen as falling to everyone, and hence, as Arendt pointed out, to no one (EJ: 289-290; RJ: 21, 28-29, 147; MH: 98-102; May, 1996: 86, 93-94, 96).9

This also was further enhanced by habituation and lack of visible opposition. While the overall action of the bureaucracy was murder, the specific tasks entrusted to most agents involved, for the most part, mundane activities that could be performed automatically and habitually, and hence, without particular concern (HC: 45; EJ: 152-153; MH: 100; May, 1996: 86; in general terms see LF: 196). This effect was further enhanced through the ‘objective’ language the Nazis adopted to refer to their activities (EJ: 69-70, 86, 108-109, 145; RJ: 43; MH: 103, 196). Lack of protest and opposition from peers, superiors, and ‘higher-ups’ further enhanced the agents’ sense

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9 It is through this rendering of agents as merely exchangeable automatic functionaries (cogs in the machine), and in the shifting of responsibility that results from it, that bureaucracy for Arendt dehumanizes its agents as well as its victims (EJ: 289; see also May, 1996; Mommsen, 2001: 228).
of the normalcy of both their own tasks and their detachment from the organization’s overall action (May, 1996: 99).

2.2

The combined use of legal and bureaucratic apparatuses also accorded the Nazis with an additional means for subverting German moral performance. This was the distortion of notions of dutifullness prevalent in pre-Nazi German society, particularly of a simplified version of Kantian moral duty and a positivistic notion of professional duty. This became a full-fledged perversion of dutifullness once these notions of duty were merged together through the unification of the legal and bureaucratic apparatuses, under the aegis of the will of the Führer. The outcome was that acting dutifully became simultaneously identified with obedience to laws, with carrying out of superior orders, and with acting morally. Its result was a paradoxical combination of blind obedience, fervency of performance, and the bureaucratic sense of lack of personal will and responsibility for the overall bureaucratic action. Through this, a perverted notion of dutifullness not only further concealed the decisional need to consult conscience over specific actions, but also allowed duty to displace conscience as a moral guide.

The simplified version of Kantian moral duty common in pre-Nazi Germany was provided by Eichmann in what Arendt herself judged to be “an approximately correct definition of the categorical imperative”: “‘the principle of my will must always be such that it can become the principle of general laws’” (EJ: 136). The perversion of Kant occurs not in the formulation itself, but in detaching it from its Kantian context. Kant envisioned a process of reformulating the principle of my action in the form of a hypothetical general law, and then determining whether the idea of having such a law would not be self-defeating for me. Kant did not envision a process of submitting the principle of my action to the verification of existing laws. The decisive difference is that under the proper Kantian understanding, specific actions (including those demanded by existing laws, and therefore such laws themselves) are subjected to an
universalizability test. Under the alternative understanding, existing laws become the test of specific action.

The problem is that, outside its Kantian context, this formulation of the Categorical Imperative is open to both understandings, enabling the Nazis to promulgate its distorted version. They were thus able turn blind law-abidingness into moral duty in Kantian garb: “Act as if the principle of your actions were the same as that of the legislator or of the law of the land” (EJ: 136; see also Villa, 1999:50). And once the Führer’s will became the source of law, the Categorical Imperative could be plausibly formulated (and entirely perverted) as: “Act in such a way that the Führer, if he knew your action, would approve it” (EJ: 136; see also EJ: 148-150; Villa, 1999: 51). This, in turn, incorporated into law-abidingness two forms of zealousness, which thereby also acquired the veneer of moral duty (EJ: 136-138, 142-150; Villa, 1999: 51). One was acting beyond the letter of the law but in accordance with the spirit of the Führer’s orders. The other was the subversion of the actions of superiors that run counter to the spirit or letter of the Führer’s orders.10

This was exacerbated by a positivistic notion of professional bureaucratic duty, also common in pre-Nazi German society. It required bureaucrats to execute their professional tasks by carrying out superior orders in accordance with proper procedure and in an impartial and neutral manner (JP: 232-234; OT: 324; 324-325 fn. 38; EJ: 105, MH: 195-197; PE: 125-128; LF: 196-197, 259-261; May, 1996: 86-87, 93-94, 96, 98, 99).11 But in Nazi Germany the state apparatus and the

10 May (1996: 87-88) provides a fuller account of the psychology of this paradoxical transformation. According to Arendt, this was aided by the fact that in legalizing the murder of Nazi victims such murder was stripped of the quality of temptation and extraordinariness which serves as a psychological barrier to murder (EJ: 150). Of course, both forms of zealousness were indeed exhibited by Eichmann (EJ: 137; Villa, 1999: 51), and their occurrences were pointed to as disproving his claim to have acted without mens rea.

11 I am here intentionally downplaying the factor of obedience to authority, as a counter to the tendency to deterministically overstate it (‘most Germans happened to be of weak and authority-susceptible personalities’), which Bauman traces back to Adorno and his colleagues’ The Authoritarian Personality (MH: 153-154). Stanley Milgram’s (1974) startling experimental work on the subject, while opposing the basic premises of Adorno, lends itself all too easily to the opposite overstatement (‘there is an Eichmann in all of us’). The authority of laws and of superiors was one of the means, perhaps the most obvious and crude of means, employed by the Nazis. But it was always but one of a package, and in my view, its effect was more of catalyzing the impact of other means. I doubt obedience alone, independent of other and deeper factors, would have sufficed to goad all but a small portion of non-Nazi German to collaborate with the Nazis. Milgram’s experiments, in my view, support this claim.
bureaucracy were effectively merged, and the Führer was both the head of the bureaucracy and the source of law. As a result, superior orders that did not contradict the known will of the Führer came to hold the power of law.

The moral result of this double perversion of dutifulness was that blind obedience to superior orders (if congruent with past expressions of the Führer’s will) and exceptional zeal in carrying them out were both taken by agents to fulfill their moral duty. This perverted sense of duty came to displace agents’ internal moral guides as the (supposedly moral) determinant of their actions. At the same time, it also put their actions (because done in submission to the will of another, namely, the Führer) outside the reach of their responsibility (OT: 243-244; EJ: 24, 135-138, 148-150; RJ: 43, 244; MH: 76-77; May, 1996: 99; Villa, 1999: 50-51). The repetitive habitualness of bureaucratic action added self-reinforcing thrust to this perversion of dutifulness because, as Bauman notes, dutifulness is in itself habituating (PE: 99).

Moreover, bureaucratic duty also provides its own set of standards for evaluating bureaucratic action (impartiality, neutrality, similar treatment, and so on). Once bureaucratic, legal, and moral duty were merged by the Nazis, this was seen to suggest that at work agents were under a separate set of moral standards than at home, even with regard to the same actions (EJ: 25-26, 106; RJ: 159; LF: 259-262; May, 1996: 93, 100-101; see also May, 1987: 66-68). One’s fellow bureaucrats, who are ‘in the same boat’ as one is, and who rely on one’s performance of one’s task to carry out theirs, now became the objects of one’s sense of professional duty and responsibility (PE: 126-127).  

Under such a perverted conception of dutifulness, of course, others’ dutiful carrying out of their tasks cannot but be assumed to signify their approval of the overall bureaucratic action. This further enhances the subversion of conscience the Nazis had been seeking to achieve. This is especially pernicious when such dutiful others are people to whom the agent looks for guidance and reassurance in case of doubt, such as clergy or ‘respectable society’ (of which, in Germany

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12 At its most extreme, this caused agents to see as separate their workplace self and their home self, as Robert Jay Lifton discovered in his study of death-camp doctors (see Vetlesen’s critical discussion of this finding in PEJ: 180-191; see also EJ: 126-127).
of the time, senior bureaucrats were considered part). Indeed, this is singled out by both Eichmann and Arendt as a crucial component of the tranquilization of Eichmann’s own conscience (EJ: 25, 92, 103-104, 110, 113-117, 126-127, 131-133, 146-147, 150, 295). In this context of perverted dutifulness, then, the reaction of others acquires a particularly pernicious effect.

Of course, this invocation of law-abidingness as a counteragent to the inner moral voice is doubly erroneous. It confuses legal and moral duty on the one hand, and second-order and first-order duties on the other. In accepting Eichmann’s faulty reasoning on a descriptive level, Arendt was not disregarding this fallacy. Rather, she was pointing out it was a plausible error to make under Nazi conditions, especially when compounded with a misunderstanding of Kant. Indeed, as Bauman’s analysis of the psychology of dutifulness (PE: 98-101) implicitly suggests, distinctions between types and orders of duty may be more difficult to sustain experientially than they are to make conceptually.

Moreover, for Arendt, the misunderstanding that led to this perversion of Kantian dutifulness may in fact be endemic to Kantian moral theory (at least as Arendt understood it). At the heart of the failure of Kantian moral thought according to Arendt is Kant’s failure to follow his “greatest discovery” (LMT: 64), namely, the distinction between reason and intellect. More precisely, what foils Kant for Arendt is his failure to see the concomitant distinctions that follow from this distinction. These are the distinctions between the activities of thinking and cognition, between meaning and knowledge as the two respective foci of these activities, and finally between self-consistency (non-contradiction) and truthfulness (self-evidence) as the respective standards of validity proper to meaning and truth (LMT: 57-58, 62-65).

13 This is especially illustrated, for Arendt, by the counterexamples of Denmark (EJ: 171-175, esp. 175; RJ: 6-7) and Bulgaria (EJ: 185-188, esp. 187), in which widespread public rejection of Nazi actions caused Nazi officials stationed there to `change their mind’ about Nazi action.

14 I elaborate these distinctions in section 5.1. In LMT Arendt only points to this reservation as concerning Kant’s moral philosophy in a footnote (LMT: 222-223, fn. 83). In elaborating this critique I have therefore drawn on earlier discussions in RJ and BPF as well as on the analysis provided by Bryan Garsten (2007).
As Arendt reminds us, the Categorical Imperative is discovered by reason and compels through the force of non-self-contradiction. As such, it is a formulation of moral meaning (BPF: 219-220, 244; RJ: 62-63; LMT: 188). But this means that it cannot also be a formula for moral knowledge and truth that compels through self-evidence, as Kant maintained, because truth is a matter for the intellect, not reason (RJ: 61-62, 77-78). Indeed, Kant himself, according to Arendt, was aware of making this leap, since the duty (and concomitant obligation) to obey the Categorical Imperative, which he adds to its application, is superfluous if what the Categorical Imperative tells us is self-evident (RJ: 77-78).

The crucial difference between non-self-contradiction and self-evidence, for Arendt, is that the latter is an objective standard external to the agent whereas the former is internal to the agent. Thus, immediately following this criticism of Kant, Arendt notes that those who under the Nazis nonetheless “never doubted that crimes remained crimes even if legalized by the government” and therefore continued acting morally, “did not feel an obligation but acted according to something which was self-evident to them even though it was no longer self-evident to those around them” (RJ: 78; my italics). This self-evidence, Arendt immediately adds, “had no obligatory character, it said, ‘This I can’t do’, rather than, ‘This I ought not to do’” (RJ: 78; italics in original). This subjective self-evidence, in other words, was in fact non-self-contradiction.

Kantian moral obligation, because it stems from an objective and universal standard of moral validity, is for Arendt the most problematic aspect of Kantian moral theory. Once a universal moral duty is adjudged to apply to a particular action, the obligation inherent in its universality demands obedience in the form of rule-following. Concomitantly, the application of the Categorical Imperative to a specific set of circumstances is carried out in the form of rule-application. As we will see in section 5.1, the application of general rules to specific circumstances is, according to Arendt, the task of the unreflective activity of determinative judgment.
following for independent moral reflection as well as steering agents away from (for Kant, subjective) internally guided moral performance.\textsuperscript{16}

For Kant, of course, this rule-following is legitimate because the universalization test of the Categorical Imperative ensures that the laws to be followed are self-legislated. Thus, Kantian agents would only abide by moral laws they adjudge that they would themselves legislate. The problem, as Garsten (2007: 1082-1083) explains, is that Kant also saw living under government as a precondition of moral action. This, for Kant, meant that rebellion or resistance to government is never legitimate (though disagreement and argument are) and that obedience to government was always warranted. Only, this makes law-abidingness appear to pass the Kantian universalization test and thereby acquire the garb of a morally legitimized duty. This, in turn, gives agents a seemingly legitimate Kantian reason for elevating law-abidingness to a decisional plane that is level with that of moral duty. The result is the undercutting of the presumptive primacy and thus decisional superiority that Kant held moral duty is supposed to have over external laws.

As a result, disagreement between one’s internal moral guides and the laws of the land can no longer be resolved through the presumption that one’s moral guides always override the laws of the land. Instead, the agent will have to validate her application of the Categorical Imperative to the legally-prescribed action at issue. More specifically, she will need to verify that her identification of the morally relevant aspects of the legally-prescribed action was correct and not corrupted through self-serving bias.

But this determination cannot be made using the Categorical Imperative (that is, Kantian moral reasoning) without entering a vicious circle of moral doubt. It therefore must turn to peer-behavior for validating either laws or conscience. Of course, moral law, by (Kantian) definition, is the same for all and discoverable by all. As a result, seemingly universal law-abidingness (as had occurred under the Nazis) would appear to agents to prove that it is the laws, rather than their personal moral guides, that are morally right, even if it is really the other way around. This

\textsuperscript{16} For a more elaborate argument in this vein see Garsten (2007, especially 1076-1084). I return to the question of whether intersubjective validation is too subjective for moral performance in section 9.5.
creates, in effect, and despite Kant’s own contrary intentions, a presumption in favor of the laws of the land in cases of conflict with personal morality. This is why the Nazis were able to use the principle of legality to substitute blind law-abidingness for moral duty under a (perverted) Kantian garb.

2.3

The third Nazi strategy for subverting German moral performance was to provide disincentives to acting on the guidance of conscience. Thus, the fact of being at war was enlisted to suggest the inapplicability of ordinary (peacetime) moral standards (EJ: 106). The historical idealism culturally and intellectually prevalent in pre-Nazi Germany was enlisted to suggest that to not partake in the Nazi endeavor was “to miss the train of History” (RJ: 24), as evidenced by Nazi political and military successes (EJ: 52, 105; RJ: 46, 54). Indeed, the ‘rags to power’ Hitler had himself come to exemplify this for many Germans, as Eichmann had attested of himself (EJ: 126, 149).

But the most effective Nazi disincentive to conscientious anti-Nazi action was the notion that such action would be both practically futile and personally very costly. This was achieved by fostering a decisional environment in which open opposition or even mere refusal to participate appeared unlikely to make any difference in the overall state of affairs, but very likely to cost the agent and her family death in obscurity (EJ: 231-232).\(^{17}\) As a result, at least as long as one was not required to commit the actual murders oneself, a simple cost-benefit analysis made acting on one’s own moral guidance appear irrational (JP: 227, 231-234; OT: 344-345, 451-452; EJ: 127,

\(^{17}\) The fact that the actor’s death would be in obscurity (that they would be made to disappear) meant that an exemplary martyr’s death – which some actors would have been willing to undertake (EJ: 231-232) – did not appear as a viable option. Arendt, of course, rejected this reasoning, pointing to the example of Anton Schmidt, whose story was, eventually, told (EJ: 230-231, 232-233).
Lack of visible German opposition to Nazi actions further enhanced the sense that such action had low chances of success and a high probability of capture.

This decisional environment also had its bureaucratic corollary. In the bureaucratic division of action into a multitude of mundane tasks most agents are replaceable, and no task is by itself sufficient for the success of overall action. It thus seemed to agents as if refusal to carry out one’s assigned task would do nothing to disrupt the bureaucratic murder machine, and would only result in economic and physical hardship and danger to actor and family (JP: 232-233; EJ: 136; RJ: 29-30, 57-58; LF: 197; May, 1996: 85). And again, the more the (general and bureaucratic) conditions that seemed to make conscientious action futile persisted, the less necessary it seemed to make this moral calculus anew. Eventually, the sense of the uselessness and futility of conscientious action itself became habitual and self-perpetuating.

This sense of decisional moral futility was in turn placated under Nazi conditions in two ways. On the one hand, agents found ways of seeing themselves as choosing the lesser evil or otherwise as trying to mitigate the evil of their actions as much as they could under the circumstances (RJ: 35-37). Again, once carrying out this ‘lesser evil’ became habituated, agents seemed to ‘forget’ the fact that this lesser evil was, in fact, evil (RJ: 36). On the other hand, the Nazis supplied an abundance of clichés which agents could use, as Arendt pointed out, to attain (moments of) a personal sense of achievement and hence elation that helped shield them against this reality (EJ: 49, 52). Again, once habituated, the (petty) sense of elation they provided encouraged their use, even in contexts that were completely inappropriate for them, as Eichmann exemplified throughout his trial and even at his execution (EJ: 48-49, 52-55, 243, 252, 288).

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18 The manipulation of one’s living condition so that cooperation rather than opposition seemed like the most rational choice in the situation was, according to Bauman, also the key to the lack of resistance and on many occasions actual cooperation of the victims with the Nazis (MH: 117-150, 201-206; see also OT: 452-453; for Arendt’s overt and controversial criticism of such cooperation – in a tone much harsher and, ironically, much less multiperspectival, than Bauman’s – see EJ: 117-119, 123-125).

19 As Arendt pointed out, the turn to historicity serves a similar reality-shielding purpose to the immersion of oneself in the mundane and habitual (EJ: 297; RJ: 259). A warning against such escapes was literally Arendt’s last public word – the concluding remark of her last public lecture (RJ: 275).
Not all of the measures involved in these three strategies were effective on all Germans, nor were they meant to be. Rather, different combinations of these measures were effective for different German individuals.\textsuperscript{20} And as long as for almost every German individual there was a combination of measures that, gradually but effectively, worked to tranquilize their conscience, this sufficed for the Nazis’ purposes.\textsuperscript{21} That these self deceptions do not stand up to close independent scrutiny – Arendt herself points out the fallacies in many of them as soon as she raises them – was decisionally immaterial. The fact was that they had a mutually reinforcing effect, especially as more agents succumbed to them and no opposition or disagreement to them was visible. And this effect reached its apex after the point at which they became habitual.\textsuperscript{22}

The result of this was a decisional environment so pervasive that its falsity was only seen by agents under its influence once the whole bubble was burst by the defeat of the Third Reich. While within it, Germans who before the Nazi period were not anti-Semitic or ideologically Nazi nonetheless ‘coordinated themselves’ to Nazi reality by accepting the Nazis’ reversal of values. And once it was burst they were able to easily ‘coordinate themselves’ back to normal reality by reverting to their pre-Nazi set of values (EJ: 103, 105-106, 108-109, 150; RJ: 24-25; 42-45, 53-55, 159, 233-234). Morality understood as a set of values and norms, preexisting (heuristic) categories under which to subsume our actions, was thereby revealed as nothing more than, an

\textsuperscript{20} Eichmann was exemplary to Arendt because for her, unlike most other non-Nazi Germans, all three effects were evident in him very much in full force, and almost all the means employed by the Nazis seemed to work on him, at least to some degree. Thus, while Eichmann wasn’t a ‘typical perpetrator’, as Dana Villa argues (1999: 52-54), he was nonetheless very much the representative of the non-Nazi German moral failure under the Nazis (the “desk murderer par excellence”; RJ: 241).

\textsuperscript{21} Thus, from an Arendtian perspective, it is superfluous to debate which measures are necessary or sufficient for the emergence of banal evildoing. Rather, all must be guarded against as morally pernicious.

\textsuperscript{22} This is the reason that historical evidence that this or that particular Nazi move should not, objectively, have been taken as pervasively as it was does not disprove the reality of the phenomenon of banal evildoing nor the psychological environment from which it sprang.
“eminently exchangeable set of habits” (Villa, 1999: 53; see also RJ: 43, 50, 54). This is the reason that Eichmann’s claim not to have been able to tell right from wrong while under the Nazi ‘spell’ was taken by Arendt as plausible.

Of course, the fact that there were individuals who did manage to tell right from wrong even under Nazi circumstances suggested to Arendt that the Nazi subversion of conscience did not thereby render moral performance impossible. This suggested to Arendt that more than just conscience is in fact involved in successful moral performance. Indeed, though in EJ Arendt still thought of German banal evildoing in terms of a failure of conscience, in RJ and LM she is talking about it as a (generally) moral failure. Thus, the quest for a response to the challenge of banal evildoing became a quest for those other mental capacities and activities that partake in moral performance.

But the psychology of banal evildoing also spotlighted, for Arendt, the direction that this quest is to take. The three Nazi strategies for tranquillizing moral performance differ in that they target different mental tasks entailed in moral performance. To make a moral decision, agents must first realize that the decision they are faced with raises moral concerns. This task, which I label ‘moral triggering’, is the target of the first strategy. Agents must then determine which of the courses of action open to them in the present situation are morally right, neutral, or evil. This task, which I label ‘moral guidance’, is the target of the second strategy. Agents must then choose a course of action, at which point both moral and non-moral considerations are weighed in the decision-making process. This task of moral choosing is the target of the third strategy.

But while these strategies differ in their decisional targets, they share the same mode of attack. All three strategies assume that agents will approach decisions about partaking in Nazi action from the same decisional stance that they approach most of their other decisions. This ordinary decision-making stance (mode) is heuristic in nature, characterized by habitualness, recourse to

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23 Tellingly, in LM conscience features only in her clarification of what it is within her newly developed scheme of moral performance (LMT: 5, 190-193; LMW: 64), and in her explications of Mill’s and Heidegger’s understandings of conscience (LMW: 97 and 184-193, respectively).
decisional shortcuts, and a self-prioritizing tendency. Indeed, as Arendt herself later conceded, approaching most of our decisions in this manner is unavoidable, as otherwise our mental capacities would be overtaxed by the sheer volume of information and decisions we are ordinarily faced with. Of course, if this is agents’ default mode of decision-making, they would be inclined to employ it in making moral decisions.

The three strategies all preyed upon, and radicalized to anti-moral effect, aspects of this default decisional stance. General categories are a mental shortcut we use both to order our information-processing and to quickly direct our reactions to this information. Laws and duties provide many of these general behavioral categories, and the behavior of our peers gives us convenient cues as to our own interpretation and application of such categories. According greater concern for, and limiting ourselves to the consideration of, what is in our immediate environment or frame of reference (the person near us, the task at hand) are also strategies for making decisions while exerting as few mental resources as necessary. And habituation is, of course, the most cognitively efficient way of reducing such exertion of mental resources. The Nazi manipulation of these heuristic cognitive means was already evident throughout my presentation of the three Nazi conscience-tranquilizing strategies.

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24 In this thesis I use the term ‘heuristic’, and its derivatives, to capture all forms of mental shortcuts and to denote decisional recourse to them. I draw this usage from cognitive psychology, where this term is used to denote mental shortcuts agents employ in place of probabilistic calculations under conditions where full relevant data is lacking, so as to speed up decision-making while reducing its costs in terms of expending time and cognitive resources on the decision. Notably, since this literature understands ‘reflection’ in terms of probabilistic reasoning, it effectively uses ‘heuristic decision-making’ to denote decision-making that eschews full reflection. However, since my concern goes well beyond probabilistic reasoning, my notion of ‘mental shortcut’ is decidedly broader than in the aforementioned cognitive psychology literature. Laws, norms, habits, concepts, meanings, values, stereotypes, the behavior of others, and one’s own aims and principles of action, insofar as they are employed as given and without reexamination in making a decision, are serving as mental shortcuts and are thus heuristics in my sense of the term. Therefore, despite greatly expanding the reach of the term relative to its cognitive psychology origin, I retain its equation of ‘heuristic’ with ‘unreflective’. Moreover, since habits are but one type of heuristics, I prefer this usage over the perhaps more familiar vocabulary of habitualness. For useful introductions to this body of psychological research see Kahneman et al (1982) and Gilovich et al (2002). For a useful critical surveys and reassessments of this body of research see Goldstein and Hogarth (1997).

25 I elaborate Arendt’s understanding of this in sections 3.4 and 4.4.
Similarly, the effects of categorization and distancing preyed upon, and radicalized, two self-prioritizing but ordinary decisional tendencies.\textsuperscript{26} One is the tendency to in part derive conduct towards others from their situatedness relative to us (visible or invisible, familiar or alien). The other is to view our own conduct through our own relation to our actions rather than through their consequences for others.

A similar self-prioritizing tendency is evident in Kantian moral duty and in positivistic professional duty. Kantian moral duty stresses self-contradiction as the measure of a maxim’s validity. Positivistic professional duty stresses evaluating professional conduct (over which the agent has full control) rather than the ends, means, and outcomes of bureaucratic action (over which most agents have little control). Both notions of duty thereby stress one’s duties to oneself. Granted, both notions of duty also place checks on this self-prioritizing tendency. Kantian moral duty requires that agents treat others as ends in themselves. Positivistic professional duty casts the bureaucrat as serving her clients. But the Nazi perversion of dutifulness enables law-abidingness, obedience to superiors, and responsibility to peers, to easily override these checks, thereby radicalizing the stress on one’s duties to oneself evident in both notions of dutifulness.

Finally, some of the most effective Nazi disincentives to conscientious action prey upon, and radicalize, decisional factors that privilege effects on the self over effects on others. Threat of death or hardship and the unlikelihood of success or of a martyr’s fame were foremost among these. Most effectively, the Nazi decisional environment radicalized the importance of the most

\textsuperscript{26} I prefer the (not very elegant) term ‘self-prioritizing’ (and its linguistically artificial derivation ‘self-prioritizingly’) over the more obvious term ‘self-interested’ because I mean by it more than simple self-interested acting. Obviously, I am being self-prioritizing when I put my interests, needs, and desires above other considerations in a given decisions. But I am also being self-prioritizing when I employ my predetermined meanings, values, ends, and principles of action (that is, what I believe in and how I understand things) in a given decision as they are, without examination or questioning. In this sense, the opposite of ‘self-prioritizing’ is not ‘other-regarding’ or ‘other-prioritizing’ but ‘self-examining’ or ‘self-reflective’. Indeed, I argue against the juxtaposition of ‘self-regarding’ and ‘other-regarding’ on the grounds that selfhood and otherness are interconnected and mutually constituting in chapters 7 and 10. In section 11.4 I argue that, as a result, we should distinguish between pre-reflective and post-reflective self-prioritizing, the former understood as above, the latter understood as ‘care for the self’ where concern for others is acknowledged to be an important components of such care for the self. I also prefer the term ‘self prioritizing’ over the term ‘self-privileging” for reasons that will be made clear in chapter 7 footnote 11).
basic of these decisional factors – the life-instinct – by making physical survival an ever-pressing concern in agents’ lives. The result was the placing of agents in a radically self-privileging frame of mind, in which acting for the sake of others appeared to be in a zero-sum game with acting for oneself.

This suggested to Arendt that moral decisions cannot and should not be arrived at in the same heuristic manner as our ordinary decisions. As a result, the task of moral triggering would need to consist of breaking into, and bracketing, the inclination to make the decision at hand heuristically. The task of moral guidance would need to consist of non-heuristic moral reflection regarding right and wrong. And the task of moral choosing would need to consist of the choosing of moral guidance over non-moral considerations as determining the decision at hand. And indeed, as we will see in chapters 3-7 and 10, Arendt’s moral analysis builds up precisely to showing that thinking, judging and willing, understood as reflective mental activities, are capable of fulfilling these tasks.
Chapter 3
World, Meaning, Politicalness

In chapter 1 I argued that Arendt turned to an analysis of thinking, judging, and willing in the hope of finding a response to the challenge of banal evildoing. But to fully make sense of this analysis, it is important to first present and clarify certain aspects of Arendt’s thought presupposed in her discussions of these mental activities. This will be the focus of chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 4 will focus on aspects relating to Arendt’s understanding of the human agent. In the present chapter I focus on aspects relating to the world within and upon which human agents act. I begin with Arendt’s understanding of the world as a world of appearances (section 3.1). I proceed to her understanding of the shared human world, the artificial physical and mental habitat human agents create to serve as their home in the world. I then present the roles Arendt envisioned in this shared world for language (section 3.2), tradition (section 3.3), political action (section 3.4), and storytelling spectatorship (section 3.5).

3.1

The starting point for Arendt’s analysis of our mental activities is a phenomenological account of the world in (and unto) which agents operate. For Arendt our world is a world of appearances. In this world all things (inanimate or sentient) appear as objects to the senses of all sentient creatures, which are thereby cast as spectators (LMT: 19-23; 30). Biological species have certain

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1 I do not have the space to assess Arendt’s relationship with the phenomenological tradition (for useful discussions of this see Moran, 2000: 287-319 and Parekh, 1981: 58-83), for which reason I will use term ‘the human world’ rather than the more familiar Husserlian term Lebenswelt (life-world).
functions reflected in the characteristic internal biological structure of its members (LMT: 27-30). But each living creature also “has an urge to appear, to fit itself into the world of appearances” in distinction from other creatures of the same species (LMT: 29; italics in original). This urge “reaches its climax in the human species” (LMT: 29-30). All creatures fulfill this urge through the self-display of whatever properties they possess, without choosing which properties to present or conceal (LMT: 36). Human agents, however, are also capable of self-presentation, the willful display or concealment of chosen properties (LMT: 29, 34, 36).2

This understanding of the world rejects at the onset the metaphysical tendency to cast appearance as superficial and what lies hidden beneath the surface as essential (LMT: 30). But Arendt does not advocate the reverse position that only appearance is essential to selfhood so that all there is to ‘who we are’ is ‘how we appear’. Indeed, the rest of LMT is devoted to our ‘inner life’ and its significance for the self. Arendt’s point, then, is that both appearance and ‘inner life’ are important facets of ‘who we are’.

Appearances, of course, are seen by other agents. A world of appearances is therefore also a world of spectators. Thus, contrary to HC and BPF, appearance and spectatorship are no longer seen as distinctly human characteristics of political activity, but as characteristic of living in general. As a result, political action is no longer the only action that constitutes appearance and is the subject of the spectators’ gaze.3

2 Arendt notes that we can choose how to present ourselves only “up to a point” (LMT: 34), but at that point in her analysis leaves this remark unexplained. Other discussions by Arendt present two, partially related, limitations on our ability to control our self-presentation. One is the fact that the spectators who view my appearance may perceive in it different properties than those that I had wished to present, and their perception trumps my intentions in determining how, in fact, I have appeared. The other is the fact that an agent’s decisions also entail implicit second-order choices of which we are not always fully aware, but which are also manifested in the agent’s appearance. I discuss both points more fully in section 4.5.

3 Thus, whereas in HC Arendt saw appearance in general as being in need of a special durable space to be carved out for it within the natural world (e.g., HC: 51, 96-97, 199), she now sees the world itself as a ‘space of appearance’. As we will see throughout the present chapter, human beings still need to carve out a human space within the world to serve as their home, but this home is needed not for human beings to appear but for them to interact with and relate to each other and thereby manifest human plurality and freedom. Indeed, in BPF, it is freedom (rather than appearance per se) that is said to be in need of “a politically guaranteed … worldly space to make its appearance” (BPF: 149).
Corollary to the world being a world of appearances is the fact that our access to it is perspectival. The world “is common to all who are alive, but it seems different to each species, different also to each individual specimen … according to the standpoint and the perspective of the spectators” (LMT: 21). Every species differs in its sensory apparatus, such that “every animal species lives in a world of its own” (LMT: 20). But every individual specimen also differs in the mental location from which she views the world, that is, the conditions and meaning structures through which she perceives the world’s appearances (BPF: 51; LK: 43).

The result of this perspectival access to the world is that no appearance “manifests itself to a single viewer capable of perceiving it under all its inherent aspects” (LMT: 38; see also HC: 57-58; BPF: 51, 144). Thus, there is no vantage point outside appearance and change from which the whole world and our place in it can be made sense of. Insights into the world of appearances that do not derive from worldly experience therefore “neither reach nor are able to present and represent reality” (LMT: 64; see also BPF: 237; LMT: 113). Rather, worldly truthfulness stems from the self-evidence of appearances, “the identity of an object the moment it is before our eyes … the simple, unquestioned and unquestionable certainty of visible evidence” (LMT: 119-120; see also LMT: 57). It is in this respect that, for Arendt, “there are no truths beyond and above factual truths” (LMT: 61).

Self-evident truth is coercive: it compels agents “by the force of necessity” (LMT: 120) rather than through “agreement, dispute, opinion, or consent” (BPF: 240; see also BPF: 239-241; LMT: 59-61). But this coerciveness extends only to the perceiving agent (LMT: 59). If the spectator seeks to tell of the appearance to others who have not witnessed it, she has to persuade them of

\[\text{\footnotesize 4 This is what enables human beings to have a pre-linguistic common sense (as discussed in section 4.2).}\\ \text{\footnotesize 5 I further discuss what constitutes our unique perspectives on the world in section 4.6.}\\ \text{\footnotesize 6 As we will see in section 5.1, Arendt distinguished between ‘knowledge’ and ‘meaning’, that is to say, between attaining knowledge regarding phenomena and between ascertaining or ascribing their meaning. I am using the term ‘to make sense’ specifically to encompass both activities Arendt distinguishes.}\\ \text{\footnotesize 7 Even mathematical postulates, for Arendt the purest truths of reason (LMT: 60-61), in fact draw on commonsensical worldly experience. Arendt here presupposes that all theoretical mathematical knowledge requires certain axiomatic starting points – for example, Euclid’s five postulates of plane geometry – which draw their force from ‘the self-evidence of appearance’. It is outside the scope of the present thesis to verify or refute this presupposition.}\]
her truth (ibid). Only, self-evident truth is also ineffable, a vision that cannot be fully captured by words (LMT: 114-119). In being communicated, then, factual truth loses both its coerciveness and its self-evidence. It can regain them if it is confirmed by other witnesses or accepted by listeners who have been persuaded to its truthfulness by evidence, demonstration, or argument (BPF: 238-239). But absent such confirmation, communicated factual truth is, from the perspective of listeners and hence of the human world, no more truthful than any opinion.

Such confirmation, for Arendt, is to be intersubjective. In a perspectival world, one’s access to the world is inevitably incomplete and subjective (and thus, in both senses, partial). Even the reality of what I see or sense requires validation, which is provided through other agents’ similar perception of reality, shared through our common sense (BPF: 254; LMT: 19-20, 46, 119). Furthermore, the needs of life, the error and illusion inherent in appearance, and the curiosity aroused by the world of appearances but inherent in human beings, all require that agents seek out and accumulate factual knowledge which they cannot themselves witness (LMT: 53-58). As a result, factual truth, though ineffable, also requires being communicated and shared. This is the reason that, upon being communicated, factual truth cannot but be transformed and lose its self-evidence and coerciveness, becoming, in effect, a factual assertion.

To regain its validity (‘truthfulness’), this assertion needs to be accepted as true by the listeners. Thus, in its communicated form factual truth/assertion must persuade, and such persuasiveness is inevitably provisional, subject to revocation if new facts become manifest or attested to the listeners. And this refusal to simply accept the witness’ factual truth as such is perfectly justified. For one, facts are inherently contingent (every fact could always have been otherwise), which means that the door to intentional falsification always remains open (BPF: 242-243, 251-252, 257; LMT: 59). Moreover, the reporter must inevitably pick and choose from among all the facts those more important and relevant to report, as well as interpret some of the facts because they

8 Of course, in the practice of daily life, we also accept many factual truths asserted to us simply on trust (for example, factual assertions made by teachers and textbooks). This is unavoidable because we cannot ourselves confirm every fact we require for our daily life, and because no argumentation and demonstration can fully replace ‘being there’. This, however, does not negate the fact, asserted presently, that our most basic stance towards others’ claims to factual truth is one of suspicion. Rather, it is an exception to this stance made to accommodate the necessities and limitations of daily living.
are equivocal or unclear (BPF: 238). As a result, no secondhand report can remain merely factual, no matter how close it stays to ‘dry facts’.

In communicating an event, then, the witness also makes sense of it, providing the facts with meaning. “Reality is different, and more than, the totality of facts and events, which, anyhow, is unascertainable. Who says what is … always tells a story, and in this story the particular facts lose their contingency and acquire some humanly comprehensible meaning” (BPF: 261-262; see also BPF: 249; LMT: 64, 122). Only after thereby acquiring meaning do factual truths gain shared realness and become part of the shared human world. It is for this reason that human beings also have an inherent need to attach meaning to whatever appearances present themselves to them (LMT: 14).

Our access to the world, then, is mediated through shared meanings conferred upon events by meaning-generating but also meaning-seeking agents. As such, agents both construct and are constructed by such meanings, and as a result agents also partake in the construction of other agents and are themselves partly constructed by other agents. In this respect, the human world is indeed shared (held in common) by the unique human agents who act within and upon it. In turn, these agents, through sharing in this human world as distinct yet equal others (HC: 175-176), also share their own humanness with other human agents operating within and upon it. This is the human condition of plurality.

Plurality, of course, is one of the “basic conditions” of human life on earth (the others being biological life, worldliness, and natality-mortality, birth and death) introduced in HC (e.g., HC:

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9 This is the reason that, though both are constructed by the mind externally to appearances, meaning belongs to the world of appearances whereas philosophical truth is foreign to it (see also sections 3.2, 3.5, 5.1 and 6.1). In this respect meaning remains rooted in worldly experience, mediating the factuality, sense, and communicability of appearances (‘saves the phenomena’; LMT: 53) rather than subsuming them under mental a experience presuming to order the world in its image.

10 This notion of a transformation of personal factual truth into intersubjectively accepted factual truth, based primarily on LMT, reconciles Arendt’s understanding of truth as coercive with her conviction that truth must be communicable, which were in deep tension in Truth and Politics (BPF: 227-264).

11 Indeed, because an appearance is visible to the fullest feasible extent only to all of its spectators in common, every appearance in the world of appearances is in a basic sense shared by all of its spectators.
In seeing the world as a world of appearances, Arendt does not reject this earlier notion of human life as conditioned by these human conditions. Indeed, all four conditions, as we will see throughout the present and succeeding chapters, feature largely unchanged in Arendt’s later thought. The only exception to this is Arendt’s stance towards the biological human condition.

In HC, biological life was very much the villain of the piece, seen as corrosive of human distinctness and potential. As a result, labor, the human activity most closely aligned with this human condition, was seen as displaying the least human dignity. In laboring we act with our own survival, needs, wants, and desires, and with the demands and limitations imposed on us by daily living and by our own bodies, uppermost in our mind. Therefore, in laboring, we act not out of potentiality and freedom but out of necessity and constraint, and oftentimes habitually, routinely and mechanically. We approach action ‘self-prioritizingly’, privileging our own needs and wants over others (HC: 8, 18-19, 30, 40-41, 56-57, 70-71, 82-83, 87, 96-101, 105-110, 116-128, 135, 141-142, 146, 150-151, 214-215, 245-246, 254-255, 310-313; see also BPF: 42-43, 151-152, 169, 208-209 and Dietz, 2002: 103-104, 193-194).

Granted, even in HC Arendt acknowledged the fact that “we are embodied creatures whose material needs must be satisfied by a constant engagement and metabolism with nature” to be a precondition of undertaking other human activities (Benhabib, 2000b: 81). But it is undeniable that in HC, a truly human life meant for Arendt being more than a biological creature and acting out of something other than survival, necessity, desire, or habit. Thus, in HC, Arendt cast the

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12 Another basic condition that appears at various places in HC is earthliness, the fact that we are creatures of the particular physical environment that is the planet Earth. However, Arendt says precious little about earthliness directly or indirectly (see HC: 2, 11, 134-135; BPF: 272-273, 278, 279), and seems to see it as no more than a basic precondition that it somehow predisposes us to be conditioned by the other conditions. She also says nothing about it later than 1963’s “The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man” (BPF: 265-280). For these reasons earthliness will not feature in my analysis in the present thesis.

13 Several feminist readers have justly criticized this denigration of biological life (see especially Brown, 1988: 23-50, 194-195; Cornell, 1993: 156-169; O’Brien, 1981: 99-110). In my view, Arendt’s reevaluation of biological life in LMT, which I discuss presently, revises several of the more problematic aspects of her HC analysis, very much along the lines advocated by Wendy Brown.
biological human condition as the source of a less humanly dignified mode of being-in-the-world, which she then juxtaposed to an alternative, political, mode of being-in-the-world. In LMT, however, Arendt no longer proclaims such a damning verdict on the biological human condition. Granted, she still considers our body with its internal organs and sensory apparatus to belong to what is common to all human beings. But since all living creatures appear and are spectators, appearance and spectatorship are now also linked to the biological component of the human (and non-human) condition. Our embodiedness, the metaphysical denigration of which Arendt now rejects (LMT: 80-92), is now seen as part of what limits us to one perspective on any given appearance at any given time and therefore as indirectly constitutive of human plurality. And our common sense, which is crucial in enabling us to overcome our perspectival partiality, is, qua sense, part of our (biological) sensory apparatus, as we will see in section 4.2. Thus, the biological human condition is now accepted as a legitimate component of what it means to ‘be human’ – that is, as long as it is accorded its proper decisional place.

3.2

Appearing and disappearing therefore mark being alive in a world of appearances. This, for Arendt, means that all living creatures are in a condition of wordliness. They live in a world that both precedes and succeeds them, and are not merely in the world but of the world (LMT: 20). As a result, “every creature born into [the world] arrives well equipped to deal with a world in which Being and Appearing coincide” (LMT: 20). Human beings, in other words, are naturally endowed with the sensory, physical, and mental capacities needed to create their own shared (held in common) world to serve as their home within the world of appearance (LMT: 20, 22). In this respect Arendt’s later thought harkens back to her earlier analyses, in HC and BPF, of this ‘human world’.

14 I return to this juxtaposition of modes of being-in-the-world in section 3.4.
At the most basic level, this shared human world is a space of durable objects which we fabricate, use, and exchange (HC: 7, 52-53, 136). It is also a repository of knowledge and experience, accumulated and shared across time and space, and often reified into durable objects (RJ: 163; LMT: 62). And it is also a shared stock of human appearances, words and deeds that we enact, observe, reify, and relate to each other (HC: 24-26, 94-95, 173-177, 181-184, 198-199). Finally, it is also a stock (context) of shared symbols and meanings which we generate to make sense of, and transmit to others the significance of, these objects, experiences, words and deeds. It is these meanings in particular that, as we saw in section 3.1, make the world more than “a heap of unrelated things” (HC: 204).

For Arendt this world is constituted, sustained, and revitalized through “the complex web of relationships in which human beings find themselves enmeshed” (Biskowski, 1993: 879; see especially HC: 182-183). This is why this world, in its most basic fibers, is a shared world. It lies ‘in-between’ the persons sharing it, relating them to each other by simultaneously separating them from, and connecting them to, each other (HC: 52-53, 182-183). It both lies between people at a current point in time and extends to past and future generations (HC: 7; BPF: 185; RJ: 28). It is sustained through the continued generation, distribution, exchange, and holding in common of such objects, experiences, and meanings, that human interrelationships facilitate. It is within this shared world that human actors carve out and maintain a space in which they can appear as human, that is, plural and natal, beings (HC: 96-97, 100-101; BPF: 153, 169, 192, 210).

The most basic human artifice facilitating and nourishing the human world is language. Language connects us to others by providing a system of shared symbols representing a set of common referents, which facilitate, structure, and shape, our interrelationships. It enables us to preserve and communicate information, experiences, feelings, and meanings across time and

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15 Thus, even though HC is an “overarching narrative about the destruction, loss, or decline of the public realm in the modern age” (Villa, 1999: 99), the modern world is not, for Arendt, a world in which shared contexts of meaning no longer exist and are irrevocably lost (as Villa maintains). A shared context of meaning lasts as long as the meanings in it are shared. HC is a narrative, first and foremost, of the decline of the means for renewing this shared context of meaning. But I am not convinced that for Arendt this decline has reached the point of no return. For one, human beings, as natal beings, are still capable of renewing such meaning through action and storytelling. If they had irrevocably lost that capacity, the act of writing and publishing HC would be pointless.
space, even to total strangers, to whom it serves as an instant bridge. As such, language is perhaps the human world’s most basic building block.

Language functions by grouping (categorizing) particulars together under abstract nouns (concepts) that serve as their common name. These concepts are either definable (house, table, bridge) or indefinable (justice, goodness, piety, beauty, courage). Definable concepts serve as a schema of what a certain type of particular physical objects is. Under such concepts we can then subsume particular objects as we encounter them, intelligibly convey our impressions of those objects to others, and even fabricate new objects, using the schema as our model (HC: 140-141; RJ: 143-144; I: 80-83; LK: 76-77; LMT: 119).

Indefinable concepts, by contrast, do not have particular physical objects as their referents, and are therefore too slippery to be captured by words as adequately as definable concepts (LMT: 102, 169-171). Instead, we specify, convey, and share a sense of these concepts through the examples of human agents who do or say something we believe captures the essence of the indefinable concept. These examples are then fit to their referent indefinable concepts through the stories told about these exemplars by storytelling spectators (RJ: 143-144; LK: 76-77; LMT: 102, 169-171). The example is analogous to the schema in that it conveys a general concept through a concrete image that illustrates and thus suggests its essence (BPF: 247-248; RJ: 143; LK: 76-77).

Note, however, that most indefinable concepts also attach a valuation (‘just/unjust’, ‘good/evil’, ‘beautiful/ugly’, etc.) to the particular that is fitted under them. When we call something beautiful or ugly, just or unjust, good or evil, we do not merely describe it, but also indicate approval or disapproval of it. In capturing and disseminating the meaning of indefinable

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16 Arendt acknowledges as a historical fact, but does not elaborate upon, the possibility of languages that are not based on abstract concepts (see RJ: 171-172 and LMT 170).

17 In HC and BPF Arendt does not acknowledge the possibility of non-action serving as a source for such an example, but her later lauding of disappearance under Nazi conditions (RJ: 43-48, 63-64, 188-189; LMT: 192-193) suggests non-action can serve as an example, at least under certain conditions.

18 It is in this sense that, in fitting a particular under an indefinable category, we pass a judgment on that particular. This is the reason that in the practice of worldly life meanings and valuations often go hand-in-hand. Still, within an
categories through examples and stories we therefore also capture and disseminate, as shared values, valuations entailed in the fitting of examples to concepts.

3.3

The shared human world, as noted in the previous section, is shared not only at a given point in time but also across time, from generation to generation. This requires passing a community’s shared context of meaning, the collected and collective stock of meanings and values it has produced, to newcomers born into the community. This shared context of meaning is passed on to newcomers in the form of tradition (HC: 245-246; BPF: 94, 122-124; 184-193, 201-202; LMT: 202; LMW: 201-202). It is against this (old) context of transmitted tradition that new generations can appear in their newness, innovating and putting their own stamp on the tradition that they, in their turn, bequeath to future generations (BPF: 177, 185, 189, 192-193, 195).

Every generation, then, is grounded in a tradition which it is expected to keep vigorous by adherence or alteration (as it deems necessary) before transmitting it to its children (BPF: 189-196). Thus, agents are initially socialized into the language, meanings, and values comprising a community’s shared context of meaning. This provides agents with an initial personal context of meaning. In particular, it provides agents with a stock of habits and prejudices, provisional judgments that are “the answers on which we ordinarily rely” to fit ourselves into the world

Arendtian context it is important not to conflate meanings and valuations because, as we will see in sections 5.1 and 5.3, they are on Arendtian terms the products of different mental activities (speculative thinking and reflective judging, respectively). However, as we will see in section 6.3 and 7.2, thinking and judging indeed have a strong decisional interrelationship even for Arendt, so that the affinity of meanings and values is not only practical but also decisional, even on Arendtian terms. For this reason, in the present chapter as well as in chapter 4, I use the term ‘meanings’ (rather than the more cumbersome ‘meanings and valuations’) to apply to valuations as well, unless what I say of meanings does not apply to valuations. This affinity between meanings and valuations will also be important for my move in section 9.3 to understand Ricoeur as theorizing decisional ground similar to Arendt.
Granted, tradition provides only one understanding of the past. The authoritativeness it thereby claims gives the human world permanence in the face of its ever-changing nature (BPF: 95). The price for this is that tradition also demands obedience to it which precludes other understandings of the past (BPF: 93-94). But as we just noted, because of the human condition of natality, every new generation also has the capability to question and rework the tradition it has inherited. It is in this sense that “[a]uthority implies an obedience in which men retain their freedom” (BPF: 106). This revitalization of tradition is carried out, according to Arendt, through political action and storytelling spectatorship.

3.4

Arendt’s understanding of political action, and her underlying notion of ‘politicalness’ (what garners an action the label ‘political’), is famously idiosyncratic. For her, the political is not defined by its subject matter (namely, public affairs). Rather, Arendt saw ‘politicalness’ as a distinctly human way (mode) of being-in-the-world. This being-political has two complementary elements, ‘agonal’ and ‘participatory’. Initially, in HC and OR, Arendt emphasized the ‘agonal’ element as definitive of being-political. But her later work, as I will show in the present section, increasingly came to emphasize the ‘participatory’ element as definitive of the political way of being-in-the-world.

Arendtian political action has two stages (RJ: 46-47). It must first be initiated by a would-be leader, an actor par excellence, who appears in speech and deed in front of a multitude of others.

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19 Thus, much of what we commonly consider political is not at all so in Arendt’s eyes. For a poignant critique of the political implications of this see Beiner (2008).

20 The labels ‘agonal’ and ‘participatory’ are borrowed from Parekh (1981; see especially 177-178).
This actor seeks to enlist the participation of others in a common undertaking that would enact some significant change (‘new beginning’) in the world, thereby actualizing the human condition of natality. This is the more ‘agonal’ element of action, in which individualistic self-presentation in search of distinction and fame is most prominent (HC: 176-199; BPF: 153-154, 249-251, 258, 263; RJ: 46-47; LK: 55).

Of course, this proposed undertaking can only be carried out with the participation or more passive support of others. It therefore depends on the agreement of those actors who formed the would-be leader’s initial audience, and who arrive at this agreement through public debate and the sharing of opinions and standpoints (HC: 199-201; BPF: 221, 241; RJ: 46-47, 199-205; LK: 59; LMW: 200). Here even the most exceptional would-be leader is transformed into a ‘first among equals’ (BPF: 241; RJ: 46-47, 199-205) and action occurs ‘with’ other people rather than ‘for or against’ specific others (HC: 180). This is the more ‘participatory’ and egalitarian element of political action, tied to human beings in their plural condition (HC: 3-4). The ‘agonal’ and ‘participatory’ elements of political action need to complement each other if the political act is to come to fruition.

In political action actors seek to disclose themselves to, and thereby distinguish themselves from, others. They act for the sake of fame (doxa), self-presentation, political excellence, or the exhilaration of acting itself, but not out of responsibility (Kateb, 1999/2001: 122). Indeed, in HC, Arendt saw political action as inherently irresponsible. Political action acts into a world shared with a multiplicity of other autonomous natal actors. As a result, once a political act has been carried out, the actor cannot predict, and has no control over, its outcomes, and therefore cannot be said to have authorial responsibility for such outcomes (HC: 183-185, 190-195, 231-234; BPF: 60, 84).

But in her post-EJ work Arendt modified this position. For one, she came to understand doxa more as ‘opinion’ than as ‘fame’, and therefore as something the political actor takes into account in their actions.

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21 Kateb also adds the motivation of exemplifying ‘a principle’, which he understands as ‘a passion’. As we will see in sections 6.2, 7.2, and 7.3, I have a different understanding of what a ‘principle’ is and what it means for action to exemplify it, which is why I omit this motivation here.
account rather than pursues (LK: 55; LMT: 94). Even more significantly, immediately after the
publication of OR and EJ, Arendt introduced a notion of political responsibility into her thought.
To act politically, she argues, is to attempt to set aright a time that is ‘out-of-joint’ by attempting
to renew the (human) world (RJ: 28). In undertaking this endeavor, the actor makes the
wellbeing of the human world – and by extension, the human condition of plurality and natality
that characterizes the human world, and thus the uniqueness, autonomy, personhood and agency
of those with whom one shares the world – her own affair and thereby takes upon herself
responsibility for it.\textsuperscript{22} As a result, political actors are now understood by Arendt to act for the
sake of the world (that is, out of \textit{amor mundi}, love of the world) rather than out of the more
‘agonal’ motives she had earlier emphasized.\textsuperscript{23}

Through this move the irresponsibility of political action comes to be seen as a feature of it being
an action \textit{rather than} of it being political. This move also deemphasizes the distinctness of the
human actors who share the world in common (an ‘agonal’ element of acting politically),
emphasizing instead the actual sharing of the world (a ‘participatory’ element of acting
politically).\textsuperscript{24} It is the fact that agonal self-disclosure is a way of being-with-others, rather than
its agonality, that is now seen as what makes it political.\textsuperscript{25}

This has important implications for Arendt’s juxtaposition, in HC, of political being-in-the-world
(political action) with two alternative, factually much more common, modes of being-in-the-
world. One was the worldly mode of work or fabrication, characterized by the utilitarian pursuit
of predetermined ends and by decisionally privileging use-values and means-ends categories (see

\textsuperscript{22} This does not contradict Arendt’s earlier notion of political action as inherently irresponsible, because this is not
responsibility for the action (authorial responsibility) but for the world that is being acted upon.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Amor mundi} appears in HC only obliquely (HC: 41, 323-324), but the fact that Arendt considered naming the
work ‘Amor Mundi’ (Kohler and Saner, 1985/1992: 264) suggests it was presupposed by her in it.
\textsuperscript{24} Indeed, at one point Arendt explicitly characterized ‘speaking politically’ as speaking “from the viewpoint of the
community or of the world we live in” (RJ: 79).
\textsuperscript{25} Thus, by the time of LK politicalness is tied with human sociability, interdependence, and plurality (LK: 14, 20,
27). This however, is still done somewhat obliquely, in Arendt’s comments about what she sees as Kant’s ‘missing’
political philosophy, implicit in the \textit{Critique of Judgment}. What makes what she extracts out of the \textit{Critique of
Judgment} political is the fact that it deals with “men in the plural … as actual inhabitants of the earth … living in
communities” (LK: 26-27).
especially HC: 154). The other was the biological mode of laboring, characterized by the habitual pursuit of survival-, need-, and desire-based interests and by decisionally privileging the often socially-determined meanings, values, and norms that ordinarily guide one’s actions.

Of these modes of being-in-the-world, Arendt considered political action the most, and laboring the least, humanly dignified. Fabrication occupied something of a middle ground in this hierarchy of human dignity, in no small part due to the fact that it can assist, and thereby strengthen the effects of, the other two modes (HC: 183-184, 197-198, 204).26 Both non-political modes, though laboring more than fabrication, posed the threat of denigration of humanness, understood in terms of human plurality and freedom (natality).

This notion of competing modes of being-in-the-world, one more difficult and rare but also more substantively human, the other(s) more common, ordinary, and pernicious, was not abandoned by Arendt in her post-EJ work. But other moves she made in her post-EJ work required her to modify her understanding of the more ordinary mode(s) of being-in-the-world. For one, the fact that in a world of appearances any action constitutes a self-disclosing appearance (section 3.1) meant that both politicalness and non-politicalness are revealed in action. This spotlights the choice of how (that is, out of which mode of being-in-the-world) to act rather than the manner of action. And this newfound focus on the choice of modes was itself reinforced by understanding ‘acting politically’ as an undertaking of responsibility for the world.

More significantly, ‘biologicalness’ could no longer be tied with the perniciousness of the ordinary modes of being-in-the-world.27 Instead, RJ and LM tie this perniciousness to the self-prioritizing, habitualness, and conformity to heuristic predetermination that ubiquitously characterize most of our daily decision-making (RJ: 44, 50, 60-61, 159-160, 178, 259-261; LMT: 26-40, 80-88).

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26 Thus, laboring is antipolitical while fabrication is unpolitical but not antipolitical (HC: 212).
27 Indeed, throughout LM, Arendt does not use the term ‘the life-process’, which was so prominent (and denigrated) in HC. Instead, she uses the more general and neutral ‘life’, even when discussing life’s biological aspects (see especially LMT: 26-40, 80-88).
3-5, 92). But notably, it was precisely these characteristics of ordinary decision-making that were so effectively preyed upon by the Nazis in their mass tranquilization of moral performance (see section 2.5). As a result, the pernicious mode of being-in-the-world, in its revised post-EJ understanding, was also pinpointed as the mode of decision-making that failed banal evildoers under the Nazis. Making decisions independent of such predetermination thereby becomes an antidote to this danger and the hallmark of the competing alternative mode of being-in-the-world. This is provided, as we will see in chapters 5-7 and 10, by reflective thinking, judging, and willing.

Thus, for Arendt in her later work, being political comes to be characterized by the agent’s being-with-and-for-others through her independence from predetermination, habit, ordinariness, and conformity. Such being-with-and-for-others, as an actualization of the human condition of plurality, itself entails the agent both sharing her humanness with others and sharing in others’ humanness. Such sharing of (and in) humanness is thereby also revealed as characteristic of the political mode of being-in-the-world. This is what the Arendtian notion of ‘the political’ comes to mean after EJ. The agonal political action that infused HC and underscored OR is thus revealed as but one of several ways of independently (natally) sharing one’s humanness with others and thereby being-with-and-for-others. And moral performance through reflective thinking, judging, and willing, will be revealed in chapter 10 to be another such way of being-political-in-the-world.

3.5

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28 This will be explained in more detail in section 4.4. As we will see in chapters 5-7 and 10, acting on the basis of predetermined ends without reexamining those ends (that is, instrumental decision-making, the consideration of appearances and choices in terms of their usefulness as means for these predetermined ends) is adjoined in Arendt’s later work to the habitualness that in HC characterized laboring but not fabrication. Thus HC’s two pernicious and non-political modes of being-in-the-world effectively become one mode, pernicious and non-reflective, in RJ and LM.
For Arendt, then, political action endeavors to set an ‘out of joint’ time aright. But what does it mean for the time to be ‘out of joint’? What is it ‘out of joint’ with? If “[t]o set the time aright means to renew the world” (RJ: 28), the disjointedness to be set aright must be between the time (that is, things as they are) and the world (that is, the story we tell about the world, things as they are meant to be). Meaning can become out of step with the times because the times – and the world with them – change, both as a result of human action with its (intended or unintended) consequences, or simply as a result of the march of time. To set the time aright therefore means to make sense of the current time and render it humanly meaningful again. This is what is undertaken by the political actor.

Political action, then, makes manifest disjointedness in the shared context of meaning of the particular human world within which it is taking place. Such disjointedness can be corrected by ascribing (new) meaning to the action. This (re)fits the action into the old shared context of meaning. It can also be corrected by reworking the disjointed aspects of the shared context of meaning so as to encompass the new action as a comprehensible, sensible, meaningful event. This fits the shared context of meaning around the new action. In other words, this disjointedness is corrected through ‘emplotting’ the action into the story we tell about the world (namely, into our shared context of meaning).

‘Emplotment’ refers to the fact that when put into a story, “particular facts lose their contingency and acquire some humanly comprehensible meaning” (BPF: 261-262). The story “reveals the meaning of what otherwise would remain an unbearable sequence of sheer happenings” (MDT: 104; see also HC: 97; LMW: 138-141). Upon being emplotted into a story, then, a hitherto contingent act (a new beginning) becomes a necessary part of the plot (the world). As such, it acquires a retrospective assumption of its necessity and with it a sense of coherence and meaning (HC: 97; LMW: 140). Emplotment is therefore what can, potentially, make “all the particular things in the world and every particular deed in the realm of human affairs fit together and produce a harmony, which itself is not given to sense perception” (LMT: 133). Meaning, in

Arendt, is thus revealed to be the quality of fit into a context of meaning or, as I shall refer to it here, ‘meaning-as-fit’.

‘Out of joint’ times, then, can be put aright by emplotting the action that manifests this disjointedness into the story of the world. Political action, *qua* example, is the vehicle onto or around which such meaning can be grafted. But the actual meaning-grafting emplotment of action into the story of the world requires someone other than the political actor to tell the tale of the event, act, and actor. This, in Arendt, is the task of the storytelling spectator. Indeed, the above mentioned *unsensible* harmony of the world’s things and deeds “would remain forever unknown if there were no spectator to look out for it, admire it, straighten out the stories and put them into words” (LMT: 133).

To tell a story about an event or an action, the storyteller must make sense of it in terms of its effects on, and place in, the shared context of meaning. She must, in other words, determine ‘what it means for this action to be’ (the guiding question of the quest for meaning in Arendt; e.g., LMT: 57). To the extent that the action has changed the world those changes – and therefore, the new, changed world – must also be made sense of (that is, rendered meaningful again) *vis-à-vis* the old world. This meaning is then shared and disseminated as the story is told to others. Action and actor are thereby ‘kept alive’, frozen in collective memory (tradition) as exemplifying the meaning ascribed to them.30 This serves to re-stabilize the world – until, that is, new action or the changing of the times destabilize it again, requiring new stories to re-stabilize it, in an ongoing process of reinterpretation and reinvigoration of a community’s shared meanings.

The storytelling activity, however, is also an evaluative activity (see especially LK: 44-69, 74-76). The storyteller cannot convey everything happening on the stage in one story. She must therefore first deem an action or event worthy of being told, and then assess the relative significance of the various details of the event to determine which to include in the story. These

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30 It is this insight, I believe, that is captured by the seemingly disparate points that meaning is found in the exceptional act (HC: 42-43), that the significance of an event is shown in its reification (HC: 187), and that the meaning of a particular is provided by the context shared by members of the same species (LMT: 50).
evaluations are attached to the action’s meaning (‘is this action worthy of emulation/defamation’). In this way, the essential quality exemplified by the told-of event, action, or person, also becomes ‘a value’.

Political action requires the complement of storytelling spectatorship for two reasons. First, political action is ephemeral and is therefore in need of reification if it is to outlast the moment of its enactment to become an example (HC: 95, 191-192; BPF: 41, 59-60, 84). Second, political actors, being ‘part of the action’, are partial. They see only the part of the play they are involved in, and have a personal stake (interest) in their action and its outcomes. The conferring of meaning and value upon the action, on the other hand, by its nature requires both disinterestedness and a broader perspective than the actor’s. Thus, “it is not uncommon for outsiders and mere spectators to gain a sharper and deeper insight into the actual meaning of what happens to go on before or around them than would be possible for the actual actors and participants” (RJ: 8, my italics; see also HC: 191-192 and LMT 93-94). To render the action on the stage meaningful one is to be positioned not as an actor but as a spectator (BPF: 210; LK: 55, 68-69; LMT: 76, 92, 96-97).³¹

Spectators’ detachment, impartiality, and disinterestedness should not, however, be overstated. For one, though outside the action unfolding on the stage, spectators are still within the theater (world) and not at some Archimedean point outside it. Granted, Arendt herself sometimes (especially in LK, but even as late as LMT: 93-94) referred to the spectator’s standpoint as one from which the whole of the play is visible. But the possibility of being positioned at such a standpoint is effectively ruled out by the perspectival nature of human access to world (see section 3.1). Full impartiality is therefore impossible for individual spectators, and can only be achieved if all spectators’ perspectives were combined. Individual spectators can at best

³¹ Of course, when making a political decision, I must first consider (look at) the matter at hand. As a result, as part of being an actor, I am also simultaneously a spectator vis-à-vis that part of the ongoing action that I am considering acting upon. This is even more so with the actors on the stage who see and hear the would-be leader’s appearance and decide whether or not to join her in her proposed endeavor. These agents are still directly involved in the action and are therefore still actors (for them the action is being undertaken, for the pure spectators, it is unfolding). But they are also required, as we will see in section 4.7, a particular exercise of representative thinking (namely, the intersubjective exchange of interested opinions Arendt calls ‘political thinking’) and are in this respect akin to spectators.
imaginatively approximate this general and impartial standpoint through the exercise of representative thinking.\\(^{32}\)

Furthermore, in a world of appearances, living creatures are alternatively appearances and spectators (see section 3.1). This means that ‘actor’ and ‘spectator’ are not permanent social roles (though particular agents may undertake them in professional capacities)\\(^{33}\) but exchangeable existential stances between which individual agents can alternate. And actors are aware of the existence of spectators on the stands and take into account the stories they anticipate these spectators would tell about them (LK: 55; LMT: 94). Indeed, once captured in a story, actions, actors and meanings become part of the shared context of meaning, that is, of ‘the old’ in the context of which ‘the new’ bursts onto the world and distinguishes itself as new. In this way the act of telling a story involves the storytelling spectators in the proceedings on the stage (albeit only after the storytelling activity itself is over and done with). As a result, actors and spectators are placed in a more symbiotic relationship than Arendt’s rhetoric would sometimes lead us to believe.\\(^{34}\)

\[^{32}\] Even in LK Arendt’s statements that the spectator is impartial and can see ‘the whole of the play’ occur before she turns from speaking about ‘a spectator’ to speaking about ‘spectators’ (LK: 59), a move necessary because spectators “exist only in the plural” (LK: 63), such that the spectator “is always involved with fellow spectators” (LK: 63) and attains her partiality through this involvement.

\[^{33}\] In fact, Arendt notes a variety of specific professional spectatorship roles: the scientist, the artist, the historian, the judge, the fact-finder, the witness, the reporter, and the philosopher (BPF: 259-260).

\[^{34}\] That the storytelling spectator, when telling her story, acts, is clear from the fact, perceptively noted by Villa (1996: 107), that such storytelling is, on the part of the spectator, self-disclosure in word and deed. Indeed, Arendt notes that the thinker who writes her thoughts down has thereby “entered the vita activa and chosen its way of permanence and potential immortality” (HC: 20). However, the writing of one’s thoughts is not political action as long as all that the spectator does is tell a story, leaving the story’s audience to decide for themselves whether and what action should be undertaken. This is why EJ, Arendt’s story of the Eichmann trial, contains no call for action, foreseeable as the public controversy it caused may have been. Once a spectator foregoes their position on the stands and uses her storytelling politically, they thereby cease to be spectators and their stories become, from a public and thus human perspective, opinions. This is why a philosopher’s success in persuading the public of their theory is a Pyrrhic victory (BPF: 246).
In the previous chapter we saw that for Arendt every living creature is born “well equipped to deal with a world in which Being and Appearing coincide” (LMT: 20). In human beings, this ‘equipment’ consists of our senses and our mind. The constitution and operation of components of this human ‘equipment’ was the focus of Arendt’s later work.

The problem was that in embarking on this investigation, Arendt was very much breaking new ground. Granted, many thinkers have discussed specific mental faculties, abilities, and activities, albeit in the course of investigations focused primarily on other concerns. But no earlier thinker had provided a sustained discussion of all the mental faculties and activities that interested Arendt. And most of the discussions that did exist were, in her view, problematic. This left Arendt with a sometimes bewildering array of scattered source materials as intellectual inspirations and starting points. And she herself embarked on this investigation with no more than a set of disparate insights, convictions, and ‘thought-trains’ regarding specific mental capacities, faculties, and activities.

As a result, her analyses of these mental faculties and activities were developed piecemeal, in an ongoing process of refining earlier insights and clearing up earlier misconceptions. Much of this development was carried out in lecture courses and public lectures that were only published posthumously. This results in an investigation even more unsystematic than usual for Arendt, especially when it comes to its terminological and conceptual levels. For example, Arendt clearly describes specific mental abilities, mental faculties that employ these abilities, and mental activities in the carrying out of which these abilities are employed by these faculties. But she gives specific abilities, faculties, and activities labels that are too close to each other so that she herself ends up oscillating between them and therefore confusing them.
It is therefore useful, before discussing Arendt’s analyses of particular mental capacities, to sketch out the ‘map of the mind’ that emerges out of these analyses.¹ This also serves to introduce the terminology to be used in my discussion of these analyses, which sometimes diverges from Arendt’s.² I do this in section 4.1. I then turn to Arendt’s specific understandings of common sense (section 4.2), of the imagination (section 4.3), of the mental shortcuts we use for most of our daily decisions (section 4.4), of the personal context of meaning that shapes and guides such decisions (section 4.5), of the perspectives through which we perceive our world (section 4.6), and finally, of the power of representative thinking, which enables us to overcome the partiality inherent in such perspectives (section 4.7). In chapters 5 and 6 I turn to the centerpieces of Arendt’s investigation of the human mind, the mental activities of thinking, judging and willing.

4.1

For Arendt the human mind possesses a sensory apparatus (including common sense), mental faculties (thought, judgment, and will)³, and mental powers or abilities⁴ (intellect, speculative reason, imagination, representative thinking, spontaneity, and logical abilities, including the powers of instrumental, deductive and inductive reasoning).⁵ Mental abilities are employed by mental faculties in carrying out mental activities. Thus, thinking and cognition are carried out by

¹ The most complete (though not entirely accurate) existing such sketch is in Biskowski, 1993: 873-875.
² Terminological choices that stray from Arendt’s usage are noted and explained in footnotes.
³ I prefer these labels over Arendt’s labels (‘thinking ego’, ‘willing ego’ and ‘judging ego’) for two reasons. First, the term ‘ego’ seems to me to carry over Freudian connotations which Arendt would have rejected. Second, the Arendtian usage makes the mind (and concomitantly, the self) seem more multiplicitious and fragmented than warranted on the terms of the Arendtian analysis itself (as I show in section 10.2).
⁴ I see no difference in decisional function between a ‘mental ability’ and ‘a mental power’, and therefore use both labels interchangeably. I retain both labels simply because some mental powers/abilities I discuss are commonly spoken of as powers while others are commonly spoken off as abilities.
⁵ Later chapters will also add to this picture of the human mind the mental faculty of empathy, the mental activity of empathetic perception (both chapter 8), and the mental ability of practical wisdom (chapter 9).
the faculty of thought, determinative and reflective judging by the faculty of judgment, and arbitration and free willing by the faculty of will). In each of these activities a particular mental power takes the lead in the activity, though other mental powers may also contribute to it. Thus, speculative reason takes the lead in thinking, intellect in cognition, deductive reasoning in determinative judging, imagination and representative thinking in reflective judging, instrumental reasoning in arbitration, and spontaneity in free willing.6

It is through these mental activities that the mind makes decisions. Each of the three mental faculties is autonomous in relation to the other two faculties in how it carries out its activities, but the faculties must work together in making specific decisions. The same mental faculties are employed, and the same mental activities may be used, in decisions made in different decisional contexts. However, the way the activity is applied (that is, the way the faculty uses the relevant mental powers) diverges across decisional contexts.

The mental activities are of two types, reflective (out-of-order) and ordinary. Ordinary activities (cognition, determinative judgment, arbitration) are carried out while the agent is within the hustle-and-bustle of daily life, often in a heuristic manner. Reflective activities (thinking, reflective judgment, free willing), by contrast, are carried out in temporary detachment from this hustle-and-bustle (that is, in temporary mental withdrawal from the physical world to the position of a spectator). By default, the mind employs the ordinary mental activities for making most given decisions. However, some decisions by definition are carried out reflectively (e.g., decisions entailed in storytelling spectatorship). Other decisions can be carried out heuristically but are more appropriately carried out reflectively, so that the mind needs to be triggered to carrying them out in this way (e.g., moral decisions). Conscience as traditionally conceived, and as we will see the internal dialogue of consciousness as Arendt conceives it, are examples of such triggers.

6 In the present thesis I will often discuss the mental faculties in anthropomorphizing language. In this I am following Arendt, though in Arendt this was less jarring because she labeled the faculties ‘egos’ (a usage I rejected in footnote 3 above). Notably, this is not meant to invoke a mechanistic picture of the mind. Rather I see the mind as an organic whole whose constituent components, because of their differing experiential roots and modes of operation, are each more or less suited for carrying out specific mental activities and tasks, and which therefore may pull the mind in different decisional directions.
Our sensory apparatus is comprised of our five physical senses and a sixth, ‘common’ sense. Common sense, in Arendt, is the sense which serves a species as its ‘sense of reality’. Since our other senses are personal and thus subjective we cannot, by ourselves, be sure what we perceive through our five senses is real, that is, “has an existence independent of the act of perceiving” (LMT: 46; see also LMT: 19-20).

The realness of appearing objects and thus the validity of our perception of them are ensured by the fact that the same object is, simultaneously and independently, similarly sensed by each of our senses and by other spectators of the same species (LMT: 50). This realness is sensed (perceived) through the common sense (LMT: 49-53; 119). This private and inner sixth sense is common in two respects. First, it senses objects as all five other senses sense them, and thereby brings the differing perceptions of the other five senses together into a common perception. Second, it is common to all human beings by virtue of the fact that human beings, as members of the same biological species, share the same sensory apparatus (LMT: 49-52, 119; see also HC: 57-58, 137; BPF: 178, 221-222).

As such, our common sense makes it in principle possible for us to communicate subjective perceptions to every other human being, in reality or imagination. This potential communicability is therefore, for Arendt, pre-communal and pre-linguistic. It is this communicability that makes the realness granted to our sense perceptions by common sense intersubjective rather than objective (LMT: 46, 119). Granted, within a specific community, the common sense also functions as the ‘community sense’ (sensus communis) that fits different members into its shared language and context of meaning. But the common sense itself is neither constructed by, nor bound to, a given community. As a result, the communication-enabling
function of the common sense transcends the bounds of any given community and shared context of meaning.  

4.3

Once phenomenal data has been collected through the five physical senses and harmonized through the common sense, it is stored in our memory (LMT: 76-78, 85). Memory ‘freezes’ appearances (events, actions, persons) out of time, ensuring they do not disappear as soon after they have appeared by giving them permanence within the mind (LMW: 11-12). This stored data, however, is no longer sensory but mental, a thought-thing. The transformation of data from sensory form into mental form, its retrieval from memory so as to represent it to the mental faculties, and the recombination of existing data into non-existing new forms (e.g., a Centaur), are all carried out through the use of the power of the imagination, “[t]he mind’s faculty of making present what is absent” (LMT: 76; see also RJ: 165; LK: 66-69; LMT: 85-87). Examples

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7 Thus it is not the case that for Arendt “[o]nly individuals who share a culture can share the kinds of understandings that compose a common sense” (Steinberger, 1993: 68). Rather, in appealing to common sense “we are not appealing to a fixed set of opinions but to what is communicable” (Zerilli, 2005b: 173). I believe Arendt here departs from Kant, who distinguished between a sensation-uniting and reality-granting common-sense and a communication-, community-, and understanding-enabling sensus communis (see Kohn, 2004: 270-271; see also HC: 283). For Kant, of course, the distinction between a ‘sensory’ common sense and a ‘cognitive’ common sense was necessitated by his distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal realms of experience, which Arendt rejected alongside other metaphysical two-world theories (LMT: 19-30, 197-98; note particularly the references to Kant at 23 and 24).

Notably, the identification of the understanding-enabling common-sense with a ‘community sense’ was to Kant unproblematic because for him the relevant community of the sensus communis was ‘the reading public’, which Kant believed would eventually, thanks to the imminent progress of enlightenment, encompass the whole of humanity. However, without such a belief – which Arendt repeatedly rejected (LK: 44, 50-51, 54, 56, 77) – the communication-enabling sensus communis is bound to remain the sense of a particular community, and this was unacceptable to Arendt, for whom representative thinking, which relies on common sense for its judgment-validating function, had to be able to transcend particular communities. Thus, Arendt had to reject this Kantian distinction, and she indeed qualified the Kantian understanding of sensus communis as a “very special Kantian meaning” (LK: 72). I therefore read Arendt as merging Kant’s two common senses into one.
are also among the data that can be transformed, stored and retrieved by the imagination (RJ: 140; I: 80). ⑧

The power of the imagination is therefore what prepares phenomenal objects for processing by mental faculties. In this way, the imagination intermediates between the mental faculties and the physical world. As a result, the imagination is a precondition of mental activities that require withdrawal from the world of appearances (LMT: 76-77, 98-102). ⑨ This is the reproductive capacity of the imagination. But the imagination is also necessary for the creation of the general concepts (definable and indefinable) that we use to make sense of the particulars of the world and to communicate our experiences and meanings to others (see section 3.2). ⑩ In this creative capacity the power of imagination is also a prerequisite of the possibility of language and therefore of the sharing of a context of meaning among different human beings (I: 83-84). ⑪

⑧ This rejects Arendt’s earlier suggestion that examples do not derive from memory (BPF: 248), but I believe she changed her mind on this once her understanding of the imagination was clarified.
⑨ Which is why, contrary to the above-quoted remark from LMT: 76, I treat the imagination not as a mental faculty but as a mental power which the mind’s faculties employ in carrying out mental activities.
⑩ Arendt does not explicitly attribute the creation of concepts to the imagination when speaking in her own voice, but in expounding Kant’s understanding of imagination and schemata, from which Arendt partially dissociates herself. I believe, however, that the attribution of the creation of concepts to the imagination is a Kantian insight she would actually retain, as it enables her to locate the creation of concepts in the mind without attributing it to thinking (which she explicitly rejects at RJ: 171-173). I thus reject Zerilli’s charge that Arendt’s understanding of the imagination is limited to its reproductive ability and neglects its ‘concept-transforming’ ability (2005a: 130, 143, 149-150, 152-154; 2005b: 178-182).
⑪ Thus, I disagree with Wellmer’s contention that Arendt, in presuming the primacy of cognition to language, ignores the symbolic structure of the human mind and the human senses (1993/2001: 172). Rather, the human abilities for translating raw data into symbols, and for processing, creating, and transmitting these symbols, are for Arendt basic mental abilities on which other mental activities rely. These basic symbolic abilities are conceptually prior to language simply because language, itself being a set of symbols, is their product. This does not negate the fact that in practice, as we will see below, agents are socialized into a context of meaning and hence into a language, which structures their early symbolic processing of worldly data. It does, however, establish the fact that this early socialization does not bind agents to this language and context of meaning – that is, to a particular community’s common sense. By extension, this deflates Wellmer’s criticism that as a result of using an outmoded model of cognition which fails to acknowledge the symbolic structure of the human mind, Arendt’s distinguishing of meaning from truth and of thinking and reflective judging from cognition and rule-governed judging cedes all mentally available conceptions to the realm of cognition and is thereby rendered insufficient for distinguishing idiosyncratic from intersubjectively valid judgments (1993/2001: 172-173).
The imagination, then, is a prerequisite for the creation and sharing of meanings and valuations, which are then internalized and stored in memory. This is the mental process whereby individual agents internalize the language and tradition of their community (see sections 3.2 and 3.3). Language provides agents with a set of concepts, abstract nouns under which particular appearances can be grouped and classified, and therefore defined and made sense of. The internalization of language thus entails the internalization of such concepts. Tradition is comprised of the shared narratives, exemplars, meanings and values of a given community (which of course also include the norms, rules, laws, duties, and customs of that community). The internalization of tradition thereby provides agents with a stock of mental shortcuts (prejudices\textsuperscript{12}, habits, customs, norms, rules, laws, duties, routines, and the behavioral cues we get from our peers)\textsuperscript{13} with which to cope with living in a world of ongoing appearance and change.

Mental shortcuts (heuristics) are necessary, for Arendt, because a world of ongoing appearance and change inevitably inundates our minds with a constant barrage of new data.\textsuperscript{14} This, alongside the sheer quantity of decisions we must make on a daily basis, would overtax our minds to the point of paralyzing us from any action, should we accord each impression and

\textsuperscript{12} For Arendt, ‘prejudices’ are the provisional judgments that are “the answers on which we ordinarily rely” to fit ourselves into the world (BPF: 174) and to take care of most of our everyday judgments (LMW: 33).

\textsuperscript{13} These are introduced by Arendt as mental shortcuts somewhat obliquely, in the context of her analyses of the Nazi failure of conscience in EJ, RJ, and LMT. See especially sections 2.5 and 3.4.

\textsuperscript{14} For an explanation of my use of the term ‘heuristic’ see section 2.4 footnote 24. Of course, many mental shortcuts were initially arrived at, or internalized through, reflective activities in Arendt’s sense of the term. For example, while reflective thinking is needed, as we will see in section 5.1, to arrive at a meaning, after this meaning has been arrived at and internalized into one’s personal context of meaning (see section 4.5), it can guide decision-making heuristically, that is, without reexamining it as part of the decision-making process. In this respect, many heuristics presuppose some prior reflection. But when I make a decision heuristically, such reflection will have already occurred, and does not take place again within the specific decision-making process (otherwise, the process is a reflective one).
decision with equal attention and reflection (RJ: 159-160; LMT: 4, 71; LMW: 32-33). As a result, heuristics significantly influence how we perceive the world and act in it.

When an agent makes a decision heuristically she is, for Arendt, acting out of a mode of being-in-the-world characterized by habitualness and conformity to (social or personal) predetermination (see section 3.4). But despite the necessity of making most decisions heuristically, we are also capable of making decisions by reflecting on the situation at hand. In making a decision in this manner we are acting out of a reflective mode of being-in-the-world.

4.5

Once internalized, then, the general concepts that comprise one’s language, and the shared meanings and valuations that comprise one’s tradition(s), form a “pre-established framework of reference” (BPF: 6) for one’s perception of the world and actions in it. This personal context of meaning is, however, more than just an internalized echo of one’s shared context of meaning. Otherwise, all individuals sharing a given context of meaning would have the same personal context of meaning, which would run counter to the human condition of plurality (see also Biskowski, 1993: 876).

Several factors contribute to differences in personal contexts of meaning even among individuals partaking in the same shared context of meaning. First, individuals can exercise choice in

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15 This holds even for cultures in which there is not much ‘hustle and bustle’ to living, since they also exist in a world of ongoing appearance and change. Indeed, habitual behavior is prominent even in such cultures.

16 Indeed, many such decisions (e.g., brushing my teeth in the morning, having my usual breakfast or taking my usual route to work), upon habituation, are not even experienced as decisions.

17 The reflective mode of being-in-the-world is also, for Arendt, a political one (see sections 3.4, 10.3, and 12.4).
accepting and rejecting specific shared meanings, and often partake in more than one shared context of meaning. As a result, different individuals would differ in their particular mix of internalized meanings. Moreover, individuals also differ in their life experiences, in the actions they have taken with regard to similar life experiences, in the relationships framing such actions, and in their goals and life-plans. They differ, in Arendtian language, in their life stories, which both enact and shape one’s meanings and valuations, and are therefore important components of one’s personal context of meaning.

In HC, Arendt held that who one is – one’s self and identity – is revealed in action and appearance and hence to spectators (HC: 178-181, 193). Initially, this suggested to Arendt that the self-disclosure entailed in action “can almost never be achieved as a wilful [sic] purpose” and that therefore “the ‘who’, which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself” (HC: 179). Therefore, “nobody knows”, or is “able to calculate beforehand”, “whom he reveals when he discloses himself in deed or word” (HC: 180, 192). As a further result, even though one initiates one’s own life-story and is its subject, one is not its author. Rather, a human life tells its own story through the events and actions that comprise it (HC: 184-185). The ultimate result of this, on HC’s analysis, is that “the essence of who somebody is can come into being only when life departs, leaving behind nothing but a story” (HC: 193).

This would seem to suggest a human self that is radically agonal and protean, with no substantive core beyond what appears to others at any given action. This, in turn, seems to preclude as futile wishing to reveal to others through one’s own actions a particular who, let alone making such a who a determinant of such actions. It thus seems to preclude as futile the adoption of a life-plan insofar as such a life-plan entails a determination of a humanly proper way of life, which one’s life is to meet. It also seems to preclude as futile any attempt at making my present actions normatively consistent with my past actions, as it is only at the end of my life that can such consistency can be conferred upon my disparate actions. Finally, it would seem to preclude the self-reexamination of one’s past actions and life and the endeavor to ‘know thyself’.

Obviously, this could not have been Arendt’s own position, especially after EJ, but likely even earlier. Indeed, it would be rather puzzling for Arendt, who in HC extols a certain mode of
being-in-the-world as meaningfully human and therefore proper for human action, to then decree the deliberate choice of this mode meaningless for the self. Moreover, the endeavor to know oneself, the reexamination of one’s past actions (or inaction), and the notion of self-consistency, are central to Arendt’s understanding of thinking (see section 5.1). And such self-examination, when carried out by inherently meaning-questing beings, cannot but entail endeavoring to ascribe meaning and purpose to one’s own life and measuring one’s past and future actions against such meaning.

The key to resolving this perplexity, in my view, is the narratival effect of emplotment, introduced in section 3.5. Emplotment confers meaning upon both act and plot through fitting them to each other, thereby providing both with closure. But such meaning and closure always remains open to future revision. In this way emplotment enables change and continuity, natality and consistency, to coexist within one life-story. Seen as a narrative, the self can therefore both be capable of change and be in continuity, one story with several, or even many, chapters and plot twists. Only when the subject of the story has died would a final act of emplotment provide full meaning and closure to the story as a whole. But this does not entail that meaning cannot be conferred upon a person’s life up until this particular point in that life. It merely entails that such meaning is provisional, subject to reexamination and change should the person’s future acts call for it.

Moreover, actor and spectator are in Arendt exchangeable existential stances between which agents can alternate (see section 3.5). Thus, although agents cannot fully assess the meaning of their actions or the self revealed in these actions while acting, they can do so, provisionally, when considering those actions in retrospect from a spectator’s position.\footnote{For Arendt, encountering and viewing one’s own self as if from a spectator’s position is made possible by human self-consciousness, although the conclusions drawn from this encounter remain subjective until they receive general (intersubjective) validation. I discuss this more fully in sections 5.1 and 5.3.} This is why, for Arendt, the meaning-conferring effect of emplotment holds even more true than usual when its topic “happens to be something I have done myself” (RJ: 93-94).
That I can retrospectively emplot my past actions into the story of my life and thereby confer meaning upon both also means that I do have a measure of authorship over my own life-story. Such self-authorship is limited, first, in that it is provisional (‘up to this point in my life’ as well as ‘as far as I can tell’). It is also limited in that it must cede to what will become, posthumously, the life-story and example that I leave behind. In other words, that the full meaning of my life will only become manifest in my posthumous biography does not preclude my writing of an autobiography. All it suggests is that the meaning and self that I seek to reveal in my actions may end up being different from the self that others see revealed in them (during and especially after my life). And it further suggests that, in case of such difference, it will be the posthumous biography, not the (provisional) autobiography, that best captures who I was.  

By extension, I indeed cannot ‘calculate beforehand’ or ‘purposefully will’ the self that will in fact be perceived by others in my actions and life-story. This is because I act into, and thereby affect, a web of interrelationships between a plurality of natal beings in a world of change I can only partially see and into which my action would be emploted by others (section 3.4). But I can still ‘purposefully will’ to disclose to others a certain self and ‘calculate beforehand’ how to act in order to disclose such a self, though the self I thereby reveal may end up differing from the self I had endeavored to disclose.

This endeavor may again appear futile, but this is so only under the assumption that the revelatory force of the action lies in its nature and outcomes. This, however, is not the case under a narratival understanding of the self. The emplotment of an event into an ongoing story inevitably entails a series of meaning-determinations and evaluative choices regarding both the event and the story, so as to fit them to each other. These choices, in turn, also entail a series of second-order determinations as to which concepts and examples are appropriate for guiding such choices in the event at hand (e.g., is walking the dog during a snowstorm an act of duty or an adventure?). It is these unique choices, determinations, and evaluations that infuse the story with the meaning it then conveys to others. When this is done for the purpose of deciding on a

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19 It is telling in this respect that in LMT Arendt presents the point that the essence of one’s life is revealed only after one’s death as part of a set of “difficult” propositions offered by Solon (LMT: 164-165), thereby dissociating herself from it (in HC this insight was presented by Arendt in her own voice).
prospective action, the resulting action will therefore reveal these first- and second-order choices, evaluations, and determinations, and through them will also disclose who the person is.

Moreover, when I emplot a prospective action into my life-story, I am concerned not only with my life-story ‘up to this point’ but also with what it will be beyond this point. As a result, in emplotting a prospective action into my life-story I relate my biographical future to my biographical past, making both part of the same story.\(^20\) For this purpose, I need to reexamine, and fit together, my personal history of past actions and life-experiences, my life-plan of practical short- and long-term goals and interests (‘what I want to do in my life’), and my normative life-aims (my determination of ‘the kind of person I want to be in my life’).\(^22\)

Both this personal history and this life-plan are thus integral components of my life-story, myself, and my personal context of meaning. Moreover, as a series of interrelated personal experiences and choices, these elements are unique to every individual agent. These are therefore the most fundamental aspects of my personal context of meaning that make it more than shared context(s) of meaning internalized.\(^23\) In fact, my determination of ‘the kind of person I wish to live my life as’ is the determination that provides my actions with a principle of action which they enact and thereby manifest. This determination can indeed be considered the core of one’s personal context of meaning, the self’s answer to the most self-examining variant of the Arendtian guiding question of meaning (‘what does it mean for me to be in the world?’). It is

\(^{20}\) It must be remembered that to make my biographical past and future part of the same story is not strictly to make the latter a continuation of the former. As a natal being I always have the choice to continue following what I perceive to be the trajectory of my biographical past, or to take a new direction. Emplotment, as stated earlier in this section, does not foreclose future change, but merely makes it an integral part of the narrative.

\(^{21}\) Notably, though recourse to my life-plan is inevitable only when dealing with prospective actions, I can, and often would, also examine my past actions in light of it.

\(^{22}\) A life-plan, for the purposes of my discussion here, can be elaborate and well-thought-out, or vague, general, and rudimentary (‘all I want to do is put bread on my plate every day’). In this sense, every person, even the shallowest, has a life-plan. Even a person who eschews having any design for her life except for living the moment can be said to have ‘living the moment’ as her life-plan.

\(^{23}\) In turn, this is what enables us, ‘when the chips are down’ (to use one of Arendt’s favorite phrases), to transcend shared meanings and act independently of others rather than in conformity to them.
thus the deepest and most fundamental choice of the self, guiding its aforementioned first- and second-order choices, and like them revealed in and through my actions.

4.6

In the world of appearances, agents’ differing personal contexts of meaning manifest themselves in their differing perspectives on the world. Arendt does not say this explicitly, but it becomes evident once we consider what would make one’s view of the world differ from others’, on Arendtian terms. Explicitly, Arendt attributed this difference to factors of two kinds, “location in the world” and “organs of perception” (LMT: 38). Agents’ ‘location in the world’ is their ‘standpoint’, “the place where they stand, the conditions they are subject to, which always differ from one individual to the next, from one class or group as compared to another” (LK: 43). Such factors are external to the agent. ‘Organs of perception’, by contrast, are factors internal to the agent (though their structure is shared across each species) and pertaining to how we look at the world.

But these cannot be the only factors that make one person’s view of the world and its objects differ from others’. For one, in perceiving the appearances of the world we do more than just sense them. We also mentally process them, most basically by fitting them under our preexisting general categories, that is, heuristics and meanings (sections 4.4 and 4.5). But this mental act of fitting is inevitably affected by the amount and nature of information one has regarding the particular appearance. Indeed, Arendt herself notes that errors stemming from our perspectivism can be corrected by improving the quantity or quality of my available data (LMT: 38, 54).

Moreover, an agent’s personal meanings, and therefore her processing of perceived appearances, are also affected by her past experiences (see section 4.5). Indeed, this seems to be what Arendt is alluding to when she refers to “the conditions they are subject to” as differing “from one individual to the next, from one class or group as compared to another” (LK: 43). Such conditions, after all, affect us through the experience of living under them. But lived experience
affect us by becoming part of our personal, internal, context of meaning (section 4.5). Similarly, our perception of appearances in the world is also affected by how they fit into the amalgam of long- and short-term hopes, general aims, life-plans, specific goals and interests, and needs, that makes up our ‘biographical future’ (section 4.5). This is also implicitly acknowledged by Arendt, for whom such goals and interests are part of what, in political decisions, makes agents’ perspective (opinions) partial (HC: 28-31; BPF: 151-152; 220-221; 241-242, 262).

What constitutes one’s perspective, then, is much more than merely sensory apparatus and ‘location’. Differences in information, life experiences, goals and interests, and personal meanings and valuations, are all part of what constitutes (and limits) one’s perspective on an Arendtian account. And these factors cannot be simply collapsed into ‘sensory apparatus’ and ‘location’.

According to Arendt, then, individual agents’ perspectives on the world are inevitably limited, their knowledge of the world and its appearances usually incomplete, and their personal meaning-attachments only subjectively valid (see sections 3.1, 4.5, and 4.6). But in order to live in, and fit ourselves into, both the physical world and our shared human world, human beings need to overcome this inherent partiality (LMT: 14, 54-60). To an extent, agents can mitigate this partiality on their own, by gathering additional or improved information (LMT: 38, 54). But this only goes so far, since our partiality stems only in part from limitations of information and knowledge. In other words, for Arendt we are inherently dependent on other human beings for expanding and validating both the knowledge we have regarding specific appearances and the meanings and valuations we attach to them, beyond our subjective perspectives.

In part, this is achieved by creating, as part of the shared human world, repositories of accumulated knowledge, experience, meanings, and valuations (judgments) that can be handed down from generation to generation. Libraries and data banks, stories, and traditions, all serve as
such repositories. But for Arendt, our main avenue for achieving this is an exchange of perspectives with other spectators (HC: 57; BPF: 241-242; RJ: 140; LK: 42; LMT: 38, 46). The mental vehicle for carrying out such an exchange of perspectives, in Arendt, is the mental ability (power) of representative thinking.\textsuperscript{24}

Unfortunately, Arendt’s untimely death left us with four different and only partially overlapping accounts of the use of representative thinking, and no authoritative statement as to the relationship between them. The first (BPF: 219-224) is in 1961’s “The Crisis in Culture”, the second (RJ: 137-144) in the 1965-1966 lecture course “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy”, the third (BPF: 241-242) in 1967’s “Truth and Politics”, and the fourth (LK: 42-44, 67-72) in a 1970 lecture course devoted entirely to Kant. In LM Arendt merely notes that an exchange of perspectives corrects the errors inherent in the particularity of our perspectives (LMT: 38), and that it brings me into company with those whose views I (mentally) take into account (LMT: 94).

Some of the differences between these accounts are attributable to gradual conceptual development in Arendt’s thought. Thus, as Beiner (1982: 139) correctly shows, Arendt only gradually separated the faculty of judgment (which employs representative thinking) from the faculties of thought (with which it was identified in the first account) and will (with which it was identified in the second account). Similarly, in LM Arendt separated the imagination from common sense (with which it was entangled in the second account). In LM she also saw the common sense again as a humanly-shared sixth sense (as in the first account) rather than as a community sense (as in the second and fourth accounts; see section 4.2). And as I will show in section 5.3, conceptual development is also at the root of Arendt’s omission from the two later accounts of the issue (raised in the two earlier accounts) of who the validity granted through representative thinking extends to.

However, most differences between the four accounts, as well as the core similarities between them, can be accounted for once we fully appreciate an almost obvious dual fact about these

\textsuperscript{24} The term ‘representative thinking’ is misleading in that it suggests that it is a mental activity carried out by the faculty of thought (section 5.1). But while BPF supports such a reading, in RJ and LK it is presented as employed in the mental activity of reflective judging, and I therefore treat it as a mental ability (power).
accounts. On the one hand, all four accounts have in common the fact that they describe how representative thinking is used in making decisions. On the other hand, each account describes how representative thinking is used in making decisions in a **different decisional context**. The first account concerns decisions about beauty, the second decisions about right and wrong, the third decisions about choosing political action, and the fourth decisions about the historical significance of political events.

Thus, for example, the third (political) account refers to opinions where the other accounts refer (implicitly or explicitly) to perspectives and standpoints. It is also the only account in which representative thinking is not conducted in withdrawal and detachment from the ‘political stage’ but ‘in the midst of the action’. For another example, the first (aesthetic) and fourth (historical) accounts present judging as the prerogative of specialized spectator-judges whereas the other two (moral and political) accounts present judging as the activity of every human agent. These are all differences in **who** employs representative thinking and **under what circumstances**, which indeed differ across decisional contexts. On the other hand, all four accounts share a core description of the mechanics of validly employing representative thinking, which would indeed remain constant across different decisional contexts.

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25 Notably, decisional contexts do not consist entirely of decisions about actions. In fact, aesthetic and historical decisions (that is, decisions about beauty or historical significance) commonly do not lead to action. As such, the judging component of the decision very much dominates aesthetic decisions, and is also quite strong in decisions about historical significance. However, meaning-ascertainment (thinking) is also an important component of the latter, and a component of willing is present in both insofar as one chooses not to take any action on the basis of one’s judgment of beauty or of historical significance (that is, to remain a spectator). Since my focus in this thesis are moral decisions, I need not pursue this further here.

26 Thus, contra Beiner (1982: 91-92, 139, 152), I see the dividing line between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* as the line between acting and deciding rather than between the political and the contemplative. This is how I read Arendt’s point that “this critic and spectator sits in every actor and fabricator” (LK: 63), as well as her anti-Kantian stress on the exchangeability of the positions of actor and spectator, noted in section 3.5. The point (made in the fourth account and contrary to the earlier accounts) that representative thinking “does not tell one how to act. It does not even tell one how to apply the wisdom” it has found (LK: 44), can be explained by the fact that it is willing, not judging, that ultimately chooses how one acts (see section 5.2), and it is thinking, not judging, that tells us what would happen once our judgments are applied to the circumstances at hand (see section 5.1).

27 The use of representative thinking in political decisions is what Arendt calls ‘thinking politically’.
Arendt, then, provides one unified understanding of the mental power of representative thinking, and four illustrations of its exercise in different decisional contexts. In the exercise of representative thinking I use my imagination to mentally represent to myself a variety of perspectives on the matter at hand, thereby ‘enlarging my mentality’. In doing so I enter an imagined dialogue (enabled by the common sense) with the spectators whose perspectives I have represented to myself, thereby exchanging perspectives with them. This enables me to view the matter simultaneously from a variety of perspectives. This also brings me, mentally, into company with the spectators whose perspectives I have represented in my mind (LMT: 94). This confers upon judgments and decisions made through the use of representative thinking an intersubjective (and hence general but not universal) validity similar to that conferred upon my sense of reality by my common sense. In this way, representative thinking enables me, in different decisional contexts, to intersubjectively overcome my perspectively inherent partiality.

Notably, the source of the data used in reconstructing the perspectives that partake in the dialogue of representative thinking is knowledge of actual or literary other people. But this dialogue itself is entirely mental and imagined. Worldly dialogue with actual others can help provide the data needed for reconstructing other perspectives, but such data must be transformed into mental data if it is to be used by representative thinking. As a result, representative thinking entails abstracting from involved Others, who can become part of the dialogue of representative thinking only to the extent that they are ‘disinvolved’ from the situation by my imagination. The imagined dialogue of representative thinking is thus a dialogue with uninvolved (or ‘disinvolved’) spectators.

In this dialogue I do not collapse my own perspective under the aggregate or consensus of the represented perspectives or under any specific one of them (BPF: 141; RJ: 140-141; LK: 43).

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28 In this reading I therefore agree with Beiner in Arendt “there is only one faculty of judgment, unitary and indivisible, which is present in various circumstances” and that “the variety of circumstances does not relevantly affect the character of the faculty” (1982: 138). But in seeing this variety of circumstances as affecting the way the faculty of judgment makes use of representative thinking, I depart from Beiner in seeing the fourth (historical) account of representative thinking as fitting into the same conceptual framework as the other three accounts. I therefore see only one Arendtian conception of judgment where Beiner (1982: 91-92) sees two.

29 This is why reflective judging (which, as we will see in section 5.3, employs representative thinking) is said by Arendt to be rooted in our common sense (BPF: 221; RJ: 138).
The point of the exercise is not to nullify my own perspective but to enrich it while retaining the independence of my thinking and judging. Still, this dialogue does entail giving a justificatory account of how and why one has arrived at, formed, and chosen the opinion, judgment, or valuation that manifests one’s perspective to one’s partners in the dialogue (LK: 41).\(^3\) Such a justificatory account, through the choices it reveals, thereby discloses to the partners in the dialogue, and exposes to the examination, who one is. As a result, this dialogue also prompts the agent to look back upon, and potentially revise, her own personal meanings. In this way personal meaning orients the agent’s initial judgment or opinion (Thiele, 2005: 707-711) without predetermining her eventual, ‘enlarged’, judgment or opinion (Zerilli, 2005c: 719).

Crucially, in the dialogue of representative thinking, the justificatory account of one’s perspective cannot and should not aspire to objective and universal validity or procedural rationality (LK: 41). Because there is no one human perspective that is all-seeing, such an attempt is inappropriate in representative thinking. Rather, it is to aspire to intersubjective and general validity attained through the assent of the participant perspectives and therefore analogous to the reality conferred upon appearances through common sense. Such assent thereby also acknowledges the exemplariness of one’s judgment, valuation, or opinion as manifestations of a relevant perspective on the appearance at issue (Beiner, 1982: 121). In this respect the intersubjective validity conferred through representative thinking is also exemplary validity. It is through, and thanks to, this intersubjective validation, that the power of representative thinking is our mental vehicle for overcoming the partiality inherent in us being spectators in a world of appearances.

\(^3\) I therefore believe, contra Habermas (1977) and others, that there is room for argumentation and mutual agreement in Arendt’s understanding of judging. I return to this omission of actual dialogue in section 5.4.
In the previous two chapters I presented several Arendtian discussions that serve as a necessary backdrop for, and are very much presupposed in, Arendt’s analysis of the mental activities of thinking, judging, and willing. In the following three chapters I turn to this analysis itself. I begin by explicating Arendt’s understanding of the mental activities of the three mental faculties of thought (section 5.1), will (section 5.2) and judgment (section 5.3). In section 5.4 I will raise the main criticisms to Arendt’s understanding of the judging activity as entailing in part the employment of the mental power of representative thinking. I then proceed, in chapter 6, to discuss the decisional interrelationship of the three mental faculties and of their reflective mental activities.1

5.1

Drawing on Kant, Arendt distinguishes two mental activities carried out by the faculty of thought, often conflated under the heading ‘thinking’. One is cognition, concerned with

1 Arendt did not live to complete the investigation she carried out in LM, leaving her final analysis of judgment, of the interrelationship of the mental activities, and of the relevance of this analysis to banal evil doing, unwritten or unresolved. There are some discussions of these matters in earlier works (especially BPF) or in posthumously published public lectures and lecture courses (RJ, LK), but these have been partially modified, sometimes in significant ways, in LM. I therefore treat the relevant materials in BPF, RJ, LK as opportunities taken by Arendt to work through and refine the analyses later presented in LM. Consequently, I take my cue, as much as possible, from LM, turning to earlier sources, insofar as they are not contradicted by LM, to ‘fill in details’ missing from LM. I note major points of disagreement between the various aforementioned sources in footnotes throughout chapters 5-7 and 10.
ascertaining knowledge about the world and its appearances.\(^2\) The other is thinking (proper), concerned with ascribing meaning to the world and its appearances.\(^3\) The two activities differ in the mental power that has the primary role in them, intellect taking the lead in cognition and (speculative) reason taking the lead in thinking.\(^4\) Nevertheless, both activities can employ both mental powers, as well as our ‘brainpower’, that is, our logical (deductive and inductive) abilities for determining, and reasoning with, causes and consequences (HC: 171-172; BPF: 14; OHC: 214; RJ: 163, 188; LMT: 11-15, 57-61).

In the activity of cognition (the purest example of which is scientific investigation), we use our intellect instrumentally to process data gathered by the senses, internalized by the imagination, and stored by memory (HC: 170-171; LMT: 53-60, 75-77, 85).\(^5\) This is done to deal with whatever problems, concerns, challenges, and decisions we face in daily life. In encountering a particular appearance, cognition would relate it to the parameters of the particular situation or problem at hand, to one’s aims and purposes within the situation, and to the preexisting meanings that one ordinarily applies to similar appearances. In doing this the faculty of thought

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\(^2\) There is some terminological murkiness in Arendt’s references to knowledge and cognition in LMT. Initially, Arendt uses ‘knowing’ to designate the activity itself and ‘cognition’ to designate the object of the activity (LMT: 13-14), both usages somewhat unusual and strained. Moreover, in the same discussion she also uses ‘knowledge’ to designate the object of the activity (LMT: 14), and later she also referred to the activity through recourse to the term ‘cognition’ (e.g., ‘cognitive thought’, LMT: 87). As a result I have reverted to a less strained usage, dating back to HC (see 170-171) but still, I believe, fully and clearly reflects Arendt’s intention in LMT: referring to the activity as ‘cognition’ and to its object as ‘knowledge’.

\(^3\) The notion of thinking and cognition as distinct thinking activities in fact dates back to HC and BPF (see HC: 75-76, 170-171, 291; BPF: 145). However, her understanding of the thinking activity, which in HC and BPF was still understood strictly in terms of philosophizing and strictly as dialogical, has since then changed dramatically as we will see in the present section and in section 6.1.

\(^4\) In referring to a ‘faculty of thought’ and to ‘reason’ and ‘intellect’ as mental powers used by it I seem to be straying from Arendt’s explicit language upon first introducing this distinction (LMT: 14). There Arendt refers to ‘reason’ and ‘intellect’ are two separate ‘faculties’ used in the activities of thinking and cognition, respectively. However, as we will see below, Arendt also distinguishes between two judging and two willing activities, but in both cases sees both activities as performed by one mental faculty using certain powers and abilities. And later in LM Arendt does refer to a faculty of thought (LMT: 25) or of thinking (LMT: 45, 191), and stops to distinguish logical abilities (considered by Arendt to be mental powers as early as HC: 171) from reason and intellect (LMT: 87). Therefore, by treating reason and intellect as mental powers and referring to a single faculty of thought, I put her understanding of the activity of the faculty of thought into a stronger conceptual symmetry with her understandings of the activities of the faculties of judgment and will, while remaining in keeping with Arendt’s language in other instances.

\(^5\) In this respect cognition is ‘common sense reasoning’, an extension of our common sense (LMT: 51-59).
uses stored (remembered) information (including personal and societal predeterminations of meaning and prejudices attached to the appearance or situation). If needed, the faculty of thought may direct our senses to collect additional information. The attained knowledge needs to be validated as self-evident, making cognition the activity of the quest for truth (LMT: 15, 54-64, 119-122; LMW: 6).

Of course, living in a world of ongoing appearance and change, we face a continuous stream of data to process and decisions to make (see section 4.4). As a result, the activity of cognition needs to be carried out quickly, with as little exertion of cognitive resources or interruption to the ordinary flow of daily life as possible. It is therefore carried out in a heuristic (non-reflective) manner, rapidly categorizing and classifying appearances under readily-available general categories of experientially proven applicability and usefulness, relying as much as it can on existing or easily attainable information, meanings, and prior judgments.6

By contrast, when we use the mind to attain meaning we are employing our power of speculative reason in the activity of thinking (LMT: 11-15, 57-59, 80-81, 88; LMW: 6).7 To attain the meaning of an appearance the faculty of thought seeks to figure out ‘what it means for it to be’, beyond its immediate cause, function, or potential uses. Through answering this question, thinking attempts to confer a measure of permanence on a lived reality of ongoing appearance and change. This quest for meaning is inherent to human beings and can be carried out by any ordinary human being endowed with the faculty of thought. It is, however, superfluous for the

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6 In chapters 5-10 I retain unquestioned Arendt’s stark juxtaposition of ‘reflective’ and ‘non-reflective’ (in my term, ‘heuristic’), as applied to mental activities, specific decisions, and modes of decision-making and of being-in-the-world, whereby all such activities, decisions, and modes, insofar as they are not fully reflective, are considered non-reflective. Thus, for example, on the terms of this juxtaposition, all the decisions and actions that are involved in me driving a car, insofar as they take place without me stopping the activity of driving the car so as to ‘think about what I am doing’, are ‘non-reflective’ by definition (I thank Ronald Beiner for suggesting this example). Obviously, it is quite a stretch to suggest that all my actions while driving my car are automatic and habitual, without any mental attention whatsoever. It is thus probably more appropriate to think of a spectrum of (differing degrees of) partial reflectivity across which most actions would be classified, and my own analysis in chapter 11 indeed presupposes such a spectrum. Arendt’s analysis, of course, pulls quite strongly, perhaps too strongly, towards the opposite extremes of this spectrum, for reasons that will also become evident in chapter 11.

7 I use the label ‘speculative reason’, rather than simply ‘reason’ (as Arendt does), to distinguish this mental power even more clearly from the logical powers of inductive, deductive, and instrumental reasoning.
needs of daily living, for which practical purposes it suffices to ascertain an appearance’s causes, effects, functions, and uses.

The quest for meaning cannot accept prior determinations of meaning as given but must reexamine them and the knowledge they are attached to. As a result, a new meaning-determination is to be made afresh rather than through the automatic application of meanings ordinarily attached to similar appearances (RJ: 165, 177-178, 189; LMT: 70-71, 75, 78, 85-88, 199; LMW: 11). For this reason, meaning-ascertainment cannot take place while within the ordinary flow of life or be carried out heuristically. Instead it requires that the agent halt her daily activities and withdraw into the mind so as to reflect, from a reflective distance, upon the appearance which meaning she is seeking to ascertain (RJ: 164-166; LMT: 78, 85, 197). Thinking’s criterion for validity is not truthfulness but self-consistency and non-contradiction (LMT: 122, 185-187).

Granted, in making this determination we would be fitting the appearance into the particular context of meaning that we would deem appropriate for it. And this eventual fit (meaning) must remain grounded in the lived experience from which the need to ascertain the appearance’s meaning had arisen (BPF: 14). But the activity itself is concerned with particular appearances in their mentally represented form. As a result, it does not have to rely on the predeterminations ordinarily attached to the appearance and is therefore capable of putting such predeterminations into question (RJ: 165, 189; LMT: 70-71, 75, 78, 85-88, 199; LMW: 11). In this respect thinking is autonomous in relation to, and ‘out-of-order’ with, the experience of daily living (RJ: 165-166; LMT: 78, 85, 123, 197). This autonomy makes thinking a purer activity of thought than cognition and therefore the one preferred by the faculty of thought when left to its own devices (see section 6.1).

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8 In fact, introspectiveness is characteristic of reflective mental activities in general (LMT: 75). The importance of this will become evident in sections 6.4 and 7.3.

9 This being ‘out-of-order’ with daily living is also, as we will see in the next two sections, characteristic of the other reflective mental activities and distinguishes them from their non-reflective counterparts. For this reason I also refer to non-reflective mental activities as ‘ordinary’, a less-cumbersome usage that also better captures the link between the non-reflective mental activities and banal evildoing, discussed in section 7.3.
Of course, in daily living our default tendency is to use the heuristic and cognitively cost-efficient activity of cognition rather than the reflective (and therefore cognitively cost-heavy) activity of thinking (see section 4.4). As a result, the mind must be triggered to abandon its default tendency and turn to thinking instead of cognition in dealing with a particular appearance or decision. The trigger, according to Arendt, is the interjection of an inner voice, a friend that always exists within me, who asks me whether I could live with myself if I did something I am considering doing. It is this triggering effect that yanks me out of my involvement in the world of action and into the world of reflection, making me ‘stop and think’ about what I am doing (RJ: 164-165; LMT: 78, 88, 184-190).

Arendt derives the notion of thinking as an inner dialogue between me-and-myself exegetically, from Socratic remarks in the *Gorgias* (RJ: 89-92, 180-193; LMT: 180-183) and the *Hippeas Major* (RJ-184-185). However, Arendt’s experiential basis for it is self-consciousness, the fact that I am able to acknowledge myself as a unique self, that is, to look at myself as if me and my self were separate entities external to each other (RJ: 76, 91, 183-185; LMT: 185-187; see also PEJ: 100-101; Garsten, 2007: 1994; Hansen, 1993: 202-203). This is what enables this two-in-one dialogue of self-consciousness to become a mental internalization of difference and hence of the external human condition of plurality.

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10 This triggering is needed even though the need for meaning is, for Arendt, inherent to human agents. The need for meaning would be awakened in the human agent by any encounter with a particular appearance. But in most such encounters, unless we are already engaged in a quest for a particular meaning or have the time and opportunity to indulge our curiosity in a quest for meaning, this need would be overridden by seemingly more pressing matters of living. The triggering effect is needed to override this latter, natural, tendency. Of course, such triggering is not needed when the mind decides to engage in an activity that by its nature can only be carried out reflectively, such as storytelling spectatorship (see section 6.3).

11 Arendt discusses this triggering effect in general terms, that is, not as specific to moral decisions. However, the specific question this internal friend asks me, in the way it is phrased, seems to be appropriate specifically to the moral context. It may therefore be that a different question would be asked in non-moral decisions that require triggering, though it is unclear in Arendt what such decisions might be.

12 The idea that the basic human conditions are also internalized within the mind and actualized through certain mental operations is not explicitly suggested in, but in my view is very much presupposed in, HC. Without such internalization these conditions would merely constrain the range of options open to agents, without serving as determinants of action, as they must do if human agents can truly be said to be acting as biological, worldly, plural or natal beings. Thus, “difference and otherness, which are such outstanding characteristics of the world of appearances as it is given to man for his habitat among a plurality of things, are the very conditions for the existence of man’s mental ego as well” (LMT: 187).
Notably, my ‘internal friend’ can have a voice different than my own only if we perceive a particular appearance differently, that is, have differing perspectives on the same appearance. But my ‘internal friend’ would presumably be privy to the same socialization and information as I am, so that these factors cannot account for our difference in perspectives. The only difference between me and my ‘internal friend’ that can account for this difference in perspectives in Arendtian terms is the fact that this ‘internal friend’, unlike me, possesses no worldly body. As such, she is not subject to the biological, worldly, or natal human conditions, but only to the human condition of plurality.\(^\text{13}\) Thus, implicitly, the ‘internal friend’ with whom the agent is conversing in fact serves as a mouthpiece for plurality within the mind.

Once thinking has been triggered, its sweep destroys, according to Arendt, anything in its path (RJ: 175-176; LMT: 88, 174-175, 192). This ‘sweep of the wind of thought’ is Arendt’s metaphor for the effect of the radical doubt inherent in thinking as a critical activity (LMT: 51-52; Beiner, 1982: 112). This, however, cannot mean that the thinking activity is merely critical and produces nothing, since this is the activity of questing for, and hence generating, meanings. Indeed, thinking, like the other reflective mental activities, operates on imaginative representations of stored data (LMT: 75-76). As a result, it cannot be able to destroy this stored data itself. Rather, what the radical doubt of thinking ‘attacks’ are the mental constructs that had been previously attached to such data – meanings, valuations, exemplars, interlinks with other data, and the like.

This means that meanings generated by thinking will remain stable (accepted) only as long as thinking has not been triggered to rethinking them. As such, these meanings can be captured in, and shared with others through, speech, metaphor, art, and other forms of self-expression.\(^\text{14}\) Therefore, these meanings can also serve as guideposts for action. But these guideposts cannot

\(^{13}\) It may be argued, alternatively, that the internal friend simply speaks my better self, the ideal self I want to be, which in section 4.5 I suggested was at the core of personal meaning. However, whereas personal meaning is open to revision through the reflective mental activities, Arendt’s internal friend is not subject to such revision by the agent herself, as this would render it an ineffective trigger.

\(^{14}\) This is why I reject Wellmer’s claim that Arendt’s distinguishing of thinking from cognition leaves all communicable conceptions on the side of cognition and thus renders thinking (and judging) unsharable and incommunucable (1993/2001: 172-173).
be taken as fixed and final banisters. Rather, agents are to be ready to put them to the test of independent thinking upon conscious suspicion of, or upon being triggered to the possibility of, their inadequacy in a given decisional situation (RJ: 167, 171-173, 188; LMT: 75-77, 88, 174-175, 192).

In this respect, what the radical doubt of critical thinking in fact attacks are the prior determinations of which meanings, values, narratives, or guiding examples to attach to appearances such as the one under consideration. By extension (see section 4.5), this radical doubt also attacks the choice of person the agent wishes to be that is implicitly entailed and explicitly revealed in such predeterminations (RJ: 95-96, 183-187). These predeterminations are not erased from memory but are opened up for self-(re)examination. They are, in other words, merely stripped of their privileged decisional status relative to any other possible understanding of the same object as guiding the agent’s understanding of the appearance. It is this ‘deprivileging’ operation of thinking that ‘opens the space’ (to borrow Beiner’s apt phrase; see 1982: 112) for thinking as a meaning-conferring activity and for judging as a value-conferring activity to operate ‘without banisters’.15

Once the decisional primacy of pre-existing meanings and valuations has been swept away by its critical activity, the faculty of thought can turn to the task of generating the meaning of whatever it is examining. But as we have just seen, this task also entails casting an examining eye on my prior meanings and valuations, and on the choices implicit in them. In other words, the quest for meaning brings my personal context of meaning to bear on the particular to which I am ascribing meaning while at the same time also reexamining this context of meaning. This self-examination and self-interpretation is what makes speculative reason, rather than one’s logical abilities (which would suffice for simply subsuming appearances under preexisting meanings), the mental

15 This deflects Vetlesen’s Gadamerian criticism that Arendt, impossibly, sees thinking as “working from scratch” from outside ‘horizons of understanding’, or what I call ‘contexts of meaning’ (PEJ: 94). Arendt, rather, sees thinking as choosing anew which meanings from within one’s horizon – and even, in some cases, which horizon – to bring to bear on the appearance at hand. Vetlesen, I believe, is drawing on Arendt’s earlier work on ‘understanding’ (which he incorrectly attributes to the later Arendt; see PEJ: 93), which has been largely abandoned in her later work, as I note in the next footnote.
power needed for the quest for meaning.\textsuperscript{16} As a result, speculative thinking, in generating new meanings, also generates, as an implicit byproduct, new determinations of the sort of person I would be if I attached a particular meaning to whatever I am examining.\textsuperscript{17}

In Arendt, then, there are in fact three elements to the activity of thinking – dialogic, critical, and speculative.\textsuperscript{18} The other mental faculties may assist in the operation of thinking, and may reject the meanings that thinking generates. But these other faculties cannot determine how the faculty of thought carries out its thinking activities. It is in this sense that the faculty of thought is autonomous vis-à-vis other mental faculties (LMT: 69-70, 92, 213). Of course, the new meanings that speculative thinking arrives at still need to be such that, once acted upon, they would not cause me to not be able to live with myself.\textsuperscript{19} Otherwise, my ‘internal friend’ would continue to question the meaning I have ascribed (though without herself prescribing any specific meaning or decision and action).\textsuperscript{20} This, indeed, will go on until I arrive at one or

\textsuperscript{16} Thus, I agree with Hansen’s observation that in between thinking-as-internal-dialogue and judging there needs to lie a ‘hermeneutic moment’ (1993: 205), though I apply this insight to the internal decision-making of the agent and not, as Hansen does, to collective (political) decision-making. Also contra Hansen, I see this hermeneutic moment as fulfilled, in Arendt, by speculative thinking and not, as he (otherwise insightfully) suggests, through her much earlier notion of ‘understanding’ (1993: 205-209). The fact that Arendt herself did not include her early work on ‘understanding’ in any of her later collections of articles, and the fact that she did not discuss ‘understanding’ in her later forays into ‘the life of the mind’ lead me to believe that she had discarded it altogether, and on my reading here replaced it with speculative thinking.

\textsuperscript{17} It is in this sense that thinking constitutes one as a person (RJ: 95, 99-100).

\textsuperscript{18} This was something that Arendt, who occasionally oscillates between the elements and who usually, though not always, uses the unspecified label ‘thinking’ for all three, may not have herself fully appreciated. This, however, seems to me the most straight forward way to reconcile the seemingly opposite thrusts of characterizing thinking, variably, as a proscriptive (and dialogical), destructive, and generative (but solitary and hence monological) activity, without being forced into trying to find a role for all three activities in all three functions they perform – which would result in a rather strained conception of thinking. As a result, I will henceforth refer to these three aspects of the thinking activity using separate labels: ‘dialogical thinking’, ‘critical thinking’, and ‘speculative thinking’, respectively (the latter usage has in fact an Arendtian antecedent in the reference to reason as a “faculty of speculative thought”; see LMT: 62-63). Of course, all three are to be distinguished from representative thinking, which is a mental ability rather than a fourth thinking activity (see section 4.7 and especially footnote 24).

\textsuperscript{19} This is, of course, one of several validation criteria or tests that such new meanings need to meet. By virtue of being meanings, they obviously must also be internally consistent and must fit into an external context of meaning. And for reasons that will become evident in sections 6.2, 6.3, and 7.2, they must also meet with the intersubjective validation that is entailed in the activity of reflective judging.

\textsuperscript{20} It is strictly in this sense that thinking, as understood in LMT, tells us what we can or cannot do. The understanding of thinking strictly in these latter terms, presented in “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy” (see RJ:
several possible meanings which, when acted upon, would put my friend at rest – that is, would not be self-contradictory for me (RJ: 105-108, 184-187).

5.2

Arendt’s analyses of the faculties of thought and (as we will see in section 5.3) judgment took as their starting point terminological and conceptual distinctions that Arendt found in Kant. As a result, these analyses explicitly state which are the reflective and ordinary mental activities carried out by each faculty, and highlight which of the two is relevant for Arendt’s general concerns in LM. Neither of these is done in Arendt’s discussion of the will in LMW, which instead takes the form of a historical survey of philosophical approaches to the will.21

Still, from her earliest attempt at an analysis of willing onwards, Arendt did distinguish between two understandings of the activity, namely, as arbiter and as initiator of action (BPF: 151; RJ: 136-137; LMW: 20, 28-33). Moreover, the latter understanding was explicitly singled out by her as being at stake in LMW (LMW: 6). And if we consider Arendt’s philosophical history of the will more carefully, we indeed find in it a watershed moment in which these two alternatives stand fully developed and juxtaposed to each other. This is the medieval debate between Aquinas’ willing as liberum arbitrium (‘arbitration’) and between Duns Scotus’ willing as a mainspring of unpredictable action (‘free-willing’).22 Before it, Arendt’s historical survey is

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112), has thus been significantly revised by Arendt by the time of LMT (as were the understanding of willing and judging in that lecture course, as we shall see in the next two sections).

21 A similar, if more concise, survey was also present in Arendt’s analysis of thinking. See LMT: 136-162.

22 The labels ‘arbitration’ and ‘free-willing’ again stray from Arendt’s text for the sake of clarity. Arendt discusses these activities in the voices of Aquinas and Scotus, and therefore uses the terms ‘free choice’ where I use ‘arbitration’ and ‘free will’ where I use ‘free-willing’. However, in the Arendtian context the label ‘free choice’ is misleading because, as we will see below, both willing activities engage in choosing between possible courses of action, but only free-willing does so freely (in Aquinas, the freedom of ‘free choice’ consists in its freedom from
primarily the story of the discovery of the will as a faculty independent of thinking and judging. After it, this is primarily the story of attempts to deny the will or subordinate it to thinking or judging.23

When we use the mind to choose the best means for satisfying our existing ends, we are engaging the will in the activity of arbitration (liberum arbitrium; see RJ: 136; LMW: 19-20, 28-29, 62). This is primarily carried out by instrumental reasoning, the mental power of fitting means to ends, albeit with the assistance of other reflective and non-reflective mental powers and activities. In particular, these other mental powers provide the will with information regarding the various courses of action open to the agent in the given situation, as well as regarding how they relate to the ends the agent is ordinarily pursuing.

In the activity of arbitration, then, the will neither chooses its guiding ends nor processes information regarding means for attaining these ends, but merely accepts both as given (BPF: 151; RJ: 283 fn. 21; LMW: 62). All the will does is choose the one set of means it deems best fitted for achieving one’s predetermined ends, and determine to carry it out. Through the activity of arbitration, then, we choose such action as best continues our previous patterns of behavior or best conforms to societal meanings and standards.

desire acquired through its subordination to the intellect). I use ‘free-willing’ rather than ‘free will’ to linguistically sharpen the distinction between faculty and activity (as I did in using ‘thought’ for the faculty and ‘thinking’ for the activity in the previous section).

23 The most comprehensive explication of Arendt’s understanding of willing, correctly seeing the need for understanding willing in the context of the other components of ‘the life of the mind’, is provided by Susan Jacobitti (1988; see especially 53-57, 59-62). However, in her attempt to come to grips with this context Jacobitti (1988: 57-59) gets lost in Arendt’s terminological murkiness, for example, maintaining the separation of a faculty of intellect from ‘the thinking faculty’ but collapsing memory and imagination into this ‘thinking faculty’ as early stages of thinking (with the bizarre implication that the intellect does not use memory or imagination). Even more troublingly, she misses the distinction between reflective and non-reflective mental activities and therefore Arendt’s implicit distinguishing of two willing activities (see especially 1988: 59), with the result that the alternative understanding of spontaneous (that is, reflective) willing appears to her to be “quite expendable in Arendt’s philosophy” (1988: 65). In section 10.2 I will show why spontaneous willing is not only necessary for Arendt’s philosophy, but in fact necessary for (rather than counteracting, as Jacobitti maintains) responsibility-ascription.
Of course, as natal beings, human agents are also capable of spontaneous action, which strays from their prior patterns of behavior or goes against the grain of their communities (LMW: 14-15, 26, 130, 138-140). The choice of such action is necessary for reconciling the will’s own internal tension between willing an action and nilling it. The will’s ability to choose such action is therefore inherent in this internal tension (LMW: 36-38, 69, 130, 141-142). Making such choices is the task of the activity of free-willing (RJ: 136; LMT: 69-70, 92, 213; LMW: 19-20, 28-30, 62, 109-110, 131, 158, 216-217).24

In free-willing, the will makes use of the mental power of spontaneity, the internalized counterpart of the human condition of natality (RJ: 136; LMT: 213; LMW: 19-20, 28-30, 62, 109-110, 158, 216-217).25 These spontaneously chosen ‘new beginnings’ are not new in the sense of having no cause at all. Rather, they are new in that they could just as well have been left undone, been their opposite, or caused by a variety of other causes (what Arendt understands by ‘contingency’; see LMW: 14-15, 26, 130, 138-140).26 Granted, in carrying this mental activity out, the will still has to rely, as in the activity of arbitration, on information (about facts, aims, meanings, values, and personal history) processed by other mental faculties. Otherwise, the will would have to take over the processing of such data itself, thereby encroaching on the autonomy of the other faculties. Nonetheless, the will’s exercise of free-willing cannot “be derived from” the mental activities that produced this information (LMT: 213).

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24 In “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy”, Arendt herself identified both willing and judging with *liberum arbitrium* and thus with each other (RJ: 112-114, 129, 137, 142-143, 283 fn. 21), to the point of being unwilling to commit to seeing judging as an autonomous activity (RJ: 131). This, however, came before she gave more systematic consideration to the disagreement between Aquinas and Scotus (whom Arendt still saw, at the time, as understanding willing in terms of *liberum arbitrium*; see RJ: 119) and to Kant’s distinction between determinative and reflective judgment (a distinction conspicuous in its absence from the discussion of judging in RJ: 137-146).

25 Because spontaneity is a mental power, separate from (though used by) the faculty of the will, its freedom “is not an attribute of the will but an accessory of doing and acting” (BPF: 165).

26 As Arendt correctly shows, it is illusory to think that, because something did happen in a certain way, it *had to have* happened in that way (LMW: 139-140), or to think that because one can retrace the causes of an act after it had been done, the act was therefore not really contingent but *had to be* done (LMW: 30-31). Granted, what *is* or *was* is necessary by virtue of having occurred, but this present necessity is really contingency that had become necessity through occurring and being emplotted into a shared or personal story (BPF: 144; LMW: 30-31, 138-141). Thus, the fact that one could trace the decision-making process of an agent and relate her eventual ‘out-of-order’ choice to the decisional factors that brought it about (‘caused it’) does not in and of itself negate the contingent nature of the choice.
In other words, in free-willing, the will does not simply accept the agent’s predetermined guiding ends, as was the case in the activity of arbitration. Rather, it revisits, revises, and either reaffirms or chooses afresh, the ends and aims that would guide the agent’s conduct and behavior (LMW: 62). This is the reason that the activity of free-willing is a reflective mental activity that cannot be carried out while the agent is deciding and acting in heuristically (LMW: 30, 35). This autonomy from predetermination is what most fundamentally distinguishes free-willing from arbitration. This autonomy is also what makes free-willing a purer willing activity than arbitration and therefore the one preferred by the will when left to its own devices (see section 6.1).

Of course, the will’s choice of ends also entails the choice of a principle, pursued for its own sake rather than as a means to another end, which the action will actualize (LMW: 132). It is in this sense that free-willing is both the ‘mainspring of action’ (LMW: 6, 57, 101, 156) and ‘its own cause’ (RJ: 282 fn. 19; LMW: 89). But this principle of action in turn reveals a determination of the sort of person I wish to be, so that free-willing is also the activity of choosing such a self-determination. This self-determination is manifest to others, as well as becoming an example of personal conduct that guide one’s own future decisions, in the contingent act that follows from the will’s free choice. This is how “the will … in a sense creates the person that can be blamed or praised and anyhow held responsible not merely for its

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27 In other words, the will is autonomous in that it remains free to accept (be persuaded by) or reject the counsel of the other faculties, not in that it itself comes up with new options to choose from. If the latter had been the case the other mental activities would be rendered superfluous and the autonomy of the other faculties would thereby be encroached.

28 Indeed, as Arendt noted of the act of political foundation (revolution), “[w]hat saves the act of beginning from its own arbitrariness is that it carries its own principle within itself” (OR: 214).

29 This, I believe, is the step Arendt takes beyond Scotus, who according to her, despite discovering the fact that the will gives agents self-generated aims, never specified the source of such aims (LMW: 133). Arendt, however, disagrees with Scotus’ contention that the will designs these self-generated aims (see section 6.2)

30 It is in this sense that the will decides one’s self-presentation (LMT: 214-215). This, of course, implies that the will is the faculty capable of ‘seeing’ these ‘submerged’ principles of action and determinations of identity most clearly. I return to this point in sections 6.2 and 7.3.
actions but for its whole ‘Being’, its *character*” (LMT: 214-215, italics in original; see also LMT: 37; LMW: 195 and Gray, 1979: 229). 31

5.3

Taking inspiration again from Kant, Arendt distinguishes two activities carried out by the faculty of judgment, namely, determinative and reflective judging (LMT: 69). Both fit particular appearances to appropriate general categories, with both particulars and general categories given to judgment as imaginatively represented mental objects (LK: 68; LMT: 76-77). The two activities differ, however, in the general categories they are engaged with, and especially in their mode of operation in fitting particulars to these categories.

As we saw in section 3.2, Arendt distinguished between two types of general categories under which we classify particulars, definable (e.g., dog, chair) and indefinable (e.g., beauty, courage, justice). The fitting of particular appearances to definable categories is a matter of subsuming the appearance under their predetermined definition. In performing this task, the faculty of judgment employs, primarily, the mental ability of subsuming “particular occurrences under general rules” (HC: 171). This is the operation of determinative judging (RJ: 137; I: 83; LMT: 69).

But these ‘predefined general categories’ also serve as our decisional shortcuts for most of daily decisions (see section 4.4). Therefore, the subsuming of particulars under these general categories (determinative judging) is usually carried out in a heuristic manner, accepting these categories as given without reflecting on them. All that determinative judging has to do is to

31 Paradoxically, the will therefore both “individuates us radically” from other human beings (Gray, 1979: 229) and is also, by virtue of this individuation, a source of human plurality (Kohn, 2000: 119, drawing on HC: 7). The former is the source of the “frightening” – for the agent – “notion of solipsistic freedom – the ‘feeling’ that my standing apart, isolated from everyone else, is due to free will, that nothing and nobody can be held responsible for it but myself” (LMW: 195-196). As I will argue in section 10.2, it is through the realization that care for the human world and hence assuming responsibility for human plurality are self-actualizations that this fear is overcome.
correctly determine what predetermined generals each encountered particular best fits under, given the parameters of the problem at hand.

Indefinable general categories, by contrast, do not admit to precise, set, and generally accepted definitions. As a result, the faculty of judgment cannot fit particulars to such categories deductively. Instead, it must discover the general category that “best captures our subjective response to a given particular” (Ingram, 1992: 124) and therefore best exemplified by this particular (Beiner, 1982: 121). This mental task – which, for reasons to be explained presently, I label ‘valuation’ – is the first stage of the mental activity of reflective judging (RJ: 138-139, 188-189; LK: 13-15; I: 83; LMT: 69, 192-193, 215-216).

As presented in Arendt’s extant works, in carrying out the task of valuation the faculty of judgment is guided by, and orients itself towards, examples of the general category that it has chosen from the agent’s memory (RJ: 143-146; LK: 66-68; I: 80, 84-85). But this presentation is descriptively incomplete, in two respects. First, it is unclear how (that is, through the use of which mental ability) the faculty of judgment would choose its guiding examples. Second, it is unclear what the faculty of judgment actually does (that is, again, what mental power it employs) to fit a particular and an indefinable category to each other under the guidance of the examples it has chosen.

Unfortunately, Arendt’s extant work does not clearly indicate which mental powers she envisioned as employed in these specific mental tasks. With regard to the task of choosing its guiding examples, however, a plausible conjecture may be made. A similar choice of examples is also entailed in the activity of speculative thinking (see section 5.1). And indeed, meanings and valuations have a strong practical and decisional affinity for Arendt (see section 3.2, especially footnote 19, as well as the remainder of the present section). Thus, it is plausible to assume that the mental ability of speculative reason, the primary mental power employed in the activity of

32 These examples are represented to the faculty of judgment from memory through the power of the imagination. This primarily reproductive use of the imagination is to be distinguished from its (obviously creative) use in constructing perspectives for use by representative thinking, to be discussed presently.
speculative thinking, would be employed by the faculty of judgment to assist it in the choosing of its examples as well.

Regrettably, no similarly plausible candidate exists among the mental powers Arendt discusses for the task of fitting particulars and indefinable general categories under the guidance of prior examples of such categories. She does liken this operation to that of the sense of taste, but she also clearly states that taste is only a metaphor for judging (LMT: 111). Taste, of course, mediates an encountered particular experience with an indefinable general sensation through past experiences of such mediation, and it does so intuitively (that is, without rules of application). But while Arendt asserts that the same occurs in reflective judging, there is no mental power discussed by her that operates in this way. In this respect the faculty of judgment remains mysterious in Arendt.

Of course, many if not most indefinable categories are evaluative in nature (see section 3.2). As a result, in fitting a particular under such a category I also indicate my approval or disapproval of the particular and thereby attach value to it. Indeed, it is in this sense that the act of fitting a particular under an indefinable category is an act of passing a judgment upon that particular. It is for this reason that, in Arendtian terms, this first stage of the act of judging reflectively is an act of valuation.

Granted, such general categories, though indefinable, are not meaningless. Rather, their meaning is indicated through the exemplars chosen to represent them within a particular (personal or shared) context of meaning. These categories are therefore predetermined in that they carry with them a set of exemplars privileged as representations of them within that context of meaning. To the extent that my fitting of a particular to such categories is guided solely by such pre-chosen

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33 In section 9.7 I introduce into the Arendtian understanding of the human mind a mental ability capable of operating in such a manner, namely, the mental power of practical wisdom (phronesis). Practical wisdom is therefore my candidate for performing this task, but I unfortunately do not have the space to develop an account of practical wisdom that would enable me to critically examine its candidacy (see also section 13.2). For a fuller account of practical wisdom that also recognizes, albeit in a different way, the need for an Arendtian understanding of judgment to be augmented by practical wisdom, see Beiner (1983).

34 Therefore, reflective judging cannot be primarily handled by inductive reasoning, the logical ability to reason from particular premises to a general conclusion.
exemplars, my faculty of judgment is engaging in determinative (and heuristic) rather than reflective judging. It determines, in other words, not whether an appearance is indeed courageous or beautiful (for example) but whether I, or most people who share my context of meaning, would normally consider it as such.

Therefore, to actually determine (evaluate) the appearance’s fit to the indefinable general category, the faculty of judgment must detach itself from such predetermination. Instead, it must judge the appearance (that is, choose which exemplars are appropriate for relating this particular to this indefinable general category) afresh. And it can only do so from a reflective distance and hence in temporary withdrawal (‘a spectator’s position’) from involvement in the worldly context within which the appearance was encountered.

In other words, to carry the activity of reflective judging out, the faculty of judgment must become autonomous from the predeterminations that ordinarily guide its (determinative) decisions. For Arendt, this is made possible through the ‘deprivileging’ effect of critical thinking (see section 5.1). But while reflective judging relies on critical thinking for providing it with the ‘reflective space’ within which it must operate, the judging operation itself is determined entirely and autonomously by the faculty of judgment (RJ: 72; LMT: 69-70, 92, 213-216).

Reflective judging, then, like speculative thinking and free-willing, also puts to self-examination the agent’s prior choices as to which exemplars to bring to bear on particular appearances and indefinable categories. These new judgment-choices are made separately from the choices of meanings, narratives and guiding examples that are part of speculative thinking’s activity of attaching meaning to the appearance under consideration. When engaging in the choice of prospective courses of action, these valuations are therefore added to (that is, grafted upon) such meaning-determinations.

But the meaning-determinations made by speculative thinking also carry with them an implicit determination of the sort of person one would be if she were to adopt a particular meaning (see section 5.1). In grafting valuations upon such meaning-determinations the faculty of judgment

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35 Thus, I reject Parekh’s charge that Arendt collapses meaning into valuation (1981: 78-79).
also adds an implicit valuation to these implicit determinations of self. Thus, my judgments, like
my meaning-determinations, also implicitly disclose my ‘who’, the sort of person that I am
(BPF: 223). These implicit revelations are then made explicit in the actual choice of action by the
will (see section 5.2).

Because the examples guiding these judgment-choices are drawn from one’s own personal
context of meaning, the initial valuation made through reflective judging is subjective. In fact, it
cannot but be so if it is to be autonomous from predetermined shared meanings and other external behavioral cues such as the example of one’s peers (BPF: 221-222; LK: 66-69; LMT: 76). However, while meanings are meanings for me, valuations, entailing fit into general
categories, cannot be limited to the agent’s own perspective. Valuations therefore carry with them a claim to non-subjective general validity (I assert not that ‘this flower is beautiful to me’
but that ‘this flower is beautiful’, in general; see RJ: 140; LK: 67-68). Valuation and validation,
then, are complementary but separate mental tasks entailed in the activity of reflective judging.36

In Arendt, general validity is attained intersubjectively (see section 3.1). But judgment must
attain such validity for its valuations without losing its detachment from the external world (BPF:
220-221; RJ: 140-141; LK: 42, 71, 73; see also Beiner, 1982: 119). As a result, the
intersubjective validation process must take place within the mind’s reflective distance and
temporary withdrawal from the world of appearances. The vehicle for such validation in Arendt
is the mental power of representative thinking (see section 4.7).

In employing representative thinking, the faculty of judgment dialogically submits its valuation
to the judgment of the imaginatively represented perspectives and judgments of other judging

36 Validation, of course, is not needed for determinative judging. The labels ‘valuation’ and ‘validation’ are my
own, used to underscore the separateness of these two tasks more than Arendt herself sometimes did. Two reasons,
in particular, require maintaining this separateness. First, such separation maintains the independence (on which
Arendt insisted, as we saw in section 3.4) of the judging self vis-à-vis the other participants in the dialogue of
representative thinking. Second, meaning-generation and valuation, though the products of different mental
activities carried out by separate faculties, are both subject to validation through representative thinking, as we will
see in sections 6.2, 6.3, and 7.2. Notably, in section 9.7 I will show that a third separate task, application, is also
entailed in reflective judging.
Such validation turns my valuation into a judgment proper. Should the valuation fail to be validated, it will need to be revisited by the faculty of judgment. But since valuations are grafted onto meaning-determinations made by the faculty of thought, these meaning-determinations are also subjected to the judgment and validation of my partners in the dialogue of representative thinking. These meaning-determinations will therefore also need revisiting by the faculty of thought should the valuations attached to them be deemed by the dialogue of representative thinking to lack general validity. Similarly, my choice of principle of action and determination of the kind of person I wish to be, revealed in my meanings and valuations, are also thereby submitted to the judgment of my partners in the dialogue of representative thinking.

In my encounter with the perspectives of these other judging subjects I neither submit to the majority judgment nor substitute individual judgments for my own (BPF: 241). Nor do I attempt to be or feel as, and thereby substitute myself for, an actual other (BPF: 241). Rather, I try to look at the matter from their perspectives so as to enrich my own by seeing what the partiality of my perspective keeps hidden from me (RJ: 140-141; LK: 42-43). My judgment can thus be informed by perspectives other than my own and yet remain undetermined by these perspectives and hence fundamentally my own.

This dialogical exchange and sharing of judgments and perspectives is what makes reflective judging “the most political” mental activity (LMT: 192) and the capacity to judge “a specifically political ability” (BPF: 221). Its reflectively made judgments are valid for every other human person because every human person is ‘a judging person’, possessed with the capacity to judge

37 Of course, what I encounter in representative thinking are the detached perspectives and judgments of particular other judging subjects (see section 4.7). What makes these other subjects particular and unique is a necessary part of the data I use in imaginatively constructing their perspective and judgment, but their imagined judgment must be the one they would arrive at in detachment from the decisional privilege they would otherwise grant their particularity.

38 This is what Arendt understood by empathy. I return to this in section 8.4.

39 I thus reject Bernstein’s influential reading of this statement as suggesting that reflective judging is “the faculty par excellence of those who participate and engage in action” (1986: 221; my italics). As I see it, thought, judgment, and the will lay equal claim to being the faculties par excellence of ‘those who participate and engage in action’. Arendt’s point here, in my view, is to introduce politicalness (in her sense) into the process of deciding on action, not to privilege reflective judging over other mental activities in political decision-making.
and expected to use it (RJ: 18-21, 59-60). But this validity is general and intersubjective rather than universal and objective, similar to the sense of reality that is conferred upon encountered appearances through common sense (see section 4.7). This is what enables reflective judging to avoid being rule-governed or community-dependent while also avoiding being purely subjective and idiosyncratic.

5.4

Arendt’s interlinking of judging and representative thinking has been perhaps the most debated and criticized aspect of her analysis of the mental activity of judging. Most of this debate has taken place in the context of attempts to apply this analysis to questions of political judgment. But some of the concerns raised within that context also apply in the context that primarily concerned Arendt in LM, namely, moral decision-making.

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40 This seems to contradict Arendt’s statement in the first account of representative thinking that the validity of reflectively made judgments “can never extend further than the others in whose place the judging person has put himself for his considerations” (BPF: 221). However, this pre-EJ position proved problematic for Arendt, both on its own terms and in light of EJ. To adopt this position would require specifying who should be included in the imagined dialogue of representative thinking, and indeed Arendt immediately raises this question and gives three answers to it: every person who actually judges, the “members of the public realm where the objects of judgment appear”, and “all those who happen to be present” (BPF: 221). However, these three answers are only partially overlapping, and are all shown to be inadequate by the Eichmann trial. The first answer would not allow Arendt to judge Eichmann (who, on her own account, did not judge). The second would not allow the same to the Israeli courts (since Eichmann was not Israeli). And the third – which Eichmann tried to use for his defense at the trial, and which critics like Gershom Scholem leveled at Arendt’s judgment of Jewish leaders in Nazi occupied Europe – would altogether preclude the possibility of judging Eichmann, as Arendt herself noted in response to both claims (EJ: 295-297; RJ: 18-21). Indeed, in Arendt’s slum-dweller example of the exercise of representative thinking, she stipulates that the slum-dweller’s represented perspective be taken into account regardless of whether the slum-dweller is present, a member of my community, or herself actually judging (RJ: 140). Thus, I believe Arendt’s later works suggest she has altogether abandoned this earlier position.

41 This is the reason that Arendt cannot ‘demythologize’ the faculty of judgment into “the faculty to hit upon what also could be agreed to in a rational consensus” (Wellmer, 1993/2001: 175; see also Habermas, 1977). This would turn judgment into a mere mental shortcut for rationality/reason, thereby collapsing its independence and autonomy and making it slave to accepted rules of what counts as rational argument.
One such criticism is that by understanding the dialogue of representative thinking as wholly imagined, Arendt omits from reflective judging any encounter or dialogue with actual others, and particularly with involved Others (Beiner, 1997: 191; Disch, 1994: 170). Indeed, I agree that there is an important role for an encounter with the involved Other in the moral decision, which I will present in section 8.4. But this role is in the ascertainment of moral meaning rather than as part of moral judging. In reflective moral judging, actual encounters and dialogue do provide much of the information needed by representative thinking. In this respect, representative thinking in fact presupposes prior actual dialogue (Benhabib, 1992: 140-141). But such actual dialogue must occur prior to the imagined dialogue of representative thinking lest this dialogue breach the reflective withdrawal needed, as we saw in section 5.3, for reflective judging.42

Several other concerns with Arendt’s understanding of moral judging will also be addressed in chapters 8 and 9. One such concern is that Arendt omits the morally relevant mental faculty of empathy from her conception of moral performance (e.g., Kateb, 1999/2001: 132-135). In section 8.4 I develop and qualifiedly accept a version of this criticism. Another concern is that intersubjective general validity is too subjective and therefore inadequate for validating moral judgments (e.g., Benhabib, 1992: 138; Garsten, 2007: 1089-1090). In sections 9.4-9.5 I develop, and deflect, a version of this criticism. A further concern is that Arendt also omits from her conception of moral performance the morally relevant mental power of practical wisdom (e.g., Beiner, 1982: 134-135). In section 9.7 I will develop, and largely accept, a version of this concern. This will also enable me (again in section 9.7) to address a version of the concern that the process of selecting my conversants in the dialogue of representative thinking may itself be biased or presuppose the kind of judging it is supposed to carry out (e.g., Biskowski, 1993: 869; Garsten, 2007: 1088-1089; Kateb, 1983: 38-39).

One important objection, however, can be discussed at this point in my investigation. This is the concern that the idea of representative thinking presupposes an impossible kind of access to, and understanding of, others, particularly those with whom the agent does not share a language and a

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42 As I will argue in the next two chapters, in reflective decision-making, reflective judging (entailing a dialogue with others) and thinking (entailing self-examination and thus a dialogue with oneself) are in practice decisionally adjoined. See especially section 7.2.
context of meaning (Kateb, 1999/2001: 131-134; Leitch, 2008; Parekh, 1981: 179-180; Steele, 2002). Arendt’s response to this is her appeal to a communication-enabling and reality-conferring common sense that is, qua sense, humanly-shared and thus not language-determined (see section 4.2).

Those of us who have encountered individuals without a common linguistic basis can indeed attest to the fact that sooner or later they were able to communicate and interact with such individuals. But such communication and interaction is usually rather basic. Thus, it cannot sufficiently yield the kind and amount of information about other persons needed to successfully reconstruct their perspective for the dialogue of representative thinking. In other words, while common sense makes it possible for us to communicate with, and try to understand, people with whom we do not share a context of meaning, it does not itself suffice for it. Such understanding also requires information and translation into our own frame of reference, either through personal encounter and actual dialogue with others, or through reliable (and reliably translated) stories about others.

But of course, dialogue and ‘translation’ are also required for understanding others from within our linguistic community, as they differ from me in other, non-linguistic but nonetheless constitutive, respects (e.g., gender). Language, in other words, is but one of several important dimensions of difference that representative thinking requires agents to bridge. Bridging it is not impossible, but it is difficult, requiring effort and willingness, to encounter a variety of others and to learn what one can about them.

At the end of the day it must be remembered that Arendt can neither require nor expect the dialogue of representative thinking to encompass all possible perspectives fully reconstructed. Such dialogue is only possible for an agent who is omniscient, and omniscience is inhuman. By virtue of our humanness, our exercise of representative thinking cannot but be imperfect, partial and incomplete. The more appropriate question is whether a given agent under her specific circumstances has exercised representative thinking as well and with as much probity as she could. Such sincere effort to understand and learn about others is demanded of us as human
beings, and the fact that such understanding is not impossible suffices to justify this demand.\(^{43}\)

That this is challenging and requires effort and diligence is but another manifestation of the challenge and effort that for Arendt, correctly, is a defining mark of being-human.\(^{44}\) But no more than such a sincere effort can be expected of us as human beings.

\(^{43}\) It is in this sense that I understand Arendt’s insistence that our perception and decision would be better the more representative our thinking leading to it is, that is, the more perspectives we have taken into account (BPF: 241; RJ: 141; LK: 43). I return to this in section 9.7.

\(^{44}\) This is a central and recurring Arendtian insight, which I will directly pick up on in chapter 13.
In the previous chapter I treated thought, judgment and will as three separate and unrelated mental faculties, which is how Arendt herself presented them. Indeed, Arendt stressed that these faculties, and their reflective mental activities, are independent from each other, each master of its own activities, which it can undertake and carry out as it sees fit. In the present chapter, however, I wish to show that this is not the end of the Arendtian account of the mind. Specifically, I argue that on Arendtian terms, these three faculties, through their reflective mental activities, in fact also need to cooperate with each other in deciding and enacting reflective action-in-the-world.

I begin by showing why the attempt by each of these faculties to individually actualize its own autonomy while in reflective withdrawal from the world of appearances is both tempting and dangerous on Arendtian terms (section 6.1). I then show why, on Arendtian terms, it is in the reflective making and carrying out of action in the world that these dangers are averted (section 6.2). I then use the activity of storytelling spectatorship to exemplify (and thereby further refine) the way such reflective decision-making would operate (section 6.3). In section 6.4 I then relate this analysis back to Arendt’s juxtaposition of banal and political modes of being-in-the-world (see section 3.4).

The notion that the autonomous and independent mental faculties nonetheless need the assistance and cooperation of the other faculties may appear to be self-contradicting. But it did not appear
so to Arendt, for whom judgment remained autonomous in relation to thought despite relying on critical thinking to ‘open up the space’ needed for reflective judging (see section 5.1). This is because once this space has been opened up, the faculty of judgment is still left to determine, on its own, how it is to use this space. This point provides the blueprint for the mutual compatibility of autonomy and interdependence in the relationship between the mental faculties on Arendtian terms. Each mental faculty must be able to determine, on its own, what it will do with the mental data that the other faculties provide it. And as long as this remains the case, the faculty remains, for Arendt, autonomous in relation to the other faculties even if it requires the products, assistance, or cooperation of the other mental faculties for its own operation (see also LMT: 76-77).

But why would the independent mental faculties in fact need each other for the carrying out of their mental operations? Is there something about their reflective activities that prevents them, while on their own in reflective withdrawal from the world, from successfully fulfilling the tasks which they were called upon to perform? I believe that indeed there is such an obstacle on Arendtian terms. Arendt herself does not explicitly put this in these terms, but in my view she gives four hints that, once developed on the basis of other elements in her analysis, point to this obstacle.

The clearest such hint, in my view, is the fact that despite extolling speculative thinking and free-willing, Arendt rejects the philosophies built upon the experience of these mental activities (namely, metaphysical speculation and Nietzschean will to power). A more obscure hint is Arendt’s point that the reflective mental activities are also reflexive, that is, inclined by their nature to recoil upon themselves (LMT: 74-75, LMW: 196).\(^1\) A third hint is the fact that one of the mental faculties (the will), when fully engaged in its own reflective activity, finds itself at the impasse of being itself beyond the reach of its own reflective activity. And the final hint is the fact that the question posed to the agent by dialogical thinking concerns something that the agent is about to do.

\(^1\) It must be remembered that ‘reflective’ and ‘reflexive’ are etymologically interrelated – for example, in English literature, ‘reflexive’ is often used where English speakers today would use ‘reflective’.
Metaphysical speculation and Nietzschean will to power, as just noted, are for Arendt philosophies that are built upon the pure experiences of reflective (speculative) thinking and (free-) willing. Metaphysical speculation is sheer speculative thinking, ongoing potentially without end and for its own sake. And the same characterizes Nietzschean willing, which for Nietzsche is sheer and ongoing willing. Therefore, in Arendt, these philosophies come to represent the reflective mental activities once they are undertaken on a permanent basis and for their own sake, permanent withdrawal from the world of appearances (to which I will henceforth refer as ‘sheer reflective activity’).

The possibility of engaging in sheer reflective mental activity very temptingly presents itself to the three mental faculties immediately upon the agent’s withdrawal into the mind. The natural inclination of such independent and autonomous mental faculties would obviously be to try and engage in their purest activities – namely, their reflective ones – as permanently as possible.\(^2\) And indeed, upon the agent’s reflective withdrawal into the mind, the promise of permanent engagement in their reflective activities is opened up for each faculty through its distinct temporal orientation.

In her analysis of willing Arendt notes that both thinking and willing “make present to our mind what is actually absent” (LMW: 35). But the two reflective activities differ in terms of the temporal modality to which they are oriented (attuned), and from which they therefore draw what they make present to the mind. Thinking is oriented towards the present and therefore makes present to the mind ‘things as they have become’ (LMW: 35). Willing is oriented towards the future and therefore makes present to the mind ‘things as they may become’, projects and potentialities (LMW: 13-14, 35-38).

Only, within the mind as withdrawn from the world of appearances, these temporal modalities also acquire a favored ‘mental region’ in which each faculty has the opportunity to unceasingly engage in sheer reflective activity. For the faculty of thought, this favored abode is what Arendt

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\(^2\) Indeed, upon the agent’s reflective withdrawal into the mind, these mental faculties would experience the constraints of the world of appearances and of the decisional situation at hand, and the need to make a decision regarding it, as shackling their inherent autonomy and independence.
calls the ‘nunc stans’, the realm (world) of ever-presence and unchange envisioned in metaphysical philosophy. Within this realm, in which the unpredictability of the world cedes to what permanence and order the faculty of thought may discover, this faculty experiences itself as omnipotent (BPF: 11; LMT: 23-24, 136, 139-140, 202-213; LMW: 11-12, 35-36). \(^3\) For the will, this favored abode of experienced omnipotence is the realm of indeterminacy and unending possibility (and therefore of constant and playful imagined deciding, choosing, and acting) that is the imagined future(s) (LMW: 35-38, 78-81, 158-172).

The trouble is that this promise of sheer reflective activity, in both thinking and willing, is both illusory and pernicious. It is illusory because once each of the mental faculties tries to engage in ‘sheer activity’, it in fact ends up recoiling upon itself by rendering itself no longer needed for decision-making. And it is pernicious because this turn to ‘sheer activity’ ends up inviting obedience and conformity rather than independent reflection and choice as the proper decisional stance for the agent. Though Arendt does not put this in these general terms, this is what emerges out of her analyses of both metaphysical speculation and Nietzsche’s philosophy of the will.

In sheer reflective activity, the faculty of thought engages in a quest for truth. \(^4\) In this the faculty of thought takes its cue from, and seeks to simulate, the only truth-seeking experience available to it, namely, the quest for factual truth in the world of appearances. Factual truth in the world of appearances, of course, is disclosed in the self-evidence of sensed (especially, seen) appearance (see section 3.1). Thus, the mental quest for truth in fact seeks the mental equivalent of the self-evident appearance, namely, a mentally intuited revelation that can be taken by the mind as

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\(^3\) A critical assessment of Arendt anti-metaphysical argument, certain aspects of which are discussed below, would require a volume all to itself, and therefore cannot be carried out here (for a strong and concise critique see Parekh, 1981: 80). For my purposes in this volume it suffices to understand why, on Arendtian terms, metaphysical philosophizing brings the faculty of thought into an impasse and therefore, without the addition of independent reflective judging and willing (which inevitably take the agent outside of the realm of metaphysics), counteracts (instead of enabling) moral decision-making and responsibility-undertaking. Let me just note, with Kateb, that Arendt’s indictment of metaphysical philosophizing is very much “an accusation qualified by love of the accused” (1983: 189), as is evident in Arendt’s mastery of, and indebtedness to, the metaphysical tradition and its insights.

\(^4\) The following discussion of metaphysical truth draws primarily on Arendt’s discussions of the applicability of the vision metaphor to metaphysical philosophizing (LMT: 110-123, especially 119-121), and of rational (philosophical and mathematical-logical) truths (BPF: 232-239, 244-248; LMT: 53-65).
axiomatic. On the basis of this axiomatic revelation the faculty of thought then constructs theories with which to order the haphazard and ever-changing affairs of the world.

Discovering the axiomatic vision, of course, requires the activities of critical and speculative thinking. Constructing a theory on the basis of this vision, however, requires the activity of cognition and the mind’s intellectual and logical powers. Such theories are therefore purely mental constructs that, if properly derived from the axiomatic revelation, retain its supposed axiomatic self-evidence. Of course, as purely mental constructs built upon a purely mental revelation, such theories are foreign to the world of appearances and therefore cannot present or represent its reality (see section 3.1). The problem is that this is precisely what metaphysical truths purport to do. And what is worse, they purport to do so through a claim to truthfulness that is, for Arendt, both dangerous and spurious.

These theories’ claim to truthfulness, like any such claim, is also a claim to coerciveness. It is a claim to putting itself “beyond agreement, dispute, opinion, or consent” (BPF: 240; see also section 3.1). Once accepted as truth, it need not be questioned further, but only applied to different specific circumstances. And for this purpose intellectual and logical abilities will do. Thus, once accepted as true, the metaphysical truth first discovered through critical and speculative thinking obviates the need to apply further speculative or critical thinking to it. In this way the reflective thinking activity ends up, through sheer reflective thinking, obviating itself (that is, recoiling onto itself).

The metaphysical claim to truth is, of course, also inimical to the ever-changing nature of the world of appearances. But to stymie change in the world is, for Arendt, to stymie human independence and interaction and with it the human conditions of natality and plurality (BPF: 233; LMT: 113-119; LMW: 22). Once accepted as true, the metaphysical theory will order agents’ perception of, and therefore access to, the world. It will also delineate and therefore delimit agents’ conduct in response to the world. Through both, it will foreclose decisional

5 It can be argued that metaphysical truths are coercive only after they had been accepted as truths, and not only allow but in fact require debate regarding whether or not to accept them as truths (as there was in the case of factual truths). I will respond to this argument presently (see footnote 9 and its adjoining text).
options and therefore restrict change in the world. This, together with the aforementioned
obviating of further need for critical reflection, are what makes metaphysical theories’ claim to
truthfulness, from an Arendtian perspective, dangerous.

Of course, facts also carry with them a claim to truth, and meanings also order agents’ perception
of and access to the world and thus delineate and delimit their conduct within it. And yet, Arendt
accepts both. But metaphysical truths differ from both factual truths and meanings in important
and relevant respects. Factual truth pertains to particular appearances and events, and therefore
its coerciveness has limited reach within the world. Indeed, the fitting of facts into meaningful
contexts itself serves to expunge much of this coerciveness. By contrast, metaphysical theories
seek to apply to these contexts themselves. The coerciveness of their claim to truthfulness
therefore has no bounds or buffers unless the theory itself provides and defines such limits on its
own.

Meanings, like metaphysical truths, also purport to affect the context within which factual truth
is embedded. But meanings differ from metaphysical truths in that meanings do not claim to be
ture. Rather, they are always revocable and therefore always invite, not foreclose, questioning
and dialogue, and even rejection or reformulation, especially when agents face novel situations
that do not fit with preexisting meaning. When reality and meaning are disjointed, either may
yield in order to facilitate their reconciliation.

By contrast, metaphysical theories’ claim to truth purports to put them beyond question and
reevaluation, and claims for them universal applicability. Agents are to apply them to the world
without questioning the truth at their core. Should they encounter disjointedness between reality
and metaphysical truth, they are to concede that their perception of reality is flawed (that is, that
they have fallen prey to illusion). And should the agent struggle in doing so, she must consult
and barring that unquestioningly follow those (few) who have (or claim to have) unmediated
access to the axiomatic vision at the core of the metaphysical truth. Thus, metaphysical truths,
for Arendt, in fact require obedience and foreclose further reflection, at least as far as ‘the many’
are concerned. They therefore end up breeding precisely the unquestioning conformity that
agents are supposed to evade through recourse to reflective mental activities.
It may be argued that this is justified if metaphysical theories’ claim to truthfulness is valid. But on Arendtian terms this claim is itself spurious, and in a particularly pernicious way (indeed, this is what makes them, for Arendt, metaphysical fallacies). 6 The problem is that metaphysical truth stems not from worldly experience but from a mentally intuited revelation arrived at through sheer speculative thinking. 7

Moreover, the vision at the core of the metaphysical truth itself is one that is disclosed in solitude (BPF: 235, 244-246). It is in this sense that “philosophical truth concerns man in his singularity” (BPF: 246). Its self-evidence therefore does not extend beyond the seeing agent. And this self-evidence cannot itself be communicated to others since, qua truth, it is ineffable (see section 3.1). To the extent that the individual thinker wishes to universalize this claim to truth she therefore cannot rely on this vision itself. It is for this reason that metaphysical theories’ claim to truthfulness rests entirely on the logical soundness of its structure and of the process of its construction. It rests, in other words, on the mathematical-logical self-evidence inherent to the rational abilities of the human mind and therefore universally experienced by human agents.

But this universal self-evidence inherent in the structure of the human mind confers self-evidence (proves to be true) only on the derivation of theory from vision. It does not confer self-evidence on the axiomatic vision from which the theory had been derived and which required proof of its truthfulness in the first place. 8 Its extension of the (subjective) coerciveness of the vision for the thinking agent into universal validity is therefore fallacious. And this fallaciousness is made even more pernicious by two interrelated effects. First, the appeal to the

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6 To say that metaphysical truths are in fact fallacies is not to say that metaphysical theories, when brought to bear upon the world, cannot provide insight into it. Indeed, separating those aspects of metaphysical truths that nonetheless apply within the world of appearances from those that only apply within the mental realm of sheer speculation is a constant preoccupation of Arendt’s in LMT (LMT: 12, 21, 30, 39, 42-44, 62, 109-110, 113-122). It is only to say that it is not their truthfulness that enables and provides this insight.

7 In this respect metaphysical truth differs even from mathematical truth, which for Arendt derives from worldly experience (LMT: 61).

8 This is not a problem in the case of mathematical-logical truths, since they are for Arendt derived from worldly experience. Therefore, in the case of mathematical-logical truths it is not the experiences or axiom, but the theory derived from it, that require validation. This, of course, holds similarly for mathematical-logical axioms (truths) that are not experience-based propositions, which are either tautological (such as ‘a+b=b+a’) or purely formal (such as ‘2(a+b)=2a+2b’).
universal experience of the mind’s rationality effectively block off the (experientially justified) suspicion agents ordinarily cast upon truth-claims (see section 3.1). Second, this appeal limits what debate there is about whether or not to accept the theory as truth to the form of the theory and the procedural aspects of its derivation from the axiomatic vision. It thereby further shields the solitary and ineffable axiomatic vision at the heart of the theory from consideration and debate.\(^9\)

This is not to say that metaphysical truths cannot only appear in, and become part of, the human world. But to do so they must transform themselves and become non-coercive, communicable, provisional and revocable, inviting questioning and debate about the axiomatic vision at their heart and not merely about their logical or procedural form. They must, in other words, transform themselves into ‘exemplary truths’, that is, become meanings, conveyable through examples (BPF: 246-248).\(^{10}\)

In the activity of the will, as Arendt understood it, we see a similar situation. As already noted above, the future opens up to the faculty of the will an abode filled entirely with possibilities and potentialities, with which the will can play as it sees fit and for as long as it sees fit. And this is particularly luring for the will because only willing and choosing can relieve the tension between willing an action and nilling it that is inherent in the will’s autonomy (LMW: 36-38, 69, 130, 141-142). The promise of ceaseless choosing is thus for the will the promise of ongoing relief from its own inherent tension. And because there is no limit to the future possibilities and

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\(^9\) This is the reason that, though there must debate about accepting the metaphysical truth as truth, its claim to truth nonetheless forecloses debate and argument regarding the substance of the vision at its heart. It is the combination of this pernicious fallaciousness with the fact that it seeks to effectively force a solitary and therefore personal experience upon all other agents that, in my view, makes metaphysical (philosophical) truths for Arendt not merely coercive but in fact ‘despotic’ (e.g., BPF: 241, 246).

\(^{10}\) This, of course, also applies to moral propositions, which Arendt treats indistinguishably from philosophical truths (e.g., her treatment of the Socratic ‘it is better to suffer wrong than to commit wrong’ as a philosophical truth in BPF: 244-249 and as a moral proposition in the almost contemporaneous RJ: 77-82 and 151-158). Indeed, in RJ Arendt argues that moral propositions have traditionally been treated as truths and therefore as purporting to compel through self-evidence (RJ: 77-78). Only, the fact that they have always also been backed up by a punishable obligation or imperative (a Thou Shalt that always hides an implicit ‘or else’) indicates that they are not self-evident but in fact, like metaphysical truths, axiomatic and deriving from a personal vision (RJ: 72, 77-78, 88, 91). They are therefore more properly taken as discursive and thus as valid as a result of non-contradiction – that is, as meanings (RJ: 86-88, 123).
potentialities one can imagine, this promise appears boundless. This, as well, is particularly luring for the will because the will as Arendt understood it finds any limits to be abhorrent (Denneny, 1979: 266).

It could be pointed out that this promise cannot be entirely boundless because the will cannot will backwards, onto what has become or has been. But this is not necessarily the case for the will in withdrawal from this world. As Epictetus (LMW: 73-84; see also LMT: 154-157) had discovered, in such withdrawal and within the mind, past and present are encountered as representations and remembrances, that is, as mental data (‘thought things’). Therefore, as long as the mind does not turn back “to outward things” (LMW: 75), past or present can be reworked by the mind’s faculties as it sees fit, and even be replaced by imagined possibilities and thereby willed away.

Moreover, as Nietzsche had discovered, in withdrawal within the mind, the will realizes that the willing activity itself is “an act of potency” and that therefore “the Will generates power by willing” (LMW: 168). This enables the will, while engaging in sheer free-willing, to turn the world’s appearances into “mere symbol for inward experiences” (LMW: 165; italics in original). As such, with the aid of the faculty of thought (which generates for it the notion of ‘Eternal Recurrence’), the will can try and transcend “the sheer givenness of the world” and thereby overcome even its inability to will backwards (LMW: 168-169). The Nietzschean notion of ‘Eternal Recurrence’ is therefore the will’s greatest attempt to free itself from the determinedness of the past (LMW: 20-21).

Only, what the mind’s faculties transform under the direction of the will is not things as they are or have been, but their subjective mental representations. Thus, Epictetus’ will is forced to pretend that the present world either does not exist or is the world it had wished for in the first place (LMT: 154-157; LMW: 80-84). The doctrine of ‘Eternal Recurrence’ evades this by assimilating past, present, and future into each other through the notion of cyclical time. But the price of this move is seeing the future as predetermined. As such, the doctrine ‘Eternal Recurrence’ ends up repudiating precisely the indeterminacy of the future that made choice and
therefore reflective free-willing necessary in the first place (LMW: 20-21, 172).\footnote{11} Thus, similarly to sheer speculation, sheer free-willing also ends up rendering itself as no longer needed for decision-making, thereby recoiling unto itself.\footnote{12}

But sheer free-willing, like sheer speculation, has, on Arendtian terms, an even more pernicious effect. As just noted, the internal tension inherent in the will’s autonomy can only be resolved by making a choice. The problem is that what matters for the resolution of this tension is the fact that a choice was made and a volition formed, regardless of which option was in fact chosen. In this respect, the realm of sheer free-willing is also a realm of unadulterated play, in which only choosing and forming volitions, not the content or the outcomes of the choice, matter. It is for this reason that sheer free-willing leads to a politics of totalitarianism (that is, the imposition of one will on all others) and to a morality of ‘might makes right’ – as Nietzsche’s thought again aptly illustrates (Dallmayr, 1984: 131; Denneny, 1979: 259; Miller, 1979: 190). It breeds, in other words, obedience and conformity rather than independent choice and action.\footnote{13}

Moreover, the will, as noted above, abhors limits and engages in sheer free-willing to pursue its promise of boundless choosing. But in pursuing this promise the will in fact comes up against an obstacle it cannot overcome (an impasse). This obstacle is the fact that the will did not choose that the agent be born and therefore did not, and cannot but, choose to be free (LMW: 217). In other words, in free-willing, sooner or later, the will must come to the realization that its own

\footnote{11} For a perceptive analysis of the relationship between Arendtian willing and Nietzsche’s notion of Eternal Recurrence see Beiner (1982: 144-153; on Nietzsche’s repudiation of the will see 150-152).

\footnote{12} Free-willing cannot be salvaged from this recoil, according to Arendt, by replacing it with either sheer speculation (as attempted, according to Arendt, by Heidegger; see LMW: 172-194; on the subordination of willing to thinking see especially 181, 184-187) or sheer judging (that is, as I will presently show, through a teleological philosophy of history; see LMW: 28, 36, 39-51, 149-158; on the negation of willing by the teleological philosophy of history see especially LMW: 47). This substitution, in Arendtian terms, amounts to trying to resolve the will’s negation of its own autonomy by subordinating it to one of the other mental faculties. Indeed, in both cases the will faces no independent choice, and without such choice the will is rendered vacuous (LMT: 213). The turn to judgment that Arendt sees as necessary for the resolution of the will’s self-negation at the end of LMW (LMW: 217) is therefore, on my reading, intended to bring judgment into the analyses as an equal partner to thought and will and not, as Beiner has influentially argued, as a substitute for the will (1982; see especially 117-131).

\footnote{13} I am here taking my cue from Garsten’s excellent analysis of Arendt’s rejection of Nietzschean irresponsibility (Garsten, 2007, especially at 1084-1086), though I am intentionally refraining from introducing the issue of responsibility until section 6.4, and from discussing it until section 7.3.
freedom and spontaneity lie beyond the reach of its power. The will, in other words, cannot but accept its own freedom and spontaneity as given. In this sense the will, which abhors limits, is its own limit.

But this is also the case, on Arendtian terms, with the faculty of thought in sheer speculative thinking. In pursuing the metaphysical promise of everlastingness and unchange through speculative thinking, thought is ‘self sufficient’ and ‘worldless’, having no need of physical space or objects (LMT: 48). As a result, it would seem, thought has no need of the agent’s own body and senses, of other human beings, or of the world they inhabit and share. Only, for Arendt, the mind cannot, without its sensory apparatus and without intersubjective validation, confer realness upon whatever it perceives (see section 4.2). As a result, in the disembodied solitude of speculative thinking, thought is incapable of conferring realness upon itself and therefore upon any of its own discoveries and constructs (LMT: 52). Its own existence is something that the faculty of thought experiences as given rather than discovers, and therefore can neither prove nor disprove (LMT: 48-49). The fact of thinking therefore lies outside the reach of the faculty of thought. The faculty of thought is therefore, like the will, its own limit.

Arendt, of course, also saw reflective judging as reflexive and therefore as recoiling upon itself (LMW: 69). Unfortunately, she did not live to explain how. Still, I believe an argument similar to the one just traced in her analyses of the other two faculties can also be developed, albeit more speculatively, in the case of the faculty of judgment. My starting point is the fact that in judging reflectively judgment is guided by, and therefore orients itself towards, examples and exemplars of judgment – that is, past exercises of judgment (see section 5.3). The temporal orientation of

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14 See also the general assertion that all three reflective mental activities recoil upon themselves at LMT: 74 and LMW: 196. What this recoil of reflective judging is remains unexplained by Beiner’s otherwise illuminating analysis of the importance of retrospectiveness to Arendt’s analysis of the faculty of judgment (1982: 117-131; 144-156). In my reading here I therefore take my initial cue from Beiner. But, as I will presently argue, I see (unlike Beiner) the sheer reflective judging activity he explicates as also recoiling upon itself and therefore as ultimately rejected by Arendt on this score, similarly to sheer speculation and sheer free-willing, as sole or predominant mental activity determining decisions leading to action (as opposed to aesthetic and oftentimes historical decisions; see section 4.7 footnote 25).
judgment is therefore towards the past (BPF: 261-262; RJ: 18-19). The past as represented within (and therefore open to reworking by) the mind (that is, history), is therefore the favored mental abode that promises judgment the possibility of ceaselessly engaging in reflective judging. This sheer reflective judging is therefore the sheer spectatorship that seeks to find value, meaning and purpose in history’s progress towards a predetermined end.

The trouble is that in the ‘end of history’, judgment finds a predetermined category under which to subsume events actions, so that it no longer needs to operate with indeterminate general categories. As a result, once an ‘end of history’ has been provided, reflective judging is no longer needed for the judging of history. Thus, the turn to sheer judging also ends up recoiling unto, and negating the need for, the reflective activity itself. And once it becomes a guide for action, this predetermined ‘end of history’ also invites conformity (to the ‘plan of history’) and obedience (to those who profess to be enacting it) rather than independent reflective judging.

Furthermore, through reflective judging, the faculty of judgment also arrives at the realization that the ability to judge is a universally human ability, stemming from, and actualizing, one’s humanness. As such, the human value of one’s own act of judging is not, itself, subject to a

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15 Granted, Arendt also saw thought as a faculty of remembering and therefore as backwards glancing (see especially LMW: 40-42). But remembrance, in Arendtian language, makes the past present to the faculty of thought (see especially LMW: 11-12). Thus, the perspective of the faculty of thought remains that of an enduring present (LMW: 47) even when dealing with past occurrences.

16 Judgment, of course, needs the faculty of thought to assist it by generating this predetermined end of history (similarly to the way that thought assisted Nietzschean sheer free-willing by generating the notion of Eternal Recurrence). Thus, even as late as LMW, Arendt treats the philosophy of history, both in its Hegelian (see especially 40-42) and its post-Hegelian (see especially 154-158) variants, as a triumph of thinking (not judging) over willing (see also LMW: 27-28) and even as “a region of pure speculation” (LMW: 156). But in the first of these sections Arendt also treats thinking as an activity rooted in the past as much as in the present – an activity intertwined with remembrance – which, following Beiner, I see as Arendtian characteristics of judging, not thinking. Indeed, immediately following this section she reverts back to seeing thinking in terms of “reflecting on the given, on what is as it is and could not be otherwise … an everlasting present” (LMW: 42-43; my italics). And in the discussion of post-Hegelian philosophy of history, thinking is clearly discussed as employed in the context of the contemplation of history so as to remedy the haphazardness of history (LMW: 154-156; see LMW: 47 for the same point in regards to Hegel) – that is, in the service of, not in control of, judgment. And in the brief outline of her prospective judgment volume at the end of LMT Arendt explicitly includes history and Modern historicism as topics to be discussed in that volume (LMT: 216; see also LK: 77). Ultimately, in the philosophy of history, the idea of progress (stemming from the will’s purposiveness) towards a meaningful end of history (stemming from thought’s quest for meaning) comes to the service of, judgment’s retrospectiveness.

17 Indeed, if human beings are natal, as Arendt holds, history cannot have a set trajectory or ‘plan’.
valuation but instead must be accepted as a given. In other words, reflective judging cannot but give one answer to the question ‘who am I to judge?’ and this answer is ‘a human being’. To be human, I cannot but judge. Thus, just as the activity of free-willing cannot itself choose the freedom that lies at its source, and just as the activity of speculative thinking cannot itself confer on the thoughts it produces the worldly realness which they aspire to and often claim, so the activity of reflective judging cannot but assume and accept, without judging (valuating) it, the fact that its act of judging is humanly valuable. Just as I cannot will not to be free, or think my way into realness, without contradicting aspects of my own humanness I cannot, for Arendt, adjudge judging to be humanly worthless without similarly contradicting my humanness. In this way, reflective judging also brings judgment to the impasse of realizing that it itself lies beyond the reach of its own power.  

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Inherent in the autonomous nature of the mental faculties, then, is the tendency, upon release from the world of appearances, to permanently and unceasingly engage in their reflective activities. But succumbing to this tendency leads the reflective mental activities to negate themselves. It also leads the mental faculties to the impasse of recognizing they are powerless to affect their own constitution. And it leads the agent herself into a decisional stance of obedience and conformity rather independent reflection and choice.

Moreover, the turn from the world of appearances and into the reflective life of the mind also presents, almost immediately, the danger of potential ‘intramural warfare’ (as Arendt would call it) between the mind’s three major faculties. Where meanings are predetermined and unchanging, no general categories are indeterminate and no choices of action contingent. As a result, reflective judging and free-willing are needed only to serve the thinking activity, and no

\[\text{18} \text{ Thus, Arendt adamantly rejected arguments suggesting that under certain circumstances it is inappropriate for human agents to judge other human agents (RJ: 18-22, 59-60, 146).} \]
longer as independent activities. Similarly, where the substance of choices made ceases to matter, speculative thinking and reflective judging are needed only to serve the willing activity (as in the discovery of the notion of ‘Eternal Recurrence’), and no longer as independent activities. And where history has a predetermined end for humanity, that end and the progress towards it provide both meaning to events and purpose to human actions. As a result, speculative thinking and free-willing are also needed only to serve the judging activity (in discovering and applying the ‘end of history’), and no longer as independent activities.

These dangers, while inherent to the reflective nature of the mind, are not unavoidable. The turn to sheer reflective activity, tempting as it may be, is not inevitable. It can be evaded if the three mental faculties instead cooperate, as independent and autonomous faculties, by employing their reflective mental activities in the making of a decision and endeavoring to carry it out in action. It is through the return from the realm of the mind to the world of action by putting a stop to mental activity through making a decision that the danger of succumbing to the temptation of sheer mental activity is avoided.

Again, this move was something that Arendt herself did not explicitly make, but it is, in my view, clearly hinted at in her extant work. The clearest such hint is the fact that Arendt turned to analyzing these three mental faculties to show that they enable agents to act other than as banal evildoers. Indeed, the question posed to the agent by dialogical thinking (see section 5.1) concerns something that the agent is about to do. But if the withdrawal into the reflective life of the mind is to concern or enable certain kind of action, then this withdrawal cannot but be undertaken for the purpose of deciding on such action. In such cases the mental faculties are being called upon strictly for the purpose of deciding on action rather than for sheer reflective

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19 This, in my view, is the Arendtian explanation for Heidegger’s failure of judgment and action during the Nazi era. I therefore see no contradiction between the assertion that thinking paves the road for judging and Heidegger’s obvious lack of judgment under the Nazis (contra Benhabib, 2000a: 192-193; Bernstein 1986: 298 fn. 6, 1996: 173-175, 2000: 287-291; and Kateb, 1983: 188-196). The fact that Arendt’s understanding of thinking bore some important affinities to Heidegger’s understanding of thinking (Bernstein, 2000: 283-284, 287) does not mean that Arendt’s understanding of thinking is meant to describe Heidegger’s practice of thinking (or judging), which she so clearly rejected (Biskowski, 1995: 80, 82-83). Her excusing acceptance of Heidegger’s own version of his conduct under the Nazis was announced in what was, as Bernstein (2000: 292 fn. 13) himself notes, an eightieth birthday honor (and can thus be plausibly seen as an act of forgiving). It therefore casts no shadow on her understanding of thinking or judging.
activity.\textsuperscript{20} And this purpose, obviously, could be thwarted if the agent takes too long in ‘making her mind up’, because the situation may change in a way that renders the decision obsolete.\textsuperscript{21}

Furthermore, for Arendt each of the three reflective mental activities is needed for her response to banal evildoing (otherwise she would not have bothered analyzing all three). This suggests that the decision she sought to illuminate would entail the activities, and therefore the cooperation, of all three faculties. This, in turn, suggests that reflectively deciding on action-in-the-world through such cooperation between the mental faculties would indeed somehow evade the dangerous temptations of sheer reflective activity.

But this immediately gives rise to an obvious question. In such reflective decision-making, the mental faculties would find themselves doubly limited. They would be acting for the sake of an externally imposed purpose (making a decision). And they would be acting with full awareness of the fact that once this purpose is fulfilled their activity will cease. Why would the independent and autonomous mental faculties, upon their release from the world of appearances, and in the face of the promise of permanently actualizing themselves in sheer reflective activity, instead accept this doubly limited role?

Here, in my view, lies the importance of the impasses that these faculties encounter in sheer reflective activity. These impasses make the respective mental faculties realize that sheer reflective activity leads to a decisional dead end. The impasses also make the faculties realize that despite their independence and autonomy they are not boundless but rather have certain limits inherent in their constitution. This, in turn, suggests to (or better, reminds) these faculties that having limitations, and particularly self-limitations, is consistent with (perhaps even a better reflection of) autonomy.

\textsuperscript{20} Obviously, the mind and its faculties can be called upon for the purpose of thinking or judging for their own sake, in which case, of course, the reflective mental activities’ self-reflexive recoil unto themselves (that is, their obviating of the decision-making need for themselves) is no longer dangerous. The point is that in her project in LM it is not these instances, but instances of reflective withdrawal for the purpose of decision-making, that are her ultimate concern.

\textsuperscript{21} It is thus also in this sense, and not only due to human embodiedness, that the mind only temporarily withdraws from the world but does not, and cannot, leave or transcend it (LMT: 21-22, 45, 56; LMW: 142).
Why, then, would the reflective mental activities turn specifically to the self-limitations required in reflective decision-making and action? The reason for this, in my view, lies in the respective temporal orientations of the mental faculties. Each of the three mental faculties, we may recall, brings forth within the mind and then deals with a different temporal dimension of reality – what has become and is now past (judgment), what is (thought), and what is not-yet (the will). But these three temporal dimensions of reality are themselves mental constructs, brought forth when the agent stops being carried away by the flow of time to consider what has become, is, and not-yet (BPF: 10-11; LMT: 76, 205-206). It is, in other words, the insertion of the agent as a deciding agent that breaks up the otherwise uninterrupted flow of time into a past, a present, and a future.

This brokenness of time is mended by acting. The act simultaneously emerges out of the past, occurs in the present, and effects change in the future (in other words, action acts in the present, on the past, and into the future). It thereby interlinks what is coming but does not yet exist with what had become (and thus no longer is) through what occurs (but immediately passes). Even ordinary (non-reflective) action, in which the agent simply allows herself to resume being swept by the flow of time, achieves this. As such, ordinary action, though it does not involve the mental faculties in their independence and autonomy, nonetheless makes them aware of the fact that by coming together to produce an action they will have reconciled their temporal modalities back into one time-flow.

Of course, reflective mental activities, being introspective, consist in part of singling the agent out from, and situating her back within, past, present, and future. As a result, in reflectively-decided action the agent acts in part out of a consideration of her place within the flow of time outside her, and of the place of her prospective action within her own personal time-flow. As a result, the reflective decision and action does not merely reinsert the agent back into the flow of time. Rather, it reconciles the three tenses into a new, and decidedly human, time-flow, within which each tense continues to factor autonomously, forming the new unity of time in and through its independence. It is in this way that reflectively-decided action enables agents to come

22 This is an Augustinian insight (see LMW: 107) I believe Arendt accepts.
to terms with reality and thus make themselves ‘at home in the world’ (see Passerin d’Entrèves, 1993: 104-108).

The creation of this new personal time-flow, then, requires independent participation and therefore cooperation from each of the three mental faculties through their respective reflective activities. And the mental faculties are aware of the fact that should they attain such cooperation, the resulting time-flow would actualize a measure of their autonomy while at the same time averting their impasses. This gives the independent mental faculties a strong incentive to forgo the attempt to actualize their autonomy through independent sheer reflective activity and instead cooperate in forming a reflective decision. The enactment of this new personal time-flow within the world thereby brings an end to the temptations of sheer reflective activity (until the next reflective decision is called for) while salvaging a measure of the autonomy that breeds this temptation.23

Of course, all this must take place while the decision is still relevant, that is, before it has been obviated by a change in the circumstances that serve as its context. After all, to let that happen is to allow oneself to again be swept away by the ordinary flow of time, without actualizing any autonomy. This, indeed, is the final incentive for the mental faculties to cooperate with each other so as to reflectively arrive at a decision and action.

Arendt herself did not provide this explication of the relationship between the reflective decision and action and between the reflexivity of the reflective mental activities. In my view, however, this is precisely what is indicated in the Kafkaesque time parable that preoccupied Arendt in both BPF (7-8) and LMT (202-210). Arendt clearly saw the relevance of the parable to the present investigation. But she had struggled to capture this relevance, taking, in my view, wrong turns – in both BPF and LMT – in her reading of it. My analysis up to this point, I believe, in fact provides us with the framework to best make sense of this parable, in partial departure from Arendt’s own reading of it.

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23 The notion that independent and autonomous components can come together into a unity in which they retain their independence is also borrowed from Augustine. For Augustine such was both the unity of the Christian Holy Trinity and the unity that is the human mind (LMW: 98-101). Of course, for Augustine but not for Arendt, the latter unity is a reflection of the former.
According to this time parable the human agent, at every point in time – at every ‘now’ – experiences herself as caught in an ongoing struggle against the pressures of past and future. The agent’s only escape from this constant struggle is to jump out of this line of time to a position from which she can see the flow of time as an uninterrupted continuity and therefore place herself in relation to this flow. This position is a spectator’s position.

In both BPF and LMT Arendt realized, correctly, two significant points stemming from this parable. The first is that it is the agent’s *appearance* in the world (that is, her insertion into the flow of time) that breaks the otherwise uninterrupted flow into a past, present, and future. The second is that the escape from this constant struggle to a spectator’s position is an escape from the world and into the mind. In BPF, Arendt identified the agent’s appearance on this line with their whole life story and this outside position with the agent’s dying moments (the one point in a person’s life when they can look at, and evaluate, their life as a whole). In LMT, she identified the agent’s appearance on this line with the agent’s ongoing being-in-the-world and this outside position with the *nunc stans* of speculative thinking, the realm of abstract metaphysical speculation.

There are also, however, several aspects of this parable whose implications for Arendt’s investigations in LMT remain underappreciated by her in either of these interpretations. First, simply being within the ordinary flow of time does not make us feel the competing pressures of past and future. On the contrary, if we are simply being within this flow, we are letting it carry us with it, from past into future seamlessly. Only when one stands up to this flow and ceases to allow oneself to be carried by it does one insert oneself into it. And only then does one encounter *both* past and future as opposing forces, pressing upon one in what now has become the break between past and future that is the present.

Thus, it is only in a specific and limited sense that thinking inserts us into the flow of time and puts us into a struggle with past and future (as Arendt suspected in LMT). If one is merely heuristically (re-)employing one’s ordinary meaning- and value-determinations, one is not standing up to this flow but instead, to borrow a colloquialism, ‘goes with the flow’. It is through dialogical thinking that one stops ‘going with the flow’, and it is through critical thinking that
one plants one’s feet to resist it, thereby breaking up this flow and bringing upon oneself the competing pressures of past and future.

Of course, such resistance to the flow of time cannot be maintained forever. Sooner or later one will succumb to the flow and be swept away by it again. But in doing this one succumbs not to the joint competing pressures of past and future but to the ordinariness of the ordinary flow of time. One, in other words, merely conforms to how things ordinarily proceed and simply allows oneself to be carried away by the flow of time again. And while thereby one no longer has to shoulder the pressures of past and future, one has not thereby stood up to these pressures but has merely escaped them.

The trouble is – and this is the second aspect of this parable left underappreciated by Arendt – that spectatorship, in and of itself, is no less an escape from standing up to the competing pressures of past and future. To get to the spectator’s position one must escape into one’s mind. As a result, one does not in actuality leave the flow within which one is struggling. One merely feels no more pain as one watches oneself, as if another, helplessly struggling against past and future until, exhausted, one succumbs to the ordinary flow of time. And as long as one remains a spectator, one can do no more than watch. If one wishes to do more, one must cease to be a spectator and return to one’s own painful struggle. Spectatorship, in and of itself, is no more than a powerful sedative.

But what option remains to the agent, then? The third underappreciated aspect of this metaphor is that being carried away by the flow of a river is not the only way to proceed within it. One can also swim in it. And when swimming, that is, while paving one’s own path, at one’s own speed, within the flow, one no longer merely suffers the joint competing pressures of past and future. To swim in the flow one must leave one’s standing stance and newly begin swimming. And one continues swimming for as long as one follows through on the trajectory that this new beginning points one towards.

Of course, to find one’s path and trajectory one must get one’s bearings within the flow of time. And this cannot be done while one is being carried away by this flow. The point of stopping to stand within the flow (dialogical thinking) is to try and get one’s bearings. The point of
temporarily defending oneself against the ordinary flow (critical thinking) is to give oneself some time to get one’s bearings and situate oneself within the flow. The point of the escape to spectatorship, from which one can best assess where one is relative the flow of time, must therefore be to actually get one’s bearings so as to start swimming in a self-chosen direction in it, rather than being carried away by it. And this escape must be temporary because the agent must return to her acting self and begin swimming before her powers of resistance fail her and she succumbs again to the ordinary flow of time.

Of course, to do so, one must situate oneself in relation to past, present, and future. That is, one must see time both in its flow around oneself, and in its brokenness vis-à-vis oneself. And indeed, while each mental faculty is temporally oriented towards one of these three tenses, the mind as a whole can reconnect all three. The turn to the mind indicated in this parable must therefore be a turn to all three faculties in cooperation. And it is the realization of the immanent necessity of action (swimming) before one is swept away again by the flow of time that provides the final impetus for these activities to cooperate and decide on a personal course within this flow.

This Kafkaesque metaphor, then, indicates, much more broadly and deeply than even Arendt perhaps realized where her separate investigations of thinking, judging, and willing were leading her. The autonomy of each of these reflective faculties, the independence of their respective reflective activities, and their detachment from the world of appearances and action, are essential to their ability to enable agents to act in a certain unique way in the world. But to do so this independence must also be transcended into cooperation, and this detachment must also be restricted by a return to acting. If either of these fails, the turn to reflective thinking, judging and willing will have failed.
On Arendtian terms, then, the three autonomous mental faculties nonetheless also bring their independent reflective mental activities together in making and enacting a decision. But how does such reflective decision-making actually operate? This, again, was not an issue that Arendt lived to explicitly develop. However, an illustrative example of this emerges, in my view, if we consider, in light of the previous two sections, an important worldly activity that Arendt did discuss more fully, namely, storytelling spectatorship.

There are two indications that storytelling spectatorship is a reflectively-decided activity, and therefore an appropriate example here. Most obviously, storytelling spectatorship requires detachment and hence (temporary) withdrawal from the world of appearances (see section 3.5). But even more importantly, storytelling spectatorship creates in public life a new human time-flow similar to that created by the reflective decision within the life-story of the agent. This point has been succinctly illustrated by Cornelius Castoriadis with regard to historiography (in Arendtian terms, a form storytelling spectatorship) in the Athenian polis. Historiography, for Castoriadis, creates a ‘public time’ whereby, at any given (present) time, “the collectivity can inspect its own past as the result of its own actions, and where an indeterminate future opens up as domain for its activities” (1991: 113-114). It is in this way that storytelling spectatorship makes the event ‘at home in the world’ (see also Denneny, 1979: 246).

The activity of the storytelling spectator, we may recall, deals with an appearance or event which apparent meaning is out-of-fit with the shared context of meaning into which it had appeared. Storytelling spectatorship can account for this new appearance in either (or both) of two ways. It can attach a new meaning to this event that enables it to fit into the existing context of meaning. Or it can revise aspects of the existing context of meaning so that the event in its apparent meaning can nonetheless fit into it.

To carry this out the storytelling spectator would need to reconsider the applicability of prior meanings attached to the appearance (or to similar appearances) to the new appearance. And she would also need to reconsider the place of the new appearance within the existing context of meaning. Of course, both are tasks for which the sweep of critical thinking and the meaning-generating activity of speculative thinking are required. Such reconsideration of prior meanings
is, of course, the agent’s own, guided by her own personal context of meaning, and in this sense a personal determination, a ‘fit as I see it’.

However, the decision to tell a particular story about an event entails two additional determinations. One is the determination that the appearance merits being narrated. The other is the determination of which story to actually tell about it. And while the meanings generated by speculative thinking are necessary components in both determinations, these determinations themselves cannot be made by speculative thinking. This is where reflective judging and free-willing become necessary for storytelling spectatorship.

In its boundless curiosity the faculty of thought is naturally inclined to seek the meaning of whatever it encounters, or at least whatever appears to be out-of-joint with the world (RJ: 93-94). But a curious or even unusual event is not, for that reason only, one worth remembering. In deeming an event worthy of being told of, the storytelling spectator in effect deems this event worthy of being salvaged, in its apparent anomalousness, from the oblivion of time. She deems it, in other words, being worthy of being frozen in collective memory as a ‘humanly significant’ event of the (soon to be) past. Making such a valuation is the domain of the retrospective faculty of judgment.

The category ‘humanly significant’, of course, is an indeterminate category that therefore calls for reflective rather than determinative judging. This activity is guided by past exemplars of human significance, but the faculty of judgment is free to choose the exemplars it deems appropriate to guide it. As a result, the reflective judging activity is not determined by these past exemplars. Similarly, the meanings that had been newly attached to the appearance by the faculty of thought serve as data in this reflective judging activity. Indeed, the faculty of judgment needs such meanings to serve as possible articulations of the human significance it finds in those appearances it valuates as significant. But these meanings also do not determine the reflective judging activity itself because the faculty of judgment is also free to reject them as failing to do

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24 This is why storytelling spectatorship has no need of being triggered by a separate thinking activity.
25 Granted, contexts of meaning predetermine which examples and meanings are more or less appropriate for valuating particular appearances. Such predeterminations, however, are swept away by critical thinking.
justice to the appearance. In its operation, then, judgment also attaches a valuation to these meanings, that is, to the refitting of appearance and meaning that thought had carried out.\textsuperscript{26}

A claim to human significance, however, is a claim that something is significant to human beings (at least, to those sharing a particular context of meaning) \textit{in general}. As a result, while the initial meaning-determinations were personal (‘fit-as-I-see-it’), the determination of ‘human significance’ aspires to general validity. This determination therefore requires confirmation of its general validity. And as just noted, this determination also entails a valuation of the meaning-determinations themselves, namely, as to whether or not they live up to this human significance. Through this double valuation, this aspiration to general validity is also added by the valuation to the personal meaning-determinations to which it is being attached. The new meaning-determinations, and judgment’s valuation of the justice they do to the human significance of the appearance, therefore also require confirmation of their general validity.

As a result, both valuations, and the meaning onto which they had been grafted, are presented to intersubjective validation through representative thinking. In this case, because a story recounts a past event and therefore requires historical judgment, representative thinking is employed as described in the LK account of representative thinking (see section 4.7).\textsuperscript{27} Should the evaluated meaning be thereby intersubjectively validated, it will be passed on to the will for a determination of whether or not to capture it in a story. Should it be deemed invalid, however, both meanings and valuations will need to be reconsidered by the faculties of thought and judgment, which are free to revise or reaffirm them.\textsuperscript{28} As a result, a back-and-forth dialogue will

\textsuperscript{26}The determination of human significance, though very much akin to a determination of meaning, is nonetheless a matter for judgment rather than for thought because, like validation, it looks to, and hence draws on, the shared human world (that is, otherness) rather than the self. I return to this point, within the context of moral performance, in section 7.2. On the decisional and practical interconnectedness of valuation and meaning-generation see sections 3.2 (especially footnote 18 and its adjoining text) and 5.3.

\textsuperscript{27}Indeed, the notion that communicability is a standard of judgment, and the identification of impartiality with the hypothetical ‘general standpoint’ of the \textit{Weltbetrachter}, both Kantian notions that do not appear in any account of representative thinking other than the LK account, are more appropriate to storytelling spectatorship than to any other notable reflective decisional context in Arendt.

\textsuperscript{28}In such reconsideration, of course, both faculties will now have the benefit of whatever new relevant information the mind has accumulated through the dialogue of representative thinking, and in the case of thought also through the initial act of valuation.
ensue between the faculties of thought and judgment until they come to an agreement on a new evaluated meaning, which will again be submitted to validation by representative thinking.  

This means that, though carried out by autonomous faculties, the reflective activities of thinking and judging are in fact also interconnected within the decision-making process. The meaning that is eventually ascribed to an appearance by the faculty of thought will also articulate its human significance as identified by the faculty of judgment. And the valuation (determination of human significance) of the appearance by judgment must be grafted upon the meaning ascribed to it by thought. As a result, each activity must also satisfy the other activity’s criterion of validity. A reflective decision would therefore entail a particularly close dialogue between the faculties of thought and judgment. The reflective activities of thinking and judging can therefore be seen as forming a distinct unit within the decision-making process, which in this thesis I label ‘reflection’.

But this process of reflection, on Arendtian terms, cannot be viewed as presenting the will with only one evaluated meaning. The will, of course, is also autonomous of determination by the faculties of thought and judgment. As a result it must remain free to either accept or reject the evaluated meaning presented to it. But if the will only receives one evaluated meaning from thought and judgment, this freedom translates into a choice between telling and refusing to tell the story thought and judgment wish told. And this, on Arendtian terms, is problematic, for a double reason.

On the one hand, there is usually more than one possible way of refitting an event and a context of meaning, each calling for its own valuation. Granted, some of these possible evaluated meanings are deemed invalid in the course of reflection due to failing the criteria of validity of either reflective thinking (non-contradiction) or reflective judging (general validity). But there is no necessity that only one possible evaluated meaning would survive this double validation. As a

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29 The failure to attain validation could, of course, also result in the termination of the decision-making process. But since the agent has withdrawn into the mind in order to make a decision, and since thought and judgment themselves have strong incentives to arrive at a decision, they will be inclined to revisit their initial outcomes rather than give up on the process. In this respect it is plausible to assume that whatever reflective decisions are arrived at entailed such close dialogue between thinking and judging.
result, if only one evaluated meaning is to be submitted to the will at the end of the process of reflection, thought and judgment will need to have chosen it from among several valid alternatives. In this respect, they will have been called for to perform the task of the will, forcing the will into doing no more than reaffirming or rejecting their choice, thereby encroaching on the will’s autonomy.

On the other hand, if only one evaluated meaning is submitted to the will, the will’s refusal of this evaluated meaning will have terminated the decision-making process. The only way for the process to continue and result in a decision would be for thought and judgment to begin the process of reflection anew, and continue to do so, until they choose the evaluated meaning that the will favors. But of course, this would mean the will has in fact forced the process of reflection into producing the evaluated meaning it would prefer, thereby encroaching on the autonomy of thought and judgment.

Viewing reflection as yielding only one evaluated meaning for the will’s choice, then, forces us to see the will either as taking over the decision-making process, or as merely rubberstamping the outcomes of reflection (the combination of reflective thinking and judging). This is avoided, in my view, if we see reflection as yielding several evaluated meanings, perhaps in a ranked order of preference, from which the will can choose one to be captured in a story. On this view of the reflective willing activity, the will, in making its choice, looks to the choices of meanings, valuations, and exemplars made by thought and judgment in the process of reflection. In doing so, it brings to the fore the choices of ends, principles of action, and determination of self (‘the kind of person I wish to be’) implicit in them. It is in this respect that free-willing indeed turns the act of storytelling spectatorship into an act of self-disclosure and appearance.

Granted, this way of envisioning the choice of the will means that it is not as interconnected with the other faculties through the decision-making process as thought and judgment are to each other. This, however, is in line with the nature of the will. As the faculty most closely aligned to the human condition of natality and to the mental power of spontaneity, the will is indeed the most independent of the mental faculties. But this is not to say that there is no internal dialogue between the will and thought and judgment. The will can still prod the faculties of thought and judgment to reconsider or clarify the evaluated meanings they have presented to it. This, I
believe, is the familiar experience whereby a seemingly sensible decisional option ‘just does not sit well’ with the agent. Nonetheless, it remains the independent choice of the will whether to prod thought and judgment in this way, and it remains the independent choice of both thought and judgment whether to heed this prodding.

This understanding of the will’s choice, I believe, is both more experientially persuasive and more in tune with the Arendtian analysis. It transfers the task of actually choosing the evaluated meaning favored by the agent back to the choosing faculty that is the will. In turn, the will, which after all shares the incentives of thought and judgment to bring the decision-making process to actualization, is given more leeway to voluntarily bring itself into shared accord with thought and judgment.\(^{30}\) It thereby allows reflective willing to be seen as an independent but integral (and therefore organic) complement to reflective thinking and judging, rather than as endemically opposed to them. This, I believe, was the view of the relationship between the mental activities pointed to in Arendt’s only attempt at articulating this relationship (LMT: 213). It is in this way that, ultimately, “it is always the same mind that thinks and wills” (LMW: 23).

The decision of the storytelling spectator, then, presupposes a necessary and distinct contribution from each of the independent and autonomous mental faculties. These distinct contributions add onto each other to make for the eventually told story. In arriving at these contributions, the three mental faculties make use of knowledge regarding the appearance and regarding other appearances, examples, and prior meanings. As a result, the imagination and the cognitive (logical) powers normally used in processing data are employed by the mental faculties, but only in assistance of their reflective activities. It is the reflective mental activities that, each in its own decisional domain, take the lead in carrying out its part of the decision-making process.

\(^{30}\) For example, by choosing an evaluated meaning it finds acceptable though not its favored one, if its favored one has been ruled invalid by thought and judgment.
The three reflective mental activities, then, although carried out by autonomous mental faculties and therefore independent of each other, are in fact also interdependent. All three are required for, and must come together in the carrying out of, a reflective decision about action in the world. In other words, the three reflective mental activities, as Arendt understood them, form a reflective decision-making process. As such, they actualize a reflective mode of acting-in-the-world and therefore being-in-the-world.

The reflective mental activities, however, are not the only mental activities these three faculties can engage in. Rather, each faculty also has an ‘ordinary’ activity (cognition, determinative judging, *liberum arbitrium*) that is carried out heuristically, without interrupting the regular flow of daily living. And if we consider these non-reflective activities more closely, we realize that they also form a process of decision-making.

In this process, cognition would ascertain the parameters of the decisional situation and the causes, effects, functions, and potential uses of the appearances encountered in it. It would also ascertain the preexisting meanings that one would ordinarily apply to similar situations and to appearances of similar causes, effects, functions or uses. It would also ascertain the personal, already-chosen aims and purposes currently guiding the agent and potentially affected by situation and appearance. These preexisting meanings and pre-chosen personal aims then serve as definable categories under which both appearance and situation can be subsumed. This is the task of determinative judging. Once this has been done, the agent would have a clear picture of how the encountered situation and appearance relate to her own pre-chosen aims and ordinary patterns of behavior. All that remains for her to do is to pick the course of action that, in the given situation, would best serve her pre-chosen guiding aims (her interests).

Of course, these non-reflective activities are carried out heuristically. This decision-making process, then, actualizes a second, non-reflective and heuristic, mode of being-in-the-world. This is therefore the decision-making process that actualizes our ordinary and heuristic default mode of being-in-the-world (see sections 3.4 and 4.4). It is out of this mode of being-in-the-world that

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31 Indeed, in LM, routine and habitualness were explicitly juxtaposed both to speculative thinking (LMT: 3-5) and to spontaneous willing (LMW: 32-33).
we are yanked by the triggering effect of dialogical thinking, and which is then bracketed by critical thinking. This ‘opens up a decisional space’ into which the activities of speculative thinking, reflective judging, and free-willing, can step, making and carrying out the decision in an alternative, reflective, manner. The reflective mode of being-in-the-world actualized by this alternative process of decision-making is thereby identified with the political mode of being-in-the-world juxtaposed by Arendt to our heuristic and ordinary mode (see section 3.4).

Of course, this default, heuristic and ordinary mode of being-in-the-world was also the mode in which banal evildoing was carried out (see section 3.4). Indeed, the Nazi tranquilization of moral performance was predicated precisely on agents approaching decisions with moral implications in this default heuristic manner (see section 2.5). The reflective decision-making process formed by the reflective mental activities thereby emerges as a potential decisional alternative to heuristic decision-making in the circumstances that breed banal evildoing. This, as we will see in section 7.3, is indeed the case for Arendt.

But the reflective mental activities are also self-interpreting and self-examining, putting (aspects of) the self to consideration alongside the consideration of external appearances and phenomena. This, indeed, is the main practical difference between the two modes of decision-making. In the non-reflective mode we take our preexisting meanings, valuations, and aims as given and merely apply them to the situation at hand. In the reflective mode, by contrast, we open such preexisting meanings, valuations, and aims to potential reconsideration. As a result, the reflective mental activities also enable agents to transform themselves and change the way they have been hitherto acting, should they so choose. Thus, reflective decision-making enables agents who sincerely wish to be moral human agents to turn themselves back into such persons even if they have been hitherto committing banal evildoing. This is why even in the darkest, most anti-political of worldly realities, being-political still remains an actual, if widely forgotten, possibility.

Of course, one of the key characteristics of the heuristic mode of decision-making, as well as of banal evildoing, was blind obedience and conformity to others. And the agent was led into such

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32 Such a turn back to being-moral may even be grounds for forgiving such a person for otherwise unforgivable crimes. I return to this in section 11.1.
conformity and obedience not only through heuristic decision-making but also through each of the sheer reflective activities (see section 6.1). As a result, ‘sheer reflective activity’, just like banal decision-making, is in fact an invitation to agents to eschew responsibility for the meanings, judgments, and choices that enter into their actions. In other words, ‘sheer reflective activity’ invites agents to ‘pass the buck’ to the ‘permanent truths’ of sheer speculative thinking, to the ‘end of history’ of sheer reflective judging, to the exhilarating playfulness of ‘sheer free-willing’, and to the figures of authority who speak, justifiably or demagogically, in their name.

As a result, the reflective mental activities, if employed together in making a decision, come with the price of personal responsibility for the meanings, judgments, and choices that stem from these activities. This responsibility is both demanded and bestowed by the independence of reflective thinking, judging, and willing. And it is undertaken (or eschewed) upon the will’s choice to undertake (or eschew) reflective action.
Chapter 7
Moral Triggering and Moral Reflection

In the previous chapter we saw that although Arendt discussed the reflective mental activities of thinking, judging, and willing separately, she in fact envisioned them as cooperating in reflectively deciding on prospective action. But Arendt also envisioned these mental activities, and therefore the reflective decision-making process they form, as responding to the challenge of banal evildoing to moral responsibility ascription (see chapter 1).\(^1\) It is to this move that I now turn.

I begin by considering the role of dialogical and critical thinking in moral performance, namely, the carrying out of the task that in chapter 2 I had labeled ‘moral triggering’ (section 7.1). I then turn, in section 7.2, to the role of speculative thinking and reflective judging in moral performance, namely, the provision of moral guidance, achieved through what I will label ‘moral reflection’. In section 7.3 I present the decisional situation in which the deciding self is placed once moral reflection has been carried out, but before this situation is resolved in a moral choice. This will enable me to argue, in section 8.4, that reflective thinking and judging alone do not in fact suffice for the purpose Arendt herself envisioned for them. This means that the Arendtian conception of moral performance requires some additional fortification, which I will undertake in chapter 8 and 9. In chapter 10 I will then return to the functioning of free-willing in making a moral choice and thereby in the undertaking of moral responsibility.

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\(^1\) The link between recourse to thinking and judging and between the telling of right from wrong is made explicitly in LMT: 5, 13, 69, and 192. It also infuses all the discussions of these activities in RJ, especially at 18-22, 50-51, 60-62, 67, 86-93, 97, 135-137, 143-145, 160-164, and 189.
As Seyla Benhabib correctly pointed out, in a world shared with other human beings, moral decisions (decisions involving moral considerations) are ubiquitous (1992: 125). As a result, we encounter such decisions as part of ordinary living and would therefore be initially inclined to handle them as we handle most of our daily decisions. We would, in other words, be inclined, by default, to make such decisions heuristically, from within the non-reflective mode of decision-making. Only, heuristic decision-making was precisely what failed agents under Nazi conditions (RJ: 44, 50, 54-61, 89, 107; LMT: 3-5). Indeed, the Nazi tranquilization of moral performance was precisely predicated upon the creation of a decisional environment in which this would be the case (see sections 2.5 and 4.4). Thus, for Arendt, the reflective mode of decision-making, not the ordinary one, is the appropriate one for making moral decisions (see especially RJ: 143).

Because the heuristic mode of decision-making is our default mode for moral decisions, it must first be bypassed if moral performance is to be carried out reflectively. In other words, a ‘moment’ of being triggered to morality is to precede the ‘moment’ of moral reflection in the reflective making of a moral decision. Such moral triggering is provided, according to Arendt, by dialogical and critical thinking.

To succeed in causing the agent to temporarily withdraw from the world of appearances and reflect on the action at hand, however, this moral trigger has to resonate with the agent within the ordinary mode of being-in-the-world. This is achieved by the question that dialogical thinking poses to the agent, namely, whether she would be able to live with herself if she did (or refrained from doing) a certain prospective action. The ordinary mode of being-in-the-world is a self-privileging mode, in which the agent’s own needs, aims, desires, and purposes are her primary determinants of action.2 One important such self-interest is the agent’s interest in having a sense of self-integrity, which is a core component of one’s sense of identity and personhood. It is on this self-interest that the effect of the question of dialogical thinking is predicated.

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2 Even when acting out of duties to others, such as familial duties, I am still acting for myself, because the duty, say, to my family members, is not a duty to them as others but as members of my family. This is at the root of the paradoxical fact that many Nazis were ‘good family-men’ (JP: 231-234). I take my cue here from Bauman’s juxtaposition of love and duty (following the work of Alberoni and Veca; see PE: 98-100).
The self-interest in self-integrity appears to the self in two interrelated forms: as a fear of being in self-contradiction, and as a personal aim to avert this fear and be in agreement with myself. It is this fear that is invoked by the question of dialogical thinking. This question suggests that some courses of action under consideration in the given situation may, in a way not apparent without reflection, pose a threat to the agent’s self-integrity. The withdrawal to reflection is thereby presented to the heuristically-acting self as necessary for actualizing its (ordinary) personal aim of averting this fear. It is the anticipation of this potentially self-threatening intervention by dialogical thinking that is to be properly understood as our conscience according to Arendt (LMT: 190-193; See also RJ: 107-108 and LMW: 64). This, I believe, is the most basic sense in which the self, as Arendt insisted, is “the ultimate criterion of moral conduct” (RJ: 104) and “the ultimate standard for conduct toward others” (RJ: 101; see also RJ: 76).

3 It may argued that the interest in self-integrity and its concomitant fear of self-contradiction are not as successful a trigger as I present them, since people are in fact capable of living with self-contradiction and internal incoherence. In response, let me first acknowledge that on my argument here people are indeed capable of living with a multiplicity of internal decisional voices (guides for action) – primarily because, as I argue in section 10.2, adjoined to such decisional multiplicity is the unifying effect of the (single) decision and action that emerged out of this internal multiplicity. This is not the self-integrity that is invoked here. What is invoked here is the sense that one is acting, or has acted, in a way that is not ‘true to herself’, falls short of the kind of person she feels she ought to be, or otherwise fails to live up to what she expects of herself as a person, a human self. This deeper sense of self-integrity is the one captured and indicated in the question of my internal friend – ‘could I live with myself if I did this’. Arendt assumes that at bottom human agents cannot over time live with the knowledge that they have done something that, in this sense, they cannot live with. It may, of course, be pointed out that many people are able to appease themselves through rationalizations or self-excusing. Arendt, I believe, would respond, correctly, that the fact that such agents needed such rationalizations and exceptions-in-their-own-case precisely attests to the fact that they could not live with themselves after what they did. They were thus, indeed, triggered by their internal friend, but then, rather than own up to their actions and make peace with themselves through moral reflection, chose to sedate themselves in banality. And for this they can be held responsible (I develop the Arendtian moves on which this response draws in more detail in section 7.3 and 10.2).

4 This internal voice appears to the self as trustworthy (a friend) precisely because it is merely proscriptive. Having no positive counsel, it appears pure of motive, caring only for the integrity of the self. Notably, at the end of LMT Arendt also aligns conscience with judging (LMT: 215), but she reverts back to interlinking conscience with dialogical thinking in LMW: 64).

5 Of course, this moral trigger would not be effective with agents for whom self-integrity is not an important guiding aim. From an Arendtian perspective, however, such people pose no challenge to moral responsibility-ascription. In a sense, such people are inhuman (psychopathic) – unlike villains (non-banal evildoers), who keep overriding their conscience but are nonetheless tormented by it, these people literally have no conscience in the Arendtian sense of the term. As such, they can be held responsible for what they do, like any psychopath, on the basis of their choice to deny and therefore disregard their own humanness.
This moral triggering effect is completed by critical thinking. Within the ordinary mode of decision-making, agents are guided by predetermined meanings, valuations, and examples, which they ordinarily apply to situations and appearances similar to the one they are now encountering. They are also ordinarily guided by a predetermined set of short- and long-term interests, personal aims, and principles of action, in light of which they assess how newly encountered situations and appearances affect them. In a moral decision these would include, among others, societal and personal laws, rules, norms and values that label specific actions, in general or under specific circumstances, as right or wrong. They would also include the example of those others – parents, friends, teachers, spiritual guides, or other opinion leaders – whose behavior in the present situation (or in similar ones) we take as cues to assist us in deciding our behavior in the situation at hand.

The predisposition to approaching encountered situations and appearances in light of this specific set of considerations is bracketed (in Arendtian language, swept away) by critical thinking. Notably, these considerations themselves are not ‘swept away’ by critical thinking but remain as data within the mind. It is only the privileged decisional status they ordinarily have for us that is put into question (‘swept away’) by critical thinking. Indeed, it is possible that, having been triggered, moral reflection will reaffirm some or all of these considerations as indeed appropriate for guiding our action in this particular case. But it is just as possible that such moral reflection will result in the rejection of all of these considerations and in the affirmation of a new set of considerations as the most appropriate for guiding such action. It is this latter possibility that is effectively ruled out while agents are in the heuristic mode of decision-making and is therefore enabled by the triggering effect of dialogical and critical thinking.

Of course, such an alternative set of considerations could only emerge as an alternative guide for moral action in the given situation through moral reflection. As a result, if this alternative set of considerations indeed ends up being acted upon, it will have actualized the reflective mode of decision-making. On the other hand, acting on the basis of the ordinary set of considerations will

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6 This means that by defining conscience as the anticipation of dialogical thinking, Arendt restricts its role in moral decision-making relative to its traditional occidental understanding as moral trigger and guide. In Arendt conscience plays no role in moral guidance, and is but part of moral triggering.
The bracketing of heuristic decision-making through the moral triggering effect of dialogical and critical thinking frees the faculties of thought and judgment to engage in moral reflection. This is done through the activities of speculative thinking and reflective judging. Speculative thinking carries out the task of ascertaining moral meanings. Reflective judging carries out the task of valuating these meanings as right or wrong, as well as the task of intersubjectively confirming the general validity of both meanings and valuations. Of course, the primary focus of the question of dialogical thinking is not the encountered situation but the agent’s prospective action in it. As a result, it is the agent’s prospective action, rather than the particular situation, that needs to be rendered meaningful and valuated. The particulars of the situation, however, are still important data for the moral reflection process, which in this respect remains situation-specific.

Upon being triggered to moral reflection, then, the faculty of thought is called upon to ascribe moral meanings to the agent’s various prospective courses of action. In this meaning-determination, the relevant context of meaning into which these possible courses of action must be fitted is the agent’s own personal context of meaning. In this respect, moral meaning is

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7 Even if upon reflection our ordinary set of consideration is reaffirmed, a choice between modes of being-in-the-world would still have initially presented itself. The only difference is that in this case, such reflection would merely affirm the fact that in this particular situation, both modes of being-in-the-world point the agent towards the same action. But in arriving at this realization reflectively, the agent would nonetheless have chosen, and actualized, the reflective mode of decision-making and of being-in-the-world.

8 The combined tasks of moral valuation and moral validation can therefore be labeled ‘moral judging’.
meaning-for-the-self, that is, right-or-wrong-for-me. Granted, as part of this primary meaning-determination, the faculty of thought will need to ascertain the consequences and implications of each course of action (a task for cognition). And it may also need to ascertain the fit of these prospective courses of action into other contexts of meaning. But such determinations are only made to serve as data in the primary determination of the personal meaning of one’s possible courses of action.

Once the various possible courses of action have had initial meaning-determinations conferred upon them, they are turned over to the faculty of judgment for the task of moral valuation. This task consists of attaching to each course of action a determination of whether it is morally right or wrong (in general). Since ‘morally right/wrong’ are indeterminate general categories, this determination requires reflective judging. In making these valuations reflective judging uses the meaning-determinations attached to these courses of action as data. But its act of valuation is guided by moral exemplars chosen by the faculty of judgment independently of those meaning-determinations or of the choices of examples that guided speculative thinking in making them.

In valuating a proposed course of action, the agent determines that whether this course of action, on top of being right or wrong for her (moral meaning), is also right or wrong for others. But this, on Arendtian terms, is also a determination of whether this course of action is right or wrong for the shared human world which will be affected by her prospective action. These valuations therefore require confirmation of their general validity, and this is attained through intersubjective mental encounter with others entailed in representative thinking. By extension, the choices of exemplars guiding the mental act of valuation are also thereby submitted to confirmation through representative thinking.

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9 For an early attempt to capture this insight, when Arendt still saw thinking primarily in terms of dialogic thinking, see RJ: 97. Notably, dialogical thinking also entailed an encounter with selfhood – a me-and-myself dialogue, as Arendt put it – but in this encounter ‘my self’ appears to the self as ‘another self’, that is, in the guise of otherness. Indeed, as Garsten correctly notes, without this dialogical encounter with myself-in-the-guise-of-other, thanks to which I am able to regard myself as if from outside myself, “explicit recognition of oneself as a being would not be possible; one can only see oneself as a self from the outside” (2007: 1094). But once this recognition has occurred, thought can now – in the activity of speculative thinking – encounter selfhood directly, without guises.
Moral judging, then, entails an encounter with otherness in the form of the partners in the dialogue of representative thinking, who are stand-ins for other human agents in general. This encounter with otherness is adjoined to speculative thinking’s encounter with selfhood once this dialogue intersubjectively confirms the general validity of the agent’s moral meanings and valuations. This, for Arendt, is indeed the key insight to be drawn out of Kant’s analysis of aesthetic judgment (RJ: 142-143). An element of care for others *qua* human others (*amor mundi*) is thereby adjoined to the care of the self that has driven the agent up until this point in the moral decision-making process.

These valuations, however, were grafted onto determinations of personal moral meaning. As a result, these meaning-determinations (and by extension the choices of examples guiding these determinations) are also put to representative thinking for validation. By the same token, of course, judgment’s valuations and choices of guiding examples and of participants in the dialogue of representative thinking are also subjected to speculative thinking’s test of validity (namely, non-self-contradiction). Furthermore, all these determinations and choices by both faculties are also subject to the prescriptive voice of the internal friend of dialogical thinking. Only after this multifaceted internal dialogue has resulted in mutual agreement are these courses of action submitted to the choice of the will, which thereby joins this interactive decision-making process.

7.3

In the moment of moral choice, the will is therefore faced with a choice between the various courses of action open to the agent. At the most basic level this choice is between the courses of action that moral reflection has identified as morally right or morally evil, that is, between righteousness and non-banal evil-doing. Because the will is independent of thought and judgment,

10 It is in this way that moral performance enables the agent to regain the “trust in himself as the partner of his thoughts”, the loss of which was for Arendt at the heart of totalitarian terror (OT: 477).
this choice is not predetermined by the meanings and valuations attached to these courses of action in the course of moral reflection. In other words, the will is free to reject some of these meanings or valuations, asking thought and judgment to further reflect upon them. But even more importantly, the will is similarly free to choose whichever course of action it sees fit – righteous or evil.

Nonetheless, the meanings and valuations attached to these courses of actions still serve as important data in the will’s moral choice. Otherwise, moral reflection would be superfluous to the moral decision. The will uses this data, however, to look beyond the explicit meaning-and-value-determinations made by thought and judgment. Instead, the will looks to the implicit choices of aims, principles of action, and determinations of self (the kind of person I wish to be) that guided, and are therefore revealed by, these explicit meaning-and-value-determinations. These aims, principles of action, and determinations of self are what the will in fact bases its choice of (righteous or evil) course of action upon, a contingent choice that therefore requires the mental power of spontaneity.

Potentially, there could be as many newly revealed combinations of personal ends, principles of action, and determinations of self, as there are different courses of action open to the agent. Nonetheless, they all have in common the fact that they have been revealed through moral reflection. As such, they all actualize the reflective mode of decision-making. As a result, they all stand as alternatives to deciding and acting out of our (default) ordinary mode of being-in-the-world.

Of course, in ordinary decision-making the agent is also guided primarily by her own goals, self-interests and desires. Indeed, this is what makes the ordinary mode of being-in-the-world fundamentally self-prioritizing, a mode of being-for-the-self. In this regard, reflective decision-making differs from ordinary decision-making in two fundamental and relevant respects. First, in ordinary decision-making the agent merely applies her goals and self-interests, as they are, to the decision-situation at hand. By contrast, in reflective decision-making the agent reexamines, and if necessary chooses (and preferentially ranks) anew, these goals and self-interest. Second, thanks to the activity of speculative thinking, the element of being-for-the-self that characterizes ordinary decision-making is also part of reflective decision-making. But thanks to the activity of
reflective judging, in reflective decision-making an element of being-for-others, and therefore, of being-for-the-world is adjoined to this element of being-for-the-self.\footnote{This is the reason that I refer to the ordinary mode of being-in-the-world as ‘self-prioritizing’ rather than ‘self-privileging’ (see chapter 2 footnote 26). Notably, though in what follows I write primary with righteous action in mind, a parallel coincidence also exists in evil courses of action, since both are presented to the will through moral reflection. The difference is that in the case of evildoing this is a coincidence between being-against-others and being-against-self (that is, self-contradiction). This is clearly evident in the fact that Arendt exemplifies the question posed to the agent by the internal friend of dialogical thinking (will you be able to live with yourself if you did this) as a question of being able to live with a killer. The non-banal evildoer, who consciously chooses to live with a killer, thereby evinces both lack of care for herself and – since a killer is someone who has killed another, that is, has injured human plurality and hence the human world – lack of love for the world. Indeed, Richard III, as presented by Arendt, also engages in internal dialogue (RJ: 186).}

Only, reflection entails the interconnection of thought and judgment to produce not simply meanings and valuations but \textit{evaluated meanings} (see sections 7.3 and 8.1). In other words, the process of reflection requires that the products of speculative thinking and reflective judging come into mutual accord and coincidence, complementing and completing each other. And this means that the reflective decision is a decision in and through which being-for-the-self and being-for-others come into coincidence and are revealed as complementary and mutually reinforcing. This, indeed, is the most fundamental difference between the ordinary and reflective modes of being-in-the-world. Ordinarily, we act as though being-for-the-self is distinct from (oftentimes in a zero-sum game with) being-for-others. But when we act reflectively we act as though being-for-others and being-for-the-self are interrelated, such that acting out of concern for others becomes a form of care for the self. This is the most fundamental sense in which the self remains the ultimate moral criterion or standard of moral conduct (RJ: 76, 101, 104).

Of course, this means that the moral choice is not only a choice between various righteous or evil courses of action. It is also a choice between ordinary and reflective being-in-the-world. On one side of this additional choice stands the acknowledgment of the human coincidence of care for the self and love of the world and its others. This is the option whereby the agent owns up to the need choose between righteousness (thereby actualizing her reflectively-disclosed being-for-self-and-others) and evildoing (that is, rebelling against this being-for-self-and-others). On the other side of this choice stands the disavowal of the human coincidence of selfhood and otherness. This is the option of acting out of being-apart-and-against-others and thereby being-\textit{ordinary}.\footnote{This is the reason that I refer to the ordinary mode of being-in-the-world as ‘self-prioritizing’ rather than ‘self-privileging’ (see chapter 2 footnote 26). Notably, though in what follows I write primary with righteous action in mind, a parallel coincidence also exists in evil courses of action, since both are presented to the will through moral reflection. The difference is that in the case of evildoing this is a coincidence between being-against-others and being-against-self (that is, self-contradiction). This is clearly evident in the fact that Arendt exemplifies the question posed to the agent by the internal friend of dialogical thinking (will you be able to live with yourself if you did this) as a question of being able to live with a killer. The non-banal evildoer, who consciously chooses to live with a killer, thereby evinces both lack of care for herself and – since a killer is someone who has killed another, that is, has injured human plurality and hence the human world – lack of love for the world. Indeed, Richard III, as presented by Arendt, also engages in internal dialogue (RJ: 186).}
This is also the option whereby the agent tries to escape the need for choosing between righteousness and evildoing altogether. In this respect, this choice is also a choice of the kind of person the agent wishes to be and act as.

Granted, the banal mode of being-in-the-world had been bracketed through moral triggering, prior to moral reflection. Indeed, without this bracketing effect the will would face no choice between being-banal and being-reflective. It is in this way that moral triggering enables (‘opens up a mental space for’) the activity of free-willing just as it did for speculative thinking and reflective judging. But this bracketing effect cannot extend into the moment of moral choice itself. If it did, then the choice between the two modes of being-in-the-world will have already been made at the moment of triggering. And this would mean that this choice was made not by the choosing faculty (the will) but by the faculty of thought, in violation of the will’s autonomy. The bracketing effect of moral triggering, in other words, is only temporary, for the purposes of moral reflection, and can only extend to the ultimate decision and action upon the will’s choice.

Thus, Arendt rejects the traditional construal of the moral choice as a dyadic choice between righteousness (identified with being-for-others) and evildoing (identified with a perversion of being-for-the-self). Rather, for Arendt, the moral choice is a triadic choice between righteousness (identified with being-for-self-and-world/others), non-banal evildoing (identified with being-against-self-and-world/others), and habitualness and banality (being-for-the-self-as-against-the-world/others). Banality and habitualness may equally result in righteousness or evildoing, as the luck of the world may have it. This is what appears to banal evildoers to exonerate them from moral responsibility under traditional conceptions of conscience and moral performance. What Arendt’s conception of moral performance reveals is the fact that being banal and habitual (and thereby ceding the determination of whether one’s acts will be righteous or evil to factors

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12 Thus, “[t]he sad truth of the matter is that most evil is done by people who never made up their minds to be either bad or good” (RJ: 180).
13 This, as well as the role of self-determinations in the choice between righteousness and evildoing, are the reason that Arendt equates being moral with human personhood (RJ: 79) and sees the kind of person one wishes to be as the standard of moral conduct (RJ: 97, 111-112). This is also the reason that there is no contradiction in Arendt’s attribution of the constitution or disclosure of personhood alternately to the faculties of thought (RJ: 95, 99-100), judgment (BPF: 223) and will (LMW: 195).
external to the agent) is in fact the product of a choice that is also part of the moral choice of the agent.  

Of course, in being-for-others, one is also being-with-others, partaking and sharing in a human world they all hold in common. Reflective moral decision-making therefore leads to an actualization of the human condition of plurality (whereas ordinary decision-making contrasts the self to others and thereby severs the agent from human plurality). Moral reflection therefore in effect reveals to the self – and thus, reintroduces into the agent’s personal context of meaning – the fact that, as a human self, it is inevitably part of this plurality. Similarly, because the reflective moral option would result in contingent action, it also leads to an actualization of the human condition of natality. Moral reflection thereby also reveals to the self, and reintroduces into one’s personal context of meaning, the fact that, as a human self, one is also a natal (and hence autonomous) being – and that so are all other human beings. In this way reflectively moral action constitutes both a sharing of one’s humanness with others and a sharing in others’ humanness.

This means that the moral choice is also a choice between being true to one’s human conditions and disavowing them. This choice is therefore also a choice between being consistent with one’s own humanness and being in contradiction with it. The reflective option thereby emerges as the option that enables the agent to be consistent with one’s own humanness, while the ordinary option is revealed to be inconsistent with the agent’s own humanness. In this respect, by choosing the reflective option over the heuristic one, the agent will have avoided the most fundamental self-contradiction possible. It is here that reflective decision-making comes full

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14 This is why, for Arendt (as for Mary McCarthy, from whom Arendt borrowed this example), when one is ordered at gunpoint to kill one’s friend one is being tempted (away from one’s humanness) but nonetheless still faces a contingent and autonomous choice (RJ: 18). In the ordinary mode of decision-making, in which self-preservation is appears an overriding personal aim, such a situation may appear to lack choice. But reflection reveals this to be a self-delusion. That the current situation is one in which it is better for the agent to override her self-preservation for the sake of other considerations and therefore die rather than live is a determination that would in most cases require reflective decision-making (it can only be made heuristically when one is following a norm or law that requires one’s death). Of course, it may be argued that to agents in the ordinary mode of being-in-the-world this apparent necessity would be so overwhelming that, realistically, agents cannot be expected or required to resist it. Arendt’s answer to this argument is factual rather than philosophical: the fact that a variety of people, who otherwise shared no common denominator, were not so overwhelmed shows that resisting this appearance of necessity is a possibility open to any and all human agents (RJ: 43–45).
circle to the question of dialogical thinking, which invoked precisely the possibility of such self-contradiction (see also RJ: 97). It is here, also, that the moral undertaking of personal responsibility for others emerges as inherent to the reflective moral choice (as we will see in chapter 10). This consistency or inconsistency of the respective modes of being-in-the-world with the agent’s own humanness is thus at the heart of the will’s choice between them, and of the undertaking of moral responsibility that comes part and parcel with this choice.

7.4

At this point, however, I believe we encounter a weakness in the Arendtian conception of moral performance. As just noted, moral reflection reveals to the will a mode of being-in-the-world at the center of which lies the coincidence and mutual complementariness of selfhood and otherness. This alternative experience of self is what distinguishes it from our ordinary mode of being-in-the-world, at the center of which lies the mutual exclusiveness and incongruity of selfhood and otherness. The will’s choice between modes of decision-making is thus the choice of which of these two competing experiences of self will henceforth guide the agent’s actions.

But in this internal contest of experiences of self, the self-prioritizing one has a decided initial head-start. As the default mode guiding most decisions, it has a proven decisional track record of serving the agent (seemingly) well in making decisions in the world. This lends its characteristic experience of self strong experiential resonance. For the reflective mode of being-in-the-world to decisionally trump the ordinary one, its alternative experience of self (as partly constituted through, and complemented by, otherness) must at least match this experiential resonance. It is therefore not enough for it to reveal the possibility, in principle or even in the specific case, of a coincidence of selfhood and otherness. It must also accompany this new realization with an experience of such congruence that can experientially indicate to the will that such congruence can, in fact, be a continuing reality for the self.
On Arendtian terms, what is supposed to imbue the reflective experience of self with such experiential resonance are the encounters with selfhood and otherness entailed in reflective thinking and judging. Thinking entails an encounter with selfhood in the form of the personal context of meaning that orients and guides speculative thinking. Moral judging then entails an encounter with otherness, both in the anticipation of general validity during moral valuation and in the dialogue of representative thinking during moral validation. As a result, moral reflection as a whole, because it entails the mutual agreement of meaning and judgment, imbues the mode of being-in-the-world it (re)discovers with such experiential resonance.

Only, the coincidence of selfhood and otherness, since it emerges only in the agreement of meaning and judgment, is not integral to either moral meaning or to moral judgment themselves. As a result, it is not experienced as an inherent fact of reflective being-in-the-world but as incidental to it. From the point of view of the self that is so used to an altogether different experience of selfhood, this new experience is therefore suspect. It just as well could be a happenstance of the specific circumstances at hand, a lucky coincidence, or a conceit of the mind stemming from its need to bring meaning and judgment into agreement. At most, it establishes reflective selfhood as an exception in the specific circumstances to the rule of ordinary selfhood, and an exception all too easy to discard in most other circumstances. But it cannot establish reflective selfhood as an alternative existential rule for the self that can successfully resist the appeal of the ordinary experience of selfhood before the will.

This concern, in my view, needs to be addressed before turning to the will and its responsibility-undertaking choice. To have sufficient experiential resonance to rival the ordinary experience of selfhood, the coincidence of selfhood and otherness must be experienced by the self as it arrives at both moral meaning and moral judgment. The Arendtian conception of moral performance therefore needs to be fortified to this effect. This is my goal in the next two chapters. Specifically, an encounter with otherness must be adjoined to the encounter with selfhood entailed in the ascertainment of moral meaning as presented by Arendt. This is the focus of chapter 8. Similarly, an encounter with selfhood must be adjoined to the encounter with otherness entailed in moral judgment as understood by Arendt. This is the focus of chapter 9. In chapter 10 I then return to the responsibility-undertaking choice of the will.
In section 7.4 I suggested that, to meet the aims Arendt set to it, her conception of moral performance requires some fortification. Specifically, I suggested that both the ascertainment of moral meaning, and the process of moral judging, need to entail encounters with both selfhood and otherness. In the present chapter I begin to follow up on this suggestion with regard to the ascertainment of moral meaning. I will do this through the work of Arne Johan Vetlesen, who proposes a conception of moral performance highlighting the moral importance of empathetic perception of the involved Other. I will present Vetlesen’s conception of moral performance in section 8.3. In section 8.4 I will show the contribution it makes to an Arendtian conception of moral performance, despite Vetlesen’s own misunderstandings of Arendt.

Of course, Arendt also saw an encounter with selfhood as entailed in moral triggering. It may thus be argued that moral triggering also requires an encounter with otherness to be adjoined to this encounter of selfhood. Indeed, such a claim is advanced by Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman, as we saw in chapter 2, largely shared Arendt’s historical understanding of the Nazi tranquilization of moral performance, which underpinned Arendt’s understanding of the moral trigger. But Bauman locates the moral trigger in the voice and call of the involved Other, and thus in an encounter with otherness. I therefore wish to first sketch Bauman’s proposed alternative conception moral performance (section 8.1), and then explain my (somewhat qualified) rejection of it (section 8.2).
Bauman locates the source of morality and moral responsibility in the involved Other. This Other appears to me in her weakness, commanding me to take responsibility for her (PE: 85, 88, 219). This call (command) to morality is nothing but an unconditional call to assume responsibility, and thus includes no promise of reciprocation, gain, relief, or even of any response at all (PE: 85-89, 112, 219). Since morality is the essence of humanness, I owe this response to any other human being who calls me out to morality simply by virtue of being a human person. This is simply the human thing to do (PE: 85, 87, 96).

As a result, it is not the self but the Other who has moral priority (PE: 85). Also as a result, moral responsibility is primordial, preceding all other human concerns, relationships, obligations, or agreements (PE: 85, 86, 112). It precedes, and thus is undetermined by, self-interest or reasoning, and as a result already exists as a determining factor of action before I even stop to ponder a decision and its correctness (PE: 85, 86, 247-248). It is actualized, in other words, in an emotive, impulsive, pre-reasoned response to the commanding voice of the Other (PE: 86). But it is always a specific response to the voice of a specific, personified, unique, uninterchangeable and irreplaceable Other. It is this involved Other whose needs and wants it is my responsibility to care for, and whom therefore my moral concern specifically targets (PE: 86, 112, 115-116, 165). Thus, contra Arendt, moral responsibility has nothing to do with ‘care for the self’ and everything to do with, and only with, ‘care for the Other’.

For Bauman, the best metaphor for the moral relationship is love, and the best metaphor for the moral act is therefore the caress (PE: 92-93). The loved one remains inaccessible, elusive, and unpossessable. And yet without the never-ceasing and always-challenging attempt to nonetheless partake in the loved one’s being, the loving relationship will perish (PE: 92-95, 101). The caress is crucial in this respect because it touches the Other and acts upon her, but without force, coercion, or possessiveness. Rather, it touches with care, takes its cue from, follows, and adapts itself to, the contours of the loved one’s body (PE: 92). By extension, the moral act must fit and

1 Bauman draws much of his conception of moral performance from a reading of Levinas which may, in fact, be questionable, but I have not the space to examine this here (I thank Dorotha Golowceka for this point). I therefore treat this conception of moral performance simply as Bauman’s own.
adapt itself to the specific Other and her needs, and must guard against coercing, possessing, or dominating the Other (PE: 87-88).

But the caress also elicits a response from the Other (even non-response is a response), though not necessarily the response it had sought (PE: 106). It is in the eliciting of responses that the bond of the relationship is created (PE: 106). Thus, I must always be conscious of the fact that my act will inevitably have consequences (beneficial or harmful, desired and undesired, anticipated and unanticipated) for the Other. As a result, my moral responsibility must extend to, and encompass, all the (intended and unintended) consequences of my action on whoever is acted upon by it (PE: 106, 217-222).

Of course, the Other’s response to my moral act (caress) engenders further action on my part and in response further actions by the Other. These successive responses accumulate as part of the moral relationship, thereby nourishing and stabilizing it, tightening the mutual attachment inherent in it (PE: 86-88, 106, 110, 180-181). And as the moral relationship develops and spreads out to include more actions and reactions by both partners, so does moral responsibility grow and deepen rather than be alleviated (PE: 106). Moral responsibility is thus the lifeblood of the moral relationship, what sustains, nourishes, and keeps it together by attaching the partners to each other (PE: 88, 100, 106, 110, 112). As a result, the moral relationship itself requires, exists in, and promotes, stability, fixedness, and long-term attachment and commitment (PE: 104-105). It is a relationship of personal intimacy and emotional interconnection, which Bauman calls proximity (PE: 86-88, 110, 113). This proximity is where morality begins and moral intentions originate, “the cradle and the home of the moral self” (PE: 87, 110).

Moreover, through the succession of responses and the proximity it creates between myself and the Other, the relationship itself becomes a unique totality onto itself. In it, the moral partners come to regard each other, and relate to each other, as unique and irreplaceable totalities (PE: 112, 114, 165, 198). This is a relationship in which only the two partners exist, and which is self-sufficient, self-nourishing, self-changing and self-creating. It sets and modifies its own standards as it goes along, and these standards are the only ones that apply to it (PE: 110-112, 198). And moral responsibility, being the lifeblood of the relationship, is also the force that sets the relationship’s contours, limitations, and unique standards for self-evaluation (PE: 110, 114).
But proximity also gives rise to the strongest impulse to escape responsibility or replace it with cruelty (PE: 88-89). The fact that the Other can thus unconditionally command me to take responsibility for her means that, while appearing to me in weakness, the Other also, and inevitably, has strength and even dominance vis-à-vis me (PE: 88). Moreover, I can only tell what the needs of the Other are, what I am to be responsible for and what specifically I should do to fulfill my responsibility, through gaining knowledge of the Other. But such knowledge is internal to me and of my constitution. It stems from my own representation, (re)shaping and (re)construction of the Other. It is therefore independent from, and always potentially overriding and dominating, the Other’s own expressed concerns, voice, and self-presentation (PE: 86, 90-91, 96).

As a result, while moral responsibility requires that the moral relationship be free of force, cruelty, possessiveness, oppression, and dominance, their danger inherently and unavoidably looms over it on both sides (self and Other) of the relationship (PE: 88-89, 92). But too much caution against this danger is in itself dangerous, as it could result in neglecting to act on my moral responsibility for the Other. “There is but a thin line between care and oppression, and the trap of unconcern awaits those who know it, and proceed cautiously as they beware of trespassing” (PE: 92). This is the inherent source of the ambivalence that, according to Bauman, is both the unavoidable existential lot and prime mover of morality (PE: 89-90, 92, 95, 110, 181-183, 185, 250).

That the moral act must exist in ambivalence does not mean the moral act is impossible, only that it is difficult and a challenge, and therefore that its attainment is an accomplishment (PE: 95, 182, 185). It is possible, however difficult, through uninterested (and without an expectation of reciprocity) but morally responsible self-limitation (PE: 96, 181, 220). But this difficulty and ambivalence cannot be ‘cured’, because its removal always carries with it the removal, through denial or devaluation, of the moral impulse. Without this difficulty, moral responsibility is tranquilized and our ability to act morally is thereby extinguished (PE: 97-98, 108-109, 181-185, 247-250). This, for Bauman, is evidenced by the experience of Nazi Germany, in which Bauman sees the complete failure of the seemingly most promising source of such a cure, namely, reason.
Under ‘reason’ Bauman includes mental processing of any form: categorizing and processing data, fitting means to ends, providing reasoned arguments and justifications, and applying and following rules (PE: 86-90, 98-104, 110-114, 146-152, 165-168, 223-226, 245-249).² It seems the most promising source for curing moral ambivalence for three reasons (PE: 89-90, 111-116, 146-150, 166, 185). First, the source of moral ambivalence is a problem of knowledge, and knowledge is a matter for reason. Second, in a plural and interrelated world the unique moral relationship cannot but be viewed, measured, and evaluated from the vantage point of the detached, distanced, objective, and reason-wielding third party. And third, reason by its nature refuses to accept that a conflict may be irresolvable through victory or compromise (PE: 89-90). The cure reason offers is the replacing of moral sentiment as a guide for moral action with a system of reason-based laws, rules, duties, habits and routines (PE: 86, 98-104).

The problem is that reason (as Bauman understands it) is, due to the nature of the reasoning activity, inimical to moral action and responsibility. Whereas the command of the Other must be heeded unquestioningly, reason conditions such a response on persuasive arguments or proofs (PE: 86, 89-90, 110, 112, 167, 247-249). Whereas moral action is primarily concerned with the consequences of actions, reasoning is primarily concerned with ends and means and sees the latter as justifying the former (PE: 223-226).³ Whereas moral action must adapt to the needs of a unique and irreplaceable Other, reasoning depersonalizes its objects by fitting them into predetermined classifications developed in abstraction from its present object (PE: 111-112, 146-152, 165-168). Whereas moral responsibility requires personal attachment, intimate proximity, individualized care, constant effort and innovation, all guided by standards specific to the relationship, reasoning favors detachment, distance, disinterestedness, routinization and standardization (PE: 89-90, 98-104, 112-114).⁴

² Obviously, this understanding of reason is very reductive. Bauman essentially ascribes to reason in general specific characteristics of disparate types of reasoning – justificatory, instrumental, inductive, deductive, abstract, causal, administrative – while treating the differences between these types of reasoning as inconsequential. He thereby collapses a host of disparate mental abilities into one capacity. This is part of what eventually fails Bauman, as I show in section 9.2.

³ “[T]he justification of the other’s pain is the beginning and the hard core of all immorality” (PE: 108).

⁴ Thus, the judging of others with whom one is not in a moral relationship is for Bauman destructive of (and not, as in Arendt, crucial to), moral responsibility.
Reasoned action, for Bauman, cannot but be infused with, and actualize, these characteristics of reason. Therefore, when reason ‘cures’ moral ambivalence by making moral action dutiful, standardized and reasoned moral action and responsibility are thereby dealt a death blow (PE: 111, 165-168, 247-248). This, precisely, was for Bauman at the root of the moral adiaphorization (rendering as of no concern) of the victims of the Nazis in the eyes of the Nazi and non-Nazi perpetrators.

But this fact cannot excuse the Germans who collaborated with the Nazis. It is precisely the responsibility of agents to visualize and personalize those affected by their action and therefore relate to them morally. As a result, the excuse of ‘I didn’t know’ or ‘I didn’t mean it’ “is not an excuse that moral responsibility at whatever level would accept” (PE: 220). And the same goes for the excuse of danger to one’s self-preservation (MH: 207). Indeed, for Bauman, as for Arendt, the fact that there were those who did act with moral care even under the Nazis attests to the fact that anyone could do it if they were simply willing to try hard enough (PE: 166 fn. 14, 183-185; MH: 207). At the end of the day, Bauman sums up, we still have our conscience to lead us when in doubt (PE: 250).

It is in this final falling back on conscience that the failure in Bauman’s analysis is indicated. The problem for the non-Nazi German collaborators, even on Bauman’s own account, was precisely

5 Making moral action dutiful and standardized is, according to Bauman, at the core of the moral and political project of modernity. As a result, modernity becomes for him primarily a systemic rationalizing attack on moral sentiment, which the Nazis merely radicalized to its logical extreme (see especially MA: 53-73; PE: 98-104, 110-129, 145-168, 217-222; LF: 99-104, 195-206, 257-265). Both moves are highly problematic, historically and theoretically, for reasons that I have not the space to elaborate here, especially since, in my view, neither move is essential to his conception of moral performance itself.

6 This adiaphorization of morality is Bauman’s label for the tranquilization of conscience which Arendt saw at the root of banal evil (see chapter 2). Bauman, of course, would object to the term ‘banal evil’, and Arendt herself would disagree with Bauman’s explanatory framework, even though their understandings of the mechanisms whereby the Nazis had affected this adiaphorization/tranquilization largely coincide.
that they did not feel in moral doubt. The primary effect of the adiaphorization of morality is to cause agents to disregard the Others’ summoning to morality altogether. It subverts not conscience’s ability to act as a moral guide but its ability to act as a moral trigger, without which conscience’s role as a moral guide is obviated.\(^7\) As a result, under adiaphorization, moral responsibility becomes excusable, even on Bauman’s own terms. When faced with the criticism that the expectation that adiaphorized moral capacity could be revived is unrealistic, Bauman can only respond that “It had \textit{better} be realistic” (PE: 240, italics in original).

This practical failure of Bauman’s analysis stems, in my view, from a deeper weakness in his account. Bauman rejects any form of reflective reasoning as morally pernicious because it distances actor and object and therefore counteracts the proximity of the moral act (PE: 89-91, 98-104, 111-116, 150-156, 218-221). The problem is that Bauman takes moral proximity and distance to be absolute opposites, different in kind, whereas they are in fact relative opposites, different in degree. This is the reason that Bauman refuses to distinguish habitualized, rule-governed, and instrumentally-oriented reasoning and decision-making (which, like Arendt, he rejects as inappropriate for moral decisions) from reflective thinking (in Arendt’s sense) and decision-making.

This, however, is problematic even on Bauman’s own terms. When answering the call of morality (as well as in subsequent actions) it is \textit{I}, not \textit{we}, who answers. Only, for there to be a distinct \textit{I} who acts morally, this \textit{I} must remain distinct, and hence at some distance, from the \textit{you} who is acted upon. Indeed, Bauman himself notes that proximity is not a “merger of identities” (PE: 87). But without some difference and distance between the two moral parties, a ‘merger of identities’ is precisely what results. Indeed, that such difference and distance is inherent to the moral act and relationship is part of the ambivalence of this relationship. As Bauman presents it, the moral act is inherently ambivalent, in essence because it is always caught between the opposing pulls of self (which pulls me away – to distance – from the Other) and Other (which pulls me towards – to proximity to – the Other and away from myself). Bauman’s moral ambivalence is thus, at its core, a result of the initial \textit{standing-apart} of selfhood and otherness.

\(^7\) Notably, conscience does not feature in Bauman’s conception of moral performance until the end of PE.
But if this is the case, then Bauman’s understanding of the basic moral act does not provide counsel on how to live with this ambivalence (as it purports to do). Rather, it falls squarely on one side of this ambivalence (namely, otherness). The root of this failure, in my view, is Bauman’s understanding of the moral self. For Bauman, “responsibility is the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity … Becoming responsible is the constitution of me as a subject” (MH: 183; italics in original). In other words, the acting self is formless until it constitutes itself through becoming responsible. But, as Paul Ricoeur correctly notes, the call to morality itself presupposes a pre-existing self with a history of past choices, actions, and relationships. Without such a self there would be no one to hear and respond to the Other’s call (OAA: 337-340, 354-355).

Bauman either neglects this need for an already existing self or seems to expect – demand – of the moral self to strip itself of its existing form and submit itself to the Other in a formless state. But a formless self is indistinguishable from other selves, and thus cannot be treated as unique and uninterchangeable. Thus, when triggering me to morality, to the extent that the Other calls me and not anyone else but me, the Other must be addressing me as a formed self. In doing so, the Other in fact is expecting and demanding that I bring some of my ‘personal baggage’ with me to the moral act. It is then up to me – through a deliberate mental act that follows being triggered – to figure out which aspects of myself are required by the Other, and determine to disregard the rest.

Moral triggering itself, however, must occur prior to this deliberate mental act. It must therefore occur in the ordinary decision-making conditions in which, for both Bauman and Arendt, the

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8 Thus, Bauman in effect asks of me, when responding to the call of the Other, to act with a love that somehow exists prior to entering the loving relationship: I must fall in love with the Other upon her call regardless not only of reciprocation but of any mutuality whatsoever. But such a unilateral response is less akin to love than to mercy, in which I the merciful take all action and initiative. And the subject I constitute myself into through such a response is one who will devour the Other through whom I have constituted myself. Bauman’s response is that “Being-for is a leap from isolation to unity; yet not towards a fusion … but to an alloy whose precious qualities depend fully on the preservation of its ingredients’ alterity and identity” (LF: 51, italics in original), which suggests the subject does exist as a subject prior to being called into being-for. But he follows this by stating that “Being-for is entered for the sake of safeguarding … the uniqueness of the Other”, which would be akin to the formation of an alloy only to the extent that the Other is simultaneously for me while I am for her, that is, precisely on the condition of mutuality Bauman seeks to reject. Bauman instead demands that I first immerse myself in the Other and then hope she responds in kind, but such a double immersion would result precisely in the fusion Bauman seeks to avoid.
self, not the Other, has priority. The challenge for the moral trigger is precisely to break through this priority of the self. But the call of the implicated Other is, in and of itself, too weak to break through this pervasive self-prioritizing. It therefore fails where Arendt’s moral trigger, by triggering a powerful self-interest within the self (see section 7.1), succeeds. Bauman can therefore offer no explanation as to how the self could pull itself out of its ordinary mode of being-in-the-world and rise to the challenge of morality. All that Bauman can do is point to the fact that people actually do it (PE: 183-185) or suggest that it must be done if we are to have any moral hope (PE: 239-240).  

Despite this failure, Bauman’s moral analysis still makes some important contributions to the deepening and fortification of an Arendtian conception of moral performance. First, his stress on the moral relationship is an important counterweight to the Arendtian focus on the singular moral act. Granted, contra Bauman, the initial and singular moral act does not always turn into an ongoing relationship. But oftentimes it does, and this makes the decisional circumstances of subsequent moral acts different from that of the original and originary act. I return to this point in sections 11.2-11.4.

Bauman’s second important contribution is his pointing to an ineradicable ambivalence that exists in the moral act. This is because such ambivalence is also, in fact, implicit in the moral act as conceived by Arendt. The Arendtian acknowledgement that selfhood and otherness are mutually complementary, in itself, does not suffice for determining how the two complement each other. Thus, even in Arendtian reflective being-in-the-world, there is still a balance to be struck, and therefore a tension, between concern-for-self-and-other and between concern-for-self-alone. Thus, for Arendt as for Bauman, the dangers of erasing one’s self and of dominating the Other are powerfully present in the moral decision, in need of ongoing negotiation in and through specific decisions. For both, this is an important component of the moral act, as a result of which being-moral (and more broadly, being-human) entails ongoing, and ineradicable, challenge and effort.  

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9 Indeed, versions of this question are raised by Bauman himself (PE: 183-185, 221-222, 239-240).
10 I pick up on this theme briefly in section 11.4 and more directly in section 13.3.
Bauman’s third important contribution to an Arendtian conception of moral performance is his reminder that the moral act targets and affects specific (implicated) Others. Arendt, of course, insisted that in the moral decision the situation, and therefore those implicated in it, are to be considered in their particularity. But once the agent has been triggered to moral reflection, Arendtian thinking turns to the self, and Arendtian judging turns to uninvolved others, with the particular situation and the implicated Others present in the mind only as represented data. A direct encounter with the implicated Other, whose concerns and needs, Bauman reminds us, have special weight in the moral decision, is thus implicitly excluded by Arendt from the carrying out of moral reflection.\(^{11}\) It is at this point that, in my view, Arne Johan Vetlesen comes to our aid.

8.3

For Vetlesen a moral situation is a situation in which the ‘weal and woe’ of another is implicated (PEJ: 153-154). One’s woe “has to do with their suffering” (PEJ: 6). One’s weal “has to do with the degree to which they are treated with a sense of justice and with trust and the degree to which their dignity and autonomy as persons is respected” (ibid).\(^{12}\) The fact that the weal and woe of others is implicated in a given situation is part of the human relevance or ‘import’ of that situation (PEJ: 166, 169).\(^{13}\) Such import, of course, is always recognized by a subject, so that “the fact that the situation bears this import for me reveals ... [that I am a] being on whom a moral obligation can be laid” (PEJ, 168). It reveals, in other words, my humanness. “Only human subjects are capable of initiating action in its emphatic sense, and they alone can be held

\(^{11}\) Even in the Arendtian moral trigger, which is an amplification of the voice of the involved Other (see section 7.1), the self encounters the Other only indirectly. Of course, Bauman’s failure to establish the direct encounter with the involved Other as the moral trigger does not mean such an encounter cannot have a place elsewhere in the moral decision – which indeed it has, as we will see in section 8.4.

\(^{12}\) Vetlesen takes this idea of the moral salience of ‘the weal and woe’ of others from Lawrence Blum.

\(^{13}\) Vetlesen draws the term ‘import’ from Charles Taylor.
responsible for the consequences that ensue from action. Only humans act morally – or fail to do so” (PEJ, 169).

Moral performance requires first that the agent recognize the moral import of the situation, that is, the fact that someone else’s weal or woe is implicated in it. It then requires that the agent adjudge what to do about it. Finally, it requires that the agent act on this judgment (PEJ: 103-104, 163). Vetlesen, however, does not really discuss this third stage. Moreover, Vetlesen understands the second stage (moral judging) to be carried out through Arendtian representative thinking, for Vetlesen “the basic cognitive faculty required for the exercise of moral judgment” (PEJ: 105; italics in original). He thus sees himself as agreeing with Arendt on all but the first stage of moral performance, which she had assigned to the activity of thinking. This stage – the stage of moral recognition – therefore becomes Vetlesen’s primary focus.

Recognizing moral import, according to Vetlesen, requires the activity of perception. Perception is “the capability of recognizing and identifying the object or phenomenon about which judgment is subsequently to be passed … as belonging to a specific class of phenomena,

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14 Vetlesen thus in effect assumes moral action will directly follow from moral judgment. Only, without this final choice the ascription of moral responsibility to the agent, and with it the interconnectedness between ‘being moral’ and ‘being human’, on which Vetlesen, insists (PEJ: 169), are lost.

15 It is important to remember that Vetlesen uses the term ‘cognitive’ differently from Arendt. Vetlesen understands ‘cognitive’ in juxtaposition with ‘emotive’, such that all non-emotive mental activities, faculties, and powers are in his sense ‘cognitive’. He therefore considers Arendt, as we will see below, to have a ‘cognitivistic bias’ (that is, an anti-emotive bias). Arendt understands cognition strictly as the non-reflective thinking activity (see section 6.1). As a result, knowledge-seeking and proof-giving are considered ‘cognitive’ by Arendt, for which reason she is sometimes accused of an anti-cognitivist bias. Notably, the reflective mental activities and the mental powers of the imagination and of representative thinking are ‘non-cognitive’ in Arendt’s sense, but ‘cognitive’ in Vetlesen’s sense. To avoid encumbering my discussion of Vetlesen with repeated terminological caveats, I will adopt his usage for the purposes of the present section, which relies heavily on direct quotes from PEJ. In section 8.4, however, I will for the most part use the term ‘non-emotive’ instead.

16 Vetlesen here collapses moral triggering (recognition) and the ascertainment of moral meaning (import). This has damaging consequences for his argument, as we will see in the next section.

17 Notably, in the English language, the term ‘perception’ has two senses, sensory and emotive. ‘Perception’ can be understood as “an awareness of one’s surroundings” (Perception, 2004), in which sense a person is perceptive if they are “observant or discerning” (Perceptive, 2004). Such perception is sensory. ‘Perception’ can also be understood as “intuitive discernment; insight or understanding” (Perception, 2004), in which sense a perceptive person is “characterized by sympathetic understanding or insight” (Perceptive, 2004). Such perception is emotive. As we will presently see, Vetlesen introduces perception in the first sense, but proceeds to understand it in the second sense. I propose a way of smoothing this leap by Vetlesen in the next footnote.
for example, as being a moral phenomenon as opposed to a physical one” (PEJ: 104). In moral
performance perception is “the ability to ‘see’ whether and to what extent the weal and woe of
others is at stake in a situation” (PEJ: 153) and to “identify some features in a particular situation
as carrying moral significance” (PEJ: 164, italics in original). It is, in other words, the ability
recognize the import of the situation. Through perception we come to see that the other is either
‘gaining in weal’ or suffering (‘gaining in woe’) as a result of something that happens, or would
happen, to them (PEJ: 158). This is why, according to Vetlesen, perception makes one a moral
subject (PEJ: 154).

Unlike Arendtian thinking, however, perception entails both cognitive and emotive ‘seeing’
(PEJ: 158). Emotions enable us to access the domain of human experience (PEJ: 154), because
emotions make us “aware of the peculiarly human reality or, more broadly, the human relevance
of a specific situation. Emotions make us attentive to the issue of how the other perceives the
situation” (PEJ: 166). Emotions, therefore, play a crucial part in recognizing a situation as
‘addressing’ us as moral, that is, human, beings (PEJ: 169). “[F]eelings, by virtue of attributing
imports, open us to the domain of what it is to be human, of what matters to us qua subjects”
(PEJ: 173).

This function of our emotions is an active one, even though emotions are reactions to external
stimuli (PEJ: 154). For Vetlesen emotions are not something that we passively ‘suffer’ but, like
cognition, something that we actively ‘do’ (PEJ: 153, 169). Emotions are “eminently active
insofar as [they involve] ascribing an import in a situation” (PEJ: 173; see also PEJ: 162, 167).
Indeed, we can choose whether to act upon our emotions or dissociate ourselves from them (for
example, after consulting our cognitive capacities), a choice for which we are responsible (PEJ:

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18 By referring to perception as a ‘capability’, Vetlesen warrants applying the generic term ‘perception’ not to the
mental activity but to the mental faculty that carries it out. This move smooths his leap from sensory perception to
empathetic perception, because it allows us to recognize these two senses of ‘perception’ as in fact denoting two
different mental activities – ‘sensory perception’ and ‘empathetic perception’ – carried out by the faculty of
perception. Granted, Vetlesen also refers to perception as an ‘ability’ (PEJ: 153), but the fact that he sees perception
as employing empathy in its activity suggests that in fact perception is the faculty and empathy is the mental ability
(power). In the present chapter I will therefore treat empathy as a mental power and perception as a faculty, and will
use the label ‘empathetic perception’ to denote the mental activity Vetlesen sees as required for moral performance.
I thank Ronald Beiner for pointing out Vetlesen’s move away from the sensory understanding of perception and for
suggesting the label ‘empathetic perception’ to me.
Thus, emotions are still part of (rather than external to) our genuine moral self (PEJ: 155), and as such are indispensable for perception and hence for moral performance (PEJ: 154).

However, emotions do not replace the need for judgment in moral performance as Vetlesen conceives it but rather pave the way for it. Emotions offer “a first, intuitive grasp of a situation, one awaiting verbal articulation, one calling for further reflection, pondering, evaluation, and – if vehement – for self-control” (PEJ: 175). Emotions give us our initial, intuitive, orientation in the moral situation, which our cognitive powers (namely, judgment) then “try to elaborate, question, modify, deepen” (ibid). From this ensues a back-and-forth exchange between our emotive and cognitive capacities through which both “join company and assist each other in” leading the agent to moral action (PEJ: 175-176). Thus, emotions give us “the first access to and grasp of another person’s emotional experience” on which “the full-blown cognitive and more detached evaluation and assessment of the other’s emotional experiences rests” (PEJ: 205). Both emotions and cognition are thus necessary and, on their own, insufficient for moral perception.19

Because it partially requires emotions, moral perception cannot be disinterested. To ‘see’ (recognize) the suffering (or weal) of the other person as suffering (or weal), I must take an interest in that person – that person must have import for me (PEJ: 159; 160). Furthermore, “emotions link our perception of the situation to that of the other involved in it” (PEJ: 166).

Vetlesen’s explication of the roles of emotion and cognition thus casts perception as a purely emotive activity and judgment as a purely cognitive activity. This, however, runs counter to Vetlesen’s insistence at several points in his analysis, and particularly in the diagram which presents his model of moral performance (PEJ: 163), that both perception and judgment require both cognition and emotion (see also PEJ: 103-104; 266-267). The way Vetlesen attempts to reconcile this is by claiming that both feelings and judgment presuppose and therefore entail a prior judgment or feeling respectively. Thus he says that “[a] feeling entails a judgment about how we hold things to be, because it incorporates a certain articulation of our situation”, initial and intuitive (and therefore amenable to refinement or revision) as this articulation may be (PEJ: 171). Moral judgment, for him, is grounded in, and thus requires, an emotive capacity precisely because “the exercise of judgment presupposes and is made possible by our ‘having’ (or, better, having the ability to have) certain emotions” (PEJ: 157). As a result, for Vetlesen “a piece of emotion … is also a piece of cognition, and vice versa” (PEJ: 175). The problem with this is that in both cases the prior judgment or feeling occurs before rather than as part of the activity of perception or judging, respectively. In other words, the articulation of the situation presupposed by perception is arrived at prior to the act of perceiving. Similarly, the access to the experiential domain of the Other that judgment requires is provided by our emotions prior to the act of judging. When a back-and-forth between the two commences, this division of labor between access (through emotions) and articulation (through cognition/judgment) persists, so that as far as the activity itself is concerned, under Vetlesen’s logic, perception remains purely emotive while judging remains purely cognitive, and it is the back-and-forth between them turns moral performance as a whole into a combination of emotive and cognitive activities.

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These two facts mean that to perceive “is already to have established an emotional bond between myself and the person I ‘see’ suffering” (PEJ: 174; italics in original). This emotional bond, created through perception, constitutes the perceiver and the perceived as co-subjects in the situation (PEJ: 179). This emotional bond, therefore, is not morally neutral but has intrinsic moral significance for the co-subjects (ibid).

Thus, when an agent witnesses a situation of suffering, an emotional bond is established between her and the sufferer solely by virtue of her perceiving the situation as one of suffering. As a result, in choosing to adopt a ‘none of my business’ attitude and turn away from the situation, the agent is suspending this emotional bond, thereby disavowing both the sufferer’s “very humanity” and her own (PEJ: 179; see also PEJ: 91). This double dehumanization – and not any cognitive failure, such as what Vetlesen understands Arendt to mean by ‘thoughtlessness’ – was, for Vetlesen, the moral failure exhibited by Eichmann and symptomatic of non-Nazi Germans under Nazi rule (PEJ: 180).  

However, as Vetlesen is fully aware, not all emotions are morally benign. The Other may indeed elicit such emotions as love or compassion, which bring one closer to the Other’s domain of human experience. But by the same token the Other may also elicit feelings such as hatred, which cause one to block off the Other as a morally relevant co-subject. Moreover, even a ‘benign’ emotion such as love may sometimes lead to moral failure. As a result, for Vetlesen, it would be a mistake to speak of ‘feelings in general’ as a prerequisite for successful moral

20 Vetlesen supports this factual assertion with an account of Nazi actions very similar to the one I developed and presented in chapter 2 (PEJ: 180-193), though he draws not only on Bauman, Arendt and Hilberg but also on Robert Jay Lifton and Berel Lang.

21 Vetlesen provides a lengthy analysis of hatred and its moral consequences (PEJ: 222-279), which I have not the space to enter here. I wish, however, to highlight its two main assertions, which I find persuasively argued by Vetlesen. First, hatred, as a psychological drive for action – a drive that leads us to immorality – matters most in face-to-face encounters, where it serves to counteract and thus undo the moral demands of the specific Other. However, in large-scale immorality hatred, like all other emotions, is marginalized as a drive for action through the impact, especially, of the bureaucratization and technologization of action (PEJ: 272-276). Second, hatred does not stem from the faculty of empathy but rather has its origin in, and is thus indicative of, a lack of empathy or a deficiently established or developed faculty of empathy (so that the fact of hatred does not run counter to Vetlesen’s argument for empathy as a precondition for successful moral performance; PEJ: 221-222). For Vetlesen it is indifference, rather than hatred, that is “the prime threat to the exercise of the faculty of empathy” (PEJ: 211; my italics).
performance (PEJ: 123-124; 218; 220). Rather, what is required for perception and thus for successful moral performance is the capacity to emotively connect with an Other and access the Other’s domain of human experience. This, according to Vetlesen, is the role of the human faculty of empathy.22

Empathy for Vetlesen “is people’s basic emotional faculty” (PEJ: 105, 119). It enables taking “an emotional interest in the human ‘import’ of the situation in which the persons affected by [one’s] actions found themselves” (PEJ: 105). It is a feeling-with through which the agent endeavors to recognize the Other as an Other meriting recognition and not merely a thing (PEJ: 118; 201). But it is a feeling-with that comes without abandoning oneself and one’s own standpoint and without abolishing, suspending, or absolutizing “the space between myself as one and the other as other” (PEJ: 118-119).

In other words, through empathy I take “an interest in how my cosubject experiences his or her situation”, without sharing in this experience myself (PEJ: 204-205). Empathy thus entails confronting my own particularity with the particularity of the Other (PEJ: 119). Thereby, empathy recognizes the distinctness of the two persons involved as something to be maintained (PEJ: 204). It therefore “establishes a reciprocal relation … as opposed to the one-way relation of elementary identification” between agent and object (PEJ: 201; italics in original). Empathy, in other words, entails both a moment of sameness – sharing the same access to an experience – and a moment of difference – your experience is yours and not mine so that we remain separate human beings (PEJ: 207).

It is thus that empathy enables me to recognize the Other as another self whose weal and woe (and the effects my actions have on whose weal and woe) are of moral consequence to me. A capacity for empathy is thus a necessary precondition for successful moral perception. However, for Vetlesen, the mere possession of a faculty of empathy, something that all human beings possess, is not sufficient for success in moral perception. Rather, the exercise of empathy in the

22 Of course, as already noted in footnote 18 above, I believe empathy is more properly understood, on Vetlesen’s own logic, as a mental ability (power) rather than a mental faculty. This is because, as we will presently see, Vetlesen sees empathy as employed by perception in the recognition of human import.
activity of perception must be learnt by the individual. It can be learnt through observing the way others in society, particularly significant others, empathize and perceive (PEJ: 194). But it is best learnt through experiencing, early in life, the exercise of empathy towards the individual (and experiencing the results of its reciprocation by the individual), especially from such significant others (PEJ: 259-267). As a result, “[f]ar from arising de novo, as if within a social vacuum, perception is taught to individuals, in a sense even imposed on them by society” (ibid).

Of course, any society, by its nature as a society, draws a boundary between morally appropriate and inappropriate objects (PEJ: 193). This boundary, which the agent experiences as predetermined, thereby potentially fixes the manner in which the other is disclosed. It therefore blocks one’s experience of the other rather than opening one up to the other, thereby potentially blocking the exercise of one’s faculty of empathy (PEJ: 194-195). Thus, empathy “is exceedingly vulnerable to societal manipulation … in ways that disallow the other to be disclosed as anything else than an abstract target, not a human face to which I can relate myself in my human and emotional being” (PEJ: 195, italics in original). As a result, if “I should pick an object that society all around me unanimously deems to be a ‘wrong’ object, my resisting such pressure or succumbing to it is a question decided by, say, my independence as a person, my preparedness to stand up for what I – but perhaps no one else around me – believe is right” (ibid).

8.4

For Vetlesen, then, empathy – the ability to feel with an Other – is necessary for successfully perceiving the Other as a moral co-subject and therefore necessary for successful moral performance. A conception of moral performance that fails to recognize this is therefore deficient. This is precisely what Vetlesen faults in Arendt’s conception of moral performance and its resultant critical analysis of Eichmann and of other non-Nazi Germans. Unfortunately, Vetlesen is grossly inattentive to many of Arendt’s conceptual analytical moves, and therefore misconceives her conception of moral performance.
Thus, Vetlesen collapses moral triggering (recognition) and the ascertainment of moral meaning (import) into one activity, carried out entirely by dialogical thinking. He also understands Arendtian moral judging entirely in terms of representative thinking, and therefore sees Arendtian moral reflection as no more than the combination of dialogical thinking and representative thinking. He also fails to see the difference between reflective and non-reflective (‘cognitive’ in Arendt’s sense) mental activities, thereby identifying reflective detachment with ‘cognitivism’. This leads him to understand both dialogical thinking and representative thinking as ‘cognitive’ mental activities, and Arendtian moral reflection as therefore entirely cognitive (non-emotive). He therefore proposes to remedy Arendt’s supposed failings by replacing thinking with empathetic perception as the activity that recognizes moral import prior to (reflective) moral judging.

Only, empathetic perception is a reaction (albeit an active one) to an identified Other’s cry for help. As with Bauman (see section 8.2), then, the other-regarding emotions it engenders are too weak and suspect to move a self-privileging self to abandon habitual decision-making without amplification through self-interest. Moreover, empathetic perception does not determine moral relevance and relies instead on predeterminations of such relevance (see section 8.3). Empathetic perception is therefore incapable either of alerting agents to potential moral dubiousness in such societal predeterminations, or of bracketing such predeterminations once the agent has been triggered to morality.

As a result, empathetic perception is ill-equipped for the task of moral triggering agents already in a decisional environment of morally false or perverse meanings (as was the case in Nazi Germany according to Vetlesen; see PEJ: 110-112, 180-183). Without moral triggering prior to

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23 This is the reason that Vetlesen faults Arendt for having what he call a ‘cognitivistic bias’.

24 In Vetlesen’s defense, it took Arendt until LM to fully distinguish between dialogic thinking, speculative thinking, and representative thinking, which were all still somewhat conflated in EJ (see chapter 4 footnote 24, as well as chapter 5 footnote 18 and the text adjoining it). Indeed, ‘thoughtlessness’ as used in EJ still conflates failure in triggering (dialogic thinking), in meaning-ascertainment (speculative thinking), and in judging (representative thinking), as I note in chapter 1 footnote 4 and the text adjoining it.

25 Indeed, Vetlesen acknowledges as much when noting that “the significance accorded to the difference that is claimed to exist between the Aryans and the Jews”, by virtue of which Jews were defined as having no moral or
moral perception, such agents would therefore fail to realize not only the need for moral judgment but also the need for empathetic moral perception. Their primary failure will thus be not a failure of perception (Vetlesen’s diagnosis of Eichmann) but a failure of triggering (Arendt’s actual diagnosis of Eichmann).  

Vetlesen’s failures should not obscure the validity of his basic charge against Arendt. Even if properly construed, Arendtian moral reflection still consists entirely of non-emotive mental activities that require reflective detachment from the situation and those involved in it. It thereby avoids the encounter with particularity that for Arendt herself, moral performance is supposed to secure (PEJ: 114). Indeed, part of Eichmann’s failure, as Vetlesen correctly notes, was his failure to identify with his victims as individuals and thus meet them as a particular meeting a particular (PEJ: 114).  

Only, without such an encounter and the emotional bond with the involved Other that it creates, the agent will not have the access to the Other required for perceiving the import of the situation for her. If Vetlesen is correct to suggest that perceiving this import is required for successful moral decision-making, then without an empathetic encounter with the particular Other, Arendtian moral performance is in danger of failure. Of course, as we have just seen, empathetic perception is an ineffective substitute for Arendtian dialogic and critical thinking. But this does

human status, is “beyond empathy” (PEJ: 188). Only after the societal predetermination of moral relevance has been bracketed does “my independence as a person, my preparedness to stand up for what I – but perhaps no one else around me – believe is right” emerge so as to determine “my resisting [societal] pressure [to conform to its boundaries of moral appropriateness] or succumbing to it” – Vetlesen’s only counteragent to the problem of this societal predetermination (PEJ: 195).  

Indeed, Eichmann himself was not blind to the fact of the suffering of his victims (see especially EJ: 87-92). What he was blind to is the fact that this suffering, and his feelings about it, morally matter.  

Vetlesen makes this point, specifically with regard to representative thinking.  

It may be countered that, in pointing to Eichmann’s inability to ‘think from the standpoints of others’ (EJ: 49), Arendt was also pointing to a failure to identify with his victims on Eichman’s part. But on Arendtian terms, of course, the failure to ‘think from the standpoints of others’ is a failure of representative thinking, that is, a failure to encounter detached others rather than the particularized and involved victims.
not mean that it cannot *join* and complement Arendtian thinking, specifically, in the task of ascertaining moral meaning.

Vetlesen does not explicitly refer to empathetic perception as a meaning-questing activity. But this is evident from the mental task of recognizing that a particular situation requires moral judgment that he assigns it. To carry this task out successfully I must first recognize that I am witnessing a human being. I must then recognize that she is a *fellow* human being. Then, I must recognize that her weal or woe is implicated in the situation she now finds herself in and which I am witnessing. Following that I must recognize that my action (or inaction) in the situation would affect this situation and would therefore affect her weal or woe. Finally, I must recognize that because I am witnessing a *fellow* human being in a situation in which her weal or woe is affected, my own humanness as well as hers would be affected by my reaction (action or inaction) to this situation.

In other words, after making the prosaic factual observation that the object in front of me is a human being, perception entails, first, my recognizing the *meaning* of this fact (that is, my recognizing the other *as other*). It then entails my recognizing the *meaning* of the situation for her. It further entails my recognizing the *meaning* of my possible courses of action for the situation and hence for her. And finally it entails my recognizing the *meaning* of these choices, and thus of the situation I am witnessing and finally (and ultimately) of the person I am observing, *for me*. Thus, on Vetlesen’s own terms, to recognize that a situation requires moral judging is in fact to ascertain moral meaning.29

It could be countered that empathetic perception, because it requires prior triggering, is also exercised in detachment and abstraction. This criticism, however, misses the mark. Moral triggering detaches the moral object, the situation, and the would-be moral agent, *as a unit*, from whatever prior contexts of meaning they might be embedded in, and thus predetermined by. In

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29 Only if perception is understood as a meaning-ascertaining and meaning-conferring activity can the perceiving agent indeed be seen, as Vetlesen claims contra Lawrence Blum, as constituting the moral object through their emotive mental activity rather than merely emotively reacting to the object (PEJ: 162). Arendtian moral triggering, of course, merely entails the recognition that *something may* be morally amiss in a situation one is encountering. Any further specification beyond this is left to moral reflection.
Arendtian speculative thinking, on the other hand, this unit is split in that the agent is separated from object and situation. It is this separation of agent from object and situation that Vetlesen’s empathetic perception is to bridge.

But is Vetlesen correct to suggest that import (that is, meaning-for-the-other) is a necessary component of moral meaning? I believe he is. The weal and woe of a person differ from person to person. The forceful shaving of one’s beard, for example, may cut to the core of their sense of self because growing a beard has a deep personal meaning for them (a religious edict, a personal pledge, etc.). But this is not necessarily the case for all bearded persons. Similarly, the coerciveness of the situation, the identity of the agents who are attempting to cut one’s beard, or the message (if at all) they thereby wish to convey, may all have differing effects different person’s weal or woe. But these meanings-for-the-Other are, of course, an important part of the overall moral meaning of the situation. Therefore, if I am faced with a forceful beard-cutting situation, ascertaining such meanings-for-the-other is important for my ascertainment of overall moral meaning.

The problem is that in relying solely on speculative thinking for ascertaining moral meaning I am bound to take as my guidepost what, say, my beard or the coerciveness of beard-cutting, means for me. The terms of this determination can be specific (if my beard was involuntarily cut would I see this as morally requiring intervention by an Other?) or general (do I hold involuntary beard-cutting to be something that, in general, morally requires intervention, for example because of its coerciveness?). In the first case, I would thereby cast the Other in my own image. In the second, I would cast the Other in the abstract image of ‘any person’. Either way, I would risk collapsing the particularity and uniqueness of the Other, de-personalizing and thereby de-humanizing her.

It is the danger of such (inadvertent and well-meaning as it may be) dehumanization that is counteracted by employing empathy in the activity of empathetic perception. Most basically, empathetic perception alerts me to the Other’s suffering (or gaining in weal). But more importantly, by opening me up to the Other’s sphere of experience, empathetic perception enables me to create the proper analogy between myself and the Other. For example, it would enable me to realize that the Other’s beard is meaningful to the Other as a symbol of mourning, similar to, say, a locket given to me by a now-dead friend.
Of course, the meaning of the situation for the Other is itself filtered through the Other’s personal meanings (perspective). It may be that the persons who are forcefully cutting someone’s beard are doing this so as to fit the bearded person’s face into a life-saving air mask, while the bearded person is unaware of this. Empathetic perception alone would merely carry over this misinformation into my moral meaning, even if I am aware of (or could ascertain) the error. Or the bearded person may, at that point in time, prefer to die rather than have the beard cut. Empathetic perception alone would simply force this personal preference upon my moral meaning. And where several involved Others have conflicting subjective moral meanings, empathetic perception can only reveal the conflict, leaving the agent to ascertain moral meaning by other mental means.

Only, as Arendt would (correctly) remind us, it is ultimately the agent (that is, the deciding self) who must decide, act, and live with (and be responsible for) that act. This unavoidable fact, rather than any non-emotive bias, is the reason that it is the meaning of the situation for me that must be ascertained as part of moral performance. Meaning-for-the-involved-Others is an important part of this meaning-for-me, but not the whole of it. Therefore, once the agent has armed herself through empathetic perception with meaning-for-the-involved-Others, she must turn back to speculative thinking to determine the moral meaning of prospective actions in the given situation for the agent herself. This is why personal meaning, and in particular the agent’s own determination of the kind of person she wishes to be, is the ultimate guidepost for the ascertaining of moral meaning.

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30 Bauman and Vetlesen seem to think of moral situations as situations in which one person is affected by others and in need of help, and thus privilege (Bauman more explicitly than Vetlesen) the encounter with that affected Other in their conceptions of moral performance. But of course, if the agent is ascertaining moral meanings having had her moral predeterminations bracketed, she cannot accord such prior privilege to any of the participants in the situation and must consider meaning for each of them.

31 Vetlesen implicitly concedes as much when he suggests that change in moral conduct – for example, from a racist to a non-racist stance – requires a prior change in how I understand myself (PEJ: 160-161). Indeed, it is no surprise that Vetlesen follows his discussion of such change with his discussion of Taylor’s notion of ‘human import’, since it is through this latter discussion that Vetlesen introduces the notion of the interconnectedness between being moral and being human (PEJ: 169). It is for this reason that for Vetlesen the encounter with the moral situation and with the Others implicated in it forces me to also recognize myself as a moral self and to draw out the implications of that recognition.
It may be objected, with Vetlesen, that Arendt herself rejected empathy as having a role in moral performance (PEJ: 118). However, both of Arendt’s rejections of empathy were made in the context of representative thinking and therefore of moral judging, not the ascertainment of moral meaning (BPF: 241; LK: 43). Moreover, what Arendt and Vetlesen mean by ‘empathy’ is not the same. Arendt understood empathy as trying “to be or feel like somebody else” (BPF: 241). Its risk is that of losing one’s “firm grasp of where one’s own boundaries lie and where those of others begin” (Benhabib, 2000a: 191; see also PEJ: 118). In empathetic perception, by contrast, I take “an interest in how my cosubject experiences his or her situation”, without sharing in this experience myself (PEJ: 204-205)\textsuperscript{32}, and therefore without abandoning myself (PEJ: 118-119).\textsuperscript{33}

But this detour of the deciding self to the involved Other and then back also has an important experiential effect on the agent. Thanks to this detour, the path to personal moral meaning entails passing through meaning for the Other. As a result, the Other is now recognized as a similarly meaning-questing-and-generating self – and hence, as also a fundamentally human self. The hitherto external and object-like other is now reconfigured as a fellow human being, an identified ‘you’ who is in most respects distinct from me, but in her most fundamental respect just like me. In turn, the recognition of the Other as a unique Other entails the recognition both of what the Other shares with other human beings and of what distinguishes her from other human beings.\textsuperscript{34}

This realization, in turn, is also turned onto the self. The self must now also be recognized and experienced as, simultaneously similar to and distinguished from other human persons. And it must also be recognized and experienced as recognizable and hence identifiable in this duality by

\textsuperscript{32} As Hansen has noted (albeit with regard to representative thinking), “[t]o adopt the standpoint of another without attempting to replicate what is in that person’s mind is to take the place of another without taking it over. It is to let others ‘be’, while reaffirming that we all ‘be’ together; it involves a certain sort of ‘receptivity’ to others” (1993: 211).

\textsuperscript{33} Indeed, Arendt may have in fact hinted at the possibility that emotional attachment have a role in ascertaining moral meaning. Note, in this respect, her comment (regarding Eichmann’s lawyer’s insistence on referring to killing as a ‘medical matter’) that objectivity (understood as emotional detachment) is no guarantee of moral understanding or evaluation (EJ: 69). Moreover, in juxtaposing the activity of empathetic perception to that of sensory perception (this distinction was proposed in footnotes 17 and 18 above), we realize that whereas sensory perception is reactive and instinctive and therefore unreflective, empathetic perception is proactive and therefore non-heuristic and thus quasi-reflective.

\textsuperscript{34} This latter recognition is the recognition of “the uniqueness of the project which constitutes the individual and makes him or her distinguishable from the backcloth of their culture” (Ferrara, 1998: 17).
other fellow human beings. It is this final realization, constituting a new self-recognition, which provides the deciding self with a powerful experience of the coincidence of selfhood and otherness.

But this realization is still suspect because it is unclear that it extends beyond this particular interaction and Other. Granted, for the self, the now identified ‘you’ was merely an unidentified ‘anyone’ but a short time ago. The reflective realization of this fact suggests that the coincidence between selfhood and otherness could potentially be extended from the identified ‘you’ to the unidentified ‘anyone’. But without an experiential complement it remains no more than a possibility. The realization of the coincidence of selfhood and otherness therefore needs to be augmented by an experience of such coincidence in a ‘me-anyone’ encounter. This is provided through moral judging.

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35 Thus, there is no contradiction between the fact that human identity is a personal project in that it entails acquiring “a firm grasp of where one’s own boundaries lie and where those of others begin” (Benhabib, 2000a: 191), and the fact that human identity is inherently intersubjective in that it is “always bound up with the [sic] mutual recognition on the part of other identities” (Ferrara, 2008: 90).
Chapter 9
Judging and Selfhood

In the previous chapter we saw that the ascertainment of moral meaning required the deciding self to bring together personal meaning (accessed through speculative thinking) and meaning-for-the-Other (accessed through empathetic perception). Through this the involved Other was recognized as both individually unique and similarly human, thereby reconfiguring her from an object-like Other into an identified ‘you’. Concomitantly, the deciding self also recognized itself as both unique and (like others) human and therefore as a potential ‘you’ for others. This double recognition provided the self with a powerful experience of the coincidence and mutual complementariness of selfhood and otherness.

But this experience is still specific to the encounter with the particular involved Other and the resulting ‘me-you’ relationship. It is not yet present to the self as a general existential reality. For it be generalized, this experience needs to be replicated in an encounter with unidentified others as part of the ‘me-anyone’ relationship. And this relationship, on Arendtian terms, is entered into in moral judging. In the present chapter I turn to showing that such an experience does indeed on the level of the ‘me-anyone’ relationship as part of moral judging. I will do so with the aid of the understanding of moral reflection propounded by Paul Ricoeur as part of Oneself As Another.¹

I begin with a brief outline of Ricoeur’s three-step understanding of moral reflection (section 9.1). I then present the first of these steps (section 9.2) and discuss its similarities and differences vis-à-vis Arendtian moral meaning-ascertainment and valuation (section 9.3). I then present

¹ For reasons that will become clear in section 9.1 Ricoeur uses the label ‘ethicomoral judgment’ to describe the focus of his moral analysis. But as I will show in section 9.3 Ricoeur sees the making of the ethicomoral judgment as entailing what I have elsewhere been referring to as ‘moral reflection’ (the ascertainment of moral meaning, moral valuation, and moral validation). In the present chapter I will retain Ricoeur’s language when speaking for Ricoeur, but will otherwise revert back to the language employed in the rest of this thesis (with reminders of Ricoeur’s language in brackets).
Ricoeur’s understanding of moral validation as universalization (his second step of moral reflection; section 9.4) and defend Arendt’s requirement of intersubjective and general moral validity against it (section 9.5). In section 9.6 I present Ricoeur’s third step of moral reflection, namely application to the concrete situation through practical wisdom, which has no equivalent in Arendt. In section 9.7 I show why the addition of moral application and especially of practical wisdom to the Arendtian account of moral performance is warranted.

9.1

Ricoeur presents his conception of moral performance as part of a broader investigation of the human self. This investigation understands the self as a multifaceted phenomenon accorded unity through the (itself multifaceted) fact that the human self is an acting self (OAA: 19-21). The self emerges from this investigation as constituted both reflexively (through self-referencing and self-interpretation) and dialogically (through a fundamental interconnectedness with otherness). In arriving at this understanding of the self Ricoeur detours to trace how the self is conceived in analytical philosophy (which deals with persons as speaking and acting agents), hermeneutics (which deals with persons as self-narrating and self-interpreting agents), and moral philosophy (which deals with persons as agents concerned with normative considerations). It is the third detour, in which Ricoeur develops his understanding of moral performance, which concerns me here.

For Ricoeur, a fully realized moral (or as he calls it, ethicomoral) judgment must go through three “stages of ethical life” (OAA: 248), that is, be determined as ‘good’, ‘just’, and ‘wise’ (OAA: 292; J: xiv). ‘Good’ action finds the agent operating on a level Ricoeur labels ‘ethical’, in which action is guided by an ethical aim (OAA: 169-202; J: xv). ‘Just’ action finds the agent operating on a level Ricoeur labels ‘moral’, in which action is guided by moral laws and the duties and obligations derived from them (OAA: 203-239). ‘Wise’ action then finds the agent operating at the practical and contextual level, in which moral law and ethical aim must both be applied in a particular and contextualized situation. Here action is guided by both moral law and
ethical aim, and in cases of conflict between them by practical wisdom, which arbitrates between them (OAA: 240-296). This use of practical wisdom is what makes the now-fully-realized ‘ethicomoral’ judgment and resulting action ‘wise’ on top of being ‘good’ and ‘just’.2

Thus, for Ricoeur, the ethicomoral judgment begins as subjectively determined, but needs to be objectivized and then concretized in order to be fully realized (OAA: 294). Notably, neither objectivization nor concretization replace the determinations preceding them. Rather, objectivization adds an objective dimension to the decision’s ever-present subjective dimension. The concretization which then follows mediates these two dimensions (which both purport to apply generally to all situations) within the contours of a given situation. The result is an almost complete conceptual transformation of the ethicomoral decision. In subjectivity, the decision is specific to the agent but generally applicable to all situations. Fully realized, it captures and actualizes the balance between agent-specificity and general validity that is proper to the given decision-situation.

It would however be a mistake to see the ethical-subjective level as self-prioritizing and the moral-objective level as other-orientated. Rather, selfhood, otherness, and their mediation all form, for Ricoeur, distinct aspects of the ethical aim. Each of these aspects of the ethical aim then receives its own objectivization into the moral law, and then its own concretization into ‘moral judgment in situation’. At the heart of this move lies a triadic structure which sees ethics, morality, and practical wisdom as guiding human action along three relationships. These are the inner relationship between ‘me’ and ‘myself’, the interrelationship between ‘me’ and an identified, specific Other (a ‘you’), and the relationship between a ‘me’ and all (unidentified) others, that is, ‘anyone’.

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2 In using the language of ‘good/ethical-just/moral/immoral-wise’ Ricoeur intentionally avoids the language of ‘right/wrong’. He thereby evades the question of the existence of objective moral truth so as to present a conception of moral performance that applies equally and similarly to agents who believe in objective moral truth and to those who do not (such faith is part of the agent’s subjective ethical aim). As a result, Ricoeur uses ‘subjective’ in the sense of ‘agent-determined’ and ‘objective’ in the sense of ‘having general validity’.
At the ethical level this triad of relationships is manifested in the ethical aim of a human life: ‘to live well, with and for others, in just institutions’ (OAA: 172). The first component of this ethical aim is the desire for personal fulfillment (OAA: 170; J: xv). Following Alasdair MacIntyre, Ricoeur sees human life as an ongoing back-and-forth movement between one’s (more or less vaguely determined) horizon of ideals and the hierarchically ordered set of (specific and historically determined but always contestable) practices (professions, arts, games) one partakes in (OAA: 153-158, 177-179). This back-and-forth movement results in a ‘life-plan’, a grand-scale practical unit which is the sum of the agent’s practices. This life-plan is both limited and guided by an (uncertain and mobile) life-project (OAA: 158, 177). The life-project itself is guided by the agent’s conception of ‘a good life’, in view of which her actions are directed. This conception is “the nebulus of ideals and dreams of achievement with regard to which a life is held to be more or less fulfilled or unfulfilled” (OAA: 179). It serves to answer the question of ‘how would I like to lead my life’ (J: xv).

One’s idea of a ‘good life’, one’s life project, and one’s life plan grant one’s life unity. But this unity is always potentially malleable, akin to the unity of a narrative (OAA: 140-151, 158-163). It therefore requires on-going self-interpretation (OAA: 177-179). Such self-interpretation inevitably involves self-evaluation, and therefore results in a sense of personal potential, capacity, and self-worth, which Ricoeur calls self-esteem (OAA: 171, 176-177, 179, 192). Self-esteem is what gives the desire to live well and one’s idea of a ‘good life’ the resonance they need both to guide ethical (‘good’) action and to oppose, in certain circumstances, the guidance of moral duty.

However, human beings in fact live with others, in what Ricoeur calls ‘solicitude’. From solicitude stems the second ethical guide, the desire for the reciprocity of friendship (OAA: 180). This desire is inscribed into the self-interpreting because self-interpretation requires my recognition of myself as a distinct self. This, in turn, requires my recognition that my experiences
may be possessed by all undesignated others, and that they may therefore be affected by the actualization of my potential (OAA: 180-181).

Following Aristotle, Ricoeur sees acting in the mode of friendship as what moves agents from the solitariness of the ‘good life’ to solicitude (OAA: 182). Through friendship the self acquires not only consciousness of the other but also the realization that the other also has consciousness of both self and other. Both consciousnesses are therefore intertwined, so that my own desire to live well comes to entail the similar desire that my friend live well as well (OAA: 186-188). In other words, friendship stems from a mutual identification by each self of the other as a ‘you’. This mutual identification splits self-esteem into esteem-of-me and esteem-of-you, thereby becoming a reciprocal exchange of esteems (OAA: 183-188). The desire for this reciprocity of friendship thus joins the desire for personal fulfillment as determinants of ‘good action’ (J: xv).

The mutuality and reciprocity of friendship presuppose equality or at least similitude (‘I esteem you as I esteem myself’) between the friends. But such similitude is, according to Ricoeur, very elusive and difficult to achieve in actual interaction. Action must be initiated and carried out by an acting agent, and is therefore an exercise of power by the agent. Thus, any single action is by definition a unidirectional relation between someone who initiates and acts and someone who is acted upon. And in such a unidirectional relation only the initiator exercises any power (OAA: 188-189). As a result, any single action, by definition, comes with an ever-present danger of turning from a mere exercise of power into an exercise of power-over, that is, of domination (OAA: 221).

Of course, any interaction must begin with a single act. As a result, any interaction begins in a dissymmetry of power and is therefore always in danger of becoming domination. This is particularly problematic for ethicomoral action, which begins in a demand for help by a needy Other. This demand is itself an action, to which my moral action is a reaction. It therefore recasts the otherwise needy (and hence weak) Other into a power-position vis-à-vis the person who is being called out to morality. This reverse dissymmetry of power is then added to the
interrelationship once one reacts by action to being called out by the Other. Both actions thus risk the danger of becoming domination.³

This double danger of domination is the reason that responding to this demand for help (that is, taking moral action) requires an element of friendship. In acting out of friendship I react to my friend’s demand for help with the ‘benevolent spontaneity’ of other-related feelings.⁴ This benevolent spontaneity guides my act of receiving the instruction to act given by my friend. It thereby enables me to receive the giving engendered by the weakness of the Other at the receiving end of the action without my sympathy turning into pity (OAA: 191-190, my italics).⁵ This “is perhaps the supreme test of solicitude, when unequal power finds compensation in an authentic reciprocity in exchange” (OAA: 191). Through this, benevolent spontaneity has the potential to compensate for action’s initial dissymmetry of power and thereby counteract the danger of domination.

If such compensation is successful, the interrelationship becomes a “shared admission of fragility”, a reciprocal exchange of acting (giving) and suffering (receiving), and a sharing and exchange of esteem (OAA: 192). This is hard to achieve and precarious to maintain, but when achieved, it brings to the two implicated selves the mutual recognition, reciprocity, and similitude of friendship (OAA: 190, 192). And with it also comes responsibility, in two forms. One is the present-oriented ‘here I am!’ with which one friend responds to the cry for help of the other (OAA: 165-168). The other is the future-oriented ‘you can count on me!’ with which each friend commits – promises – to similarly respond to such cries for help in the future (OAA: 189-190). Through this mutual commitment to responsibility friendship comes to stand at “a midpoint where the self and the other share equally the same wish to live together” (OAA: 192).

³ This feature of the moral act and relationship is disregarded by Bauman, as we have seen in chapter 8.
⁴ In developing this understanding of friendship as the exercise of ‘benevolent spontaneity’ Ricoeur draws on, and mediates between, Aristotle (partly as read by Martha Nussbaum), Levinas, and Max Scheler.
⁵ This idea of a giving that is engendered by weakness may seem curious, and is not really specified further by Ricoeur. To lend plausibility to this idea, however, one need only think of situations covered by an expression like ‘to give myself away to someone’ – in opening myself up to someone in this way, I put myself in the most vulnerable state – that is, I bring myself to the height of my weakness.
This midpoint, however, is precarious to maintain. Every new action reintroduces the danger of domination and violence into the relationship. As a result, after every new action this midpoint needs to be established anew. It therefore needs to stabilized if it is to guide ethicomoral action. Such stabilization is sought through a prohibition on violence and a fixed obligation to the other. This is attained when the ethical commitment to the Other passes a universalization test at the level of morality (OAA: 183-184, 197).

Friendship, of course, extends only to specific and identified Others (‘you’). But human beings also live together with unidentified others (‘anyone’), to whom the realm of ethics also extends (OAA: 194; J: xv-xvi). Our relations to these unidentified others are mediated, according to Ricoeur, through ‘shared institutions’, structures of living together erected by historical communities (OAA: 194). Following Arendt, Ricoeur sees such shared institutions as erected through, and therefore as actualizing, the power-in-common of that community (OAA: 194-196). In this acting-in-common, for the fleeting moment of action, unidentified others are included in interhuman interaction (OAA: 195). This inclusion is then enshrined across time in the resulting institution, which in most cases comes to provide a distributive function within the community (OAA: 195-197).

Only, this distribution is not only of goods but also of esteems, because acting-in-common brings with it the realization that each actor is also a self-esteeming self (OAA: 194, 198-202). This distribution therefore needs to be a distribution of just shares (OAA: 194, 201-202). It is in this way that the question of justice enters the picture already at the stage of the ethical aim – that is, as part of ‘good’ action and not only of ‘just action’ (OAA: 197-198). Living under just institutions thereby becomes the third element of the ethical aim of a human life. Still, justice here is yet underdeveloped, no more than a sense of justice (and injustice), a yet unreflected-

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6 Thus, from Ricoeur’s perspective, approaches such as Bauman’s (see chapter 8), which require that we treat strangers as we would friends simply on the force of them approaching us for help, disregard the fact that we reserve such treatment for friends precisely because, for us, our friends are special and not like anyone else. It is thus inherent in the nature of the economy of human interaction, rather than a result of the eradication of moral sentiment, that a moral reaction cannot simply be an instinctive response to the suffering of a stranger, but rather requires further moral reflection to equate, in the given situation, stranger and friend and thus treat the stranger as we would a friend.
upon feeling that I had not been given my fair share in a certain distributive act.\textsuperscript{7} It does not displace solicitude or one’s idea of a ‘good life’ but joins them in guiding ‘good’, ethical action (OAA: 194, 198, 202; J: xxi).

The search for justice, then, is “set in motion” (J: xxi) by three desires, each operating within a different type of relationship and translated into a specific guide for ethical action. One is the desire for personal fulfillment, operating within the ‘me-myself’ relationship and translated into an idea of ‘a good life’. Another is the desire for the reciprocity of friendship, operating within the ‘me-you’ relationship and translated into solicitude. The third is the desire for just institutions and fair distribution, operating within the ‘me-anyone’ relationship and translated into a sense of justice. Without these desires there is no ethicomoral action. It is in this sense that ethical determination is primary in relation to moral determination, as Ricoeur repeatedly insists (e.g., OAA: 170; J: xv-xvi).

9.3

For Ricoeur, then, ethicomoral judgment entails, first, the mutually-augmenting subjective determinations of meaning-for-self, meaning-for-involved-Other, and meaning-for-uninvolved-others. In this, I believe, he in fact concurs with the Arendtian conception of moral performance. That the ascertainment of moral meaning entails the determination of both meaning-for-self and meaning-for-involved-Other was already shown in the previous chapter. On top of this, Arendt also understood valuations as having a strong practical and decisional affinity to meanings (see section 3.2, particularly footnote 18).\textsuperscript{8} And she also saw valuation as aspiring to general validity

\textsuperscript{7} Indeed, as Ricoeur correctly note, our first experience of injustice often comes, as children, in the form of a feeling that we have not been given our fair share of some distributed good (OAA: 198).

\textsuperscript{8} For my introduction of the vocabulary of ‘valuation’ into my explication of Arendt (who does not use this vocabulary herself) see sections 3.2 and 5.3.
validity for anyone) even prior to validation (see section 5.1). In this double respect, valuations can be seen as the Arendtian parallel to Ricoeur’s meaning-for-uninvolved-others.

This indicates in my view that Ricoeur is in fact theorizing the same decisional ‘moment’ that in section 6.3, in the Arendtian context, I labeled ‘reflection’. This is further supported by two other fundamental concurrences between Ricoeur and Arendt. First, the fact that these determinations are subjective requires, for both thinkers, that they undergo a process of validation. Second, these determinations, for both thinkers, need to be augmented with concomitant experiential encounters with selfhood and otherness. But there are also two specific differences between how both thinkers conceive this decisional ‘moment’ that are important to note in the context of the present investigation.

First, in focusing solely on moral reflection, Ricoeur, like Vetlesen, fails to provide for an effective moral trigger. Granted, in acknowledging that ethicomoral reflection and judgment need to be ‘set in motion’ by a desire, Ricoeur implicitly concedes the need for such moral triggering. The problem is that these three ethical desires presuppose and therefore unquestioningly rely on prior meaning-determinations (of what constitutes a fulfilling life, of who is considered a person and therefore as a potential friend, and of what constitutes a fair share, respectively). And such meaning-predeterminations are all too easily perverted, as the Nazi example attests (see chapter 2). As a result, Ricoeur’s ethical desires are, from an Arendtian perspective, unreliable moral triggers, ineffectual to penetrate agents’ default self-privileging mode of decision-making.

I do not believe, however, that this is as damaging for Ricoeur’s understanding of the moral decision as it was for Vetlesen’s (see section 8.4). Vetlesen rejects and thereby rules out recourse to the Arendtian moral trigger of an internal dialogue invoking the desire to live in self-integrity and avoid self-contradiction. But I see no necessity for such a rejection on Ricoeur’s terms. In

9 In Ricoeur this is implicit in the fact that these determinations need to be ascertained through the ‘me-myself’, ‘me-you’, and ‘me-anyone’ relationships.

10 On the Arendtian understanding of the moral trigger and its effectiveness, see section 7.1, especially footnote 3 and the text adjoining it.
fact, much of the analysis in his first two detours in OAA (see section 9.1) was devoted to different practical and philosophical manifestations of this desire for self-constancy. Furthermore, Ricoeur himself accepts self-examination as required by the desire for a good life (see section 9.2), and gives no reason to bar similar critical examination from the other two desires. I therefore believe that the addition of the Arendtian moral trigger as what makes agents employ such critical examination in meeting her ethical desires need not be objected to on Ricoeur’s terms.

More problematic, in my view, is Ricoeur’s understanding of the source of moral meaning-for-anyone and of the experiential encounter with otherness that augments it. Ricoeur introduces meaning-for-anyone into moral reflection through the sense of the fairness – or, more commonly, unfairness – of the share that has been distributed to me. Partaking and hence sharing in distributive institutions thereby becomes, for Ricoeur, the ethicomorally relevant experience of encountering unidentified otherness. For Arendt, however, both moves would be morally problematic, as exemplified by the Nazi case.

When the relationship with others is mediated through a shared institution, the sharing of responsibility among them also comes to be mediated through the institution. As a result, responsibility towards the institution can all too easily replace responsibility towards its individual members. At its most radical, as in the Nazi case, this may come to legitimize sacrificing the well-being of individual members for the sake of the well-being of the institution itself\(^\text{11}\), without independent reflection on the morality or immorality of this sacrifice in the given case.

Moreover, the demand for fair distribution is a demand from the world and its others of something that the self perceives as owed to it. As such, it positions the agent in opposition to others and to the human world she shares with them, who are in turn positioned potential threats to the self. Otherness is thereby cast not as something to be encountered, shared in, and cooperated with, but as an inevitable constraint to be guarded against, evaded, and arbitratted

\(^{11}\text{That is, the notion of ‘the greater good’ promoted by those in political power.}\)
between. And the agent is thereby cast as a self whose primary interest (stake) and responsibility are in and to itself. In other words, the demand for a just distribution of fair shares repositions the agent back into what I have labeled the self-prioritizing mode of being-in-the-world, which counteracts moral reflection.

This is the reason that Arendt introduces moral meaning-for-anyone in the form of the valuation ‘morally right/wrong’. This valuation is a determination of whether one’s prospective action would well- or ill-affect the world and others in it (see section 7.1). As such it invites, and opens oneself up to, a dialogue with others (see section 5.1). In making this valuation the agent both acquires and displays an interest (stake) in the human world and its human others, and as a result also undertakes responsibility for and to them. This valuation is therefore a more morally appropriate source for the element of meaning-for-anyone needed in the course of moral reflection.

9.4

As we saw in section 9.2, for Ricoeur ethicomoral action requires the three ethical desires (for personal fulfillment, solicitude, and just/fair distribution). As a result, the ethical for Ricoeur has primary decisional status vis-à-vis the moral. But ethicomoral action nonetheless that aims at, relates to, and therefore interacts with, others. As such, it is always in danger of becoming an exercise of power-over (see section 9.2) – what Ricoeur call violence and identifies with evil (OAA: 219-221; J: xvi-xvii). To respond to this danger, according to Ricoeur, the ‘good’ needs to arm itself with the ‘obligatory’ (and its corollary, the ‘forbidden’). But the ethical desires are still subjective and partial. As a result, obligation cannot stem from them because what is obliging in the obligation is precisely its claim to universal validity (J: xvi-xvii). For this reason, ethical action needs to ascend beyond its partiality, and become not only ‘good’ but also ‘just’.

As a result, each of the three ethical desires needs to be validated through its own universalization test, which tests “our illusions about ourselves and about the meaning of our
inclinations” (OAA: 204, 211, 240-241; J: xxi). These tests are presented in the three formulations of Kant’s Categorical Imperative. These three formulations thereby manifest Ricoeur’s triadic structure of relationships (‘me-myself’; ‘me-you’; ‘me-everyone’) at the level of morality. However, each of these formulations still presupposes a certain ethical guidance (contrary to what Kant himself thought). As a result, in passing these tests ethical action does not lose its prior and still primary ethical determination. Rather, morality joins ethics as a determinant of what for this reason should be labeled ‘ethicomoral’ action, action that is still ‘good’ but now also just.12

The moral principle announced in the first formulation is “‘Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law’” (OAA: 208, quoting Kant’s *Groundwork*). It represents for Ricoeur the universalized form of the ethical guidance of one’s idea of a good life (OAA: 206-211; J: xvii-xviii).13 The desire for personal fulfillment, when aspiring to normatively guide action, in fact aspires to be what Kant calls ‘a good will’ (OAA: 206). Only, to be ‘good’, it must for Kant be ‘good without qualification’ and thus without personal bias, acknowledged by the agent as ‘good’ even if she did not subjectively desire it (OAA: 206).

As a result, one’s idea of a ‘good life’, when it purports to guide ethicomoral action, must pass through the universalization test of the first formulation of the Categorical Imperative (OAA: 206-208).14 The imperative form of this test introduces a relation of commanding and obeying into moral action while internalizing this relation into one and the same moral agent (OAA: 209). By passing this test, the guidance of one’s idea of a good life acquires the status of a self-

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12 It is only because ethics remains primary in relation to morality that, even after objectivization, ethics is able to force recourse to a third capacity – practical wisdom – in case of conflict between ethics and morality (see section 9.6). It is in this way that there is “a relation involving at once subordination and complementarity” between ethics and morality according to Ricoeur (OAA: 170-171).

13 Ricoeur sees universal/deontological elements already operating within the ethical realm, and deontology still attached in certain ways to the ethical realm, suggesting a more organic relationship between the two than may seem to be the case from my presentation of Ricoeur (OAA: 204-206). Unfortunately, I have not the space to flesh this part of Ricoeur’s argument out.

14 In Kant, of course, the application of the universalization test entails ongoing self-examination (OAA: 207-208). This is why for Ricoeur requiring the universalization test is not an external imposition on the ethical self, who after all is a self-interpreting, and hence self-examining, self (J: xv).
legislated moral law. It therefore obliges the agent as a universal duty without contradicting the autonomy of that agent (OAA: 206-210). In turn, ‘self-esteem’ is transformed upon universalization into ‘self-respect’, which thus comes to be identified with respect for the moral law (OAA: 171, 203-204, 213-215).15

The problem, according to Ricoeur, is that the idea of autonomy in Kant is presented as – and legitimized by being – a ‘fact of reason’. This ‘fact of reason’ is our consciousness of the primordial connection between freedom and the moral law, which autonomy establishes for us (OAA: 212). This move, however, itself rests on the presupposition that morality actually exists and therefore that the moral law is a reality rather than a mere convention. This presupposition, according to Ricoeur, cannot be arrived at by a merely self-legislating self and must therefore be derived from ethical guidance (OAA: 212-213, 238-239). It is thus that the Categorical Imperative, in its first formulation, cannot entirely free itself from ethical guidance. It therefore must instead presuppose it, with the result that its moral guidance cannot displace, but can only join, ethical guidance.

The moral principle announced in the second formulation is “’Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end’” (OAA: 222, fn. 33, quoting Kant’s *Groundwork*). It represents for Ricoeur the universalized form of the ethical guidance of solicitude (OAA: 225). The desire for the reciprocity of friendship, when aspiring to normatively guide action, needs to overcome the danger of violence inherent in interaction. For this purpose, it needs to arm itself with a prohibition and an obligation.

15 Ricoeur’s use of the terms ‘self-esteem’ (see section 9.2) and ‘self-respect’ is somewhat idiosyncratic, at least to the speaker of English. Ricoeur uses ‘self-esteem’ to denote the self-designation that corresponds to action-designation through the predicate ‘good’. He uses ‘self-respect’ to denote the self-designation that corresponds to action-designation through the predicate ‘just’ (or ‘obligatory’). He therefore sees ‘self-esteem’ as the self-designation appropriate for what he labels the ethical level and ‘self-respect’ as the self-designation appropriate for what he labels the moral level (OAA: 171). Notably, according to Ricoeur, what he calls self-respect is in Kant distinguished from self-love, the form of (what Ricoeur calls) self-esteem that is ‘pathological’, that is, fails to pass the universalization test (OAA: 214-215).
Such a prohibition and such an obligation are provided, according to Ricoeur, through a norm of reciprocity (e.g., the Golden Rule) which transforms self-respect into respect for others (OAA: 219-221). Only, on Kantian terms, the Golden Rule relies on inclinations (love/hate, like/dislike) that cannot pass the universalization test (OAA: 222-223). It is therefore imperfectly formal. It can pass the universalization test only to the extent that self-respect refers to “what, in my person and in the person of others, is worthy of respect”, namely, to the humanness common to, and shared by, all persons (OAA: 223).

But humanness thus understood is merely a pluralization of autonomy. As such, it is so abstracted from actual otherness that it eliminates the diversity of persons to be respected. This emptied ‘respect for others’ *in their diversity* of any original significance for the self-legislating autonomous self (OAA: 223-224, my italics). As a result, the self-legislating self must apprehend its relation to human diversity only through an abstraction of its relation to itself, that is, by treating others as ‘ends in themselves’. And this transforms the imperfectly formal ‘respect for others’ of the Golden Rule into the (perfectly) formal principle of ‘respect for persons (as ends in themselves)’ (OAA: 222, 224).

In effect, then, through this transition from self-respect to ‘respect for persons’, reciprocity is introduced where there initially had been none. Only, this introduction is based upon, and therefore brings with it, an intuition of the “genuine otherness at the root of the plurality of persons” (OAA: 225). And it is this intuition that transforms the idea of humanity into something original rather than a mere pluralized carbon copy of autonomy (OAA: 225). It is in this way that the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative finally emerges as the appropriate

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16 For Ricoeur, the Golden Rule “appears to be part of the *endoxa* acclaimed by Aristotle’s ethics, one of those received notions that the philosopher does not have to invent, but to clarify and justify” (OAA: 219). Ricoeur thus sees Kant as attempting such ‘clarification and justification’ of the Golden Rule.

17 Of course, ‘humanness’ (‘humanity’) in Kant is not the same as ‘humanness’ in Arendt. Both thinkers use the term to designate what is distinctly human (human *par excellence*) about human beings. They differ, however, as to what that property is (plurality and natality in Arendt, autonomy in Kant).
universalization test for the ethical guidance of the desire for the reciprocity of friendship (OAA: 218, 222).18

The problem is that the move to respect for persons as ends in themselves relies on the presupposition that people differ from things in some way that makes using people as one would use a thing morally problematic (OAA: 239). This presupposition, according to Ricoeur, is pre-moral and therefore derives from ethical guidance. It is in this way that the Categorical Imperative, in its second formulation as much as in its first formulation, cannot entirely free itself from ethical guidance. Rather, it must again presuppose it, with the result that its moral guidance cannot displace, but can only join, ethical guidance.

The moral principle announced in the third formulation of the Categorical Imperative is “Act in accordance with the maxims of a member giving universal laws for a merely possible kingdom of ends” (Groundwork, 4:439). As developed by Rawls, it represents for Ricoeur the universalized form of the ethical guidance of the sense of justice (OAA: 211, 227-230, 281). The sense of justice itself is only an intuition regarding the fairness of the share the agent receives in a given distribution (see section 9.2). As such, it is inevitably guided by one’s own estimation of the distributed goods, that is, by one’s own conception of the ‘good’.

Of course, different people partaking in the same institution (and thus also entitled to a just share in what it is distributing) have different conceptions of the good. This makes one’s sense of justice an insufficient standard for just distribution unless it is universalized. The best attempt to conceptualize such a universalization, according to Ricoeur, is found in Rawls’ A Theory of Justice. In particular, it is found in Rawls’ elaboration of Kant’s third formulation of the Categorical Imperative into a strictly procedural conception of justice (OAA: 227-230; J: xvii).

18 In other words, this universalization test does not affect the particularity of the friendship, but tests whether the particular action that the friendship is understood to require (its ethical guidance in Ricoeur’s language, its meaning/import in the language we adopted in the previous chapter) is also ‘the right thing to do’ (what morality requires). It is important to remember that there is no assumption here that the two must be congruent or that if they are not one is in error. Rather, as we will see in the next chapter, it is precisely disagreement between ethical and moral guidance – between what I (ethically) owe to my friend and what I (morally) ought to do – that requires, for Ricoeur, practical wisdom to determine how, in the given situation, they are to be balanced (or which is to prevail, if the particular circumstances necessitate one of them to prevail).
In the original deliberative situation hypothesized by Rawls, all participants have full and equal knowledge of various competing principles of just distribution. At the same time, the mechanism of the ‘veil of ignorance’ strips all participants of any contextual knowledge of their own situation in the actual world (OAA: 231-233). The participants are thereby precluded from recourse to their own conceptions of the good in deciding about just distribution. Instead, they are forced to make an estimate, in abstraction, of what their sense of justice would tell them in the actual world (OAA: 231-233).

Following work in cognitive psychology, Rawls argued that this uncertainty about their own sense of justice would lead participants to strive to maximize the minimum share of everyone. This striving thereby comes to represent the guidance of a universalized sense of justice (OAA: 236). It will result, Rawls believes, in two principles of justice. One is the principle of equality in the freedoms of citizenship. The other, which cannot serve to justify departures from the first one, is the principle of reducing to a necessary minimum the inequalities that stem from unavoidable differences between persons (OAA: 234-236). These principles of justice, through rules of justice derived from them, come to guide just distribution instead of participants’ own senses of justice (OAA: 236-237).

The problem with this move is that, as Rawls himself admits, his principles of justice do not rest on an independent theory but “upon a preunderstanding of what is meant by the unjust and the just” (OAA: 236-237). As a result, Rawls claims for his theory no more than a ‘reflective equilibrium’ between it and our ‘considered convictions’. Only, these convictions become ‘considered’ through their quasi-universalization through a “complex process of mutual adjustment between conviction and theory” (OAA: 237). For Ricoeur this is where Rawls’ theory of justice as well ends up presupposing ethical guidance and therefore cannot displace, but can only join, it.

Thus, according to Ricoeur, each of the desires that guides ‘good’ action in the ethical realm is validated through universalizing it into a principle (or principles) of justice. This universalization then enables it to guide ‘right’ action in the moral realm. The resulting triadic structure of the moral law (imperative) parallels and reflects the triadic structure of the ethical aim. Furthermore, each of these principles of justice nonetheless presupposes the desire which it formalizes. As a
result the moral law (imperative) cannot replace, but rather must join, the ethical aim which it both validates and presupposes.

9.5

From an Arendtian perspective, this move by Ricoeur’s is highly problematic. Why would agents whose default predilection is towards a self-prioritizing mode of decision-making seek to validate their subjective ethical guidance in the first place? Ricoeur explains why moral validation is required for a proper ethicomoral judgment. But these reasons – the fact that we live with other human beings, the danger of violence inherent in the me-you relationship, the need for distribution to be just and fair for everyone – would be felt by self-prioritizing agents as decisionally external to them. Rather than acquiesce to them, they are much more likely to simply shrug them off.

The only way this is avoided, on Ricoeur’s terms, is if two preconditions are fulfilled. First, agents must already be aware of the fact that they are sharing their world with other human beings, and that those human beings are, qua human beings, moral persons. Second, agents must already have recognized this fact to mean that their ethicomoral decision cannot rely solely on the subjective guidance of their own ethical desires and personal meanings. Ricoeur, indeed, seems to take both preconditions for granted, but as the Nazi example clearly illustrates, neither precondition can in fact be taken for granted.

Of course, for Ricoeur, these problems, encountered in the Nazi case, are problems of application, correctable through the use of practical wisdom. The problem is that for Ricoeur, as we will see in section 9.6, practical wisdom enters moral performance only when, in a particular case, ethical guidance conflicts with moral law. But the Nazis managed to distort both moral law and personal meanings while at the same time also weakening the ability of the latter, even it not distorted, to stand up to the distorted moral law (see chapter 2). As a result, the kind of internal
moral conflict Ricoeur sees as calling for practical wisdom is not likely to occur under Nazi-like conditions.  

This decisional problem is avoided in Arendtian moral valuation. Moral value being a general category, it necessarily aspires to general validity (which is not the case with Ricoeur’s subjective ethical desires). As a result, its own subjective nature makes the initial valuation appear to the reflecting agent herself as decisionally inadequate for moral performance. Thus, agents engaged in moral reflection themselves cannot be satisfied with their initial and subjective determinations of moral meaning and value, and must put them to the test of moral validation. But this is lost in Ricoeur because for him meaning-for-anyone is in fact arrived at through universalization and not prior to it. In requiring that the initial moral valuation be made subjectively and prior to validation, then, Arendt decouples moral valuation from moral validation. And this ensures that in the reflective decision there is always an inherent decisional need for moral validation.

But Ricoeur’s understanding of moral valuation and validation is also, from an Arendtian perspective, morally dangerous. The universality of the moral law and its obligating imperative form demand obedience rather than reflection. As a result, once action is acknowledged by an agent as conforming to a duly universal moral duty, that agent thereby feels released from the need for further independent reflection. This is precisely what happened under Nazi rule (see section 2.3).

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19 Moreover, both ethical and moral guidance, as Ricoeur understands them, are made in general terms, presuming applicability to all circumstances. Practical wisdom, as we will see in section 9.6, only resolves conflicts between them in particular cases. As such, of course, practical wisdom itself does not reexamine or question either of these general determinations. Practical wisdom as Ricoeur understands it would therefore be powerless to do anything about distorted personal meanings or moral laws. At most, if it is constantly needed and constantly sides with one or the other, the agent may eventually realize that one of their ethicomoral guides has been distorted. But finding and correcting the distortion would still be a matter for reflection, not practical wisdom.

20 This is the case even for the sense of justice, which was previously held by Ricoeur to already introduce meaning-for-anyone at the ethical level. In Ricoeur’s discussion of its universalization, the sense of justice is revealed to in fact not introduce meaning-for-anyone into the decision at all. Rather, the sense of justice merely introduces the notion that there is a meaning-for-anyone that is different from meaning-for-self. But the sense of justice itself is now revealed to be, prior to its universalization, ill-equipped to ascertain meaning-for-anyone, because it inevitably, for Ricoeur, recoils back into meaning-for-self.
Moreover, the moral law is applied to particular situations deductively (determinatively) and hence (oftentimes) heuristically. Indeed, this is central both to the appeal of the Kantian Categorical Imperative for moral performance under normal circumstances, and to its failure under Nazi conditions (see section 2.3). Seeing moral valuation as made through universalization therefore in fact discourages making it through independent moral reflection. It is thus a recipe for moral conformity and for the shirking (rather than encouraging) of moral responsibility. Arendt avoids this by requiring that the initial moral valuation be made subjectively but non-heuristically, thereby making independent reflective moral judgment requisite for moral valuation.

This moral danger, inherent in Ricoeur’s universal and objective validity, is what led Arendt to reject it as the appropriate standard of moral validity. But Arendt’s turn to intersubjectivity and dialogue is also crucial at the level of the experiential encounters entailed in moral performance. Both Arendt (see section 7.5) and Ricoeur (see section 9.1) concur that an experience of encountering unidentified otherness (‘any person’) is needed in (ethico)moral judgment. In Ricoeur, such an encounter is provided through partaking in shared distributive institutions, recourse to which we have rejected, on Arendtian terms, in section 9.3. In Arendt, this encounter with unidentified otherness is provided by the intersubjective dialogue of the enlarged mentality.

Of course, the otherness encountered through the dialogue of representative thinking is not the purely unidentified otherness of ‘any other human being’. Rather, a process of non-random selection, and hence, of identification, is presupposed in the process of enlarging my mentality as part this dialogue. After all, when a decision needs to be made within limited time (as is often the case in real-life situations), I must at some point stop enlarging my mentality and get on with the decision. Moreover, I am also expected to only include other judging subjects in the dialogue, so that I need to distinguish between those who judge and those who do not. And finally, I must have some familiarity with the other judging subjects whose perspectives I seek to reconstruct in an enlarged mentality so as to be able to reconstruct those perspectives. In these respects the dialogue of representative thinking is in fact akin to a conversation in the company of friends.

This friendship-like quality of the dialogue of representative thinking is not coincidental. Inherent to the ‘me-you’ relationship (of which friendship is the emblematic example) is a
simultaneous double recognition (see section 8.4). On one side it is the recognition that as human persons both me and the Other are unique individuals who may differ in personal meanings and judgments. On the other side it is the recognition that despite such differences we both have, as human persons, a similar capacity and need for meaning and judgment (and thus, similar in our uniqueness). The friendship-like quality of the dialogue of representative thinking extends to it this double recognition, thereby enabling it to become an exchange and sharing of judgments and perspectives.

But the otherness encountered in representative thinking is also not the exclusive and intimate otherness of the ‘me-you’ relationship. My relationship with my imagined conversants has nothing of the emotional bond, shared intimacy, and exchange of vulnerability that characterize friendship. Instead, this relationship exists solely for the purpose of, and only the duration of, moral validation. Thus, while my conversants are treated as friends, they are friends only for the moment. While part of the dialogue, each conversant is a ‘you’, an identified Other. But prior to the dialogue, as well after it is concluded, each conversant is an ‘anyone’, an unidentified other.

As a result, while participation in my dialogue of representative thinking is select, it is also non-exclusive in that it is in principle open to any other human being. Thus, the encounter with otherness entailed in representative thinking, while not an encounter with ‘any person’, is an encounter with ‘you who could be anyone (but for limitations of time, data availability, and certain others’ unwillingness to judge)’.21 As such, it extends to ‘anyone’ the aforementioned double recognition of the simultaneous uniqueness and similarity of shared human personhood, previously confirmed only for the identified ‘you’ (see section 8.4).

Similarly the Arendtian dialogue of representative thinking also replaces Ricoeur’s shared distributive institution as what extends mutual and shared responsibility from the ‘me-you’ to the ‘me-anyone’ relationship. The institution extends through time and to any member of the community the otherwise fleeting exercise of power-in-common (acting-together) that founded it (see section 9.2). It thereby extends to this ‘anyone’ the sharing of the mutual responsibility for

21 And given real-life reality of such limitations, this is probably as broad and general an intersubjective encounter with unidentified otherness as can be expected.
each other’s well-being that originates in the ‘me-you’ relationship. The dialogue of representative thinking, of course, is itself an (imagined) common deliberation, which resolution thereby stems from all participants. It is thus the closest possible mental approximation of actual acting-together. And as such, it also extends to the ‘me-anyone’ relationship the sense of a shared human responsibility that first arose in the ‘me-you’ relationship.

But being a common deliberation, the dialogue of representative thinking is also, as already noted, an exchange and sharing of judgments and perspectives. In opening myself up to being judged by the participants in this dialogue I therefore encounter and meet them as coequal fellow human judges. These modes of reciprocity and coequality fall short of mutual complementariness and coincidence as long as the shared and exchanged judgments have not been brought into common resolution. But they are the first manifestation at the level of the ‘me-anyone’ relationship of the coincidence and mutual complementariness of selfhood and otherness experienced at the level of the ‘me-you’ relationship. And they already reveal themselves to the self as part of the fabric of human interrelatedness and thus as an essential part of being human among fellow human beings. It is here that moral obligation – to myself and to other human beings – emerges without need for the obligatory form of universal moral law.

9.6

Ricoeur, then, sees moral determinations (‘just’) as joining rather than replacing ethical determinations (‘good’) in guiding ethicomoral action (see section 9.4). The moral and ethical guides for action must coexist, the moral enjoying general validity and the ethical retaining experiential primacy. Therefore, neither can have overriding priority should they come into conflict in specific decisions (what Ricoeur calls moral conflict). Only, in real life, where no situation is entirely the same as another, moral conflict is inevitable (OAA: 240, 249). And because such conflict is always contextual, its resolution is always case-specific, and therefore always amenable to revision or revocation as circumstances change. Such resolution, in all three
relationships entailed in ethicomoral judgment, is provided, according to Ricoeur, by practical wisdom (phronesis).

At the level of the institutionalized ‘me-anyone’ relationship, this is most evident in the shared distributive institutions of the democratic political sphere (OAA: 251-252, 257, 260). The political sphere needs to justly and fairly facilitate cooperation within the community (OAA: 251). Such cooperation, however, is in conflict with the fact that individuals differ as to what determines things as good and how this determination is best arrived at (OAA: 251-253, 257-259). As a result, in concrete and historically embedded circumstances there is always potential for moral conflict regarding both the distribution of goods and the rules of deliberation about such distribution (OAA: 257-259).

Moreover, individuals also differ regarding the meaning of emblematic terms like ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ (OAA: 258-259). As a result, the potential for moral conflict is similarly inevitable when it comes to determining the ends of government (OAA: 258-260). And lastly, the democratic political sphere, founded through a revolution of prior institutions, itself confesses indeterminacy as to the foundation of its own legitimacy and “accepts its contradictions to the point of institutionalizing conflict” (OAA: 260; following Claude Lefort). As a result, the potential for moral conflict is similarly inevitable when it comes to legitimizing democracy itself (OAA: 259-261).

These inevitable moral conflicts within the democratic political sphere are resolved through ongoing public deliberation and vote. Such deliberation and vote, made on a case-by-case basis and therefore always revocable, finds out the ‘wise’ resolution that is as much as possible in the concrete circumstances both ‘just’ and ‘good’ (OAA: 256-261). Such deliberation and vote is thus, for Ricoeur, the collective and (democratically) political equivalent of the exercise of practical wisdom (OAA: 258).

At the level of interpersonal relationships, moral conflict manifests itself, in concrete circumstances, in conflict between respect for persons and respect for law (OAA: 263). This is the conflict between my responsibility to the identified Other, grounded in the uniqueness of our interrelationship, and the uniform application required by the moral law. It is inevitable because
my responsibility stems from my commitment and promise (‘you can count on me!’) to ‘be there for her’ creates an expectation within the other (OAA: 265-267). This expectation, in turn, potentially legitimizes creating an exception to the moral law in the specific case, since such an exception would be ‘other-serving’ rather than ‘self-serving’ (OAA: 268-269). Practical wisdom resolves such conflict, on a provisional and case-by-case basis, by recognizing the conflict and “inventing conduct that will best satisfy the exception required by [the personal commitment to the identified Other, while] betraying the rule to the smallest extent possible” (OAA: 269-273).

At the level of the ‘me-myself’ relationship moral conflict is found in the conflict between universality and historicity. This is the conflict between the universality to which our personal convictions aspire and the historically embedded life-context from which they originate and in which they are realized (OAA: 274). This conflict manifests itself most clearly in conflicts between the ideas of a ‘good life’ and horizons of meaning of different historically-embedded communities and traditions (OAA: 286-290). Such ideas of the ‘good life’ and horizons of meaning have emerged from and through a specific historical context. This means that there is an inevitable plurality of such horizons. But such ideals and horizons inevitably claim universality, and this claim conflicts with the similar claims by other communities’ ideals and horizons.

Practical wisdom can resolve such conflicts because it recognizes that other cultures we are confronting can contain “proposals of meaning that are at first foreign to us” but in fact carry “a possible truth” (OAA: 289). As a result, it can submit both our universal claim and theirs to

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22 Ricoeur’s best illustration of this is the example of a decision on whether to tell a patient that she is dying (OAA: 269-270). In such a situation I am under a universal moral obligation not to lie, but also under a personal ethical commitment to prevent harm for the patient. It is through practical wisdom that I must determine whether knowing or not knowing of her impending death would hurt the patient and what specific course of action to take (e.g., tell the truth, hide it, reveal it gradually or in a certain way, etc.) so as to minimize both lying and hurt to their necessary degree. Obviously, such determination would always depend on the individual patient as well as on my particular relationship with her. This ‘wise’ determination is thus always potentially different, but still never arbitrary. Ricoeur then uses the example of abortion to argue that as a result, practical wisdom is also able to resolve moral conflicts between different understandings of what counts as a person, or between the present hope engendered by technological advances and their potential risks to future generations, to whom we are also responsible (OAA: 270-272).

23 The manifestation of the conflict between universalism and historicity at the level of communities is for Ricoeur analogous to its manifestation in the ‘me-myself’ relationship. This is the reason that he develops his account of it through a critique of Habermas’ communicative ethics (OAA: 280-281, 286-290).
discussion on the level of considered convictions “incorporated in concrete forms of life” (OAA: 289). “Only a real discussion, in which convictions are permitted to be elevated above conventions, will be able to state, at the end of a long history yet to come, which alleged universals will become recognized by ‘all the persons concerned’ (Habermas)” (OAA: 289-290).\(^{24}\) It is through mediating such intercultural conversations that in the meantime practical wisdom resolves, within concrete circumstances, specific conflicts between universality and historicity (OAA: 290).

For our present purposes, two recurring characteristics of the mental power of practical wisdom identified by Ricoeur’s are particularly pertinent. As seen by Ricoeur, practical wisdom is the independent power that mediates and arbitrates between other determinants of action where there is no preset decisional hierarchy between them. Moreover, it does this on a case-specific and thus revocable basis, thereby emerging as the internal power attuned to the particularity of the encountered situation.\(^{25}\) It is these two characteristics that in my view give practical wisdom an important role in moral performance, even when conceived on Arendtian terms.

9.7

Arendt, of course, had intentionally omitted practical wisdom from her understanding of moral performance. Practical wisdom (\textit{phronēsis}) is only mentioned twice in Arendt. Its first appearance is in the first account of representative thinking, in which it is noted as the Greek equivalent of representative thinking (BPF: 221). This understanding of \textit{phronēsis}, however, is not repeated in the other three accounts of representative thinking, and is implicitly rejected in LM. In LM \textit{phronēsis} appears only as part of a listing of the various mental capacities proposed

\(^{24}\) As Ronald Beiner pointed out in private correspondence, a similar response to Habermas was articulated by Gadamer, though Ricoeur does not acknowledge this (he acknowledges debts to Gadamer elsewhere).

\(^{25}\) Ethical desires and moral principles (that is, meanings and judgments), by contrast, abstract from the situation in the direction either of the self or of the world (humanness).
by Aristotle, and is merely distinguished from *proiaries*, Aristotle’s progenitor of *liberum arbitrium* (LMW: 59-60).

This rejection, I believe, was not just a carryover from Kant (Beiner, 1982: 134). Practical wisdom, as Beiner notes, has traditionally been marked by “the qualities of experience, maturity, and sound habituation” (ibid). But these qualities mark practical wisdom, for Arendt, as a capacity of the wise and experienced few (Passerin d’Entrèves, 1993: 123). Moral judging, by contrast, is something of which Arendt insists every human agent is capable. As a result, practical wisdom *in and of itself* could not be entrusted with the task of moral judging on Arendt’s terms. But Arendt seems to conclude from this that practical wisdom cannot have any role in moral performance, and this conclusion, in my view, is mistaken. On the contrary I believe practical wisdom is unavoidably entailed in reflective moral performance, even on Arendtian terms, in three respects.

First, Arendt seems to have ‘forgotten’ the task of application that comes after moral validation and completes moral judging and reflection prior to the moral choice of the will. Both speculative thinking and reflective judging move the self away from the specificity of the situation to the generality of meaning and value (both of which claim applicability across situations). The specifics of the situation are taken into account in both activities, but the products of these activities unavoidably aspire to generalize away from these specifics. They are concerned primarily with fitting the specific meaning, valuation, and situation back into the larger contexts of self and world. And as such, they lose sight of the fact that this fit is a two-way street, such that once determined, meaning and valuation (and through them self and world) must also be fitted to the specific situation itself. It is this final fitting (application) that completes moral reflection for which practical wisdom is needed.

The second respect in which practical wisdom is entailed for reflective moral performance is the roles it has to play in the exercise of representative thinking. As we have seen in section 9.5, the agent must select her conversants in the dialogue of representative thinking since the dialogue cannot encompass all perspectives. She must also reconstruct their perspectives, which entails selecting those pieces of information about them to be drawn upon for this purpose. And the agent oftentimes must terminate both of these processes of selection at a certain point before
their completion lest the decision she is making be obviated. She must, in other words, determine when her mentality has been enlarged sufficiently for the present decision. And this is open to self-serving selection biases which could corrupt the dialogue of representative thinking from a mechanism of intersubjective validation into a mechanism of self-confirmation.

Arendt failed to deal with this problem, though she did implicitly acknowledge that in practice the dialogue of representative thinking will only encompass a sample of conversants and perspectives.26 The only decisional safeguard she provides is dialogical thinking, which would presumably persist in requiring further reflection should self-serving selection biases corrupt the dialogue of representative thinking. Her implicit stance therefore seems to be that carrying this selection process out with probity is part of our moral responsibility. And even if we are satisfied with this stance, it still leaves open the practical question of which mental power would be employed in determining when the assembled sample is sufficiently representative. And given that this determination requires mediating and arbitrating different decisional ‘voices’ within the context of a specific and unique decisional situation, this cannot but be practical wisdom.

But practical wisdom has, in my view, an even more important role in reflective judging. Subjecting my meanings and valuations to validation through representative thinking does not mean subsuming them under the judgments of my conversants in this dialogue. Rather, this dialogue is a common deliberation that is supposed to find a meeting ground between my meanings and judgments and those of my conversants. It therefore involves a back-and-forth between me and my conversants in which our meanings and judgments are ultimately arbitrated. And this arbitrating task must also be decisionally assigned, by default, to the arbitrating mental power that is practical wisdom.

This latter arbitrating role also makes practical wisdom of particular importance for reflective moral performance in a third, experiential respect. The self enters the imagined common deliberation of representative thinking still guided by ‘care of the self’. But my conversants in this dialogue are disinterested in the particular situation. Therefore, they are guided instead by

26 See in this respect her repeated point that our decision would be better the more representative our thinking leading to it is (BPF: 241; RJ: 141; LK: 43).
‘care for the world’ and thus by care for shared humanity. In validating my judgment by finding the meeting ground between it and their judgment, I bring (my) ‘care for the self’ and (their) ‘care for the world’ together within and through the encounter with ‘you who could be anyone’. In mediating my meanings and judgments with those of my conversants, then, practical wisdom brings ‘care for the self’ and ‘care for others’, selfhood and otherness, into coincidence and mutual complementariness.

In this meeting ground of meanings and judgments brought about with the aid of practical wisdom, the self finally experiences the mutual complementariness and coincidence of selfhood and otherness at the level of the ‘me-anyone’ relationship. This was anticipated in representative thinking’s extension of the recognition of common and shared human personhood and responsibility from the ‘me-you’ relationship to the ‘me-anyone’ relationship (see section 9.5). And it began to manifest itself in the human reciprocity and coequality inherent in representative thinking as a sharing and exchange of judgments and perspective (see section 9.5). But it is the intervention of practical wisdom that finally confirms this experience as a genuine experience of human selfhood.

And the intervention of practical wisdom is experientially necessary at this point precisely because it draws on, and therefore harkens back to, personal experience. It was, after all, the longstanding personal history of decisional reliance on ordinary decision-making that gave the ordinary experience of selfhood such strong experiential resonance (section 7.5). Through practical wisdom, the decisional weight of the testimony of personal experience is now enlisted on behalf of the reflective experience of selfhood as well. It is for this reason that the reflective mode of being-in-the-world and its experience of selfhood can finally stand before the will as equally resonant alternatives to the ordinary mode of being-in-the-world and to its experience of selfhood.

27 It is for this reason that the perspectives of the involved Others – who, obviously, are also not disinterested – must be excluded from the dialogue of the enlarged mentality. Of course, as we have seen in the previous chapter, such perspectives have already been taken account of in meaning-generation.
Chapter 10
Willing, Moral Choice, Responsibility

With my introduction of empathetic perception (chapter 8) and practical wisdom (chapter 9) into moral reflection, both the ascertainment of moral meaning, and moral judging, are revealed to entail encounters with both selfhood and otherness. As a result, both the ascertainment of moral meaning and moral judging entail experiences of the coincidence and mutual complementariness of selfhood and otherness. And these experiences are integral, not incidental, to both moral meaning and moral judgment. This gives the reflective conception of self the experiential resonance it needs to decisionally rival the ordinary experience of selfhood. As a result, reflective being-in-the-world can stand before the will as a viable decisional alternative to ordinary being-in-the-world.

At the moment of moral choice, then, the will is faced with a choice between two competing, and more or less equally resonant, modes of being-in-the-world and conceptions of oneself and one’s relationship with others. And within the reflective mode of being-in-the-world, it is faced with an additional choice, between actualizing and rebelling against one’s conception of oneself as interrelated with others and partly constituted through this interrelatedness.

But this triadic choice is also a choice between the guiding principles of action concomitant to each of these three decisional options, and thus also between the goals, aims, and motives that derive from these principles of action. It is thus a choice of the kind of person I wish to be, in the most fundamental sense of personhood: a (righteous) person who lives with herself as a human, plural and natal self, one who contradicts her own humanness (and thus, herself) by intentionally acting against this human condition (non-banal evildoer), or one who (banally) eschews choosing between these options and thereby runs the risk of contradicting her humanness (evildoing) unwittingly.
Of course, as a plural and natal being, I hold a shared world in common with other plural and natal beings. Concomitantly, we all share a responsibility for this world, and for our condition as plural and natal beings within it. And this responsibility, by extension, is also a responsibility for each other person sharing in this world. This responsibility is acknowledged, undertaken, and actualized when I choose to act as a (plural and natal) human being, thrown off and cast aside when I choose evildoing, and disregarded when I choose banality.

Arendt, however, insisted that each of the three mental faculties is independent and autonomous. This raises two puzzles regarding the responsibility-undertaking moral choices. First, on what basis, independent of moral reflection by the faculties of thought and judgment, does the will make this choice? Second, how is it possible for a self consisting of a multiplicity of autonomous and ever-active internal voices to undertake and bear such responsibility? I resolve these puzzles in sections 10.1 and 10.2, respectively. In section 10.3 I highlight the similarities and differences between moral and political responsibility and action as understood by Arendt, and thus the line Arendt sought to draw between the two.

10.1

The will, of course, must make this choice independently of the other faculties of the mind. In other words, it must base its choice in its own experiences. As a result, the experiences of reflective selfhood acquired in moral reflection, being experiences of the faculties of thought and judgment, are for the will no more than data to be used in its own independent choice.¹ The problem is that in reflective withdrawal from the world of appearance and action, the will’s most powerful experience is the experience of autonomy, the sense that the agent is independent, self-

¹ This does not render unnecessary the fortification of the experiential resonance of reflective selfhood we have just undertaken in the previous two chapters. Without this fortification the will would have been faced with two alternatives unequal on their own terms and would not even have needed to bother choosing between them reflectively, that is, on its own experiential terms.
sufficient, and self-empowering. And such autonomy appears more compatible with the ordinary experience of selfhood as independent of others than it is with the reflective experience of selfhood as interdependent with others. As a result, the will would choose the reflective decisional option only to the extent that its experience of interdependent selfhood is also reflected in the will’s own experience of autonomous willing.

Of course, while the experience of autonomy may be its most immediate experience, it is not the will’s strongest one. The will’s strongest experience, rather, is the experience of the release from its own internal tension attained in willing and choosing. Only, when willing and choosing are conducted in the world rather than in the mental realm of sheer willing, they find their completion and actualization in action. As a result, for the will, the experience of acting in the world is part and parcel of the experience of willing and choosing. In this respect the will, unlike the faculties of thought and judgment, experiences the world directly and not only as a mental representation (that is, as a ‘thought thing’). It is in this sense that the will stands as an intermediary between the mind’s inwardness and the world outside it, as Augustine had realized (LMW: 101; see also LMT: 214-215).

But the world unto which the will’s volitions act is also a world of human plurality and natality. The will’s volitions therefore inevitably affect others and engender reactions from them. In turn, such reactions also affect the agent, usually in unexpected ways, engendering further (re)action from the agent. The will’s volitions therefore also create and maintain interrelationships. The ensuing experiences of human interrelatedness are thus also part of the will’s experience of willing, choosing, and acting.

The ubiquity of unexpected reactions to the will’s volitions also serves to counteract the sense of omnipotence inherent in the will’s experience of its own autonomy. Unexpected reactions from a

2 This realization is drawn by Arendt from Nietzsche (LMW: 162, 167-170). This experience is stronger than the experience of autonomy because the will’s internal tension is in part born out of its autonomy.
3 Thus, “[e]very volition, although a mental activity, relates to the world of appearances in which its project is to be realized” (LMW: 36-37). Notably, Arendt appropriates this Augustinian insight despite rejecting Augustine’s of how this intermediation takes place, as Augustine assigns to the will tasks that Arendt assigns to common sense and to the imagination (compare LMW: 99-100 with sections 4.2 and 4.3).
plurality of other agents often clash or even frustrate the realization of the will’s volitions, requiring the agent to alter her plans. The anticipation of such reactions sometimes serves to constrain the agent’s decisional choices, as do the commitments that stem from relationships in which the agent is enmeshed. The acquisition of the knowledge necessary for many of the will’s volitions also often requires assistance from, and therefore reliance on, others. As a result, the realization and fulfillment of many of the will’s volitions in fact depend on the actions of others.\(^4\) This experience of human interdependence, which goes hand-in-hand with human interrelatedness, is therefore also part and parcel of the will’s experience of willing, choosing, and acting.

At first, the will may be inclined to deny or rebel against such autonomy-constraining human interdependence. But the will has a very good reason to recognize and accept such human interdependence in its ubiquity. Human interdependence harkens back to the same human condition that is the source of the will’s own autonomy, namely, natality. To have been born is to be “fundamentally dependent creatures, born promiscuously to others like ourselves and radically dependent upon the good will and solidarity of others to become who we are” (Benhabib, 1992: 81). Indeed, even the initial awareness of our autonomy and freedom is acquired “in our intercourse with others” (BPF: 148). As such, human plurality, interrelatedness, and interdependence form the context within which human autonomy and freedom is asserted, but which it cannot transcend. To deny this, or rebel against it, is to deny or rebel against the conditions of being-human.

Contained in the will’s experience of willing, choosing, and acting, then, is an experience of human interdependence that is recognizable as being in fact interrelated with individual human autonomy. This is the parallel within reflective willing of the new experience of reflective selfhood that emerges out of moral thinking and judging. Thanks to it the will can realize that this new experience of reflective selfhood is in fact more representative of being-human-in-the-world, and therefore, more authentically human, than its ordinary counterpart. The reflective mode of being-in-the-world, which is revealed by this experience of reflective selfhood, is

\(^4\) Indeed, even agonal political action, the most natal worldly action in Arendt, depends upon others.
thereby revealed to the will as the one that protects and promotes, rather than threatens, human plurality and natality.

At the same time, the will also realizes that its own autonomy, if employed for choosing the reflective moral option, will in fact complement and hence complete this reflective experience of selfhood. Reflective thinking and judging have shown the self that its meanings and judgments are inextricably bound up with the meanings and judgments of others. As such, the generation of one’s meanings and the formation of one’s judgments entail an exchange and sharing of meanings and judgments with others who are also, and similarly, meaning-seeking and meaning-generating, judging and judged, fellow human agents. And these humanness-sharing experiences interrelate the self to other selves.

But the will realizes that to autonomously act on this set of realizations is also to undertake personal responsibility for the human world one shares in qua human being. And it realizes that this is a responsibility simultaneously and unconditionally owed to oneself as a human self and to one’s fellow human agents qua human selves. It also realizes that such an undertaking of responsibility is expected and demanded of the agent by her fellow human agents by virtue of her humanness. And it also realizes that a similar undertaking can also be expected and demanded from them (though one cannot condition one’s own undertaking of responsibility on such reciprocation).

Thus, finally, the will also realizes that through this exchange of responsibilities one’s humanness will have been shared with others on the level of volitions as it was shared on the levels of meanings and judgments. As a result, the self’s autonomy will have been reintroduced into the decision, but now as an integral part of human interrelatedness and interdependence. And this enables the agent to reinsert herself into the intricate web of human interrelationships and interdependency in her own uniqueness without ripping into, and tearing apart, this web. ⁵

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⁵ In my view, this is Arendt’s “step leading from the constituents of a philosophical anthropology (natality, worldliness, plurality, and forms of human activity) to [an] attitude of respect for the other”, which Benhabib (2000b: 81) believes to be missing in Arendt’s thought. This is how Arendt sought to reconcile the general (not universal) idea (not ideal) of humanity with “the fact of human particularity and diversity” (2000b: 79), which Benhabib (2000b: 78-80) believes Arendt had failed to do.
As a result, the will is finally able to see the triadic moral choice it faces in terms of what it entails for a natal and plural human self. The will can let the agent revert back to heuristic decision-making with its risk of banal evildoing. But to do so is to deny human plurality and interdependence, and thereby forgo its own autonomy and natal spontaneity. It can, on the other hand, retain and even celebrate its autonomy and spontaneity by choosing non-banal evildoing. But to do so is to rebel against human plurality and interdependence in pursuit of unfettered and therefore inhuman autonomy and self-sufficiency. Or it can choose moral righteousness, thereby accepting and actualizing human plurality with its interdependence, human natality with its spontaneous but circumscribed freedom, and with them the responsibility that comes with being-human.

This does not mean that the agent will always choose the reflective moral option. Nothing can guarantee this because such guarantee would foreclose the choice itself. It does, however, mean that the agent always has good enough reasons to pick the reflective moral options. And this gives us sufficient legitimation to prospectively expect and demand of agents to live up to their moral-human responsibility by picking the moral option, and to retrospectively hold them responsible for not having picked it. In this way, Arendtian willing puts the final seal on the legitimation of moral responsibility-ascription on all agents under any and all conditions, including those that foster banal evildoing.

10.2

Moral responsibility, then, is first and foremost a responsibility to oneself as a human self, stemming from, and actualizing, one’s humanness. As such, it is the price of being, as we are, plural and natal beings. Indeed, such responsibility is both demanded and bestowed by the independence of reflective thinking, judging, and willing (see section 6.4). But reflective moral action also reveals to the self complementariness and coincidence between care for the self and love of the world (see chapter 7). As a result, in reflective moral performance, personal responsibility to oneself is also, simultaneously and without contradiction, personal
responsibility to those other human beings with whom one shares the human world. Indeed, the act that stems from the choice to undertake reflective moral action is an act of joining into this holding in common of a human world for which all human agents are, jointly yet personally, responsible.

This personal responsibility undertaken with the will’s choice of reflective moral action, however, is responsibility for one’s own meanings (independent thinking), valuations (independent judging), choices (independent willing), and resulting actions. As a result, this responsibility, unlike political responsibility (see section 4.4), is authorial.\(^6\) This is what enables other human beings – any other human being – to demand that the agent choose to undertake this responsibility, and to hold the agent accountable for choosing to eschew it. This is what the ascription of human responsibility to banal evildoers is predicated upon.\(^7\)

Granted, such responsibility-ascription presupposes an ‘enduring I’ with a ‘strong well-shaped character’ stable enough to bear such responsibility (Jacobitti, 1988: 62-65; 1996: 208-210). This, it may be argued, is not supported by the Arendtian picture of the mind, for two related reasons. First, the notion of the mind as containing three independent faculties in potentially ongoing intramural warfare suggests a multiplicitous, fragmented, and therefore unstable, self (Honig, 1988: 82-90; 1993: 77-84; Villa, 1996: 90-92). The second is that the notion of a spontaneous and contingently choosing will suggests a self that is protean and therefore, again, unstable (Jacobitti, 1988: 65).

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\(^6\) This, I believe, is why Arendt, after HC, never referred to the “moral irresponsibility inherent in a plurality of agents” (HC: 220; my italics). The irresponsibility she is referring to is the inability to control the effects that one’s actions have in a plural world. This irresponsibility matters for political responsibility, but not for moral responsibility, as long as we are in control of our decision-making and resulting action.

\(^7\) Of course, the point that banal evildoers are held responsible because of the choice to let themselves act banally is not, in itself, novel. Indeed, a similar point was raised by the judges in the Eichmann trial (RJ: 30-31). What is novel about Arendt’s response is the fact that she does not take it for granted that such a choice is always open to the agent. Rather, as we saw in section 7.2, for Arendt this choice is itself enabled by the moral triggering and moral reflection that are carried out by reflective thinking (dialogical, critical, and speculative) and judging. It is in this sense that the Arendtian ascription of moral responsibility on the banal evildoer is in fact predicated on their human capacity for thinking and judging, which human beings possess regardless of their external circumstances.
But as already noted, these independent mental faculties in fact come together, in their independence, in reflective decision and action (see sections 6.3, 7.1 and 7.2). For such a decision, each of the three faculties is both required and, on its own, insufficient. As a result, in any given reflective decision, the independent mental faculties are also interdependent, having to find mutual ground if a decision is to be arrived at. The reflectively-decided single act thus stems from a coming together of independent and initially discordant faculties. This enables the reflectively acting self to be comprised of disparate and dissonant voices and yet also be an ‘I’ sufficiently cohesive and enduring to bear responsibility, both in the eyes of others and in its own retrospective eyes.

The combination of three facts of the reflective act is the key to this. First, the reflective act requires, reflects, and reveals a mutual ground of agreement between the independent voices steering it. This mutual ground is what the act and the principle of action guiding it encapsulate, actualize, and exemplify. Second, initial internal conflict notwithstanding, the act appears to (that is, is experienced and thus treated by) others as the act of a single and unified person with a cohesive self. Third, once undertaken, the act becomes a guiding example for one’s own further conduct that directly continues it, as well as for future action in circumstances adjudged to be similar to the present ones. The act thereby both serves as a ‘new beginning’ enacted by the agent upon the world, and becomes part of her own personal context of meaning. It thereby comes to be treated by the agent as the un-discordant and self-evident act of an enduring, self-consistent, ‘I’.

8 It is in this sense that in the reflective decision is found the reconciliation of spectatorship and action hinted at, as Bernstein (1986: 237) correctly suspects, in LK: 74-75.
9 Even when we remember, in retrospect, the discord and conflict that preceded a decision, if this is a decision we still approve of we would usually adjudge such discord to have been unwarranted for a decision that ‘should have been so obvious’. Indeed, this is what accounts for the fact that rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe repeatedly refer to their decision as self-evident (RJ: 78), more spontaneous reflex than conscious choice (Monroe, 1996: 210-213). Importantly, this should be seen not as an indication of a natural proclivity to a ‘perspective of shared humanity’, as Monroe (1996: 213-216) suggests, but as the result of a choice that is no longer recalled as such. Otherwise, to hold evildoers responsible for their actions is to punish them for lacking such a natural proclivity. Indeed, as Arendt insists, moral personhood is not a personal property one is born with but acquired through choices (RJ: 79; LMW: 195).
As a result of these three facts, the multiplicity and initial ‘intramural warfare’ which characterize the human mind need not result in a fragmented self too unstable and not cohesive enough to bear responsibility. Rather, reflective decision and action (which are, of course, predicated upon the spontaneity of the will and the contingency of its choice), in fact bring the discordant voices of the mind into a cohesive, stable, and ‘enduring I’. \(^{10}\) It is in this way that the mind, through reflective decision-making, mediates self and world, selfhood and otherness, in light of the reality of human interdependence.\(^{11}\)

The undertaking of such responsibility thus becomes an actualization of the freedom of the will. Limits on the agent’s contingent freedom that derive from such responsibility are therefore self-imposed and as a result acceptable to the will, which otherwise abhors limits (see section 6.1).\(^{12}\) In undertaking this responsibility, the agent shares her humanness with others while also sharing in their humanness. She thereby overcomes the fear of “solipsistic freedom – the ‘feeling’ that my standing apart, isolated from everyone else, is due to free will, that nothing and nobody can be held responsible for it but myself” (LMW: 195-196). It is in this being-with-and-for-the-self that is simultaneously also being-with-and-for-others that we find, I believe, Arendt’s ultimate affirmation of living in response to the challenge of Silenus (LK: 23; OR: 285; Beiner, 1982: 145).

Importantly, Arendt’s conception of moral performance does not provide a blueprint for getting moral decisions right. Nor is it meant to provide such a blueprint. Indeed, as Bernstein correctly notes, Arendt “is not trying to specify necessary and sufficient conditions that can ‘prevent catastrophes’. For there are none; there are no guarantees against evil. To believe that there are

\(^{10}\) Of course, this self will remain cohesive, stable, and ‘strong’ only until reflective decision-making is again undertaken by the agent. This does not mean that in this next occasion the self will completely unravel, to be reassembled afresh into a new configuration. Rather, the next time the agent undertakes reflective decision-making, one’s personal meanings, values, and prior actions – the glue that held the self together – will be reexamined, with the possibility – not certainty – that some will be changed or replaced.

\(^{11}\) I borrow this wording from Hansen (1993: 196). Notably, Hansen attributes this mediating capacity, incorrectly in my view, to the faculty of judgment rather than to the mind as a whole.

\(^{12}\) Though, again, the will alone, without thought and judgment, is incapable of giving itself such self-imposed but also self-consistent limits.
(or can be) is to slip into the illusion that there are firm banisters” (2000: 285).\footnote{13} Indeed, such a guarantee does away with the need to choose between righteousness and evildoing and therefore with moral responsibility.\footnote{14}

The point of Arendt’s conception of moral performance \textit{is} to show that a process of moral reflection other than blind conformity to instinct, shared meanings, and peer behavior is always open to human agents. Therefore, a real choice between righteousness and evildoing is open to human agents at any time, even when it appears as if the most basic personal considerations override such a choice. And human agents, by virtue of their humanness, have a responsibility, simultaneously to themselves and to others, to undertake this choice. For Arendt, this is the price we pay for being plural and natal human beings in a world shared with other similarly plural and natal human beings. Succumbing to such personal considerations, primary and overriding as they may initially appear, is always, for Arendt, a matter of contingent choice. This is therefore a choice which agents cannot shirk without thereby shirking their human responsibility and with it their humanness. And for this such agents may be legitimately held responsible.

\footnote{13 Notably, the linking of righteousness to being-for-self-and-world specifies the orientation of the category ‘right’ rather than its content, thereby maintaining its indeterminacy as an indefinable general category.}

\footnote{14 This, and not an existential and anti-moral commitment to human freedom as a supreme value, is the reason for Arendt’s reticence to provide “a general view of all kinds and degrees of wrongdoing, and at least by implication, right conduct” (Kateb, 2007: 812). Indeed, freedom is central to Arendt’s conception of moral performance primarily because it is a precondition of moral responsibility-ascription. Thus, contra Kateb, Arendt as I read her is very much ‘theorizing morality’, only she does so by providing a conception of moral performance rather than by providing a ranked catalogue of moral do’s and don’ts, which seems to be what Kateb understands as ‘moral theorizing’. Rather than try, with Kateb, to figure out whether and when, for example, the use of violence is right or wrong, Arendt prefers to try to figure out how we are to decide \textit{for ourselves} whether the use of violence in the given situation we are facing is right or wrong. Arendt’s reluctance to publish on morality since EJ, to which Kateb points as indicating her reticence to theorizing morality, is more plausibly explained as a reticence to publish only partly formed work-in-progress in the wake of the EJ controversy.}
Arendtian moral responsibility is thus in several important respects similar to Arendtian political responsibility, discussed in section 3.4. Like political responsibility, moral responsibility is also responsibility for the world that human agents share. This responsibility for the world is, by extension, also responsibility for the human condition of plurality and natality that characterizes the shared human world. And by further extension, this responsibility is a responsibility for every other human agent with whom one shares a world, insofar as such an agent is part of, a manifestation of, or an actualization of, plurality and natality. It is, in other words, responsibility for others’ uniqueness and autonomy, and thus of their personhood and agency. In this central respect Arendtian moral responsibility is political, in Arendt’s unique sense of the term. Both types of responsibility, one may say, are two branches of the same trunk, or two sides of the same coin, the coin of *being-political* in the human world.

But Arendtian moral and political responsibility are nonetheless two separate, and importantly dissimilar, branches of this trunk. The key difference is that the political act which derives from, and actualizes, political responsibility (and which was the focus of HC and OR) is a collective and shared undertaking. It seeks from the get-go to set an out-of-joint world aright by correcting the world. By contrast, the moral act which derives from, and actualizes, moral responsibility (and which was the focus of LM and RJ), whether an action or a willed refrain from action, is a wholly personal undertaking. Its initial thrust is concern not with correcting the course of the world but with correcting the course of the self in the world. Indeed, while publicness is for Arendt a defining mark of political action, reflective moral action may require, under certain circumstances, disengagement from one’s community and withdrawal from public appearance (*disappearance*; see RJ: 43-45; LMT: 192-193).

This is not to deny that the moral act is also world-protecting. On the contrary, once the moral act is captured in a story that is recounted to others, it becomes a moral exemplar. As such it is emplotted into, thereby becoming part of, and contributing to the maintenance and protection of, the shared human world.\(^{15}\) Moreover, the undertaking of moral responsibility itself consists of an

\(^{15}\) Indeed, justice and righteousness are among the indefinable concepts the sense of which is indicated through such exemplars (see section 3.2). Even moral acts done in ‘disappearance’, away from the public eye, can be made to
undertaking of concern for the course of the world. The world and its ‘out-of-jointness’ thereby come to direct the course that the self is steering in the world through moral action. But the thrust of the self’s movement remains, unlike in political action, care for the self and its human self-constancy.

This difference has two important, and interrelated, consequences. First, the political act, as an exercise of power-in-common that takes place within, and sustains, a shared public space, also inevitably presupposes such a space. Political responsibility is therefore undertaken and actualized within, and inexorably bound up with, a particular public space, political community, and specific shared world of meaning. It is the responsibility of an agent qua member of a political community (whether a preexisting one or one founded by the political act), shared with and owed to other members of this political community.

By contrast, the undertaking of moral responsibility, being personal and private, presupposes no such community. It is the responsibility of an agent qua human person, owed to herself and to any other human person, and in that sense to all human persons, qua human persons. As such, while it extends to all human beings, it does not create, nourish, sustain, or exist within, political relationships (including shared institutions or widespread commitments) or communities. It is in this way that Arendt, in my view, tries to remain a moral humanist while avoiding (political) cosmopolitanism, which as late as the early 1970 she still opposed. In this respect, the (potentially) universal but non-political personal moral responsibility replaces the “new political principle … a new law on earth, whose validity this time must comprehend the whole of humanity” as the new guarantee needed for human dignity in post-totalitarian times (OT: ix).

appear and become moral exemplars when discovered and then told of. Thus, “totalitarian domination tried to establish these holes of oblivion into which all deeds, good and evil, would disappear, but … there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible. One man will always be left to tell the story” (EJ: 232-233).

See in this respect her remark that “Kant knew quite well that a world government would be the worst tyranny imaginable” (LK: 44).

It is therefore not surprising that the demand for such a new political principle or law was not repeated in her later work, most notably in EJ. It may be that the Eichmann trial made her realize made her realize that given the inherently unprecedented and therefore unpredictable nature of banal evildoing, such a law would be ineffectual.
Second, the political act serves to maintain and promote the human condition primarily by adding to, and strengthening, it. Of course, in the process of strengthening the human condition, the political has the effect of also protecting and fortifying the human condition. But this is more a secondary result rather than a primary effect of the political act. The moral act, on the other hand, serves to maintain and promote the human condition primarily by protecting and fortifying it against encroachment. This, of course, also helps to strengthen the human world, but this is only a secondary effect of such protection and fortification.  

But here we must keep in mind that Arendt’s guiding example in her moral analysis is the world of Nazi Germany, in which agents’ reaction to the world’s disjointedness could not be a public undertaking to correct the world. It could at best be a personal undertaking to keep one’s human bearings in the world and not let its disjointedness make one also out-of-joint with oneself and one’s humanness. And this, in turn, restores a ray of hope for the world as well. For if more and more people retain their humanness in such an unhuman human world, there may come the point at which they can, between them, reinstate a public sphere in which public political action would again be possible.  

The rediscovery of plurality and natality as the conditions of one’s humanness thus amounts to a rediscovery of one’s capacity for contingently holding the world in common with a plurality of others. It is thus a rediscovery of the fact that this holding of the world in common (that is, acting out of love of the world) is an actualization of oneself as a human self. It amounts, in other words, to a rediscovery of one’s political capacity in Arendt’s sense of the term. And this rediscovery is possible even where, as under Nazi totalitarianism, the common public stage needed for political action has been destroyed. In a world so out of step with being human,
holding fast to one’s humanness despite (and potentially against) the world around you, is the only realistic way of *being political* left open to individual agents.\(^{19}\) It is in this respect that, for Arendt, under such extreme circumstances, independent reflective moral thinking and judging “becomes a kind of action”, that is, for Arendt, political (LMW: 192; see also RJ: 104-105, 188-189).\(^{20}\)

Of course, to say that the reflective moral decision and the act that results from and actualizes it rekindle our forgotten political capacity is to suggest that this act does not stand alone as an exceptional event within one’s life. Rather, this decision and action are contingent and natal and in this sense, as Arendt had always insisted, a new *beginning*. As a *beginning*, it inevitably has a continuation. Such continuation can be found in further decisions and actions that continue the course of action initiated by the originary decision and action. It can also be found in the moral relationship that grows out of the originary moral act. And it can be found in future originary acts by the same agent for which the present moral act serves as a guiding example. Such continuations, however, raise some difficulties for the Arendtian moral analysis, which I discuss in chapter 11. In chapter 12 I then return to the question of the relationship of morality and politics on Arendtian terms.

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\(^{19}\) Thus, contra Arendt’s initial position, responsibility for the world in fact can be assumed even without “a minimum of political power” (RJ: 45). On the contrary, the undertaking of such responsibility is the first step towards recovering this lost political power.

\(^{20}\) Thus, thinking’s “political and moral significance comes out only in those rare moments in history when ‘Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world’, when ‘The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity”’ (RJ: 188; quoting W. B. Yeats’ *The Second Coming*). The world of the Nazis was indeed for Arendt a world that had been stood on its head (RJ: 256).
Chapter 11
Moral Life

The Arendtian moral analysis, as presented in the previous ten chapters, was very much guided by the example of Nazi Germany. Only, as we were reminded at the end of the previous chapter, Nazi Germany is very much a limit case, representing an unusual and extreme set of circumstances even by Arendt’s own admission. Does this mean that the Arendtian moral analysis is limited to these extreme circumstances? Or is it also instructive for moral and political decisions in more ordinary moral circumstances? This is the focus of the present chapter, dealing with ordinary moral decisions, and the next chapter, dealing with the intersections of morality and politics.

With regard to ordinary moral decisions, this issue arises out of a tension within the Arendtian analysis between the extraordinariness of the reflective moral act and the necessity of a return to ordinary action. If non-reflective decision-making is the ordinary decisional rule, then any reflectively-decided act is extraordinary by definition. Reflective acts thus mark exceptional decisional moments within a stream of heuristic decision-making to which agents always return after reflective interludes. But if this is the case, then any reflective decision, including the moral one, is singular, unique, and self-contained. And yet, the reflective act is also, for Arendt, ‘a new beginning’, and as such it cannot but be an originary act which is continued by further decisions and actions. Indeed, righteous action under the Nazis oftentimes manifested itself in a moral course of action (e.g., harboring a fugitive over an extended period of time) or pattern of behavior (e.g., regularly harboring fugitives for a night), and not merely in singular moral acts.¹ Only, to the extent that such further decisions and actions occur within the ordinary flow of life they themselves cannot be made reflectively.

¹ Even disappearance, which Arendt herself lauds, is a pattern of behavior rather than a singular act.
The problem of the return from the reflective moral decision to the realm of ordinary action also manifests itself in a puzzle at the heart of Arendt’s analytical framework. On my reading here agents ordinarily act in a manner that presumes selfhood and otherness to be separate and mutually exclusive. Upon moral reflection, however, the agent recognizes the interconnectedness and mutual responsibility of oneself and others to be a more authentic representation of human being-in-the-world. But if this is the case, how can the agent then return to the ordinary pattern of heuristic decision-making, now recognized to be less humanly-authentic?² Arendt does not resolve this puzzle. The reason for this, in my view, is that, guided by the Nazi example, she remains preoccupied with making sense of the moral decision in its singularity and uniqueness. As a result, she does not offer a sustained discussion of how this moral act relates to ordinary situations and actions. In the present chapter I therefore develop, beyond (and in part ‘with and against’) Arendt, such a discussion.

For my starting point I take the acts of forgiving and promising, which Arendt herself singled out as acts of moral significance (section 11.1). Specifically, I show that these acts point us to two ways in which the singular moral act stands in relation to ordinary action: as an originary act that engenders a moral course of action, and as a guiding example for future singular moral acts by others or by the agent herself. I discuss these two relationships further in section 11.2. In section 11.3 I highlight the difficulties these relationships (especially the moral course of action) raise from an Arendtian moral perspective. In section 11.4 I respond to these difficulties.

11.1

In light of the moral significance of human interdependence on Arendtian terms, it is curious that Arendt almost entirely omits the acts of promising and forgiving from her moral analysis. Promising and forgiving are introduced in HC as the human acts that can remedy the inherent

² I am indebted to Jennifer Nedelsky for posing this challenge to me.
“irreversibility and unpredictability of the process started by acting” (HC: 236). Natal and contingent action acts into, affects, and triggers (re)actions within, a plural world of natal human agents enmeshed in a complex web of relationships. As such, the actor can neither control nor direct the outcomes and effects that her action has in the world, nor undo or change the action she had taken (see section 3.4). And this can have a debilitating effect on action, deterring agents from undertaking natal and contingent action for fear of their unintended and irremediable consequences (HC: 195-198).

This irreversibility and unpredictability is mitigated by promising and forgiving. Promising reduces the unpredictability of action by binding agents to certain future acts, thereby creating “islands of predictability” within the “ocean of uncertainty” that is the future (HC: 244; see also HC: 237). Forgiving alleviates the irreversibility of action by releasing the agent from the outcomes and consequences of certain past acts, which are thereby in effect undone (HC: 237). The knowledge that the unintended future consequences of their present acts can be forgiven then enables agent to accept the risk of such consequences and undertake new action despite them (ibid).

Only, both acts owe their effectiveness to the reliance upon them that they foster in others. My promise binds me because it creates in another agent an expectation of fulfillment and with it future reliance upon me. Such expectation and reliance, in turn, are what moves me to relinquish some of my future autonomy for the sake of the Other. Being forgiven releases me to act because it creates in me the expectation that others will forgive the unintended consequences of my acts if these acts themselves reveal me to merit such forgiveness. It is in this sense that, in my view, both promising and forgiving, for Arendt, depend on human plurality (HC: 237). Of course, this makes one’s capacity for autonomous and natal action itself depend on the actions of others. Interdependency is therefore definitive rather than restrictive of the self’s autonomy (HC: 237-238, 245-246).

A similar interdependency, however, also operates at the level of personhood. It is the unique person who is, by virtue of who she is, forgiven (HC: 241). This means, though Arendt does not say this, that being forgiven entails opening my self up to the forgiving Other. Forgiving, in turn, is an act not only of receiving the personhood that has been thereby opened up to the forgiver,
but also of acknowledging and respecting it as human personhood. And as a form of giving, it can only be given by someone who thereby positions herself as a fellow human person. Thus, forgiving is an act in which two human persons meet each other as human persons and thereby share and intertwine their humanness. A similar sharing and intertwining of humanness occurs in my reliance on the Other, and the resultant binding of her future self to her present self, upon her making me a promise. Thus, in promising, forgiving, being promised, or being forgiven, I reveal my human personhood through acknowledging and reciprocating the human personhood of the Other.

Promising and forgiving are thus acts of sharing humanness. The interdependence they foster actualizes (and thus acknowledges and accepts as inherent) fundamental human interdependence. But promising and being forgiving also interrelate and therefore unify the self. Promising binds decisions by my future self to those of my present self, thereby creating continuity between them. This unifies our identity in a similar way to its confirmation by the spectators who view our actions (see HC: 237). And this latter unifying effect of being seen and treated by others as a person is itself in operation, and may even be at its strongest, in being forgiven. This is because I am to be forgiven (or not) on the basis of who I am (more precisely, have been), as revealed through my overall actions. In other words, promising and being forgiven also presuppose, acknowledge, and foster, the continuity and cohesiveness of the self over time.

But promising and forgiving are also moral acts, though in HC Arendt concedes this only indirectly. Promising and forgiving are unpredictable and hence natal acts that depend on human plurality. As a result, for Arendt, moral precepts inferred from them “arise … directly out of the will to live together with others in the mode of acting and speaking, and thus they are like control mechanisms built into the very faculty to start new and unending processes” (HC: 246). Within HC, such moral precepts are the only ones that can legitimately limit political action.

Notably, in HC, Arendt does not explain why she considered the limitations on political action inferred from promising and forgiving to be moral ones. This becomes evident, however, in light of her later moral analysis. Promising and forgiving are natal acts that require ascribing meaning
to, and evaluating, both the acts of the person being forgiven or promised, and one’s own acts. As such, they have to be decided reflectively. They are also acts of sharing humanness entailing recognition of the mutual complementariness of oneself and others. They are acts that simultaneously enable us to live with ourselves through the living-with-others they facilitate, and to live with others through the living-with-ourselves they facilitate. And third, these are acts in which our own humanness, the humanness of others, our sharing of the world with them, and their (and the world’s) plurality and natality, are all at stake. It is the combination of these factors that indeed makes promising and forgiving moral acts.

Arendt, of course, had insisted that some acts are unforgivable, such that it would have been better for the human world if their perpetrators had never been born (HC: 241; RJ: 109). But this runs counter to Arendt’s insistence that forgiveness is granted on the basis of the person rather than the deed (HC: 241; RJ: 95, 111). This inconsistency, I believe, is the reason that her startling claim that it is better if the perpetrator of such crimes had never been born is drawn from Jesus, her traditional exemplar of goodness and the “discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs” (HC: 238).

The paradigmatic example of unforgivable crimes in Arendt is of course Nazi crimes (RJ: 22-23, 55, 95, 111). But even here this inconsistency persists, as is evident in her discussion of former Auschwitz physician Franz Lucas, one of the defendants in the 1964 trials of several German Auschwitz operatives (RJ: 234-235, 248-250, 256). Of the defendants, Lucas was the only one to insist that he was guilty of anything, to the point of rejecting the testimony of inmates he had actually helped while at Auschwitz. He was, in other words, the only one of the defendants to acknowledge his deeds for what they were and realize there were no ‘mitigating circumstances’

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3 Indeed, an immediately and automatically granted promise or forgiveness would appear dismissive or insincere and therefore unreliable, undoing its effect on human action. Think, for example, of a person who makes a promise while watching a hockey game and without turning her eyes away from the television. More often than not, such promises would require reminding – in effect, being remade – to be fulfilled and/or relied upon.

4 If forgiving and promising are reflective moral acts, are we required to engage in full self-reflection every time we make a promise or grant forgiveness? I respond to this question, put to me by Jennifer Nedelsky, in section 11.4 (see especially footnote 19).
for them. And Arendt’s own verdict of him is that even “the judges knew quite well that in the words of a witness, he ‘didn’t belong there at all. He was too good’” (RJ: 249, my italics).

Lucas, then, is forgiven by Arendt. And he is forgiven, I would argue, because his conduct, both at Auschwitz and at his trial, displayed him as a person who realized the immorality of the crimes in which he had partaken. His was no mere ethical change of hearts whereby one set of external mores was replaced by another, but an internal recognition, born of moral reflection, of the evil of his deeds. And as such, it showed him to be a person worthy of forgiveness of past moral transgression, banal or non-banal. Such forgiving thereby emerges as the moral act that can, on the reflective decision of the agent, relieve the ever-present and all-encompassing demand for unconditional human moral responsibility.

Notably, however, even though promising and forgiving are, in themselves, singular moral acts, they also inevitably stand in close relation to other acts. A promise is by its nature a commitment to perform (or abstain from) certain future acts. In this respect, the promise is an originary act, engendering a moral course of action, a moral relationship, or both. And since for Arendt one forgives a person rather than an act, forgiveness would usually (though not always) be granted on the basis of a series of actions displaying a consistent moral pattern of behavior. Indeed, most Nazi collaborators, including Eichmann, could point to isolated instances in which they had helped or saved victims. But only those meriting forgiveness, such as Franz Lucas, could point to a pattern of such action. Thus, the moral act, though in itself singular and unique, can (and often does) also find continuation in a chain of related future acts which it starts off as a ‘new beginning’.

Moreover, as shown above, promising interrelates present and future actions and therefore one’s future self to one’s present self. Promising thereby has a unifying effect on the self. And forgiving draws upon, and therefore attests to, such self-interrelatedness. In other words, promising also finds internal continuation within the self, to which forgiving confers external confirmation. This effect as well is not restricted to promising and forgiving, but is a feature of

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5 It may be tempting to try and see Arendt’s forgiveness of Heidegger in a similar light, though it may also have been the case that in her eyes his crimes were not of the unforgivable category in the first place.
the reflective moral act in general. Indeed, the notion that the moral act entails the undertaking of responsibility itself presupposes such internal continuity, since responsibility relates certain future acts to my present act. Only, within this continuity of the self, the moral act relates not only to the chain of future actions it originates, but also to future moral acts, for which it stands as a guiding example. And this relation of exemplarity is not restricted to the internality of the self. Rather, once it is told of by and to others, the moral act may also become a moral exemplar for the moral performance of others.

The reflective moral act, then, is inevitably singular and unique only while it is being decided and enacted. Once it has been enacted into the world it may remain singular and unique, but more commonly it will be related to actions it either originates or exemplarily guides, by the agent or by others. Rather than stand alone, it in fact becomes both part of a course of action and emplotted into the biographical or autobiographical life story of its enactor. Only, within these relations, certain features of the originary and exemplary moral decision insisted upon by Arendt are no longer tenable without certain modification, as I show in the following sections.

11.2

The notion that the singular moral decision serves as a guiding example for future moral decisions and actions is to an extent presupposed in the preceding analysis. We have already seen that in making a reflective moral decision, the agent looks back to, and draws upon, her own personal context of meaning, including examples of her prior actions (sections 7.2 and 7.3). Of course, in the reflective decision, the agent does not merely follow and apply these meanings and examples automatically. Rather, she must self-reflectively reexamine them so as to choose anew which ones to prioritize in the given decision. But once this is done she does draw on such meanings and examples for moral guidance. Prior examples of one’s own morally righteous

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6 Thus, for Arendt as for Bauman, being-moral has a stabilizing and therefore anchoring effect on the self.
conduct, and of the actions of other moral exemplars, would likely be particularly important in this decisional moral self-reflection.\textsuperscript{7}

This, of course, suggests that successful moral performance importantly relies on the availability to the agent of guiding examples of successful moral performance, either in her own past or in the actions of others. And indeed, under ordinary lived conditions, most adult human agents would, I believe, have such examples available to them thanks to their pre-adult process of moral learning.\textsuperscript{8} This is the case even in the Nazi example, wherein most adult agents were born and raised prior to the Nazi takeover. Under the Nazis, such past examples were not erased from within agent’s personal contexts of meaning, but merely buried, forgotten, within it.

In other words, the reflective moral decision is one in which ‘forgotten’ moral exemplars are recalled and given the decisional priority they merit, and in which moral capacity is thereby recovered rather than discovered. In the process, past reflective moral decisions are (upon reconsideration) reaffirmed as guiding moral examples, and as such are continued by the current reflective moral decision. And agents can be held responsible for choosing not to recover their moral capacity even after a recent history of non-moral conduct and without exemplars of moral conduct in one’s immediate decisional environment.\textsuperscript{9}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{7} The actions of moral exemplars, of course, would be represented within the agent’s self in the form of the meanings that such persons exemplify.
\item \textsuperscript{8} I am here presuming that, though agents have the mental capacities required for moral performance, the use of such capacities is not discovered out of nowhere but cultivated during one’s childhood and teen years. Of course, if this is the case, then in the reality of most people’s lives there therefore is not one particular decision that can be regarded as the first moral decision one has ever made. It may well be possible for a person to point to a past choice one feels to be the beginning of one’s moral life, but usually such a decision would not be the first ever one has made that involves moral considerations and some moral reflection, and would in fact have drawn on such past decisions. This decision is more aptly described as the first mature moral decision one makes.
\item \textsuperscript{9} This would seem to suggest that agents whose moral capacity was left uncultivated, or cultivated to immorality, cannot be legitimately held morally responsible for their immoral conduct. This would be the case, for example, with agents born under Nazi rule had Nazi Germany continued to exist long enough for them to become adults. However, it may be countered that if morality is endemic to human interrelatedness, as my argument in this thesis presumes, then the seeds of moral capacity are sown in the first experiences of care and interrelationship in our lives, and are nourished and cultivated through additional such experiences. This may not suffice to hold such agents responsible for evildoing conducted under Nazi rule, for in this case such agents could make a strong case that they could not have known otherwise. But this may still be enough to legitimately expect such agents, once outside Nazi society, to see the moral error of their upbringing and prior ways, and to hold them morally responsible for not changing those ways.
\end{itemize}
The moral course of action and interrelationship pose even more of a problem to the Arendtian moral analysis.\(^{10}\) This is because they inevitably take place in the world of action, that is, within the decisional reality that gives rise to the need for heuristic decision-making. Once I have decided, under Nazi-like conditions, to harbor a fugitive family in my home over an extended period of time, I need to take subsequent actions to effectively conceal them, and to provide them with sustenance. I must also take care not to inadvertently arouse the suspicion that I am sheltering fugitives, in either my planned actions or in my immediate reactions. I must therefore be diligent about all my actions, even otherwise prosaic acts such as buying food or hanging laundry to dry in the sun. I must, it would seem, reflect carefully about everything that I am doing, which, for the reasons outlined in section 4.4, is cognitively impossible.

This seeming impasse, however, is in an important sense more apparent than real. The subsequent decisions that derive from, and carry out, the originary moral decision, do not in fact entail full reflection in the Arendtian sense. In thinking carefully about how I can obtain food for, say, five people, without arousing the suspicion of those who know I live alone, I am not reconsidering the moral aim that I had undertaken in my originary moral decision. Rather, I take this aim, as given, for my decisional guide, and devise the best means of attaining it. I am, in other words, engaged not in fully self-reflexive Arendtian reflection, but in instrumental reflection, and am thus engaged, in Arendtian terms, in ordinary rather than reflective decision-making.

However, and contra Arendt, instrumental reflection, though non-reflective in the Arendtian sense, is also not merely heuristic. It is not an automatic application of the given aim, but requires stopping what the agent is currently doing, even if in Arendtian terms this is a ‘stop-and-cognize’ rather than a ‘stop-and-think’.\(^{11}\) And as such, it requires the expenditure of some

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\(^{10}\) Decisionally, moral relationships are a special type of moral courses of action (one could call them moral courses of *interaction*). Thus, even though, in the remainder of my discussion, I speak mostly of moral courses of action, what I say is in principle applicable to moral relationships as well.

\(^{11}\) For example, if I were a military commander whose unit encounters unexpected resistance, I would not simply order my soldiers to proceed as if nothing has happened, nor would I simply order them to rush on the source of the resistance. Rather, I would try to pause and devise a plan of action, and even if I can only devote a minute or two to
cognitive resources and therefore also cannot be employed for every decision and action. Recourse to such instrumental reflection therefore also needs to be reduced by the agent.

One means of reducing recourse to instrumental moral is habituation. Thus, I may devise a plan to buy food from different sources on different days, and then adopt the habit of regularly buying my groceries in neighboring town A on Mondays or Tuesdays, and in neighboring town B on Thursdays or Fridays. I may also adopt the habit of doing my laundry early in the morning, before I am seen by others, or late in the day, so that I can hang it to dry overnight in darkness. I would still need to be aware of unexpected occurrences that could endanger my moral course of action, but such awareness need not break with the habit and may itself be habituated.  

Of course, many circumstances and contingencies cannot be addressed through adopting such habits. This is particularly the case with changing circumstances or unexpected occurrences, which force the agent into momentary (and hence non-reflective) reactions. In such cases, the originary moral act, as a guiding example, can also serve as a general category (aim or principle of action) under which situations and prospective actions can be subsumed determinatively (and hence heuristically) rather than reflectively. Thus, should someone unexpectedly visit me while I am harboring the fugitives, my quick and immediate reactions towards that person would be determined primarily in terms of my endeavors to harbor the fugitives. This is even to the point of incurring personal risk, for example, if the visitors are police officers (to whom I can simply turn in the fugitives at the first risk of discovery).

Moreover, within the world of human interrelationships, the agent is but one among a plurality of persons, and her moral course of action but one among a multitude of (moral and non-moral) courses of action, initiated by her or by others. She possesses a body that that needs nourishing if such planning, it would nonetheless constitute an instance of ‘stopping’ to (instrumentally) consider the situation and my options within it.

This would be akin to my awareness, when crossing a road on a green pedestrian light, of the possibility of right-turning vehicle not giving me right of way. It does not break my habit of crossing on a green light, and can be habituated into a practice of checking the street behind me for right-turning vehicles.
she is to carry on with her moral course of action. And she is involved in a myriad of moral and non-moral relationships, which carry with them both moral and non-moral obligations and responsibilities, and often mixtures of both.\textsuperscript{13}

This worldly plurality of persons, courses of action, life-goals, and interrelationships inevitably turns many of the decisions that comprise one’s moral course of action into ones that entail moral tradeoffs, compromises, and balancing acts. This is most clearly evident in the case of moral relationships. As Bauman correctly observed, such relationships are characterized by a precarious vulnerability and interdependence, and therefore entail a special moral obligation (see section 8.1). This obligation, of course, has to be accorded decisional priority on moral grounds.\textsuperscript{14} This means that an agent can only enter a very limited number of full-fledged moral relationships. Beyond this limit, every new moral relationship reduces the agent’s ability to fully fulfill the obligations entailed in all her moral relationships, resulting in an unavoidable moral calculation (when I am already harboring a fugitive family in my home, can I extend more than immediate temporary assistance – and perhaps not even that – to another fugitive family that comes my way?).

\textsuperscript{13} The most obvious example of non-moral relationships are business or professional relationships, but I also consider life-partner relationship, family relationships, and friendships, to be non-moral ones, giving rise to non-moral obligations and responsibilities. If moral responsibility is responsibility to and for other human persons \textit{qua persons}, then it is a responsibility that does not discriminate between familiars (loved ones, friends, family) and strangers. I am to save a drowning person’s life, if I can, regardless of whether I know this person or not. Moral relationships, since they are engendered by moral acts, therefore (contra Bauman) retain an element of interchangeability, even though over time they become unique and personalized relationships: I would have done the same for anyone else. This, of course, is not deny that my relationships with my life-partner, child, parents, siblings, or close friends, are all special relationships carrying with them special obligations and responsibilities. This is to say that whatever commitments, obligations and responsibilities which exist within such relationships and are not also conferrable upon human strangers (that are, in precisely this sense, \textit{special} commitments, obligations, and responsibilities), are not moral ones. These special commitments are added onto the moral commitment I would already owe my partner, friend, parent or child by virtue of their human personhood. In other words, these special relationships are non-moral in the sense that their primary engine is not moral responsibility, and in the sense that they carry with them commitments beyond what is demanded by moral responsibility.

\textsuperscript{14} As such, this special moral obligation differs from the special non-moral obligations discussed in the previous footnote. Notably, this does not negate the point that moral relationships carry over an element of interchangeability. In the course of harboring the fugitive family I develop a special relationship with them. But the knowledge that had \textit{another} fugitive family happened to cross my path instead of the one I am harboring I would have harbored them instead remains part of the relationship – indeed, part of the moral content of the relationship. Thus, when the family no longer needs harboring, I will no longer have any moral reason to maintain a relationship with them, though I may choose to do so, say, if the relationship had acquired an element of friendship over time.
Thus, in real life, moral relationships inevitably (and legitimately) bring with them moral tradeoffs. Moreover, in the complex reality of human life, agents are also likely to be faced with decisions in which different moral considerations may point in different decisional directions (as when, for example, I encounter a dying person whom I can save while on my way to fulfilling an important promise that would go unfulfilled if I were to stop and save the dying person). And sometimes relevant and legitimate non-moral considerations, such as commitments to one’s life-partners, children, family, or friends compete with moral considerations over determining the same decision (for example, do I risk my children’s lives by harboring a fugitive from the Nazis?). As a result, subsequent moral decisions within one’s moral course of action oftentimes also require moral calculations, tradeoffs, and balancing acts.

11.3

Arendt, of course, rejected non-reflective moral decision-making, as well as moral calculations and tradeoffs, as (at least) morally suspect. This rejection is understandable given her guiding example. After all, the subversion of heuristic decision-making, and the creation of a decisional environment in which moral considerations would always lose out in the decisional balance, were both central components in the Nazi tranquility of moral performance (see chapter 2). In Nazi reality, necessity was perceived as overwhelmingly pressing, one’s own life was felt to be under ongoing threat, and moral action almost always appeared to increase this threat. In such a reality, being-moral would usually appear a luxury the agent could not afford. And after enough decisional calculations end in the defeat of the moral option, it would cease to be considered viable. From that point on it would not even enter into the calculation, henceforth lying forgotten in a dim corner of one’s memory and self. Heuristic decision-making would then be left to reign decisionally supreme, with habituated banal evildoing the result.

It may be suggested that courses of action that continue an originary moral act escape this Arendtian criticism. The general categories that guide such subsequent moral decisions in a heuristic manner were still arrived at through appropriate moral reflection. They therefore still
derive from, and (self-) actualize, moral human personhood. They may foster habits, but these are the right habits to have.

From an Arendtian perspective, however, this suggestion is unpersuasive, for two reasons. First, in an ever-changing world of human plurality and natality, changing circumstances may render initially good habits evil, under the new circumstances. Second, the nature of habituation is such that, as time goes by and the habit gets entrenched, it decisionally overtakes the reasons that had occasioned and initially guided it. From a means to better actualizing moral reasons for action, the habit eventually becomes a reason for action in and of itself, its reflective moral origins decisionally neglected and eventually forgotten. Thus, from an Arendtian perspective the specter of banal evildoing always lies in wait at the end of the habituation of moral conduct.

Arendt therefore sought to defeat this vicious circle by not entering it in the first place. As a result, her moral analysis deals with, and therefore recognizes as moral, only decisions made in full reflection and with moral considerations overriding non-moral ones, especially self-preservation (ordinarily taken by agents as their most basic and overriding concern). But the result of this is that the reflective and life-changing moral decision, despite being singular, unique, and biographically uncommon, in effect becomes the standard against which the morality of all decisions and actions is measured. And this, in my view, restricts the possibility of being-moral to biographically uncharacteristic actions undertaken under extreme conditions, and thereby nullifying the possibility being-moral in the sense of the leading of a moral life.\textsuperscript{15}

Indeed, the (sad) reality of human life is that an absolutely righteous life, in which all decisions involving moral considerations are made reflectively and disregard all non-moral considerations, is well-nigh impossible. I may determine that giving money to a homeless beggar is a righteous act. But I inevitably have a limited amount of money I can give. And yet, to take this into account is to fail the Arendtian moral test. Similarly, I may be a concentration camp physician who has realized the evilness of the camp and has determined to help the inmates as much as I can. But for the most part I will not be able to help all of those that I encounter and who need my

\textsuperscript{15} I leave open the interpretive question of whether Arendt had intended this outcome.
help, and if I am found out I will no longer be able to help anyone. Yet again, by taking such considerations into account I will have also failed the Arendtian moral test. I may determine that saving human lives is a righteous act. But when I can save only one of several lives, the choice of whom to save and whom to sacrifice cannot but be made on the basis of non-moral considerations. And in this case, any choice I make will have failed the Arendtian moral test.¹⁶

Moreover, as my above examples of harboring a fugitive family under Nazi-like conditions attest, many morally righteous actions under Nazi-like conditions would also come short of the Arendtian moral test. Once the originary moral act has begun a new, moral, course of action, that course of action is in fact comprised primarily of decisions and actions that in strict Arendtian terms would be non-reflective. This course of action is also highly unlikely to avoid any need for moral tradeoffs and calculations. To say that such courses of action are for this reason no longer moral would be, in my view, an unrealistically and undeservedly harsh evaluation. The originary moral choice, indeed, needs to be made reflectively in the Arendtian sense of the term, and entails overriding non-moral considerations for the sake of being-moral. But a moral life is in fact a mix of reflective and non-reflective moral action, the latter considered moral due to the aim and/or example that guide them, rather than the way in which they were decided.

11.4

The previous section is not meant to suggest that the Arendtian moral analysis is inapplicable outside the Nazi example or uninstructive beyond the strict aim of legitimizing moral responsibility-ascription on banal evildoers. For one, I still find it highly instructive with regard

¹⁶ Think, for example, of a situation in which two people are caught in a burning house, and it is within my power to save one, but only one, of them. The choice to risk my life so as to save one of them is a moral one. But since moral responsibility is responsibility for and to other persons qua persons, I have an equal responsibility to save either one. Therefore, in choosing which one to save, I cannot but let non-moral considerations (such as the relative risk to my life or the nature of my relationship to both – for example, if one is a stranger and the other a friend or family member) tip the balance.
to those watershed decisions in which a commitment to being a moral person and to leading a 
moral life, and an ensuing new moral course of action, are undertaken or reaffirmed. The Nazi 
example indeed sheds important light on such decisions. Where moral stakes are at their highest 
and moral choices at their most extreme (as was the case under Nazi conditions), moral stakes 
and choices are also most sharply and therefore clearly drawn, revealing most clearly what is at 
their core. But the Arendtian moral analysis, in my view, cannot be taken as describing either 
how most ordinary moral decision and actions are made or how such decisions ought to be made.

Nonetheless, I believe the Arendtian moral analysis still makes some significant contributions to 
the understanding and evaluation of ordinary moral life, in at least three ways. First, it still 
captures, in my view, the human meaning of being moral, that is, what is at the core of, and at 
stake in, moral performance and a moral life in general. It thus contributes the idea that concern 
for others stems from a shared responsibility for the world we all hold in common and the human 
condition we all share. It contributes the idea that this is therefore a responsibility to and for 
every person qua (unique and autonomous) human person. It contributes the idea that this moral 
responsibility is part and parcel of both being-with-others and being-with-and-for-the-self. It 
contributes the idea that therefore the self is constituted and held together, in part, in and through 
its relatedness to, and conduct towards, others. It contributes the idea that as a result, to be moral 
is a necessary part of what it means to be truly human and lead a meaningful human life. And 
finally, it contributes the conviction that every person has the capacities, and therefore the ability 
and power, to lead such a life – even if at times Arendt herself may have seemed skeptical about 
this potential coming to widespread fruition.

17 In fact, where moral choices are most clearly delineated and sharply differentiated, moral decisions are indeed ‘all 
or nothing’ decisions, as Arendt seems to treat the moral decision.
18 On several occasions, Arendt insisted that those who did not succumb to the Nazi moral failure were ‘few, very 
few’ (e.g., RJ: 43, 78). Since in LMT Arendt ties this to the exercise of moral reflection, and especially to the 
exercise of critical thinking (e.g., LMT: 192), it may tempting to read Arendt as believing that in reality only a few 
people will engage in critical thinking and therefore be capable of successful moral performance. I, however, would 
reject this reading. Textually, I find it at odds with Arendt’s own insistence that “[t]hinking in its noncognitive, 
nonspecialized sense as a natural need of human life, the actualization of the difference given in consciousness, is 
not a prerogative of the few but an ever-present faculty of everybody” (LMT: 191), and that therefore “if indeed the 
ability to tell right from wrong is tied to thinking, we must be able to demand its exercise from every person, not just 
the few” (LMT: 13). On a factual level, I believe – perhaps contra Arendt – that instances of self-reflection, self-
examination and self-criticism in fact occur in most peoples live’s, though seldom as a matter of course. Rare is the
The second contribution I see made by the Arendtian moral analysis is that, in the form of the reflective moral act, it provides both agents and spectators with an exemplar of moral performance at its purest. This exemplar, in my view, should not be taken to set a standard of judgment which action must pass in order to count as moral. Rather, it should be taken to mark a horizon towards which both moral action and the moral evaluation of action can orient itself.

Such a horizon does indeed highlight those aspects of agents’ actions that had met the challenge of being moral and those that came short of meeting it. But it does so in the spirit of acknowledging agents’ sincere moral efforts while instructing them on improving their ways. It acknowledges, in other words, that actions can be morally better and morally worse rather than strictly successful or failed. It thereby acknowledges as morally legitimate the perhaps less demanding, but more realistic, aspiration to do morally better given a life context of varied and often conflicting commitments, aspirations, and interrelationships. It thus puts forth a demand for, and a challenge to, moral effort and diligence while eschewing an insistence on moral perfection that ends up despairing agents from moral effort.\textsuperscript{19}

Of course, in eschewing a demand for moral perfection, and in effect acknowledging ‘good enough’ as an acceptable moral evaluation, I may be opening the door to moral laxity through self-excusing. However, I believe that in its understanding of (banal and non-banal) evildoing the Arendtian moral analysis also provides means of addressing this danger. This is the third contribution the Arendtian moral analysis is making, in my view, to an understanding of ordinary moral performance.

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\textsuperscript{19} This line of reasoning, of course, also applies to the acts of promising and forgiving. Thus, while the exemplary promise or forgiveness is arrived at through full moral reflection, ordinary acts of promising or forgiving may be arrived at through less than full reflection. Nonetheless, to be worthy of their name and to have their unifying effect on the self, they still cannot be granted automatically and unreflectively.
Most basically, Arendt’s analysis of evildoing provides actors and spectators with exemplars of pure moral failures, to orient their evaluations of when conduct is no longer morally ‘good enough’. But no less importantly, Arendt’s analysis of evildoing also provides an account of moral pitfalls and dangers. It shows where and how such pitfalls are inherent in moral tradeoffs and compromises, in the habituation, normalization, or codification of moral conduct, and even in the actualization of an originary moral decision in moral course of (part-reflective and non-reflective) action. And it thereby cautions actors and spectators against letting all of these concessions to the realities of living become excuses for moral laxity.

In other words, Arendt’s analysis of evildoing provides a powerful reminder of just how easily and unnoticeably ‘good enough’ can slip into ‘not good enough’. And in this way, it goads both agents and spectators to ‘stay on their moral toes’. It goads agents to be morally diligent, and occasionally revisit and reevaluate their actions self-reflectively, retrospectively acknowledging as such their moral tradeoffs, blunders and failures, and successes. It goads spectators to expect and demand of agents to do so. And it highlights the moral fact that the importance of such diligence and willingness to engage in self-evaluation grows the more external circumstances make being moral seem something the agent, on the balance, cannot decisionally afford.

20 Thus, Arendt’s understanding of conscience as the anticipation of such internal dialogue (section 7.1) still applies to these subsequent moral decisions.

21 Such occasions of self-reflection, in my view (and perhaps contra Arendt), are not (and the demand for them cannot be) restricted to those times when ‘things get out of joint’. It may be more likely that such self-reflection would be occasioned by my facing a tough moral choice, and circumstances in which my prior patterns of behavior are morally ‘out of joint’ with times would indeed occasion such choices. But such choices may also be occasioned under ordinary circumstances – see my burning house example above – and may also be encountered viscerally, through books, movies, or personal conversations.

22 This latter move may appear counterintuitive, but in fact it is not, for two reasons. First, life-concerns, due to their experiential immediacy, tend to overwhelm our decision-making, making it psychologically tempting to mistake a threat to my brute biological being for a threat to my being human. Second, assuming that my worries about my ability to provide for life-necessities are not objectively unfounded, chances are many others are facing similar concerns. On both counts, then, the more tempted one is to decisionally prioritize the self, the more diligently one must remind oneself that care for others is a constitutive component of the human self. The darker the times, the more steadfastly one must cling to being moral. It is for this reason that when (and only in) being moral appears to run up against self-preservation in its strongest experiential immediacy, being moral becomes an absolutely overriding decisional consideration.
These three contributions seek to acknowledge the moral significance of the more mundane moral decisions that in practice fill agents’ moral lives. *Being-moral* may manifest itself most dramatically in the ‘big’ life-changing decisions that Arendt is primarily concerned with. But such decisions are dramatic and exemplary precisely because they are rare and unique. They lay the foundations of our moral life, set it on its course, and serve to correct or confirm this course at occasional key junctures. But it is the ‘smaller’ decisions which carry such ‘big’ decisions to fruition. It is therefore through these ‘smaller’ decisions that our moral life proceeds on its course, faces its ongoing struggles and challenges, achieves its triumphs, suffers its setbacks, and ultimately displays and actualizes the person living it. One’s determination to lead a moral life may be declared to oneself and sometimes to others in the originary moral decisions. But it is through these subsequent decisions that a moral life is built and becomes reality.

But to acknowledge these ordinary moral decisions as the actual building block of a moral life is to expect and demand of moral life somewhat less than what Arendt seems to. The triumphs and setbacks of ordinary moral decisions cannot be measured in strict comparison to the rare and unique ‘big’ life-changing moral decisions, against which they will inevitably seem faint. Our life-changing moral decisions indeed must be made in full self-reflection and without moral tradeoffs, compromises, or concessions to non-moral considerations. But to expect the same of all our ordinary moral decisions is to render *being-moral* realistically unattainable as a lived reality outside of such rare life-changing biographical moments.

Granted, this lowered expectation increases the room left open to moral self-excusing. But even Arendt’s moral perfectionism is not foolproof against self-prioritizing misuse, and intentionally so. The only decisional force that can prevent me from slackening my moral diligence and allowing too many or too easy exceptions to *being moral* is my self, my self-reflection, and my dialogue with myself. This is the price to pay for not foreclosing the freedom on which moral

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23 It must be remembered that while instances of full self-reflection may be uncommon, my internal friend is ever-present, her voice can be heard at any insistence, and my anticipation of her intervention – conscience, as Arendt understands it – is always with me. Practical wisdom is also of importance here, because it would inevitably be employed in the task of striking these ongoing and contextual balances between moral and non-moral considerations. I am uncertain, however, as to the ability of practical wisdom, in the course of such balance-striking,
responsibility is predicated. If I am to be held morally responsible for my actions, by myself or by others, I must have been free to act immorally, whether by evil intent or through banal self-prioritization. But if self-prioritizing misuse is still a risk even on the more stringent moral threshold, isn’t its price – relegating being-moral to biographically rare instances, thereby rendering moral life unrealistic – too high?

At the end of the day, my moves, I believe, are sufficiently limited to not invite or tempt agents who determine to act morally away from this determination. The demand for moral responsibility, powerfully insisted upon by Arendt, remains undiminished under my lowered threshold. And the Arendtian moral analysis does lay bare both the humanly high stakes of being-moral, and some key hidden dangers and temptations it faces. As a result, moral life remains a struggle and a challenge under my lowered threshold just as it was under Arendt’s more stringent threshold. But under Arendtian terms this was an ongoing struggle and challenge that for the most part was bound to be frustrated. By contrast, my lowered threshold makes moral achievement more attainable, some moral failures more tolerable, and the struggle to be moral/human more livable. And this “hope, not of solving any problems, but of making it possible to live with them” (BPF: 9), is itself, in my view (and I believe also in Arendt’s) a worthwhile accomplishment.

Foremost among these stakes and dangers is the agent’s living with oneself as a meaningfully human self. Thus, the reflective realization that being-with-self-and-others is more authentically and meaningfully human than ordinary self-prioritizing is not diminished by the inevitable return to a decisional reality in which self-prioritizing decision-making is the ordinary rule. Rather, this realization arms the agent with the recognition of the fact that concern for others is not only compatible with, but in fact inscribed into, her care of and for herself as a human self, and thus into her self-prioritizing. The difference between the pre-reflective self-prioritizing self and the

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24 In this respect, Arendt’s heightened threshold ironically turns the pure reflective moral act into a banister for moral conduct.
post-reflective self-prioritizing self is that the latter realizes that being-with-others, concern for others, and therefore responsibility to and for others, are part and parcel of the self-prioritizing proper to a meaningfully human life. And as long as the agent not only remains aware of this, but continues to decide and act accordingly, then even if such decisions are made non-reflectively or allow non-moral considerations into the decision, they are still humanly ‘good enough’. No more, but also no less, can in my view be realistically expected of a moral and therefore meaningfully human life.
Chapter 12
Moral Politics

In the previous chapter I argued in favor of a notion of mundane moral action as conceptually juxtaposed to, but practically complementary of, the extraordinary reflective moral act theorized by Arendt. Such daily decisions and actions, which are not arrived at in full reflection, but which nonetheless take their cue from the originary and exemplary Arendtian moral decision (either as principle of action or as guiding example). Arendtian moral decisions, I argued, set our moral life in motion, and occasionally change and steer its course. But our moral life proceeds through, is revealed in, and therefore acquires lived reality through, these mundane moral decisions.

This argument, of course, immediately raises the question of the relationship between morality and politics. After all, many (if not most) of the decisions that agents are called upon to make as political agents directly or indirectly affect the lives and wellbeing of others, and as such involve moral considerations. Should I support a universal healthcare plan? Should I vote for a representative who supports it (thereby supporting it indirectly)? To the extent that I wish to lead a moral life that is instantiated in my actions I cannot, it would seem, treat such decisions as non-moral.

And yet Arendt, as we saw in section 10.3, seems to suggest otherwise. Rather than acknowledge the interconnectedness of the spheres of moral and political action, she seeks to keep them apart, conceptually and practically. In the present chapter I develop a response to this Arendtian move which, I believe, would be worthy of consideration even on Arendtian terms. I begin from an examination of the practice of morally judging others, first as a personal act (section 12.1) and then as a collective act (section 12.2). This will lead me to revisit the question of encoding moral considerations in laws (section 12.3) and the question of the relationship between morality and politics (section 12.4). Lastly, I will turn to some final thoughts on moral responsibility and its ascription (section 12.5).
In one respect, my claim in section 11.4 that my self and dialogue with myself are the only decisional safeguards against the slackening of my moral diligence, may seem curious. After all, the point of the Arendtian exercise was to legitimize personal moral responsibility ascription by others on the agent. Would this not also affect the agent’s moral decisions and help safeguard her moral life?

The problem is that ascribing moral responsibility to others – judging others – seems to conflict with respect for those others. And respect for others surely must be a component of concern for others and therefore of being moral. Of course, in a sense, when judging others I am acting out of concern for them. Specifically, I concern myself with their humanness, in which I share through my own humanness. This would seem to justify judging others, even and especially when those others themselves do not seem concerned with their humanness. Only, in thus using moral responsibility ascription am I not encroaching on the agent’s freedom to make a moral choice, on which my own ascription of moral responsibility to her is based?

Normatively, then, my ascription of moral responsibility to others is not meant to safeguard their own moral diligence in the decision for which they will then be held responsible. Nor can it do this on a practical level. My judging of others and ascription of responsibility to them is always retrospective. They come into play only after the agent has acted, because only at that point will the agent have appeared before me to be judged.

Moreover, my moves in section 11.4 have suggested that a moral life is built on, and manifested in, many ‘small’ decisions rather than merely in a few originary ones. If this is indeed the case, then the ascription of moral responsibility to an agent over this or that particular moral failure must be made in light of the context of her moral life as a whole. The latter is the evidence that determines whether her specific moral failure is an exception to the rule of her life or characteristic of it (and thus, whether she can be forgiven for her specific moral lapse). But if the
point of moral responsibility ascription is not swaying the agent’s present moral decision, what is the point of moral responsibility ascription? What is judging others good for?

Part of the point may be to punish the moral transgressor. The point may also be to take revenge upon the moral transgressor in the name of either her victims’ friends and relatives, or humanity as a whole. Or the point may be to eject the transgressor from the midst of the human company which she herself implicitly rejected through her evildoing. But, with Arendt, I do not think these points tell the whole story. These are motives, not principles. They hide, but also indicate, deeper purposes.

In my view, several interrelated purposes are served by judging others and ascribing moral responsibility to them. First, it creates a guiding example which can help orient – though not determine – agents’ future moral decision-making. Indeed, by not judging others and therefore remaining silent as to the evil of their actions, I may in fact be contributing to evildoing. After all, the silence of others and the lack of moral opposition to the actions promoted by the Nazis was a significant contributing factor to banal evildoing, as we saw in chapter 2.¹ Moreover, to the extent that I am indeed committed to shared humanness, my judging of others must presuppose a willingness to be judged by others. As a result, the judging of others is one of the forms of action that interrelate people to one another within the shared human world. Furthermore, my judging of others also sets a bar for my judging of myself, which (if I am indeed committed to shared humanness) I cannot lower in my own case without falling into self-contradiction.

Most importantly, however, by ascribing moral responsibility to others, especially when such ascription is collective, a line is drawn between *being-human* and inhumanity. And this line

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¹ In this respect, the ‘disappearance’ (withdrawal from any activity, neither partaking in nor actively opposing the Nazi’s actions) that Arendt extols in the Nazi case may in fact be morally problematic on Arendt’s own, more general, terms. Merely refraining from evildoing (e.g., refusing to partake in Nazi action) is not the same as righteousness (e.g., trying to do something about Nazi action, such as saving Jews or resisting). The most evident difference between the two is in the fact that only the latter seeks to act into, and try to change, the world, which on Arendtian terms is a political, not moral, difference. But when the world is *morally* out-of-joint and our humanness is at stake in acting in it, the difference is also a moral one: it is the difference between doing the most I can do and doing the least I must do. This is a difference in degree more than in kind, but it is still a difference that matters, *both* morally and politically.
prevents *being-human* from falling into meaninglessness. This line cannot be defined, drawn and set for all times. It can only be indicated and attested to, again and again, sometimes moving or shifting from its previous position. But precisely because it cannot be drawn and set for all time, it *must be* indicated and attested to, so that agents who wish to be moral agents are always aware of the fact that, wherever this line may be, it clearly exists *somewhere*. Without such a sense of this line the ongoing struggle to *be moral* through the ‘small’ decisions that make up a moral life would again seem futile.

12.2

Important as it is for moral agents to have a sense of a clear (if episodically drawn) line between the humanness of *being-moral* and the inhumanity of evildoing, drawing this line is itself a tricky affair. The Eichmann trial, with Arendt’s final defense of it, brings this into sharp focus. After all, if such a line indeed exists, its transgression through evildoing justifies the removal of the transgressor from the company of ordinary humanity – imprisonment, and in more extreme cases, execution. This, of course, was Arendt’s main defense of Eichmann’s death sentence.

Only, moral judging is a personal act, centered on internal dialogue. And yet, obviously, we cannot simply grant every judging agent the justification to personally incarcerate or execute those she, personally, has deemed evildoers. Individual agents can, of course, withhold their own company from the person they have deemed an evildoer, thereby effectively removing the evildoer from it. But that is the farthest that they can go as individuals. To remove an evildoer from ordinary human company as such and in general is a collective, not an individual, act of moral responsibility ascription.

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2 Of course, forgiving, as the release from moral responsibility (which, as a release from responsibility, implies a prior ascription of such responsibility), is also important in indicating and attesting to this line.

3 An argument can be made that even when a transgressor has fled into exile and hiding, as many Nazi operatives had been after World War II, this constitutes, to a degree, their removal from human company. I cannot develop and assess this argument within the confines of the current volume.
This point can also be made in a different way. If moral responsibility ascription is legitimized on the basis of the humanness of being-moral and the inhumanness of evildoing, then evildoing is evil because of its transgression against humanness rather than against its individual victims. It is evil because it is a crime against humanity. It therefore stands to reason that moral responsibility for such transgression should be ascribed, and appropriately acted upon, as a collective rather than an individual action. In this respect, an individual agent who judges others and ascribes moral responsibility to them is acting not on some personal authority and legitimacy. Rather, she is acting as a member and representative of human community, that is, as a human being.

Only, making the exercise of moral responsibility ascription and vindication part of human power-in-common also carries with it moral risks and dangers. After all, this would be an act in which the whole community targets, and directs its collective power at, a single individual. The fate of this individual cannot be prejudged, but rather she must be allowed to defend herself publicly to her fellow human beings. But with such a power discrepancy, can the individual hope to mount a proper defense of herself or reach enough of her judges to change their judgment? Will she even be allowed to?

Moreover, independent moral reflection, as we have seen throughout this thesis, means in part independence from social predetermination and opinion. This is because social predetermination and opinion can otherwise have an overwhelming effect on agents’ decision-making. But can such independence really be expected, especially in the face of apparent social consensus, when the pressure of such consensus also appears justified as the legitimate enactment of moral responsibility ascription?

Thus, it seems, both personal moral responsibility ascription and collective moral judgment carry some grave dangers with them. The solution to this dilemma, as Arendt herself had realized as

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4 Such public defense is necessary because our judgment of others, as we have seen in section 12.1, must take into account not only this or that particular act, but the kind of person the transgressor is and the kind of moral (or evil) life she has been, and is, leading. This cannot be learned from the facts of the case alone, nor even from the facts of a life alone, without also witnessing the manner in which one conducts oneself. This is why description and analysis of the manner in which Eichmann has conducted himself before, at, and after his trial were so prominent in EJ.
early as EJ, is in the institution of the professional judge (or, better still, a limited tribunal of professional judges) sitting in a court of justice. Such judges act on behalf of, and thus as representatives of, the human community. They are therefore backed up by the power-in-common of the community. And yet, they are also sufficiently insulated from the community to be independent of its whims in the case of the particular individual at hand (though they cannot be oblivious to their own general public legitimacy as representatives of the community). Such judges, in my view, can and should be vested with the authority and legitimacy, in special cases, to overrule law in the name of justice, in one of two ways: trying and punishing patent and extreme evildoing that is not proscribed by law (as was the case in Nazi trials), or forgiving legal transgression where they adjudge that justice is not served by the letter of the law.5

When sitting as such a tribunal of justice, judges sit, and judge, as individuals, using their own personal judgment and moral reflection to ascribe, or forgive, moral responsibility, in the name of the community, to the individual transgressor before them.6 They sit, in other words, not as expert interpreters of the laws, but as (presumably) good judges of righteousness and evildoing, of personhood and appearance (in Arendt’s sense of the term), of right and wrong. They sit as moral judges rather than as legal judges, determining not breaches of law but transgressions of shared humanness and therefore of morality. They decide cases before them through moral reflection, not legal reasoning.7 And importantly, the transgressor need convince only theses

5 Circumstances of the former type, in my view, would be extremely rare and unusual, and require the judges’ utmost discretion. In fact, today, with laws banning ‘crimes against humanity’ in place in most Western democracies, it is hard to think what would constitute such circumstances. Then again, as Arendt pointed out, evildoing can manifest itself in unforeseen ways, and it is towards such cases that the institution I am proposing is geared. As for circumstances of forgiving, many Western democracies already have mechanisms for mitigating unjust legal outcomes – primarily, discretion in meeting punishment and various institutionalized mitigating circumstances. What I am arguing for is extending this logic from the sentencing stage to the trying stage (that is, allowing judges to forgive transgressions by not convicting a person and not only by reducing to the point of practically annulling their punishment) and to cases which present mitigating circumstances that were themselves unforeseen by law. Notably, I leave open the question of whether what I am proposing would be institutionalized in the form of a separate High Court of Justice, hearing cases on appeal, or by vesting such authority and legitimacy in an existing Supreme Court. I do, however, envision a set and limited tribunal for this purpose, not vesting such authority and legitimacy in every judge in the legal system.

6 “Even the judge who condemns a man for murder may still say, and there but for the grace of God go I!” (RJ: 19). ‘I’, not we or they.

7 Although experience as legal judges, because it exposes the judge to all manners and degrees of wrongdoing and all kinds of persons, may make one’s moral judgment better nuanced. In this respect (and only in this respect), such
judges of her worthiness of forgiveness. Such judges thus stand as a buffer, but also and simultaneously as mediators, between the individual transgressor and the power of the community. The public nature of the trial fortifies this buffer, offering additional protection to both the transgressor and the judges.

12.3

Thus, there is indeed a distinction, as Arendt insisted, between the legal and the moral realms. In this respect ‘moral’ laws and conventions are misleadingly labeled. They represent not what is morally right or wrong, but what a given community deems right and wrong (that is, desirable or undesirable) conduct. They differ from the morally right or wrong in that they are community-specific and yet applicable across circumstances. The laws of one community do not apply outside of that community, but within that community they apply to all relevant contexts and circumstances. By contrast, the determination of right and wrong is circumstance-specific yet applicable across communities. It is made in a particular case and in light of a particular context, but claims general human validity, potentially affirmable regardless of cultural differences.

experience better equips the judge to determine when wrongdoing has crossed the line to become evildoing, and whether the transgressor has proven to be the kind of person whose transgression can be forgiven. This is one reason for which I prefer to vest such authority for moral judgment in professional judges rather than juries.

8 This is the other reason for which I prefer to vest authority for moral judgment in professional judges, not juries.

9 This, of course, opens up a myriad of thorny issues of legal philosophy, particularly questions regarding the rule of law. I cannot resolve such questions here. I can only make three quick remarks. First, some of the apparent problemacticness of such a casuistic institution disappears when we remember that the transgressor is judged on her moral reflection, in which legality and illegality are not supposed to be determining factors. Second, the proper defense of such an institution would not be to show that it is not imperfect, but merely to show that it is the best solution at our disposal to the double dilemma or collective moral responsibility-ascription presented above. Third, at the end of the day, my sole intention here is to free experienced judges faced with one of those all to rare cases in which justice is not served by the letter of the law from being limited to the choice of either going through legal hoops to serve justice or ceding justice to the letter of the law.
Of course, norms and conventions may lead agents in specific cases to the same action to which their independent moral reflection would also have led them. But there is no necessary correlation between the two and therefore no guarantee that they will lead to the same outcome in all decisional contexts (nor, or course, can there be such guarantee). Rather, the two belong to different existential and therefore decisional realms. As a result, norms and conventions are unsuitable to serve as heuristic substitutes for independent moral reflection. Such substitution is therefore as morally dangerous in ‘ordinary’ circumstances as Arendt had argued on the basis of the (extreme) Nazi circumstances.

This, however, does not mean that outlawing forms of evildoing (for example, crimes against humanity) is futile and dangerous. Such laws still accord an important extra layer of protection, backed up by the community’s power-in-common, to the shared humanness of the members of the community (and even of non-members, should the legislators choose to do so). Only, this extra layer of protection is political, not moral, and should not be mistaken for the latter.\(^\text{10}\) Granted, the individual decision that enacting such a law (or supporting it) is appropriate may be arrived at either morally or politically. But once the decision has been made and the law enacted, what gives this law its authority and obligating force is not its moral origins but the power-in-common behind it.\(^\text{11}\)

For Arendt, of course, power-in-common is arguably the most potent of the human powers to act into, and protect or change, the world. In this respect acting-in-common still offers the strongest protection to shared humanness within the human world. Our best hope for being-with-and-for-others is acting-together. But this protection is also precarious, since it is preconditioned both on the existence of a public space of appearance and (being action-in-common) on the agreement of

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\(^\text{10}\) Thus, moral forgiveness may mitigate legal punishment only where laws or legal-judicial practice allows for such mitigation as an extenuating circumstance. Even Dr. Lucas, whom Arendt herself seems to have forgive (see section 11.1), nonetheless had to be found guilty. Of course, the fact that a particular community does not have laws forbidding crimes against humanity does not absolve individual members of the community from moral responsibility for such crimes.

\(^\text{11}\) Thus, law abidingness per se, its political merits notwithstanding, is not, cannot be, and therefore cannot be elevated to the level of, a moral duty. Even morally good laws draw their authority, qua laws, from political power, not moral righteousness.
others (LMW: 200). When either precondition cannot be met (as occurred with both under the Nazis), the protection that power-in-common offers to shared humanness is rendered ineffective.

Moreover, acting-in-common can also be subverted into use against shared humanness. After all, the Nazis came to power through a free popular election. Thus, just as acting-in-common accords shared humanness its strongest protection, the distortion and abuse of acting-in-common for the sake of an attack on shared humanness poses to it its strongest threat. And this is a threat that political action itself cannot avert. In such circumstances shared humanness can only rely for its defense on individual action that depends solely upon the self. And this is precisely reflective moral action.

This would seem to suggest that political action could be made to avert such a threat to shared humanness by enlisting moral reflection to assist in making a political decision. And this conclusion may appear problematic on Arendtian terms. After all, this would entail introducing into the political decision a consideration that is seemingly foreign to it – care of the self instead of the love of the world. It would also seem to turn the political decision into a personal rather than a common decision. But surely Arendt would have expected her fellow Weimar Germans to exercise moral reflection in their common acts of voting the Nazis into office and of then silently assenting in their anti-plural decrees?

12.4

I believe, however, that there is a way of accepting moral considerations into political decision-making and action even on Arendtian terms. The key to this move is to distinguish, within Arendtian political action, between the political decision and the political act itself. The political decision is the would-be leader’s act of proposing a joint endeavor to her fellow citizens and the concomitant act of joining or refusing to join in (that is, voting yea or nay to) this endeavor on the part of these citizens. The political act itself is the act of carrying out the joint endeavor. Arendt herself suggests this distinction when, within the act of political founding (LMW: 204),
she separates the liberation from the old (which is indeed attained by the public proposal and acceptance of the joint endeavor) from the enactment of new (which is indeed attained by the enactment of the joint endeavor).

The carrying out of the endeavor, indeed, is a common act that depends on the agreement of others. But the proposal and the decision to join are not. Rather, they entail each agent individually identifying or acknowledging disjointedness in the world, and determining to try and do something about it. These acts are therefore independent, personal, and reflective in nature. They depend on the self and not on others, and are in this respect similar to storytelling spectatorship and moral performance.12 The Arendtian political act, in other words, is a common act that nonetheless may be – indeed, should be – individually and reflectively (and therefore contingently) decided.

Of course, as already noted, independent personal reflection – deciding from within the reflective mode of being-in-the-world – reveals to the agent the coincidence of care for the self with concern for others and for the shared human world. It thus reveals to the agent an instance of coincidence between care for the self and love of the world. And the responsibility that the self undertakes through the reflective decisions is therefore also a responsibility for the shared human world – that is, political responsibility. In this very specific sense the political decision may indeed, on Arendtian terms, be driven by care for the self as much as by the love of the world, as the two are revealed in their coincidence through the reflective decision. Thus, reflective decision-making, and therefore, potentially, moral reflection, may in fact legitimately enter political decision-making even under Arendtian terms.

The significance of this move on Arendtian terms becomes evident, in my view, once we consider the example of technology, as analyzed by Arendt’s lifelong friend and colleague Hans Jonas. Both Arendt and Jonas have observed that technological advances have given human agents unprecedented power and reach (HC: 1-4, 231-233, 323-325; Jonas: 1979/1984). For Jonas (ibid; see especially 1-24), the use of modern technology draws on finite natural resources

12 Indeed, the common acceptance of the joint endeavor is the result of a multitude of individual decisions.
and has a worldwide effect on climate and ecology, while often rendering those affected by its use invisible to the users themselves.\textsuperscript{13} It gives human agents the ability to shape the lived environment of others, and may in the near future give them the ability, through genetic manipulation, to partly shape future others themselves. And it gives single decisions and actions by individual actors the potential to irreversibly affect (often in unforeseen ways) numerous other human beings, often far away in space and time, who do not partake in the decision itself.

The employment of technology can be the result of particular individual decisions, frequently decisions regarding mundane actions (such as driving a car) or decisions seen as primarily business ones. But it can also be the result of collective decision-making, even by the whole community. Indeed, the decision on whether, how, and to what extent the community is to regulate individual decision-making regarding the employment of technology is always a collective political decision (a lawmaking activity).

As a result, humanness, the sharedness of which (and the protection of this sharedness) are at the heart of \textit{being-moral}, is affected by many decisions we would otherwise justifiably call political. Moreover, when the effects of the actions of a community reach outside it, those affected – often, ill affected – by the action are not themselves part of the decision-making process. In such a reality, surely the reach of our moral responsibility must be commensurate with the scope, exercise, and reach of technological power?\textsuperscript{14} Surely agents who have undertaken to lead a moral life would be in self-contradiction should they disregard moral considerations in such policy decisions?\textsuperscript{15}

Arendt had already been aware of similar concerns in EJ, in which she saw them as part of what raises the danger that banal evildoing could reappear (EJ: 273). This is particularly remarkable

\textsuperscript{13} The point that technology renders those affected by its use invisible from its users is taken from Bauman (see LF: 151-152), who correctly sees it as an extension of Jonas’ argument.

\textsuperscript{14} This latter point is the crux of Jonas’ argument in \textit{The Imperative of Responsibility} (1979/1984).

\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, it may be argued that only in a geographically secluded pure direct democracy (an idealized version of the Athenian \textit{polis}, virtually impossible in the contemporary world, advances in communication technology notwithstanding) would we find a political community in which all those affected by collective action partake in the decision leading to such action. In this respect, it may be argued that only in such an idealized political community is a politics without morality possible.
because there she is clearly linking individual moral decision-making and collective action. Indeed, this realization, in my view, played an important role in her turn to devising a new conception of moral performance (see section 1.2). This concern was not picked up by her in her post-EJ work. But her early awareness of it, as well as anecdotal evidence suggesting that she may have read at least some of Jonas’ work on the subject, gives strong reason to expect that this concern would have at least been on Arendt’s mind while completing LM. And indeed, I believe that Arendt’s separation of morality and politics can be reworked so as to acknowledge the importance of using moral reflection in certain collective and political decisions.

At the heart of such a reworking stands, again, Arendt’s post-EJ notion of political responsibility. Under this notion of political responsibility political action is understood as action-in-common that endeavors to set aright a world that is ‘out of joint’ (see section 3.4). Such disjointedness occurs when changes in the human world make it out of step with the stories we tell about the world so as to render it humanly meaningful, sensible and hence livable (see section 3.5). And some of these stories are stories we tell about how we are to relate to one another, including stories about moral acts and moral conduct. Only, as Jonas has pointed out, one of the key effects of modern technology is precisely to throw these moral stories into disjointedness:

“The [technologically] altered, always enlarged nature of human action, with the magnitude and novelty of its works and their impact on man’s global future, raises moral issues for which past ethics, geared to the direct dealings of man with his fellowmen within narrow horizons of space and time has left us unprepared” (1979/1984: ix-x).

From an Arendtian perspective, the key point Jonas makes is that this is a situation in which the world’s disjointedness, the correction of which is a political act, is morally underpinned. It is our past moral exemplars whose applicability and therefore guiding power has become out of step

16 Richard Wolin, drawing on Walther Christian Zimmerli, reports that upon the appearance of Jonas’ *The Imperative of Responsibility* Arendt had told Jonas that “’that is the book that God had in mind when he created you’” (2001: 117). Of course, Jonas’ book appeared more than three years after Arendt’s death. Zimmerli has graciously confirmed hearing this from Jonas, adding that Jonas “must have meant either an outline or a draft manuscript which he might have shown her during his time at the New School for Social Research in New York” (Walther Christian Zimmerli, personal communication, March 4, 2010).
with a world in which the human capacity to act escapes the confines of face-to-face interaction. This is not to say that such exemplars are to be abandoned. Rather, it is to say that they need to be morally reflected upon and then either reapplied or abandoned, as appropriate. And this reapplication must itself be captured in an act that will itself be turned into a new ethical exemplar by storytelling spectators. Only, such an act would be both moral, the result of moral reflection, and political, an act that endeavors to set an out-of-joint-world aright. When the reasons for the human world having become ‘out-of-joint’ are moral, the moral act also becomes political. As a result, under such circumstances, the political act can and should be guided by moral reflection.

This can be restated in stronger Arendtian terms. The ethical danger of modern technology is that of rendering the human world out of step with, and thus a potential danger to, shared humanness. Modern technology opens the door to a reality in which – as was in the Nazi case – one’s own humanness comes to be at stake even in one’s mundane actions in the world. If we step through this door, the risk of banal evil, now with worldwide reach, lies in wait. But while the door is open, we have not yet stepped through it, and we may still be able to close it. Only, the closing of this door requires acting, both individually and collectively, out of individual moral reflection.

This refers first and foremost to policy decisions, the most basic and fundamental of which is the electoral vote. This is obvious when we consider the fact that even the Nazis were democratically elected and initially required at least silent popular ascent, and sometimes open public support, for their policies. Opposition to such policies, though a political act both in the ordinary sense of the term and in Arendt’s specialized sense of it, could not but be at least in large part morally driven. As noted above, it is hard to imagine that Arendt would have chided those opposed to the Nazis in the 1930s for bringing into their political decision-making considerations alien to the political.17 When humanness and its sharedness, or the human conditions that underpin human

17 Note in this respect her point that “[t]oday the most serious consequence of the terrible disasters of the thirties and forties in Europe is that this form of criminality with its bloodbaths has remained the conscious or unconscious standard by which we measure what is permitted or prohibited in politics” (RJ: 266).
sharedness, are at stake, moral reflection is no longer alien to the political. In such circumstances, establishing an additional, political, layer of protection around shared humanness becomes an act in which moral decision-making and political decision-making do, and must, coincide.

Arendt’s overplaying of the distinctness of moral and political action and underplaying of their similarities and potential practical interrelatedness likely resulted from her use of the guiding example of Nazi Germany. Indeed, Nazi Germany is a stark example of a set of circumstances in which moral performance is possible whereas political action is not. It is also an example of a set of circumstances under which moral action, for most agents, could only be undertaken outside of public view.

But at the end of the day, Arendt’s accounts of political and moral action are not as starkly set apart as Arendt herself thought. Circumstances in which shared humanness itself is at stake bring the two together most dramatically. And such circumstances are today more prevalent than we might at first suspect. As a result, political and moral action emerge as closely interlinked in the (political or mundane) practice of our contemporary life.

Moreover, such an interlinking may also be identified in the analytical trajectory of Arendt’s investigations of both politics and morality. In politics, where we often find humanity at its power-hungry crassest and self-interested pettiest, Arendt spotlights the beauty of human gloriousness. In morality, where we often find humanity at its darkest, Arendt shows us the beauty of sheer, simple humanness. In both, humanity appears in its finest, most meaningful

18 As Villa correctly notes, “in the world of politics, [thought and judgment are] faculties that … prepare us, as individuals and citizens, to say no to policies or narratives which present themselves as necessary, unquestionable, irresistible” (1999: 90).

19 Although I have arrived at this conclusion through an analysis of the case of modern technology, this conclusion applies with similar force to policy decisions that do not concern the employment or regulation of technology but nonetheless pose, or deal with, threats to shared humanness and to human plurality – for example, decisions to intervene in unfolding genocide or ethnic cleansing.
form. In this deepest and most profound respect, morality and politics in Arendt ultimately belong together, two sides of the same human coin.\(^{20}\)

One result of my interlinking of moral and political action in the previous section is that moral and political responsibility become much closer than Arendt thought they were. Indeed, if shared humanness is so central to both morality and politics, then moral responsibility becomes something we may legitimately expect and demand would-be political actors to place on themselves (though we are not be legitimized, on Arendtian grounds, in imposing any such constraints on them). And in a technological age this extends, as we have already seen, to individual actions that contribute to morally harmful collective effects even when such actions are mundane rather than political.

But this move may appear problematic from, an Arendtian perspective, in an additional respect. Arendt was justifiably wary of agents (such as Germans of the generation raised after World War II) undertaking a feeling of guilt (and concomitant acts of repentance) for their parents’ actions under the Nazis (RJ: 20-21, 147-151). Moral guilt, for her, is unavoidably personal, a property of an agent’s relation to her own past acts. One cannot feel guilty for something one has not done unless one commits the error of positing a ‘collective guilt’, in which one vicariously partakes as a member of the collective. Only, when guilt is transferred from individuals to the collective they comprise, the individuals themselves are exculpated from their own, personal, guilt – “where all are guilty, no one is” (RJ, 21; see also RJ: 147). In interlinking moral and political responsibility, do I not in effect collectivize moral responsibility in a similar way?

\(^{20}\) This affinity of politics and morality is strengthened, in my view, by the fact that moral propositions, for Arendt, are more properly treated as discursive (like meanings and opinions) rather than as ‘truths’ (see chapter 6 footnote 10). This, of course, makes moral disagreement a warranted fact of life on Arendtian terms. Unfortunately I have not the space to discuss moral disagreement further in the present thesis.
Arendt, of course, did not wish to argue that agents are freed from the burden of responsibility for the acts of the collective of which they are members. She therefore accepted the notion of collective responsibility, defining it as responsibility for acts carried out by (or in the name of) the community I am a member of where I myself was not the agent who carried them out (RJ: 149). On the basis of this, she then drew a sharp dividing line between collective responsibility, which, being collective, is always political, and between moral (and legal) guilt, which is always personal (RJ: 149-151).

But this move is unsatisfying, on several different levels. On the level of Arendt’s own terms, her notion of collective responsibility does not square with her notion of political responsibility (see section 3.4) in one crucial respect. Political responsibility, as the undertaking of the burden to set aright a disjointed world, is always and only prospective, related to the prospective acts I am currently deciding upon. As a result, the actual outcomes and effects of one’s action lie outside its reach. Collective responsibility as Arendt defined it, on the other hand, is, like moral guilt or responsibility, retrospective. But as such it is, and must be, related to my past acts and especially to their outcomes.

This Arendtian move is also unsatisfying on a practical level. It remains unclear in the definition of collective responsibility and in its juxtaposition to moral guilt what types of actions would the undertaking of collective responsibility manifest itself in. Clearly, Arendt rules out acts of remorse and repentance, but what other options does that leave us with (reparations? affirmative action?)? And how can it be ensured that, decisionally, feelings of guilt were not part of the decision? Indeed, are not feelings of guilt and remorse engendered by the undertaking of collective responsibility and thus among the motivational forces shaping how she manifests this undertaking in action?

Finally, this Arendtian move is also unsatisfying on an analytical level. In her distinction between collective political responsibility and personal moral guilt, Arendt in fact maps three separate conceptual distinctions – collective vs. personal, political vs. moral, and responsibility vs. guilt – onto each other. But these three distinctions only partially map onto each other. Guilt cannot be collective, and because it is always retrospective it also cannot be political. But this, of course, cannot mean that responsibility cannot be personal or moral. Thus, the separation of
collective political responsibility and personal moral guilt neglects to account for and therefore deal with personal political responsibility and moral responsibility, personal or collective. And as we have seen throughout this thesis, Arendt herself accepted the notions of personal political and moral responsibility. In this respect, on the analytical level, a notion of collective moral responsibility is not ruled out by the Arendtian separation of collective political responsibility and personal moral guilt.

I believe my notion of moral responsibility for collective acts or effects to which I had contributed in fact provides this missing notion of collective moral responsibility while avoiding the other two problems noted above. This is because the moral responsibility undertaken when I bring moral reflection to bear on political or mundane decisions is responsibility for my own choice and therefore for my own individual act. It therefore adjoins to political responsibility in the prospective undertaking of the burden caring for the world and for shared humanity – the burden of being-human. And it is the moral component of this undertaking that enables this collective responsibility to become retrospective once the outcomes and effects of the collective act have come to fruition.

If collective moral responsibility is understood in this way, it is legitimate to feel guilt and remorse over harm done by a collective act because I had participated or contributed to it (by act or omission). Such feelings are in fact engendered by such participation or contribution. They are thus proper internal manifestations of my moral responsibility for my own choices and actions, channeled through the collective act which they enabled or contributed to. Moreover, the anticipation of this responsibility becoming retrospective makes it incumbent upon agents to factor their best anticipations of the outcomes of the collective act into their moral reflection. In this way the moral component of the decision introduces a consideration of likely, potential, and possible effects into the political decision, which political responsibility as Arendt defines it cannot do. Such consideration, of course, is entailed in forgiving and promising, which Arendt indeed sees as legitimate moral constraints on political action (see sections 3.4 and 11.1).

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21 In the case of heuristically made decisions, moral reflection is brought to bear on such decisions indirectly, through the use of the originary moral act and the aims or principles of action revealed in it as a heuristic guide for action (see chapter 11).
But throughout this my moral responsibility remains bound up with my own choice and action and therefore remains personal. It is collective only in the limited sense that its reach extends beyond my personal decision and action to encompass the collective act or effect my individual act had partaken in, contributed to, or helped enable. But this is no more than personal moral responsibility amplified, and it cannot become a collective substitute for it. Through it I acknowledge the part my action plays in the collective act, even if it is neither necessary nor sufficient for bringing the act about. And through this personal responsibility I acknowledge the fact that the other members of the collective share this responsibility with me. It is an undertaking of the burden of responsibility for the whole collective act through and as a result of our responsibility for our own (large or small) part in it. It holds not the collective as an entity, but every individual who remains a member of that collective, responsible for the harm or evil that the collective does.

It is here that my investigation comes full circle to the question of ascribing moral responsibility to banal evildoers like Eichmann. Arendt correctly suggests that banal evildoers faced a choice between being-banal and being-reflective and therefore between evildoing and righteousness. She correctly sees this choice as giving rise to moral responsibility, a personal undertaking of concern with, and care for, the world we share with other human beings, the humanness that is shared in this world, and the humans with whom we share the world and our humanness. She correctly implies that this moral responsibility is a component of the human self. And she correctly suggests that as a result this moral responsibility is complementary to (as opposed to taking away from) the care for the self that underpins most of an agent’s decision-making and action. And finally, she was correct to suggest that therefore this undertaking of moral responsibility must accompany, and can be expected by others to accompany, such care for the self.

The moral responsibility that I undertake through moral reflection and by bringing moral considerations to bear on decisions and actions thus stems from and reflects my humanness (my *being-human*). As a result, it can legitimately be brought to bear – I would even say expected to be brought to bear – on decisions and actions that affect my own or others’ humanness. And this also holds for actions that contribute to such effects without being themselves necessary or
sufficient for bringing them about. As such, the moral responsibility (for the world, for others, and for shared humanness) that I hold in common with others by virtue of being human extends beyond my individual actions to the collective acts and effects to which they contribute.

As a result, banal evildoers indeed have nothing to hide behind. As human beings, they have a moral responsibility to the shared human world, to the others with whom this world is shared, and to the humanness that is shared between them. They cannot claim that they are exonerated from this responsibility because they had no choice, since they did have a choice (difficult, unappealing, and sacrifice-laden as that choice may have been). Nor can they claim to be exonerated from this responsibility because their individual actions were neither necessary (‘we were replaceable cogs’) nor sufficient for the harm they helped cause, since their responsibility extends through their individual actions, but without ever leaving their individual actions, to the collective acts and effects to which they had contributed. They carry their moral responsibility with them, and cannot renege on it without thereby reneging on their own humanness.

Still, my case for moral responsibility for collective acts itself does not provide an argument regarding which particular policies or collective choices and acts are, in general, morally right or wrong. Granted, my analysis here suggests that policies which cause harm to human plurality and difference or to human natality and freedom or to others’ humanness and its sharedness are morally wrong. But it still remains to the agent herself to determine whether or not, for example, global warming causes such harm and whether, therefore, a particular act in a particular context is morally right or wrong. Nor does my analysis provide an argument regarding how best to publicly argue and decide whether global warming is morally right or wrong and whether, as a result, a particular policy or decision is morally right or wrong. To provide such arguments is to provide fixed banisters, thereby foreclosing choice, freedom, and moral responsibility.

What my case for moral responsibility for collective acts does provide is the argument that by virtue of choosing (reflectively or heuristically) an action that contributes to collective effects one acquires personal responsibility for such effects. And this responsibility cannot be floated to anyone else simply because one’s act is neither a necessary nor a sufficient cause of this effect. This argument therefore maintains the Arendtian stress on personal choice as standing at the
heart of moral responsibility-ascription while enabling it to apply to components of much larger collective acts.

But in doing so my argument also draws on, reaffirms, and even strengthens, another and no less important Arendtian insight. This is the Arendtian stress on the burden of this responsibility, which is no more and no less than the burden of being human. The price of this burden is a life of ongoing effort and challenge with which we must learn to live, for without it we are estranged from our humanness and deny – dehumanize – ourselves. Its reward is the ability to live with one’s self in the truest and deepest of friendships. And this reward, much as we may be inclined to take it for granted, is in fact a great one.
Chapter 13
Concluding Remarks

As this investigation draws to a close, I wish to make some concluding remarks regarding it. I wish, first, to reiterate my major agreements with the Arendtian moral analysis, as well as the major addition, adjustment, and clarification that I have sought to contribute to it (section 13.1). I then wish to outline several important avenues of further investigation that were left, mostly for reasons of space, unaddressed in the present thesis (section 13.2). Finally, I wish to stress again several convictions, implicit in the Arendtian moral analysis, that I see as its most important teaching (section 13.3).

13.1

Despite pronouncing the phenomenon of banal evildoing to have shattered traditional occidental thinking about evil, Arendt in fact retains three central traditional convictions. One is that moral performance has to enable agents to tell right from wrong in opposition to social predetermination or personal history and future plans. The second is that moral responsibility cannot be ascribed unless the agent had a choice between righteousness and evildoing. The third is that agents have an internal mechanism that can always, regardless of external circumstances, trigger them to, and guide them through, moral performance.

I share all three convictions. History, sadly, is chockfull of examples of societies which shared context of meaning supported as morally unproblematic certain immoral conduct. And yet, all too often, first individual agents, and eventually the societies themselves, realized the wrongfulness of their ways. This gives strong support to the conviction that moral capacity can
operate successfully even if the agent herself up to that point, and all others around her still, are acting immorally. And the conviction that there is no responsibility without choice stems directly from the notion of human freedom and autonomy. To hold agents responsible for (that is, to treat as one’s own) acts done under compulsion diminishes human personhood to the point of emptying it of selfhood. And the third conviction, in my view is indeed indicated and presupposed by the other two.

The occidental tradition, however, identifies the internal mechanism required by the third conviction entirely with conscience. And it is here that the phenomenon of banal evildoing, for Arendt, shatters this tradition. Under the Nazis, Arendt contends, conscience proved unreliable as either moral trigger or moral guide, as was amply shown in chapter 2. On traditional terms this meant that in Nazi Germany moral action was impossible under the first conviction, and moral responsibility cannot be ascribed under the second conviction. And this conclusion, for Arendt – and for me – is unacceptable.

However, I also agree with Arendt that therefore the three convictions can be retained in the face of the challenge of banal evildoing if the internal moral mechanism is understood to entail other mental powers and activities in addition to, and in fact in a more significant role than, conscience. Arendt’s proposed additions are the mental activities of thinking, judging, and willing, of all of which most agents have at least some personal decisional experience. And I find her characterization of these activities – how they operate, the experiences underlying them, the distinction between reflective and habitual performance (chapters 3-7) – more than sufficiently persuasive to support this proposal (with the additions and adjustments I have proposed in chapters 8-9).

Thus, I largely share the trajectory and contours, and accept many of the specifics, of the Arendtian moral project. It is for this reason that I address what I saw as the major deficiencies of this project by adding to, adjusting, and clarifying it much more than by rejecting and replacing aspects of it.

My main addition to this project was the introduction of empathy and practical wisdom as also required for making the moral decision (chapters 8-9). This addition rounded out the experience
of selfhood that Arendt, convincingly, saw as entailed in reflective moral performance. This experience of selfhood as in coincidence and complementariness with otherness marks Arendtian moral decision and action, correctly, as stemming from, and actualizing, shared humanness. As such, it also marks it as a decisional alternative to ordinary being-in-the-world. But only with the addition of empathy and practical wisdom does this experience of selfhood acquire sufficient experiential resonance to be a viable alternative to ordinary decision-making.

My main adjustment to the Arendtian analysis was to move it beyond the confines of Arendt’s own guiding limit case. The Nazi example helped direct the Arendtian analysis to the core problem with moral performance as traditionally conceived, and to the best solution for it. It also helped draw the contours of this solution much more clearly, and sharpened our grasp of what is at stake in moral performance (namely, shared humanness at the levels of both self and world).

But this example is so morally stark and extreme that it inevitably sets the standard for moral life at its highest and most rigorous, and as such it may be too onerous for the more ordinary circumstances within which most of our moral life takes place. As such, our moral life is not conducted primarily through the starkly drawn and life-changing unique moral decisions that Arendt, appropriately for the limit case, had envisioned. Rather, our moral life is interwoven with the rest of our life-plan as part of a continuous personal history and of ongoing relationships with others. As such, our moral actions influence and even guide our future decisions, create moral relationships, and affect existing ones. They are enmeshed within also-pertinent non-moral considerations, usually in decisional contexts that are not primarily or visibly moral, and often as part of collective acts.

Arendt, as is evident throughout chapters 11 and 12, is not oblivious to this. But even if she notes these facts, her focus quickly shifts back to what applies first and foremost in the limit case. In this respect the example of Nazi Germany, like any appearance, both conceals and reveals. And as a result the example of Nazi Germany risks costing Arendt in terms of the applicability of her analysis. It was this risk that I attempted to mitigate, as much as possible, within what I consider a still Arendtian framework, through the series of moves I made in chapters 11 and 12. In
particular, this meant for me not breaching some key insights into human moral life that underlie
the Arendtian analysis and that give her moral project its strong resonance and force. These
moves, however, are still somewhat preliminary and speculative in nature, in need of much
further consideration.

My clarification of Arendt has to do with the answer she would give to the question of what
would make a given act a moral one. The most obvious Arendtian answer would point to the
procedure whereby the moral decision is arrived at. But two additional levels at which the
question can be answered on Arendtian terms implicitly emerge in my analysis of Arendt. The
first, and perhaps most counterintuitive, is the substantive level of ‘what the action is about’. Arendtian moral action is action that is about care for, and protection of, human plurality and
shared human personhood. It is at this level that, under Arendtian terms, morality becomes the
other side of the same coin as politics. The second is the situational level of ‘under what
situational circumstances or conditions is the decision made’. Arendtian moral action is action
that arises out of, and addresses, circumstances in which the agent’s own humanness and self-
consistency as a human self is in danger and therefore at stake. Only a moral act can meet this
danger for Arendt.

13.2

These additions and adjustments were made within the broader outline of the Arendtian moral
project, which in the present thesis I have otherwise accepted and shared. This, together with the
limited space that I could accord to my investigation here, forced me to leave several important
issues and concerns outside of, or underdeveloped in, the present thesis. I wish to note these
issues and concerns, as avenues for further clarification and consideration, in the present section.

1 I flesh these insights out at the end of chapter 12 and again in section 13.3.
2 In the preceding chapters, this only came to the surface in my argument that promising and forgiving are moral
acts (see section 11.1).
In doing so I remain fully aware of the fact that these concerns may very well reveal, upon further development, legitimate problems and weaknesses with the Arendtian moral project. But since such further development is not possible in the present thesis, I can here do no more than point in their direction.

One important issue requiring further investigation is the cultivation of the mental abilities required for successful moral performance. All human beings have the potential capacity to think, judge, will, empathize, and be practically wise. But for this potentiality to become reality the mind must train itself to think, judge, will, empathize, and be practically wise. And the mind cannot do this without witnessing, and learning from, the examples of the thinking, judging, willing, empathizing, and practical wisdom, of others. Thus, the present investigation requires further exploration of how such training and learning is best facilitated, to which Arendt herself pays too little attention.

This exploration, however, would also have to deal with the thorny issue of whether agents whose moral capacity has been impaired due to problematic cultivation are to be absolved of moral responsibility as a result. For example, if such cultivation entails learning from the example of others, then successful moral cultivation may depend on the availability of a plurality of different exemplars to learn from.³ For another example, the radical self-examination entailed in reflective moral performance may require a strong sense of self-worth or the ability to imagine oneself otherwise than one has hitherto been. And the cultivation of these may be impaired, for example, as a result of oppressive socialization (Benson, 2000; Mackenzie, 2000). A consideration of such psychological preconditions of moral capacity and of their impact on moral responsibility- ascription is also warranted as we move forward and away from the Arendtian moral analysis itself.⁴

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³ This point, of course, seems to suggest the (potentially contentious) conclusion that moral capacity may be improved by, or even dependent upon, being raised in a diverse and plural society.

⁴ Another thorny question, perhaps related to this question, is whether to treat misjudgment similarly to lack of, or impairment of, judgment. I thank Markus Kornprobst for this point.
Moreover, the shared human world is permeated with unequal power relations. And this fact (regardless of whether we see it as avoidable) has to be contended with in any helpful account of moral performance. In fact, several aspects of my analysis raise concerns regarding worldly power relations. For example, if examples are so important in cultivating moral capacity before the agent is capable of choosing her own guiding examples herself, who is to choose those examples for her (and how)? For another example, what is entailed in world-and-humanness-sharing across unequal power relations may well differ depending on one’s relative place in such relations. These and other concerns regarding the relationship between power and moral capacity require deeper consideration than I have been able to provide in the present thesis.

The notion of world-and-humanness-sharing as being at the core of moral performance itself gives rise to certain concerns regarding the legitimate reach of moral responsibility-ascription. To what extent, if at all, are we justified in demanding (and even forcing) world-sharing on those who do not wish to share the world with us or even with anyone but the likes of them? Arendt, of course, took the position that such imposition was justified. But she was dealing with a case in which the refusal to share the world with others has taken on the most extreme and violent form we can at this point imagine. Would the same apply to arguably more benign cases of exclusion, for example, to a community that simply blocks itself off from the world’s plurality without seeking to destroy it? Are there to be shades and degrees to our response to such cases of exclusion, perhaps on the basis of their degree of threat to the reality of human plurality? This as well requires deeper consideration, which I was unable to accord it in the present thesis.

My recourse to world-and-humanness-sharing merits further clarification in another respect as well. In the present thesis I assume that a commitment to shared humanness would not, in given decisions, ‘cut both ways’. But this is not necessarily the case. For example, both support for, and opposition to, abortions can be derived from a commitment to shared humanness. The question of how we deal with such conflicts and whether the notions of moral responsibility or shared humanness can help us decide them requires further thought. Similarly, I treated moral responsibility as if it were a decisionally overriding and primary human concern. I did acknowledge in chapter 11 that there may be circumstances to the contrary. But I did not provide
the needed systematic discussion of such non-moral considerations and of the circumstances under which they can legitimately stand up to moral ones. This, as well, merits further work.

Another casualty of the space limitations of the present thesis was the mental power of practical wisdom. With Ricoeur I took practical wisdom to be the mental power that is the independent arbiter of discordant internal voices and the mental power most attuned to the particularity of the decisional situation. But is this characterization of practical wisdom correct and complete? And how does practical wisdom itself operate? This also needs to be addressed by a separate future investigation.5

Finally, I feel the present thesis does not sufficiently acknowledge, or critically explore, my debt to Ricoeur’s understanding of the interrelatedness of selfhood and otherness, of which his account of moral reflection is but part. It was very much in tracing his route towards this conception of selfhood that I realized that Arendt’s own analysis pointed in a similar (though not identical) direction. Tracking how Ricoeur’s understanding of the interrelatedness of selfhood and otherness differs from Arendt’s, as well as how it complements it, is also called for to complement my own analysis.

13.3

Such additional work will no doubt take the investigation of moral performance outside the outlines of an Arendtian analysis. However, I believe that three core convictions regarding morality and human life, emerging out of Arendt’s analysis, should be retained in any such future work. Indeed, these convictions have already served to guide and delimit my own

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5 Such an investigation would also confirm or reject the candidacy of practical wisdom for performing the task of fitting particulars and indefinable general categories, entailed in Arendtian reflective judging but not accounted for in her description of it. On this, see section 5.3, especially footnote 33.
expansions and adjustments to the Arendtian analysis in chapters 11 and 12. These constitute, for me, the core of the instruction I take away from Arendt’s moral analysis.

The first conviction is that to be moral is to be human and to be human is to be moral. Righteousness is not extrinsic to, but cuts to the core of, human personhood. As such, moral life manifests and actualizes the essentially human in us, and is an important part – perhaps the most important part – of what constitutes the self as a distinctly human self.

The second conviction is that to be moral and human is to simultaneously be both for self and for others. Otherness is also not extrinsic to, but intertwined with, our selfhood. And the recognition of this fact also manifests and actualizes the essentially human in us. It is because of our humanness that, as individuals, we cannot be self-sustaining and self-enclosed wholes. Our humanness is impaired unless we share it with others, unless we share in others’ humanness, and unless, together, we share a physical and mental habitat.

The third and perhaps most difficult and yet most important conviction is that to be moral (and, by extension, human) is an ongoing struggle. The moral act must constantly guard against, negotiate, and balance, the dual risks of erasure of self and domination of the Other. It must assert itself against a plethora of non-moral considerations with legitimate claims to guiding our decisions. And it must achieve both in the face of a radical triple uncertainty, itself inherent in human plurality and natality. First, one can never know in advance when a moral choice would present itself and what form it would take. Second, one can never guarantee or be fully certain of what consequences one’s moral act would bring. Third, one cannot accord each of one’s choices the reflection they would need to fully explore and take heed of such moral consideration and consequences.

Thus the moral act seems caught between the rock and the hard place. Because morality and humanness are so intertwined, the moral choice carries with it the highest stakes and deepest expectations. But it also carries with it a high level of both decisional uncertainty and profoundly personal risk. And it presents itself in a decisional reality in which there are always seemingly good reasons to avoid it altogether. Why, then, should I not avoid it for the sake of a less demanding and uncertain life? Why bother being a good person?
At the end of the day, from my own perspective, Arendt’s deepest teaching and most profound contribution is found in responding to this question, though not in her answer itself. This answer – ‘because you are human’ – seems at first to merely restate an obvious and therefore meaningless truism. Arendt’s contribution is found precisely in the meaningfulness with which she infuses this simple answer. That being-moral is a constant struggle is but an indication that being-human is something that cannot, and must not, be taken for granted. Rather, being-human is a burden and a responsibility, concomitantly and complementarily to oneself and to others. It is a burden we cannot shirk or evade without thereby denying and negating the essentially human in us.

But if negating ourselves is our highest risk and greatest possible depravity, then its opposite – being who we are – must be our greatest reward. And it is here that the fallacy is exposed. Being-human, rather than a constant struggle, is in fact a constant challenge. The burden of being-human is met not in being who we are (which indeed can be taken for granted) but in living up to who we are. And it is in the achievement of this living up to our humanness – in a single act, in a course of action, in a relationship, or in a life – that we reap this greatest of rewards. This reward can be found in the self-actualization within a plural world that for Arendt characterizes as political action. But more importantly, it is found in living with others, sharing a world with them, being-human with and for them, having them be human with and for you, and ultimately, being one’s human self.

At the close of this investigation there is one final remark that is owed to Arendt, and, indeed, to many others). There is another lesson that Arendt teaches, though more in the example of her thinking than in the contents of it. And though this lesson is in no way unique in the world, it is nonetheless too profound to be, as well, taken for granted.
Arendt looked into the abyss of humanity at its darkest moment in history and, without flinching from its horrors, has drawn not despair but profound hope in humanity. She is unique in that she has done so through the medium of theoretical analysis. But the achievement itself, regardless of medium, is by no means unique. Every person who lives within such an abyss and yet goes on being-moral-and-human attains the same achievement, as does every victim who survives such an abyss and yet goes back to being-moral-and-human. And in achieving this they all manifest and exemplify the nobility and strength of soul marking humanness at its finest. In them, especially in the survivors, the achievement of being-human can least of all be taken for granted or go unheralded, if only by those who witnessed and benefited from their example.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of such survivors who were my exemplars.
Reference List


