

# Hannah Arendt's Ethic of Responsibility to the "Who" and the "World"

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The rise of populism and the polarization of traditional and new media pose threats to pluralistic democratic action and judgment. Citizens often vilify each other, deny each other the space to test and justify their perspectives publicly, either because they hold radically different political views, or because they ascribe an essentialist identity upon the other, one that they believe must be negated in accordance with the logic of their own ideology. This paper presents three vital resources in Hannah Arendt's thought for addressing these challenges to democracy. First, Arendt promotes physical — not merely virtual or digital — spaces of public deliberation in which actors disclose "who" they uniquely are and the "world" that contextualizes their action. Arendt proposes a principle of resistance to totalitarianism and a "responsibility for the world" as the appropriate limit to free action within these spaces. Second, Arendt presents a limit, or standard of intelligibility, to political action and speech permissible in public: the *sensus communis* of Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment. This standard of common sense, which binds the public sphere, demands that a speech act's intersubjective validity appeal to an objectivity that can be shared from different perspectives, but which allows for disagreement, and is not as restrictive as an Aristotelian ethos or an internally consistent ideology. Finally, Arendt asserts the imperative of factual truth telling and attention to the details of public phenomena, as necessary conditions for intelligible action and judgment in a pluralistic public sphere.

*Keywords:* Arendt, media, democracy, plurality, responsibility, judgment, action, *sensus communis*

The rise of populism and the polarization of traditional and new media pose critical threats to democratic action and judgment. Citizens often vilify each other, deny each other the space to test and justify their perspectives publically, either because they hold a radically different political view, or because they ascribe an essentialist identity upon the other, one that they believe must be negated in accordance with the logic of their own ideology. This paper presents three vital conceptual resources in Hannah Arendt's thought for addressing these challenges. The first is Arendt's promotion of physical — not merely virtual or digital — spaces of public deliberation in which actors, through the performance of speech and deeds before diverse others, disclose "who" they uniquely are and the "world" that contextualizes their action. Arendt proposes a principle of resistance to totalitarianism and a "responsibility for the world" — which she conceives as conditioned by pluralism — as the appropriate limit to free action within these spaces. Second, Arendt presents a limit, or standard of intelligibility, to political action and speech

permissible in public: the *sensus communis* of Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment. This standard of common sense, which binds the public sphere, demands that a speech act's intersubjective validity appeal to an objectivity that can be shared from different perspectives, but which allows for disagreement, and is not as restrictive as an Aristotelian ethos or an internally consistent ideology. Finally, Arendt develops a crucial connection between responsibility for the public world and the imperative of factual truth telling. Caring for shared objects of intelligibility in the political realm requires that overt lying in public speech acts about facts and past events be forbidden. While spectator storytelling is a crucial part of political judgment and the disclosure on the meanings of political action, facts are just as crucial. An insistence on the accurate accounting of the detail of phenomena, experienced from many perspectives, is crucial for resisting radical ideology, the totalitarian tendency of transforming the given to fit the internal logic of a story propagated by the ruling regime. It is also key to acknowledging and appreciating the diversity and complexity of human affairs, and therefore rejecting the overly simplistic and often xenophobic solutions of populist rule and radically polarized and solipsistic political opinions. While Arendt's resources are immanent to human action, and by no means offer a transcendent source of validity or authority that presumes to ground and guarantee the security of the public sphere absolutely and forever, they do go a long way in inspiring a style of politics that vigilantly defends and rejuvenates democratic spaces where pluralism may be appropriately countenanced, and where the right of all human actors to appear in the world is protected.

### **Public Space, Individuation, and Responsibility for the World**

The last decade has seen a significant shift in the way that citizens communicate with each other about political matters. More and more, people voice their political opinions, preferences, and allegiances through social media like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Social media is transforming how citizens deliberate with each other and how they regard their role as political participants. It is also contributing to a polarization and radicalization of opinion in many political systems around the globe. It is important to note, however, that social media does not cause the polarization of opinion, the rise of populism, or the vilification of political opponents on its own. Rather, it seems to be aggravating a phenomenon that bears similarities with what Arendt observed as part of the rise of totalitarian movements: a pervasive lack of confidence in the capacity of liberal democratic states, as well as liberal international economic and political organizations, to deliver on the promises of fairly distributed economic prosperity, security, responsible government, and meaningful avenues of political participation for the average citizen. The corrosion of the citizen's trust in the post-war welfare state's ability to manage the economy in a way that can provide each family with a stable income has had the biggest impact. Economic stagnancy, unemployment, and the hollowing out of the middle class in the United States have been crucial factors in the rise of Trump-style populism. Sovereign debt crises, rising economic inequality, and uncertainty over how to appropriately manage the influx of

refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere have been key to the rise of right-wing populist movements in many parts of Europe, and have posed a serious threat to the stability of the European Union, as evidenced most dramatically by Brexit. There is a very concerning trend in North America and Europe toward isolationism, nativism, and the search for scapegoats, a will among populists to protect jobs and other sources of economic and social security and status for what they perceive as the deserving, authentic, core members of the political community, from what they perceive as the undeserving others. Conditions of uncertainty and scarcity breed a fear-driven tendency to want to take care of what is closest to one's self. These economic factors, working along with the rise of new social media as a dominant mode of human interaction, have contributed to a new phenomenon of "world-alienation" that bears striking similarities to the kind that Arendt explains as contributing to, and being exacerbated by, the hyper-nationalist totalitarianism of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Before examining the contemporary form of world-alienation evidenced in social media, let us revisit what Arendt meant by the concept. Arendt explains world-alienation as when the individual no longer conceives spaces of human appearance and interaction as the loci of freedom (1958: 251–257). In situations where public spaces are no longer available for meaningful political action and judgment, individuals try to retain some sense of freedom by focusing on their own interiority, and either abandoning the common world, or imposing their own will upon it. Arendt explains this hyper-subjective standpoint as, at least in part, ethically and historically rooted in Stoicism, which encouraged individuals, if they could not effect change in the political world around them, to instead focus on attaining control over one's own internal reactions to outside phenomena, good or bad (1977a: 147–148). The individual's alienation and retreat from the pluralistic and complicated realm of human affairs is also rooted in Platonism. That world-alienation is compatible with any form of freedom at all is due to the dominant conception of freedom within the tradition of Western political philosophy since Plato; a conception that links freedom with sovereignty (Arendt, 1958: 221–227; 1977a: 157–159). Arendt sees sovereignty in terms of a mastery over one's own self, and ultimately a mastery over one's environment, including control over the wills of others (1977a: 162). Much of her work re-invigorates an alternative view of freedom as non-sovereign, experienced through speech and action, before and with others, in a way that introduces something new, albeit unpredictable and uncontrollable, to the world, in all its plurality.

World-alienation, both in 20<sup>th</sup>-century and contemporary forms, occurs when people no longer feel at home in the world, and when their speech and action have no significant bearing on the processes that seem to govern their environment. A contemporary manifestation of this can be seen in the reduction of citizen participation in traditional party politics over the last half-century, whether through voting or volunteering, driven by the sense that political and corporate elites decide the rules of the economic and political game anyway. Part of populism's appeal to those disenchanted by the institutions of liberal democracy is the prospect of a leader strong enough to affect change in the rarefied realm of elites, but representing the will of the "ordinary" people. In the early

and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the world-alienation that drove the rise of totalitarianism was fed by the prevalence of political ideologies that followed a common logical structure. What the Marxist ideology of Stalinism and the racist ideology of Nazism had in common was a teleological philosophy of history in dialectical form, inspired, above all, by Hegel (Arendt, 1977a: 68; 2005: 70–74). Each saw events and actors as playing out necessary laws of history and nature, a dialectical movement governed by the law of struggle between economic classes or races, all moving inevitably toward the end of history and the fulfillment of its *telos*, whether that be a classless society of non-alienated laborers, or the world dominance of the Aryan race (Arendt, 1994a: 464–468). History followed the continuous logic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, and an action was deemed free if it contributed to this necessary movement. There was a sense of purpose, rationality, lawfulness, and necessity — of being on the right side of history — if one acted in favor of the Nazi or Soviet movement. On the other hand, if one's speech or action was not clearly pro-Nazi or pro-Soviet, it would, by this internal logic, be deemed either accidental, meaningless, or worse: something that needed to be cancelled, negated, overcome in order for the movement to proceed to synthesis. How one spoke or acted came to matter much less than “what” one was, which role one served in the overall structure of history's dialectical movement, according to their class, race, religion, or nation. By this violent logic, a Jew or a bourgeois, no matter how they acted or how they spoke, were deemed the necessary opponents of the torchbearers of history, and thus negated. Particular individuals became accidental, superfluous in relation to the universal process or the law of the movement. In *Origins of Totalitarianism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt explains how the dominance of totalitarian logic, and the sense that actors merely fulfilled their duty according to the laws of history and nature as expressed by the regime's leader, removed the sense of personal responsibility from individual action, and replaced it with anonymous, highly bureaucratized rule (1994a: 25–26, 135–137; 1994b: 470–473).

The capacity of individuals to question, critique, and resist the violent policies of totalitarian rulers was suppressed by the regimes' destruction of public spaces in which ordinary citizens could gather and communicate openly. These spaces of intersubjectivity, Arendt has shown, are vital for developing and sustaining the capacity to properly think and judge, the capacity to perceive and consider facts and details of common import, to validate and reform one's perspectives about meaningful events in conversation with others, and to imagine one's self in the positions of others, a capacity that is key to moral reflection. The disappearance of such public space contributed to the generalized crisis in the capacity to think that Arendt argues allowed for the “banal” evils of totalitarian rule (1994a: 252; 1994b: 475–478).

The contemporary obsession with social media represents a form of world-alienation in interrelated ways. The loss of the citizen's sense that their action or speech has much bearing on the political world or economic system induces a retreat to the inward domain of the online user. At its extreme, social media users see the construction of their online profile, through posted comments, images, “likes,” and links, as more “real,” “valid,” or somehow authorized than their life offline. It is easier to lose a sense of the reality of a

shared world when citizens engage in political communication with disembodied social media personae or avatars that remain concealed from actual human view, and may be highly fictionalized constructions. When one draws inward into radical subjectivity, one loses connection to the detailed particularity, the texture and nuance, of what Arendt calls the “web of human relationships” (1958: 183) in the shared world. Atomized subjectivities become even more susceptible to the xenophobia and irrational attitudes towards others which a political environment of “post-truth populism” engenders. When one retreats and remains in an atomistic form of subjectivity, the internally consistent rationality of logical systems can come to dominate thought more easily, unchallenged by the facticity and complexity of the world outside. It becomes easier to draw highly questionable inferences between concepts or intuitions. It becomes easier to judge another person categorically, rather than reflectively, as a particular example subsumable to a category — their group — and expect a predetermined mode of behavior, political opinion, and historical destiny for that person. Others may appear as categorically antithetical to one’s own will or sense of the historical destiny of one’s community, and thus become vilified. All the while, users can safely remain relatively anonymous behind their profiles; they do not have to physically appear in public to defend their principles, nor do they have to publicly face those with very different *doxai*. This weakens the degree to which actors feel the ethical imperative of considering the perspectives of others, and accordingly moderating their own opinion. Because it is relatively simple for users to find others online with shared perspectives, and because the dominant social media expose users predominantly to stories determined by algorithms to reflect back their already existing *doxai*, the global community of users becomes rigidly fragmented according to increasingly polarized political lines. The digital echo chambers of social media do not allow for sufficiently visiting the perspectives of others, nor a careful examination of the detailed facts and particularities of public events, to develop the more moderate opinions which can best stabilize political communities and best encourage respect for all citizens’ right to live well.

In the spirit of Arendt’s critique, to discourage radical political polarization and the political isolation that it breeds, particularly as it is aggravated through new social media, political communities should foster physical sites of deliberative democracy to encourage actors’ actual appearance in public. In these physical sites, where political actors publicly appear along with their speech and deeds, there is an imperative to answer for one’s principles before others who might disagree. Politics, by Arendt’s account, involves a courageous acceptance of responsibility for one’s stance, rather than an anonymous retreat behind the masks of online personae. It should involve facing diverse others in a space where one might more readily feel the imperative to visit their perspectives, to respect them as co-actors or co-judges in a spirit of “disinterested togetherness,” than in a virtual space. This leads to more thorough and critical deliberative praxis.

Arendt develops her account of political action in resistance to totalitarianism’s threat to the public space, as well as its ideological and structural vilification of individuals based merely on their categorical group membership. For Arendt, action between indi-

viduals creates and sustains the very public space necessary for its appearance, as well as its judgment by spectators. Real human spectators, not a meta-agent working through the dialectical law of history, ultimately interpret each particular action's meaning for contemporary politics and for history. Spontaneous action and speech, not willing rationally according to a perceived dialectical law, are that through which freedom is experienced, and one's particular human dignity is confirmed publicly (Arendt, 1977a: 146, 151–153). Action accompanied by speech discloses “who” the actor uniquely is, along with aspects of the “world” that contextualizes the act (Arendt, 1958: 175–184).

Arendt's notion of the “who” is disclosed in the interaction between the actor's unique performance of deeds and speech, and objective world conditions to which they respond. While the actor may self-consciously stylize a public persona that they choose to project, the disclosure of the “who” is ultimately not something one can exert complete control over, and it appears more clearly to outside spectators than to the actor themselves (Ibid.: 179–180). It is impossible to fully reify the phenomenal ways that each unique “who” appears “in the flux of action and speech” (Ibid.: 161). Arendt argues that most attempts to identify the “who” lead to a description of universals shared with others, categories of social function or general standards of human behavior, which conceal the who's uniqueness. Following Heidegger, Arendt holds that the existential and performative “who” is separate from the constative “what” of the self, to which belong categories of identity including the actor's gender, race, religion, economic class, their biological traits, objects that represent their life's work, and even their moral intentions. Arendt presses this distinction to distinguish properly political affairs as those which deal with a plurality of “whos” that can never be instrumentally governed or mastered, as stable units, according to a principle of reason or will. Given the sheer plurality of unique and irreplaceable “whos,” any inwardly consistent logic, which depends on stable and nameable entities, is inadequate for fully governing the complexity and dignity of human affairs (Ibid.: 181–182). The distinction between the “who” and the “what” is thus key to Arendt's resistance of totalitarianism, and the imperative that people be acknowledged and judged in a way that allows for their freedom, according to how they actually act and speak in their particular life story, rather than according to how their perceived category of identity fits in a pre-determined logic of a dialectical law of nature or history. Individuation through action and speech transcends anonymity, both the anonymity of one's biological life as a specimen of the human species, and as an anonymous and replaceable or superfluous “what” within the dialectic.

There is perhaps some irony in my mobilization of Arendtian resources to critique social media profiles, given Arendt's regular use of political metaphors from the world of Greek and Roman theatre, her seeing the public world in terms of the *theatrum mundi*. Arendt encourages the depersonalization of the public sphere, the actors' wearing of masks, or *personae*, when they act and speak politically (1977b: 106). This mask is meant as a metaphor for holding legal status within a political community, holding an intersubjectively recognized office or place in the public space which confirms the actor's right to speak and be heard, and helps provide context and intelligibility for their speech. This

mask, or site of amplification, helps the unique “who” of the actor sound through. It allows political opponents to disagree and compete with each other, while maintaining the imperative to listen to each other, and without vilifying the private person wearing the mask. The public persona allows actors to manage, to some extent, how much of themselves they wish to disclose to the world. This is critical, because, unlike in virtual social media space, in actual physical spaces of public deliberation, actors appear bearing their givenness, the unchangeable “whats” they are born with or to. These cannot be hidden behind an online profile. Indeed, much of the significance of political action is that it is that through which each human being reveals a unique life narrative in response to the unchangeable “whats” that they bear. Key to overcoming the contemporary polarization of political debate and the vilification of opponents is Arendt’s notion of “disinterested togetherness.” Action becomes determined by the instrumental logic of means and ends when human “togetherness” is lost. Speech forgoes its capacity to reveal meaning and becomes a mere tool, an instrument of potential concealment in attaining one’s immediate political ends. By contrast, the spirit of togetherness is “disinterested,” so that actors are neither for nor against each other (Arendt, 1958: 180). Only under these conditions — when no identity is under attack because actors are “disinterested” in relation to the other — can the particular “who” be disclosed from behind the categorical “what.”

For Arendt, political action should be self-elective, since it is essential to experiencing freedom. No one should be pre-emptively kept out of the public sphere, as each individual human being ought to have the opportunity to pursue the free action which bestows an important level of dignity upon human life stories. This equal opportunity is at the root of her “right to have rights” (Arendt, 1994b: 296–297). However, free speech can be as dangerous as it can be edifying for a pluralistic public sphere. There should, therefore, be some boundary to what kind of action or speech is permitted in public, some limit to the radical spontaneity and agonism of action, to save it from its destructive side. There ought to be some guideline that the actor considers, even in their will to show themselves and their doxa as being the greatest among competing doxai, and thus worthy of remembrance. Arendt is well known for her rejection of categorical moral or rational imperatives as a way of validating speech acts, on the grounds that it robs speech and action of its freedom, its spontaneity (1977a: 145, 151–152). Arendt draws, instead, a different limit to what kind of action and speech should be permitted in public. This limit is the imperative that actors be motivated by principles that fight totalitarian tendencies, and that they accept responsibility for the public world and try to sustain it. Arendt writes: “Thus the fear of concentration camps and the resulting insight into the nature of total domination might serve to invalidate all obsolete political differentiations from right to left and to introduce beside and above them the politically most important yardstick for judging events in our time, namely: whether they serve totalitarian domination or not” (1994b: 442).

The resistance to totalitarianism involves responsiveness to a plurality of opinions, careful attention to the particular details and facts of shared objects and events within the world, and respect, rather than negation, of the categories of identity, the “whats” that

humans are born with, so that all actors may be judged based on their individual speech acts, and “who” this discloses. Individuation through action’s disclosure of the “who” involves taking responsibility for one’s words and deeds, for how they fit in or respond to the world that contextualizes them. This disclosure is a response to the condition of plurality. So, even if an actor is, agonistically, affirming their *doxa* as great or worthy of acknowledgement, they need also, reciprocally, be ready to listen, judge, and respond back to other *doxai* in a way that preserves the integrity of the world that allows for their own disclosure. Responsibility for the world entails acting responsively to other people in their plurality, showing them a respectful willingness to share the public sphere. It involves continuous care for the institutions and practices that allow for the disclosure of plurality, continued action and speech among those who elect themselves to participate. Arendt argues that a republican foundation that creates space for political freedom must be made in such an augmentable way that subsequent actors can freely and critically respond to their own contexts within its institutional and legal parameters. Unlike a work of *poiesis* that survives and outlasts the process by which it was made, the public space depends on continuous subsequent performative acts to maintain it. According to George Kateb, Arendt does not see the establishing of a constitution as the “making” of a model for society, so that the purpose of political action is achieved in the design of a country’s political structure, but rather the “creation of a frame of institutions for indefinite future possibilities of political action . . .” (1984: 19). What binds the public sphere and deliberative community together is not a shared substantive *ethos* — there must be room for agonism, disagreement, and freedom of opinion — but a shared world, shared objects or events that can be seen from different perspectives, as well as a shared institutional framework that all actors are willing to defend through their continuous action, and that self-elected actors have a reasonable opportunity to act through.

Arendtian limits to free speech constitute more than mere “political correctness,” but she never establishes a particular, substantive political ideology, right or left, that she thought should validate speech from without. This would be to contradict her phenomenology of political action and judgment, which never sought to prescribe political principles for any given people, but instead described how any given principle could be disclosed publicly and historically, through action and the judgment of its meaning. For Arendt, herself, to propose a transcendent, external standard by which to validate speech acts would be to determine a ground for action in advance, thus robbing it of its spontaneity and freedom. Arendt develops the implications of acting and judging without metaphysically guaranteed grounds. Action requires courage since the actor takes the responsibility for beginnings that are never guaranteed by moral and metaphysical certainties. Instead, Arendt writes that actions spring from the principles that inspire them (177a: 152). She alludes to principles in her account of Montesquieu, and suggests that his chief concern in *De l’esprit des lois* are the human passions expressed by a community’s laws — understood as *rappports* between beings — and the types of action these inspire (Arendt, 1958: 190–191n). As examples of principles that inspire political action, Arendt lists honor, glory, equality, and excellence, but also hatred, fear, and distrust (177a: 152).



According to Lucy Cane, Arendt suggests that political communities may be inspired by many principles at once, and that these can either sustain continued engagement with the public realm, or undermine the necessary institutional conditions of freedom (2014: 62, 67). Principles do not exist in a realm higher than their phenomenal appearances in speech and in physical acts. They survive only through spectator narrative, after an act or speech has been judged to serve as a valid example of that principle. Some principles go on to inspire future political action, so that their being is extended through time.

While Arendt never posits a substantive determinant of the will that could categorically validate or invalidate a given speech act, she is consistently dedicated to defending the interrelated principles of responsibility for the public world, and the resistance to totalitarianism. A politics inspired by these principles would rule out any speech act that excludes others from freely appearing in public, that vilifies or attacks others in a personal way based on their group membership, and that threatens the public space and renders it impossible for citizens to actively respond to events of common import. A politics inspired by these principles requires and reinforces a subjectivity that Arendt describes as the “enlarged mentality,” which is developed by visiting the perspectives of others in the process of political judgment. Arendt turns to the aesthetic judgment of Kant for another crucial limit to free speech, one that helps protect the world from the destructive and irrational side of action by establishing communicability and inclusiveness as procedural imperatives, yet sustains freedom itself by also rooting judgment in subjective taste.

### ***Sensus Communis: Limiting the Agon***

Arendt develops her account of political judgment, based on the aesthetic critique of Kant, in a way that incorporates another crucial limit to the *agon* of action, a standard to help ensure the ongoing health of a pluralistic public sphere and the communicative freedom of citizens. Arendt explains how totalitarianism destroys the common world where the plurality of *doxai* may be disclosed and exchanged, and creates atomized and isolated individuals who are unable to properly think. It became a priority for Arendt, in the wake of totalitarianism, to explore the faculty of judgment as an autonomous one, without appeal to the laws of nature or history at the core of totalitarian ideology. Dana Villa notes that Arendt’s approach bears an important ethical dimension, in that it champions the autonomy of reflective judgment, yet rescues it from radical relativism and decisionism by helping deliberators reconstruct moral horizons (1996: 165).

Arendt develops her account of political judgment through an adaptation of Kant’s critique of aesthetic judgment, where situated individuals judge phenomena in a world of appearance along with others who are also immediately partial. Both Arendt and Kant account for how opinions about public objects, seen from different perspectives, become validated, while maintaining freedom of judgment. Political judgments seek the agreement of others without being confirmed with the certainty of logical truth. By Arendt’s account, the public sphere is bound and sustained by a Kantian *sensus communis*, an intersubjective standard of intelligibility and meaning by which spectators judge deeds and

speech, bridging the subjective taste of the individual spectator and the worldliness of objects and events which can be seen from different perspectives (Arendt, 1992: 70–72). Arendt's account of judgment can be read in at least two ways, both as a model for ethical judgment, by which an actor may consider the validity of their intended acts beforehand, and as an explanation of how political phenomena are retrospectively disclosed and judged in a public forum, how the meanings of deeds, speech, and actors become constructed for contemporary politics, or for future politics, based on their exemplary validity.

The Arendtian spectator judges an object or event primarily according to what it discloses about the meaning and integrity of the particular event in its own terms, rather than how this particular event fits into a larger natural or historical process understood through dialectical logic. The meaning of the object, event, deed, or speech in question is constructed and refined from the perspectives of the variously positioned spectators, but also closely related to its own facticity and particularity. Therefore, this judgment pays attention to the facticity and detail of the object, rather than be determined by self-consistent logic. Arendt's account begins from the immediate sense experience of the particular spectator, and the particular impression, or taste, they feel in the representation of the object. The spectator's immediate sense of the object is then compared and contrasted to the imagined perspectives and potential judgments of others.

Arendt claims that political judgments are reflective rather than determinant. Spectators must judge the meaning of phenomena without universal categories under which to subsume them. The famous Kantian example of such a particular is an object that the spectator judges as beautiful. There is no rule confirming that an object is beautiful. One merely feels pleasure in the representation of the object. This judgment of taste is aesthetic, meaning that its determining ground is subjective (Kant, 2000: 45–46). According to Arendt, in politics, like in art, the meaning of an object cannot be proven, but it can be validated intersubjectively. The spectator aims to persuade others of the validity of their judgment, and in the process, raises their *doxa* above mere subjectivity. The criteria for verification of taste's validity is its communicability. Kant posits that because one's satisfaction in communicating the mental state involved in representing a beautiful object is disinterested, one's judgment of beauty is grounds for the satisfaction of all people. One's pleasure is grounded on what one can presuppose in every other person, so one can attribute "subjective universal validity" to their judgment (Ibid.: 175).

Overcoming the impasse of the relativity of taste involves the imperative of disinterest or impartiality, an abstraction from one's own particularity through consideration of the standpoints and possible judgments of all other spectators in the judging community. By "visiting the perspectives" of others, and trying to "woo their consent," the spectator's mentality is enlarged (Arendt, 1992: 72). The communicability of taste depends on its appeal to a *sensus communis*. In referring to the *sensus communis*, as Kant explains, the spectator takes an *a priori* account of the modes of representation of all other people in the community of judgment (2000: 170–171). Disinterested judgment requires judging representations in a way that transcends considerations of their instrumentality, of the

object's relation to one's immediate sensuous need. There is thus an important material basis to conditions of disinterested judgment, as Arendt asserts: "This attitude of disinterested joy . . . can be experienced only after the needs of the living organism have been provided for, so that, released from life's necessity, men may be free for the world" (1977a: 210).

Public, dialogical critique implies that spectators can communicate their judgments, explain their implications, and be responsible for them, before others. One must be ready not to necessarily prove the correctness of their judgment, but explain how they arrived at it, by which considerations of other perspectives they formed it. The *sensus communis* may validate speech acts that appeal to its store of intelligibility, but it still allows for an important degree of disagreement in judgment and opinion, and is not meant to be as substantive or restrictive the standard of validity as an Aristotelian community's *ethos* or an internally consistent ideology, one that would invalidate or disallow a given speech act because it did not fit a particular logic or ideological premise sanctioned by political authorities. In communicating our reflective judgment, we cannot expect to always ultimately convince others. The autonomy of individual judgment remains key to exercising freedom. Spectators cannot reconcile empirical judgments, but form their own judgments from what they imagine to be the general perspective (Arendt, 1992: 43). Judging according to the *sensus communis* does not mean automatically adopting the opinions of others; rather, it means opening one's self up to the possibility of having one's *doxa* transformed by having visited the perspectives of others. In the judgment's appeal to what can be meaningfully communicable to others, this does not mean that it must conform to a substantive ethical judgment that dominates the *ethos* of one's particular cultural community. After all, we might ask, what if a particular *sensus communis* is dominated by a narrow, exclusionary *doxa*? What if two political groups in deliberation are too polarized for their respective spectators to bridge the gap, accurately imagine the other's perspective, and allow the other's perspective to significantly inform and moderate one's judgment? The Arendtian community of spectators, the bearers of the *sensus communis*, is not conceived as the bearer of a substantive harmony of judgment, where consensus of opinion is seen as the *telos* of deliberation; rather, it is a community based on open and continuous argument. Arendt's community of judgment is formed through the processes of judgment and agonistic politics themselves. Often a spectator must imagine themselves in the position of spectators who stand outside their own cultural or ethical community. This allows for the widening of the community of spectators, for the increased validity of opinions, and the enlargement of public thought.

As Villa notes, political judgment limits the *agon* of action not by disclosing a common opinion, but a common world (1996: 165). The processes of political deliberation are valuable for disclosing plurality, disclosing the world and its actors in their particularity, and thus sustaining the public sphere. Arendt's model does not and cannot promise to bridge the gap between empirical polarized *doxai*, but its underlying ethic of responsibility for the world can certainly help, especially when agents remember that the "world" is conditioned by plurality, and is not something that can be crafted, according to the in-

strumental logic of *techne*, to fit some model of perfection imagined from one particular subjectivity. Arendtian reflective political judgment discloses a shared world of events and objects that matter, about which different *doxai* can be compared and contrasted, and a shared institutional framework which allows for inclusive and diverse action and judgment. Kim Curtis shows that Arendt's theory of judgment highlights the political responsibility to countenance unique "whos" out of oblivion, to invite relevant perspectives, which might have been previously marginalized, into public light (1999: 142). Despite her championing of agonistic politics, Arendt also establishes important limits to what kind of political speech and opinion may be validated in the public sphere. In her imperative that spectators judge according to a progressively enlarging *sensus communis* and according to a principle of caring for the public world, judgments are informed by a principle that works to ensure the conditions of possibility of future pluralistic judgments.

### The Responsibility of Truth Telling

For Arendt, the disclosure of the meaning of reality in human affairs takes place in narrative form. Spectator storytelling is a crucial part of disclosing and judging the worldly relevance of political action, as well as for transmitting the authority of a political tradition over time (1958: 173, 184–185). Political storytelling relies on interpretation, the augmentation of initial spectator judgments, facilitated by what Kant describes as the structure of aesthetical ideas. He writes that an aesthetical idea is an imaginative representation associated with a concept, to make it available for sense, but which is bound up with other partial representations. While imagination submits to the understanding that "clips its wings," it can also provide the understanding with an overabundance of representations that excite the cognitive faculties. These many possible representations are then available to future interpretation, future enlargement (Kant, 2000: 197–202).

Despite the freedom of interpretation that political storytelling entails, public speech acts should not include outright lying about confirmable facts and past events. One of the most important conditions of possibility for the meaningful disclosure of pluralistic speech acts and judgments in a stable public world is that these be supported by factuality, that actors and spectators engaged in politics tell the factual truth. Arendt affirms that factual data and details of particular phenomena which can be intersubjectively validated from many perspectives are crucial for establishing shared objects or events available for judgment and responsive action within a public space. Moral thinking, sound political judgment, and meaningful action are all reliant on the intelligibility of worldly events and objects that appear in public space, and lying about verifiable facts concerning these events and objects erodes the very space of appearance in which they appear. While Arendt rejects the possibility or desirability of affirming a *doxa* that claims to disclose the totality of reality, some absolute rational or philosophical "Truth" of the matter concerning human affairs, she insists on actors and spectators communicating confirmable facts and particulars. Otherwise, a political community risks slipping into an unanchored "post-truth" world where totalitarian domination is an ever-present danger.

Arendt's most direct exposition on the crucial role that facticity and truth telling play in providing stability for the public sphere is in the chapter "Truth and Politics," in *Between Past and Future*. Here, Arendt is not concerned with philosophical or rational truths, but merely the transparent accounting of facts and events of action that have come to pass. As always, Arendt is careful not to suggest that past events are predetermined. Instead, they are the result of free human action, and could have been otherwise. However, once an action has taken place, and becomes part of the past, its facticity should be undeniable, not subject to concealment and distortion by powerful interests, nor considered mere opinion.

In "Truth and Politics," Arendt presents lying as a particular form of action, in that often its aim is to reject the world as it is, to "change the record" (1977a: 249). "[The liar] is an actor by nature; he says what is not so because he wants things to be different from what they are — that is, he wants to change the world" (Ibid.: 250). The capacity to lie actually confirms human freedom, and all of the danger and uncertainty that freedom entails. Arendt is not promoting lying, however, as "it is this freedom that is abused and perverted through mendacity" (Ibid.). Under normal circumstances, that is, when a regime and a people are not engaged in collective and systematic lying or self-deception, truth telling is not a form of political action, since, on its own, it does not change the world or introduce anything new, but merely relates particular facts of the past or present. Arendt writes: "Conceptually, we may call truth what we cannot change; metaphorically, it is the ground on which we stand and the sky that stretches above us" (Ibid.: 264). Facts should not, therefore, be manipulated by political action and political power, which can never produce a substitute for the "secure stability of factual reality" (Ibid.: 258). Indeed, Arendt explains that "it is only by respecting its own borders that this realm, where we are free to act and to change, can remain intact, preserving its integrity and keeping its promises" (Ibid.: 264).

While factual truth telling is not, under normal circumstances, a form of political action, Arendt asserts that the integrity of a "common and factual reality" is a "political problem of the first order" (Ibid.: 237) and that "[w]hat is at stake is survival, the perseverance in existence . . . and no human world destined to outlast the short life span of mortals within it will ever be able to survive without men willing to do what Herodotus was the first to undertake consciously . . . to say what is. No permanence, no perseverance in existence, can even be conceived of without men willing to testify to what is and appears to them because it is" (Ibid.: 229). Verifiable facts and events that are publicly known make up the "very texture of the political realm" (Ibid.: 231), the stable ground upon which opinions may be formed and judged intersubjectively: "Facts and opinions, though they must be kept apart, are not antagonistic to each other; they belong in the same realm. Facts inform opinions, and opinions, inspired by different interests and passions, can differ widely and still be legitimate as long as they respect factual truth. Freedom of opinion is a farce unless factual information is guaranteed and the facts themselves are not in dispute" (Ibid.: 238).

Like opinions, factual truths depend on their intersubjective articulation to be disclosed as part of human reality: “Factual truth . . . is always related to other people: it concerns events and circumstances in which many are involved; it is established by witnesses and depends upon testimony; it exists only to the extent that it is spoken about . . .” (Arendt, *Ibid.*: 238) This is one reason why factual truths are so fragile, and subject to distortion, forgetting, and willful concealment, both by powerful actors within a political regime, and by the “hostility” of a majority of opinion-holders (*Ibid.*: 243). Unwelcome or inconvenient facts and events may be treated as secrets, countered by deliberate falsehoods, their very discussion may be taboo, or, more commonly in democracies, considered mere opinions (*Ibid.*: 236–237). In a marketplace of opinions, a liar may also present their falsehoods concerning facts and events as just another opinion, to which they are entitled as a constitutional right. As Arendt cautions, “[t]his is frequently done by subversive groups, and in a politically immature public the resulting confusion can be considerable” (*Ibid.*: 249–250).

Truth telling about facts and events becomes a form of political action in the special circumstance when it resists and disrupts a world that is being constructed through organized lying and propaganda. Where a “community has embarked on organized lying on principle . . . [w]here everybody lies about everything of importance, the truth teller . . . has begun to act . . . for, in the unlikely event that he survives, he has made a start toward changing the world” (Arendt *Ibid.*: 251). Arendt is one of the foremost theorists about the particular circumstance in which mere factual truth telling becomes political action. However, this is a situation that, unfortunately, has become a new normal, with the prevalence of the modern political lie. Arendt writes at length in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* about how totalitarian regimes instrumentally distorted and concealed factual truth so that the prevalent sense of reality would conform to an ideological fiction, in order to demonstrate how the overall political movement was achieving its *telos* (1994b: 351–353). One of the reasons why her thought has such import today is because in many countries around the globe, human beings already live or risk descending once again into the kind of “post-truth” world which characterizes totalitarianism.

Arendt describes a “relatively recent phenomenon of mass manipulation of fact and opinion . . . evident in the rewriting of history, in image-making, and in actual government policy” (1977a: 252). In “Truth and Politics,” Arendt turns her attention briefly to the Cold War. She describes a national government’s propaganda machine operating according to an instrumentally deceptive *raison d’état* which had learned from manipulative business practices and the advertising techniques of Madison Avenue, that was mobilized by a foreign affairs department determined to fool their opponent, but that had also spread to other, social and political, domains and that had effectively deceived their own leaders and their own citizens as well. “[A] whole group of people, and even whole nations, may take their bearings from a web of deceptions to which their leaders wished to subject their opponents” (*Ibid.*: 255). In the “trade of image making,” the liar begins to believe their own lies, and this “self-deception is likely to create a semblance of truthfulness” (*Ibid.*: 254) necessary to perform publicly with conviction. Citizens might not fact

check what the political actor says, or consider the long-term impact of the substance of the speech act on the integrity of the public world, but they are satisfied that he or she says it with conviction, that he or she means what they say. Both the “deceived group and the deceivers themselves” work to keep the “propaganda image intact” (Ibid.: 255), since in the absence of a stabilizing ground of facticity, the propaganda narrative serves as an alternative source of intelligibility, albeit fictional. The long-term effect of “brainwashing” and the constant replacement of facts with lies “is a peculiar kind of cynicism — an absolute refusal to believe in the truth of anything” (Ibid.: 257). When modern political lies become pervasive, “the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world — and the category of truth vs. falsehood is among the mental means to this end — is being destroyed” (Ibid.). Lying, argues Arendt, “harbor[s] an element of violence; organized lying always tends to destroy whatever it has decided to negate” (Ibid.: 252). Arendt asks, in a cautionary tone: “And finally, and perhaps most disturbingly, if the modern political lies are so big that they require a complete rearrangement of the whole factual texture — the making of another reality . . . what prevents these new stories, images, and non-facts from becoming an adequate substitute for reality and factuality?” (Ibid.: 253–254)

Arendt’s insistence on truth telling is especially significant given the influence of Machiavelli in her own account of action, despite him being a champion of instrumental lying (Machiavelli, 1995: 54–55). Indeed, Arendt shares much with Machiavelli. She promotes a secular political sphere, framed by republican institutions, whose authority rests in the act of foundation itself. Arendt espouses a politics whose guiding principles are immanent to action, not metaphysical or natural, and, like Machiavelli, she celebrates the virtuosity of great political action and speech that serves to establish or augment the foundations of a political community’s public tradition (Arendt, 1977b: 175, 195–196). Further, like Machiavelli, Arendt recognizes that political communities are often founded after a violent act that liberates people from an existing, oppressive regime. However, Arendt differs from Machiavelli in important ways, namely her rejection of a politics that conceives of the human being primarily as *homo faber*, and dominated by instrumental rationality.

Arendt argues that the Western tradition of political thought has been dominated by an association of freedom with sovereignty, mastery, and rule, an association stemming from the dominance of the fabrication or work model of freedom. This model, inspired in large part by Aristotle’s account of *poiesis* and its guiding intellectual virtue, *techne*, has inspired an understanding of politics dominated by instrumental rationality. Arendt challenges the intrusion of the instrumental rationality of *techne* and the sovereign will to mastery into politics. The will to master one’s self, one’s environment, and ultimately the destiny of others is compatible with the instrumental logic of *poiesis*, where any posited *telos* orders and justifies the means and processes involved in making (1958: 157–158, 194–195). This strictly instrumental logic tends to justify lying, and treating other humans as material to the posited end. Here, the ends established by the ruler or regime are seen as logically justifying the use of the available means, including other human beings, in often violent or manipulative ways. Machiavelli, one of this model’s greatest proponents,

was, notoriously, a champion of the use of violence and deception for the purpose of increasing the prince's power and the stability of the state.

Arendt diverges in an important way from Machiavelli in that she sees foundation not as the work of a solitary figure that manipulates the raw material of other human beings and existing political and social institutions, but rather as the acts of many individuals, through non-violent collective power. As an alternative to sovereign rule, Arendt emphasizes the non-sovereign mode of immanent, collective action she calls "promise making," which relies on honesty and trust, and which she sees as the bedrock of republican political communities (Ibid.: 243–247). This is not to say, however, that violence and lying have no place in Arendt's account of the foundation of spaces of appearance through "promise making." Indeed, Arendt calls violence the "prepolitical act of liberating oneself from the necessity of life for the freedom of the world" (Ibid.: 31). This violence can itself include instrumental and strategic forms of deceit or secrecy, necessary in revolutionary war. Further, Arendt acknowledges that the instrumental violence often necessary for liberation may become concealed by an authoritative *mythos* that augments the founding event into something palatable and inspirational for future generations, who are then left with a space of appearance in which non-violent, truth-disclosive action may occur. There is, therefore, in Arendt's writing, a complex and tense relationship, one that is never fully resolved, between the revolutionary action that overthrows an old order and that is accompanied by violence, and the non-violent constitutive action that subsequently founds a new space of appearance through collective power and "promise making," the immanent source of secular political authority.

However, Arendt asserts that violence, as well as lying, is always instrumental, ruled by means-end categories. As opposed to action, violence and lying are never ends in themselves, nor do they disclose the uniqueness of the "who" or the true texture and meaning of the "world"; thus, they are anathemas to the essence of politics. Arendt does not share with Machiavelli the sense that ends established by the regime justify all means. In her 1955 Berkeley lectures on Machiavelli, Arendt differentiates between ends that organize means in order to successfully achieve them, and the general principle that inspires action and gives it meaning. Here she suggests that there is, indeed, a limit to the means that should be permitted if action is to disclose the principle that inspired the act: "In pursuing an end, you can lose the meaning" (1955: 8). Arendt, therefore, does not concede that violence and deception in the struggle for liberation justify the contemporary use of organized lying in the public sphere that was founded as a result. It does not justify rulers, or organized power, deciding on the "truth of the matter" merely through arbitrary will, or according to the regime's or ruler's dominant ideology.

We have established that Arendt's alternative to the fabrication or work model of freedom, a performative model of non-violent action and power, is based on the intersubjective exchange of *doxai*. She explains that the collective power of non-violent action creates public space and discloses reality, in a way that the muteness and instrumentality of violence and lying cannot (1958: 199–201). Arendt writes that collective power exists only "where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil inten-



tions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities” (Ibid.: 200). Admittedly, the “making of promises” achieves only limited sovereignty by partly buffering against the uncertainty of the future by stabilizing human relationships. It does so not through establishing or expressing an identical will, but through an agreed upon purpose between people with a plurality of perspectives (Ibid.: 244–245). Lying has no place in Arendt’s account of action, which features the disclosure of truth and meaning through deeds and speech, among co-equals holding a diversity of perspectives. She insists on the capacity of non-violent, discursive action to create and sustain public space, as well as to disclose real and meaningful aspects of the “who” and the “world,” in a way that the instrumentality of lying and violence cannot (Ibid.: 199–201). Ultimately, a plurality of actors cannot lie to each other, and have the conditions for the intelligibility of their action survive.

Arendt’s proposed alternative account of freedom as non-sovereign action, and the resources she offers to limit the *agon* of free action, are themselves immanent to human action, and offer no transcendent philosophical or religious ground by which to guarantee the validity of speech acts, nor the long-term security and sustainability of the public sphere. She knows all too well how fragile public spaces are, how totalitarian practices and subjectivities pose a constant threat to the free action and plurality upon which these spaces are based. I submit that these resources within Arendt’s thought are indispensable for forming a strategy to combat ways of speaking and acting that risk eroding the pluralistic world we share, whether they be populist, xenophobic, totalitarian, radically instrumental, or highly atomizing. However, nothing is guaranteed, and Arendt’s principles of responsibility for the world, and resistance to totalitarianism, will wither into nothing, as principles do, without constant and vigilant action by those who elect themselves fit for the light of the public.

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## Этика ответственности по отношению к собственному «кто» и к «миру» в работах Ханны Арендт

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Рост популизма и увеличение разрыва между традиционными и новыми медиа представляет угрозу плюралистическому демократическому действию и суждению. Граждане клеветают друг на друга, отказывают друг другу в возможности проверить и обосновать свои взгляды публично: либо по причине того, что их политические взгляды радикально различаются, либо потому, что они приписывают друг другу обладание такими индивидуальными качествами, которые в их представлении должны быть отвергнуты в соответствии с логикой их собственной идеологии. В данной статье представлены три ключевых источника в философии Ханны Арендт, которые позволяют справиться с этими вызовами демократии. Во-первых, Арендт ратует за физические — не только виртуальные или цифровые — пространства для публичного обсуждения, где участники раскрывают себя, «кто» они есть на самом деле, и «мир», в контексте которого совершаются их действия. Арендт считает принцип сопротивления тоталитаризму и «ответственность за мир» приемлемым ограничением свободного действия в рамках этих пространств. Во-вторых, Арендт представляет ограничение, или стандарт интеллигибельности, политического действия и речи, допустимого публично, а именно *sensus communis* кантовской теории эстетической способности суждения. Этот стандарт здравого смысла связывает воедино публичную сферу и предполагает, что intersubъективная значимость речевого акта взывает к объективности, которая может разделяться с различных точек зрения. Этот стандарт допускает при этом разногласие и не является столь же ограничительным, как аристотелевский этос или внутренне непротиворечивая идеология. И, наконец, в-третьих, Арендт утверждает императив истины факта и внимания к деталям публичных событий в качестве необходимых условий для интеллигибельного действия и суждения в плюралистической публичной сфере.

*Ключевые слова:* Ханна Арендт, медиа, демократия, плюрализм, ответственность, суждение, действие, *sensus communis*