

Hannah Arendt on Thoughtlessness and Modern Politics

POLS 4013 Honours Thesis

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Abstract

Political thinker Hannah Arendt explores the crisis of modern politics, a crisis attested by the disastrous events of the 20th century. Arendt identifies the problem as modern bureaucracy, which attempts to order and manage human life in an ostensibly 'scientific' manner. This leads to the emergence of totalitarianism, wherein a leader seeks to scientifically control humanity. According to Arendt, this system is destructive to freedom and eliminates the possibility of spontaneous action, replacing it with necessity. Indeed, for Arendt, the structure of bureaucratic organization itself extinguishes the possibility of genuine thinking and practical human political engagement. For this reason, Arendt recommends an alternative system as a contemporary model to restore human action, taking examples from ancient politics and modern council systems. This thesis weaves a thread through Arendt's works including: *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, *On Revolution* and *The Human Condition*, while also considering the influence of Franz Kafka and Martin Heidegger on her writing.

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Introduction

The political thought of Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) is considered to be some of the most influential work of the twentieth century (Villa 2000, xiii-xvi, 1). Throughout her career, her work did not restrict itself to a single subject, instead the variety of topics she covered were all in response to the disastrous events of the twentieth century (Villa 2000, 1). As a German Jewish woman, she was directly impacted by Nazi Germany and the Second World War. She was arrested in 1933 for illegal work researching antisemitism, after which she fled Germany with her mother (Young-Bruehl 2004, 105-107). She was later imprisoned in a French internment camp called Gurs, and she was able to leave after the defeat of France, a few weeks into her internment in 1940. The majority of the inmates who survived at Gurs were transported to extermination centers in 1942 and 1943 by the Germans (Young-Bruehl 2004, 153-155). The cusp of Arendt's life's work is centered around the totalitarian regimes that were inflicted on Europe without precedent (Swift 2009, 3).

Arendt believed in the importance of storytelling, and much of her writing involves her own historical accounts and reports. Benhabib commented on the nature of Arendt's storytelling:

Arendt herself no longer thought it either desirable or even possible to fit the world into a coherent 'philosophical *Weltanschauung*' [philosophical world view]. For her, political philosophy became a method of narration to 'cull meaning from the past', an exercise in establishing distinctions that would enable us to think the meaning of our times and our actions, to 'think what we are doing.' (Benhabib 1996, 118, Quoted in Swift 2009, 4).

The objective of this thesis is to sift through the work of Arendt and the thinkers that influenced her, to properly understand the meaning that she culled, in regard to the problem of modern politics. Her major works considered are *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, *On Revolution* and *The Human Condition*.

The initial point of interest for this thesis, and perhaps the most well-known assessment by Arendt, is the notion of the banality of evil coined in her report *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. What was particularly intriguing was the role that the scientific minded bureaucracy played in Eichmann's crimes. This inspired a comprehensive investigation of the work of Arendt, in an attempt to understand the problem of evil in the modern political world. The main research questions are: Why does Arendt think that thoughtlessness, produced by bureaucracy, undermines freedom and action? Other questions include: How does Arendt critique the modern scientific world? What does Arendt propose as a solution to the modern scientific bureaucracy? This thesis is divided into two parts: Part One is the problem, and Part Two is the solution.

This thesis discerns a narrative that threads its way through the scattered web of Arendt's political thought. Arendt identifies a problem, uncovers what has been lost, and presents a solution. Freedom and action have been destroyed by modern bureaucratic systems, which are a harmful product of the scientific utilitarian world. Her main case study is Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi official responsible for the forced emigration of the Jewish people from Germany. Chapter 1 will navigate Arendt's assessment of Eichmann in combination with a literary analysis of Franz Kafka's major works on bureaucracy.

Chapter 2 will provide an in-depth account of thinking and thoughtlessness according to Arendt. Arendt uses literary exposition to describe the two concepts, which will elucidate how thoughtlessness is harmful within bureaucratic functionaries. It will also discuss obedience and intentions under totalitarian regimes. This will be followed by a digression pertaining to Arendt's relationship with Martin Heidegger and a specific argument about her work as a retort to Heidegger's theory of ontology.

Chapter 3 will discuss Arendt's proposed solution to the problem. Arendt claims that freedom and action have been lost and uses the Ancient Greek polis as the prime example of when public freedom thrived. The modern solution that she presents in her work *On Revolution*, is the council system. This is a political system that arises in the wake of modern revolutions, such as the French, American, and Bolshevik examples. Arendt argues that these political communities are squashed by oligarchic groups in favor of representative democracy. In that short period of time before they are eliminated, these council systems provide all of its citizens with an opportunity to actively participate in the politics of their community. Arendt sees the potential for these councils as an alternative to the thoughtless bureaucracies.

Part One: The Problem

Chapter 1: Kafka, Eichmann and Bureaucratic Necessity

Arendt is consistently and ardently opposed to the political effects of bureaucratic systems. In her later work, *On Violence*, she defines bureaucracy in the following manner:

Bureaucracy or the rule of an intricate system of bureaus in which no men, neither one nor the best, neither the few nor the many, can be held responsible, and which could be properly called rule of Nobody...rule of Nobody is the most tyrannical of all, since there is no one left who could even be asked to answer for what is being done. It is this state of affairs, making it impossible to localize responsibility and to identify the enemy (Arendt 1970, 38-39).

Bureaucracy is the rule of Nobody. In her essay "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship", her definition of bureaucracy also includes, "for this very reason [bureaucracy is] perhaps the least human and most cruel form of rulership (Arendt 2003, 31). For Arendt, this is an expression of an inhumane utilitarianism run amok. Arendt writes in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, "the essence of totalitarian government, and perhaps the nature of bureaucracy, is to make

functionaries and mere cogs in the administrative machinery out of men, and thus to dehumanize them” (Arendt 2006, 289). Arendt affirms that this form of political system is dangerous; administrators conceive of people as parts in the social machine. Seeing people as automatons, they come to regard them as without worth. Indeed, Arendt goes so far as to say the functionaries themselves believe in the superfluousness of their own lives (Arendt 1973, 459). In her characterization of bureaucracy, Arendt is no doubt inspired by the fictional narratives of Franz Kafka. Arendt’s work continually draws back to the stories of Kafka, signaling the influence it had on her assessment of bureaucracy and totalitarianism in the 20th century. Arendt’s understanding of bureaucracy is shaped by Kafka’s own assessment written just decades before Arendt began her thought.

Arendt’s understanding of bureaucracy in the 20th century is heavily shaped by the work of Franz Kafka. Kafka (1883-1924) was a German-Czechoslovakian Jewish writer (Gray 1973, 208-213). The vast majority of his work, including the novels that will be analyzed in this thesis, were published posthumously by his friend Max Brod (Gray 1973, 2). In his short life, Kafka felt misunderstood and alienated, and this sentiment shone through in his work. He struggled with his Jewish identity and internally battled with his relationship with his father (Brod 1995, 3, 16). Kafka’s stories retain an autobiographical element as he responds to his condition in the world. Without realizing it, he expresses the feelings of many and reveals a social condition that is emerging in the modern world. Kafka writes in his diary in 1915, “there is no one here who wholly understands me. To have one person with this understanding, a woman for example. That would be to have a foothold on every side, it would mean to have God” (Quoted in Brod 1995, 196). This feeling of being misunderstood and alone in the world is a very common sentiment in the technological utilitarian world.

In 1944, in honour of the twentieth anniversary of his death, Arendt wrote an essay titled “Franz Kafka: A Revaluation”. Arendt describes Kafka’s fictional novels as blueprints to reality. It is through intentional efforts of imagination from the reader to realize the meaning behind Kafka’s stories, in the same way that one must use their imagination to see the house that an architect has carved out on blueprint (Arendt 1994, 77). It seems as though Kafka anticipated the reality which Europe found itself in during the early-middle 20th century. Arendt describes the prophecy that Kafka describes as a bureaucracy which brings about destruction. She writes: “the faith of bureaucrats as a faith in necessity, of which they themselves are shown to be the functionaries. But as a functionary of necessity, man becomes an agent of the natural law of ruin, thereby degrading himself into the natural tool of destruction, which may be accelerated through the perverted use of human capabilities” (Arendt 1994, 74). In Kafka’s narratives, both the victim and the perpetrator are existing in submission to a nucleus of power that is never revealed or realized. This is the force of machinery in bureaucracy which Kafka is illustrating through his novels. What appears to be a nightmare in his stories, becomes a reality throughout the 20th century. Arendt scrutinizes the actual manifestation of this bureaucratic nightmare. She refers to two of his works: *The Trial* and *The Castle*.

1. 1. What is Necessity?

Arendt recounts her grasp of necessity in her work, *The Human Condition*. Necessity is the aspects of human life that are required for survival. Lechte writes that for Arendt, “The *oikos* [household] is the domain of subsistence or the domain of ‘necessity’” (Lechte 2018, 4). In order to participate in political community, and to reach true freedom, humans must continually attempt to liberate themselves from necessity (Quoted in Lechte 2018, 5). The threat comes from bringing the matters of necessity into the public sphere (Lechte 2018, 4-5). In the Ancient Greek

example, citizens freed themselves from necessity by participating in the democratic *polis*

(Lechte 2018, 5). Lechte writes:

Women or slaves, or those whose horizon has been circumscribed by labour in the *oikos* or its equivalent, cannot realistically harbour designs of an active political life (a 'bios' in Aristotle's terms), but must remain immured in a sphere that nonetheless paves the way for the experience of freedom by others in the *polis*. This dichotomy (*oikos-polis*) derived from Arendt's interpretation of the Greek model governs the Arendtian theory of politics (Lechte 2018, 5).

Arendt's theories of freedom and action will be explored in Chapter 3 of this thesis. This section's objective is to provide the context of necessity for Arendt's identification of the problem. Although it is difficult to fully distinguish between the two concepts because they are so closely interconnected. Put simply, Arendt and Kafka will point out characteristics of the modern bureaucratic political system, that treats humans as superfluous or as inhumane cogs in a machine. The system wrongfully equates this process as being necessary for the survival of the system or the state. It believes in the scientific, biological requirements of the system, over the freedom of the people involved. This is a brief explanation of necessity to help understand the Kafka and Eichmann analysis.

Essential to Arendt's assessment of bureaucracy is the notion of necessity, which is intrinsic to the system and is highlighted in Kafka's work. The idea of necessity is explored in Arendt's journalistic report of Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem. Her report on Eichmann was initially published in *The New Yorker* but subsequently was published as a book in 1963, titled *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Arendt uses the example of Eichmann to discuss a thoughtlessness and necessity which she examined in utilitarian bureaucracy. This report received significant backlash from the public, as it was interpreted that she was not considering Eichmann's crimes to be abhorrent. This was in response to her infamous characterization, the banality of evil. The

controversy also stemmed from her condemning the Jewish leaders that helped Eichmann's emigration project (Dossa 1984, 164). In her representation of Eichmann and the bureaucrats in totalitarian regimes, they were not acting out of any form of ideology or conviction, other than the understanding that they had to do what was expected of them in the system. It is the idea that doing what was necessary was the top priority, and the consequences were not a worthy consideration. By weaving a thread through the fictional narratives of Franz Kafka and the reports and political thought of Hannah Arendt, a more robust understanding of Arendt's criticism of the bureaucratic system will be conceptualized.

1.2 Kafka and the Jewish Experience

The Castle, an unfinished work by Kafka published posthumously, follows a man named K. who arrives in a new village as he was summoned to work as a land surveyor. The village is controlled and ruled by a castle and exists in a state of never-ending treacherous winter. The people who live in the village submit to the authority of the castle without question and work as impoverished peasants. The Castle, which is purportedly ruled by a Count, operates via a convoluted bureaucracy which K. struggles to reach and communicate with. He is avoided and denied his job as a land surveyor, but K. does not give up in his attempts to receive an explanation as well as his job. He has a strong conviction of his right to work and to receive official communication through this bureaucracy. K. describes his efforts as follows:

Dealing directly with the authorities wasn't all that difficult, for no matter how well organized they were, they only had to defend distant and invisible causes on behalf of remote and invisible gentleman, whereas he, K., was fighting for something vitally close, for himself, and what's more of his own free will, initially at least, and he was not struggling for himself on his own, there were also other forces, which he knew nothing of, but could believe in because of the measures adopted by the authorities (Kafka 1998, 58).

For K., the villagers act as though their actions are necessitated; it is as though life simply happens to them as a matter of fate. K. is attempting to break out of this generic experience and live authentically. This is simultaneously while trying to live alongside these people and belong to their community.

Arendt's interpretation of this novel is that Kafka is describing the Jewish experience. The protagonist K. represents a Jewish man who enters a village and seeks cultural assimilation. Arendt writes, "he speaks for the average small-time Jew who really wants no more than his rights as a human being: home, work, family, and citizenship. He is portrayed as if he were alone on earth, the only Jew in the whole wide world – completely, desolately alone" (Arendt 1978, 85). K. is treated as a pariah and does not manage to assimilate himself. He consistently pursues what he considers to be his human rights and utterly refuses to believe the bureaucrats when they assert that the demands he receives are "an "act of favor from the Castle"" (Quoted in Arendt 1994, 73). Regardless of his efforts, Arendt writes that for K.:

In the eyes of the minor bureaucratic officials his very existence was due merely to a bureaucratic "error", while his status as a paper one, buried "in piles of document for ever rising and crashing" around him. He is charged continually with being superfluous "unwanted and in everyone's way" with having, as a stranger, to depend on other people's bounty and with being tolerated only by reason of a mysterious act of grace (Arendt 1978, 84).

Arendt is identifying here the 19th century European Jewish experience. It is this complete isolation and attempt to assimilate alone, which is what Arendt considers "the whole world wants the Jew to do". (Arendt 1978, 85). As K.'s journey continues in *The Castle*, he realizes that the human dignity that he is fighting for is exceptional for all the villagers. The bureaucratic regime has rendered the villagers helpless and incapable of forging their own path. "So long as the village remains under the control of the castle, its inhabitants can be nothing but the passive

victims of their respective “fates”; there is no place in it for any man of goodwill who wishes to determine his own existence” (Arendt 1978, 87). Arendt describes the villagers as enslaved to the bureaucratic system of the Castle, which they are powerless against (Arendt 1978, 88).

The Castle has no conclusion, therefore K.’s struggle remains unresolved. However, Arendt conveys her admiration for the character Kafka has written and the unwavering will he displays. Arendt appreciates that K. refuses to submit to necessity but instead fights for the human rights that he believes are inalienable. It is his stubbornness that sets him apart from a world of hopeless individuals, who have learned to accept their circumstances and keep their head down. Arendt writes that the protagonist dies at the end of the novel, which does not literally happen, therefore this could be an interpretation of what could have happened, and to represent his exhaustion (Arendt 1978, 88).

In Brod’s biography of Kafka, he writes extensively on Kafka’s Jewish identity, and his interpretation of *The Castle* in relation to the book of Job. Brod writes:

Since the Book of Job in the Bible, God has never been so savagely striven with as in the Kafka’s *The Trial*, and *The Castle*, or in his *In the Penal Colony*, in which justice is presented in the image of a machine thought out with refined cruelty, an inhuman, almost devilish machine, and a crank who worships this machine. Just the same in the book of Job, God does what seems absurd and unjust to man. But it is only to man that this seems so, and the final conclusion arrived at in Job, as in Kafka is the confirmation of the fact that the yardstick by which man works is not that by which measurements are taken in the absolute (Brod 1995, 175-176).

Kafka views his characters, and hence himself, as experiencing an absurd, unexplainable, relationship with the divine. Kafka lived his life balancing between skepticism and belief in a divine power – an experience that Brod declares to be of the highest order (Brod 1995, 176).

An additional work of Kafka, perhaps the most well-known, is *The Metamorphosis*. This novella is also considered to be about the Jewish experience. The story concerns a man, Gregor Samsa, who transforms into a bug, and recounts his life in this condition until his death. Gray breaks down the narrative in the following manner:

In the first [section], Gregor Samsa awakens to the realisation that he has turned into an insect and emerges from his bedroom, to be driven back by his infuriated father. In the second [section], he tries to accommodate himself to his absurdly hideous predicament, while his sister offers him various food, doing all she can to reconcile herself and the family to the monster he has become; again, a brief sally into the living-room is repulsed by the father, this time even more violently, as he pelts Gregor with apples. In the third [section], Gregor comes out while his sister is playing the violin, entranced by the music which seems to be the ‘food’ he has so long been unable to find, but a third attack drives him back to die alone and untended (Gray 1973, 83).

Gregor’s family responds to his death with relief, as they are no longer burdened by the parasite in their home (Gray 1973, 83). Several scholars argue that Kafka makes use of Jewish folklore in his stories, including *The Metamorphosis*. On the surface, it is a metaphor for alienation. Bruce suggests that it is also the element of transformation that acts as a mirror to a crucial component of Jewish narratives (Bruce 1996, 107). Bruce writes that Kafka had a significant interest of Jewish tradition and Yiddish culture (Bruce 1996, 107-108). She suggests that Kafka would have had knowledge of the history and the important texts in Judaism (Bruce 1996, 107). Hence, there is an argument made that Kafka took from Jewish tradition for his concept of the metamorphosis (Bruce 1996, 108).

In Jewish folklore, the metamorphosis has taken different forms. In the stories of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772-1810), “the protagonists are shown to undergo several metamorphoses in their lives as they move through the kabbalistic cycle of transgression, punishment, exile, and trials in hopes of deliverance and redemption” (Bruce 1996, 109-110).

Another example comes from Yiddish writer I.L. Peretz (1852-1915), describes the metamorphosis as a condition of exile (Bruce 1996, 111). From a post-Holocaust perspective, this image of vermin serves as an illustration of the treatment of the Jewish people by the Nazis. Steiner, “argues that Kafka was ‘possessed of a fearful premonition: he saw, to the point of exact detail, the horror gathering...Gregor Samsa’s metamorphosis...was to be the literal fate of millions of human beings. The very word for vermin, *Ungezierfer*, is a stroke of tragic clairvoyance; so the Nazis were to designate the gassed” (Quoted in Bruce 1996, 113). This circles back to Arendt’s notion of the Jew as pariah.

Gregor sticks out as a pest and is treated as a grievance by his community. Feldman writes in the introduction of Arendt’s posthumous collection, *The Jew as Pariah*, about what the pariah meant to her. He writes the pariah, “characterizes the position of the Jews in Western Europe following the Enlightenment and emancipation because they were never truly accepted by European society. ‘During the 150 years when Jews truly lived amidst, and not just in the neighborhood of, Western European peoples, they always had to pay with political misery for social glory and with social insult for political success” (Feldman 1978, 18). Kafka represents this sentiment through his character Gregor. He is treated as a pest and comes to regard himself as such. Unlike, K. in *The Castle*, Gregor fails in persevering for justice. Instead, he comes to understand himself as a burden.

1.3 One Does Not Escape Jewishness

Arendt writes extensively on this sentiment that European Jews were never successful in assimilating, despite their efforts. This feeling of alienation resonates in her biography of the European Jew Rahel Varnhagen (1771-1883) (Arendt 1997, 85). Arendt explains how Rahel

understood her Jewishness to be a great source of shame, and as inescapable as a physical disability (Arendt 1997, 251). Arendt writes on Rahel's experience:

To enter society all alone, marked with the blemish and condemned to be one of the last, was far worse than waiting outside and hoping for better. Always having to represent oneself as something special, and having to do it all alone, in order to justify her bare existence, was so strenuous that it nearly consumed all her strength. "How loathsome it is always having to establish one's identity first. That alone is enough to make it repulsive to be a Jew" (Arendt 1997, 252).

This describes in greater context the picture Kafka is painting in his narratives. Arendt illustrates European Jewish experience leading up to World War Two and the Holocaust through the sentiments of Rahel. Arendt identifies with the life of Rahel and her final words of reflection in her biography. Rahel stated, "the thing which all my life seemed to me the greatest shame, which was the misery and misfortune of my life – having been born a Jewess – this I should on no account now wish to have missed" (Quoted in Feldman 1978, 48). The modern European context created a socio-political situation that made it impossible for Jews to assimilate themselves, and then shamed them for not being assimilated, for being vermin to the society. Arendt and Kafka emphasize that this culture fueled a sense of shame and worthlessness that weighed down on Jewish people. The Jewish people were being robbed of their humanity even before the Nazis came to power.

While the literary analysis of *The Castle* and *The Metamorphosis* address specifically the Jewish experience in the modern world, the next analysis will apply to all people subject to the utilitarian bureaucracy of necessity, including Jews and non-Jews. The experience of the character in *The Castle*, is juxtaposed against the character K. in Kafka's novel, *The Trial*. This interpretation is fully realized through an understanding of Arendt's report on Eichmann.

1.4 Eichmann and Kafka's Narratives

Adolf Eichmann joined the Nazi party in 1932 and in less than a decade, became a leader in the Nazi administration (Arendt 2006, 31). Throughout his career, he was first appointed as a high party official in the Security Service of the *Reichsführer* S.S. in 1934 (Arendt 2006, 36). In 1939, he was appointed as head of the *Reich* Center for Jewish Emigration (Arendt 2006, 67). Lastly, Eichmann was selected to be the *Obersturmbannführer* in 1941 (Arendt 2006, 79). Eichmann's prosecution was because of his contribution to the Holocaust. Eichmann followed Hitler's plan for Jewish extermination and was involved in first, the forced emigration of Jews, second, sending Jews to concentration camps, and third, managing the forced emigration of Jews to killing centers (Arendt 2006, 63-94).

Eichmann was taken by Israel to be tried for crimes against humanity in Jerusalem, where he was ultimately found guilty and was hanged. Throughout his trial, Eichmann was very honest about his own responsibility regarding the Holocaust. Although he recognized his guilt in the forced emigration of Jews, he completely disconnected himself from the extermination camps he was sending them to. He was completely aware of the nature of the death camps, as he had visited several including Treblinka and Chelmno (Arendt 2006, 87). He saw just enough of the conditions to understand the destruction that was taking place, but was severely disturbed by it. Arendt writes "he had seen the places to which the shipments were directed, and he had been shocked out of his wits" (Arendt 2006, 90). Nonetheless, he did not believe he personally had any responsibility regarding the genocide of the Jewish people.

In his interrogation, Eichmann asserts "I had nothing to do with killing Jews. I've never killed a Jew. And I've never ordered anyone to kill a Jew. [...] Maybe that is what gives me a certain peace of mind. I'm guilty, because I helped with the evacuation" and further on, "I am

obviously guilty of complicity. That is plain. I've said so before. To that extent Herr Hauptmann, I cannot deny my responsibility, and any attempt to do so would be absurd. Because from a juridical point of view I am guilty of complicity" (Eichmann, 1983, 102-104). Eichmann's attitude towards his crimes fascinated Arendt as she attempted to understand how Eichmann had contributed to committing such an evil atrocity without being an evil person. The answer to this question is found in the work of Kafka.

Arendt characterizes the type of bureaucrat that Eichmann was within the Nazi regime. She explains that Eichmann was not necessarily devoted to the ideology or the ultimate plans of the Nazi party, but rather found success working in the party, in which employment was his main concern at the time of joining. "At any rate, he did not enter the party out of conviction, nor was he ever convinced by it. Whenever he was asked to give his reasons, he repeated the same embarrassed cliché about the Treaty of Versailles and unemployment", and further writes "he had no time and less desire to be properly informed, he did not even know the Party program, he never read *Mein Kampf*. Kaltenbrunner [young lawyer turned chief of the Head Office for Reich Security (Arendt, 2006, 31)] had said to him: Why not join the S.S.? And he replied, Why not? That was how it happened, and that was about all there was to it" (Arendt, 2006, 33). Arendt believed that it was worth noting that Eichmann did have a Jewish mistress during the war period. Engaging in sex with Jews was one of the gravest crimes an member of the S.S. could commit – it was called *Rassenschande* (Arendt 2006, 30). This made it very uncommon and discouraged to be in a sexual relationship with a Jewish woman. Even though raping Jewish girls was customary for Nazi soldiers (Arendt 2006, 30). Eichmann had close relationships with Jewish people and was publicly against the pornographic antisemitism of Julius Streicher, an unofficial Nazi journalist (Arendt 2006, 30). This information provides insight into Eichmann's

personal sentiments, and perhaps lends a hand to why Arendt maintains that Eichmann is not antisemitic.

Eichmann's approach to his job was neutral, and he believed that he was carrying out a task similar to that of any other job. He was not fueled by antisemitic and violent disposition, throughout his career, which is what would have been a much more palatable explanation for his crimes. Instead, Arendt argues: "it would have been very comforting indeed to believe that Eichmann was a monster [...] The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal" (Arendt, 1963, 276). Arendt described the problem as thoughtlessness. This thoughtlessness was not a lack of intelligence in Eichmann. She further reflects in *The Life of the Mind*, "I was struck by the manifest shallowness in the doer that made it impossible to trace the uncontested evil of his deeds to any deeper level of roots or motives. The deeds were monstrous, but the doer – at least the very effective one now on trial – was quite ordinary, commonplace and neither demonic or monstrous" (Arendt, 1978, 4 (how to put that there is two volumes so two page 4)). Through her assessment of Eichmann, as a regular man opposed to a sadistic monster, Arendt identifies in Eichmann the problem of modern politics, which is the scientific, utilitarian mindset which fails to use the conscience and consciousness.

The Trial is another novel by Kafka, which describes the experience of man who is tried for a crime he did not commit and is never made aware of. It is well known for its curious opening sentence: "Someone must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything truly wrong, he was arrested" (Kafka 1998, 3). Despite his continuous efforts throughout the entire book to be acquitted and freed from this impossible bureaucratic process, in the end he is secretly taken in the night and executed.

Most notable for Arendt about this narrative is the machine function of the trial's bureaucracy and the total submission that is required from this system. K.'s lawyer tells him that it is impossible for him to be acquitted of his crime, that his guilt is simply inevitable. K. explains that he wishes to fight against this system, in which his lawyer replies:

The only proper approach is to learn to accept existing conditions. Even if it were possible to improve specific details – which, however, is merely an absurd superstition – one would have at best achieved something for future cases, while in the process damaging oneself immeasurably by having attracted the attention of an always vengeful bureaucracy. Just don't attract attention! Keep calm, no matter how much it seems counter to good sense. (Kafka 1998, 119).

K. is encouraged to give up hope and simply allow the relentless power of the bureaucracy to wash over him, thereby confirming his guilt.

In her essay, Arendt also draws back to the chapter before K.'s death when he speaks to the prison chaplain about his trial. In this scene, the chaplain recounts a parable about a man who requests to be admitted to the Law, and the doorkeeper declines. The man waits at the door until his death and gives everything he owns in a desperate attempt to gain admittance to the Law, but the doorkeeper never gives in. At the end of his life, the doorkeeper tells the man that no one else could have ever been admitted through this door but that it was made solely for this man (Kafka 1998, 217). K. and the chaplain go back and forth about whether the doorkeeper has been deceptive. The chaplain concludes that the doorkeeper is beyond human judgement because he is working for the Law. Crucial to the argument that both Kafka and Arendt are making about 20th century bureaucracy lies in the final statements of the discussion between the two characters, which Arendt quotes in her essay on Kafka. ““I don't agree with that opinion,” said K., shaking his head, “for if you accept it, you have to consider everything the doorkeeper says as true. But you've already proved conclusively that that's not possible.” “No,” said the priest, ‘you don't

have to consider everything true, you just have to consider it necessary.” “A depressing opinion,” said K. “Lies are made into a universal system” (Kafka 1998, 223). In both the parable and K.’s trial, criticism of any kind to the system is discouraged, and accepting the existing conditions is deemed best. Accepting these oppressive conditions meant developing a sense of guilt inside himself which prepares K. for his trial and death (Arendt 1994, 70-71).

This guilt reduces K. to an indignity comparable to the behaviour of a dog. K. initially sees this demeanor in Block, a man he meets who had been going through the process of his trial for five years. K. describes Block’s conduct towards the lawyer as a pathetic sight: “That the client [Block] finally forgot the entire world, desiring only to trudge along this mistaken path to the end of his trial. He was no longer a client, he was the lawyer’s dog. If the lawyer had ordered him to crawl under the bed, as into a kennel, and bark, he would have done so gladly” (Kafka 1998, 195). This shame and guilt existing in Block, is the same found in K. at his death. The novel ends: “Where was the judge he’d never seen? Where was the high court he’d never reached? He raised his hands and spread out all his fingers [...]. With failing sight K. saw how the men drew near his face, leaning cheek-to-cheek to observe the verdict. “Like a dog!” he [the man] said; it seemed as though the shame was to outlive him” (Kafka 1998, 231). It is the function of the bureaucratic machinery that works to break a man down into submission, even though he knows it is unjust. Arendt writes, “in the case of K., submission is not obtained by force, but simply through increase in the feeling of guilt of which the unbiased accusation was the origin in the accused man. This feeling, of course, is based in the last instance on the fact that no man is free from guilt (Arendt 1994, 70). The bureaucratic machinery understands this is to be necessitated, as though by some divine order (Arendt 1994, 70).

Necessity is a theme that flows continuously through several major works of Kafka. This problem of necessity is also revealed in the work of Arendt as she discusses the impact of totalitarianism and thoughtlessness in the 20th century. It is precisely the necessity that Kafka describes in *The Trial* and *The Castle* that is mirrored by Arendt's understanding of bureaucracy in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. *The Trial* tells the story of a man who submits to the crushing system, and *The Castle* is about a man who refuses to submit. Arendt characterizes Eichmann as a man who submits to becoming a perpetrator in the bureaucratic nucleus of violence.

In Kafka's short story "In the Penal Colony", an explorer observes a presentation of the machinery for the execution of a soldier in a penal colony. The condemned does not understand what he is being punished for and has had no chance to defend himself. The machine works as follows: the commandment which the convicted has broken, will be carved onto their body for twelve consecutive hours, resulting in their slow and painful death. The officer was very certain that justice would be achieved through the torture and execution of this soldier. He believed that it was necessary to carry out this punishment. But, when the explorer disagrees with the cruelty of the punishment, the officer lets the soldier go. Instead, the officer goes in his place and executes himself by the same punishment. The inscription he chose to be carved on his body read "BE JUST!" (Kafka 1952, 119). The officer does not think twice about his suicide. He does not consider himself worthy of trial or mercy. He understands it to be necessary for himself to die, being punished for enacting the pain he is about to inflict on himself. He submits to the system and allows himself to die a painful death.

This is a representation of the utilitarian mindset which Arendt sees as most dangerous in the modern scientific world. She profoundly writes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

The manipulators of this system believe in their own superfluity as much as that of all others, and the totalitarian murderers are all the more dangerous because they do not care if they themselves are alive or dead, if they ever lived or never were born. The danger of the corpse factories and holes of oblivion is that today, with populations and homelessness everywhere on the increase, masses of people are continuously rendered superfluous if we continue to think of our world in utilitarian terms. Political, social and economic events everywhere are in a silent conspiracy with totalitarian instruments devised for making men superfluous. The implied temptation is well understood by the utilitarian common sense of the masses, who in most countries are too desperate to retain much fear of death. The Nazis and the Bolsheviks can be sure that their factories of annihilation which demonstrate the swiftest solution to the problem of overpopulation, of economically superfluous and socially rootless humans are as much of an attraction as a warning. Totalitarian solutions may well survive the fall of totalitarian regimes in the form of strong temptations which will come up whenever it seems impossible to alleviate political, social, or economic misery in a manner worthy of man (Arendt, 1976, 459).

The bureaucratic officials are dehumanized because their lives too become ultimately irrelevant in the task of solving utilitarian problems presented by the state. The dehumanization of the bureaucrat is also examined in the report on Eichmann. As previously mentioned, Arendt writes in her postscript of the report that totalitarian government makes “mere cogs in the administrative machinery out of men, and thus to dehumanize them” (Arendt 2006, 289). The term cog in the machine can be dangerous because often that term is used to declare innocence to the individual who played the cog. However, Arendt is very explicit in stating that the cogs in the machine of the bureaucratic system are still responsible for their actions and are not victims of determinism (Arendt 2006, 289-290). A key point to be made is that these necessitated bureaucratic officials were fundamentally thoughtless. Arendt’s distinction between thinking and thoughtlessness will be discussed in the following sections.

Günther Anders, Arendt’s first husband, wrote a work on Kafka, and interprets his writing on the industrial world, similarly to how Arendt has in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Anders analysis details how Kafka successfully describes the indescribable circumstance of the modern age. Kafka pinpoints modern reality as the merging of two world into one (Anders 1960, 15).

Anders writes, “Kafka achieves a true description of reality: a description of the fact that to-day the world of duty and the private world have hardly anything in common, but that these two worlds really merge – or at least overlap – into one world. Indeed, the industrialized mass-murderer and the comfortable family man are one and the same individual” (Anders 1960, 15). In Anders interpretation of Kafka’s narratives, he perfectly describes the problem Arendt identifies with Eichmann.

Adolf Eichman is the representation of the modern merging of two worlds. Eichmann was a regular man, with a wife and children. When he was evaluated by psychiatrists during his trial, one of them asserted: “his whole psychological outlook, his attitude toward his wife and children, mother and father, brothers, sisters, and friends, was “not only normal but most desirable”” and the Supreme Court declared him ““a man with very positive ideas”” (Arendt 2006, 26). He also contributed to the industrial killing of eleven million people. What Anders sees through Kafka’s work about this condition, is that “what makes the reading of his stories such a gruesome experience is his manner of treating the grotesque as everyday normality” (Anders 1960, 13). He coins this experience “the principle of ‘soundless explosion’” (Anders 1960, 13). Anders writes that it, “consists in withholding even a pianissimo where a fortissimo is expected; there is no change in volume at all – the world simply goes on as before” (Anders 1960, 13). There is a horrifying calmness and flatline to the stories.

Drawing back on *In the Penal Colony*, Anders remarks on Kafka’s antisensationalism of a “highly complex and diabolically conceived execution-machine” (Anders 1960, 14). The officer refers to the monstrous machine as “peculiar” and the explorer is simply “not very interested in the machine” (Quoted in Anders 1960, 14). Anders compares the execution-machine to the Nazi’s genocidal instruments (Anders 1960, 14). The point that Anders is making is that in

modern reality, “men are not rendered speechless by the unspeakable, not horrified by what is horrifying” (Anders 1960, 15). The industrial killing of Jews and marginalized people through the Holocaust was unspeakable and horrifying. The bureaucratic functionaries such as Eichmann did not react accordingly because their utilitarian mindset renders the masses superfluous. Instead, there is a sort of dissonance or flatlining. This is a way to understand the thoughtlessness that Arendt is pinpointing in her assessment of Eichmann. Eichmann and many men like him facilitated atrocities as if they were simply “a matter of course” (Anders 1960, 15). Exactly what thinking and thoughtlessness means to Arendt will be further explored in the subsequent chapter.

1.5 Policies of Lying in the Vietnam War

Arendt’s critique of bureaucratic structures does not end with the Second World War. Until the end of her life, she exhibits an unwavering position towards corrupt bureaucratic structures. This includes the United States, a nation which she became a citizen and supported in various other capacities, such as her impression of the American Revolution (which will be considered in the final chapter of this thesis, concerning the council system). Arendt’s later work in 1971, “On Lying and Politics” criticized the American government’s involvement in the Vietnam War. Her article was specifically in response to the release of the Pentagon Papers in the *New York Times* which revealed the deception taking place during the war (Arendt 2022, 62). Arendt’s main critique is of the national security bureaucracy. This is likely comprised of the State and Defense Departments, the White House staff, the CIA, AEC, NSA, as well as international divisions of Commerce, Treasury, Agriculture, etc. The bureaucracy seemingly includes all departments that manage foreign or military affairs. (Wohlstetter 1968).

Arendt writes that the national security bureaucracy formed a policy of lying through problem-solvers who prepared different information concerning the war effort, for separate

relevant audiences (Arendt 2022, 68-73). This was not an effort in war to preserve the survival of a nation, but rather an image. Arendt writes, “they lied perhaps out of a mistaken patriotism. But the point is that they lied not so much for their country – certainly not for their country’s survival, which was never at stake – as for its ‘image’” (Arendt 2022, 70). Arendt asserted that there was a great divergence between the information provided. The national security bureaucracy provided different information to the population of the U.S. concerning decision-making for the war in contrast to what truly took place in Vietnam (Arendt 2022, 83).

The lying went so far as to be deceptive to other departments of the government, and self-deceptive to the problem-solvers themselves. The war became no longer about helping South Vietnam fight against communism and was instead about keeping the United States’ image as a superpower and a saviour of the world. Arendt writes “John T. McNaughton’s [Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs] much-quoted enumeration of the U.S. aims in 1965, ‘70% - To avoid a humiliating U.S. defeat (to our reputation as a guarantor). 20% - To keep SVN [South Vietnam] (and the adjacent) territory from Chinese hands. 10% - To permit the people of SVN to enjoy a better, freer way of life’” (Arendt 2022, 75).

Arendt argues the bureaucratic system of the national security managers and their scientific model allowed for such tragic consequences in the Vietnam War. Arendt quotes Richard J. Barnet in the following writing, “the bureaucratic model had completely displaced reality: the hard and stubborn facts, which so many intelligence analysts were paid so much to collect were ignored” and follows with, “the relation, or, rather, nonrelation, between facts and decision, between the intelligence community and the civilian and military services, is perhaps the most momentous, and certainly the best-guarded, secret that the Pentagon papers revealed” (Arendt 2022, 79-80). The same issue found in Eichmann, is found in the work of Arendt

concerning the American bureaucracy. It is the thoughtlessness of the problem-solvers that permitted intentional lying with disastrous consequences for the people in Vietnam. This thoughtlessness is evident here:

What is surprising is the eagerness of those scores of “intellectuals” who offered their enthusiastic help in this imaginary enterprise, perhaps they were fascinated by the sheer size of the mental exercises it seemed to demand...to remain unaware of the untold misery that their “solutions” – pacification and relocation programs, defoliation, napalm, and antipersonnel bullets – held in store for a “friend” who needed to be “saved” and for an “enemy” who had neither the will nor the power to be one before we attacked him (Arendt 2022, 77-78).

Human life became a resource and was expendable in their scientific effort to boost the best image of the United States in the most necessitated, practical formulation.

Policies of lying are treated the most by Arendt in “On Lying in Politics”, however it is explored in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* as well. Policies of lying are identified by Arendt in “On Lying in Politics” as policies created by the American national security bureaucracy for the purpose of preserving the United States’ image. The U.S. therefore abandoned veracity to reach their objective of presenting an image of hegemonic power. Arendt writes, “image-making as a global policy- not world conquest but victory in the battle “to win the people’s minds” – is indeed something new in the huge arsenal of human follies recorded in history” (Arendt 1971, 77). This bureaucratic work was being done in complete separation of the work on the ground in Vietnam.

While there were missions such as the Saigon Military Mission which waged political-psychological warfare in Vietnam, there were fact-finding branches that were responsible for gathering information to send to Washington (Arendt 1971, 81). Arendt writes that, “they were relatively independent, and the result was that they told the truth, year in, and year out” (Arendt

1971, 81-82). However, there was a divide between the agents gathering information and the national security bureaucracy who would be releasing said information to the public. Arendt deduces that, “those who were responsible for intelligence estimates were miles away from the problem-solvers, their disdain for facts, and the accidental character for those facts. The price they paid for these objective advantages was that their reports remained without any influence on the decisions and propositions of the National Security Council (Arendt 1971, 82). These policies of lying were considered to be necessitated for the war effort. The problem-solvers did not reflect on their actions which resulted in the death of Vietnamese civilians. Their scientific approach viewed human life as a resource and expendable in order to achieve the image they were presenting.

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt discusses the importance of ideology within the totalitarian regime. She considers the link between ideology, lies, and terror (Grunenberg 2002, 360). Although the United States is not totalitarian, the methods of lying run parallel to the totalitarian account that Arendt conceives (Grunenberg 2002, 363). Arendt presents three functions of ideology in totalitarianism, which Grunenberg summarizes in the following manner: “totalitarian ideology explains, first, not only what has to be but also what has been and what will be. Second, it declares its independence from experience and reality. And third, it proves the domination of a brutal logicity” (Grunenberg 2002, 361). An aspect of the lying strategy is that the lies contain elements of truth, which encourage people to believe them (Grunenberg 2002, 361).

Arendt makes the distinction between traditional and modern lies from the government. The traditional lies omit truth from the public. In modern lies, Arendt argues that the government “destroys reality and replaces it with an *image* of reality” (Grunenberg 2002, 362). Fry argues

that this continues after Vietnam and is a pattern in the US government. Fry argues there are intense parallels between the US government during Vietnam and the Iraq War (Fry 2011, 43). Grunenberg emphasizes the distinction between the totalitarian ideology used by the Nazis and the Soviet Union, and the policies of lying by democracies such as the United States: “the main difference is that totalitarian ideology is linked to systematic terror whereas lying in democracies belongs to acting. A totalitarian regime leads to a regime of evil; a democracy is able to unveil the network of lies in order to bring the executive power under control and restore the body politic” (Grunenberg 2002, 364). This provides an important distinction; however both cases are examples of thoughtlessness in modern utilitarian bureaucracies.

Noam Chomsky, writes a scathing dissection of the Pentagon Papers and the Vietnam War in his essay “The Backroom Boys.” This essay was published after “On Lying and Politics” and Chomsky references Arendt’s contribution to the discussion of the Pentagon Papers. He summarizes her argument as “ignorance, blind anticommunism, arrogance, and self-deception lie behind American policy” (Chomsky 2003, 51). He argues that the “intelligence community” in the CIA was completely incapable of acknowledging the falsity of an “international Communist conspiracy” (Chomsky 2003, 51,55). Chomsky agrees with Arendt that ignorance could not be the answer to the massive failure on behalf of the American intelligence. He writes that if America had made simply “a series of disastrous errors”, that still leaves several questions, especially considering all of the other anti-communist endeavours that the US policy makers failed in as well: “To mention only the simplest: Why were policy makers always subject to the same form of ignorance and irrationality? Why was there such a systematic error in the delusional system constructed by postwar ideologists? Mere ignorance or foolishness would lead to random error, not to a regular and systemic distortion: unwavering adherence to the principle

that whatever the facts may be, the cause of international conflict is the behavior of the Communist power, and all revolutionary movements within the United States are sponsored by the Soviet Union, China, or both (Chomsky 2003, 53). Chomsky's main explanation for this, which is commonplace, is that the motivations of the Vietnam War were colonial. It was an excuse that the American policymakers made to justify their actions. He asserts, "the fact is that anticommunism provides a convenient mythology to justify colonial wars, and to gain the popular support that is often hard to rally, given the grisly nature and substantial costs of such endeavors" (Chomsky 2003, 54). Chomsky argues that the reason the United States was so anticommunist was because these developing nations were using their own resources for themselves domestically, instead of exporting them to developed nations. The US could not economically benefit from this system and therefore schemed to stop it. Chomsky discusses it as: "the primary threat of communism as the economic transformation of the Communist powers "in ways which reduce their willingness and ability to complement the industrial economies of the West," their refusal to play the game of comparative advantage and to rely primarily on foreign investment for development (Chomsky 2003, 60). Arendt and Chomsky's insight into the Vietnam War showcases another extreme case of the bureaucratic nightmare that exists in the modern scientific world.

Chapter 2: Thinking and Thoughtlessness

Kafka is essential also in Arendt's understanding of thinking. In the "Thinking" section of her work, *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt quotes Kafka's parable which comes from a collection entitled "HE" (Arendt 1978, 202). The parable describes the situation of an unnamed man who is in a fight with two antagonists on either side of him: one from behind and one from in front of him. The antagonists support the man in fighting the other antagonists as he is continually pushed

back and forth. His dream is that he may one night jump out of the fight and act as the umpire for the two antagonists fighting one another. Arendt interprets this to be the “time sensation of the thinking ego” (Arendt 1978, 202). The two antagonists exist as representations of the past and future, which is in a constant struggle with man, who represents the individual in the present.

The gap between past and future only exists through thinking. It is the thinking ego that is represented by the man in the middle of Kafka’s analogy. Instead of providing a stagnant, concrete, understanding of what thinking is, Arendt uses an image to portray thinking as faculty which only exists in the now, not a moment before or after. It is intentional; stepping away from the push back and forth of the forces of the past and future and entering the world that is invisible to appearances. This is labeled by Arendt as the “*nunc stans*”, the “standing now” which represents existing in the present (Arendt 1978, 210). Arendt writes, “in this gap between past and future, we find our place in time when we think, that is, when we are sufficiently removed from past and future to be relied on to find out their meaning” (Arendt 1978, 209). Inspired by the teaching of Socrates, thinking is fresh and wakes people up. It does not search for an answer that will be easily found and remain forever, but rather, Arendt writes it is “to assume the position of “umpire,” of arbiter and judge over the manifold, never-ending affairs of human existence in the world, never arriving at a final solution to their riddles but ready with ever-new answers to questions of what it may be all about” (Arendt 1978, 209-210). This analogy reveals what thinking is for Arendt.

Richard J. Bernstein, an Arendt scholar, discusses his thoughts on this poetic description of thinking in his essay, “Arendt on Thinking”. The thinking Arendt is describing through Kafka’s parable does not align with the modern conception of thinking, which is concerned with logical deduction and application of formulas (Bernstein 2000, 279). Bernstein writes, “the

thinking that she describes and practices is a creative activity which requires remembrance, story-telling, and imagination. It also requires the virtues of both courage and independence” (Bernstein 2000, 279). The former understanding of thinking is what Kafka and Arendt view as driving bureaucratic necessity. This latter explanation is what Arendt encourages people to practice as resistance to the modern scientific worldview. This is in opposition to Arendt’s conception of thoughtlessness laid out in her report on Eichmann.

After the backlash that she received from *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt sought to explain thinking in relation to evil, which had initially been her thesis regarding the Banality of Evil. The question that she introduces in her lecture “Thinking and Moral Considerations” is: does thinking condition men against evil doing? (Arendt 1971, 418). Arendt follows Socrates as the model thinker for the subsequent analysis.

In Plato’s *Gorgias*, Socrates addresses the idea of humans being two-in-one. One of the positive remarks made by Socrates which Arendt uses is: “It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than that I, *being one*, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict *me*” (Quoted in Arendt 1971, 439). This seems paradoxical because harmonies require two different sounds, therefore if something is identical, it cannot produce a harmony or contradiction. However, Arendt reveals this is not a contradiction. Consciousness is “to know with myself” (Quoted in Arendt 1971, 441). There is a part of an individual that appears only to the individual possessing it, whilst the second part of the person is what appears to the apparent world, hence the two-in-one person. Arendt asserts: “consciousness is not the same as thinking; but without it thinking would be impossible. What thinking actualizes in its process is the difference given in consciousness” (Arendt 1971, 442). Socrates’ other positive statement is that,

“it is better to be wronged than to do wrong” (Quoted in Arendt 1971, 439). Socrates believes that productive thinking comes from the two parts of the two-in-one consciousness being on good terms, to be friends. Therefore, it is better to be wronged, because the relationship of the consciousness becomes severed if one of the parties, for example, is a murderer (Arendt 1971, 442). Arendt uses the dialogue between Richard and himself, after committing murder, in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, as an illustration:

What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.

Richard loves Richard: that is, I am I.

Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am: Then
fly. What from myself? Great reason why- Lest

I revenge. What, myself upon myself?

O no! Alas, I rather hate myself

For hateful deeds committed by myself.

I am a villain. Yet I lie, I am not.

Fool, of thyself speak well. Fool, do not flatter (Quoted in Arendt 1971, 443).

This conversation with the self that takes place in *Richard III*, is a conversation that can only take place when one is alone with oneself. It is in the midnight hour that Richard must confront his own actions with his conscience, because once he is in the company of others:

Conscience is but a word that cowards use,

Devised at first to keep the strong in awe (Quoted in Arendt 1971, 443).

This conscience is not the voice of God which inspires a person towards the righteous action to take, but rather is the witness which meets a person when he comes home, an afterthought to the actions a person has taken. To live without this, would be to never go home and confront one's

conscience who awaits; a task that makes wrongdoing and contradiction rather simple, because they are able to forget their actions immediately after committing them. (Arendt 1971, 444-445).

This is a terrifying idea that Arendt brings from Plato. That through one's own actions, an individual can destroy their ability to think and philosophize because they break down their integrity to themselves. She writes, "since man contains within himself a partner from whom he can never win release, he will be better off not to live in company with a murderer or a liar. Or, since thought is the silent dialogue carried on between me and myself, I must be careful to keep the integrity of his partner intact; for other wise I shall lose the capacity of thought altogether" (Arendt 1968, 245). This is the thoughtlessness that Arendt wishes to describe in Eichmann.

In her essay "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship", also written in response to the backlash of her report on Eichmann's trial, she comments on this Platonic idea of thinking in regard to personal responsibility under the Nazi regime. Arendt was considering the nonparticipants under the Third Reich, that chose to leave public life completely. Arendt explains that within totalitarianism, the state takes over all forms of public life, therefore the only way to not be implicated in the atrocities whatsoever was to leave public life completely (Arendt 2003, 34). Arendt argues that the nonparticipants chose to withdraw from the public world, not because they believed they were doing something good, but because they would not be able to live with themselves if they did not. She writes, "to put it crudely, they refused to murder, not so much because they still held fast to the command "Thou shalt not kill," but because they were unwilling to live together with murderers" – themselves" (Arendt 2003, 44). This notion is a direct example of the Socratic "two-in-one person" that does not want to exist in conflict with the other. Arendt is arguing that the nonparticipants are those who chose to think. She reiterates that, "the dividing line between those who want to think and therefore have to judge by themselves,

and those who do not, strikes across all social and cultural or educational differences” (Arendt 2003, 45). It is not a matter of social belief or intelligence. This is one distinction Arendt makes between those in the Third Reich that possessed thought vs thoughtlessness.

In a profoundly written conclusion to the lecture, Arendt declares:

Thinking 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; by the same token, inability to think is not the “prerogative” of those many who lack brain power but the ever-present possibility for everybody – scientists, scholars, and other specialists in mental enterprises not excluded – to shun that intercourse with oneself whose possibility and importance Socrates first discovered. We were here not concerned with wickedness, with which religion and literature have tried to come to terms, but with evil; not with sin and the great villains who became the negative heroes in literature and usually acted out of envy and resentment, but with the nonwicked everybody who has no special motives and for this reason is capable of *infinite* evil- unlike the villain, he never meets his midnight disaster (Arendt 1971, 445).

Thoughtlessness is more frightening than the monsters created in literature because the nonwicked everybody, people such as Eichmann, will never explain their wicked plans, because they do not have any. They have no motives and never meet with themselves at midnight to confront what they have done. This is the reality created by bureaucracy, and in extreme cases totalitarianism.

Arendt’s argument is seeking to destroy the legend of evil. In exposing Eichmann and his thoughtlessness, she eliminates the myth that evil is something great, like the characters infamously recognized in literature, such as the villains in Shakespeare or Milton. Arendt is quoted as saying:

When I wrote my “Eichmann in Jerusalem,” one of my main intentions was to destroy the legend of the greatness of evil, of the demonic force, to take away from people the admiration they have for the great evildoers like Richard III or et cetera. I found in Brecht the following remark: “The great political criminals must be exposed and exposed especially to laughter. They are not great political criminals, but people who permitted great political crimes, which is something entirely different (Quoted in Brody 2013).

Eichmann and the bureaucratic officials in the Nazi administration should not be remembered as a legend of evil, but rather, identified by Arendt, as the “banality of evil” (Arendt 2006, 252).

The impact of Kafka’s assessment of bureaucracy on Arendt is evident throughout her written work on totalitarianism and the 20th century. Bernstein writes about how Arendt believes that true thinking is found not exclusively in “professional thinkers”, but rather, “genuine thinking is exemplified by poets, writers, and artists. Furthermore, she makes it clear that thinking is a “weapon”, indeed a primary weapon in the struggle against the oppressive bureaucratic forces of society (“a society of nobodies”) in the fight for genuine freedom” (Bernstein 2000, 278). This is representative of the inherent value that she sees in Kafka’s fictional narratives. Her political understandings do not need to come from scientific intellectuals that form hypothesis based off logical evidence and conclusion. Instead, she believes in the profound power which comes from these creative forms of thinking. In Kafka’s novels, there are large and complicated webs of bureaucratic power that the protagonist tries to understand and overcome in the oppressive system. They ultimately fail as the force of the machinery dehumanizes and degrades them. As this thesis will continue to investigate Arendt’s conceptualization of thoughtlessness and modern politics, Kafka’s narrative must remain ever present in the discussion.

2.1 A Note on Obedience and Intention

A common observation made about the Eichmann case is that it is yet another example of the problem of obedience and following orders. This is the argument that Eichmann himself makes while on trial (Arendt 2006, 277-278). It evokes the comparison of soldiers in battle following the officer’s commands. The question arises on whether Arendt believes that Eichmann should be hanged and whether he is truly guilty. Arendt makes several judgements about

responsibility, guilt, and criminal justice in her report on Eichmann, and other essays pertaining to the Holocaust.

In the “Epilogue” of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt is clear about her conclusions on Eichmann. She was displeased with the final statements made by the judges, and wrote her own which she believed was a more accurate fulfillment: “justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done,” (Arendt 2006, 177). In her assessment, she believes that Eichmann is guilty and should be hanged. She contends that whether he supported the Nazi policies that he administered was irrelevant. She summarizes that Eichmann tried to appeal to the court by explaining his motivations, his intentions, and his inner life. Eichmann appeals to the idea of “collective guilt” asserting that any German could have taken his place in the crimes that he committed, and that it was a matter of following laws and orders. Arendt repudiates this claim by countering, “what you mean to say was that where all, or almost all, are guilty, nobody is. [...] guilt and innocence before the law are of objective nature, and even if eighty million Germans had done as you did, this would not have been an excuse for you” (Arendt 2006, 278). This evokes Arendt’s definition of bureaucracy. The second half of the definition she declares: “Rule of Nobody is the most tyrannical of all, since there is no one left who could even be asked to answer for what is being done. It is this state of affairs, making it impossible to localize responsibility and to identify the enemy” (Arendt 1970, 38-39). Throughout his defense, Eichmann tries to create confusion around his responsibility, but Arendt does not allow that to influence her own judgement of the case. For Arendt, the considerations of how he felt meant nothing to her judgement. She states plainly, “for politics is not like the nursery; in politics obedience and support are the same” (Arendt 2006, 279). Therefore, she concludes that in the same way

Eichmann carried out a plan to take all Jewish people off the planet, nobody should have to share the planet with him any longer. Thus, he must be hanged (Arendt 2006, 279).

Turning back to “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship”, Arendt makes additional points on the guilt of administrative functionaries in Nazi Germany. She explains that the Eichmann trial had inspired conversation about the “cog-theory” in public opinion. She illustrates how when anyone describes a political system, especially modern bureaucracy, it begins to sound like describing a machine, which entails the people working in the system as cogs, and wheels that keep the machine functioning (Arendt 2003, 29). Arendt explains, “each cog, that is, each person, must be expendable without changing the system, an assumption underlying all bureaucracies, all civil services and all functions properly speaking” (Arendt 2003, 29). The issue that arises with this mindset, is that in the aftermath of World War II, many functionaries, including Eichmann, made the argument that they were not personally responsible, because, “if I had not done it, somebody else could and would have” (Arendt 2003, 29). This inspired Arendt to ask the question of whether anyone could be held personally responsible. She doubles down on the claim she had made on her report in Eichmann and reasserts the guilt of bureaucratic functionaries.

Arendt does not discount the fault of the totalitarian system as a whole, but seeks to emphasize individual guilt. Despite the efforts of the defendants and their lawyers during the postwar trials, in the courtroom, they stopped being cogs and returned to human form. Arendt asserts that it is not the system that is on trial, but the individual – who although they were a mere functionary, they were also a human being, and it is because of their human capacity that they were being tried (Arendt 2003, 30). “Hence, the question addressed by the court to the defendant is, Did you, such and such, an individual with a name, a date and place of birth,

identifiable and by that token not expendable, commit the crime you stand accused of, and Why did you do it?" (Arendt 2003, 31). Notwithstanding the defensive efforts to see Eichmann as a mere cog, the trial transformed the "'referent" of Section IV B4 in the Reich Security Head Office into a man" (Arendt 2003, 31-32). It is because of this transformation, and by removing the goggles that make men into parts of machinery, that Eichmann was tried as a human, and therefore held individual responsibility (Arendt 2003, 31-32).

Furthermore, the dispute about obedience remains one of the most compelling arguments by people who question personal responsibility for participants in Nazi atrocities. It was present in the defense at each postwar trial (Arendt 2003, 46). Arendt continues to dispute this argument and strongly disagrees with this idea. Her rebuttal draws upon liberal political theory's understanding of political community. She writes, "'all governments," in the words of Madison, even the most autocratic ones, even tyrannies, "rest on consent," and the fallacy lies in the equation of consent with obedience" (Arendt 2003, 46). Arendt contends that Hitler, as one man, did not have the capacity to commit good or evil, without the help of others. The people who participated in the Third Reich were consensually supporting the regime, not simply obeying. Arendt argues that obedience only applies to children, and slavery. She states, "it would make much more sense to look upon the functioning of the "cogs" and wheels in terms of overall support for a common enterprise than in usual terms of obedience to superiors" (Arendt 2003, 47). Arendt rejects the notion that obedience can apply to political and moral matters and instead concludes that the functionaries supported the regime through their participation in atrocities (Arendt 2003, 48).

In 1966, after her report on Eichmann and her essay on personal responsibility, Arendt published an essay titled "Auschwitz on Trial." The essay centered around the SS men who were

being tried in Frankfurt for their deployment at Auschwitz during World War II. Arendt describes around 20 men, that she calls the “little men” or “small fish” who had lower ranking positions such as captains, lieutenants, noncoms, and physicians (Arendt 2003, 236-238). The men represented in this trial were deemed, “a handful of intolerable cases” out of the around 2,000 SS men who were posted at Auschwitz from 1940 to 1945 (Arendt 2003, 227). There was significant controversy surrounding these trials because German public opinion was not interested in prosecuting these SS officers. The West German administration was filled with previous Nazi officials and, “those of the accused who still live at home are by no means treated as outcasts by their communities” (Arendt 2003, 236; Quoted in Arendt 2003, 229). The major concern was with the “desk murderers”, men who had facilitated the atrocities. Hoffman, a man convicted years earlier for murders in Dachau, shouted, “but where are the gentlemen who stood on top? They were the guilty ones, the ones who sat at their desks and telephoned” (Quoted in Arendt 2003, 238). The answer to his question is that most of them had already died from suicide or hanging (Arendt 2003, 238).

Arendt makes the point that public and legal opinion, (and indirectly herself), understand that the “desk murderers”, “whose chief instruments were typewriters, telephones, and teletypes – were guiltier than those who actually operated the extermination machinery” (Arendt 2003, 241). This was confirmed previously in the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem when the court affirmed: “the degree of responsibility increases as we draw further away from the man who uses the fatal instruments with his own hands” (Arendt 2003, 241; Arendt 2006, 247). Arendt agrees that there is room for understanding varying degrees of responsibility because of the administrative machinery that was intellectually pumping out more efficient ways to kill an entire population.

However, the argument in her essay does not end there. The SS officers acted autonomously in horrific ways.

Auschwitz was structured under very strict conditions by Himmler, in order to utilitarianly create the most efficient outcome. The fit to work prisoners laboured until death, and the unfit to work were killed immediately upon arrival in the gas chambers (Arendt 2003, 242-243). For this reason, it was prohibited for officers to beat or kill a prisoner because they were meant to die in very calculated manners, not from the select motivations of the individual SS (Arendt 2003, 248). Despite these regulations, SS officers created their own torture and killing methods that were done for their own amusement. “No one had issued orders that infants should be thrown into the air as shooting targets, or hurled into the fire alive, or have their heads smashed against walls; there had been no orders that people should be trampled to death, or become the objects of the murderous “sport”, including that of killing with one blow of the hand” (Arendt 2003, 247). These “little men” used their creativity and imagination to participate in a genocide. It was not simply a matter of obedience.

Arendt asserts that the extermination was intended to function like a machine. Auschwitz planned “administrative massacres” that followed an assembly line level of procedure (Arendt 2003, 250). This is not what happened in practice. Instead, Arendt asserts: “and yet, what came out of the bureaucratic calculations was the exact opposite of predictability. It was complete arbitrariness” (Arendt 2003, 250). Depending on the day and the officer, prisoners could expect different kinds of treatment (Arendt 2003, 251). Arendt makes it clear that this is not a comment on human nature, because the men who were stationed at Auschwitz could have found ways to be put to work elsewhere. The vast majority of the men who worked at the extermination camp were doing it by choice, and hence represent a sadistic portion of Germans (Arendt 2003, 251-252).

Arendt concludes her essay on Auschwitz by providing examples of SS officers pure arbitrariness in their treatment of prisoners. What was intended to be procedural was completely irregular. Arendt writes:

[...] those who lived up to the Nazi ideal of “toughness”, and are still proud of it (“sharp cookies” indeed), were in fact like jelly. It was as though their ever-changing moods had eaten up all substance – the firm surface of personal identity, of being either good or bad, tender or brutal, an “idealistic” idiot or a cynical sex pervert [...] It is certainly true that there was “almost no SS man who could not claim to have saved someone’s life” if he was in the right mood for it (Arendt 2003, 254).

In spite of the disinterest of public opinion regarding the prosecution of several SS men, Arendt makes it very clear that she believes their actions were evil, and judgement should apply to them. This is not a matter of obedience or following orders, rather a representation of officers acting of their own volition to torment the prisoners. She writes, “death was the supreme ruler in Auschwitz, but side by side with death it was accident – the most outrageous, arbitrary, haphazardness, incorporated in the changing moods of death’s servants – that determined the destinies of the inmates” (Arendt 2003, 255). Arendt does not offer them sympathy, (except the one medical doctor on trial that seems to have tried to help the prisoners above all else), and instead understands them to have had bad intentions. This is still under the assumption that the “desk murderers” are more responsible for the entire administrative massacres as a whole, but she wanted to highlight on an individual level the autonomy that the SS men had in torturing and killing prisoners. She notes the importance of anecdotes, which tell “moments of truth” about what happened in the camp, instead of using sweeping generalizations that fail to mark one’s heart, in order to better understand the suffering (Arendt 2003, 55). Arendt describes, “Bednarek, after performing his specialty of trampling prisoners to death, went into his room and prayed, for he was then in the right mood [...] There is the defendant Boger, who finds a child eating an

apple, grabs him by the legs, smashes his head against the wall, and calmly picks up the apple to eat it an hour later (Arendt 2003, 254-255). Arendt's assessment of the Auschwitz Trials provides a deeper understanding of how she views responsibility and judgement in the bureaucratic nightmare of the Holocaust.

2.2. A Digression on Heidegger

Martin Heidegger exists as the “elephant in the room” whenever Arendt and her work are studied. Ettinger divides their relationship into three phases or seasons: “1925 until 1930 or so, when the two were lovers; the early 1930s [...] until 1950, when their lives were utterly changed by the rise of National Socialism [...] and 1950 to 1975, when, at Arendt's initiative, they [...] built a new one [relationship] - that lasted until Hannah Arendt died” (Ettinger 1995, 2). Arendt and Heidegger engaged in an affair, beginning when Heidegger was thirty-five, married with two children, and when Arendt was eighteen, and his student (Wolin 2001, 34-35, 37-38) Their relationship was forbidden by the university because of Heidegger's position, and his wife was also a blazing antisemite (Wolin 2001, 35). Wolin describes them as an “unlikely couple”: [Arendt], the fetching young Jewish woman from a Baltic-cosmopolitan milieu; he [Heidegger], the Schwarzwaldler, a lapsed Catholic and convinced provincial” (Wolin 2001, 35). Arendt would have been close to the complete opposite of the other women in Heidegger's life (Wolin 2001, 35).

Wolin continuously directs the reader to Elżbieta Ettinger, who comments on the exploitative nature of Heidegger and Arendt's relationship. Heidegger was described as having a mystique and darkness that intrigued many students. He did however keep his distance from the majority, which help to uphold his mysterious nature (Ettinger 1995, 11). Ettinger wrote that Heidegger experienced a deep passion and desire for Arendt to idolize him (Ettinger 1995, 3).

Ettinger writes, “Heidegger initiated the affair, as his first letter to Arendt makes clear, with forethought, using his position and maturity to take advantage, to some extent at least, of her innocence and of the overpowering attraction that his intellect and manhood held on her. From the beginning, he kept the upper hand, dependent though he was on her love for him” (Ettinger 1995, 15). They had several breakups, the first being caused by Arendt’s moving schools. It was an act of self-sacrifice on behalf of Arendt, because hiding their relationship was burdensome, but it also seems as though Heidegger was pressuring her to leave (Wolin 2001, 37). Wolin writes, “though Arendt’s departure from Marburg [university town] was nominally voluntary, she was clearly wounded by Heidegger’s callous treatment. It was as though he had repaid her intimacy and trust by summarily banishing her. Upon moving to Heidelberg, she retaliated by refusing to provide him with her new address” (Wolin 2001, 37-38). Heidegger and Arendt’s relationship was tumultuous and evolved over Arendt’s lifetime.

Wolin makes the argument that Arendt’s work *Rahel Varnhagen*, which this thesis considered for Arendt’s understanding of Jewishness, is best read with the context of Heidegger in mind. After her breakup with Heidegger, Wolin contends that Arendt feelings of Jewish inferiority heightened with his rejection of her. Varnhagen was an autobiographical figure for Arendt, as they shared similar sentiments about wishing to be able to assimilate. Both women tried to “gain acceptance in a semi-enlightened Prussian society” and struggled in their young adulthood (Wolin 2001, 46). Varnhagen also experienced a romantic relationship with a non-Jewish man, Count Karl von Finckenstein, but their engagement fell through. Arendt must have seen Varnhagen as her doppelgänger, as she had experienced such a heartbreak from Heidegger (Wolin 2001, 47). Wolin writes that Arendt rejects her delusion about egalitarianism in German culture in the same way that Varnhagen does. He describes this delusion of culture as:

A sphere in which people were purportedly judged on the basis of merit rather than rank or ethnicity. These were the illusions that had collapsed for Varnhagen in the aftermath of her breakup with von Finckenstein. They came to grief for Arendt following her rejection by Heidegger amid the rising tide of German anti-Semitism. Inevitably, these two circumstances – one highly personal, the other political – must have been maddeningly conflated in Arendt's mind (Wolin 2001, 48).

Rahel Varnhagen supports Arendt's sentiments towards her Jewishness and relationship to Heidegger. The second, more relevant, controversy to their relationship is Heidegger's Nazism in opposition to Arendt's ardent anti-Nazism.

Heidegger joined the Nazi party in 1933, the same year that Arendt was arrested for illegal research on antisemitism (Wolin 2001, 45; Young-Bruehl 2004, 105-107). He was appointed as *Rektor* at Freiburg University, and saw the Third Reich as a way of renewing German intellectualism (D. Maier-Katkin and B. Maier-Katin 2007, 39). During his time as Rektor, he dismissed all Jewish faculty and helped to align the university with the ideology of Nazism (D. Maier-Katkin and B. Maier-Katin 2007, 39). Heidegger would end his speeches in similar fashions as: "to the man of unprecedented will, to our *Führer* Adolf Hitler – threefold *Sieg Heil!*" (Quoted in D. Maier-Katkin and B. Maier-Katin 2007, 39). In an interview, Arendt stated, presumably directed towards Heidegger, "the problem ... was not what our enemies did but what our friends did" (Quoted in Wolin 2001, 45). It was not only that the Nazis were her enemies, but that she felt especially betrayed by the German intellectuals who followed in support of the regime. Arendt wrote, "never again! I shall never again get involved in any kind of intellectual business" (Quoted in Wolin 2001, 48). Heidegger had introduced her to the world of intellectualism, and he had betrayed her. She changed her academic direction in response to this heartbreak.

Arendt forgave Heidegger for his allegiance to Hitler and reconciled with him in 1950 when she returned to Germany (Wolin 2001, 49). She is described as having a “blind devotion” to Heidegger and became his spokesperson to aid in saving his terrible reputation in the post-war years (Wolin 49, 51). At the same time, she wrote in her diary a parable about Heidegger called “Heidegger the Fox”. The story followed the Heidegger fox who was unable to tell the difference between traps and non-traps, and therefore kept getting stuck in traps. His fur had an abnormality and therefore made him weaker because of his lack of protection. He got the idea to build his borrow as a fox trap. He thought it would be smart to trap other foxes, but none ever came because he was sitting in his own trap. He then decorated it and invited foxes in, and many came. He thought this made him the slyest fox in the world. She finishes her parable in this way: “everyone except our fox could, of course, step out of it again [...] But the fox who lived in the trap said proudly: “So many are visiting me in my trap that I have become the best of all foxes.” And there was some truth in that, too: Nobody knows the nature of traps better than the one who sits in a trap his whole life long” (Arendt 1994, 362). Maier-Katkin’s interpretation of this parable is that Arendt believed, “Heidegger was naïve about the affairs of men and oblivious to the transparency of his lies” (D. Maier-Katkin and B. Maier-Katkin 2007, 44). There is also this quality of portraying Heidegger as pathetically comedic. In a way, she is laughing at him, because he is so unintelligent as to trap himself. In this way, she rids him of the accusation that he believed in the Nazi ideology. Arendt’s personal convictions shine through her intellectual character. This parable is less about Heidegger, and more about Arendt’s navigation of how she feels about him.

Her biggest act of support for Heidegger was in 1969, when she spoke an address in honour of his eightieth birthday. She spoke favourably about his philosophy, and described his

involvement in the Nazi regime as a “mistake” (D. Maier-Katkin and B. Maier-Katin 2007, 47).

Heidegger responded to this compassion by never truly supporting Arendt’s success. Arendt understood this, and wrote in a letter to Jaspers:

I know that he finds unbearable that my name appears in public, that I write books, etc. Always, I have been virtually lying to him about myself, pretending the books, the name, did not exist, and I couldn’t, so to speak, count to three, unless it concerned the interpretations of his works. Then, he would be quite pleased if it turned out that I can count to three and sometimes to four. But suddenly I become bored with the cheating and got a punch in the nose (Quoted in Wolin 2001, 51).

Until the bitter end of their relationship, and thus Arendt’s life, she had to shrink herself in order to make Heidegger feel big.

Heidegger’s phenomenological ontology had an immense impact on Arendt as she navigated philosophical understanding. Arendt wrote that it was a matter of “immediate and urgent importance” to reconsider Heidegger’s ontology, which occurred throughout her book *The Human Condition* (Quoted in Taminiaux 1997, 17). She had initially responded to Heidegger in her article “What is *Existenz* Philosophy?” published in 1946, where Arendt had a marked bitterness towards him. This attitude was not found in *The Human Condition*, but she still disagreed with him on many ideas (Taminiaux 1997, 13). Taminiaux argues that *The Human Condition* acts as a retort to Heidegger’s works *The Sophist* and *Being and Time*, specifically the Ancient Greek concepts that were evaluated (Taminiaux 1997, 13). The three major points of disagreement for Arendt, that allowed her to cultivate her own understanding of human beings are their relation to: “the world, the principle of individuation, [and] publicness” (Taminiaux 1997, 13). The separation in their thought ultimately comes from their incompatible views on human affairs (L. Hinchman and S. Hinchman 1984, 189). Heidegger’s influence set the

foundation of Arendt's consideration of freedom and action, and thus her consideration of the solution to the modern bureaucratic nightmare.

Setting the groundwork, there are certain elements foundational to Arendt's political thought that have been drawn from Heidegger. In her assessment of the problem in the modern political sphere, Arendt consistently criticizes the problem of necessity. People within the modern world are unable to act authentically, which eliminates their freedom. This notion is Heideggerian in nature. Arendt draws from Heidegger's ideas, specifically of, "the peculiar and complex relationship [...] between authenticity and everydayness, unconcealment and concealment" (Villa 1996, 115). Like Heidegger, she believes in a polarity. Arendt sees humanity's capacity for authenticity found in the public sphere and in humanity's preference to favour automatic and necessitated processes opposed to real freedom (Villa 1996, 115).

Arendt differs from Heidegger in her understanding of the world (Taminiaux 1997, 13). Heidegger pronounces the everyday world to be inauthentic. He believes that one must be removed from the everyday world into nothingness, facing anxiety. The *Dasein* [being-there] is not at home in the everyday world (Taminiaux 1997, 13-14). Arendt disagrees and acknowledges the dangers of Heidegger's concentration on the self in his philosophy (Biskowski 1995, 80). It led him away from the public world which becomes so important for Arendt. Arendt views the activity of work as potential for, "the duration of a properly human habitat – beyond the biological environment to which the activity of labor and the vital cycles that circumscribe labor are bound, inasmuch as labor and vital cycles leave nothing behind themselves" (Taminiaux 1997, 14). Heidegger sees the public world as inauthentic which removes people from their true Being (Biskowski 1995, 80). Arendt comments on this in her 1946 article, writing:

He dismisses ‘all those modes of human existence which rest on the fact that Man lives together in the world with his fellows. To put it historically, Heidegger's Self is an ideal which has been working mischief in German philosophy and literature since Romanticism. In Heidegger this arrogant passion to be a self has contradicted itself; for never before was it so clear as in his philosophy that this is probably the one being which Man cannot be’ (Quoted in Biskowski 1995, 80).

Arendt recognizes the inherent problem with Heidegger’s emphasis on the self and retorts with a thought of her own.

Arendt also rejects Heidegger’s notion of individuation. This is found in the difference between Heidegger’s concept of being-towards-death, compared to Arendt’s notion of natality (Taminiaux 1997, 16). She agrees with him by asking a non-traditional question, “Who are you?” instead of “What is the human being” (Taminiaux 1997, 15). She is in line with Heidegger in believing that that action and the activity of production is required for individuation (Taminiaux 1997, 15-16). Heidegger focuses his concept of individuation as a response to one’s anticipation of their own death. Arendt flips this on its head, and asserts that individuation comes from action which is an act of birth leading to the creation of something exceptional (Taminiaux 1997, 16). Bernauer writes on Arendt’s characterization of individuation: “when I insert myself into the world, it is a world where others are already present. Action and speech are so closely related because the primordial and specifically human act must always also answer the question asked of every newcomer: “Who are you?” The manifestation of “who somebody is” is implicit in the fact that speechless action somehow does not exist or, if it exists is irrelevant” (Quoted in Taminiaux 1997, 16). Arendt responds to Heidegger’s ontological thought with her own. In this way, she is continuing the importance of practical application, by shifting the negative understanding of life: the public world as bad, the being-towards-death, and instead creates a much more hopeful understanding of reality.

2.3 Arendt on Forgiveness

Considering all of the wretched and horrific events of the 20th century that Arendt evaluated, it is important to note her writing on forgiveness. She had an interesting approach to forgiveness as a secular Jewish person, because she draws upon Jesus of Nazareth (Arendt 1998, 238). Arendt discerns two traits about forgiveness taught by Jesus that should be upheld by every person in modern society. She lists them as, “first that it is not true that only God has the power to forgive, and second that this power does not derive from God – as though God, not men, would forgive through the medium of human beings – but on the contrary must be mobilized by men toward each other before they can hope to be forgiven by God also” (Arendt 1998, 239). Arendt separates evil from trespassing, and states that while God will judge the evil in the Last Judgement, it is humanity’s task to forgive trespasses as they happen daily (Arendt 1998, 240). Arendt attributes forgiveness as a form of action. She writes on forgiveness:

But trespassing is an everyday occurrence which is in the very nature of action’s constant establishment of new relationships within a web of relations, and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly. Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new (Arendt 1998, 240).

Arendt believes that forgiveness grants people freedom. Instead of vengeance, which is a reaction to what someone has done to harm another, forgiveness is an action all on its own. It is acting anew, and in doing so is not constrained by the harm that prompted needing forgiveness (Arendt 1998, 241). For this reason, forgiveness is freedom from vengeance (Arendt 1998, 241).

Arendt does make a distinction between forgiveness and radical evil. She defines radical evil in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* as first coined by Kant and beyond the conceivable evil

described in the Bible (Arendt 1976, 459) This is before her report on Eichmann and her revelation on the banality of evil. She picks out radical evil as something that is unforgiveable. She reasons that radical evil is beyond the judgement of human affairs and is hence unforgiveable and unpunishable. For her, forgiveness extends only to relationships between individuals (Arendt 1998, 241). Love acts as a form of respect for the other person, and by extending forgiveness, one is extending that respect. Arendt believes society has lost this notion of respect and forgiveness in the modern world because people no longer believe in depending on others. Both forgiveness and being forgiven require dependency on others, and they rely on action and speech (Arendt 1998, 242-243). It is possible that this philosophy is what Arendt extended to Heidegger in mending their relationship. Forgiveness acts as a precursor as the next section of this thesis which will evaluate the solution to the problem Arendt identifies: Freedom, action, and the council system.

Part Two: The Solution

Chapter 3: Freedom and Action

Arendt is highly critical of the modern world; hence, she draws from the Ancient Greek way of life in explaining the proper way of life for humans, as political animals (Kanatli 2017, 102). In her work, *The Human Condition*, Arendt very specifically categorizes human activities in terms of the *Vita Activa* and the *Vita Contemplativa*. These categorizations help clarify what public life meant for the Ancient Greeks and how it has been misunderstood in modernity (Kanatli 2017, 103). The *Vita Activa* is divided into three categories of human activity: labor, work, and action (Kanatli 2017, 103). Labor refers to the aspects of life that are required for survival. Work is the term to describe human creation, may that be physical tools to assist in

labor, and it is a representation of stability and human artifice (Tsao 2002, 100; Arendt 1998, 136). The human activity that is most important to political life is action.

Arendt writes, “all human activities are conditioned by the fact that men live together, but it is only action that cannot even be imagined outside the society of men [...] Action alone is the exclusive prerogative of man; neither a beast nor a god is capable of it, and only action is entirely dependent upon the constant presence of others” (Arendt 2003, 182). Tsao asserts that the other human activities, labor and work, have a quality of anonymity to them. When the individual labors, they are seen as part of a body of laborers. When they work, the products they create do not bear their own name. However, in the activity of action, the person’s peers must see them as a unique individual (Tsao 2002, 101).

Action is necessary for the polis to exist at all. The polis is not defined by the city-walls or by any physical institutions in place; instead, the polis is the people that make up the politics through action. It is in this public space that people can act and do politics. She explains that while all people are capable of participating in this space, in the modern world it is exclusive to certain groups of people (Arendt 1998, 198-199). She states the political, hence political action, is differentiated from, “what we can do and create in the singular: in isolation like the artist, in solitude like the philosopher, in the inherently worldless relationship between human beings as it exists in love and sometimes in friendship” (Quoted in Kohn 2000, 113). Kohn establishes that Arendt is declaring that human plurality is necessary for human flourishing. He states, “the point is rather that apart from free political activity, which is to say from action and judgement, both of which depend on human plurality, human experience is thrown into jeopardy” (Kohn 2000, 113). For Arendt, action is the only human activity that requires a plurality (Kohn 2000, 113, 120).

Arendt asserts that politics is freedom, writing, “freedom [...] is actually the reason that men live together in political organization at all. Without it, political life as such would be meaningless. The *raison d’être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action” (Arendt, 1993, 146). Arendt describes the uniqueness of action in comparison to the other activities in the *Vita Activa*. She writes, “it is an initiative from which no human being can refrain and still be human [...] A life without speech and without action, on the other hand – and this is the way of life that in earnest has renounced all appearance and all vanity in the biblical sense of the word – is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men” (Arendt 1998, 176). Arendt states clearly that action is not necessitated. People are not acting out of necessity; instead, action is beginning something new (Arendt 1998, 177).

In order for freedom to exist and thrive, it must have a “common public space” which allows people to act in speech or deed. For Arendt, there is no internal sense of freedom that is relevant (Arendt, 1993, 147-148). Therefore, Arendt believes that action is essential for true freedom. She writes “men are free – as distinguished from their possessing the gift of freedom – as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to be free and to act are the same” (Arendt, 1993, 153). Arendt rejects the modern idea that politics is creating legislation. In Greek antiquity, legislation was not attributed to political life but instead, acted as a precursor to the polis. Arendt describes the Greek’s perception of lawmakers as similar to architects, that build the city walls for people to live within (Arendt 1998, 194-195). The actual political action takes place after this legislation has been instituted. Arendt writes:

The polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of the acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where

they happen to be. [...] they expressed the conviction that action and speech create a space between participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly [...] To be deprived of it means to be deprived of reality, which humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance. To men the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others, by its appearing to all (Arendt 1998, 198-199).

This illustration of the polis that Arendt provides, is a space where political matters are not handled by pre-set administrative structures. It is not a performance in that sense that everything is preordained. Instead, in the public space, citizens could be genuinely swayed by others' ideas. It was not a matter of following the ideology of one's prescribed party, but instead, ideas were shared freely, and could be accepted or rejected freely.

Arendt's assessment of freedom and action runs counter to the traditional Western philosophy. In the Western tradition, to be free, one must remain in self-command. For example, the Biblical tradition believes in free will, and that true freedom comes from self-control in a relationship with Jesus. In this belief, free will is a personal, inner, experience of the individual (Brunkhorst 2000, 181). Contrarily, Arendt's view of freedom is being free, it is a verb and outward experience. It is motivated by spontaneity and lack of predictability. Traditional Western philosophy sees this unpredictability of action as negative and potentially harmful. This is the way that Arendt breaks from the customary European philosophy (Brunkhorst 2000, 181).

There is significant critique of Arendt's understanding of the Greek polis in the scholarly literature. Arendt draws from Aristotle's *Politics*, and classical political theory in presenting the Greek polis. The society is structure into two realms: the public and the private – which Arendt applies in *The Human Condition*. The public sphere is the political business, and the private is the household. There was one master of each household, the patriarch, and he had dominion over

everyone: wife, children, slaves, and animals (Brunkhorst 2000, 183). He used violence to maintain command over his inferiors. Under this hierarchy, “friendship with women, slaves, dogs, or even young boys could never reach the highest, “most perfect” level of reciprocal relationship between free and equal men” (Brunkhorst 2000, 183). By supporting Aristotle, Arendt is affirming the idea that freedom comes from relationships among equals (Brunkhorst 2000, 183).

In the same breath, Arendt is denouncing the existence of freedom in the private sphere. Therefore, free men could participate in the freedom of the public space, and everyone else was under their submission – and doing all of the labor for the community. “Arendt remains completely in line with the elitist assumptions of ancient Greek philosophy and practise. For the Greeks, there could be no struggle for recognition between master and slave because these two types of human being belonged to irreducibly different ontological spheres” (Brunkhorst 2000, 184). It is only the master that can transcend his needs for survival, and enter the public space because he does not need to labor. (Brunkhorst 2000, 185). Hence, “overcoming” the master/slave relationship in the name of human equality could never be the goal of political action, since politics occurred only amongst those who were already civic equals (Brunkhorst 2000, 184). The foundation of the political freedom that Arendt details is mastery of a household which alleviated them of necessity.

For Arendt, “if free men come together and act within such an order, a distinct kind of power arises, one free of the taint of violence and domination” (Brunkhorst 2000, 186-187). Her rationale here is that power exists as a reference to the entire citizen body. It is the unity of the citizens that maintains power. She maintains that violence - such as war and slavery – exist to sustain the polis, and thus the public sphere, which grant them their freedom (Brunkhorst 2000,

187). Brunkhorst argue that what Arendt is failing to acknowledge here is that the system is entirely dependent on violence. Not only warring with states, or enslaving populations for labor. Brunkhorst argues that “power also becomes violence in any interaction between male citizens and those who are not (or no longer) full members of the political community. The latter category includes women, slaves, children, criminals, traitors, displaced and unworthy persons, aliens, idiots, and (of course) enemies” (Brunkhorst 2000, 187). The society which has inspired Arendt’s theory of freedom and action, is also maintained by violence and only the few benefits from it. It is important to note how she has neglected these aspects of the Greek polis and bear in mind the shortcomings of this framework.

3.1 Arendt’s View of the Council System

In light of Arendt’s negative account of bureaucracy, which she views as a system that creates thoughtlessness and destroys freedom and action, Arendt offers a positive account of politics as well. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt is drawing on antiquity to describe what she believes must be renewed in the modern world. A common response to this claim is that it is a political system of the past that has yet to be active in the modernity. The final section of this thesis will be concerned with her ideal political system, that she draws from modern examples to illustrate.

Arendt had an enthusiasm for a system which she believed was destroyed in the modern world before it had the chance to truly flourish. In her work *On Revolution*, she provides a historical account of democratic and republican revolutions, including the French, American, and Bolshevik case studies. Her argument is that the basis for the best political system is found in the aftermath of these revolutions. This is the council system, which is a direct form of democratic participation. This system is inspired from Ancient Greece but is never completely successful in

the modern political sphere. Arendt argues that the reason for its failure is oligarchic groups that squash the councils before they can properly flourish. It is important to note that Arendt's work is not historical, rather she is presenting her own account of what happened in these case studies which may come with glaring bias or incorrect information. The problem identified by Arendt is that the scientific attitude which thrives in the modern world replaces democracy with bureaucracy. She believes that until representative government is replaced, the people cannot obtain true public freedom and happiness.

Arendt's disdain for representative government is the same as her critique for bureaucratic functionaries – which go hand in hand with one another. She writes:

Even the representatives of the people hardly possess an authentic area of action but are administrative officers, whose business, though in the public interest, is not essentially different from the business of private management. [...] who could deny the extent to which in our mass societies the political realm has withered away and is being replaced by that 'administration of things' with Engels predicted for the classless society? [...] when government has really become administration, the party system can only result in incompetence and wastefulness (Arendt 1963, 276).

The case studies that Arendt uses are all born out of revolution. She emphasizes that revolution and beginnings are interconnected. It is only through a revolution that a society is confronted "directly and inevitably with the problem of beginning. For revolutions, however we may be tempted to define them, are not mere changes" (Arendt 1963, 13). Arendt states that revolution in political terms was originally meant to signify revolving back to a previous order. She uses the example of the Glorious Revolution when the monarchy was restored from the Rump Parliament (Arendt 1963, 36). This word was used during modern revolutions because the members initially thought that they were moving back to a previous order before it became corrupt. It was not until the American project had gone too far that they realized that it was a

revolution. Benjamin Franklin said that he did not think any of the original people of the American Revolution ever intended for it to be a separation from the crown entirely (Arendt 1963, 37). She quotes, “Benjamin Franklin, who had more firsthand information about the colonies than any other man, could later write in all sincerity, ‘I never had heard in any Conversation from any Person drunk or sober, the least Expression of a wish for a Separation, or Hint that such a Thing would be advantageous to America’” (Quoted in Arendt 1963, 37). Arendt concludes that separation and complete regime change is what the word has come to mean. Revolutions in modernity formed the idea that the regime did not have to be Providence or the divine, but could be the acts of men using their own will to make a change (Arendt 1963, 40). Before she addresses the modern cases, she turns to antiquity.

Arendt sees the council system as having its historical roots in Ancient Athens and Rome. The Athenian political system was labeled as an isonomy, which was characterized by having no division between the ruler and the ruled (Arendt 1963, 22). Equality existed for citizens; therefore, the political realm was open to all men who owned property and slaves. For the Greeks, no man was free but among his peers. Freedom required a communal space for them to come together (Arendt 1963, 24). Arendt contrasts this notion of freedom with the modern conception, which is concerned with civil and individual liberties. She writes that these rights are not about true freedom but about liberation from oppressive governments. Arendt notes that, “it is frequently very difficult to say where the mere desire for liberation, to be free from oppression, ends, and the desire for freedom as the political way of life begins” (Arendt 1963, 25). The former could be accomplished through governments like a monarchy, but the latter requires a new government, like a republic (Arendt 1963, 25). Arendt explains that modern people have difficulty identifying the difference between liberation and freedom. This difficulty

does not mean they are the same phenomena. Instead, she sees the Founding Fathers of America as having the modern conception of liberty and freedom – however, they achieved the freedom that she believes in because they used their liberty to enter the public space. Thus, freedom became a “visible, tangible reality”, one that they were not intending, but unfolded because of their involvement in the “space of appearances” (Arendt 1963, 26). This common public space is no longer present and or even commonly desired, which is precisely the problem that Arendt identifies in the modern political world. Modern revolution has introduced a form of civil liberty which is not the freedom that Arendt views as essential to politics.

In her assessment of the French and American Revolutions, Arendt is more sympathetic to the American case, and she draws extensively from Thomas Jefferson in supporting her notion of the council system. Arendt acknowledged the strong foundation that the United States had when creating a new nation. However, she sees the country to have failed to produce public freedom and happiness. Arendt believes the Founding Fathers, especially Jefferson, recognized a problem with the new American government. Should things really be unchangeable? He defined it as the worst tyranny if the decisions of the founders would rule all people without a way to change even after they died. Jefferson believed that changes should be permitted to the political sphere by the “common reason” of the people in every generation (Arendt 1963, 237). Arendt describes this idea as “recurring revolutions” (Arendt 1963, 237). A big issue was the fact that the American Revolution had given men freedom, but did not give them the space to exercise this freedom. This is because the big structures of the government took precedent over town hall meetings, and the voice of the average people. Which arguably meant that during the British Colonial period, men had more of a voice because they could participate in these influential town hall meetings. Founders resulted in what Benjamin Rush’s doctrine suggested, “all power is

derived from the people, they possess it only on the days of their elections. After this it is the property of their rulers” (Quoted in Arendt 1963, 239). The revolution had given men freedom but did not give them the space to exercise this freedom.

Arendt quotes a letter Jefferson wrote where he addressed the state of America post-revolution:

[...] the age-old distinction between ruler and ruled which the Revolution had set out to abolish through the establishment of a republic has asserted itself again; once more, the people are not admitted to the public realm, once more the business of government has become the privilege of the few, who alone may ‘exercise [their] virtuous dispositions’ (as Jefferson still called men’s political talents). The result is that the people must either sink into ‘lethargy, the forerunner of death to the public liberty’ or ‘preserve the spirit of resistance’ to whatever government they have elected, since the only power they retain is ‘the reserve power of revolution’ (Arendt 1963, 240).

Arendt asserts that in the American system, the only reason that the representatives did not become corrupt was because of the checks and balances built into the nature of the system. This still did not give a public space for the people. Thus, the revolutionary spirit withered away because of this lack of political activity available to the people (Arendt 1963, 242).

John Sitton stresses that for Arendt, “the American Constitution impoverished the political experience of the American people” (Sitton 1987, 81). The system of representative democracy essentially eliminated the participation of the people in politics because proper engagement in politics could only be done by the small group of representatives. Sitton writes that freedom and civil liberties were wrongly conflated; civil liberties cannot replace political freedom. He quotes Arendt’s strong assertion, “for political freedom, generally speaking, means the right “to be a participator in government,” or it means nothing.” (Arendt 1963, 221). She labels the American government as oligarchic because, only a small group of individuals have

access to public freedom and happiness (Sitton 1987, 82). Identified a Jefferson's idea of elementary republics which he conceives of near the end of his life is what Arendt uses as inspiration for her own defense of the council system.

Jefferson's idea of elementary republics would be to divide all of the counties into wards to allow each individual American to participate in the political world. Arendt highlights this idea by writing, "the basic assumption of the ward system, whether Jefferson knew it or not, was that no one could be called happy without his share in public happiness, that no one could be called free without his experience in public freedom, and that no one could be called either happy or free without participating, and having a share, in public power" (Arendt 1963, 258-259). Arendt understood this to be a counter to the problem of representative government which does not give opportunity for everyone to engage in political community.

Arendt draws from the French Revolution but is much more critical of it than the American case. Arendt argues that the social question, meaning considerations of class inequality, were accepted as natural and unavoidable prior to the modern context. She believed that it was in modernity that people began to question poverty as a fact of life (Arendt 1963, 14-15). This was probably inspired by the abundance in the American colonial experience before the revolution (Arendt 1963, 15). Following the French Revolution, the Parisian Commune, with its forty-eight sections, created a, "revolutionary municipal council" called the Commune of Paris (Arendt 1963, 242). The people, unaffiliated, created clubs and societies which were, according to Robespierre, to instruct the people on the new constitution and to keep this spirit of freedom alive (Arendt 1963, 242). It was an opportunity for true representation and participation for the masses. This was then thwarted by Robespierre and the Jacobin party, which had initially been a club. Robespierre changed his position on societies because he believed that France needed to be

unified, and in order to do that, they needed a centralized government and to eliminate the societies which only caused division in the country (Arendt 1963, 243-244).

Robespierre through the Jacobin faction crushed the organs of a potential republic for a centralized government instead. This was to eliminate the multi council system and gather all the power in the Assembly (Arendt 1963, 247-248). Arendt writes, “it is, on the other hand, the conflict between the people and a mercilessly centralized power apparatus which, under the pretense of representing the sovereignty of the nation, actually deprived the people of their power and hence had to persecute all those spontaneous feeble power organs which the revolution had brought into existence” (Arendt 1963, 247). Louis de Saint-Just, another revolutionary, turned against the clubs and societies once Robespierre had taken power. He turned away from the public freedom ideals originally held by the Revolution and instead proclaimed, “‘the freedom of the people is in its private life; don’t disturb it. Let the government be a force only in order to protect this state of simplicity against force itself.’ These words indeed spell out the death sentence for all organs of the people, and they express in rare unequivocally the end of all hopes for the Revolution” (Arendt 1963, 247). Arendt recognizes the potential that existed in these clubs and societies which operated like councils.

The highlight here is the struggle between the party system which benefits and gives the power to the parliament, versus the council system which benefits and gives power to the people. Both councils and parties emerged from the modern revolutions in the 18th centuries onward. Councils are born during the revolution, and parties are established after the fact. It is the parties like the Soviet Party that crushed the council, who were the original Soviets, and typically used violence. They did this for the sake of representation. But this did not provide the people with any say in public affairs. In representative government, the people are able to support parliament

through voting, but it is understood that the actual political action is only the privilege of the government. Furthermore, Arendt argues that representative government reaches the point where, “all political questions in the welfare state are ultimately problems of administration, to be handled and decided by experts, in which case even the representatives of the people hardly possess an authentic area of action and are administrative officers, whose business, though in the public interest, is not essentially different from the business of private management” (Arendt 1963, 276). Alternatively, the councils - “sprang from the people as spontaneous organs of action and order” (Arendt 1963, 275). These revolutions show time and time again the ultimate choice of the party system.

Modern liberal democracies are so familiar with the party system that they forget the origins and original purpose of these political systems (Arendt 1963, 250-251). Arendt asserts that both the party system and the council system rose in the same post-revolutionary moment – when the nation state was born, it uplifted the party system and crushed the council system. Because the party system is so prevalent in the modern democratic world, citizens are made to see parliamentary politics as the battle between two parties. This causes a form of historical amnesia, wherein society forgets that the original struggle is the people versus the parliament. Arendt argues that the parliament system is always “from without and from above”, in their approach (Arendt 1963, 251). Arendt provides her own historical political analysis for why the most recent example, the Bolshevik Revolution, was unsuccessful in maintaining their council system.

James Muldoon argues that Arendt was largely influenced by Marxist theorist and revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg. Luxemburg’s major impact comes from her work during the transitional period between the two eras of Germany in the 20th century (Muldoon 2016, 770).

She was a leading member in the Spartacus League or Spartakusbund, and in their manifesto, she wrote that the first step in any communist revolution ““will be the formation of workers and soldiers councils”” (Muldoon 2016, 771). Luxemburg was critical of the Bolsheviks, particularly their decision to dissolve the Constituent assembly. She argued this was an elimination of the will of the people and prevented them from engaging in public life (Muldoon 2016, 772-773). Mass participation was crucial for both Luxemburg and Arendt.

Muldoon contends that for Arendt, the greatest contribution that Luxemburg made was her assertion that “political action precedes and creates political organization and not vice versa”. life (Muldoon 2016, 774). Luxemburg writes from her own personal experience in the Russian Revolution of 1905 and criticized the rise of an elite which squashed the institutionalization of revolutionary activity. Luxemburg argues that there needs to be active participation of the people, and they should not be lowered by party officials into passivity. She was not anti-democracy but rather wanted there to be a democracy which truly represented the will of the people. She wanted the masses to be connected with their political affairs (Muldoon 2016, 774). Muldoon remarks that Arendt and Luxemburg differed in that, for Arendt, it was not an East/West or capitalist/communist divide that she wanted to lay out. Instead, she described the real conflict to be found, in the words of Muldoon, in “the bureaucracy, centralism, and paternalism of the party system (both liberal democratic and communist) and the democratic participatory model of the council system” (Muldoon 2016, 774).

The German philosopher Hegel had a theory of history which was heavily inspired by the French Revolution. He believed in historical motion and the dialectical quality of history which is simultaneously driven by necessity (Arendt 1963, 47). This is relevant for the Bolshevik case because Arendt understands the Bolsheviks to have believed they were playing a part in history,

and thus followed the playbook of the French Revolution. Instead of action, they imitated (Arendt 1963, 51). Historical necessity confused these men into believing that revolutions needed to “devour their own children”, “split into two extreme factions”, and “the open enemy was followed by the hidden enemy under the masks of “suspects””; this they took from the French (Arendt 1963, 51). Arendt argues this made them the “fools of history” (Arendt 1963, 52). Nevertheless, Arendt does offer another explanation for why the Soviets failed to continue their council system, and provides insight into what can break down the council system. It traces back to the thread weaving throughout this thesis about the problem of administrative structures in governments.

Arendt’s position is that the Soviet professional revolutionists believed, “the substance of politics was not action but administration” (Arendt 1963, 279). She believes that a fatal mistake was made by the revolutionary councils because they did not differentiate amidst, “participation in public affairs and administration or management of things in the public interest” (Arendt 1963, 278). The revolutionary party – Arendt gives the example of Hungary but states that it applies to the Russian – gave the councils jurisdiction over the factories. The councils failed abysmally at this task, because the workers within these councils had political aims, and were concerned with matters unrelated to administrative managerial positions (Arendt 1963, 278). Arendt’s historical interpretation is that this drove the failure of the Soviet Union. She declares that the political man and the administrator not only have different qualities, but these qualities will rarely be found in the same person. She writes, “the one is supposed to know how to deal with men in a field of human relations, whose principle is freedom, and the other must know how to manage things and people in a sphere of life whose principle is necessity” (Arendt 1963, 278). In their management of factories, the councils brought action and political qualities into

their task. She argues that their failure and, “the reason why the party apparatuses despite many shortcomings – corruption, incompetence, and incredible wastefulness – eventually succeeded where the councils had failed lay precisely in their original oligarchic and even autocratic structure, which made them so utterly unreliable for all political purposes” (Arendt 1963, 279). Arendt believes that the failure to place the council workers into political position contributed to the failure of their governmental system as a whole. These men were chosen for their integrity, judgement, and courage, which allowed them to act spontaneously, as politics is intended. Instead, they were placed into managerial positions that they could not operate, while the oligarchic party transformed the government into a complete managerial administration (Arendt 1963, 278-279).

In these revolutionary cases, analyzed by Arendt, an oligarchic group quickly comes to suppress the burgeoning council system. Often, a representative government is installed, and this replaces the vital spontaneity and possibility for excellence engendered by the councilial system with partisan mediocrities. These partisan mediocrities, in turn, decide everything in advance, in accordance with some supposedly “scientific” but ultimately ideological outlook. Arendt maintains:

That representative government has in fact become oligarchic government is true enough, though not in the classical sense of rule by the few in the interest of the few; what we today call democracy is a form of government where the few rule, at least supposedly, in the interest of the many. This government is democratic in that popular welfare and private happiness are its chief goals; but it can be called oligarchic in the sense that public happiness and public freedom have again become the privilege of the few (Arendt 1963, 273).

Arendt's critique of bureaucracy is coupled with her disdain for political parties. She draws extensively on Maurice Duverger, a French political scientist that wrote a text called *Political Parties*, published in 1951.

Duverger also believes that political parties are almost inherently oligarchic, and in practice exist as such. Duverger contends: "the leadership of parties tends naturally to assume oligarchic form. A veritable 'ruling class' comes into being that is more or less closed; it is an 'inner circle' into which it is difficult to penetrate [...]. In theory the principle of election should prevent the formation of an oligarchy; in fact it seems to favour it" (Duverger 1967, 151). He explains this favour is because the people stick to what they are familiar with and are suspicious of new candidates (Duverger 1967, 151). Duverger's major conclusions are that "the organization of political parties is certainly not in conformity with orthodox notions of democracy", instead they are oligarchic in nature (Duverger 1967, 422). He confirms, "their leaders are not really appointed by the members, in spite of appearances, but co-opted or nominated by the central body; they tend to form a ruling class, isolated from the militants, a caste that is more or less exclusive" (Duverger 1967, 422). The obvious question thus is, what is the solution? Is it possible to eliminate political parties and retain freedom? Duverger believes it is possible.

He maintains that liberal democracies operated under this false, empty assumption of, "government by for the people, by the people" that does not exist in reality. It is simply a way of constraining people without their objection. Instead, Duverger believes that true democracy is "liberty, 'for the people and for all sections of the people', as the 1793 Constituents put it" (Duverger 1967, 424). This system would provide liberty for all people, not only the privileged, which presupposes a standard of living, education, social equality, and political equilibrium

(Duverger 1967, 424). His suggestion for a new formula, which Arendt takes verbatim for her work *On Revolution*, is as follows: “Government of the people by an elite sprung from the people” (Duverger 1967, 425). Duverger sees all forms of government as oligarchic. However, this is this the most optimal option (Duverger 424-425). He writes, “A regime without parties ensures the permanence of ruling elites chosen by birth, wealth, or position: to secure admission to the governing oligarchy a man of the people must accomplish a considerable effort to rise above his initial position; he must also work his way up the ladder of middle-class education and lost contact with the class in which he was born” (Duverger 425-426).

Arendt elaborates on Duverger’s idea of the *élite*. Arendt’s positive vision for politics is that a kind of aristocracy, arising from direct, counciliar participation, should adjudicate the order of a republic. Individuals who excel at leadership will spontaneously arise within a council system (Arendt 1963, 282). The deliberation they undertake and the actions they prescribe will embody the vital plurality at the heart of any genuinely democratic order. This is the realization of the public life Arendt so admires in the Ancient Greek forerunners to the modern system.

Arendt believes that the party system reenforces the “constantly and universally increasing equalization of society (Arendt 1963, 281). The vast majority of society has become uninterested in public affairs, being it is only the few that get to participate in the public space (Arendt 1963, 281). In the council system, there is still an *élite*, but they are different than the few that participate in representative democracy. Arendt suggests this form of *élite* for the elementary republics or councils, which are not chosen from above and below, but that are, “of the people and sprung from the people” and, “one is tempted to say that they had selected themselves; those who organized themselves were those who cared and those who took the initiative.” (Arendt 1963, 282). The *élites* are not nominated or supported but rather their

position rested in the confidence of their equals (Arendt 1963, 282). An equality that exists because of a consensual joint collective among the people (Arendt 1963, 282). These councils have no exclusion or inclusion that is not self-chosen. Everyone is given the chance to actively participate in them.

Arendt illustrates the power structure in the form of a pyramid. Instead of the power coming from above or below, the power is generated in each level of the hierarchal pyramid. Essential for these structures are, “the principle for the selection of the best [...] the principle of self-selection [...] and the principle of personal trust in their development” (Arendt 1963, 283). These principles of selection are not universal but apply specifically to the political realm (Arendt 1963, 283).

For Arendt, there is no internal sense of freedom that is relevant (Arendt 1993, 148-149). Therefore, Arendt believes that action is essential for true freedom. Philosophers and ‘scientific’ political leaders whom they influence, according to Arendt, are dominated by a conception of rational necessity and an accompanying desire for scientific control. For this reason, the councils, which allow for the expression of plurality and action, are subsequently quelled by leaders who claim technical, political expertise, rooted in a tradition of supposedly scientific necessity. Arendt’s view is that such constitutes the end of genuine politics, since politics, by its very nature, demands a recognition of the reality of spontaneous and free action.

Hannah Arendt has a positive view of the council system and believes it to be the method which allows public freedom to thrive. She believes that the council system has only been successful in antiquity, and that in the modern political sphere, the council system has been continuously crushed by representative government. Representative government is oligarchic, as the few make decisions for the many. Arendt believes that drawing on this understanding of

political action as preceding political institutions, and allow active participation for all people, true political freedom will be achieved.

Margaret Canovan, a highly regarded Arendtian scholar, wrote a scathing critique of Arendt's council system, believing its very nature to be contradictory (Canovan 1978, 5). Canovan identifies two problems to Arendt's political thought: "a contradiction between democratic and elitist attitudes on the one hand, and an uncertainty about the relation of her political thought to practice on the other" (Canovan 1978, 8). This thesis will only be concerned with Canovan's argument against Arendt's council system.

Canovan observes that in *On Revolution*, Arendt presents an elitist position about politics, asserting that political freedom can only be practised by the "aristocratic leisured class", and that in modernity, politics has been given to the poor which has caused political freedom to be lost (Canovan 1978, 15). She believes that there is an inherent contradiction in her book, because after she has presented this elitist position, Arendt goes on to support public spaces and participatory democracy (Canovan 1978 15-16). This is because of her support of council systems that are formed through revolutions. Canovan summarizes Arendt's council system in the following manner:

[...] a nationwide network of small, face-to-face gatherings, on the lines of the Workers' Councils, Soldiers' Councils, Neighbourhood Councils, and Student Councils that have sprung up in the revolutions. It is of the essence of such a system that it should not be organised bureaucratically from above, but should be generated by the people themselves. Once these tiny political spaces have been constituted, they will naturally federate among themselves, sending deputies, whose personal qualities they trust, up to higher level councils (Canovan 1978, 17).

Arendt's purpose for these councils is not so that the interests of the people will be better spoken for than in a representative government, but rather that participation and political action will be

extended to the many (Canovan 1978, 16). Arendt believes that despite a different system, an élite will still exist as it does in parliamentary government. The difference rests in the selection process. The élite in the councils choose themselves and want to act among their equals (Canovan 1978, 17).

The question that Canovan poses is, exactly what would these councils do? Arendt is extremely vague about the exact functions of these councils, and she mainly reiterates the importance of public affairs, which is a comprehensive category. Canovan contends that the distinction between politics and administration is difficult to determine, and not a division that Arendt strictly draws herself (Canovan 1978, 19). Canovan questions how this utopian system would work because, presumably administrative tasks must still take place, such as welfare, economy, and the average business of government (Canovan 1978, 19). She also points out the illogical framework of the councils. She does not understand what happens to the people who are unable or unwilling to participate in the public freedom. She calls attention to if these élites are not getting paid, because that would make them professional politicians, then the only members of society that could participate in the political action would be the wealthy or unemployed (Canovan 1978, 19). Canovan notes that although in *On Revolution*, Arendt does not believe that freedom and action exist in the United States, in her later work, she does believe that the student protests during the 1960s were a form of “public happiness” as the 18th century understood it (Canovan 1978, 19-20).

Canovan’s overall criticism of Arendt is that despite her concern with human dignity and respect, especially in her evaluation of totalitarian governments and thoughtlessness, she is very elitist. Furthermore, Arendt is concerned with the practical elements of politics yet make such an extraordinarily utopian political system (Canovan 1978, 20). The analysis that Canovan extends

is very common observation that readers of Arendt see in her council system. The modern world demands utility and practicality, which is not what Arendt is suggesting here. It frankly reads as unrealistic and fictional.

Conclusion: The Importance of Narrative

This thesis has been attempting to follow the story that Arendt is writing throughout her entire academic career. It has been seeking to interpret and understand Arendt, by classifying her work into two categories: the identification of a problem and her proposed solution. Her work is not chronological but rather a scattered web awaiting scrutiny. In closing this exploration of Arendt's political thought, this thesis will discuss the importance of narrative.

Arendt describes her work as storytelling and often draws on other storytellers to further her political thought (Benhabib 1990, 186). A substantial portion of this thesis was dedicated to Kafka's impact on Arendt. As discussed earlier, Arendt believes that Kafka's narratives are blueprints to reality (Arendt 1994, 77). Arendt accentuates that, "in Kafka's books there is no element of daydreaming or wishful thinking. Only the reader for whom life and the world and man are so complicated, of such terrible interest, that he wants to find out some truth about them and who therefore turns to story-tellers for insight into experiences common to us all", could turn to the stories of Kafka and be exposed to the "naked structure of events" (Arendt 1994, 77). Arendt does conceive of a hopeful element to Kafka's work, one that has been ignored thus far, but fits well into this conclusion. Arendt determines that in Kafka's stories, the protagonist represents "the common man", who acts as an ideal for humanity to aspire towards. The protagonist has a good will that fights against the society, whose goal is functionality. The "common man" acts as a model that reveals, "the hidden structures of society which obviously frustrate the most common needs and destroy the best intentions of man" (Arendt 1994, 76).

Kafka brings the reader hope in a dark world by inspiring them through the model of the “common man” who is capable of reconstructing the world (Arendt 1994, 80). She writes, “and since these heroes are only models of good will and left in anonymity, the abstractness of the general, shown only in the very function good will may have in this world of ours, his novels seems to have a singular appeal, as though he wanted to say: This man of good will may be anybody and everybody, perhaps even you and me” (Arendt 1994, 80). Kafka’s narratives are important because they both expose the functionality-focused nature of the modern world and provides hope to the reader who lives in it.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt writes about the importance of narrative to action. Arendt draws upon the ancient understanding of action as a story that makes up a person’s life. She explains that in the public realm, people may choose to act and to speak. By acting, they are carrying out their own beginning, but that action falls into the web of human relationships that exist in the public sphere. This combination creates the life story of the actor, as well as all the lives they impacted through their action (Arendt 1998, 184). Arendt affirms, “it is because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions, that action almost never achieves its purpose; but it is also because of this medium, in which action alone is real, that it “produces” stories with or without intention as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things” (Arendt 1998, 184). For Arendt, there is no author of the story, but rather it is the action itself that is creating the narrative (Arendt 1998, 184-185).

Arendt was inspired by Ancient Greek theatre to discuss narrative and action. She directs the reader first to Homer, and his formation of the hero. In Homer, a hero was any soldier who participated in the Trojan Enterprise (Arendt 1998, 186). In this same way, the hero is the person who has the courage to act and speak – to leave their own comfort of the private, and enter the

world of appearances. It is in this place, that they will produce their own story. Arendt follows by using Aristotle's theory on theatre from his work, *Poetics* to further discuss narrative and action. Aristotle refers to different playwrights as the same, because dramas "both represent people in direct action" (Aristotle 1448a27-28). He states that dramas are given this name because "they represent people in action" (Aristotle 1448a29-30). Arendt connects this by noting that the revelatory nature of speech and action requires imitation for it to be properly represented. It is because action has this quality of the present that makes drama the essential representation of it (Arendt 1998, 187).

Narrative was important to Arendt because of the atrocious events in Europe during the 20th century. In her major works pertaining to totalitarian government and bureaucracy, i.e., *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt is criticized for failing to employ empirical and historical methodology that would make her assessment more deductive and accurate (Benhabib 1990, 178-179). When Tocqueville visited America, he believed that a new political science was required to explain this unknown political environment. While Arendt is alike in her discernment that totalitarianism is completely new and unprecedented, it is not a science that is required to understand it, but a new narrative (Behabib 1990, 180). She believed that totalitarianism put the individual in a state of aimless wandering, and that only through a story, could the horrors be put into context, and could a future be made (Benhabib 1990, 180).

Her problem with the positivist social sciences of her time was that they led to generalizations, and attempts to establishes laws to the nature of politics and human interaction. She had a moral and political opposition to this approach because she believed that it fails to account for the unprecedented, like the extermination camps produced by the Nazi regime. Arendt understood it to stunt confrontation and resistance to the unprecedented (Benhabib 1990,

184). The analogical thinking is set on creating a normal, routine quality to harness the logic of the everyday (Benhabib 1990, 185). Arendt holds that the narrative permits a moral resonance to the outrageous (Benhabib 1990, 185).

It is indeed narrative that is required for true thinking, which conditions people against evil doing (Benhabib 1990, 187; Arendt 1971, 418). As previously discussed, thinking exists in the gap between past and future. In the modern world, and post-twentieth century, there is an ever-growing gap as the past continues to disunify the narrative. Arendt declares in the “Thinking” section of *The Life of the Mind*, “each new generation, every new human being, as he becomes conscious of being inserted between an infinite past and an infinite future, must discover and ploddingly pave anew the path of thought [...] thus establishing a present for themselves, a kind of timeless time in which men are able to create timeless works with which to transcend their own finiteness” (Arendt 1978, 210-211). Arendt views narrative, a structure of action, as a fundamental human activity, that determines one’s identity (Benhabib 1990, 187-188). She believes people must continue to use narrative to tell the past, and thus interpret it – “narrative is the modality through which time is experienced” (Benhabib 1990, 188). Arendt describes what it is to be the storyteller through Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*:

Full fathom five thy father lies
 Of his bones are coral made,
 Those are pearls that were his eyes
 Nothing of him that doth fade
 But doth suffer a sea-change
 Into something rich and strange (Quoted in Arendt 1978, 212; Benhabib 1990, 188).

Arendt sees her task in writing as shifting through the sea of the past, and making it into, “something rich and strange” (Benhabib 1990, 188; Arendt 1978, 212). Not through a quantitative analysis, but through thoughtful contemplation and creation of a narrative.

Arendt’s work is difficult to make sense of. The 20th century was a period that caused much confusion and despair in the aftermath of WWII. Arendt lived in this period and responded to what she observed in her lifetime. With the assistance of Kafka, Arendt identified the problem and probable cause of the despair suffered by many: modern scientific bureaucracy. This political structure has existed since the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution, but Arendt argues that it crystalized in totalitarianism in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. The extermination camps created by the Nazis represent to Arendt the result of a political system run by “desk murderers” that value productivity and utility over human lives.

After identifying the modern problem, this thesis interpreted thoughtlessness as the symptom which Arendt believes leads to disregard of human life. It found that thoughtlessness is a failure to meet one’s midnight hour, and thrives in functionaries such as Eichmann. The other disregard for human life in the Nazi regime was found in the SS men, who operated on an arbitrary, random basis when considering the lives of their prisoners. The solution to this modern problem is a renewal of freedom and action, by reintroducing the citizenry into the realm of public affairs. Arendt suggests the council system as an adequate replacement to representative democracy. Although often disregarded as utopic, the system provides insight into the aspects of modern democracy that she believes contributed to the atrocities in WWII.

In closing, modern scientific bureaucracy destroys freedom and action. Representative democracy and “desk murderer” functionaries limit the public space to the few, and the many remain disengaged. The bureaucracy submits to a utilitarian approach, where people’s lives

become a matter of business, and organizing the deaths of thousands becomes paperwork. In order to revive freedom and action as it was practiced prior to modernity, there must be a renewal of the public space for all citizens to act within. This could take the form of a council system, but freedom is not mutually exclusive to councils. What is important to Arendt is having the ability to act spontaneously and without a pressure of necessity. Arendt's political thought remains relevant in the contemporary context as "desk murderers" continue to facilitate administrative massacres and public freedom remains the prerogative of the oligarchic few.

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