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Political judgment and the constitution of the common in Arendt

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Abstract

In this text, I examine the relationship between political judgment and the constitution of a common world in the thought of Hannah Arendt. In this analysis, I argue that totalitarianism emerged from processes of social atomization and isolation. These processes destroyed shared reality by eliminating plural perspectives and common sense. For Arendt, reality is dependent on a common world sustained by the presence of others who perceive and interpret it differently. The present study aims to elucidate Arendt's concept of understanding as an ongoing, imaginative process through which individuals achieve a state of reconciliation with reality, independently of fixed categories. This capacity is closely linked to judgment, especially as developed through Arendt's reading of Immanuel Kant. Reflective judgment, grounded in imagination, enables individuals to consider multiple perspectives and form opinions within a shared public space. Totalitarian regimes destroy both the common world and the capacity for judgment by fostering loneliness, ideological uniformity, and the collapse of distinctions between truth and falsehood. In contrast, political judgment depends on plurality and communicability. It requires adopting an "enlarged mentality" that considers the viewpoints of others. I ultimately argue that the common world is both the condition of and the product of political judgment. This world is constituted through interaction, speech, and the exchange of perspectives. I conclude that sustaining this shared world is essential in contemporary contexts marked by fragmentation because the loss of plurality erodes reality and political life itself.

Introduction

In *The origins of totalitarianism*, Arendt argues that the process of political disintegration that paved the way for totalitarian domination was characterized by social atomization and political isolation, ultimately consolidated by the total dominance of a single ideological perspective. Totalitarian regimes brought together isolated individuals who had nothing in common except for the coercive force of ideology. In *The human condition*, Arendt emphasizes that reality is constituted by what is seen and heard by ourselves and others. The presence of others who see and hear the same things guarantees us the reality of the world and of ourselves. Our sense of reality thus relies on the existence of a common, shared world. Only by sharing a common human world with

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others who observe it from different perspectives can we see the reality around us and develop a shared common sense. Without this, we are thrown back into our subjective experiences, where only our feelings, needs, and desires are real. The constitution of a common world depends on the ongoing process of understanding through which we seek to reconcile ourselves with reality and feel at home in the world.

In "Understanding and politics" (1954), Arendt establishes an initial connection between understanding and judgment with reference to Kant. For her, it was crucial to emphasize the importance of understanding our reality without relying on the categories of thought and the rules of judgment that constituted tradition and were destroyed by totalitarianism. Just as we are free because we are initiators – capable of beginning something anew – we are likewise capable of understanding without the mediation of preconceived categories. Understanding, for Arendt, is the counterpart to action; it is made possible by our capacity for imagination, which enables us to adopt the standpoint of others, to bring the distant closer and to take critical distance from what is near. For Arendt, political thought is representative because the more I am able to imagine the positions of those who are absent, the more comprehensive my understanding becomes. Arendt later develops these insights in her *Lectures on Kant's political philosophy* and *The life of the mind*, where she appropriates Kant's notion of reflective judgment and reinterprets it as a communitarian sense – judgment that is perspectival and that always presupposes a community of judging subjects. In this text, I aim to explore the connection between this perspectival judgment and the constitution of the common world.

Totalitarianism and understanding

Arendt's reflections on judgment in dialogue with Kant in her *Lectures on Kant's political philosophy* are well known, and many often regard this course as the unfinished third part of *The life of the mind*. However, Arendt's concern with understanding and judgment runs throughout her entire work, and her dialogue with Kant on this topic predates the conception of the *Lectures* by many years. Already in the brief original preface to *The origins of totalitarianism*, Arendt emphasizes the central importance of her concern with understanding – not only diagnosing the failure of common sense and of our traditional standards of judgment, but also indicating that such a condition demands the capacity to face extreme events without preconceived categories. This, in turn, requires the courage not to yield to the temptation of the totalizing narratives of tradition and the philosophies of history, which, though discredited by the totalitarian experience, continue to cast their shadow over the prevailing modes of thought. In her words:

> the conviction that everything that happens on earth must be comprehensible to man can lead to interpreting history by commonplaces. Comprehension does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalities that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are.no longer felt. It means, rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us – neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the

> unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality – whatever it may be (Arendt, 2004, p. xxvi).

This conviction that the first step toward understanding totalitarianism lies in recognizing that we are forsaken by the old order of the world and in confronting events in their singular dimension reappears in the text "Social science techniques and the study of concentration camps" (1950), published alongside *The origins of totalitarianism*, and, above all, in the essay "Understanding and politics" (1954). In this text, Arendt asserts that understanding has no end and produces no definitive results; it accompanies our existence from birth to death, for we must constantly reconcile ourselves not only with extreme events such as totalitarianism, but with the very world in which such events – and others – are possible. Arendt argues that understanding "is the specifically human way of being alive; for every single person needs to be reconciled to a world into which he was born a stranger and in which, to the extent of his distinct uniqueness, he always remains a stranger" (Arendt, 1994, p. 308).

It is not only because of totalitarianism that Arendt insists on understanding as a permanent openness to the singularity of events. For her, a historian who believes in causality – the crudest of all preconceived categories, in her words (Arendt, 1994, pp. 319-320) – is denying both the subject matter of their own field of knowledge and human freedom itself. Such a historian should instead take on the task of "detect this unexpected *new* with all its implications in any given period and to bring out the full power of its significance" (Arendt, 1994, p. 320, Grifos no original). The conviction that every event can be assimilated into general trends or reduced to generalizations and categorizations makes it impossible to grasp the meaning of events as "something irrevocably new," and "history without events becomes the dead monotony of sameness, unfolded in time" (Arendt, 1994, p. 320).

The assumption that even totalitarianism must be comprehensible, announced in the preface to *The Origins of Totalitarianism* – despite being an event that "have clearly exploded our categories of political thought and our standards for moral judgment" (Arendt, 1994, p. 310) – is reaffirmed beautifully in a passage from *Understanding and Politics*, in which Arendt connects understanding, judgment, and natality:

> even though we have lost yardsticks by which to measure, and rules under which to subsume the particular, a being whose essence is beginning may have enough of origin within himself to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the set of customary rules which is morality. If the essence of all, and in particular of political, action is to make a new beginning, then understanding becomes the other side of action, namely, that form of cognition, distinct from many others, by which acting men (and not men who are engaged in contemplating some progressive or doomed course of history) eventually can come to terms with what irrevocably happened and be reconciled with what unavoidably exists (Arendt, 1994, p. 321).

Arendt points out that it is not only because of the rupture historically established by totalitarianism that we must seek a way of dealing with events that takes their singularity and novelty as a starting point. Understanding is "the other side of action" because it represents our way of feeling at home, through constant effort, in a world that is

continually transformed by events engendered by human action. She concludes "Understanding and politics" by interpreting the "understanding heart" that King Solomon asked God for in the Bible as the "faculty of imagination", the internal compass that guides us in the world. For her, "we are contemporaries only so far as our understanding reaches" and this is because

> imagination alone enables us to see things in their proper perspective, to be strong enough to put that which is too close at a certain distance so that we can see and understand it without bias and prejudice, to be generous enough to bridge abysses of remoteness until we can see and understand everything that is too far away from us as though it were our own affair. This distancing of some things and bridging the abysses to others is part of the dialogue of understanding, for whose purposes direct experience establishes too close a contact and mere knowledge erects artificial barriers (Arendt, 1994, p. 323).

In her analysis of the totalitarian phenomenon, Arendt devoted particular attention to the condition of the masses and the reasons behind their massive engagement in totalitarian movements. She argued that such movements become possible only when there are masses of socially superfluous or interchangeable individuals who, especially in times of crisis, develop a taste for political organization without, however, being mobilized by any common interest (Arendt, 2004, p. 414). These masses were composed of discontented and desperate individuals, whose numbers were multiplied by the hyperinflation and unemployment that followed military defeat, as was the case in Germany. Under such conditions, the collapse of the European class system gave rise to the transformation of dormant majorities into a furious and disorganized crowd, intent on identifying and punishing those deemed responsible for their precarious situation.

The members of totalitarian movements were recruited from this mass of seemingly apathetic and indifferent individuals who, precisely because of their exclusion from political life and consequent lack of experience in political debate, were unable to "refute opposing arguments" and did not consider this necessary, as they "consistently preferred methods which ended in death rather than persuasion, which spelled terror rather than conviction" (Arendt, 2004, p. 415). These were "people who either because of sheer numbers, or indifference, or a combination of both, cannot be integrated into any organization based on common interest, into political parties or municipal governments or professional organizations or trade unions" (Arendt, 2004, p. 414). These masses directed their diffuse rage against all political parties and the "talkative articulation" (Arendt, 2004, p. 431) of the parliamentary representative system.

Arendt argues that "the chief characteristic of the mass man is not brutality and backwardness, but his isolation and lack of normal social relationships" (Arendt, 2004, p. 367), in which common interests are shared with others who endure the same hardships. Each individual among the masses thrown into misery perceived their own suffering as a sign of personal failure and specific injustice, thereby failing to establish any common bond with the multitude who shared the same precarious condition. Paradoxically, this individualized suffering led to a weakening of the instinct for self-preservation, so that "selflessness, in the sense that oneself does not matter, the feeling of being expendable, was no longer the expression of individual idealism but a mass phenomenon" (Arendt,

2004, p. 419). Arendt attributes much of the extreme fanaticism of members of totalitarian movements to this self-abandonment of individuals who are entirely willing to sacrifice themselves for the movement.

"Totalitarian movements are mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals" (Arendt, 2004, p. 429), Arendt argues, and they are able to demand the kind of unconditional loyalty that constitutes the psychological basis of total domination because their ideology aims at the total organization of the human species, such that no individual possesses real significance outside the movement. All the dignity an individual was capable of was framed within the horizon of total loyalty to the movement, which was made possible precisely because the movement lacked a clear program about which people could change their minds. Such loyalty can only be expected "from the completely isolated human being who, without any other social ties to family, friends, comrades, or even mere acquaintances, derives his sense of having a place in the world only from his belonging to a movement, his membership in the party" (Arendt, 2004, p. 429).

Ideology brings people together without creating bonds of shared conviction or common consent, while terror transforms the public isolation of the masses into loneliness, which shatters even private ties. As terror ruins all relationships between individuals, ideology, by imposing uniformity of thought, annihilates all connection to reality, which can only arise through a plurality of perspectives. Thus, the ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the ideologically committed individual, "but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist" (Arendt, 2004, p. 610).

This ideal subject was multiplied by the totalitarian government through propaganda. The primary function of propaganda was to engage the masses in the totalitarian movements, which sought through it to appear plausible in a non-totalitarian world where the masses still had access to alternative sources of information (Arendt, 2004, p. 450). Totalitarian propaganda refined the techniques of commercial mass propaganda but also benefited from themes developed by imperialism and the disintegration of the nation-state, such that "mysteriousness as such became the first criterion for the choice of topics" (Arendt, 2004, p. 462). Many of these mysteries were related to hidden conspiracies and secret societies, which resonated with the masses' assumption that everything respectable and official was in fact concealing the true reality. These also included scandals involving high society and the corruption of public figures, which totalitarian propaganda claimed to unmask: "the mob really believed that truth was whatever respectable society had hypocritically passed over, or covered up with corruption" (Arendt, 2004p. 462). Their alienation from political participation in a representative party system, in which there was no room for any direct engagement or debate, only reinforced their susceptibility to conspiratorial discourses.

The susceptibility of the masses to this type of propaganda has to do, Arendt argues, with the typical lack of trust of the masses in everything that is visible,

> in the reality of their own experience; they do not trust their eyes and ears but only their imaginations, which may be caught by anything that is at once universal and consistent in itself (…). What the masses refuse to recognize is the fortuitousness

> that pervades reality. They are predisposed to all ideologies because they explain facts as mere examples of laws and eliminate coincidences by inventing an all-embracing omnipotence which is supposed to be at the root of every accident. Totalitarian propaganda thrives on this escape from reality into fiction, from coincidence into consistency (Arendt, 2004, p. 462).

This susceptibility is entirely related to the deprivation of a place in the world experienced by the masses and the consequent collapse of common sense, which constantly reminds us that coherence is not what ultimately constitutes reality – a reality marked by accidental and incomprehensible aspects. Propaganda can vilify common sense precisely because it has lost its validity in a world where the masses are forced to live without occupying any meaningful place within it. For Arendt, the revolt of the masses against "realism" and common sense "was the result of their atomization, of their loss of social status along with which they lost the whole sector of communal relationships in whose framework common sense makes sense" (Arendt, 2004, pp. 463-464), finding themselves in a state of total social and spiritual homelessness.

To the political isolation produced by all forms of tyranny, totalitarianism adds loneliness in human life as a whole, so that totalitarian domination represents a new form of government also because "it bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man" (Arendt, 2004, p. 612). Isolation "is that impasse into which men are driven when the political sphere of their lives, where they act together in the pursuit of a common concern, is destroyed" (Arendt, 2004, p. 611). The loneliness that serves as the common foundation for both the terror and the ideology, which constitute the core of totalitarian domination, is profoundly connected to the uprooting ("to have no place in the world, recognized and guaranteed by others") and superfluousness ("not to belong to the world at all") of modern masses after the Industrial Revolution, but it is also something deliberately produced by totalitarian regimes. This is decisive because

> even the experience of the materially and sensually given world depends upon my being in contact with other men, upon our common sense which regulates and controls all other senses and without which each of us would be enclosed in his own particularity of sense data which in themselves are unreliable and treacherous. Only because we have common sense, that is only because not one man, but men in the plural inhabit the earth, can we trust our immediate sensual experience (Arendt, 2004, p. 613).

Reality and common world

These elaborations from "Ideology and terror" (1953), a text added to the second edition of *The origins of totalitarianism* (1958), are deeply connected to *The human condition*, published in the same year. In the section addressing the common world within the chapter on the public and private realms, Arendt argues that what constitutes reality is "something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves," and therefore, "the presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves" (Arendt, 2018, p. 50):

> the reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised. For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. (…). Only Where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear." (Arendt, 2018, p. 57).

As in *The origins of totalitarianism*, in *The human condition* Arendt links the perception of the reality of the world to active plural coexistence. This reality coincides to a large extent with the public sphere of existence. However, even when dealing with what can only be experienced in privacy or intimacy, she asserts that only when we talk about them do they acquire a reality that cannot be compensated for by the intensity of the private experience itself – it is more likely that "this intensification will always come to pass at the expense of the assurance of the reality of the world and men" (Arendt, 2018, p. 50). Since our sense of reality depends on what appears simultaneously to ourselves and to others, even the reality of private experiences largely depends on the interaction maintained within the private, social, and public spheres and, ultimately, on the illumination that emanates from the public realm. In its absence, everything becomes more opaque and less apparent – and therefore less real.

Arendt distinguishes between two senses of "public": on the one hand, it consists of everything that is visible, disseminated, and perceived by many, as highlighted above; on the other hand, and in a related way, it consists of the common world we share, without it coinciding with the sum of the positions we occupy privately. This common world is primarily the human artifact in which we gather the set of things we add to the world, constituting what we call civilization and culture. To coexist in this world means having a world of things mediating our relations with each other, from the private to the public, a kind of "in-between": "the public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak" (Arendt, 2018, p. 57). Arendt articulates these two meanings of public by stating that we enter the common world at birth and leave it at death, but the world itself only persists and survives the flow of generations insofar as it appears in public: "it is the publicity of the public realm which can absorb and make shine through the centuries whatever men may want to save from the natural ruin of time" (Arendt, 2018, p. 52).

In the common world, reality is guaranteed by the diversity of perspectives and by a shared concern for the preservation and renewal of the world itself, while such diversity of perspectives is sustained and reinforced through human coexistence, particularly within the public realm. For Arendt, "the end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective" (Arendt, 2018, p. 58), and this may result either from the radical isolation imposed by tyrannies or from the fabricated conformism of mass societies, when each individual merely extends the

perspective of the next. Arendt argues that mass society is difficult to endure precisely because the world between people "has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them" (Arendt, 2018, p. 58).

As she had already indicated in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, mass societies are characterized by worldlessness, both due to the uprooting caused by their alienation from common life and the precariousness of their economic condition, and because individuals within the masses share with the bourgeoisie an idolatry of success within a competitive consumer society. As a result, all the duties and responsibilities of citizenship, within a society of consumers, came to be perceived as a waste of time and effort, and the prevailing attitude toward public life became one of apathy or hostility (see Arendt, 2004, pp. 416-417). The issue, Arendt observes, "is that a consumers' society cannot possibly know how to take care of a world and the things which belong exclusively to the space of worldly appearances, because its central attitude toward all objects, the attitude of consumption, spells ruin to everything it touches" (Arendt, 2006, p. 208). The masses are thus both victims and agents of worldlessness and of the corresponding loss of the sense of reality which is dependent on the exchange of plural perspectives.

Action and speech take place within an objective world constituted by the public realm, which is the space-between human beings (the public sphere, the constitution, political institutions, etc.), but they also unfold within an intersubjective, pre-institutional space-between, formed by the web of human relationships woven by the deeds and words of each agent. This web constitutes the realm of human affairs and is marked by a notable indeterminacy, insofar as it articulates the initiatives of spontaneous agents and, at the same time, reveals the "who" of each agent – the life story that can be narrated from their initiatives and sufferings. Thus, "the reason why we are never able to foretell with certainty the outcome and end of any action is simply that action has no end" (Arendt, 2018, p. 233), "the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation" (Arendt, 2018, p. 190).

Each agent's initiative is both reinforced and also diverted by other initiatives that make up this web, so that although the agent is the initiator, they are never the author of the entire process their action sets in motion: "the stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is not an author or producer. Somebody began it and is its subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely, *its* actor and sufferer, but nobody is its author" (Arendt, 2018, p. 184). In contrast to the activity of fabrication (*poiésis*), whose constitutive elements and effects can be defined unequivocally – from the initial mental plan to the means, such as materials and tools, and finally the finished product, whose realization requires the *techné* of the expert – action is characterized by ambiguity. Indeed, as Jacques Taminiaux affirms,

> Its beginning escapes univocity because it inscribes itself in a preexisting, inherited, network of human interactions and interlocutions. Its process also escapes it because it cannot be dissociated from an indefinite overlapping of the various perspectives, the ones over the others. Its end escapes it no less, because this very overlapping is renewed at the appearing of newcomers. The knowledge that action requires is not expertise, but rather availability to the unpredictable and the unknown.

> As a result of the definite character of the activity, the agent committed to fabrication stands in a position of mastery, dominating the nature he transforms and those subordinates of his or hers who have to obey him or her.
> By contrast, as a result of the ambiguousness of action, the acting individual never stands in the position of mastery, he is always a patient as much as an agent, he is an actor, never an author. Opposed to the predictability of fabrication, the unpredictability of action entails an unsurpassable mixture of knowledge and impossibility to know (Taminiaux, 1997, p. 104).

The ambiguity of human affairs and of the appearance that constitutes their reality is largely mitigated by the persistent exchange of perspectives within a public space. Appearance constitutes reality insofar as it is within a common space, where we act and make our voices heard, that we dispel, at least partially, the nightmare of solipsism and can broaden our perspective. This happens through discursive exchange with others and through the imagination that enables us to visit other perspectives, thereby expanding our capacity to judge and to experience the reality of the world. Even though this is our ultimate instance, it never renders the world, events, or someone's identity fully transparent to the spectator, who – no matter how great their imagination or how wide their mentality – never steps outside the play of the world, never emits judgments that are not perspectival.

It is the plurality of spectators who observe the world and issue judgments about it in a public realm that guarantees the reality of the world. Opinions and judgments contribute decisively to the weaving of the web of human relationships that constitute this common world, which is not objective, but intersubjective and real, and which constantly requires the renewal of co-presence for its continued existence. In her essay "Truth and politics", Arendt returns to this theme conclusively:

> political thought is representative. I form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to · my mind the standpoints of those who are absent; that is, I represent them. This process of representation does not blindly adopt the actual views of those who stand somewhere else, and hence look upon the world from a different perspective; this is a question neither of empathy, as though I tried to be or to feel like somebody else, nor of counting noses and joining a majority but of being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not. The more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinion (Arendt, 2006, p. 237).

Judgment and imagination

When Hannah Arendt first taught a course on Kant's political philosophy in 1955, she had not yet fully addressed the question of judgment, although several features of her later characterization of judgment and imagination had already appeared in the 1953 essay "Understanding and politics" in the concept of understanding, as we have seen. It is Arendt herself who already establishes in this text, with reference to Kant, a connection

between understanding and judgment – interpreted as the capacity to attribute meaning to particulars – as well as between imagination and "enlarged mentality". This articulation would resonate many years later in her *Lectures on Kant's political philosophy*. Only two years after this course on Kant's political philosophy, the *Critique of the Faculty of Judgment* is mentioned in a letter to Jaspers dated August 29, 1957, already in the sense it would occupy for her until the end of her life.

> At the moment I'm reading the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* with increasing fascination. There, and not in the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, is where Kant's real political philosophy is hidden. His praise for "common sense", which is so often scorned; the phenomenon of taste taken seriously as the basic phenomenon of judgment (...); the "expanded mode of thought" that is part and parcel of judgment, so that one can think from someone else's point of view. The demand for communicativeness (Arendt; Jaspers, 1992, p. 318).

In the same letter, Arendt mentions that she was finishing *The human condition* and beginning to work on the text of an introduction to politics, which she had committed to writing for her German publisher (Piper). In a text entitled "Prejudice and judgment" (Arendt, 2003, pp. 17ff), an attempt to advance this project that she never finished, she revisits her reflection on preliminary understanding and true understanding, as it appears in "Understanding and politics," and offers a reflection on judging that already establishes an intense dialogue with Kant. Just as preliminary understanding spares individuals from trying to understand even the most banal situation at every moment, the prejudices we share with others – and about which we can speak without much explanatory effort – spare us from the superhuman state of alertness that would be required if we had to judge everything that happens at every moment. In this light, prejudices, which always to some extent trace back to personal experience, although they involve the risk of actually taking the place of judgment and blocking it, allow for a preliminary understanding of what is presented to us. Thus, although in politics we in fact orient ourselves by judgments and always seek to dissipate prejudices through reflection, prejudices are indispensable to the conduct of normal social life and, to some extent, indissoluble in their entirety.

In this text, Hannah Arendt already draws attention to two senses of judgment: on the one hand, the subordination of the particular, according to criteria, to something general and universal, often based on our prejudices; on the other hand, the evaluation of events and objects for which we have no criteria, either by the very nature of such events and objects or because they represent something with which we have never before come into contact. This second mode of judging, which she already describes as analogous to aesthetic judgment as presented by Kant, relies solely on the evidence of what is being judged and presupposes human discernment, understood more as the capacity to distinguish than as the capacity to order and subsume (see Arendt, 2003, pp. 22-23). Here she also mentions this capacity as fundamental to orientation in a world where the criteria by which one used to judge have collapsed, but she considers this loss catastrophic only if one does not trust in the human capacity for original judgment, as she formulated in "Understanding and politics".

In his response to the aforementioned letter, Jaspers invited Hannah Arendt to a seminar in which they would work together on Kant's *Critique of judgment*. This did not

come to pass, but in 1964, at the University of Chicago, Arendt taught a course on Kant's political philosophy based on the *Critique of judgment*, already presupposing that Kant did not write a political philosophy *per se* and that what is commonly regarded as his political philosophy – his writings on history, theory and practice, perpetual peace, the doctrine of right, etc. – is not fundamental to his work. She further assumed that if there is any hidden political philosophy in Kant, it must be sought not in those writings nor even in the *Critique of practical reason*, but in the *Critique of judgment*. This course formed the basis for another course taught in 1970 at the New School for Social Research, which was edited by Ronald Beiner and published in 1982 under the title *Lectures on Kant's political philosophy*.

The reasons why Hannah Arendt considers Kant's aesthetic reflective judgment as akin to politics are fundamentally the following: it deals with the particular as particular and always presupposes the presence of others. When I judge, I always do so as a member of a community (Arendt, 1992, p. 75). If taste is a kind of *sensus communis*, or community sense, as Arendt intended, then when I make aesthetic reflective judgments, I always have in mind the presence of others. As Kant stated, "the fact that man is affected by the sheer beauty of nature proves that he is made for and fits into this world" (quoted by Arendt, 1992, p. 41). Likewise, it may be said that the mere fact that one is capable of judging from a general standpoint indicates that one is fit not only to be with oneself, but also with others.

When Arendt discusses in her *Lectures on Kant's political philosophy* the properties of aesthetic reflective judgment, as they appear in the *Critique of judgment*, and seeks to make explicit their affinities with the political sphere or the potentially political character of their operation, she conceives of the faculty of imagination not merely as the capacity to make present in the mind, in images, objects that are no longer sensibly present, but also as the ability to represent in thought the standpoint of all others who inhabit the world – who thereby become virtually present and are effectively taken into account in the formulation of a judgment.

For Kant, the maxim of the faculty of judgment is an enlarged mentality, that is, the ability to think in the place of others, to leave behind the private subjective conditions of one's own judgment and to adopt a way of thinking that takes into account the expansion of the mind to the point where the one who judges is capable of suspending themselves. This implies setting aside self-interest, and attempting to assume a general standpoint that considers the perspectives of all others, not through empathy, but through the abstraction from the limitations of one's own judgment. This is, moreover, the very condition of impartiality, as conceived by Hannah Arendt.

For her, critical thinking – that is, thinking that exposes itself to free and open examination and does not even spare itself from its own caustic power, thinking that is eminently anti-authoritarian and open – implies communicability and cannot occur without imagination. Through imagination, I go out to visit other points of view and can acquire a general standpoint (a term she prefers over "universal" to translate *allgemein*), intrinsically connected to the particular perspectives I have visited: "to think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one's imagination to go visiting" (Arendt, 1992, p. 43). Just as Kant asserts that "enlarged mentality" is more a way of thinking than a

property of a broadly endowed mind, Hannah Arendt maintains that when I think from the standpoint of others, rather than merely expanding the domains of my own mind, I expand my own perspective in its highest capacity for impartiality, and "the very quality of an opinion, as of a judgment, depends upon the degree of its impartiality" (Arendt, 2006, p. 237).

Conclusion

Arendt refers to this capacity to imagine other points of view and to form one's own opinion while taking those perspectives into account as "enlarged mentality," welcoming plurality within the very process of forming judgments. Arendt's sensitivity to the constitution of the common is undoubtedly one of the most salient features of her thought in our times of fragmentation and disintegration. It is likely for this reason that such diverse thinkers as Judith Butler and Adriana Cavarero, as well as Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, Christian Laval and Pierre Dardot, have engaged in dialogue with her when reflecting on the possibility and the need of a common interest in the present.

Arendt's claim that judgment depends on the plural common world for its formation, and that this very common world is also sustained and renewed through the exchange of plural opinions and judgments, is currently very critical. To the objective in-between space of laws and institutions, for example, corresponds the subjective "in-between" space in which I represent within my mind the plurality of perspectives, as well as the intersubjective in-between space in which I express my judgments within a realm shared with the presence of other actors and judges:

> of course, I can refuse to do this and form an opinion that takes only my own interests, or the interests of the group to which I belong, into account; nothing, indeed, is more common, even among highly sophisticated people, than the blind obstinacy that becomes manifest in lack of imagination and failure to judge (Arendt, 2006, p. 237).

If this is the case, it is very likely that oppressed groups engaged in struggles for justice may be unable to form any common bond except with the narrowly defined community of those who already share their premises, vocabulary, and perspectives, and may be incapable of imagining connections with individuals and other with similar demands that could become common.

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