



ARENDT'S THEORY OF JUDGMENT: CHOICE AS THE FAULT LINE BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

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ETHICAL DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have conducted my work in accordance with academic rules and ethical behaviour at every stage from the planning of the thesis to its defence. I confirm that I have cited all ideas, information and findings that are not specific to my study, as required by the code of ethical behaviour, and that all statements not cited are my own.

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ABSTRACT

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The actor-spectator divide in Hannah Arendt's theory of judgment remains one of the most contested issues in the secondary literature. Scholars have long debated the tension between judgment as a retrospective faculty tied to the spectator's gaze and its potential as a forward-looking guide for action. This divide encapsulates the dual character of judgment, with critics highlighting the apparent contradiction between its political application in Arendt's early works and its contemplative focus in her later thought. At the heart of these debates lies the unresolved question of how judgment transitions from being an essential component of political action to a solitary, reflective activity. This thesis seeks to address this enduring controversy by tracing the origins and reasons behind this shift in Arendt's conception of judgment. It explores the introduction of the faculty of the will and its impact on the functions that had hitherto been assigned to judgment. Specifically, the thesis argues that this transformation arises from Arendt's reconfiguration of the mental faculties, particularly the relegation of the power of choice—initially assigned to judgment—to the will. By examining key

texts, including *Between Past and Future*, *Freedom and Politics*, *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, and *The Life of the Mind*, this study identifies the critical junctures in Arendt's thought and provides a comprehensive analysis of the philosophical motivations underlying this evolution. Through this, it aims to illuminate the broader implications of the actor-spectator divide and its centrality to Arendt's unfinished project on judgment.

Keywords: Arendt, Kant, judgment, judging, will, willing, choice, decision, arbitration, arbiter.



ÖZET

ARENDT'İN YARGI TEORİSİ: GEÇMİŞ VE GELECEK ARASINDAKİ FAY HATTI OLARAK SEÇİM

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Hannah Arendt'in yargı teorisindeki “aktör-seyirci” (actor-spectator) ayrımı, ikincil literatürde en çok tartışılan meselelerden biri olmaya devam etmektedir. Akademisyenler, yargının retrospektif bir yeti olarak izleyicinin bakışına bağlı kalırken, geleceğe yönelik bir rehber olma potansiyeli taşıyan eylemsel işlevi arasındaki gerilimi uzun süredir tartışmaktadır. Bu ayrım, Arendt'in düşüncesinde yargının hem siyasi hem de zihinsel bir etkinlik olarak çift yönlü karakterini temsil eder. Eleştirmenler, bu gerilimin Arendt'in düşüncesinin *Zihnî Yaşamı* (*The Life of the Mind*) bağlamında, *vita activa*'dan *vita contemplativa*'ya geçişi sırasında yaşanan değişimi yansıttığını savunmaktadır. Bu tez, yargı anlayışındaki bu değişimin kökenlerini ve nedenlerini tespit etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Yargıya özgü işlevlerin, Arendt'in zihinsel yetiler ailesine istenç (*will*) yetisinin eklenmesiyle nasıl dönüştüğünü araştırmaktadır. Tez, yargının temel işlevlerinden biri olan “seçim gücü”nün istenç yetisine devredilmesinin bu değişimin merkezinde yer aldığını savunmaktadır. *Geçmişle Gelecek Arasında, Özgürlük ve Politika, Bazı Ahlak*

Felsefesi Soruları ve Zihnin Yaşamı gibi temel metinler ışığında, bu çalışma Arendt'in düşüncesindeki bu dönüşümün felsefi motivasyonlarını inceleyerek, aktör-seyirci ayrımının onun yargı teorisindeki temel rolünü ve çözülmemiş gerilimlerini aydınlatmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arendt, Kant, yargı, istenç, irade, seçim, tercih.



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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Topic and Its Significance

Hannah Arendt's unwritten theory of judgment remains one of the most significant and enigmatic gaps in 20th-century thought. Intended as the third and final volume of *The Life of the Mind*, this project marked a substantial philosophical departure from her earlier work. Whereas Arendt's previous writings primarily engaged with political theory and praxis, *The Life of the Mind* represented a clear shift toward more abstract philosophical explorations. Although Arendt consistently distanced herself from the title "philosopher," preferring instead the designation "political theorist," she nevertheless ventured deeply into philosophical territory—the theory of the mind—to confront profound questions that had preoccupied her for decades. In this final work, she intended to address complex questions that not only defined her intellectual pursuits but also profoundly influenced the broader political and philosophical discourse of her era.

Unfortunately, Arendt passed away before writing the third volume. The piece of paper found in her typewriter at her death, bearing the heading "Judging" and two epigraphs, signifies that the problem of judgment remained a primary concern until her last moments. Her unfinished work has since attracted substantial scholarly attention, notably through Ronald Beiner's compilation of Arendt's manuscripts into *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, accompanied by an interpretive essay by Beiner himself. This contribution significantly clarifies the direction Arendt intended to take in her unwritten text, yet interpretation and conjecture remain necessary due to the incomplete nature of her final reflections.

This thesis examines one of the most persistent tensions in Hannah Arendt's political and philosophical thought: the divide between the actor and the spectator in her evolving conception of judgment. This divide—between judgment as a faculty oriented toward future action, and judgment as a reflective, retrospective capacity—has become a focal point in the secondary literature. Scholars such as Ronald Beiner and Richard Bernstein have described it as a "flagrant contradiction" at the heart of Arendt's thought. Others have attempted to minimize, reconcile, or reinterpret it. But

what remains clear is that this division, once noticed, becomes difficult to ignore. It cuts across Arendt's corpus and remains unresolved at the end of her life.

The central argument of this work is that this actor-spectator divide reflects a deeper structural fault line in Arendt's philosophy—one that originates not from inconsistency, nor from a merely interpretive problem in the secondary literature, but from a conceptual reconfiguration: namely, the introduction of the will as a distinct mental faculty. I argue that as Arendt develops her philosophy of mind, the faculty of choice, originally grounded in judgment, is gradually reassigned to the will. This shift strips judgment of its action-guiding function and confines it to retrospective evaluation. In short, the fault line is not only thematic or terminological—it is architectural.

More specifically, I argue that this reconfiguration stems from Arendt's critical engagement with Kant's moral philosophy. Arendt faults Kant for subordinating the will to reason, treating it not as autonomous, but as a faculty determined by rational law. She interprets Kant's moral theory as involving a "self-misunderstanding": by framing the moral law as a command of reason, Kant, in Arendt's view, conflates moral obligation with natural necessity. As a result, she sees Kant's conception of the will as bound by the law of reason in the same way that nature is bound by causal law. This conflation—between the law of freedom and the law of nature—leads Arendt to reject any model in which reason legislates for the will. To preserve the autonomy of the will, she effectively severs it from rational determination. But this move, I argue, has profound consequences for Arendt's theory of judgment: it removes judgment from its role in guiding action and displaces the faculty of choice onto an unanchored, radically autonomous will.

This turn toward a mental faculty of volition—toward an inner, spontaneous power of willing—did not emerge in a vacuum. It was catalyzed by a concrete political event: the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann. Arendt attended the trial as a reporter for *The New Yorker*, and what shocked her most was not the magnitude of Eichmann's crimes but the banality of the man himself. She expected to encounter a fanatic or a monster. Instead, she saw a bureaucrat: someone who used cliché in place of thought, who acted without reflection, and who insisted he had merely followed orders.

Arendt diagnosed this condition as “thoughtlessness,” and it was this term that marked a decisive shift in her intellectual trajectory. Confronted with a new form of evil—an evil rooted not in ideology but in mental emptiness—she turned inward. Her earlier concern with political action gave way to a deeper investigation into the mental faculties that condition moral and political responsibility. This is what led her to begin *The Life of the Mind*—a trilogy on Thinking, Willing, and Judging.

The originality of my approach lies in tracing the fault line introduced by this inward turn across three distinct phases of Arendt’s work: her early theory of political judgment in *Between Past and Future*, her transitional engagement with moral philosophy in *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, and her final systematic articulation of the will in *The Life of the Mind*. Rather than treating the actor–spectator divide as a merely interpretive problem, I treat it as a symptom of a philosophical shift in Arendt’s thinking about the faculties of mind and their relation to freedom, action, and responsibility.

In doing so, my thesis contributes to the secondary literature by reframing the debate: instead of asking whether Arendt’s theory of judgment is consistent, I ask why it changed, and what conceptual pressures drove that change. This perspective allows us to better understand not only the status of judgment in Arendt’s late thought, but also the internal tensions that arise from her attempt to preserve both the autonomy of mental faculties and the coherence of political responsibility.

1.2 Scope of the Thesis

The four texts previously mentioned will be discussed across the three main chapters of this thesis: Chapters 3, 4, and 5. My analysis of Arendt’s concept of judgment will begin with what Ronald Beiner has termed as her early theory of judgment. In Chapter 3, I will first examine Arendt’s *Between Past and Future* (1961), highlighting the primary characteristics and functions she attributes to the faculty of judgment. Particular attention will be paid to how judgment, in this work, connects to action and politics through its “arbitrating” and “deciding” functions. Additionally, I will briefly analyze her earlier essay “*Freedom and Politics*,” to clarify how Arendt initially conceptualized the relationship between judgment and other mental faculties, thereby providing further context to the development evident in her later writings. This initial

exploration will lay the groundwork necessary to identify and contrast significant shifts and continuities in Arendt's subsequent theoretical evolution.

The second work this thesis will focus on is the lecture series *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, delivered in the mid-1960s. I will argue that in this work, we find the seeds of the shift that Arendt's thought will later undergo. This work serves as a transition point between Arendt's early and late theories, and its explication provides the first insights into the causes behind this later shift. Of particular importance to the aims of this thesis are two key aspects of the work: first, the introduction of the will as a separate faculty, which had previously been absent from Arendt's thought. We will observe that the emergence of the faculty of the will in this work leads to contention between the will and judgment regarding the arbitrating and deciding functions, which had previously been assigned to judgment. Second, Arendt's significant criticism of Kant concerning the relationship between the will and reason. While I believe this criticism may be unjustified, it provides valuable insight into Arendt's evolving views. I will argue that this criticism is a primary factor behind the subsequent shift in Arendt's conception of judgment.

The third and final work this thesis will examine is *The Life of the Mind*, specifically the *Willing* volume, where I argue the underlying cause for the shift from Arendt's early to late theory of judgment takes effect. I will demonstrate how judgment, in this later period, is relegated exclusively to evaluating past events, becoming entirely detached from the realm of action. The cause behind this crucial shift lies in Arendt's reassignment of the power of choice—referred to as "decision" in *Between Past and Future*—from the faculty of judgment to the faculty of the will. Previously, decision-making had been an integral function of judgment itself, directly influencing action, a feature characteristic of what we have identified as her early theory. In *The Life of the Mind*, however, Arendt explicitly classifies this function of decision under the will alone, thereby severing the direct connection judgment formerly had with action. This change represents a defining characteristic of Arendt's later theory of judgment.

I will therefore analyze the *Willing* volume to identify and critically examine the significance of this theoretical development. Conversely, the *Thinking* volume will be excluded from this thesis because, in Arendt's conception, thinking inherently

withdraws from the world of appearances and tends toward abstraction and generalization, having no immediate relation to particular events or practical action.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis comprises six chapters, beginning with this introduction. Chapter 2 provides an overview of interpretations and criticisms of Arendt's judgment theory within existing scholarship, establishing the theoretical context. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 progressively analyze Arendt's evolving conceptualization of judgment in key texts. Together, these chapters form a cumulative argument clarifying how and why Arendt's theory of judgment underwent its notable shift. Chapter 6 presents the thesis's conclusions, synthesizing the preceding analyses and underscoring the significance of the will's introduction as the decisive factor behind the transformation of Arendt's thought on judgment.

CHAPTER 2: IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM: A SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The actor-spectator divide in Hannah Arendt's theory of judgment has long been a point of contention in secondary literature. Scholars have debated whether this distinction marks a fundamental shift in her thinking or whether it is an artificial construction imposed by later interpreters. The core of the issue lies in whether judgment should be understood as a retrospective faculty belonging to the spectator, who evaluates past actions, or as an active faculty tied to the actor, who exercises judgment in the realm of politics. This tension raises fundamental questions about the nature of Arendtian judgment and its relationship to political life.

Several prominent scholars—such as Ronald Beiner and Richard Bernstein—have argued that this divide is essential for understanding Arendt's late thought, particularly in *The Life of the Mind*, where she explicitly distinguishes judgment from action. Others, however, reject this divide, either by arguing for a more continuous development in Arendt's thought or by shifting focus to other dimensions of judgment, such as its moral or aesthetic qualities. Some of these critics do not directly refute the existence of an actor/spectator divide but instead gloss over its significance, treating it as a secondary or misleading concern.

This chapter explores the scholarly debate surrounding the actor-spectator divide in Hannah Arendt's theory of judgment. It first outlines and assesses the arguments of those who affirm the existence of this divide as a fundamental shift in Arendt's thought. It then examines critics who either reject or attempt to downplay this distinction. Finally, it considers how Arendt's introduction of the will as an autonomous faculty further complicates this debate, reinforcing rather than resolving the tensions already identified.

The chapter proceeds in three main sections:

- Section 2.2 examines scholars who argue for the actor-spectator divide.
- Section 2.3 analyzes critical perspectives attempting to minimize or reject this distinction.

- Section 2.4 addresses the impact of Arendt's conception of the will on this ongoing debate, assessing whether it resolves or deepens existing theoretical ambiguities.

2.2 Scholars Defending the Actor-Spectator Divide

The actor-spectator divide in Arendt's theory of judgment is one of the most contentious issues in the secondary literature. At its core, the problem concerns the relationship between judgment and action: Is judgment a faculty that belongs to the actor, guiding political decision-making and shaping the course of events? Or is it, as Arendt's later work suggests, a faculty of the spectator, who retrospectively evaluates past actions without directly intervening in the political realm? This tension is particularly pronounced when one considers Arendt's shift from the *vita activa*—the life of action—to the *vita contemplativa*—the life of the mind—in her final, unfinished project on judgment.

Ronald Beiner was among the first scholars to frame the actor-spectator divide as a central feature of Arendt's theory of judgment. In his interpretive essay in *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Beiner argues that Arendt's early understanding of judgment is embedded in political action, where individuals judge in a shared public space. However, in her later thought, particularly in *The Life of the Mind*, judgment takes on a different role: it becomes an activity of the spectator, detached from action and concerned with retrospective meaning-making. Beiner highlights this transition as a significant shift in Arendt's thought, marking a departure from her earlier emphasis on political engagement.

Similarly, Richard Bernstein underscores the apparent contradiction in Arendt's treatment of judgment. He notes that Arendt describes judgment both as a political faculty, essential to collective deliberation, and as a reflective activity undertaken by an isolated thinker. For Bernstein, this contradiction is not merely a matter of terminology but reflects a deeper theoretical tension that remains unresolved in Arendt's work. He suggests that this tension arises from Arendt's engagement with Kant, whose aesthetic theory of judgment she appropriates but never fully integrates into her broader political philosophy.

Other scholars, such as Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Dana Villa, have also identified this divide as a critical issue in interpreting Arendt's theory of judgment. While some view it as an inconsistency that weakens her overall argument, others see it as a necessary evolution in her thinking, reflecting the complex interplay between political action and reflective judgment.

Additionally, the introduction of the faculty of the will into Arendt's conceptual architecture further complicates this debate. In her later writings, particularly *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt assigns functions previously attributed to judgment—such as choice and decision-making—to the will. This reconfiguration shifts judgment's role decisively toward retrospective evaluation, reinforcing the divide between the active faculties (will, action) and reflective ones (judgment, contemplation). Scholars examining Arendt's conception of the will thus find themselves confronted with critical questions: does the emergence of the will reinforce the actor-spectator divide, or does it offer a more coherent integration of judgment within her theory of the mental faculties?

By tracing how scholars have articulated this problem and considering Arendt's introduction of the will, we can better understand the stakes of the debate. The following sections will examine the arguments for and against the actor-spectator divide, exploring whether it constitutes a genuine conceptual shift or an interpretive imposition on Arendt's work.

Among scholars who address the actor-spectator divide, Richard Bernstein offers perhaps the clearest and most compelling articulation of the problem. Bernstein identifies this divide not merely as an interpretive subtlety, but as a "flagrant contradiction" that cuts directly to the heart of Hannah Arendt's philosophical project. His analysis vividly illustrates how judgment oscillates ambiguously between active political engagement and detached contemplation, encapsulating a tension that Arendt herself never fully resolved.

Bernstein identifies a fundamental contradiction in Arendt's conception of judgment. On the one hand, Arendt explicitly defines judgment as "a specifically political ability" (Arendt, 1969, p. 221), closely linked to active participation in public life. Yet, on the other hand, she characterizes judgment as the contemplative mental activity of the spectator, who remains detached and seeks primarily to understand the meaning behind

the spectacle of human affairs. Bernstein succinctly captures this tension when he writes, "Judging is at once the faculty par excellence of those who participate and engage in action and the faculty of non-participating spectators" (Bernstein, 1986, p. 221). Thus, judging simultaneously occupies two seemingly irreconcilable positions: active political engagement and reflective detachment. Bernstein argues that this tension draws us "into the center of her 'problems and new insights,' into her own distinctive project to make sense of the human condition" (Bernstein, 1986, p. 221).

Bernstein further highlights this contradiction through Arendt's analysis of judgment in her essay "The Crisis in Culture." He points out the remarkable ease with which Arendt moves from Greek thought to Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment. Arendt identifies judgment as what the Greeks called *phronesis* regarding it as "the principal virtue or excellence of the statesman," distinct from the speculative wisdom of philosophers. Crucially, she distinguishes judgment by emphasizing its rootedness in "common sense," a form of insight closely tied to practical life rather than speculative reason (BPF, p. 230). Bernstein also notes Arendt's alignment of judgment with persuasive speech, underscoring her assertion that judgment's "'wooing' or persuading corresponds closely to what the Greeks called convincing and persuading speech," thus closely associating judgment with the political activity of debate (BPF, p. 230). In this respect, judgment seems aligned with Aristotle's notion of *phronesis*—a form of practical reasoning dealing explicitly with particulars.

Yet, Bernstein immediately points out significant difficulties that arise when Arendt transitions to Kant's aesthetic judgment. He emphasizes Arendt's insistence that judging is fundamentally "the capacity of the spectator who views and judges human affairs, the human spectacle, not that of the actors who participate" (Bernstein, 1986, p. 231). He notes explicitly: "This does seem flagrantly to contradict the claim that judging is itself not only the political ability par excellence but is a form of action—debate—which Arendt takes to be the essence of politics" (Bernstein, 1986, p. 231). Bernstein thereby pinpoints the unresolved tension: how can judgment simultaneously define active political engagement through debate while also belonging essentially to the contemplative spectator who stands apart from political participation?

Bernstein further underscores this contradiction through a subtle examination of judgment's temporal modality. In political contexts, judging is future-oriented, directed

toward "the decision what manner of action is to be taken in the sphere of public life," yet he emphasizes that Arendt increasingly characterizes judgment as primarily concerned with the past (Bernstein, 1986, p. 231). Bernstein raises essential questions on this point:

"How are we to deal with the strain in her thinking that associates judgment with the form of practical reasoning that the Greeks, and especially Aristotle, call phronesis and the claim that judgment is the mental activity of the non-participating spectator? How are we to explain that in the context of action the temporal modality of judging is the future; while from the perspective of the life of the mind, judging is our faculty for dealing with the past?" (Bernstein, 1986, p. 234).

Bernstein thus vividly highlights the unresolved complexity and enduring significance of the actor-spectator tension in Arendt's theory of judgment.

Ronald Beiner has made one of the most influential and detailed contributions to discussions of Arendt's theory of judgment. Through his careful editorial work and interpretive analysis in the volume *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Beiner published Arendt's lecture notes on Kant, providing crucial insight into her unfinished reflections on judgment. His commentary offers perhaps the most detailed and systematic examination of the actor-spectator tension, paralleling Bernstein's analysis but delving even deeper into textual nuances and philosophical implications. Thus, Beiner complements Bernstein's striking presentation by providing a meticulous and expansive account that further clarifies the complexities of Arendt's thought on judgment.

Beiner, in his seminal interpretive essay published with the Kant Lectures, underscores the complexity by pointing out that Arendt herself appears to offer "not one but two theories of judgment" across her writings. He notes that "beginning in 1970 we can detect a subtle but important reorientation" in Arendt's thought. In her works up to the pivotal 1971 essay "Thinking and Moral Considerations," judgment is primarily considered "from the point of view of the *vita activa*," emphasizing the "representative thought" and "enlarged mentality" of political actors (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 91).

However, from that essay onward, Arendt repositions judgment within the framework of "the life of the mind," prioritizing the role of spectators who engage in "retrospective judgment." The figure of "the blind poet," exemplified by Homer, thus becomes emblematic of this shift toward detached contemplation. Removed from direct engagement, the poet is capable of the "disinterested reflection" essential for impartial judgment, setting the stage for the exemplary impartiality of ancient historians like Herodotus. In highlighting these two distinct theories, Beiner adds further depth to Bernstein's identification of a fundamental tension within Arendt's understanding of judgment.

Beiner further elaborates on the shift by closely examining Arendt's earlier writings. He observes that initially, in essays such as "Freedom and Politics," "The Crisis in Culture," and "Truth and Politics," Arendt employs the notion of judgment primarily "to give further grounding to her conception of political action as a plurality of actors acting in concert in a public space" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 91). In these earlier texts, the faculty of judgment is tied closely to political activity, as human beings act politically precisely because they can "enter into the potential standpoints of others" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 91). Judgment, therefore, becomes essential for political life, as it allows individuals to "share the world with others through judging what is held in common," with the primary objects of these political judgments being the words and deeds that constitute and illuminate the shared public realm (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 91).

Thus far, according to Beiner, "Arendt's theorizing about the nature of judgment has followed a consistent line of development" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 91). However, he identifies "a discernible shift of emphasis" in Arendt's reflections during the 1970s (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 91). In this later period, Arendt no longer emphasizes "the representative thinking of political agents" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 109). Instead, judging becomes increasingly aligned with thinking, a mental activity which, as Arendt notes, "has no political relevance unless special emergencies arise" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 109). Whereas earlier judgment had been associated with "the deliberations of political actors deciding on possible courses of future action," Arendt now reassigns this active deliberation to the faculty of the will (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 109). Judgment, in contrast, is redefined primarily as reflective contemplation of past events,

dealing with what is already given, and thus shares thinking's tendency to arise "in political emergencies" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 109).

Beiner deepens the analysis of Arendt's shifting understanding of judgment by highlighting her conception of the mental faculties as fundamentally autonomous. In *The Life of the Mind*, originally conceived as a trilogy—*Thinking*, *Willing*, and *Judging*—Arendt stresses that these three mental activities "cannot be derived from each other," and although sharing "certain common characteristics," they "cannot be reduced to a common denominator" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 91). Crucially, as Beiner underscores, "each of them obeys the laws inherent in the activity itself" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 128). For Arendt, the autonomy of these faculties—especially their independence from intellectual cognition—is essential. As Beiner notes, subordinating these faculties to cognition would imply forfeiting "the freedom of the thinking, willing, and judging ego" (Beiner, 1989, p. 129). To preserve this autonomy, Arendt differentiates "truth and meaning" in the volume on *Thinking*, contrasts Duns Scotus' conception of the will to that of Aquinas in *Willing*, and, in the intended analysis of *Judging*, would have embraced Kant's sharp distinction between "the noncognitive operation of reflective judgment and the cognitive operation of intellect" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 91).

Yet, as Beiner carefully points out, Arendt's later formulations stand in striking contrast to some of her earlier accounts, particularly regarding the relationship among intellect, will, judgment, and action. In her essay "What is Freedom?" Arendt explicitly situates judgment within a hierarchical relationship to action and intellect, emphasizing judgment's cognitive role in guiding the will toward action:

"The aim of action varies and depends upon the changing circumstances of the world; to recognize the aim is not a matter of freedom, but of right or wrong judgment. Will, seen as a distinct and separate human faculty, follows judgment, i.e., cognition of the right aim, and then commands its execution. The power to command, to dictate action, is not a matter of freedom but a question of strength or weakness. Action insofar as it is free is neither under the guidance of the intellect nor under the dictate of the will—although it needs both for the execution of any particular goal." (Arendt, 1969, p. 152).

Here, judgment explicitly operates in concert with the intellect, guiding the will, which in turn dictates the execution of action. By contrast, Arendt's later perspective,

particularly in *The Life of the Mind*, significantly revises this relationship. In her mature formulation, judgment and will each become fully autonomous, distinct not only from the intellect but also free from each other. The later Arendt thus explicitly rejects any subordination of judgment and will to intellect, maintaining that their autonomy is a precondition for genuine human freedom. This fundamental shift in the conceptualization of the mental faculties—from a hierarchical relationship to strict autonomy—constitutes a central tension in Arendt's thought and is the core concern of the present analysis.

Beiner further clarifies this tension by emphasizing Arendt's shifting views regarding the faculty of judgment and its relationship to political action and decision-making. In her earlier formulations, Arendt closely ties judgment to "representative thinking" and opinion, suggesting that judgment is exercised by actors directly involved in political deliberation and action (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 137). Indeed, it was precisely this earlier approach that led Arendt to characterize judgment as "the most political of man's mental abilities" and as "the political faculty par excellence" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 138). Yet, Beiner notes that Arendt's later account implicitly denies this earlier position. He highlights how, initially, Arendt explicitly aligned judgment with intellect or cognition, as seen in her essay "What is Freedom?," starkly contrasting with her later insistence that judgment is neither intellectual nor cognitive in nature (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 138).

Moreover, Beiner points out that in previously unpublished lectures delivered in 1965 and 1966—now published under the title *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*—Arendt temporarily went to the opposite extreme, defining judgment explicitly as a function of the will, identifying it with *liberum arbitrium*, the arbitrating function of the will (Beiner, 1989, p. 139). Reflecting her uncertainty at this time, Arendt herself acknowledged this ambiguity: "whether this faculty of judgment, one of the most mysterious faculties of the human mind, should be said to be the will or reason, or perhaps a third mental capacity, is at least an open question" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 139).

This gradual evolution reveals, as Beiner underscores, that Arendt only slowly arrived at a definitive separation of judgment as an autonomous mental activity distinct from both intellect and will. Importantly, in reaching this resolution, Arendt significantly

reformulated the very relationship between judgment, politics, and action. While earlier she closely tied judgment to decision-making in political contexts, she later attributed this active dimension explicitly to the faculty of the will. Thus, the shift in Arendt's thinking culminates in a clear reassignment of the faculties: the active deliberation previously associated with judgment is decisively transferred to the will, leaving judgment to occupy a contemplative and retrospective stance distinct from political action and decision-making.

Beiner frames the tension in Arendt's theory of judgment by explicitly addressing the question of whether judgment belongs primarily to the *vita activa* or the *vita contemplativa*. He summarizes the core dilemma succinctly: "The question is whether (and to what extent) judgment participates in the *vita activa* or whether it is confined, as a mental activity, to the *vita contemplativa*—a sphere of human life that Arendt conceived to be, by definition, solitary, exercised in withdrawal from the world and from other men" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 139). This fundamental uncertainty, according to Beiner, forced Arendt toward a difficult choice: on one hand, she was drawn toward integrating judgment into the *vita activa*, viewing it as inherently political—a function of "representative thinking" and the "enlarged mentality of political actors" engaged in "common deliberation" ((Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 139). On the other hand, Arendt was equally committed to emphasizing judgment's contemplative and disinterested dimensions, aligning it closely with aesthetic judgment and retrospective reflection.

Ultimately, Beiner argues, Arendt resolves this tension "only by negating some of her own broader insights into judgment," decisively placing judgment within the contemplative realm of "the life of the mind" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 139). Judgment thereby acquires practical relevance only in exceptional circumstances—moments of "crisis or emergency"—when it "may prevent catastrophes, at least for myself, in the rare moments when the chips are down" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 138). Outside these rare moments, judgment remains confined to solitary reflection, the "mind's communion with itself"(Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 138).

This resolution, while consistent, comes at a significant cost. Beiner observes that "by adhering to a firm disjunction between mental and worldly activities, Arendt was forced to expel judging from the world of the *vita activa*, to which it maintains a natural

affinity" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 140). Judgment thus remains inherently caught between the two spheres—a dualism central to Arendt's entire philosophical project. Arendt's systematic effort to resolve this dualism resulted, according to Beiner, in a conception of judgment that is "much narrower (and perhaps less rich)" precisely because it denies judgment's natural connection to practical political life (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 140).

Christopher Lasch further elaborates on the tensions highlighted by Bernstein and Beiner, focusing explicitly on the conceptual difficulties arising from Arendt's reliance on both Aristotle's *phronesis* and Kant's aesthetic judgment. Following Bernstein, Lasch points out that Arendt initially associates judgment closely with Aristotelian practical reason, as embodied in *phronesis*, "that form of practical reasoning which deals with the particular" and is essential for practical decision-making within political communities (Lasch, 1983, p. x). Indeed, Lasch observes that Arendt's early writings, such as "The Crisis in Culture" and "Truth and Politics," treat judgment explicitly as a political faculty—one that guides political actors in deciding "what courses of action to undertake in the public sphere," determining objectives and evaluating past actions (Lasch, 1983, p. x). This perspective aligns closely with Beiner's account, who identifies Arendt's earlier writings as associating judgment directly with political deliberation and decision-making among political actors.

Yet, echoing Bernstein, Lasch emphasizes that Arendt's later writings show a significant shift toward Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment, stressing "impartiality, spectatorship, and reflective distance" rather than practical engagement (Lasch, 1983, p. x). Like Bernstein, Lasch sees this transition as problematic, resulting in an unclear synthesis of Aristotelian and Kantian traditions that pull judgment in fundamentally different directions. On one hand, judgment is presented as deeply political, guiding action through practical reasoning and direct involvement; on the other, it is described in Kantian terms as "disinterested," removed from immediate political concerns, and oriented primarily toward retrospective reflection and universal validity (Lasch, 1983, p. x).

Lasch argues that this attempt to merge the Aristotelian model of practical reason with Kantian aesthetic judgment results in "a whole series of perplexities, riddles, and contradictions" (Lasch, 1983, p. x). He particularly criticizes Arendt's restriction of

judgment to the explicitly political sphere, arguing that such a limitation distorts the genuinely practical nature of judgment itself, which arises naturally "in the course of any practice" and depends fundamentally on collaboration and practical experience, rather than merely reflective distance (Lasch, 1983, p. x). Moreover, Lasch maintains that Arendt's rigid division between mental activities (such as judgment) and worldly action obscures the fundamental continuity between practical reasoning and everyday engagement, a continuity better captured by Aristotle than by Kant.

By thus reinforcing Bernstein's and Beiner's positions, Lasch underscores that Arendt's attempt to hold together incompatible philosophical traditions—practical reasoning grounded in particulars, and reflective, spectator-oriented judgment based on universal standards—ultimately leads her theory into contradiction and obscurity rather than clarity. In particular, Lasch challenges Arendt's confinement of judgment exclusively within the sphere of politics, emphasizing instead its relevance across various practices, thereby aligning his critique with Bernstein's identification of a "flagrant contradiction" and Beiner's critique of Arendt's ultimate separation of judgment from political action.

Seyla Benhabib approaches Arendt's theory of judgment by explicitly acknowledging the tension highlighted by Bernstein and Beiner—the shift from judgment as a politically engaged activity of actors to judgment as a retrospective, contemplative faculty exercised by spectators. Yet, unlike Bernstein and Beiner, who emphasize unresolved contradictions, Benhabib sidesteps the actor-spectator divide to provide a distinctly moral interpretation of Arendt's notion of reflective judgment. Central to Benhabib's analysis is the argument that what Arendt found significant in Kant's conception of reflective judgment—erroneously limited by Kant himself to the aesthetic domain—was a "procedure for ascertaining intersubjective validity in the public realm" (Benhabib, 1988, p. 39). For Arendt, following Kant, reflective judgment involves the exercise of "enlarged mentality," a critical ability to think from the standpoint of others by engaging in "anticipated communication," thus achieving judgments that transcend subjective preferences without falling into rigid universality (Benhabib, 1988, pp. 43-44). This process, closely linked to Kant's "sensus communis," depends upon one's imaginative capacity to consider the possible perspectives of others, achieving validity through the potential consent and agreement

of an intersubjective community rather than through abstract or universal moral rules alone.

Benhabib acknowledges the complexities inherent in Arendt's attempt to synthesize Aristotelian *phronesis*, with its deep sensitivity to context and particularity, and Kantian reflective judgment, characterized by universal communicability and impartiality. While she recognizes the philosophical tensions highlighted by Bernstein and Beiner—tensions arising from fundamentally divergent metaphysical assumptions between Kant and Aristotle—Benhabib argues that Arendt's seemingly problematic combination of these traditions proves theoretically productive (Benhabib, 1988, pp. 42-43). Specifically, she suggests that Arendt's use of Kant's reflective judgment allows for the preservation of a universalist moral standpoint while maintaining a critical sensitivity to the particularities and contextuality of human action. Benhabib therefore reads Arendt's "enlarged thought" as fundamentally dialogic and discursive, rather than empathetic or merely subjective, implying that moral judgment arises precisely from one's capacity to engage in dialogue—real or imagined—with others (Benhabib, 1988, p. 44).

Thus, Benhabib's moral reading of Arendt significantly enriches the discussion initiated by Bernstein and Beiner, highlighting how Arendt's appropriation of Kantian concepts such as "intersubjective validity," "enlarged mentality," and "sensus communis" provides a sophisticated response to moral questions central to modern politics. Yet, her interpretation implicitly raises a critical question: if judgment is fundamentally moral, requiring dialogue, consent, and intersubjective agreement, how precisely does it connect to action, the realm in which morality is ultimately realized—a question Benhabib leaves largely unresolved.

John McGowan, in his book *Hannah Arendt: An Introduction* further illuminates the tensions surrounding the actor-spectator divide, explicitly addressing Arendt's complex reconfiguration of the mental faculties, particularly in relation to the will and judgment. According to McGowan, Arendt is firmly committed to preserving the radical autonomy and freedom of the will, which she conceives as entirely self-sufficient, independent of any determination by external causes such as desire or rational deliberation. In his words, the will, as Arendt conceives it, acts spontaneously and independently, "like a 'kind of coup d'etat,' as Bergson once said," free from the

constraints of causal chains of desires or logical deliberations of intellect (McGowan, 1998, p. 120)

Yet, as McGowan notes, this radical separation poses a considerable difficulty. He writes, "Determined to protect (at all costs) the freedom of action, Arendt must sever the will from all necessary connection to either desire or reason. No causal chain from desire nor any logical progression from ideas or beliefs determines the decision put into action by the will" (McGowan, 1998, p. 120). Such a decisive severance generates a conceptual impasse for judgment: "This complete severance of the will from the other faculties poses a considerable problem, however, for it becomes difficult to identify precisely what is left for judging to do." (McGowan, 1998, p. 120).

This problem is important for understanding the role of judgment in Arendt's theoretical framework. McGowan emphasizes that judgment, traditionally understood as essential for practical reasoning and decision-making, typically involves evaluating past experiences and situations to guide present and future action. It is, as McGowan clarifies, inherently future-oriented: we judge precisely to determine "what courses of action to pursue in the future," drawing upon past experiences, habits, predilections, prejudices, and analogical imagination in order to identify relevant similarities and differences between situations we have previously encountered and those we face now (McGowan, 1998, p. 120).

Yet, as McGowan incisively points out, Arendt's late theorization significantly restricts judgment's role by defining it primarily as a contemplative and retrospective faculty, exercised from a position of spectator-like distance. Unlike the Aristotelian or pragmatist models in which judgment plays an active, formative role by shaping concrete decisions and future action, Arendt's judgment instead becomes predominantly historical, evaluative, and backward-looking. According to McGowan, Arendt's judgment is primarily concerned with making sense of what has already transpired rather than guiding or influencing ongoing or future practical decisions (McGowan, 1998, p. 120).

McGowan underscores the difficulty that arises from this transformation: if Arendt's judgment no longer directly influences action, it becomes challenging to see how judgment can retain any meaningful practical or moral significance. While Arendt aligns judgment with Kantian reflective judgment and its hallmark notions of

impartiality, "enlarged mentality," and intersubjectivity, she simultaneously divorces it from the direct engagement with practical deliberation and concrete decisions traditionally associated with ethical and political reasoning. As McGowan perceptively notes, judgment in Arendt's mature conception is no longer primarily about "deciding what future actions are appropriate" but rather about evaluating past actions, as if rendering verdicts from a distance without necessarily shaping immediate action (McGowan, 1998, pp. 121).

Thus, McGowan's critique aligns with and significantly extends the critical interpretations of Bernstein and Beiner, by highlighting how Arendt's commitment to the autonomy of the will leads to a conceptual impasse. Judgment, as McGowan rightly notes, becomes increasingly disconnected from the practical and moral decisions it traditionally guided, intensifying rather than resolving the actor/spectator divide. This intensified divide leaves unanswered the critical question of precisely how judgment, reduced to retrospective spectatorship, can still fulfill its traditional role as a guide to practical action—an issue that lies at the heart of the critical discussions initiated by Bernstein and Beiner.

Majid Yar, in his essay *From actor to spectator Hannah Arendt's 'two theories' of political judgment*, further elaborates on the actor-spectator divide in Arendt's theory of judgment, arguing that her work does not simply reflect an unresolved tension but rather exposes a fundamental antinomy at the heart of judgment itself. He frames this duality in explicit terms, stating that Arendt's work "highlights what is perhaps the fundamental antinomy of judgment qua political faculty, that between the actor and the spectator, between the one who judges to secure the future, and the one who judges to redeem the past" (Yar, 2000, p. 2). This division reflects the two distinct temporal orientations of judgment: one forward-looking, guiding political actors in their practical decisions, and the other backward-looking, exercised by spectators as a means of evaluating and immortalizing past actions.

Yar notes that Arendt's reflections on judgment cannot be understood apart from her broader political philosophy, particularly her concern with action as an expression of freedom and her critique of modernity's rupture with tradition (Yar, 2000, p. 2). As Bernstein has observed, Arendt is a systematic thinker whose concepts interlock in a

"web" of interdependent ideas, making it essential to situate her theories of judgment within the context of her overall political framework (Yar, 2000, p. 2).

One of the primary difficulties in interpreting Arendt's work, according to Yar, lies in the fact that she does not neatly separate her two theories of judgment across different periods of her writing. Rather, her concern with judgment as exercised by actors and spectators "often (and sometimes perplexingly) intertwines throughout her writings," creating a theoretical framework in which Aristotle and Kant—her two main philosophical influences—exist in a state of unresolved tension (Yar, 2000, p. 2). As a result, Arendt's work presents an interpretive challenge, where "one is never quite sure where one ends and the other begins" (Yar, 2000, p. 2).

Yar argues that Arendt's early work tends to privilege judgment from the perspective of the actor, where judgment serves as a political faculty akin to *phronesis*—the practical wisdom required for deliberation and persuasion within a political community. Here, Arendt envisions judgment as future-oriented and communicative, facilitating shared understanding and political decision-making among actors engaged in public discourse (Yar, 2000, p. 16). This model is exemplified in *The Crisis in Culture*, where she equates Kantian judgments of taste with Aristotle's concept of rhetoric as persuasive discourse, suggesting that political judgment operates through an appeal to shared sensibilities, or *sensus communis* (Yar, 2000, p. 16).

However, in her later work, particularly in *The Life of the Mind* and *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, judgment increasingly takes on a retrospective, spectator-based function. Here, judgment shifts from guiding action to evaluating and giving meaning to past events, particularly in the wake of historical catastrophes such as totalitarianism. Yar underscores that "withdrawal from direct involvement to a standpoint outside the game is a condition sine qua non of all judgment" (Yar, 2000, p. 17). In this framework, judgment no longer serves to deliberate on future political decisions but instead functions as a means of retrospectively assessing and memorializing human deeds.

This bifurcation in Arendt's theory of judgment, according to Yar, corresponds to two divergent models of political action. The first, which he describes as the "communicative-accommodational model," aligns judgment with deliberation, consensus-building, and participatory democracy, where actors strive to establish

shared understandings about matters of public interest (Yar, 2000, p. 12). The second, the "expressive-agonal model," sees judgment as focused on the retrospective evaluation of political deeds, particularly the greatness or failure of past actions and the actors who performed them (Yar, 2000, p. 13). The former is a future-oriented model of judgment, seeking to shape political action, while the latter is past-oriented, ensuring that actions and events are not forgotten but are integrated into the narrative memory of a political community.

Yar ultimately concludes that Arendt's two conceptions of judgment remain in a state of unresolved tension, reflecting two incommensurable approaches to politics itself—one in which action is about communication and consensus, and another in which it is about self-expression and historical remembrance. This reading aligns closely with Bernstein's and Beiner's critiques, reinforcing the argument that the actor-spectator divide is not merely an analytical difficulty but a fundamental structural feature of Arendt's political thought.

The scholars defending the actor-spectator divide—such as Beiner, Bernstein, and McGowan—argue that this distinction is central to understanding Arendt's late thought. They highlight how her shift from *vita activa* to *vita contemplativa* reconfigures judgment as a retrospective faculty, distancing it from political action. For them, this transformation is not incidental but marks a fundamental change in her theory of judgment. However, not all scholars accept this divide as a necessary or even accurate reading of Arendt. The following section will explore the arguments of those who either reject the actor-spectator distinction outright or downplay its significance, offering alternative interpretations of Arendt's theory of judgment.

2.3 Critics Minimizing or Rejecting the Divide

Dana Villa, in his article "*Thinking and Judging*" further explores the critical tension highlighted by Beiner and Bernstein, acknowledging explicitly that Arendt's thought on judgment indeed underwent a significant evolution—a shift clearly visible in her writings. Echoing Beiner, Villa observes that "it is quite plausible to speak of not one, but two theories of judgment in Arendt," corresponding distinctly to earlier and later phases of her work (Villa, 1999, pp. 12–13). Like Bernstein and Beiner, Villa confirms that the shift from the perspective of the *vita activa*—with its emphasis on "the

representative thought and enlarged mentality of political agents"—to that of the contemplative spectator, with its emphasis on the "retrospective judgment of historians and storytellers," is not only significant but also "textually demonstrable" (Hermesen and Villa, 1999, pp. 12–13)

Yet, Villa differs importantly from both Beiner and Bernstein in stressing the underlying continuity between these two phases. While acknowledging the textual evidence for the shift, Villa argues that Arendt's emphasis on "independent or autonomous judgment," the core of her defense of "thinking (and judging) for oneself," remains consistent throughout her writings. In Villa's view, even Arendt's earlier notion of "representative thinking" should not be narrowly understood as a method for collective deliberation or political decision-making; rather, its primary purpose is always to facilitate the individual's capacity for autonomous and critical judgment (Hermesen and Villa, 1999, pp. 12–13). Thus, whether judgment is exercised from within political life as an actor, a "citizen among citizens," or as a detached spectator removed spatially or temporally from immediate engagement, it consistently reflects "how the world and the things in it... appear to me" as an individual, reflecting personal discernment and moral "taste" (Hermesen and Villa, 1999, pp. 12–13).

In highlighting this autonomy and independence of judgment, Villa positions Arendt against any conception of political solidarity that might undermine the individual's privilege of independent judgment. Arendt's persistent commitment to independent judgment thus represents, for Villa, the heart of her idea of human dignity and moral integrity—a commitment she maintains across both earlier and later formulations of judgment, despite the undeniable textual evolution of her thought.

Dana Villa explicitly addresses the tension highlighted by Bernstein and Beiner, who both identify two seemingly irreconcilable perspectives within Arendt's thought on judgment: one tied closely to political action, the other grounded in reflective spectatorship. Villa acknowledges, following Bernstein, that Arendt does indeed shift abruptly from emphasizing Aristotelian *phronesis*—with its inherent proximity to practical political deliberation—toward Kantian aesthetic judgment, characterized by "taste, distance, impartiality, and spectatorship" (Hermesen and Villa, 1999, pp. 20–21). Yet Villa argues that Bernstein and Beiner mistakenly interpret this shift as signaling a fundamental conceptual contradiction or tension in Arendt's thought.

For Villa, the apparent contradiction disappears when viewed against Arendt's broader historical and philosophical narrative—the "destruction, loss, or decline of the public realm in the modern age," a central theme developed extensively in *The Human Condition* (Hermesen and Villa, 1999, p. 21). He contends that Bernstein and Beiner's interpretations inadequately consider how profoundly this historical narrative shapes Arendt's treatment of judgment. From Villa's perspective, Arendt does not advocate "consensus for those in the game, and critical thinking, impartiality, and autonomy for those who were out of it" (Hermesen and Villa, 1999, p. 20). Rather, both perspectives—action-oriented and contemplative—consistently share a commitment to autonomous and critical judgment, which Arendt fiercely maintains as essential to human dignity.

However, despite this insightful reinterpretation, Villa leaves unanswered the crucial question raised by Bernstein and Beiner: namely, how exactly judgment in its later, reflective form can effectively guide or influence political action, especially now that Arendt categorizes active decision-making explicitly under the faculty of the will.

Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves offers an illuminating perspective on the complexities underlying Hannah Arendt's theory of judgment, particularly highlighting the coexistence of two distinct models: the actor's judgment—"judging in order to act," which guides political decision-making—and the spectator's judgment—"judging in order to cull meaning from the past," reflective and interpretative in nature (Passerin d'Entrèves, 2001, p. 104). He emphasizes that the tension between these two models, while striking at first glance, is ultimately "more apparent than real." Similarly, although the two main philosophical sources Arendt draws upon—Aristotle and Kant—initially appear fundamentally opposed, Passerin d'Entrèves contends that this opposition is also "more apparent than real" (Passerin d'Entrèves, 1993, p. 104). By employing both Aristotelian particularism and Kantian universalism, Arendt achieves a synthesis in which careful attention to particulars is balanced by a concern for universal validity. To fully appreciate the subtle interplay of these apparent oppositions, Passerin d'Entrèves suggests beginning the analysis from the standpoint of the *vita contemplativa*.

Passerin d'Entrèves challenges the notion of an absolute divide between actors and spectators within Arendt's theory of judgment. He acknowledges that Arendt indeed aligns judgment primarily with the standpoint of spectatorship, describing judgment

as "the capacity to be impartial and disinterested" and suggesting that only spectators, being removed from immediate action, "can produce judgments which are free, autonomous, disinterested, and impartial" (Passerin d'Entrèves, 1993, p. 116). From this perspective, spectators appear better positioned than actors to grasp the broader meaning of events precisely because of their detachment.

Yet, Passerin d'Entrèves explicitly cautions against interpreting Arendt as advocating a rigid or absolute separation between actors and spectators. He underscores Arendt's attempt at reconciliation by highlighting her assertion that the "critic and spectator sits in every actor and fabricator," implying that without this critical, judging faculty, "the doer or maker would be so isolated from the spectator that he would not even be perceived" (Passerin d'Entrèves, 1993, p. 116).

Furthermore, Passerin d'Entrèves emphasizes Arendt's essay "The Crisis in Culture," where she explicitly aligns judgment with Aristotelian *phronesis*, noting that both judgment and *phronesis* are faculties belonging to political actors. Arendt also equates the "wooing or persuading character" of judgment to the Greek concept of *peithein*, the persuasive and convincing speech integral to political interaction (Passerin d'Entrèves, 1993, p. 70). Thus, Passerin d'Entrèves underscores his disagreement with any rigid dichotomy, showing that Arendt herself complicates such a clear-cut separation by consistently acknowledging judgment's deeply political and participatory dimensions.

Passerin d'Entrèves further engages with the interpretive tension in Arendt's theory of judgment—particularly the apparent contradiction between Aristotelian *phronesis* and Kantian aesthetic judgment—that both Bernstein and Beiner identify as central. Bernstein, as we have seen, perceives a "flagrant contradiction" in Arendt's simultaneous appeals to Aristotle and Kant, arguing that these traditions seem to pull judgment in fundamentally opposing directions—*phronesis* toward particularity, and Kantian judgment toward universality and impartiality. Similarly, Beiner emphasizes a shift in Arendt's thought, asserting that she ultimately resolves the actor-spectator tension by assigning judgment exclusively to the contemplative realm, detaching it from the realm of political action.

However, Passerin d'Entrèves explicitly contests these interpretations. While acknowledging that Arendt's use of Kant and Aristotle has "puzzled some

commentators," he argues forcefully that the contradiction noted by Bernstein and implicitly by Beiner is "more apparent than real". In his view, both Aristotle and Kant actually align closely, as both theorists emphasize judgments of particulars *qua* particulars, without subsuming them under pre-established universal rules. Passerin d'Entrèves maintains that the primary difference lies not in the tension between universality and particularity, but rather in their respective modes of asserting validity. For Aristotle, *phronesis* is "the privilege of a few experienced individuals (the *phronimos*)" whose judgments derive validity from personal wisdom and a proven track record of sound decisions (Passerin d'Entrèves, 1993, p. 123). Kantian reflective judgment, by contrast, derives its validity from the "potential agreement with others," as individuals must appeal to a broader community and elicit consent from "differently situated subjects" (Passerin d'Entrèves, 1993, p. 123).

Yet, despite this insightful analysis, Passerin d'Entrèves does not address a critical question raised explicitly by both Beiner and Bernstein: namely, how judgment in its later formulation is supposed to influence or guide political action, given that Arendt appears to have transferred the faculty of practical decision-making explicitly to the will. While Passerin d'Entrèves argues convincingly against a rigid actor-spectator divide, he does not adequately explain how judgment—now categorized as reflective and retrospective—is meant to connect meaningfully to future-oriented political decisions and actions. Furthermore, d'Entrèves's attempt to reconcile the positions of the actor and the spectator by emphasizing Arendt's remark that 'critic and spectator sits in every actor and fabricator' fails to clarify how this reconciliation is to be understood in terms of the faculties of the mind. Since Arendt, in her later formulations, assigns action and choice exclusively to the will, it remains unclear how the spectator's reflective judgment can be integrated into the domain of action without undermining this division. Even if such a transition were to be made, it would require prior conceptual development, as it runs counter to textual evidence that supports Beiner's position. Without a more explicit articulation of how the faculties relate in this context, d'Entrèves's reconciliation remains more of an assertion than a substantiated argument.

Simon Biskowski positions himself against scholars like Beiner and Bernstein, who argue that Arendt's theory of judgment presents an unresolved contradiction between the perspectives of the actor and the spectator. While Beiner and Bernstein emphasize

the *divide* in Arendt's work, highlighting how judgment oscillates between guiding political action and retrospectively assessing past events, Biskowski instead seeks to dissolve this tension. He argues that Arendt's critics have been misled by her method of exposition by distinction and that categories such as *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, or actor and spectator, should not be seen as rigid divisions but as interwoven "dimensions or moments of human existence" (Biskowski, 1993, p. 872). In contrast to Beiner and Bernstein, who insist that Arendt's two models of judgment are fundamentally at odds, Biskowski seeks to reintegrate them into a single, cohesive framework.

At the core of Biskowski's argument is his rejection of the idea that Arendt maintains a strict actor-spectator divide. He suggests that this distinction has been overemphasized and that judgment cannot be confined solely to the spectator's retrospective role (p. 866). Rather than seeing judgment as a fundamentally different faculty from those required for action, he argues that judgment remains integral to political engagement. According to Biskowski, Arendt's critics mistakenly assume that judgment, as she describes it in *The Life of the Mind*, is isolated from political action, when in fact it is a crucial part of how actors navigate the political world. He claims that a coherent account of political judgment must draw as much from Arendt's theory of action as from her reflections on mental faculties (p. 871).

Biskowski attempts to bridge the actor-spectator divide by emphasizing that 'both the actor and the spectator make use of judgment; the human capacity that mediates and distinguishes between the "moments" called spectator and actor may be thought of variously as *prohairesis* or will or choice (although, as always, important distinctions between these concepts need to be remembered)'(p. 875) However, the very distinctions he acknowledges in the parenthesis—distinctions that Arendt herself rigorously upholds—precisely prevent the reconciliation he seeks. Arendt does not treat *prohairesis*, will, and choice as interchangeable with judgment, nor does she collapse the faculties they belong to. Will is future-oriented and tied to action, whereas judgment, as Arendt ultimately conceives it, is retrospective and operates independently of volition. Hence, This equation is no small leap, as it contradicts Arendt's insistence on the autonomy of the mental faculties, particularly her careful differentiation between thinking, willing, and judging.

What Biskowski ultimately fails to do is draw out the necessary implications of his own argument. Even if judgment and will must ultimately be related to each other in action, this relation cannot simply be assumed—it would require prior conceptual development that directly addresses the issues Beiner articulates concerning the autonomy and interrelation of the faculties. Arendt's insistence on their distinctness means that any attempt to integrate them must first clarify how such integration is possible without undermining their autonomy. Without this groundwork, the proposed transitions between actor and spectator risk blurring the very distinctions that Arendt took great care to uphold, rather than offering a coherent resolution to the problem.

Weidenfeld's central claim is that Arendt *misreads* Kant by mistaking *sensus communis*—which, for Kant, refers to the potential agreement of rational beings based on shared cognitive faculties—for an actual agreement within an existing political community (Weidenfeld, 2012, p. 264). Kant's *sensus communis* is an epistemological principle, a condition for the possibility of universal validity in judgments, rather than an empirical social bond. However, according to Weidenfeld, Arendt distorts this by treating *sensus communis* as a political concept, one that directly embeds judgment in an existing plurality rather than preserving its autonomy as a reflective mental faculty. He sees this as an unwarranted interpretive leap, arguing that Arendt projects onto Kant an ethical and political dimension that is not present in his text.

Weidenfeld further claims that this alleged misreading is responsible for the actor/spectator divide in Arendt's work. Because Arendt wrongly sees judgment as grounded in an actual political community, she is forced to locate it in the realm of the spectator rather than that of the actor (Weidenfeld, 2012, p. 264). Since judgment requires disinterestedness and withdrawal from immediate involvement, it becomes something only spectators—rather than actors—can exercise. Weidenfeld thus presents the divide between actor and spectator, which scholars like Beiner and Bernstein have long grappled with, as an *artifact* of Arendt's flawed Kantian foundations. If she had remained faithful to Kant's original account, he implies, she would not have been led to construct such a rigid separation between judging and acting.

Yet even if Weidenfeld is correct that Arendt reads Kant in an unorthodox way, this does not explain the divide identified by Beiner and Bernstein. The core issue is *not*

whether Arendt misinterprets *sensus communis*, but rather *how judgment is supposed to influence action once action and choice are assigned exclusively to the will*. Beiner and Bernstein's concern is that in Arendt's later work, judgment is increasingly detached from the sphere of action, leaving political decision-making without a clear connection to reflective judgment. This problem persists regardless of whether one accepts Weidenfeld's claim about Arendt's Kantian misreading. Even if she had adhered strictly to Kant's epistemological framework, the question would still remain: *How does judgment, once severed from action, retain any political efficacy?* Weidenfeld does not answer this.

Annelies Degryse's article, *Sensus communis as a foundation for men as political beings: Arendt's reading of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, argues against two common claims in the literature on *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*: first, that Arendt developed two distinct theories of judgment (as Beiner suggests), and second, that she detranscendentalizes Kant's philosophy by linking his notion of judgment to empirical sociability (Degryse, 2011, p. 346). Instead, Degryse contends that Arendt's thinking on judgment follows a single trajectory and that her reading of Kant's *sensus communis* as a 'community sense' is a crucial yet overlooked element of her thought (Degryse, 2011, p. 350).

Degryse refutes Beiner's claim that Arendt offers two separate theories of judgment—one practical, tied to politics, and another contemplative, tied to spectatorship. She argues that the shift Beiner observes in Arendt's work is not a transition from one theory to another but a general evolution in her thought. Judgment, she insists, is always a central faculty for both actors and spectators (Degryse, 2011, p. 347). In this view, Arendt's increasing emphasis on judgment after *Eichmann in Jerusalem* does not signal a rupture but a deepening of an existing concern (Degryse, 2011, p. 348).

This reading, however, risks flattening the tensions in Arendt's treatment of judgment. While Degryse rightly stresses that Arendt never abandoned judgment's political significance, she underplays the difficulties in reconciling judgment as a retrospective, spectator-driven faculty with its role in guiding action. Beiner's distinction—though perhaps overstated—captures a real ambiguity in Arendt's late work, which Degryse does not fully resolve.

Degryse's more original argument concerns Arendt's reading of *sensus communis*. She highlights how Arendt transforms Kant's concept from a purely transcendental principle into a foundation for political life. For Kant, *sensus communis* was the condition that made aesthetic judgment universally communicable. Arendt, however, sees it as a form of 'community sense' that not only makes judgment possible but also establishes humanity as a political category (Degryse, 2011 p. 351). This, Degryse argues, is not a misreading of Kant but a deliberate innovation.

Her key claim is that judgment depends on communication and testing in the public sphere. Without the 'test of others,' judgment risks disappearing altogether (Degryse, 2011, p. 353). This insight leads her to emphasize the role of spectators in Arendt's political thought. The spectators, according to Degryse, play a central role in giving meaning to action: 'The public realm is constituted by the critics and the spectators, not by the actors and the makers' (Degryse, 2011, p. 354). Without judgment, action would remain unnoticed, just as genius would go unrecognized without taste.

Yet this argument ultimately minimizes the significance of the actor-spectator divide in Arendt's work. While it is true that actors require spectators to make sense of what they do, this does not collapse the distinction between them. Degryse writes, 'Actors as well as spectators share the ability to judge. Without it, spectators would not be capable of perceiving action' (Degryse, 2011, p. 354). This is uncontroversial. But the real question is not whether actors possess judgment—it is how they exercise it.

Arendt insists on the autonomy of the faculties. Thinking is not action, willing is not judging, and judgment—though related to both—is distinct from both. Degryse attempts to bridge the actor-spectator divide by emphasizing their shared capacity for judgment, but this does not resolve the fundamental problem: how can actors judge while acting, if judgment is fundamentally a spectator's activity? If judgment remains retrospective, how can it guide action in the moment? Arendt's own text does not provide an easy answer to this, but her separation of faculties suggests that judgment and action cannot be fully integrated without undermining their distinct functions.

By glossing over this difficulty, Degryse's argument leaves unresolved precisely what judgment does for the actor. If judgment is detached from action, then actors—those who initiate and engage in the world—are left without guidance in the moment of decision. It is not enough to say that actors also judge; the question is how they are to

exercise judgment while acting. This remains an open problem in Arendt's thought, one that neither Beiner's division nor Degryse's synthesis fully resolves

Peter Steinberger, in his essay *Hannah Arendt on Judgment*, argues that *The Life of the Mind* should not be read as a retreat into *vita contemplativa* but as a continuation of Arendt's political thought. He rejects the idea that thinking, willing, and judging are purely contemplative activities, insisting instead that they are integral to *vita activa*: "actors are people who—or at least should—think, will, and judge" (Steinberger, 1990, p. 810). His argument challenges interpretations like Beiner's, which emphasize a shift in Arendt's late thought toward a more detached, spectator-oriented model of judgment. For Steinberger, judgment does not belong exclusively to spectatorship but remains an active faculty necessary for political engagement.

However, Steinberger's attempt to reconcile judgment with action sidesteps a key issue in Arendt's later writings: her explicit distinction between the will, which governs choice and action, and judgment, which remains tied to spectatorship and retrospective evaluation. He acknowledges that judgment is not about asserting truth but about shaping political meaning (Steinberger, 1990, p. 813), but he does not address how this meaning-making function translates into political decision-making. Arendt makes clear that the will is the faculty of initiating and choosing in the present, while judgment, as she conceives it in *The Life of the Mind*, evaluates past events and forms opinions after the fact (Steinberger, 1990, p. 812). If judgment belongs to the spectator and action to the willing actor, how can judgment guide political decisions in real time?

This is precisely the issue Bernstein raised: if judgment is meant to orient political action, how does it do so in the absence of the will? Without a clear mechanism explaining how judgment transitions from retrospective spectatorship to informing future choices, Steinberger's argument collapses the divide between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* without resolving it. By insisting that judgment must be part of action, he ignores why Arendt maintained their separation in the first place. His reconstruction, while valuable in reasserting the political relevance of judgment, ultimately remains incomplete because it does not explain how actors can exercise judgment in the moment of action without dissolving its spectator-based nature.

Peter Gottsegen, in his book *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, argues that Arendt's theory of judgment remains politically engaged and should not be seen as

shifting from *vita activa* to *vita contemplativa*. He maintains that judgment, while linked to spectatorship, is not detached from political life but functions as an intersubjective process embedded in shared discourse (Gottsegen, 1994, p. 187). Rather than seeing a fundamental break in Arendt's thinking, he views her later reflections on judgment as an extension of her earlier work, emphasizing its communicative and relational nature rather than its detachment from action (Gottsegen, 1994, p. 189). His proposed resolution to the tension between judgment and action is to highlight the way judgment operates within a network of perspectives, ensuring that political actors engage in meaningful deliberation rather than merely acting in isolation.

However, while Gottsegen provides a valuable perspective on judgment's political function, his attempt to integrate it into *vita activa* does not fully resolve the issue that Beiner and Bernstein identified: how judgment, if it is primarily retrospective and tied to spectatorship, can actively guide political action. Arendt herself explicitly distinguishes between the will, which governs choice and action, and judgment, which evaluates and reflects upon past events (Gottsegen, 1994, p. 188). While Gottsegen acknowledges this distinction, he does not engage deeply with its implications. His assertion that judgment remains part of *vita activa* does not clarify how it can function as an orienting force for actors in the moment of decision, given that Arendt associates action with willing rather than judging.

Gottsegen's approach to bridging *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* is insightful in emphasizing the communicative and intersubjective nature of judgment, but it does not fully address the fundamental challenge of how judgment moves from retrospective reflection to guiding future action. By focusing on judgment's role in discourse and public debate, he offers an important contribution to understanding its political relevance, but he leaves open the question of how judgment operates in real-time decision-making. In this way, while his reading expands the discussion of judgment's role in political life, it does not entirely resolve the tension between Arendt's faculties, particularly the relationship between judgment and the will.

Linda Zerilli, in her article *Imagination and Judgment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt*, argues that Arendt's theory of judgment is not about establishing rational validity but about affirming freedom—an activity that allows us to navigate a

pluralistic world without relying on fixed rules (Zerilli, 2005, p. 160). She challenges critiques such as Beiner's and Habermas's, which focus on Arendt's supposed failure to provide a foundation for political judgment, stating that such readings misunderstand Arendt's intent: 'Arendt was not trying to secure judgment's validity in a rationalist sense but to show how judgment is integral to the practice of freedom' (Zerilli, 2005, p. 161). Instead of grounding judgment in cognitive certainty, Arendt presents it as an exercise in *sensus communis*, an imaginative process that enables one to consider different perspectives without requiring universal principles (Zerilli, 2005, p. 163).

Zerilli disputes critiques from Habermas and Beiner that argue Arendt severs the link between argument and judgment. She explains: "Arendt's insistence that political judgments cannot be truth claims has puzzled her otherwise sympathetic readers. Most famous among them is Jürgen Habermas, who more or less accuses Arendt of aestheticizing politics, that is, of identifying this realm with opinions that cannot be subjected to rational processes of validation any more than we can validate judgments of taste. Arendt's turn to Kant's account of aesthetic judgment in the third Critique, Habermas maintains, is symptomatic of her refusal to provide a "cognitive foundation" for politics and public debate. This leaves "a yawning abyss between knowledge and opinion that cannot be closed with arguments.'" (Zerilli, 2005, p. 159)

Taking up this critique, Beiner similarly 'emphasizes the problems associated with "the all-important contrast between persuasive judgment and compelling truth" in Arendt's thought and wonders why she failed to recognize that "all human judgments, including aesthetic (and certainly political) judgments, incorporate a necessary cognitive dimension"' (Zerilli, 2005, p. 159). Beiner's concern is that a Kantian approach, which excludes knowledge from political judgment, 'renders one incapable of speaking of "uninformed" judgment and of distinguishing differential capacities for knowledge so that some persons may be recognized as more qualified, and some as less qualified, to judge' (Zerilli, 2005, p. 160).

Zerilli argues that these critiques misunderstand Arendt's position. Arendt does not exclude argument from politics but resists the idea that 'agreement in procedures for making arguments ought to produce agreement in conclusions,' since political reasoning is distinct from logical deduction (Zerilli, 2005, p. 160). She writes, "Arendt

is struggling with a difficult problem to which her critics, focused as they are on the rational adjudication of political claims, are blind: our deep sense of necessity in human affairs. If Arendt brackets the legitimation problematic that dominates the thought of Habermas, it is because she sees in our practices of justification a strong tendency toward compulsion, which, in turn, destroys the particular qua particular and the very space in which political speech (including arguments) can appear”(Zerilli, 2005, p. 160).

Zerilli further emphasizes that judgment is an activity, not a mere cognitive result. She writes: “We can judge without a concept, exactly as Arendt held, because we are not limited to *disputieren* (i.e., agreement on the basis of proofs from established premises); we can create new forms or figures with which to make sense of objects and events. And we can argue about the meaning of those objects and events without declaring a *Widerstreit*. In this process of judging reflectively we refuse to limit ourselves to proofs based on concepts and instead alter our sense of what is common or shared: we alter the world, the space in which things become public.” (Zerilli, 2005, p. 183)

Through this process, judgment allows us to break from established norms and introduce new meanings into the world. This, for Arendt, is what makes judgment integral to freedom: “What we affirm in a political judgment is experienced not as a cognitive commitment to a set of rationally agreed upon precepts (as they are encoded in, say, a constitution—though it can be experienced as that too) but as pleasure, as shared sensibility. “We feel our freedom,” as Kant put it, when we judge aesthetically or, as Arendt shows, politically.” (Zerilli, 2005, p. 183)

While Zerilli provides a compelling defense of Arendt’s theory of judgment as an affirmation of freedom rather than a quest for rational certainty, she does not fully engage with the fundamental issue raised by Beiner and Bernstein: how judgment relates to action. By emphasizing judgment as a retrospective and meaning-making activity rather than a faculty that can guide political decision-making, Zerilli reinforces its importance for understanding political events but leaves unresolved the problem of its practical application. If judgment is not meant to provide direction in moments of action, then how can it function as a meaningful political faculty beyond spectatorship? Arendt’s own insistence on the separation of faculties—thinking, willing, and

judging—suggests that this problem cannot simply be dismissed. In the end, the core tension identified by Beiner and Bernstein remains: if judgment is distinct from the will, and spectators do not guide action, how can judgment play an active role in politics?

Robert Dostal, in his essay *Judging Human Action: Arendt's Appropriation of Kant*, examines Arendt's engagement with Kant and her attempt to develop a political theory of judgment. He identifies a fundamental shift in her understanding of the public realm, arguing that she moves from an action-centered view to one where judgment, exercised by spectators, takes precedence: "*the public realm is v, not by the actors or the makers*" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 63). This shift, he suggests, leads to a fundamental tension in her later work, where judgment becomes the culmination of *vita contemplativa* while also being tasked with mediating between thinking and action.

Dostal ultimately seeks to reconcile this tension by arguing that judgment is not purely retrospective but can influence action. He claims that "this culmination not only completes thought but mediates between thought and the life of action, the *vita activa*. For finally, of course, the spectator and the actor are the same person. The judgment may direct action" (Dostal, 1984, p. 753). However, this attempt to close the gap between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* is problematic, as it does not follow from Arendt's own distinctions between the faculties of the mind.

Dostal highlights Arendt's prioritization of spectatorship over action, noting that she follows Kant's model in which "*the creative activity of genius is subordinated to taste*" (Dostal, 1984, p. 729). He argues that she applies the same logic to politics by subordinating actors to spectators: "*Arendt would subordinate action to judgment and, in such a subordination of the free participant to the spectator, unify practice and theory*" (Dostal, 1984, p. 10). This represents a reversal of her earlier work, where action was central to the constitution of the public realm.

However, while Dostal suggests that judgment can unify theory and practice, he does not explain how this actually occurs within Arendt's framework. His assertion that "judgment may direct action" (Dostal, 1984, p. 13) contradicts Arendt's claim that "these insights of aesthetic and reflective judgment have no practical consequences for action" (Arendt and Beiner, 1992, 53). If judgment remains a faculty of spectatorship, as Arendt insists, then it does not guide actors in real-time decision-making.

Dostal critiques Arendt's reading of Kant, particularly her rejection of his moral philosophy and her attempt to detach judgment from reason. He highlights Arendt's dismissal of Kant's practical reason as inappropriate for human action, noting that she viewed "the inhumanity of Kant's moral philosophy as undeniable" (Dostal, 1984, p. 738). Arendt rejects the categorical imperative because of its universality, which she sees as negating the plurality and relativity of human affairs. By stripping Kant's judgment of its connection to moral reasoning, Arendt leaves it politically ungrounded. This critique reinforces the broader concern that Arendt's judgment lacks a stable foundation, making it unclear how it can function as a reliable political faculty beyond subjective interpretation.

Dostal tries to bridge the gap between judgment and action by arguing that judgment "not only completes thought but mediates between thought and the life of action" (Dostal, 1984, p. 753). He then makes the claim that "the spectator and the actor are the same person" and that "the judgment may direct action" (Dostal, 1984, p.753). However, this assertion contradicts his later claim that "so thought's by-product of judging becomes action by default—through passive resistance. It does not so much direct action as obstruct it" (Dostal, 1984, p.754).

This contradiction exposes the difficulty in reconciling judgment with action within Arendt's framework. If judgment directs action, it collapses into willing, which Arendt explicitly rejects; if it obstructs action, it remains passive and incapable of guiding decision-making. Dostal does not explain how judgment, considered within the life of the mind, can influence action in a way consistent with Arendt's framework. His assertion that "*the spectator and the actor are the same person*" does not address the fundamental problem identified by Beiner and Bernstein—the strict division between action, decision (the prerogative of the will), and judgment. By failing to clarify *how* judgment moves from spectatorship to guiding action, Dostal ultimately leaves unresolved the very divide he seeks to close.

Dostal's attempt to integrate judgment into action ultimately fails because it does not follow from Arendt's own distinctions between the faculties of the mind. While he recognizes the challenge of unifying *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, his assertion that judgment may direct action contradicts both Arendt's explicit claims and his own argument that judgment primarily functions as a by-product of thinking. His contention

that “the spectator and the actor are the same person” does not resolve the issue that judgment and willing remain distinct faculties in Arendt’s framework.

By suggesting that judgment can influence action while maintaining its spectatorial nature, Dostal ultimately sidesteps the fundamental divide rather than resolving it. His reading remains incomplete because he assumes judgment can guide action without demonstrating *how* it functions beyond spectatorship.

Ferrara, in his essay *Judgment, Identity and Authenticity A Reconstruction of Hannah Arendt’s Interpretation of Kant*, seeks to reconcile the apparent tension in Arendt’s theory of judgment by claiming that the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* and Kantian reflective judgment are not only compatible but ultimately converge in her thought. His main move is to argue that *phronesis* and Kantian judgment share fundamental similarities, such as their dependence on experience, their cultivation through exemplary cases, and their inability to be fully demonstrated but only made plausible (Ferrara, 1998, p. 115). He thus downplays the claim made by Beiner and Bernstein that Arendt’s late shift to Kantian judgment constitutes a substantive change in her thought.

However, his attempt to harmonize *phronesis* and Kantian judgment does not adequately address the concerns raised by those who see a shift in Arendt’s work. While it is true some similarities can be drawn between *phronesis* and reflective judgment, this does not resolve the fact that in her later work, Arendt distances judgment from the realm of political action and assigns it primarily to spectatorship (Ferrara, 1998, p. 114). The issue is not simply whether *phronesis* and judgment share some similarities, but rather whether Arendt’s later concern with judgment represents a departure from her earlier political thought, as Beiner and Bernstein argue.

Thus, Ferrara’s argument ultimately sidesteps the fundamental problem posed by Beiner and Bernstein: how Arendt’s later shift to judgment as spectatorship affects the political significance of judgment. While Ferrara invokes Arendt’s statement that ‘critic and spectator sits in every actor and fabricator’ to bridge the gap between the actor and the spectator, this does not resolve the deeper structural issue in Arendt’s thought—namely, the distinction between action, decision (which belongs to the will), and judgment (which in her later work becomes reflective and retrospective). His effort to synthesize Arendt’s early and late thought is compelling in some respects, but it does

not sufficiently address the challenge posed by those who see a fundamental shift in her work. It is too easy to rely on a single sentence to collapse distinctions that Arendt carefully maintained, without engaging in the conceptual development necessary to reconcile these faculties in a way that remains faithful to her evolving philosophical framework

Albrecht Wellmer, in his essay *Hannah Arendt on Judgment*, critically examines Arendt's theory of judgment, emphasizing both its importance and limitations. He acknowledges that "the faculty of judgment played a preeminent role in Hannah Arendt's political and moral thought" but insists she "certainly was no neo-Aristotelian philosopher of praxis" (Beiner and Nedelsky, 2001, p. 163). While judgment first appeared in her work in relation to political action, her later thought "was moving in the opposite direction, tending to dissociate judgment from action as well as from argumentation" (Wellmer in Beiner and Nedelsky, 2001, p. 165). This dissociation stems from her reliance on Kantian aesthetic judgment, exercised from the standpoint of a spectator rather than an actor. "Aesthetic judgment is the judgment of a spectator—thus the dissociation of judgment from action. And the fact that consent to aesthetic judgment cannot be compelled by arguments accounts for its dissociation from argumentation" (Wellmer in Beiner and Nedelsky, 2001, p. 165).

Wellmer argues that Arendt "denies the existence of anything like an ethical community that could provide the basis for the exercise of *phronesis*" (Wellmer in Beiner and Nedelsky, 2001, p. 166). Instead of grounding judgment in a shared ethical life, she treats the *sensus communis* as a regulative idea that only appears "in those rare moments when autonomous judgment breaks through the crust of established opinions" (Wellmer in Beiner and Nedelsky, 2001, p. 166). This detachment leaves judgment without a clear connection to action.

Arendt's model also lacks a mechanism for intersubjective validity. She follows Kant in distinguishing "judgments that are open to argument and those that are merely open to 'contention'" (Wellmer in Beiner and Nedelsky, 2001, p. 168). Since aesthetic judgments do not rely on concepts, they "are not open to argument but only to 'contention'" (Wellmer in Beiner and Nedelsky, 2001, p. 169). Wellmer calls this "a mythology of judgment" because it suggests that judgment can produce valid claims without rational justification (Wellmer in Beiner and Nedelsky, 2001, p. 169).

Wellmer questions whether Arendt's judgment can influence action, noting that "every actor is a potential spectator, as Arendt admits, therefore not only means that he may become a judge after he acted; for certainly he may have been a moral judge before he acted" (Wellmer in Beiner and Nedelsky, 2001, p. 168). However, within Arendt's framework, choice belongs to the will, not judgment. If judgment were to guide action, it would require a theoretical transition Arendt never provides. While Wellmer rearticulates the divide between judgment and action noted by Beiner and Bernstein, his attempt to bridge this gap remains incomplete. His contention that "every actor is a potential spectator, as Arendt admits" (Wellmer in Beiner and Nedelsky, 2001, p. 168) does not provide an adequate transition between the two faculties. Within Arendt's framework, judgment is retrospective and distinct from the will, which governs action. If judgment were to guide action in the way Wellmer suggests, it would require a theoretical relation that Arendt never articulates. Instead, his claim implicitly collapses the divide without explaining how judgment, which she explicitly separates from willing, could influence decision-making without losing its autonomy. Thus, despite Wellmer's critique, the fundamental problem posed by Beiner remains unresolved: if judgment is detached from action, how can it function as a meaningful political faculty?

In his article, *The actor does not judge: Hannah Arendt's theory of judgement*, Lederman's central claim is that "Arendt never had a theory of an actor's judgment, but rather only of a spectator's judgment" (Lederman, 2016, p. 1). He challenges the dominant view, established by Beiner and Bernstein, that Arendt developed two models of judgment—one for actors and another for spectators. Instead, he contends that this assumption became "unquestioned" in secondary literature despite lacking textual evidence (Lederman, 2016, p. 1).

Tracing this idea's origins, Lederman cites Beiner's claim that "surveying Arendt's work as a whole, we can see that she offers not one but two theories of judgment" (Lederman, 2016, p. 2), arguing that Arendt initially saw judgment as an activity of political agents but later restricted it to spectators. Similarly, Bernstein states, "judging is the capacity of the spectator who views and judges human affairs . . . not that of the actors who participate" (Lederman, 2016, p. 2).

Lederman disputes this, asserting that “nowhere in the essays from the 1960s . . . does one find any reference to political actors employing judgment” (Lederman, 2016, p. 4). He emphasizes that Arendt explicitly states, “The public realm is constituted by the critics and the spectators, not by the actors or the makers” (Lederman, 2016, p. 4). Judgment, he insists, is tied to doxa, which “belongs not to those who act in the public realm, but to those who observe the actors” (Lederman, 2016, p. 5).

Furthermore, he argues that judgment does not determine action. He cites Arendt: “Judgment allows a general perspective on the particular; it prepares us for action . . . yet it does not determine how we will ultimately act” (Lederman, 2016, p. 6). Thus, “as long as a person acts, he or she does not judge, and as long as he or she judges, he or she does not act” (Lederman, 2016, p. 6).

Lederman’s strict separation of judgment and action ignores Arendt’s earlier writings, which suggest judgment plays a role in decision-making. While Lederman reinforces the retrospective nature of judgment, his rigid actor-spectator divide is too extreme. Beiner and Bernstein’s claim that Arendt’s earlier account had an model of judgment is not an unfounded assumption but supported by textual evidence. Lederman fully embraces the actor-spectator divide, but in doing so, he sidesteps the problems that arise from a theory of political judgment entirely divorced from action. While he effectively highlights the retrospective nature of Arendtian judgment, his insistence that “*as long as a person acts, he or she does not judge, and as long as he or she judges, he or she does not act*” (Lederman, 2016, p. 6) leaves unresolved the question of how political judgment is to have influence on political action.

Marshall, in his essay *The Origin and Character of Hannah Arendt’s Theory of Judgment*, challenges the dominant scholarly view, articulated most notably by Beiner and Bernstein, that Arendt’s theory of judgment underwent a fundamental shift from an actor-oriented model to a spectator-oriented one. He argues that this interpretation oversimplifies the development of Arendt’s thought and overlooks the intellectual influences that shaped her views on judgment. Instead of seeing a rupture between Arendt’s earlier and later accounts of judgment, Marshall traces her engagement with Hegel, Aristotle, and Kant as the key to understanding her theory’s evolution.

He first highlights Arendt’s early (1955) critical reading of Kant, where she saw his political theory as rooted in the will rather than in judgment. At that time, she viewed

Kant as an "anti-political" thinker, primarily concerned with moral autonomy rather than political plurality. However, by 1957, following a re-reading of *Critique of Judgment*, she began to see judgment, rather than willing, as the foundation of political engagement. According to Marshall, this shift was informed not only by Kant but also by Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik*, which shaped her understanding of judgment as both a rhetorical and a political faculty.

Beiner and Bernstein famously argued that Arendt's theory of judgment contains a "deep tension" because it oscillates between two irreconcilable models: *phronēsis* (practical wisdom) from Aristotle, which ties judgment to action, and *Geschmack* (taste) from Kant, which confines judgment to the perspective of the spectator. They contend that Arendt never successfully resolved this tension and, in her later works, seemed to retreat from an actor-centered view of judgment toward a more retrospective, spectator-centered one.

Marshall, attempts to bridge the actor-spectator divide in Arendt's theory of judgment by appealing to her engagement with Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and her translation of the Greek term *krinein* as both *urteilen* (judging) and *entscheiden* (deciding) (Marshall, 2010, pp. 377–78). He claims that this dual translation suggests that, in Arendt's thought, judgment and decision-making are not separate faculties but rather interconnected aspects of a single process. However, this move, while linguistically intriguing, is conceptually unconvincing, as it contradicts Arendt's systematic distinctions between judgment and will.

Marshall emphasizes that in *Aristotle's Rhetoric*, judgment (*krinein*) involves not only evaluating but also deciding: "In the context of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, there is no such thing as a judge who is not at least potentially an actor" ((Marshall, 2010, p. 377). He further asserts that for Arendt, judgment is always engaged with the possible, rather than the necessary, and that it is tied to *prohairesis*—deliberate choice—which moves the agent beyond indecision: "Deliberating, thus, is a process of liberating oneself from the (potentially debilitating) plurality of options set out by the moment of crisis" ((Marshall, 2010, p. 378). By framing judgment as an essential step in decision-making, Marshall argues that Arendt's thought does not conform to the strict spectator-actor dichotomy posed by Beiner and Bernstein.

However, this conflation of judgment and decision misrepresents Arendt's explicit separation of these faculties. Arendt is clear in *The Life of the Mind* that judgment belongs to the *vita contemplativa* and is distinct from willing, which is associated with action. Marshall himself notes that "Intellect is insufficient for the task of removing oneself from the zone of indecision that is associated with *krinein*, judging" ((Marshall, 2010, p. 378). This very point undermines his argument, as Arendt repeatedly distances judgment from the will's role in initiating action.

Marshall's argument also relies heavily on an etymological connection between *krinein*, *urteilen*, and *entscheiden*, but such a linguistic similarity does not constitute conceptual continuity. Even if *krinein* historically contained both dimensions, Arendt's own usage does not support the idea that judging and deciding are interchangeable. He states that "Arendt emphasized Aristotle's stipulation that it is impossible for someone to involve themselves with the business of judging if they have already concluded that there is no possibility of acting upon a decision" ((Marshall, 2010, p. 377), yet this claim assumes that judgment necessarily entails a decision, which Arendt explicitly denies. Her framework is premised on judgment as a distinct mental faculty that does not guide or determine action in the way that willing does.

Even if one were to argue that Arendt's judgment could play a role in action, this claim would require conceptual synthesis and textual analysis rather than a purely linguistic route. Marshall's reliance on translation as proof for conceptual integration falls short, as it overlooks the deeper structural divisions in Arendt's theory. If judgment were truly meant to direct action, then Arendt's explicit statements separating judgment from willing and action would need to be reconciled with this claim—something Marshall does not attempt.

Thus, while Marshall provides an interesting historical reconstruction of Arendt's engagement with Aristotle, Hegel, and Kant, his attempt to collapse the distinction between judgment and decision through linguistic equivalence fails to account for Arendt's systematic separation of these faculties. His reading, while innovative, does not resolve the fundamental problem posed by Beiner and Bernstein—namely, how Arendt's theory of judgment can function as a genuinely political faculty when it remains detached from action. Instead, by relying on an etymological argument rather than a conceptual one, Marshall sidesteps the very issue he seeks to address.

Critics of the actor-spectator divide take two main approaches: some outright deny that such a divide exists in Arendt's work, arguing instead for a more continuous development of her theory of judgment, while others acknowledge the divide but attempt to reconcile or close it. Yet, despite these efforts, the tension between judgment as a political faculty and judgment as a retrospective, spectator-like activity remains unresolved. Attempts to bridge this gap often lead to further complications, as they must account for Arendt's increasing emphasis on the contemplative nature of judgment in *The Life of the Mind*. Moreover, her introduction of the will as a distinct faculty further destabilizes these interpretations, raising new questions about the place of judgment within her broader framework. The next section will explore how Arendt's treatment of the will impacts the actor-spectator distinction and whether it offers a resolution or merely deepens the theoretical divide.

2.4 The Impact of Arendt's Conception of the Will

Yarbrough and Stern, in their article *Vita Activa and Vita Contemplativa: Reflections on Hannah Arendt's Political Thought in The Life of the Mind*, argue that *Willing* presents some of the most profound yet unresolved tensions in Arendt's thought, particularly regarding the relationships between the mental faculties. They note that Arendt never fully clarifies how *Willing* relates to *Judging*, writing that "the precise relation between the faculties is not spelled out" and that "when, in volume two, Arendt discusses the will, it is entirely in relation to thinking, not judging" (Yarbrough and Stern, 1981, p. 344). This omission leaves the connection between judgment and action obscure, a gap that scholars like Beiner and Bernstein have found troubling.

Arendt's historical approach to the will is central to Yarbrough and Stern's analysis. They emphasize her claim that the will was not a recognized faculty in Greek thought, emerging only after the decline of the *polis*. This raises a paradox: if, as *The Human Condition* suggests, political freedom flourished in the Greek *polis*, how could this be possible without a developed conception of the will? This tension is compounded by Arendt's shift from her earlier essay *What is Freedom?*, where she had opposed the freedom of the will to political freedom, arguing that "the will as a possible locus of freedom arises only after political power has been lost" (Yarbrough and Stern, 1981,

p. 346). In *Willing*, however, she claims that “the freedom of spontaneity is part and parcel of the human condition. Its mental organ is the will” (Yarbrough and Stern, 1981, p. 346). This shift implies that political freedom and the will’s freedom are not necessarily opposed but complementary, though they do not occur at the same time.

One of the most significant points in Yarbrough and Stern’s analysis is their discussion of how Arendt, following Augustine, views the will as inherently split. Arendt highlights how willing is never straightforward; it is always accompanied by a counter-will or nil, which rebels against itself. This leads to the paradoxical experience Paul describes: “I will, but I cannot” (Yarbrough and Stern, 1981, p. 348). Augustine, in contrast to Paul, recognizes that this internal struggle is not between the flesh and the spirit but within the willing ego itself. Yarbrough and Stern underscore that for Arendt, the will is the “spring of action” and the “principle of individuation” (Yarbrough and Stern, 1981, p. 348), but before it can lead to action, this internal conflict must be resolved.

Arendt’s account of the will also highlights its role in initiating something new, aligning it with her concept of natality, that is, the power to begin something new.. However, Yarbrough and Stern point out that this emphasis on spontaneous beginning leaves unresolved how the will translates into sustained political action. Arendt suggests the traditional solution of this problem expounded by the likes of Augustine, that is, transforming the will to love. However, as Yarbrough and Stern ask, “how does love help resolve the will’s inner conflicts, especially when the choice is not simply between good and evil?” (Yarbrough and Stern, 1981, p. 348-49). This unresolved question mirrors the broader ambiguity surrounding how the will connects to judgment.

Yarbrough and Stern’s analysis underscores why Arendt’s treatment of the will is crucial for understanding her later shift in judgment. If the will is the mental faculty responsible for initiating action, and if judgment remains fundamentally separate from willing, then judgment is confined to spectatorship. The unresolved question of how willing and judging relate to one another leaves a gap in her thought, one that Beiner and Bernstein both point out.

Arendt’s rejection of practical reason as a guiding force for action means that neither *Willing* nor *Judging* provides a clear bridge to political action. Yarbrough and Stern’s

discussion of exemplary validity as a standard for judgment shows that Arendt seeks to make judgment relevant for the political world. However, without a clear connection to willing, judgment remains detached from the actor. This is precisely the concern that scholars like Beiner and Bernstein raise: if judgment remains purely a spectator's faculty, then it loses its political force. Arendt's engagement with Augustine and Kant shows that she was aware of this difficulty, yet as Yarbrough and Stern emphasize, she never fully resolves it.

Thus, their analysis supports the argument that Arendt's later shift toward judgment as a spectator's faculty is tied to her evolving view of the will. If the will is the source of action and judgment is something fundamentally distinct from it, then judgment cannot direct action, which reinforces the divide Beiner and Bernstein find so troubling.

Young-Bruehl, in her essay *Reflections on Hannah Arendt's the Life of the Mind*, highlights Arendt's insistence that thinking, willing, and judging are autonomous faculties, each governed by its own internal principles rather than derived from a singular metaphysical source. "Thinking, willing and judging are all autonomous, both in the sense that they follow only the rules inherent in their activities and in the sense that they are not all derived from some single source" (Young-Bruehl, 1982, p. 280). This autonomy is crucial for Arendt's broader commitment to plurality and freedom; subordinating one faculty to another would undermine the very conditions of political and mental independence.

While the faculties are not hierarchically ordered, thinking holds a unique position in relation to willing and judging. Young-Bruehl explains that "thinking presents the other two faculties with 'de-sensed' thought objects, invisibles, afterthoughts; it presents the will with images of the future and it presents judgment with images of the past" (Young-Bruehl, 1982, p. 281). These thought-objects structure the conditions in which the other faculties operate: willing requires thinking's projection of possibilities, while judgment depends on its recollection of the past. However, thinking does not control or dictate the will and judgment, but merely provides them with material for their respective operations.

Arendt's discussion of the will, as Young-Bruehl notes, follows a *via negativa* approach, distinguishing it from past philosophical traditions. Greek thought lacked a concept of the will as an autonomous faculty, instead emphasizing *prohairesis*—the

deliberative faculty that chooses among given ends (Young-Bruehl, 1982, p. 286). However, “nothing genuinely new can arise out of a choice among givens” (Young-Bruehl, 1982, p. 287), which is why Arendt dismisses prohairesis as inadequate for capturing human freedom. The will, in contrast, introduces radical spontaneity into human affairs, allowing for the initiation of unprecedented actions.

Young-Bruehl traces Arendt’s understanding of the will to Augustine, who saw it as internally divided: “In every act of Will, there is an I-will (*velle*) and an I-nill (*nolle*) involved” (Young-Bruehl, 1982, p. 287). This internal conflict reveals the will’s autonomy—it is not merely an obedient faculty responding to commands, but a force capable of resisting itself. Duns Scotus refines this view by asserting that while the will is free, it is not omnipotent: “The past, what has happened and therefore become absolutely necessary, is beyond the reach of the Will” (Young-Bruehl, 1982, p. 288). In other words, while the will initiates actions, it cannot undo them—thus necessitating judgment as a separate faculty to evaluate the consequences of action.

Young-Bruehl emphasizes that judgment, for Arendt, cannot be reduced to either *phronesis* (practical wisdom) or taste, both of which lack the necessary recoil that judgment requires. “*Phronesis*...was only a forerunner of the notion of judgment because it was tied to given ends and means, without the necessary recoil, and because it was tied to desire, a source of unfreedom” (Young-Bruehl, 1982, p. 293). Unlike *phronesis*, judgment does not simply weigh options based on pre-existing standards; instead, it relies on communicability and persuasion. “Persuasion—what Kant called ‘wooing the consent of others’—is the communicative mode or manifestation of judgment” (Young-Bruehl, 1982, p. 294).

Arendt’s distinction between judgment and taste is equally important. Taste is an immediate, subjective preference, whereas judgment involves a reflective step back: “Judgment involves a step back: we represent to ourselves (and this involves imagination) the now-absent particulars we once sensed” (Young-Bruehl, 1982, p. 294). This process requires the ability to abstract from personal inclinations and consider how an opinion might be communicable to others.

In sum, Young-Bruehl underscores Arendt’s strict separation of the faculties while also acknowledging the tensions that arise between them. Thinking provides images to the will and judgment but does not govern them; the will initiates but cannot undo its

actions; and judgment retrospectively evaluates actions but does not direct them. While Arendt's account rejects phronesis as an adequate model for judgment, it leaves open the question of how judgment remains relevant to action. As Young-Bruehl concludes, "If willing is what enables new beginnings, and judgment is what retrospectively evaluates past actions, what ensures that judgment remains relevant to the ongoing process of political action?"

Suzanne Jacobitti, in her excellent essay *Hannah Arendt and the Will*, argues that one of the central challenges in *The Life of the Mind* is Arendt's insistence on the will as an autonomous mental faculty. This represents a significant shift from her earlier works, where she associated freedom primarily with action rather than an internal faculty of volition. This late turn raises fundamental philosophical questions, which Jacobitti articulates explicitly: What is this faculty called the will, and how is it justified? How does it relate to other human faculties? What is its connection to the self that presumably possesses it? And, most importantly, how does it relate to action? (Jacobitti, 1988, p. 57). These questions are crucial for understanding the broader structure of Arendt's thought, particularly the tensions that emerge in her attempt to reconcile judgment, thinking, and willing.

For Arendt, the will is the *spring of action* and our *mental organ for the future* (Jacobitti, 1988 p. 59). Unlike thinking and judging, which are concerned with understanding and evaluation, the will is directed toward initiating something new in the world. However, the precise relationship between willing and action remains deeply ambiguous. The will, as Arendt defines it, does not reflect or persuade; it simply issues imperatives, commanding action without recourse to argument or reflection (Jacobitti, 1988, p. 59). It is the faculty by which we choose among possible courses of action and make those choices real by initiating them in the world. As the source of human freedom, the will is also what makes us morally accountable, since it is by willing that we create the self that can be praised or blamed for its actions (Jacobitti, 1988, p. 59).

Much of what Arendt says about the will follows philosophical tradition, particularly in relation to *liberum arbitrium* (freedom of choice between alternatives) and Kant's idea of the will as the power to begin a series in time. However, her account is distinguished by her engagement with three key thinkers: St. Augustine, Duns Scotus,

and Kant. Each of these philosophers contributed insights into the nature of the will, yet none, in Arendt's view, fully escaped the biases of traditional philosophy against freedom and contingency (Jacobitti, 1988, p. 59-61).

Arendt admires St. Augustine for his recognition of the self-determined nature of the will and its radical freedom. Augustine's interpretation of St. Paul's inner struggle as a conflict within the will, rather than between mind and body, reveals the will's power to negate—to say *No* to existence itself. Moreover, Augustine's idea that each person is a new beginning, created in the image of God, aligns closely with Arendt's own conception of natality as the foundation of human freedom. However, Arendt criticizes Augustine for failing to develop the implications of this insight. Had he done so, she argues, he would have seen the will not merely as the faculty of choosing between willing and nilling, but as the Kantian power of spontaneously beginning a series in time (Jacobitti, 1988, p. 61).

Duns Scotus, in Arendt's view, comes closest to developing a proper philosophy of the will. He extends Augustine's notion of radical freedom and emphasizes the will as the source of human individuality. More importantly, he is one of the few philosophers willing to accept contingency as a fundamental condition of reality. Scotus denies that all events are determined by causal necessity and instead insists that each event is the product of multiple contingent causes. This insight is crucial for Arendt because it allows for the possibility of something genuinely new emerging in the world—a possibility that is essential for both freedom and action (Jacobitti, 1988, p. 61). However, Scotus fails to integrate his account of the will with his understanding of contingency in a way that fully embraces the radical implications of human freedom. While he recognizes that the will is free, he does not adequately connect this freedom to the capacity for action in the world (Jacobitti, 1988, p. 61).

Kant, for Arendt, represents both an essential reference point and a profound limitation. She repeatedly attributes to him the idea of the will as the *faculty of spontaneously beginning a series in time*. However, she is troubled—just as Kant himself was—by the problem of how a spontaneous act of the will could insert itself into a world governed by causality. Kant resolves this difficulty by appealing to a *noumenal* will guided by practical reason, but Arendt finds this solution unsatisfactory (Jacobitti, 1988, p. 61). In her view, Kant ultimately fails to develop a true concept of

the will because he subordinates it to reason, making it an executive function rather than an autonomous faculty. As she puts it, “Kant’s Will is neither *liberum arbitrium* nor its own cause; for Kant, sheer spontaneity, which he often called ‘absolute spontaneity,’ exists only in thinking” (Jacobitti, 1988, p. 61). By making the will a mere servant of reason, Kant eliminates the very freedom that he sought to defend.

This concern leads to a broader problem in Arendt’s account: what does it mean for the will to be absolutely autonomous? She insists that the will must be independent of both desire and reason, acting as a kind of *coup d’état* within the self, interrupting causal chains and imposing its own commands (Jacobitti, 1988, p. 62). But this raises the question of the relationship between the will and the self that possesses it. If the will is entirely autonomous, does it stand apart from the person who wills? And if so, what is the nature of the self that is supposed to unify thought, judgment, and action? These unresolved questions point to the deeper tensions in Arendt’s late thought, tensions that remain especially acute when considering the relationship between willing and judging.

A fundamental difficulty in Arendt’s late philosophy is how the will relates to action. As Jacobitti observes, the willing ego decides upon a project but seems to disappear as soon as action begins (Jacobitti, 1988, p. 64). If this is the case, then it is the *appearing self* that acts, rather than the willing ego. But this poses a contradiction: is the actor determined by the will or by external conditions? Arendt seems to suggest that the actor is not truly autonomous but is shaped by the expectations of spectators. As she puts it, “He is not his own master, not ... autonomous; he must conduct himself in accordance with what spectators expect of him.” Men, she says, though autonomous in their mental activities, are “totally conditioned existentially”(Jacobitti, 1988, p. 64). This difficulty, in turn, exposes a deeper problem: Arendt lacks a coherent theory of self. If the thinking ego thinks, the willing ego wills, and the judging ego judges, but all disappear when action begins, then there is no stable *person* uniting these faculties (Jacobitti, 1988, p. 64). Instead, we are left with a fragmented self—one in which the mind is fractured into separate faculties with no unifying force to integrate thought, will, and judgment. As Jacobitti argues, Arendt’s insistence on the will’s spontaneity creates a deep inconsistency: if the will is entirely autonomous and disconnected from reason, then there is no clear explanation for how it can lead to meaningful action (Jacobitti, 1988, p. 64-65). This rupture severs the connection

between thinking and doing, making it unclear how judgment can inform ethical or political decisions. Furthermore, by rejecting Kant's conception of the will as an executive function of reason, Arendt isolates it in a way that leaves the actor beholden to external conditions rather than internal deliberation. The result is an incoherent theory of agency—one in which action seems to emerge from an isolated will but is simultaneously shaped by the judgments of spectators, leaving no room for an integrated self that actively determines its course in the world.

Jacobitti ultimately argues that Arendt's claim that the will must be entirely spontaneous and autonomous is one of the most problematic aspects of her late thought. This position prevents her from providing a coherent theory of self, disrupts the connection between thinking and action, and precludes her from making use of Aristotle's concept of *prohairesis*—the rational deliberation that allows for meaningful choice and voluntary action (Jacobitti, 1988, p. 65). By insisting on the will's total autonomy, Arendt paradoxically undermines its role as the "spring of action," since a faculty entirely cut off from reason and judgment lacks the capacity to determine meaningful courses of action.

Arendt's reconfiguration of the faculty of the will in *The Life of the Mind* introduces yet another layer of complexity to the actor-spectator debate. By attributing decision-making and action to the will, she appears to further distance judgment from political engagement, reinforcing its retrospective, spectator-like character. At the same time, this move raises deeper questions about the relationship between thinking, judging, and willing—questions that remain unresolved due to the unfinished nature of Arendt's final work. The broader implications of this shift continue to shape interpretations of her legacy, as scholars grapple with whether the will offers a resolution to the actor-spectator divide or merely deepens the theoretical tensions within her work.

2.5 Conclusions

The debate over the relationship between action and judgment in Arendt's thought has long been a site of interpretive contestation. Throughout this chapter, we have demonstrated that the divide between Arendt's early and late reflections on judgment is not merely an evolution of thought but a fundamental rupture that creates unresolved tensions in her theory of political agency. In agreement with Jacobitti, Beiner, and Bernstein, I contend explicitly that the divide between Arendt's early and late

reflections on judgment is not merely an evolution of thought but a fundamental rupture that creates unresolved tensions in her theory of political agency. Jacobitti's critique, especially, underscores that Arendt's late insistence on the absolute autonomy of the will leads to an incoherent theory of agency, severing judgment from action and resulting in an isolated, spectatorial faculty incapable of genuinely informing political engagement.

Beiner and Bernstein were among the first to recognize the existence of two distinct theories of judgment in Arendt's work. This division, as Beiner describes it, follows a temporal trajectory: in her writings up until the early 1970s, judgment is considered from the perspective of *vita activa*—that is, as a capacity exercised by political agents—whereas in her later work, it is reconfigured as an activity of the spectator, detached from the sphere of action. Bernstein similarly underscores this shift, stating that “judging is the capacity of the spectator who views and judges human affairs . . . not that of the actors who participate” (Bernstein, p. 221). While some scholars have sought to challenge this interpretation—either by downplaying the divide or by attempting to reconcile the two models—we maintain that the distinction is too structurally embedded in Arendt's later work to be ignored.

Jacobitti's critique is central to understanding this problem. As she argues, Arendt's insistence on the will's absolute autonomy creates an inconsistency that destabilizes the relationship between the will, judgment, and action. If, as Arendt claims, “the decision the will arrives at can never be derived from the mechanics of desire or the deliberations of the intellect” (Jacobitti, p. 62), then how can the will produce meaningful action rather than arbitrary spontaneity? By confining decision and choice exclusively to the will while divorcing it from reason, Arendt disrupts the connection between judgment and action. The result is an incoherent theory of agency: action appears to emerge from an isolated will, yet it is simultaneously shaped by the judgments of spectators, leaving no room for an integrated self that actively determines its course in the world

Jacobitti's analysis is particularly significant because it reveals the extent to which Arendt's later model precludes any form of rational deliberation within the will itself. By rejecting Kant's conception of the will as an executive function of reason, Arendt isolates it in a way that makes it unresponsive to judgment. This radical autonomy of

the will, while securing its spontaneity, also severs it from the faculty of judgment, which remains spectatorial and unable to inform action. Without the guidance of reason or judgment, the will is left to function as an unmediated impulse rather than as a faculty capable of orienting action within a shared political world. This, we argue, is the fundamental problem underlying Arendt's later work: the complete autonomy of the faculties not only fractures the unity of the self but also renders judgment politically impotent.

Jacobitti's critique highlights the deeper paradox at play in Arendt's late work: her attempt to secure the autonomy of the faculties ultimately undermines the coherence of her political theory. In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt insists that "the decision the will arrives at can never be derived from the mechanics of desire or the deliberations of the intellect that may precede it" (Arendt, 1981, bk. 1, p. 213). While this formulation is meant to secure the will's autonomy, it also isolates it from judgment, making it a faculty of arbitrary spontaneity rather than one capable of genuine political agency. The consequences of this position are profound: if judgment is wholly retrospective, how can it inform action? If the will is wholly autonomous, how can it be meaningfully connected to the plurality of the political world? These questions remain unresolved in Arendt's late work, and we argue that they constitute a fundamental tension that any account of her theory of judgment must confront.

The implications of this rupture extend beyond theoretical abstraction; they challenge the very possibility of a coherent Arendtian model of political judgment. While some scholars, such as Lederman and Marshall, have attempted to bridge the gap by suggesting that Arendt's late reflections can be reconciled with her earlier thought, these efforts often fail to account for the depth of the divide. Lederman, for instance, fully embraces the actor-spectator distinction but sidesteps the problems that arise when political judgment is entirely divorced from action. Marshall, on the other hand, seeks to collapse the distinction by appealing to Arendt's engagement with Aristotle, yet his etymological argument does not withstand scrutiny when placed alongside Arendt's explicit claims in *The Life of the Mind*. What these interpretations fail to acknowledge is that Arendt's own conceptual framework precludes any easy reconciliation: once the faculties are rendered fully autonomous, judgment and action can no longer meaningfully intersect.

Our analysis thus arrives at a critical juncture. If we accept that Arendt's later theory of judgment is fundamentally spectatorial, we must also acknowledge that it no longer serves as a political faculty in the way her earlier work suggested. If we instead attempt to reclaim judgment as an active faculty, we must confront the fact that Arendt herself offers no conceptual bridge between judgment and willing. This unresolved tension points to a deeper problem in Arendt's thought—one that is not merely an inconsistency but a structural consequence of her insistence on the autonomy of the faculties.

The following chapters will trace the development of this rupture, examining how Arendt's shifting formulations of action, judgment, and the will evolved across her corpus. By situating her late work within the broader trajectory of her thought, we aim to clarify how and why this divide emerged, as well as to assess its consequences for contemporary interpretations of Arendt's political philosophy. If, as we argue, Arendt's final position leaves judgment politically ambiguous and action theoretically unstructured, then the task ahead is to examine whether her earlier work offers resources for rethinking the relationship between these faculties—or whether her later writings mark a decisive break that renders such reconciliation impossible.

CHAPTER 3 : ARENDT'S EARLIER THEORY OF JUDGMENT

3.1 Introduction

In *Between Past and Future*, published in 1961, Hannah Arendt grapples with the breakdown of tradition in the modern age and its implications for politics, culture, and thought. This collection of essays addresses the crises brought about by the rupture between past and future, leaving humanity without the guidance of inherited frameworks. In the essay *The Crisis in Culture*, Arendt examines the collapse of shared standards for evaluating cultural and political phenomena in a society increasingly dominated by mass culture. She argues that this loss threatens both the durability of the past and the possibility of meaningful engagement with the present, a crisis exacerbated by the rise of relativism and the inability of culture to sustain its critical role.

Judgment emerges here as a central, though not yet fully articulated, faculty in Arendt's thought. Drawing on Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, Arendt explores how judgment can operate independently of established universals, enabling individuals to evaluate particulars without subsuming them under inherited traditions. In this context, judgment becomes the capacity to assess the world critically and impartially, even in the absence of universally accepted standards. More importantly, it serves as a bridge between individual reflection and collective action, guiding meaningful responses to moments of disorientation and upheaval. For Arendt, judgment is not only a tool for understanding but also a crucial element of political and cultural renewal, linking her reflections on cultural crises to her broader concerns with action and the public sphere.

This early articulation of judgment, what Ronald Beiner has termed Arendt's "earlier theory of judgment," first appears in *The Crisis in Culture*, a context not of politics per se but of art and cultural criticism. The emergence of this most political of faculties in a discourse on aesthetics and mass consumerism is both surprising and revealing. As Arendt points out, the realm of culture—like the political realm—is endangered by the commodification of experience and the ascendancy of consumer values. By locating judgment within this endangered cultural sphere, Arendt highlights its role as a response to cultural disintegration and its potential for fostering renewal in both politics and culture.

To deepen our understanding of Arendt's early conception of judgment, we will also briefly examine her essay *Freedom and Politics*, where she outlines the relationship between the mental faculties as they function in relation to action. This essay offers a valuable point of comparison, as it still presents judgment, will, and action as interrelated and coordinated faculties—an arrangement that will later undergo significant transformation. Our aim in analyzing this essay is not to provide a comprehensive reading, but to clarify how, at this stage, judgment is still embedded in a framework oriented toward action and public freedom. This will allow us to better identify the moment when Arendt begins to reconfigure the faculties, paving the way for the conceptual rupture that emerges in her later writings.

As we shall see in subsequent chapters, this integration will begin to unravel. The conceptual unity between judgment and action, and between freedom and the capacity for reflection, will become increasingly strained in Arendt's later work, particularly in *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy* and *The Life of the Mind*. For now, however, this chapter will focus on Arendt's earlier phase, in which judgment emerges not only as a response to cultural crisis, but as a central element of political life—rooted in taste, reliant on common sense, and directed toward the creation and preservation of a shared world.

3.2 Judgment in *The Crisis in Culture*

The Crisis in Culture offers the earliest sustained glimpse into Arendt's theory of judgment. It is noteworthy that judgment surfaces here not within a treatise on politics, but in an essay examining the fate of art and culture in mass society. Arendt warns that the cultural sphere—traditionally a space of permanence, shared meaning, and worldly commonality—was facing near-total destruction under the pressures of commodification and the rise of consumerism.

In this essay, Arendt draws a crucial connection between art and politics. Both belong to the shared world that lies between individuals, the world of culture that sustains a space of appearance, communication, and evaluation. It is within this shared space that judgment plays a vital role. As she turns to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, Arendt finds in aesthetic judgment a model for political judgment: a faculty that allows individuals to evaluate particulars without the support of objective rules or inherited traditions.

This faculty is grounded in a capacity for impartial reflection, dependent not on private taste or subjective preference, but on a broader appeal to the imagined perspectives of others.

In this light, judgment becomes Arendt's response to the crisis of modernity. It offers a way to reestablish meaning in a disoriented world, to reconnect private reflection with the common world, and to preserve a space for public deliberation even amid the collapse of traditional authorities. The essay thus provides a foundational moment in Arendt's broader philosophical project, anticipating the more systematic elaborations of judgment she would undertake in her later, unfinished work, *The Life of the Mind*.

In *The Crisis in Culture*, Arendt examines how culture, reduced by mass society to mere entertainment, has lost its permanence and its ability to connect past and future. This degradation reflects the collapse of shared standards and criteria by which art can be judged, leaving culture adrift. "Mass society not only destroys the public realm but the private as well," she writes, emphasizing how this loss undermines the critical role of culture in sustaining a shared world.

Culture, Arendt shows, is the foundation for both art and politics, which are "interrelated and even mutually dependent" (Arendt, 1969, p. 218). Culture shapes how the world is to look, while politics determines who we are. Both rely on shared frameworks for meaning, and without these, the ability to judge, to discriminate between what endures and what does not, collapses. As a result, neither art nor politics can preserve their roles in shaping the human world.

Arendt argues that art and politics depend on the public realm to fulfill their purpose. Art objects, like political actions, "must find their place in the world" to be seen in appearance and appreciated. Beauty, she writes, "The common element connecting art and politics is that they both are phenomena of the public world. What mediates the conflict between the artist and the man of action is the *cultura animi*, that is, a mind so trained and cultivated that it can be trusted to tend and take care of a world of appearances whose criterion is beauty" (Arendt, 1969, p. 218), offering a form of evaluation that transcends individual preferences and idiosyncrasies. This capacity to move beyond the subjective is precisely what Arendt sees as necessary for renewing both culture and politics. It is here, as she outlines these connections, that Arendt begins to introduce a faculty capable of addressing these crises.

In her search for an ability to judge and discriminate using such criteria, Arendt introduces the Kantian concept of "taste" as the only way, she argues, through which culture, as such, can express itself (Arendt, 1969, p. 219). What is most important to note here is that Arendt, contrary to the standard interpretation of taste—which views it solely as the ability to judge beauty—proposes that it actually contains what may be the greatest and most original aspect of Kant's political philosophy (Arendt, 1969, p. 219).

To support this highly original and bold claim, she goes on to distinguish what is commonly regarded as Kant's political philosophy, found in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The latter, as Arendt notes, is centered around the law-giving faculty of reason, as formulated in the "categorical imperative," which commands that a principle must be universalizable into a law for everyone. This command-obedience relationship, she traces back to reason's need to be in agreement with itself—a need, she argues, born from the principle of contradiction, which is central to our logic (Arendt, 1969, pp. 219–20).

In the *Critique of Judgment*, on the other hand, Arendt identifies a different way of thinking that stands in stark contrast to the former "categorical" one. It is this alternative approach, she argues, that underlines the essence of the analogy she is about to draw between judging aesthetically (beauty) and judging politically.

That different way of thinking, which the power of judgment—considered as taste—is meant to provide, is what Arendt calls "enlarged mentality". Through this, we not only think for ourselves but also "think in the place of everybody else" (Arendt, 1969, p. 220). Judgment, by virtue of this enlarged mentality, does not rest on the internal agreement between me and myself (as in the principle of contradiction); rather, it rests on a "potential agreement with others."

This "anticipated communication," in which we expect agreement from everyone else, already implies that judgments of taste are inherently open to dispute—a characteristic that is the *conditio sine qua non* for all political discourse in the public realm. It is through this prospect of reaching eventual agreement with others that the power of judgment derives its specific validity. This validity, however, depends on the presence of others and is therefore limited to those in whose place we judge. As Arendt notes, judgment in this sense is valid for "every single judging person" (Arendt, 1969, p. 221).

In other words, it does not apply to those who refuse to judge or who are not part of the public realm where the objects of judgment appear.

It is this aspect of taste that provides Arendt with what she had been searching for: a way of judging that transcends individual idiosyncrasies and accounts for our shared existence with others. As such, it represents one of the most fundamental aspects of humanity as a political being(Arendt, 1969, p. 221). To underscore her claim that the judgment of taste is our "specifically political ability," she emphasizes that by judging through taste, we are able to break free from our merely subjective perspectives and place ourselves in the position of others. This enables us to "orient" ourselves within the public realm—a capacity whose necessity is felt even more acutely in political matters than in the realm of art.

This aspect of judgment, Arendt likens to the Greek concept of *phronesis*, which is sometimes translated as wisdom, and at other times as prudence or insight(Arendt, 1969, p. 221). However, she is careful to note that this form of wisdom or insight is not that of the philosopher; rather, it is the "principal virtue or excellence of the statesman" and, for this reason, fundamentally differs from speculative or theoretical acumen as such. This practical wisdom, as it were, rests on and derives its validity from common sense—the shared sense through which we orient ourselves (and our five private senses) in a world that is common to all.

For Arendt, judgment is inherently tied to decision-making, particularly in the aesthetic and political spheres. She argues that judgment, like taste, operates through “common sense” and opposes subjective whims or “private feelings.” In both aesthetic and political judgments, decisions are not arbitrary but arise from the interplay between subjective perspectives and the objective world. As Arendt explains: “The activity of taste decides how this world, independent of its utility and our vital interests in it, is to look and sound, what men will see and what they will hear in it”(Arendt, 1969, p. 222).

Judgment is not only evaluative but transformative, shaping the collective space in which actions unfold. It determines not just what is perceived as beautiful but also what is considered politically significant. The connection between aesthetics and politics lies in their shared reliance on persuasion rather than compulsion. Judgment, Arendt notes, “woos the consent of everyone else,” seeking to foster agreement

without coercion(Arendt, 1969, p. 222).This mirrors the political process, where actions are debated and decisions guide collective futures.

At its core, judgment mediates between individual subjectivity and a shared public reality. Arendt underscores that “culture and politics... belong together because it is not knowledge or truth which is at stake, but rather judgment and decision, the judicious exchange of opinion about the sphere of public life and the common world, and the decision what manner of action is to be taken in it”(Arendt, 1969, p. 223).This alignment reveals the essential role of judgment in determining both aesthetic values and the course of political action.

Taste, as Arendt explains, is a form of judgment inseparably tied to decision, operating not within private feelings but in the shared, common world. “Taste, insofar as it, like any other judgment, appeals to common sense, is the very opposite of ‘private feelings.’ In aesthetic no less than in political judgments, a decision is made”(Arendt, 1969, p. 223). Judgment, in this sense, is not merely evaluative but active, deciding “what men will see and what they will hear in it”(Arendt, 1969, p. 223). It does more than that, though. Judgment also arbitrates between subjective viewpoints and the objective world we share, building the framework for any kind of collective action to take place at all.

Judgment, as our specifically political ability, operates within the realm of persuasion, where it “can only ‘woo the consent of everyone else’” (p. 223) and relies on fostering agreement, not enforcing compulsion. This persuasion, tied to the Greek *peithein*, was at the heart of political speech in the polis—a place where judgment mediated differing opinions without recourse to violence (p. 223). Through this mediating role, judgment not only navigates ideas but determines actions, deciding “what manner of action is to be taken in it” and “what kind of things are to appear in it” (p. 223). In this way, judgment influences not just how the world is perceived but also how it is acted upon and shaped. Arendt contrasts persuasion with *dialegesthai*, Aristotle’s philosophical form of speaking, which was concerned with the pursuit of knowledge and truth and therefore relied on compelling proof(Arendt, 1969, p. 223). Persuasion, by contrast, operates within the realm of culture and politics, where judgment and decision take precedence over truth or certainty.

For Arendt, judgment and decision are inseparable from action and essential for sustaining the political realm. “By his manner of judging, the person discloses to an extent also himself, what kind of person he is”(Arendt, 1969, p. 224) .Judgment mediates between individual identity and the public sphere, where action unfolds, revealing who we are as individuals in relation to the shared world. It doesn’t just evaluate; it arbitrates the demands of the private and public, reconciling the two so that decisions are made freely and collectively.

“Judgment and taste,” Arendt concludes, “are beyond the coercion which each specialty imposes upon us” (p. 225). This freedom allows judgment to arbitrate what actions are taken and how the shared world should appear. Through this interplay of judgment, decision, and action, Arendt ties culture and politics together, anchoring them in the shared reality of human freedom.

Arendt highlights how taste, as the chief cultural activity, intersects with politics. Through judgment, taste reveals more than the qualities of things; it discloses the "who" of the individual making the judgment, a disclosure that is inherently political. In the public realm, where action and speech manifest “who one is,” judgment introduces a personal element that shapes shared life. As Arendt writes, “taste decides not only how the world is to look, but also who belongs together in it”(Arendt, 1969, pp. 223–24).

Judgment, unlike the objective certainty of quality or truth, operates through discrimination and decision. It tempers the pursuit of beauty by giving it a humanistic meaning and transforming the merely beautiful into culture. In this sense, judgment is essential to the political domain, where it connects the personal with the public and determines the shared world we act within. “By his manner of judging, the person discloses to an extent also himself, what kind of person he is,” Arendt observes, tying judgment to action and political identity(Arendt, 1969, p. 223).

3.3 Freedom and Politics

In *Freedom and Politics*, Hannah Arendt explores the intricate relationship between the mental faculties of intellect, judgment, and will, specifically in regard to their roles in political action. Crucially, Arendt argues that the cognition of the aim of action—

what she explicitly identifies as judgment—is not itself an act of freedom but a matter of discerning correctly or incorrectly what ought to be done:

“Action, to be sure, has an aim, but this aim varies and depends upon the changing circumstances of the world; to recognize the aim is not a matter of freedom, but of right or wrong judgment. Will, seen as a distinct and separate human faculty, follows judgment, i.e., cognition of the right aim, and then commands its execution. The power to command, to dictate action, is not a matter of freedom, but a question of strength or weakness”(Arendt, 1960, p. 32).

Here, Arendt clearly distinguishes judgment from both freedom and will. Judgment emerges as the faculty responsible for the cognition of an action’s aim. Importantly, recognizing or determining this aim through judgment is essentially an act of choice or decision—a selection among possibilities given by circumstances. Judgment thus sets the stage for action by identifying what should be done; it determines the path but does not enact it.

Following judgment, the will is engaged as a separate faculty that commands the execution of the aim recognized by judgment. However, Arendt carefully notes that the commanding function of the will is not itself an expression of freedom. Instead, it merely exercises strength or weakness in carrying out what judgment has already decided. The freedom that characterizes action, therefore, is not located in either the cognition of its aim (judgment) or in its execution (will), but precisely in the action itself—in the act of initiating something new.

The implications of Arendt’s distinctions for our thesis are significant. Early in Arendt’s thought, judgment is tightly linked to decision and action—it is the faculty through which aims are discerned and chosen. The subsequent execution by the will is merely instrumental, reliant upon the decisiveness of judgment. This integrated model, in which judgment precedes and dictates to the will, will undergo significant changes in Arendt’s later writings. As we continue to trace the evolution of her theory of judgment, the shift away from this initial alignment of faculties—particularly the

subsequent isolation of judgment from direct involvement with political action—will become central to our inquiry.

3.4 Conclusions

So far, we have examined how Arendt conceives of judgment at its origin within her thought. We are now in a position to briefly summarize the most important characteristics of judgment at this stage. This summary will provide the foundation for our comparison with Arendt's later writings, helping us identify exactly when and why her thought undergoes the transformation which is the central issue of this thesis.

It is self-evident that, at this stage, judgment and action are directly linked through what Arendt refers to as "decision." This term is simply another translation of "choice" (*prohairesis* in Aristotle, *liberum arbitrium* in medieval philosophy), a concept that will later become central to her discussions of the will. It is crucial to note that, here, in contrast to her later works, the ability to choose and mediate—what Arendt emphasizes as the faculty that determines the kind of action to be taken in the public realm and what kind of things are to appear in it (Arendt, 1969, p. 223)—belongs solely to judgment and is classified under it. Through this ability to decide and choose, judgment is presented here as inseparably linked with action.

The discussion of Arendt's essay *Freedom and Politics* further supports this conclusion. As we have seen, Arendt clearly separates the cognitive role of judgment from the executive function of the will, emphasizing that judgment determines the right aim of action according to the circumstances of the world. The will subsequently commands its execution but does not itself partake in the freedom inherent in action. At this stage in her thought, judgment remains fundamentally connected with decision-making, oriented toward the future, and essential to action. Freedom, in turn, is manifested not in the internal deliberations of judgment nor in the mere exercise of willpower, but precisely in the public act of initiating something genuinely new.

Moreover, because all actions, due to the temporal nature of their actors, are inherently future-oriented, judgment in this context does not exhibit the exclusive concern with the past that characterizes her later thought, as Beiner notes. Thus, the main problem—the rupture between judgment and action—has yet to emerge.

To trace the origin of our main problem, we next turn our attention to the series of lectures titled *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, delivered in the mid-1960s. I argue that this work contains the seeds of the issue that will later become the primary cause of the shift in Arendt's thought.

CHAPTER 4: ARENDT'S TURN TO MORAL PHILOSOPHY

4.1 Introduction

The primary and most immediate impetus that drove Arendt to embark upon the monumental undertaking of *The Life of the Mind* was, as she tells us in its introduction, her firsthand experience of the Eichmann trial in 1961. To bear witness to such proceedings, where the defendant stood as the quintessential embodiment—or “archetype,” as it might be put—of that perplexing problem which had haunted both Arendt and her entire era since the horrors of the Holocaust rendered the world utterly “speechless,” constituted, for her, the main problem, the attempt to answer which would become *The Life of the Mind*.

The most famous (or infamous) phrase to come out of Arendt's analysis of Eichmann's behavior during his trial and execution was, without a doubt, the phrase “*banality of evil*” (Arendt and Elon, 2006, p. 252). She coined this phrase to emphasize that Eichmann's actions were not the result of profound malice or extraordinary hatred, but rather of sheer *thoughtlessness*—a profound detachment from the reality of his deeds. Arendt writes, “It was sheer thoughtlessness—something by no means identical with stupidity—that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period” (Arendt and Elon, 2006, pp. 287–88). This thoughtlessness, coupled with a lack of imagination, enabled Eichmann to remain blind to the consequences of his actions, even as he faced death. Remarkably, Arendt notes, his final words beneath the gallows were clouded by “lofty words” and clichés, betraying a complete inability to grasp the gravity of his own situation or the enormity of his crimes. For Arendt, the lesson from Jerusalem was clear: “That such remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together” (Arendt and Elon, 2006, p. 288). This, she asserts, is the true nature of the “banality of evil”—not the presence of

diabolical intent, but the absence of critical thought and moral reflection that allows individuals to commit atrocities with unsettling ordinariness.

The example of Eichmann and his “thoughtlessness” exposed to both Arendt and the world the fragile moral foundation underlying modern society. Devrim Sezer highlights a crucial aspect of thoughtlessness, particularly its ethical and political implications. According to Sezer, thoughtlessness fosters an intellectual incapacity that prevents individuals from distinguishing between legality and legitimacy. This incapacity underpins a failure to differentiate between just and unjust commands, thereby obstructing the moral evaluation of legal systems and actions. Sezer uses Adolf Eichmann as a key example, emphasizing how his uncritical obedience to existing laws exemplifies a lack of ethical judgment. Eichmann’s inability to assess laws on an ethical level—distinguishing right from wrong—reveals the dangers of unquestioning conformity to authority, particularly in the context of regimes committing crimes against humanity(Sezer, 2016, p. 113).

In this vein, Sezer draws attention to the intrinsic connection between judgment and the capacity to resist unjust authority. Without the ability to ethically evaluate laws, individuals risk becoming complicit in inhumane systems, as Eichmann’s actions tragically demonstrate.

Devrim Sezer underscores Hannah Arendt’s controversial yet profound observation regarding Adolf Eichmann: he was neither a monster nor a fool. Rather, his moral and intellectual failure stemmed from his inability to think independently and critically assess the circumstances he faced. Eichmann's seamless transition from one system of rules (such as Kant's moral philosophy) to another (the Führer’s laws) reflects a troubling adaptability that is rooted in his lack of judgment and comprehension. According to Sezer, this incapacity to evaluate the conditions of his actions without blindly adhering to commands was the defining feature of Eichmann’s complicity in the Nazi regime’s crimes(Sezer, 2016, p. 114).

Arendt identifies this deficiency in judgment as the very trait that made Eichmann one of the primary perpetrators of Nazi atrocities. However, as Sezer highlights, the true significance of Eichmann’s case lies in its broader implications. His situation was not an exception but a paradigmatic example of a widespread phenomenon. The lesson from the Eichmann trial, therefore, is not confined to understanding a single

individual's guilt but extends to recognizing the dangers of thoughtlessness and its potential to proliferate under authoritarian systems.

Devrim Sezer underscores the profound ethical and political significance of critical thinking, particularly in times of historical crisis when justice is profoundly undermined. He argues that the capacity to think independently enables individuals to escape the grip of societal prejudices and resist blind obedience to imposed commands. This ability is vital because it allows one to form autonomous judgments, preventing complicity in tyranny and evil (Sezer, 2016, p. 116).

Sezer highlights that the prerequisite for such judgment is the ability to "think without a bannister". Critical thinking interrupts the unexamined flow of everyday norms and beliefs, compelling individuals to pause and question the world around them. This disruption of habitual thought fosters a deeper awareness of ethical and political realities, equipping individuals to navigate crises with a sense of responsibility and discernment.

The phenomenon of thoughtlessness, as illustrated by Eichmann's case, provoked Hannah Arendt to reconsider the foundational capacities of the human mind that enable ethical judgment and resistance to injustice. Arendt's reflections on Eichmann's inability to think critically, and his subsequent complicity in a regime of unspeakable evil, pointed to a broader crisis of moral responsibility in modern society. This realization served as a catalyst for her later explorations of moral philosophy, a domain she had largely distanced herself from in her earlier work. The Eichmann trial thus marked a pivotal moment in Arendt's intellectual trajectory, prompting her to address questions of morality and judgment with renewed urgency.

This shift becomes evident in her lectures *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, where Arendt expands her inquiry beyond judgment to include the faculty of the will. The trial not only revealed the dangers of unthinking obedience but also raised deeper questions about the internal mechanisms that guide human action. As Arendt grappled with these issues, she began to outline a more comprehensive account of the mind's capacities, exploring how the will interacts with judgment to arbitrate between moral and political choices. This expansion of her thought represents a significant development in her philosophical project, one that reshaped her understanding of moral responsibility in light of the Eichmann case.

4.2 Some Question of Moral Philosophy

The lectures entitled *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, delivered a few years after the Eichmann case, are where we first observe the intellectual impact that the trial had on Arendt. Up to that point in her career, she had consistently distanced her political thought from moral philosophy, against which she had harbored deep qualms ever since its collapse, as experienced under Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, in order to follow the implications that the example of Eichmann posed for her, she decisively ventured into the realm of moral philosophy, from which she had long remained distant.

Furthermore, it is here that the will, for the first time, receives a thorough examination in Arendt's thought. As we will observe, the introduction of the will into Arendt's broader project will lay the foundation for the first significant transformation that her thought undergoes after *Between Past and Future*. This transformation will relate to a specific capacity of the mind—the ability to mediate or arbitrate between different courses of action among which to choose and carry out. As we discussed in the previous chapter, this role of arbitration had been previously attributed to judgment in *Between Past and Future*. However, in *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, with the introduction of the will, a new contender emerges for the position of arbiter within the mind.

The contention between the faculties of judgment and will is crucial for our discussion. While Arendt does mention several times that the will arbitrates, she is not entirely certain on the matter. This uncertainty is reflected in her referring to both the will and judgment as "the arbiter." Aware of this inconsistency, Arendt stresses that it remains an open question as to which of the two truly assumes the role of the arbiter.

To clarify this, I will analyze, in the following sections, how Arendt begins to address the questions of morality and freedom. First, I will explore how these discussions lead her to her initial conceptualizations of the will. Then, I will examine how the will is linked to action and how the discussions surrounding arbitration and decision-making relate to the will, marking a shift in her thought. We will see the will emerging with two fundamentally distinct functions. The first is what Arendt calls its "instigating function," which "stirs us into action" as its efficient cause (Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 112). The second function, which is our primary focus, is its role as "arbiter."

4.3 Turning to Moral Questions

In *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, Arendt reflects on the need to address moral questions after World War II. The Holocaust exposed how fragile moral and legal standards could be. The post-war trials, especially those of war criminals, forced a confrontation with these failures. As she writes, “the simple fact of courtroom procedure forced everybody...to look at these matters from a moral viewpoint”(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 57). However, she also argues that the courtroom couldn't fully address how to judge actions that were legal but morally wrong. This tension between law and morality led her to rethink judgment, responsibility, and ethics.

Arendt points out that the war showed how easily people could abandon moral responsibility in favor of following the law. She explains, “Morality collapsed into a mere set of mores-manners, customs, conventions to be changed at will-not with criminals, but with ordinary people, who, as long as moral standards were socially accepted, never dreamt of doubting what they had been taught to believe in”(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 54). The trials revealed that people could follow laws that had no moral foundation. But Arendt stresses the importance of focusing on individual responsibility, saying, “It is the undeniable greatness of the judiciary that it must focus its attention on the individual person” rather than on systems or organizations(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 57).

Arendt also reflects on how the moral issue has been overlooked since the war, largely due to the horror of the events themselves. She writes, “When I think back to the last two decades since the end of the last war, I have the feeling that this moral issue has lain dormant because it was concealed by something about which it is indeed much more difficult to speak and with which it is almost impossible to come to terms—the horror itself in its naked monstrosity”(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 55). This "speechless horror," as she calls it, seemed to transcend moral categories and made it difficult to address the moral questions that came with it. She argues that this focus on the catastrophic events overshadowed the moral lessons that could have been learned from them, noting, “What I wanted to indicate is that the same speechless horror, this refusal to think the unthinkable, has perhaps prevented a very necessary reappraisal of legal categories as it has made us forget the strictly moral, and, one hopes, more manageable,

lessons which are closely connected with the whole story but which look like harmless side issues if compared with the horror”(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 55).

Finally, Arendt concludes that moral conduct is no longer self-evident, as many once believed. She says, “no one in his right mind can any longer claim that moral conduct is a matter of course—*das Moralische versteht sich von selbst*,- an assumption under which the generation I belong to was still brought up”(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 61). The once-clear distinction between legality and morality has become increasingly ambiguous. In the past, when the laws of the land conflicted with the moral law, the latter was regarded as the higher authority. However, the experience of Nazi Germany has demonstrated that this notion no longer holds, as the moral law was subordinated to, or even supplanted by, legal dictates in the service of atrocities.

4.4 Kantian Morality

This friction Arendt observes between the "law of the land"(legality) and the "moral law"(morality) naturally leads her to her first discussion of Kant's moral philosophy. Arendt turns to Kant to explore the tension between legal obligation and moral responsibility, as Kant's philosophy emphasizes the individual's capacity for judgment and moral autonomy, which aligns with her concern for personal responsibility in the face of broader legal and moral frameworks. She notes how Kant, well aware of the wretched nature of human beings, was forced to make his universal standard for determining what is good and evil an imperative that is commanded to the person by the moral law(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, pp. 61–62). This shows Kant's recognition that moral judgment must be internalized by the individual, as a response to the frailty of human nature and the need for a guiding principle that transcends personal desires or societal laws. This question of how the human being is capable of distinguishing between right and wrong, and where this capacity lies, Kant would answer, as Arendt argues, that it resides in the rational structure of our mind. For Kant, the ability to discern moral truths comes from the inherent capacity for reason within us, which allows individuals to apply universal moral laws and judge actions according to these principles.

While Arendt acknowledges that Kant's argument—that humans possess the capacity for moral judgment as an intrinsic characteristic—can be accepted, yet, she writes,

"What Kant would not have taken for granted is that man will also act according to his judgment"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 62). In other words, Kant's philosophy assumes that humans have the rational capacity to discern right from wrong, but it does not automatically follow that they will act on that judgment. Arendt expands on this by pointing out that "man is not only a rational being, he also belongs to the world of the senses," which means that humans are often tempted by their sensory inclinations and desires. These desires, she argues, may lead them to act contrary to reason and judgment, yielding instead to their immediate inclinations rather than following what reason or moral law dictates. This tension between rational judgment and sensory temptation highlights the complexity of moral action, showing that it is not enough for individuals to merely have the capacity for judgment—they must also be able to act on it, despite the pull of their desires.

Arendt's discussion on morality emphasizes a critical distinction between legality and morality. As she writes, "... moral conduct has nothing to do with obedience to any law that is given from the outside—be it the law of God or the laws of men"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, pp. 68–69). For Arendt, moral behavior is not about following external authorities, whether religious or legal. She draws on Kant's distinction between "legality and morality," with legality being morally neutral. Legality, according to Arendt, fits within political and religious structures, but it does not belong to the moral order. She explains, "The political order does not require moral integrity but only law-abiding citizens, and the Church is always a church of sinners"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 69). The political and religious realms, then, do not demand moral action from individuals, but merely adherence to the law, whereas morality transcends these frameworks and binds all rational beings.

Arendt reinforces this distinction by quoting Kant's perspective on governance: "The problem of organizing a state, however hard as it may seem, can be solved even for a race of devils, if only they are intelligent"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 69). Here, Kant suggests that the organization of a state is possible even if its citizens lack moral integrity, as long as they can follow rational laws. In contrast, the moral order requires a different kind of adherence—one that emerges from within the individual. As Arendt emphasizes through Kant's ideas, "If, however, I can be said at all to obey the categorical imperative, it means that I am obeying my own reason, and the law which I give myself is valid for all rational creatures, all intelligible beings no matter where

they may have their dwelling place"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 69). This highlights the Kantian idea that morality comes from the individual's rational capacity to legislate for themselves, not from an external law. "I am the legislator, sin or crime can no longer be defined as disobedience to somebody else's law, but on the contrary as refusal to act my part as legislator of the world"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 69). For Arendt, this notion of self-legislation and moral autonomy, grounded in reason, forms the foundation of Kant's moral philosophy. She sees this as a "rebellious" shift from understanding morality as obedience to an external authority, to seeing it as a personal and rational act of self-governance, where the individual becomes the source of moral law.

4.5 Arendt's Criticism of Kant

However, Arendt argues that there is a "self-misunderstanding" in Kant's moral philosophy. She explains that Kant's formula—that a moral act is one which establishes a universally valid law—was framed as a law that commands obedience, which contradicts his earlier discussions of moral freedom against mere obedience. As Arendt notes, "The chief reason for this self-misunderstanding in Kant is the highly equivocal meaning of the word 'law' in the Western tradition of thought"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 69). According to Arendt, the term "law," as used by Kant, creates confusion in interpreting his moral philosophy.

This passage gives the first glimpses of Arendt's later criticisms of Kantian moral philosophy. It is revealed by the "self-misunderstanding" Arendt attributes to Kant, signaling the beginning of her divergence from Kant's moral philosophy, which had served as a guide up until now. Therefore, it is beneficial for us to analyze this supposed "self-misunderstanding" in Kant, as it marks a pivotal moment in Arendt's evolving critique of Kantian ethics. Her focus on this issue suggests that Kant's view of moral law, grounded in obedience, fails to capture the full scope of human moral autonomy, a theme that will shape her later arguments.

Arendt, to elaborate on this point, starts by distinguishing between the meaning of the word "law" in political and religious contexts. When Kant speaks of the moral law, Arendt argues that he uses the term in a way similar to the laws of the land, where the law is seen as obligatory simply because individuals must obey it. She explains, "The

law of the land is considered obligatory for all inhabitants in the sense that they have to obey it"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 69). This concept of obedience, she continues, is rooted in religious usage, where the Law of God is given as a command—"Thou shalt"—and the obligation to obey stems not from the content of the law but from the fact that God has commanded it. Arendt contends that this commanding aspect of Kant's moral law introduces the concept of obedience back into morality. This distinction is central to understanding Arendt's critique of Kant's moral law. She points out that the concept of law as obedience to an external authority does not align with Kant's moral philosophy, which stresses the individual's capacity to legislate moral laws for themselves.

Yet, we can easily defend Kant against this criticism by pointing out that what Arendt sees as detrimental to moral freedom—obedience to a law imposed by an external authority—differs markedly from the obedience we are to show Kant's "moral law." As Arendt previously emphasized, obedience to Kant's "moral law" is obedience to a law that the individuals give to themselves. However, Arendt seems to believe that Kant did not realize that by grounding his moral philosophy in a "law," he ended up equating obedience to the moral law—whose legislator is us—with the unquestioning obedience to external laws-whether religious or political- which is contrary to the spirit of freedom.

On the contrary, this obedience that the moral law demands is not one shown to an external law but to an internal law that we legislate for ourselves. Under this conception, there seems to be no "self-misunderstanding" in Kant's use of the word "law," as it does not contradict the core aspects of his moral philosophy regarding freedom. For the obedience we owe to the moral law is fundamentally different from obedience to external laws. When we obey the moral law, we obey a law we give to ourselves, and thus we remain free even if we "obey" its commands. This, for Arendt, is the "self-misunderstanding" in Kant's philosophy, where the distinction between obedience to a self-legislated moral law and obedience to external authority becomes unclear. Therefore, we must concede that Arendt's criticism of this aspect of Kant's moral law is based on a misinterpretation, where the internal law-giving authority of reason is conflated with the external authority seen in religion and politics.

That Arendt attributes such a position to Kant becomes even more evident when, in the next paragraph, she discusses the distinction between "laws of nature" and "laws of freedom," a distinction that is absolutely central to Kantian moral philosophy. Here, Arendt emphasizes how Kant's moral philosophy, by linking the moral law to a concept of law itself, blurs the line between freedom and obedience. "Laws of nature", she writes, "are obligatory"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 70). They are the laws that human beings cannot ever transgress. Arendt further notes that, for Kant, the main difference that distinguishes a law of nature from that of freedom is that the latter does not carry with it any natural necessity but only an obligation.

Arendt's argument sets up a critique of Kant's view, which she articulates as follows: "But if we understand by law either commands which I must obey or the necessity of nature to which I am subject anyhow, then the term 'law of freedom' is a contradiction in terms"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 70). Arendt is pointing out that by framing the "law of freedom" in terms of obligation, Kant inadvertently makes it identical to a law of nature, where compliance is necessary, thus contradicting the concept of freedom.

Yet, we can save Kant from this criticism rather easily by pointing out that "laws of nature," for Kant, are not *obligatory* but absolutely *necessary*. The question of obligation or obedience does not apply to the laws of nature, as they are completely necessary for every single being in space and time. The concept of obligation only makes sense if the subject of the law could, by its own preference, withhold or grant obedience to the law. However, natural laws do not obligate us in this way; for, they do not require our obligation to exert their influence on us and the world. They are absolutely necessary, irrespective of whether we grant obedience or rebel against them. We cannot help but to follow them, because they are not based on subjective choice, but on objective necessity. They are truly always "a matter of course."

Laws of freedom, on the other hand, are laws against which the human being has the capacity to dissent. Unlike the laws of nature, which are unavoidable and apply to all beings, laws of freedom are not necessary in the same way. They carry only an obligation, meaning that it is still up to the individual whether to follow them or transgress. In other words, the subject has the freedom to either obey or break these laws. In short, laws of freedom carry no inherent natural necessity—there is no natural force compelling us to follow them—but only an obligation. This contrasts with the

laws of nature, which, while they carry no obligation (since we cannot choose to disobey them), are governed by necessity. The laws of nature bind us regardless of our personal desires or actions, as they are not subject to our will.

Arendt seems to confuse the concepts of obligation and necessity by attributing to Kant's moral law—the law of freedom—the same mechanical necessity that the laws of nature exert on their objects. However, this is exactly the opposite of what Kant puts forward. Kant emphasizes that the moral law carries no necessity; it does not bind us in the same way that natural laws do. Instead, it demands obedience from us, but this obedience is not mechanistically guaranteed—it is something we can choose to deny according to our will. This distinction is crucial in Kant's philosophy, as he views moral law as a matter of personal choice and rational will, not something imposed by external necessity.

This last point is further supported by Arendt's most extreme criticism of Kantian philosophy, which, I believe, is demonstrably false. Discussing again why Kant felt it necessary to make his moral law an obligatory imperative, she raises the all-important question of whether, by virtue of this imperative commanded by reason to the will, reason necessarily determines the will (Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 71). Arendt questions whether Kant's moral law, presented as an imperative from reason, inevitably dictates the will's actions, implying a conflict between Kant's concept of moral freedom and the nature of the moral law itself. This critique, however, overlooks Kant's key idea that while reason provides the moral law, the will retains its autonomy to choose whether to follow it, meaning the will is not strictly determined by reason.

"In that case," she writes, "the will would no longer be free but would stand under the dictate of reason." Arendt raises the concern that if reason commands the will, the will's freedom would be compromised. She goes on to explain that reason can only tell the will: "this is good, in accordance with reason; if you wish to attain it you ought to act accordingly." She argues that this creates a paradox, adding that the problem "does not grow less when we hear that 'the will is nothing else than practical reason' and that 'reason infallibly determines the will,'" suggesting that either reason determines itself or, as Kant suggests, "the will is a faculty of choosing only that which reason ... recognizes as ... good." Arendt concludes that if this is true, the will would essentially become "nothing but an executive organ for reason," serving merely as the

"execution branch" of human faculties. This conclusion, she argues, stands in flagrant contradiction to the core tenets of freedom in Kant's moral philosophy (Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 71).

Now, that this criticism of Kant is unjust can easily be demonstrated. To do so, I will analyze the passage Arendt uses to underline that, for Kant, "the will is nothing else but practical reason" (Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 71). Since this criticism will later play an important role in the development of her thought, leading her into the perplexities she will eventually confront, I might be permitted to quote that important passage from Kant—found in the *Groundwork*—at some length.

"Everything in nature works in accordance with laws. Only a rational being has the capacity to act in accordance with the representation of laws, that is, in accordance with principles, or has a will. Since reason is required for the derivation of actions from laws, the will is nothing other than practical reason. If reason infallibly determines the will, the actions of such a being that are cognized as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary, that is, the will is a capacity to choose only that which reason independently of inclination cognizes as practically necessary, that is, as good. However, if reason solely by itself does not adequately determine the will; if the will is exposed also to subjective conditions (certain incentives) that are not always in accord with the objective ones; in a word, if the will is not completely in conformity with reason (as is actually the case with human beings), then actions that are cognized as objectively necessary are subjectively contingent, and the determination of such a will in conformity with objective laws is necessitation: that is to say, the relation of objective laws to a will that is not thoroughly good is represented as the determination of the will of a rational being through grounds of

reason, indeed, but grounds to which this will is not by its nature necessarily obedient"(Kant, 2008, p. 24)

Arendt emphasizes Kant's argument that the will serves as the executive organ of reason, drawing attention to a critical passage where Kant asserts that the will is "nothing but practical reason" only if it is "infallibly determined by reason." The concept of "infallibility" is central to this claim. However, Kant immediately qualifies this by noting that if the will is influenced by subjective conditions and not entirely determined by reason, it may fail to align itself with the law dictated by reason. This, he explains, is characteristic of human beings. In such cases, the moral law lacks the unavoidable necessity of natural laws and instead imposes what Kant terms "necessitation." That is, the moral law obligates us to align our will with reason, but it does not do so through automatic or unbreakable compulsion. This distinction underscores that, for Kant, adherence to the moral law remains a rational imperative, yet one that requires the individual's active and deliberate choice to harmonize their will with it. This distinction between the laws of nature and the laws of freedom lies at the heart of Kant's moral philosophy. Laws of nature are characterized by absolute necessity, both objectively and subjectively—they operate independently of our will, leaving no room for deviation. In contrast, the laws of freedom, epitomized by the moral law, possess a dual character: while they are objectively necessary as rational principles, they remain subjectively contingent. This contingency stems from the fact that the moral law imposes an obligation rather than a compulsion. It obligates us to act in accordance with reason, but the choice to comply or defy this obligation ultimately rests with the individual. Thus, the moral law, though universal and binding as an objective standard, acquires a subjective dimension by allowing the individual the freedom to decide whether to align their will with it. This interplay between objective necessity and subjective contingency distinguishes the moral law from the inexorable determinism of natural laws.

Kant's view, in contrast to Arendt's interpretation, does not reduce the will to a mere executive organ of reason at the expense of its freedom. This is evident in the concluding sentence of the passage, where Kant describes the notion of necessitation arising from the moral law: "... the relation of objective laws to a will that is not thoroughly good is represented as the determination of the will of a rational being through grounds of reason, indeed, but grounds to which this will is not by its nature

necessarily obedient"(Kant, 2008, p. 24). Here, Kant makes it clear that the will is not automatically or necessarily determined by reason; it retains its capacity for disobedience. While reason provides the rational basis for moral action, the will remains free to choose whether to follow these grounds. This inherent freedom of the will, even in the face of rational moral imperatives, is a key feature of Kant's moral philosophy, underscoring the voluntary nature of moral obedience.

Hence, we must acknowledge that the criticism Arendt levels against Kant in this instance is unwarranted. Arendt's interpretation misreads Kant's position by suggesting that his claim—that reason can and does determine the will—renders the will a "slave" of reason. This misunderstanding, as we will argue, sets the stage for the central issue this thesis seeks to address. In her effort to "rescue" the freedom of the will, Arendt proposes a complete severance between reason and the determination of the will. However, as we will explore in the next chapter, this interpretation, though flawed, does not fully take shape in this work but becomes more pronounced in the *Willing* volume of *The Life of the Mind*.

Thus far, we have examined Arendt's initial engagement with the fundamental questions of morality and freedom, particularly her exploration of the intricate relationship between the will and reason. We now shift our focus to the functions Arendt attributes to the will, as articulated in *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*. Specifically, we will analyze the distinct roles the will plays in relation to action, with particular emphasis on its function as "the arbiter." This examination will illuminate how Arendt conceptualizes the will as a mediating force, one that navigates between conflicting impulses and rational principles to enable deliberate action.

4.6 Emergence of the Will as The Arbiter

Right at the outset of the discussion, Arendt defines the will as the arbiter between the dichotomy of reason and desire. As she writes, "I can decide against the deliberate advice of reason as I can decide against the mere attraction of objects of my appetite, and it is will rather than reason or appetite that decides the issue of what I am going to do"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 113). It is evident here that, in contrast to *Between Past and Future*, it is the will that assumes the role of arbitrating and deciding among

possibilities. The will, rather than reason or desire, takes on the decisive function, determining the course of action amidst competing options.

We can further highlight this contrast by looking at a passage a few pages later, where Arendt describes the will as "a kind of arbiter—*liberum arbitrium*—between the mind that knows and the flesh that desires." In this description, the will is positioned as the decisive force, standing between reason (the mind that knows) and bodily impulses (the flesh that desires). Arendt emphasizes that, in this role, the will is free—it is not determined by either reason or desire but rather makes decisions independently, acting out of its own spontaneity. This idea leads her to a conclusion, quoting the philosopher Duns Scotus, that "The will alone is the total cause of volition"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 119), suggesting that the will is the fundamental power behind our actions and decisions. Thus, we first see the early indications of the change that Arendt's thought would undergo regarding the role of arbitrating and deciding, which had previously been assigned to judgment. In this context, the will appears clearly as the contender for this function.

Arendt further emphasizes the function of the will when she discusses *liberum arbitrium* in Augustine's philosophy. She focuses on the famous thought experiment in which Augustine imagines a will divided between several equally possible options. According to Augustine, this will fluctuates between different "conflicting wills" and must make a decision among them. This process of coming to a decision Arendt likens to "deliberation"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 121).

Deliberation, in this context, clearly is the process of carefully weighing the various possibilities between which the will is divided. In this sense, deliberation closely resembles what Arendt had earlier described as arbitration. It involves the will deciding among several potential courses of action, as these options present themselves, with the will assuming the role of arbiter, evaluating each possibility before making a final decision.

Viewed in this light, one might conclude that deliberation and arbitration are essentially the same. However, it is puzzling to see that, while Arendt had consistently emphasized the arbitrating function the will plays in decision-making, she nonetheless asserts that "to deliberate and to will are not the same". Although, she argues, deliberation is a form of willing, as she quotes Augustine: "Where anyone deliberates,

there is one soul fluctuating between conflicting wills"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 121). It is in this fluctuation between conflicting options that the will, as arbiter, is supposed to choose. Hence, there appears to be no real difference between deliberation and arbitration, as both are processes that ultimately lead to a decision.

This apparent ambiguity concerning deliberation is quite revealing. It marks Arendt's first attempts to clearly distinguish between reason and will in terms of the roles they play in action. One could argue that her hesitation to equate deliberation with willing stems from the fact that deliberation is undeniably a rational process, while the will itself is not a rational faculty. Although it is hard to see why there is no hesitation in attributing the capacity of arbitration to the will, given that it, too, involves weighing alternatives in order to reach a decision—an undeniably rational process. Yet, these perplexities reveal that the questions surrounding arbitration and deliberation are central to Arendt's overall project.

Furthermore, Arendt, recognizing the ambiguities surrounding the arbitrating function of the will, acknowledges that when she previously stated, "it is the will, and neither reason nor mere desire, that prompts man into action," she was only presenting a half-truth. As she clarifies, "the will, as we saw, is understood as the arbiter between desires or the arbiter between reason and desires, and as such, it must be free from being determined by either reason or desire"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 127). This recognition points to the need for a more precise understanding of the will's role, one that accounts for its freedom from both the rational and the appetitive aspects of human nature.

It is difficult to understand why Arendt confesses to a "half-truth," especially given that the passage clearly indicates the will must, by necessity, determine action independently of both reason and desire in order to be truly "free." In other words, the will must determine itself. This, it seems, represents the full truth of the matter, making her confession of a "half-truth" seem unnecessary. The will's freedom is inherently tied to its independence from external influences, a point Arendt has already established, which renders the admission redundant. However, the core of her hesitation, as she explains, lies in the very nature of the will's self-determination, a capacity that raises profound challenges she has yet to resolve fully. As she states, the difficulty lies in

"there being something that is not determined by anything and yet is still not arbitrary; that the arbiter should not arbitrate arbitrarily"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 129).

This point is especially important for us, as it represents the culmination of the previous ambiguities. Arendt is grappling with the question of how this self-determining causal agent—the will—is to carry out its arbitration and ultimately determine itself. In other words, how does the will arbitrate between the various possibilities within its power? This question, which encapsulates the perplexities surrounding the arbitrating function of the will, remains deliberately unanswered. As emphasized previously by Beiner(Arendt and Beiner, 1992, p. 139), Arendt argues that this function "is, in fact, the same as judgment; the will is called upon to judge between different and opposing propositions, and whether this faculty of judgment, one of the most mysterious faculties of the human mind, should be said to be the will or reason or perhaps a third mental capacity, is at least an open question"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 130). This is indeed one of the most important passages relevant to our purpose. For this reason, it is essential to dedicate careful attention to this passage.

Here, we observe the contention that we had previously pointed out between the will and judgment in terms of their roles in the arbitrating and choosing capacity of the mind. While Arendt repeatedly emphasizes the will's arbitrating function, we have also seen that she harbors certain hesitations about attributing this function exclusively to the will. This is evident from her confession of the "half-truth" mentioned earlier, where she acknowledges the complexity of the issue and the need for further clarification regarding the will's precise role in decision-making. Her reluctance to fully assign the role of arbitration to the will reflects a deeper uncertainty about the nature of the faculties involved in judgment and decision.

The admission that it is indeed an open question as to where this ability of arbitration lies explains the cause of all the ambiguities and perplexities we've pointed out previously. Arendt is still grappling with the question of which power should be classified as the source of this capacity for arbitration. As a result, her thought in *Some Questions on Moral Philosophy* seems to oscillate between judgment and will in terms of which of these two faculties holds the role of arbitration. This oscillation reflects her ongoing uncertainty and the complex relationship between the will, judgment, and their respective functions in decision-making.

This oscillation is further evident in her final explanation of the will in its role as arbiter, where she notes that it is "called upon and then sitting in judgment over conflicting claims..."(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 136). So, it seems that it is the will that is supposed to "sit in judgment" in order to arbitrate among options and decide what is to be done. This ability, as she notes, was known in antiquity as *liberum arbitrium* (free arbitration), and here, it appears to be attributed to the will. This attribution, in turn, seems to offer an answer to the open question we discussed earlier.

Yet, we can see that the question of which faculty holds the arbitrating power is still open. After the discussion of the will concludes, Arendt introduces judgment by describing it as "the true arbiter between right and wrong, beautiful and ugly, true and untrue"(Arendt and Kohn, 2003, p. 137). This indicates that, despite the will's role as an arbiter, judgment is still viewed as the primary faculty responsible for distinguishing between opposing values and truths.

4.7 Conclusions

Thus, it is evident that the decisive shift we observe between Arendt's early and later thought regarding the role of judgment in action has not yet fully taken effect. Although we can see the seeds of change being sown, the problem begins to emerge with the introduction of the will as a mental faculty, a concept that had been entirely absent from her earlier work. As we noted in the previous chapter, judgment, in its initial treatment in *Between Past and Future*, was regarded as the faculty that arbitrates and mediates between the multitude of possible options in order to decide "what manner of action is to be taken" by the human being as an actor. Whereas, in *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, another faculty undeniably tied to action emerges—the will. As we have seen, Arendt distinguishes, at several points, between two entirely different functions of the will. The first function, as the instigator of action within the mind, is granted by Arendt without hesitation, in line with the philosophical tradition. However, its second function, as the arbiter that decides between several courses of action—*liberum arbitrium*—is where the ambiguities and uncertainties arise.

This uncertainty is evident from the fact that, as we have noted above, Arendt, at several points, attributes the capacity of arbitration to both the will and judgment. We see Arendt struggling to establish clear boundaries between judgment and the newly

introduced faculty of the will. The most crucial distinction to be made, as highlighted by Arendt's acknowledgment of the "open question," lies in the power of arbitration and choice. This is the central issue around which her thought oscillates, reflecting the challenge of defining the roles of these two faculties in decision-making.

The main conclusions to be drawn from this chapter are twofold. First, Arendt's sharp criticism of Kant's moral philosophy, which we analyzed in the first section, is based on a misinterpretation of Kant's moral law and a confusion between moral obligation (laws of freedom) and natural necessity (laws of nature). Arendt argued that Kant, by formulating his basic moral principle as a law that reason legislates to the will, turned the will into an "executive organ" of reason, thereby stripping it of its freedom. However, we have shown that Kant can easily be defended against this criticism. While laws of nature involve both objective and subjective necessity, which make the concept of obligation irrelevant, laws of freedom, though they carry an objectively necessary command, are subjectively contingent. Therefore, they carry no natural necessity, only a moral obligation.

Second, Arendt's initial treatment of the will in relation to its functions in action and decision-making presents a sharp contrast between *Between Past and Future* and this work. In the former, the arbitration and decision-making functions of human beings are classified under the faculty of judgment. However, with the introduction of the will, we see the emergence of a challenger for the title of arbiter, as we discussed in detail in the previous section. Furthermore, we have noted that Arendt deliberately leaves open the question of which power ultimately holds this title and that her thought oscillates between judgment and action in relation to this unresolved issue. Hence, as we pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, we can see the seeds of the transformation that Arendt's thought would undergo being sown here, although this change does not fully take effect in this work.

Therefore, to trace and pinpoint exactly where this transformation occurs, we now turn our attention to the last text Arendt completed before her death: the *Willing* volume of *The Life of the Mind*. The next chapter will provide a brief analysis of that work, focusing on two key points emphasized in this chapter. The first is Arendt's criticism of Kant regarding the relationship between reason and will in action. The second is an

examination of how the role of arbitration is treated, particularly concerning the faculty to which this function is classified.



CHAPTER 5: WILLING

5.1 Introduction

Turning our attention to the last text that Arendt was able to complete before her untimely death, namely, the *Willing* volume of *The Life of the Mind*, the first thing to note here is the difficulty of the text. As Arendt's editor, Mary McCarthy, points out, it was the hardest volume to write for Arendt as well (Arendt, 1981, bk. 2, p. 243). This difficulty stems from the complex nature of the topic and the challenges Arendt faced in trying to explore the concept of will in depth, while also dealing with the theoretical and existential implications of human freedom and action.

What Arendt intends to accomplish with this work on the will is truly a monumental project. As she notes, the faculty of the will and the concept of freedom have always been stumbling blocks in metaphysics, producing many problems even for the greatest and most acute philosophers in the tradition. In this volume, Arendt grapples with these questions in order to produce a theory of the will that would rid the faculty of these traditional perplexities. Fortunately, these complexities are not of concern to our aim.

Hence, this chapter will examine, first, the relation that Arendt conceives between reason and will as regards the determination of action, as is evident from her criticism of Kant. Second, it will investigate how Arendt explicates the function of the will in relation to action and arbitration. We will also see that the open question regarding which faculty should be classified as the source of arbitration and decision is finally answered in favor of the will. This answer, as we will explore, will create a rupture between judgment and action, a shift that characterizes her later thought.

5.2 The Relation between Reason and Will

It is indeed surprising that we do not find a separate chapter dedicated to Kant's views on the will, especially considering that Arendt's theory of judgment draws its main inspiration from Kant's theory of judgment as presented in the *Critique of Judgment*. However, it might be argued that Arendt, due to the criticisms we have highlighted earlier, did not think that Kant's views on the will merited further exploration in this work. Nevertheless, we find two brief mentions of Kant, both of which echo the critical

tone found in *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*. Thus, in this section, I will briefly revisit these points to reiterate Arendt's criticism of Kant. This analysis will provide valuable insight into how Arendt conceives the relationship between reason and will in relation to the determination of action.

In the chapter on *prohairesis*, Arendt reiterates her earlier criticism, asserting that, in Kant's framework, the will is essentially synonymous with practical reason. Drawing an analogy to Aristotle's *nous praktikos*, she suggests that the will derives its obligatory force from the compelling nature of self-evident truths and the logical reasoning that supports them. As Arendt herself puts it, "The will in Kant is in fact 'practical reason' much in the sense of Aristotle's *nous praktikos*" (Arendt, 1981, bk. 2, p. 63); it borrows its obligatory power, Arendt argues, from the compulsion exerted on the mind by self-evident truth or logical reasoning.

The next point where this same argument is made is found in the chapter titled *German Idealism and the "rainbow-bridge of concepts"*. Arendt argues that Kant's will "is not a special mental capability distinct from thinking, but practical reason, a *Vernunftwille* not unlike Aristotle's *nous praktikos*... Kant's Will is neither freedom of choice (*liberum arbitrium*) nor its own cause; for Kant, sheer spontaneity, which he often called "absolute spontaneity," exists only in thinking. Kant's Will is delegated by reason to be its executive organ in all matters of conduct" (Arendt, 1981, bk. 2, p. 149).

It is self-evidently clear that the criticism Arendt had previously directed at Kant persists in her later thought. With this point established, the final chapter of this thesis will explore how this view of the relationship between reason and will influences and creates challenges for Arendt's overall project. Therefore, in the next section, we will examine how Arendt explicates the function of the will in relation to action and choice within the context of the present work.

5.3 Answering the Open Question

We see already in the Postscriptum to *Thinking* that Arendt had decisively resolved the open question we've emphasized in the previous chapter. In the Postscriptum, Arendt explicitly states that "The decision the will arrives at can never be derived from the mechanics of desire or the deliberations of the intellect that may precede it. The will

is either an organ of free spontaneity that interrupts all causal chains of motivation that would bind it or it is nothing but an illusion" (Arendt, 1981, bk. 1, p. 213).

This unambiguous statement confirms beyond any doubt that Arendt now attributes the faculty of choice and decision exclusively to the will. Such a position marks a significant departure from her earlier works. Previously, in *The Crisis in Culture* and especially in *Freedom and Politics*, judgment had been conceived as the faculty responsible for determining the aim of action. Judgment thus served as the critical cognitive faculty necessary for orienting action through the determination of the aim, i.e. choice. By reassigning this essential mediating role to the will, Arendt fundamentally redefines the relationship between judgment and action—an act that introduces the conceptual rupture at the heart of our thesis.

This decision is further reinforced in the introduction to the *Willing* volume itself, where Arendt argues explicitly that the Aristotelian concept of *prohairesis* (known as *liberum arbitrium* in Latin), that is, the faculty of choice or decision, is "the forerunner of the will" (Arendt, 1981, bk. 2, p. 6). Later in this work, *prohairesis* receives its own treatment in a separate chapter, which is crucial to our project. In the following section, we will undertake an analysis of this chapter, examining *prohairesis* as it relates to the concepts of deliberation, arbitration, and the themes previously discussed.

5.4 Prohairesis or The Power of Choice

Hannah Arendt's discussion of *prohairesis* in Aristotle begins with the acknowledgment that "reason by itself does not move anything" (Arendt, 1981, bk. 2 p. 57). This foundational insight, which Aristotle uses to challenge Platonic assumptions, leads to the guiding question of his inquiry: "What is it in the soul that originates movement?" (Arendt, 1981, bk. 2 p. 57). Aristotle accepts Plato's idea that "reason gives commands (*keleuei*) because it knows what one should pursue and what one should avoid," but he denies that these commands are inherently obeyed (Arendt, 1981, bk. 2 p. 57). Instead, the incontinent man, Aristotle's paradigmatic example, disobeys reason and follows desire, while simultaneously, reason can recommend resisting these desires. This tension marks the beginning of Aristotle's effort to reconcile reason and desire. Arendt highlights that Aristotle ultimately situates the origin of movement in a dynamic interaction between reason and desire. "Desire for

an absent object stimulates reason to step in and calculate the best ways and means to obtain it”(Arendt, 1981, bk. 2 p. 58). This interplay is mediated by *nous praktikos* (practical reason), which deals with contingent matters—those “within human power and therefore contingent (they can be or not-be)”—unlike *nous theoretikos* (speculative reason), which is concerned with immutable truths.

Arendt emphasizes that deliberation lies at the heart of *prohairesis*, which she defines as the faculty that enables preference and choice. Aristotle, she notes, insists that deliberation is about means, not ends. Happiness (*eudaimonia*), for instance, is an ultimate end which is inherent in human nature and the same for all, and thus not subject to deliberation or choice. Instead, deliberation involves selecting the most appropriate means to achieve these ends. She writes, “The element of reason in choice is called ‘deliberation,’ and we never deliberate about ends but about the means to attain them”(Arendt, 1981, bk. 2 p. 61).

Prohairesis mediates the conflict between reason and desire by introducing a deliberate process of preference. Arendt explains, “Reason and desire, being in conflict, [require] the decision between them... [to be] a matter of ‘preference,’ of deliberate choice”(Arendt, 1981, bk. 2 p. 61-62). This mediation transforms the natural antagonism of reason and desire into a harmonious framework for action. *Prohairesis* thus serves as an arbiter, ensuring that action is neither purely rational nor entirely impulsive but guided by reasoned deliberation.

The ultimate function of *prohairesis* is to bridge the gap between deliberation and action. Arendt notes, “Choice becomes the starting-point of the actions themselves,” as it integrates desire, which motivates movement, with logos, which provides purpose(Arendt, 1981, bk. 2 p. 60). This mediating role makes *prohairesis* essential to purposeful human action. “*Prohairesis* is the arbiter between several possibilities,” ensuring that action is preceded by rational evaluation(Arendt, 1981, bk. 2 p. 62).

Arendt concludes that while *prohairesis* offers a framework for reconciling reason and desire, its scope is limited. The space it creates for freedom is small, confined to the rational selection of means rather than the determination of ultimate ends. As we’ve emphasized, nobody deliberates and chooses health or happiness as his aim, since such ends are intrinsic to human nature, leaving *prohairesis* to focus solely on the practicalities of achieving them.

In Arendt's interpretation, *prohairesis* is a precursor to the modern will, offering a mechanism for reconciling internal conflict and guiding action. However, this space is limited, leaving broader questions of freedom and moral choice unresolved. As Arendt concludes, *prohairesis* mediates between competing possibilities, enabling deliberate and reasoned action but remaining constrained by the given ends of human nature.

Choice, then, becomes the culmination of this deliberative process. Arendt emphasizes that the power of choice serves as the mechanism through which deliberation is translated into action, as it resolves the tension between reason and desire. Through choice, the faculty of *prohairesis* enables individuals to act intentionally, reconciling internal conflicts and directing their energies toward a unified purpose.

This interplay of deliberation, reason, and choice underscores the mediated nature of human action in Aristotle's and medieval thought. As Arendt concludes, *prohairesis* operates as a deliberative faculty, dependent on rational evaluation and the negotiation of desires to establish the means of action. It is through this careful arbitration that human agency takes shape, not as an expression of autonomy but as a reasoned response to the complexities of the world.

5.5 Conclusions

From the previous discussion, it is now clear that the question Arendt had left open regarding which faculty should be responsible for the power of arbitration and choice has been resolved. The answer, as we can see, favors the will as the faculty that assumes this crucial function.

The power of choice, that is, the power to arbitrate between possibilities and subsequently decide which one to actualize, had been, in *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, the topic of contention between the faculties of judgment and will. As we've stated in the previous chapter, Arendt's thought concerning this question had been uncertain and seemed to oscillate between the two faculties of judgment and will. This oscillation was not a minor fluctuation, but rather a deep tension that reflected a significant philosophical dilemma within her work.

One of the main reasons behind this uncertainty was the issue concerning "deliberation." Deliberation, that is, the calculated mental process in which one weighs

the several options against each other prior to choosing one among them, had been explicitly distinguished from the act of willing. The distinction between deliberation and willing was, in the early stages of Arendt's thought, carefully articulated, with each faculty performing a distinct function in the process of decision-making. Yet, however, it was subsequently suggested by Arendt that deliberation could, in a sense, be considered a form of willing. This ambiguity in her thinking reflected the complexity of the process of actualization, as all deeds that are to be actualized in the world required this process of deliberation prior to their final actualization. This presented an undeniable connection between the deliberation and willing, which at first appeared separate. Due to this necessary relationship between deliberation and action, Arendt, while at first clearly distinguishing between the two faculties, felt the need to tie them together.

Earlier, in *Freedom and Politics*, Arendt had offered a significantly different formulation of the relationship between judgment, will, and action. In that essay, she clearly positioned judgment as the cognitive faculty responsible for recognizing the aim of action, asserting explicitly: "Action, to be sure, has an aim, but this aim varies and depends upon the changing circumstances of the world; to recognize the aim is not a matter of freedom, but of right or wrong judgment. Will, seen as a distinct and separate human faculty, follows judgment, i.e., cognition of the right aim, and then commands its execution. The power to command, to dictate action, is not a matter of freedom, but a question of strength or weakness" (Arendt, 1960, pp. 32). Here, the function of determining the goal of action (choice) clearly belonged to judgment, with will playing merely an executive role.

When we turn to the *Willing* volume, however, we clearly see that the power of arbitration and choice (*liberum arbitrium*), has been assigned exclusively to the faculty of the will. As we explained in the previous section, Arendt, while not equating *prohairesis* with the will, argues that the former functions as a precursor to the latter. The role of guiding action through deliberation and choice, once fulfilled by *prohairesis*, is now, in our post-Christian world, exercised by the will.

With this now clear, we have located the origin of the main problem—the rupture between action and judgment. Judgment, which had once been a contender for the title

of arbiter and could have influenced action, is now completely excluded from both choice and action. Both are now within the exclusive domain of the will.

Having traced the origin of our problem, we can now conclude our discussion of the Willing volume. In the next and final chapter, we will draw the conclusions of our investigation. First, we will highlight the difficulties that arise from this classification (of choice under the will) and its implications for Arendt's overall project. Afterwards, I will present my argument for why Arendt believed it necessary to make such a classification.



CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

To conclude, I will argue that the shift in Arendt's conception of judgment, which, as we have seen, resulted in the reclassification of choice under the faculty of the will, creates two significant problems for Arendt's overall project. In the next two sections, I will explicate these issues, and in the final section, I will examine the underlying cause that necessitated this reclassification.

6.2 Problem I

The most obvious problem this classification creates for Arendt's theory of judgment is, of course, the central issue of our thesis. To reiterate, judgment, which had been asserted as our most political ability—deciding what manner of action is to be taken in the world—is now completely severed from influencing action. Since the political realm is nothing but the collective space individuals constitute and shape through action and speech, this rupture places judgment in the strange predicament of being the most political faculty, yet simultaneously the faculty with the least political significance in relation to the actual world, as it is entirely cut off from influencing action.

If we align with Arendt's political theory and connect action and politics as essential components, then, when we compare this with our investigations in *The Life of the Mind* regarding action, we see that the will now occupies the central political role, as choice and action are now exclusively within its domain. Hence, we see judgment relegated to merely evaluating past events. Indeed, judgment could do nothing more than this, as choice and action—always future-oriented due to our temporal nature—are now assigned to the will.

With this separation, judgment loses most, if not all, of its political relevance and worth. The essence of political life, its ever-present question, is: How are we, through our actions, to shape the future world of our collective existence? A theory of political judgment that relegates judgment to merely evaluating past events undermines the core function of this power as a political ability, rendering it practically useless. Its sole

redeeming quality becomes the ability to judge past events and assign value to them—a function that is indeed important but still misses the essence of politics, which is always action- and future-oriented.

6.3 Problem II

In the previous section, we focused on the problem that the classification of choice under the will creates for Arendt's theory of judgment. However, we now find that the very same classification also leads to a problem concerning Arendt's theory of the will itself. This issue can be explicated as follows.

Since the power of choice—whether as *prohairesis* or *liberum arbitrium*—consists of two essential stages, the first being the process of deliberation in which we calculate which option is most conducive to our goal, and the second being the choice itself, which then becomes, as we've previously stated, “the starting point of action”, it is evident that the first stage of deliberation requires rational calculation and, therefore, reason. As we noted with Arendt in our section on *prohairesis*, the element of reason in choice is deliberation, which, according to Aristotle, is carried out by reason. Upon deliberating, reason then provides desire with the purpose that the action aims to achieve.

Yet, in the *Willing* volume, Arendt assigns both deliberation and choice exclusively to the will. This shift is significant, for it means that neither judgment, which had previously been associated with decision-making, nor reason, in its traditional sense, has any influence on action. This presents a notable change in Arendt's framework, as reason and judgment were once understood as playing crucial roles in guiding action. However, since deliberation is inherently a process that requires rational calculation — a process of weighing options and determining the best course of action based on reason — assigning this function solely to the will suggests something much more radical. It clearly implies that the will, in this new framework, must be capable, on its own and independent of reason, of carrying out this rational process of deliberation.

For this shift to be coherent, we would have to accept and reconceptualize the will itself as a rational faculty — one that is fully capable of reasoning, independently of judgment or reason as traditionally understood. This, however, presents a serious

contradiction. It runs counter not only to the long-standing philosophical tradition, which has consistently kept reason separate from the will, but also to Arendt's own views.

6.4 The Underlying Cause

The cause behind these problems becomes evident when we consider the criticism Arendt directed at Kant regarding the relationship between reason and the will. We first saw this criticism in *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, where Kant's formulation of his moral precept as a law demanding obedience was interpreted by Arendt as transforming the will into nothing more than an executive organ. In this view, the sole function of the will would be to actualize whatever reason determines as good, reducing the human being to something akin to an *automaton* of reason, as it were.

We were able to defend Kant against this criticism, however, whose entire moral philosophy rests on the insistence that while reason can determine the will, our sensible existence—with all its inclinations and temptations—prevents reason from exerting complete domination over the will's actions.

We also saw in the first section of the previous chapter that some of this criticism still persists in the *Willing* volume. Although there is no separate chapter dedicated to a discussion of Kant's account of the will, Arendt, in a few places, mentions in passing that the will in Kant's philosophy is not a distinct ability but is rather just practical reason.

While we can indeed point out again that this interpretation does not align with Kant's own view on the matter, what is more significant is that this criticism offers clear insight into Arendt's own thought regarding the relationship that the will and reason must have in order for the will to be considered free, according to Arendt.

As is evident from her persistent criticism of Kant, Arendt argues that conceding the idea that reason, through its internal moral law, commands the will in order to determine its actions would, in her view, lead to the demise of the freedom of the will. As noted previously by Jacobitti, for Arendt, the very notion of free will is fundamentally incompatible with any form of determinism imposed by reason. Given

this stance, Arendt is left with no alternative but to separate any potential input that reason might have in the process of action through deliberation, maintaining that the will must remain independent of reason's directives in order to preserve its freedom.

Yet, the criticized view in no way implies absolute determinism with regard to the determination of the will by reason, especially if we think of determinism in the mechanistic sense observed in the laws of nature, which entail both objective and subjective necessity. Such mechanical determinism cannot be attributed to reason's moral law, which serves as the law of freedom. Unlike the laws of nature, the moral law carries no inherent necessity but only a moral obligation to heed its commands. Even so, we remain absolutely free to either comply with or dissent from its dictates.

Furthermore, even if we were to "obey" its commands—an attitude contrary to the essence of freedom in Arendt's view—we still retain our freedom in that obedience. This is because the law in question is not one imposed by an external authority, whether religious or political, but is instead a law legislated internally by reason itself. Therefore, the individual who obeys the dictates of this law in determining their will is, in essence, obeying the law that they have given to themselves, thereby preserving the freedom of both the person and their will.

However, as we pointed out in our chapter on *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, Arendt appears to confuse and equate the mechanistic determinism of the laws of nature—against whose influence the human being is necessarily subject, both objectively and subjectively—with the obligatory character of the moral law. While the commands of the moral law are objectively necessary, compliance with them in determining the will remains subjectively contingent.

To conclude, as Arendt's criticism of Kant makes clear, in order to avoid the same contradiction she wrongly attributes to Kant, Arendt is compelled to completely separate reason and judgment from any influence on deliberation and choice. For, if she were to grant even deliberation to reason, she would, in her view, be subjugating the will to the tyranny of reason. Consequently, she has no course than to attribute deliberation and choice solely to the will, as this is the only course that, in her conception of freedom, preserves the freedom of the will. Hence, driven by these considerations, Arendt ultimately gives a definitive answer to that open question

concerning the classification of the power of choice. However, as we have shown, this solution creates problems both for her theory of judgment and her theory of the will.



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