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Hannah Arendt: Thinking and Action

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application of another degree, or qualification thereof, of for any other university or institute of learning. I declare that this thesis is my own independent work. All sources and literature are cited and included.

Prague, 24th June 2022

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the question is raised, whether thinking can be a moving principle for action. Hannah Arendt's major works in the respect to thinking and action, Life of the Mind and The Human Condition are considered. However, in these two volumes thinking and action remain separate from each other. Attention is turned to her essay *Thinking and Moral Considerations*, where it becomes apparent that thinking can in times of catastrophe be a restrictive principle for action, rather than a moving one. Arendt's account on thinking makes the thinker question given doctrines and rules, which leads to the possibility of not obeying under the condition that the world is breaking apart. The essay ends on the note of judgment, seemingly working as a freeing principle for action, hence possibly a moving one. This possibility is examined, thereafter, using the work of Ronal Beiner, who tried to reconstruct Arendt's account of Judgment. Arendt's references about Judgment made in Thinking and Moral Considerations, Life of the Mind and her Kant lectures are used for a reconstruction of her possible argument and answering, the aforementioned question. Leaving us with her differentiation about the particular and the universal, which seems to address more a frame of understanding, then action directly.

KEW WORDS

Hannah Arendt, thinking, action, judgment, conscience, harmony

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THINKING AND ACTION – IN HANNAH ARENDT

INTRODUCTION

"The manifestation of the wind of thought is no knowledge; it is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly. And this indeed may prevent catastrophes, at least for myself, in the rare moments when the chips are down." (Arendt, 1971, p. 446)

In this final sentence of Arendt's 'Thinking and Moral Consideration', she seemingly asserts that thinking allows one to divide things, indeed to divide the very world, into good and evil: to distinguish the beautiful from the ugly and, as a result – through the application of these distinctions provided by the 'wind of thought'- to avert disaster. Crucially, this ability does not derive from 'knowledge', as might be mistakenly assumed, but through an inherent ability of distinction and differentiation. At first sight these catastrophes seem to mean events such as the Holocaust, because 'thoughtlessness' is what - according to Arendt - is how someone like Eichmann could commit such atrocious deeds during the Nazi Regime[1].

Thus, a failure to think may either lead one directly into catastrophic action, or at least mean that one fails to avoid it. But is the assertion here that thinking leads one to act only in these 'rare' - or perhaps 'singular' moments, or is the process of thinking and acting more fluidly interrelated? Arendt's quotation tempts one to think the latter, asserting that the ability of differentiation lets one distinguish right from wrong and the thinker - when touched by the 'wind of thought' - transitions to become the doer, an active actor in cases of catastrophe.

In fact, classical academic interpretation of Arendt's works on Thinking and Acting often tends to take an alternate view; that the two processes occur in entirely separate worlds. Whilst a close relationship between the two concepts is readily interpretable

[1] Kimberly Curtis states "the experience that led Arendt to reflect on the vita contemplativa occurred during the trial of Adolf Eichmann"

from the opening quote presented here, other quotations with Arendt's text suggest the exact opposite. Take for instance her assertion that "the trouble is that the thinking ego, as we have seen - in distinction from the self that, of course, exists in every thinker, too - has no urge to appear in the world of appearances." (Arendt, 1977, p. 167) In this case, the "world of appearance" according to Arendt's understanding can be equated with the political space, which is where action takes place. Thus, this quote arguably suggests that "the thinking ego" - or more simply 'thinking' - has no desire - or even potential - to appear in public space, meaning that it is not connected with action, which Arendt asserts *only* takes place in the public sphere. But if this is the case, then how can thinking prevent catastrophes (as asserted in Arendt's quote at the outset of this paper), if it has no 'urge' to appear on the outside?

The following paper therefore seeks to identify an answer to the question: *According to Arendt's conceptualisations, can thinking be a moving principle of action?* The work thus devotes itself to exploring in detail Arendt's construction of the two core concepts: thinking and action, with the aim of understanding their possible interrelationship more deeply. The work is structured as follows: It first outlines the concept of action and then the concept of thinking - breaking down the progressive elements that Arendt forwards in relation to each. In relation to the concept of Action, the predominant texts examined is that of *The Human Condition (Vita Activa)*, whilst in relation to thinking the most significant is one of the last works in her lifetime: *Life of the Mind (Leben des Geistes).* The analysis will then explore the logical connection of the precepts embedded in Arendt's construction of both thinking and action, in order to identify potential grounds for connection and relationship between the two. In the next step, the resolutions from these initial findings will be linked to Arendt's further article *Thinking and Moral Consideration.* It is here that Arendt asserts that "the wind of knowledge" can "prevent catastrophes", and an in-depth analysis of the text will show how Arendt creates a link between thinking and action, and how this can be rectified with the interpretation of each concept individually, as they are presented in both *The Human Condition* and *Life of the Mind.* The following chapter will then unite thinking and action, not only on the grounds of catastrophes, but for all situations, via the link of judgment. Introducing judgment means introducing a speculative element, for Arendt has never finished her last chapter of *Life of the Mind*, which was intended to culminate in Judgment and for this reason

the closing chapter will outline a resume of Arendt's notes and remarks about Judgment, which she has left in the presuming chapter of Life of the Mind in combination with Kant's Aesthetics, which is where she has her interpretations drawn from.

1. ACTION AND THINKING

As already stated in the introduction in most parts of academical discourse on Arendt the activities thinking and action are seen as separate, which will become very apparent in the following chapter, because the way Arendt depicts these activities, seemingly does not link them. Some interpreters of Arendt, such as Bradshaw (Dietz, 1991, p. 259), have gone so far, as to argue there being a 'radical shift' in Arendt's thinking after Eichmann, from her emphasize on action to thinking, but this is rather bold interpretation, as Dietz (Dietz, 1991, pp. 259-260) notes in her review on Bradshaw's book. It could be argued that Bradshaw arrived at this interpretation, precisely because it is difficult to bring Arendt's accounts of thinking and action together.

1.1. ACTION

Starting with action as it is presented in *The Human Condition*, Arendt here seeks "to think (about) what we are doing" (Arendt, 1958, p. 5). She makes this statement in her prologue, because she says she specifically does not want to make claims about what humans are made of in essence or such, because she argues there are new things or we are going to find out about our condition, when we discover new places like going into space for example and it being redundant to already claim that she or we would know by now all the aspects of our humanness. Only something standing above us, like a god could know or claim to know such a thing. Therefore, she here merely seeks to identify what we have been doing so far on this earth, what our activities consisted of here. From these activities action is one of Arendt's central areas of focus within the book *The Human Condition*. Beyond this the 'active life' is constituted work and labor. This section seeks to work through her construction of the concept of action, with the specific aim of identifying the definitional components and logical precepts and principles that support it, in order to understand whether these have the capacity to rectify with the precepts and principles that she outlines in relation to the concept of *thinking*.

1.1.1. ACTION IN CONTEXT

To place action in context it firstly has to be looked at in the context of one of three basic human activities which we all share - the other two being work (Herstellen)

and labor (Arbeiten). What differentiates Action is that it takes place in the public sphere in contrast to work and labor, which are both activities of the private realm. Arendt links this distinction from the Greeks, for whom this separation between the public and the private sphere was part of the natural order of things. In the Greek context, the household - meaning the private sphere, was meant for private things - *oikia*, meaning the necessities of life (Arendt, 1967, p. 43), whilst the public sphere was meant for the political life (which, it should be noted, should to be widely distinguished from what we understand politics to be today). *Bios politikos* – the political life - is determined by equality between the different acting individuals and by the opportunity for men to appear to each other through speech and action within a 'free space; a 'public sphere' - where men are judged according to their 'performance'. Within this group of equal individuals something akin to 'hierarchy' forms through the judgement of one's peers. Notably (and relevant for the developing analysis) in order for the public to exist the private was for the Greeks - and is also for Arendt - absolutely necessary, because without having the opportunity to withdraw back into the private realm, one's life becomes shallow if only lived in the space of appearances.

Importantly, action - in contrast to the other two aforementioned 'basic human activities' (namely, work and labor - has a special place in Arendt's philosophy, because she asserts that 'acting' is part of what makes us human (d'Entreves, (Fall 2019 Edition)). But for Arendt it is essential to distinguish between action and work. Work[2] always refers to the world of things and here man always has a very specific *purpose* because he is making means; making and creating the world in the same way that one would, for instance, create a table. And Arendt makes a further distinction of labor, where labor constitutes those activities which ensure that the basic needs of a person such as food and shelter are met. The crucial distinction here is, that labor and work are activities that can be conducted in solitude, though to do so would make a person mere *animal laborans* or *homo faber*. Action, on the other hand, specifically

[2] Note, Arendt's use of the word Herstellen - the German word for Work – connotes something slightly more nuanced than the traditional translation that 'Work' in English captures.

does not aim to create or provide. Action "alone is the exclusive prerogative of man"[i] (Arendt, 1967, p. 34)

"Action can best be understood along the lines of the performing arts, in which the "the accomplishment lies in the performance itself and not in an end product which outlasts the activity that brought it into existence and becomes independent of it""[ii] (Mahrdt, 2011, pp. 266-267) (Arendt, 1960, p. 33) Thus, acting should not be conflated with working; the merit of action lies in the performance itself, which is transitory, whilst the merit of work lies in that which it produces, which will outlive the initial point of creation. This differentiation is important at this point to highlight that action and politics are to be dissociated from our modern understanding of politics. For Arendt, politics in fact is a separate space, which makes this contrast even more evident.

1.1.2. Web-of-Entanglement and Who-ness

This separate space is going to be outlined in the following sub-section. The only thing that action 'creates', as it were, is a second space; an intermediate world which is created through people and only exists in-between them. It is relevant with respect to the 'space' thinking occupies, for these two separate realms, as will be seen, depict especially good, their separateness. This 'public sphere' or 'world of appearances'; for Arendt, is basically 'politics' as such. It is created through people speaking and appearing in front of each other. This betweenness has its own definitive, but intangible reality. This means that the world that Action and Speech create is not materially tangible, but is nonetheless very real. Through speaking and thus through displaying their whoness to each other people "do" politics, but without necessarily always "doing" something in the sense that the activity has to aim for something that is not itself. So, the performance that was talked about before consists mostly of displaying one's 'whoness'. In public space, everyone has a chance to show themselves, and the point of this space is to give those involved a chance to show their unique diversity, which Arendt expresses when she states: "The fact of human plurality, the fundamental condition of action as well as of speech, manifests itself in two ways, as sameness and as diversity."[iii] (Arendt, 1967, p. 213)

For Arendt, if people are to resolve this same differentness (or different sameness), the mediating force is that of language. If we were to be exactly alike, signs would be enough to interact with each other, because one mere sign would be enough to show the other person what we mean, are trying to say, but we are not exactly alike, signs are insufficient, and so we use language – which still requires explanation, but which can be explained precisely due to a sufficient level of sameness. Importantly, this inherent character of everyone, this 'who-ness', in which we are not like others, shows itself when we act and speak. "Speaking and Acting are the activities in which this uniqueness (whoness) presents itself [...] they are the modes in which being human reveals itself." [iv] (Arendt, 1967, p. 214). Necessarily, this presentation of whoness to others through language is one of action, because as seen above, the other two activities that constitute life (labor and work) are necessary, but can also be carried out alone and, according to Arendt, and do not make one a human being, but, as she pejoratively remarks, would merely make one *homo faber* or *animal laborans*.

Work and Labor are indeed something that language could be used for, too, but it would be precisely that 'being used' for communicating information, but it is not designed for that. Arendt argues that this has already happened to some extent in the sciences or mathematics (Arendt, 1967, p. 218). This means that language could well be exploited in this way. In the sciences, communication is partly done only with signs, i.e., in a sign language, which is essentially more effective in conveying information than speech, which again illustrates the point that speech is mainly made to convey 'whoness' and not information.

"Since this disclosure of the subject is an integral part of all, even the most "objective" intercourse, the physical, the worldly in-between along with its interests is overlaid and, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between which consist of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to men's acting and speaking directly to one another." (Arendt, 1958, pp. 182-183)

Speaking and action are thus fundamental to the expression of whoness, and this cannot be achieved by any other mechanism. For instance, the description of someone is insufficient to communicate their whoness: as soon as one tries to describe, one is accidentally led to a description of the 'what' of a person, which is the part we

share with others. For example, one would say someone is 'a swimmer' or someone is 'nice', but these descriptions for a 'someone' are more than inadequate, because they show a part of the person that could simply be someone else.

To sum it up, this means that speaking and acting are necessary to display 'Whoness' and through this showing they create an in-between world, a concept initially explored at the outset of this chapter. This in-between world is not objective like the results of Labor or Work, so in this sense it is not material, but is none-the-less very real and fundamental to the conduction of human affairs.

1.1.3. Stories in agere and gerere

The course of action itself represents an essential element of its existence and is therefore illustrated in the following. Arendt's full conception of action is developed in the next stage and builds upon the above point of an interwoven web of human affairs which must be *initiated* through speech or action, but which itself has no discernible beginning or end. "If one wants to speak of an outcome of action at all, it rather has the character of a story that continues as long as the action takes place, but whose end and final result no one, not even the one who started the story, can foresee and comprehend"[v] (Mahrdt, 2011, p. 267).This means that these different strands, which are all interwoven, do not produce clear outcomes, but stories, and *life stories* at that. For when someone has died, there is a clear end, and one can tell their story from birth to death. The implication of this is that because the web of interwoven stories and Actions always already exists, then in effect one finds oneself *already* thrown into this world, and resultantly can never determine beforehand what the result of one's actions will be, for one's actions are interwoven with the actions of all others, and the individual himself can only ever provide the start of action; the execution of the action will and must be done with others.

The result, in the context of an action, does not lie in a certain outcome that one has striven for, but that striving is none-the-less still present: one begins an Action (*agere*) with the initial spurt, which is peculiar to the human being, and through the process of living or acting out (*gerere*) with others, in the plurality of togetherness, the story finally takes turns, which are by nature always unpredictable. Crucially, *gerere* - the acting out - must happen with and through other people. Both *agere* and *gerere*

make it clear that, on the one hand, the initiative must be taken by the individual and, on the other hand, the action must ultimately be carried out by others: the original initiator must be helped - “to insist that no leader, however heroic, can act by himself, and that those who carry through initiatives need not be merely passive subjects of rule, but can themselves be participants in action, and must in any case join in responsibility for what they carry out” (Canovan, 1992, p. 141) In brief, action is initiated by the actor in the space of appearances and carried out with others. Altogether this process culminates in a story, which can for example be told at the end of one’s lifetime. This aspect is not only relevant to understand Arendt's concept of action in principle, but also for the later part of this thesis, in which the context in which actions take place will be examined more closely and on which the interpretation, which combines thinking and acting, is founded. But in the context in which the observations at this point stand, it must be emphasized that the place and the execution of action appear to be in a self-contained space, where the action is carried out for itself, for displaying the who-ness, but not because of any connection, have it be thinking or something else.

1.1.4. Thinking in Action?

With this construction of Arendt’s concept of action laid out - moving through its components and their logical relationship with one another - it is possible to examine the original intention of action. Thus, it is readily apparent that on the face of it, thinking in the concrete context - as it is presented in *Vita Activa* - does not even achieve a subordinate role for Arendt. Action takes place in the public space where people speak and act, which continues to exist through the restarting of actions and their executions, all with the fundamental purpose of showing the 'whoness' of people. Arendt even states that "Essential is that action is not based on thinking, but on the fact of human plurality."[vi] (Mahrdt, 2011, p. 266). Such a definitive statement would seem to demonstrate clearly that for Arendt, action stands for itself, and is not contingent on thinking – or indeed, even related to it.

Conclusively, Action is an activity that exists in an interspace that is created between people and through their actions, in plurality. It is for enabling people to show their 'whoness' in front of each other and consists of actions being started and completed with others, from which stories ultimately emerge.

1.2. THINKING

This chapter, similar to the previous one, will present the concept of thinking as Arendt portrays it - drawing centrally from *The Life of the Mind*, again focusing particularly on the characteristics and components of Arendt's concept of thinking, with a particular focus on those that might be relevant in the context of action. The section on *thinking* will identify how for Arendt, thinking occurs in a separate neighboring world, but will also identify how this separation can still be maintained even in the presence of the connection between words, language and thinking.

1.2.1. WITHDRAWAL

Similarly, to Action Thinking takes place in a specific world. In her final chapter, speaking of the *Vita Activa* and modern times, Arendt additionally states that when it comes to thinking, "this dialogue does not appear external; indeed, it presupposes that all outward activity and movement has ceased, it is still an activity itself and even a most intense activity."[vii] (Arendt, 1967, p. 370) Thinking is thus an activity that takes place internally and not in the space of appearances, in direct contrast to the space that Arendt claims action occurs in. Arendt sets up the concept of thinking as one of 'withdrawing', and it is implicit within this concept of withdrawing that one must withdraw away from something. Arendt asserts that it is the 'World of Appearances' from which one withdraws:

"But what all of these activities have in common, however, is the peculiar quiet, absence of any doing or disturbances, the withdrawal from involvement and from the partiality of immediate interests that in one way or another make me part of the real world…" (Arendt, 1971, p. 92)

The above quote demonstrates that for Arendt, thinking specifically requires the absence of immediate re*actions*, that is, being in the moment is an opposition to what is required in thinking. In other words, anything that makes one part of the immediate world, that is, of action itself, is basically incompatible with Thinking; indeed, it specifically "withdraws" from this.

Withdrawal must always take place in a retreat from something to something else. It has been established where one withdraws *from*. Next is going to be determined

where they withdraw *to*. For Arendt, one retreats to a neighboring world, one might say, in order to think there. This neighboring world into which one withdraws, is characterized, among other things, by the fact that it shows itself on the outside in silence. “The only outward manifestation of the mind is absentmindedness […] which in no way hints at what is actually happening within us.” (Arendt, 1971, p. 72) This silence, this withdrawal is crucial because it entails the exclusion of participation in "partialities" or "immediate interests", thus one becomes de-sensed from the things at-hand and leaves this world of immediate sensory impressions to become part of the neighboring world, where one remembers sensations experienced before. Thinking requires one to leave the present moment and retreat into a world of ‘remembrance’ or imagination. And in the imagination, in this neighboring world, “our mental tools” can detach from the phenomena in question, but nevertheless remain aligned with the world and the appearances in it as such (Arendt, 1971, p. 24). Our thinking can withdraw *from* the world of phenomena, but it always remains fixed *on* the phenomena. Therefore, thinking remains connected to the world of phenomena by remembering and re-imagining the phenomena presented before it in front of the inner eye. It is thus tied with action – for it needs these actions as phenomena to draw from in imagination and remembrance, but it is not *an* action. A connection which will become rather important later on in this thesis, in the interpretation offered in chapter three, precisely section 3.1.

But for now, considering where the analysis at this point in the paper stands, thinking detaches from the world of appearances, including that it detaches from direct physical input and withdraws into a neighboring world, where this sensory input from before is imagined again in front of the inner eye.

1.2.2. Philosophy vs Thinking

In the next sub-section, it is going to be talked about a crucial distinction Arendt makes between philosophy and thinking which is also partly relevant for the later analysis. In the philosophical tradition thinking has been looked at in a specific way and Arendt wants to make clear, that her notion of thinking departs from this tradition. One aspect this “contemplation” (the traditional interpretation of thinking will be called in the following) and thinking have in common is that they both withdraw, as has been explained in the previous section from the place of action. The

difference here is, however, thinking was considered as something that takes place in a realm inaccessible to and separate from the realm of appearance, which is going to be laid out in the following. Originally, it must be said that this assumption was based on the fact that only the spectator could ever really understand the spectacle itself, and thus glimpse the truth. So, the philosophers (mainly Plato) have separated acting and understanding, and concluded that only he who is not involved himself and can look at the spectacle from the outside, can really understand i.e., see the truth.[viii] Arendt does not find the same justification for delineation between thought and action. She refers the justification for the distinction made by philosophers before her as the "metaphysical fallacy", "logical fallacy" or "metaphysical delusion", because the original idea from so many philosophers was that it is the honorable thing to leave the public realm and 'transcend into the realm of "true being".

The issue with these metaphysical fallacies is that they stem from a constant theme of the devaluation of public space found in early philosophy. The problem with philosophers is - one could say - that many of those who have progressed so far, once they found manner of thinking that was not influenced by their actual material situation, put thinking, or rather philosophical contemplation, above action and thus politics. It is this conflict between spirit and life, soul and body that emerged in Plato, and his conclusion is that the soul must win in order to be truly free. (Canovan, 1992, pp. 260-262) The mind must therefore triumph over the material world; it must precede action. But for Arendt, thought is not at odds with action, nor does it seek to triumph over it, but simply seeks meaning, just as the spectator is also the one who makes sense of the affairs that take place before him. (Arendt, 1971, p. 96) Nonetheless, it should be mentioned that Arendt states that both the thinker and the judge, meaning the spectator, seem to seek meaning and from her side it is not made explicit in what respect these two *meanings* are different. It can be assumed, however, that because Arendt is often to be understood out of the context from which she writes[3], that *meaning* for the spectator, i.e., the judger, takes on the classical meaning, which is also cited by Arendt at this point.

[3] As Roy T. Tsao already points out in the introduction to his paper, is that a common approach to Arendt is to draw from multiple sources of her works thematically,

Pythagoras:
"Life… is like a festival; just as some come to the festival to compete, some ply their trade, but the best people come as spectators [theatai], so in life the slavish men go hunting for fame [doxa] or gain, the philosophers for truth." (Arendt, 1971, p. 93)

Indicating that, even though Arendt might not agree with acting and thinking being hierarchized or as strictly separated as traditionally intended, meaning probably still means for the spectator assigning meaning to the play and thinking being more of discovering meaning, but having these two meanings be separated. Nevertheless, this is a question that can be posed and is not clearly addressed by Arendt.

Omitting these ambiguities Arendt speaks of, thinking is to be distinguished from contemplation insofar as thinking seeks meaning and contemplation seeks truth. And as Arendt makes clear in her other essay *Truth and Politics*, neither politics nor thinking is about truth, because truth has, if you may say so, dictatorial features. Truth is uncompromising because it does not allow for many divergent opinions, but brings with it a clarity and incorrigibility that is coercive (Arendt, 1967, p. 297). Thus, thinking is a quest for meaning and contemplation concerned with the truth and thought therefore necessarily moves in the space between reality and the "longing for meaning". It is *triggered* by worldly situations, but thinking seeks only to think about them and find meaning. 'Longing for meaning' in thus a neighboring reality. Importantly, "thought and contemplation are not the same" (Arendt, 1958, p. 311) – with Arendt arguing that thinking itself is an activity and contemplation a passivity. Contemplation is what the philosopher does, she states that "the need of reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same." (Arendt, 1971, p. 15)

In brief, it can be said that Arendt deliberately views thinking differently from the philosophical tradition, which consists in the fact that thinking seeks meaning rather than truth. However, it should not be neglected hereby that meaning in the case of thinking most likely means something different from the meaning that the spectator

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however, by removing these statements from their intended argumentative context (Tsao, 2002, pp. 98-99) one is undermining the intended structure of her works.

ultimately ascribes to the spectacle of life. This, however, is an interpretation and this question itself eventually remains unresolved in Arendt.

1.2.3. THOUGHT IN SPEECH

As could be seen in the previous sections, thought and action seem mainly separate and independent from each other. A final attempt to establish the connection between the two will consist in examining thought and language. Arendt writes on page eighty-nine in *Life of the Mind*: “Mental activities, invisible in themselves and occupied with the invisible, become manifest only through speech.” (Arendt, 1977, p. 98) Thus, it can perhaps be argued that whilst thinking does not translate directly through action into the public space, through speaking, speech and possibly logos – i.e., the ability to convince – one can find the chain of linkage that allows Arendt to assert that thinking “prevents catastrophes”.

The relevance of speech as the connecting tissue between thought and action must therefore be explored in more depth. With speech, we create an interstitial space in which our non-material, yet very real reality exists. Arendt goes on to say, "It is not our soul but our spirit that demands language."[ix] (Arendt, 1977, p. 98) All this suggests that, contrary to what has been said so far, thought and action – through the form of language - are indeed not separate, for thoughts demand to be spoken.

The solution to this is that thought, unlike action, “does not demand an audience, does not necessarily imply them."[x] (Arendt, 1977, p. 103) The words that speech manifests could thus 'take place' in this way without anyone watching or listening, i.e., there would not be, or would not necessarily be, a space-created-in-between-people by speech when no other people are around. This, in turn, would ‘take thinking out of public space’ because the activities of public space do not presuppose it and are not generated by it. Thinking does not presuppose a need to be seen, either in speech or in action, because it does not need an audience, so the words that drive thinking do not have to be heard. Arendt cites Kant who argues that "Of all human needs, only the 'need of reason' can never be fully satisfied without discursive thinking, and discursive thinking is unimaginable without words..."[xi] (Arendt, 1977, p. 104). This means that thought needs words for its practice, but “Thinking, although always in words, needs no listeners.”[xii] (Arendt, 1977, p. 103) "Thoughts do not need to be

communicated in order to take place, but they cannot take place without being uttered - silently or audibly in conversation, depending on the circumstances."[xiii] (Arendt, 1977, p. 104) This means that we can speak words quietly to ourselves. This would mean that we speak words or, in this way, make speech to ourselves; it is not optional and cannot be circumvented, but whether the words are spoken to someone else or to oneself is not crucial. The only thing that matters is that they are said.

This, in the context of our question, means that thinking is not necessary for either action or speech, but it is inherently linked to the both of them; one does not "have" to think in order to act, but it is not uncommon to put one's thought processes into words. But crucially, this does not imply that all thoughts are linked to action by speech, because thought-prompted speech does not *require* an audience, it just sometimes favors one. Essentially, thoughts may favor being expressed to an audience, but do not presuppose it and in this way do not generate action and, hence, the process of thinking is not a moving principle of Action.

1.2.4. Thinking as an impetus for Action?

In summary, it does not seem that thinking and acting are intrinsically linked. The two activities take place in different worlds. Thinking in a neighboring world, which is in principle without direct sensory impressions and the like, and acting in the active political world of phenomena, which is between people and is created by acting and speaking. Thoughts need words and language and can be expressed by speaking (speech), but acting or speaking do not necessarily need or are specifically "moved" by thinking. Also otherwise, acting is not given impetus by thinking, but exists, similarly to thinking, for itself and not for or because of anything other than merely representing the 'who-ness' of the acting person. Thinking, on the other hand, exists in order to find meaning, contrary to philosophy, which tries to find truth.

As with the concluding section of 1.1.5., which concerned itself with reviewing Arendt's concept of action and identifying any potential integrations with thinking, so too this section will review how Arendt's concept of *thinking* has been laid out, and identify how it might hold integrations with *action.* There is strong textual evidence to indicate that for Arendt, thinking is an activity that is independent of action; it takes place in a neighboring world. Taken this way, it seems readily apparent that at this

point in the analysis, an answer to the original question – 'Can thinking be a moving principle for action?' – must necessarily be no. In order to take place, thinking must withdraw quite concretely from the situation which takes place in the world of appearances; it deals only with the memories of appearances which preceded it. Everything suggests that thinking is not a *precondition* for acting and these two activities are also not connected.

However, the section has identified that there are ways in which the two concepts of thinking and acting may remain in separate domains, and they may be devoid of a cause-and-effect relationship, but they none-the-less carry an interrelatedness, and it is this interrelatedness that allows one to rectify Arendt's position of 'thinking and action' as separate with the idea that 'thinking can avoid catastrophe'. For as one could see thinking in these thoughts and conceptions always treats images or phenomena which were represented before in the world itself. Which thus means that thinking at least derives from the world and it is that very connection which will be shown more clearly in the next chapter and which, contrary to what could be presumably established here in the preliminary, namely that thinking and acting are separate, can be bypassed, so to speak, in these situations in which catastrophes are afoot.

2. THINKING AND MORAL CONSIDERATIONS

If – despite some efforts to bring thought and action within touching distance of each other – the analysis of Arendt's framework of thought and action renders the two elements fundamentally distinct, then we are still in search of a way to rectify this with the assertion that "indeed may prevent catastrophes […] in the rare moments when the chips are down" (Arendt, 1971, p. 446). Does there remain some other way to link thought to action, or are action and thought inherently disconnected, as the above section strongly suggests? This chapter will seek to probe that gap further by sketching the connection between thought and action that Arendt makes in her essay *Thought and Moral Considerations,* and thus seek to provide an answer to the question of how thinking can prevent catastrophes.

Arendt begins the article by saying that "some years ago" (Arendt, 1971, p. 417) she covered the Eichmann trial, which led her to talk about the "banality of evil," (Arendt, 1971, p. 417); the idea that evil arises not from actual badness but from "thoughtlessness": an assertion that is not contrived, but, as she says, "something quite factual" (Arendt, 1971, p. 417).

> *"It was not stupidity but a curious, quite authentic inability to think. He functioned in the role of prominent war criminal as well as he had under the entirely different set of rules. He knew that what he had once considered his duty was now called a crime, and he accepted this new code of judgment as though it were nothing but another language rule" (Arendt, 1971, p. 417)*

In other words, Arendt could witness in Eichmann that he flatly accepted the given rules as they were being given to him. In a way, one might say, he did not deal with these things, the given, but simply adopted them, as she states here, merely as a set of new rules for speech, as if it were purely and simply nothing more. Arendt deals with this phenomenon in the following essay.

2.1 VERNUNFT & VERSTAND

In this sub-section of the work, the differentiation Arendt makes between intellectual thinking and thinking as she intends it, i.e., the thinking she describes Eichmann as missing. Arendt argues that Eichmann, as he stood there in front of

everyone, was not stupid in the way we imagine stupidity to be. Instead, Arendt is clear that Eichmann's actions arose from the fact that he did not think. She distinguishes here between thinking (Vernunft) and knowing (Verstand – intellectus) (Arendt, 1977, p. 23). Thinking is the longing for meaning - "the need to think beyond limitations of knowledge" and aroused by the "old metaphysical questions of God, freedom, and immortality" (Arendt, 1971, p. 422), while "the activity of knowing is no less a world-building activity than the building of houses" (Arendt, 1971, p. 421). For knowledge is devoted to knowing and gaining knowledge and is thus more like the activity of work, for both do something for a purpose, for an end result. And it is possible to imagine that a person might not be able to do this mentally, to be "stupid" in this way – unable to 'build their house of knowledge', but may still be capable of the want to know about things that cannot be known by knowledge, but only by the discovering of meaning. Thus, they might be stupid in the activity of knowing, but not in the act of thinking. This distinction is crucial, because "If the ability to tell right from wrong should have anything to do with the ability to think, then we must be able to "demand" its exercise in every sane person no matter how erudite or ignorant, how intelligent or stupid he may prove to be." (Arendt, 1971, p. 422) (Note, this is an assertion that every sane person should have the *capacity* for thought, and is not an assertion that every sane person *exercises* that capacity). This means that perhaps not everyone has the capacity to gain or accumulate knowledge, but everyone has the capacity to think. Thus, the moral implications of eventually being able to "tell right from wrong" derive from the responsibility to think, which supposes a counter responsibility for "thoughtlessness", when one does not think. This moral duty derived from the capacity for thought extends to everyone, because, contrary to what philosophers like Plato concluded, thinking is not reserved for "noble nature" (Arendt, 1971, p. 438). A remark that will be revisited later in this chapter.

2.2 CONVENTIONS

The fact that Eichmann accepted and did not question the code of rules in force in society at that time, but simply followed the rules - the social code given to him and acted accordingly – is what Arendt refers to as 'shallowness'. Arendt constructs Eichmann not as an Iago or Macbeth, but instead as a 'normal' person. He even spoke in cliches – the type of phrases that one arms themselves with to deal with various situations that may arise in their life. This use of stock dialogue constitutes an

idiosyncrasy, or rather, a particular "show" of this non-thinking, which was particularly evident for Arendt when Eichmann was placed in a situation where none of these "stock phrases" made sense, and where he was forced to default to the type of "clichés used in funeral oratory" (Arendt, 1971, p. 417).

"Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking attention which all events and facts arouse by virtue of their existence. If we were responsive to this claim all the time, we would soon be exhausted; the difference in Eichmann was only that he clearly knew of no such claim at all. This total absence of Thinking attracted my interest. […] Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining and reflecting upon whatever happens to come to pass, regardless of specific content and quite independent of results, could this activity be of such a nature that it "conditions" men against evil-doing?" (Arendt, 1971, p. 418)

As already mentioned, Eichmann used an extremely conventional way of speaking, speaking "as one speaks". To put it in the terminology of Heidegger, existing entirely in the cultural, historical and social background of Dasein. For if Dasein is not aware of its determination by tradition, then it is at the mercy of the given patterns of behavior and view, and thus exists inauthentically. "We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way they enjoy themselves. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way they see and judge. But we also withdraw from the "great mass" the way they withdraw […]" (Heidegger, 2010, originally 1953, p. 123) There are certain phrases or sentences into which one can place one's speech, and Eichmann spoke no differently. These "conventional codes" that exist and that one can choose to speak and live in, Arendt says, "protect us from reality". They protect us insofar as they relieve us of responsibility for the situation at hand and thus enable us not to think. For thinking means entering into conversation with oneself, where "the other," - as Socrates or "consciousness," as Arendt later calls it, questions one's own opinions, one's own actions; where it might be said that one comes to doubt oneself and the situations and facts that have occurred in the actualization of the 'original duality', explained in the previous chapter. This entering into conversation with oneself is an "urge." The events that take place around us, the facts we are given, the opinions we form – they urge us

to think, but thinking in itself is a rather exhaustive exercise, and given the number of events and facts around us, it is almost inconceivable to give in to this "call" all the time. But Eichmann in particular seems not to have engaged in this inner conversation, not actualized this duality at all, as if he did not possess this urge or had never given in to it. And because it was him who organized these monstrous crimes of executing hundreds and thousands of Jews, Arendt wonders if this specific activity of thinking could be the cause of preventing such evil deeds.

2.3 USELESSNESS OF THINKING

But the question that arises after this is: how can an activity (namely, thought) that is so much based on not doing anything except searching for meaning, be used for anything good, indeed, be used at all, if it is very specifically an activity that is not *for* usage.

"For it is true that the moment we start thinking on no matter what issue we stop everything else, and this everything else, again whatever it may happen to be, interrupts the thinking process; it is as though we moved into a different world." (Arendt, 1971, p. 423)

Thinking always takes place in this neighboring world; but being with other people keeps one from entering this neighboring world unless one removes oneself deliberately mentally from the situation, but this calls for actively practiced absence and cannot occur incidentally when with others. Moreover, the action of removal is an activity without means-purpose rationality (Arendt, 1971, p. 423). This argument deals with an issue similarly mentioned in the conclusion of chapter one. Thinking is removed from the situation at hand and cannot be practiced while being with other people, is not made to be there for something else, but at the same time never moves too far away from reality as such, from the world itself.

Nevertheless, the question "How can anything relevant to the world in which we live come out of such a resultless enterprise?" (Arendt, 1971, p. 426) must be raised, for the opening quotation of this thesis strongly suggests that thinking can in fact do something, meaning 'prevent catastrophes'. Arendt answers: "An answer can come, if at all, only from thinking activity, from performance itself, which means that we must

trace experiences rather than doctrines." (Arendt, 1971, p. 426) Arendt thus goes in search of the experience of thinking itself, for thinking, we have already noted, does not produce results and does not produce doctrines or even a set of rules, so we must determine from the thinking experience itself, not its outcome. Only in examination of the experience that is made during the process of thinking itself, can we discover how such an apparently inconclusive undertaking can actually prevent anything. This undertaking is investigated in the following section, here it will be explicated how Arendt assesses the thinking experience itself.

2.4 SOCRATES' THINKING EXPERIENCE

For this Analysis Arendt chooses Socrates as the one whose thinking experience is to be studied because the ordinary person does not write about their thinking experience, and "professional thinkers" always already have an audience in mind when they write something down. Moreover, in the case of other professional thinkers, the audience usually demands results and the professional thinker may be inclined to accommodate those demands in his writings, which distorts the accurate reproduction of the thinking experience. Socrates, on the other hand, "never even tried his hand at formulating a doctrine that could be taught and learned" and was just "a citizen among citizen" (Arendt, 1971, p. 427). Thus, Socrates did not write down his findings, because he recognized for himself that thinking does not try to recognize in itself specific results and consequently does not seek to teach them, i.e., by writing them down. In this sense then Socrates constitutes a 'pure' thinker unaltered by the demands of his audience, who recognizes that ""Thinking has a "natural aversion" against accepting its own results as "solid axioms", [meaning] we cannot expect any moral propositions or commandments, no final code of conduct from the thinking activity, least of all a new and allegedly definition of what is good and what is evil." (Arendt, 1971, p. 425) This suggests that thinking naturally changes its own resolutions each time, and must begin anew each time the activity itself begins again. It is not a matter of finding the right axiom; it is a matter of remaining 'in' question.

To expand on this, "The first thing that strikes us in Plato's Socratic dialogue is that they are all aporetic. The argument either leads nowhere or it goes around in circles." (Arendt, 1971, p. 428) This means that the arguments do not lead to a conclusion or a new definition of what is good and evil. After an extensive discussion

of Socrates' questions, everyone relinquished their previous beliefs, but were not able to develop new ones. Arendt argues that thinking is a kind of thawing of preconceived stable categories; an erosion of big concepts like justice or freedom, but also of "normal" words such as house. All that being said, these concepts, assumed to be firm, are then taken apart.

"In any event, this kind of pondering reflection does not produce definitions and in this sense is entirely without results; it might however be that those who, for whatever reason, have pondered the meaning of the word house will make their apartment look a bit better – though not necessarily so and certainly without being conscious of anything so verifiable as cause and effect." (Arendt, 1971, p. 431)

From this it can be deduced that this way of thinking, of taking apart previously existing concepts, does not lead to any clear resolutions. As already mentioned, thinking does not produce or obtain new clear, delimited categories in place of the concepts taken apart, because thinking does not seek to *cause* anything. What can happen, nevertheless, is that a person who has thought about the house as such unconsciously makes behavioral changes. This means that the mere fact that someone thinks about something can make them change their habits or behavior a little, although this certainly does not have to happen, for there is no deliberateness in it. In the example of the house, the thinker might have thought about its origin - "*auto kath'auto*" and might consider the fact that the idea behind this word is that someone "dwelt in" this place, which makes it a house, and therefore he might unconsciously decide to make some factual changes in the world of appearances, perhaps to decorate a bit more (Arendt, 1971, p. 430). Hence, in pondering about concepts such as piety or justice, some men might be inclined to become more just and more pious.

This idea is why Socrates thought virtue was teachable, uttering and dismantling words like "piety, justice," and "courage," but without pronouncing a clear "truth" about what exactly these virtues are supposed to entail. Socrates "called himself a gadfly and a midwife, and, according to Plato, was called by somebody else an "electric ray", a fish that paralyzes and numbs by contact" (Arendt, 1971, p. 431) First, a gadfly, because the other citizens around him with whom he conversed, without being awakened by him, would have continued to live resembling

“sleepwalkers" living their unexamined lives. Thus, without this examination, one is never "fully alive." Secondly, the midwife, because similar to the woman who decides about the child of the fertile woman, whether it may live or is only a "wind egg", the midwife is "sterile", that is, she can no longer bear children herself. And so, Socrates talked to his fellow men about whether their opinions were "allowed to live" or were mere "wind eggs," while he himself was sterile in the sense that he had no opinions. The opinions of his fellow men were usually wind eggs. And finally, an electric ray, because an electric ray itself is paralyzed and paralyzes others by touch, because he "remain(s) in his own perplexity" and everyone with whom he spoke was deprived of his previous opinion after the conversation, but without being able to fill the gap with a new truth, thus only remained in their new found confusion.

This argument is precisely the point that was made earlier and will be discussed in more detail later in chapter three. That is, thinking does not cause conscious changes, but unconsciously can lead to behavioral changes, which, as will be made clear further at the end of this chapter, can lead to 'political acts' in these exceptional situations, to the extent that non-participation in what everyone is doing can be political in times of catastrophe. Further explications to this will follow. It is important to note, however, that in usual times thinking as already described does not do much, and is in fact dangerous, which is why this whole undertaking, Arendt notes, should be treated carefully. Why and in what way exactly this can be dangerous, will be explained in the next passage.

2.4.1 Dangers in Thinking

As has already been indicated, the down side of not-thinking will be explicated in the following section. In order to illustrate in the negation of the actual argument why thinking can prevent catastrophes, it becomes clear in the following to what extent *not-thinking* i.e., thoughtlessness, as well as the transition into thinking, with sudden interruption in the middle of the procedure, can cause or encourage catastrophes generally. Therefore, in the following, it will be shown that the initiation of the thinking process itself can be dangerous if it is not carried out consistently. As already discussed, thinking is an act that leads one to go around in circles, as it were, and dissolves previously given rules. Socrates as an exemplary thinker is used here and so also in this case, an example in which his own students have, *quasi*, resorted to harmful

actions because of thinking. *Quasi*, because his students Alcibiades and Critias, whom are concerned, have left the thinking process after the first querying.

Hence, awakening this perplexity can also be dangerous, for there is a danger inherent in the thinking activity itself. *"In the circle around Socrates, there were men like Alcibiades and Critias – God knows, by no means the worst among his so-called pupils – and they had turned out to be a very real threat to the polis, and this not by being paralyzed by the electric ray but, on the contrary, by having been aroused by the gadfly. What they had been aroused to was license to cynicism."* (Arendt, 1971, p. 434) This paralyzing effect on the other interlocutor would cause him to turn values such as piety on their head. Since students like Alcibiades and Critias were not used to thinking without doctrines, they ended up negating the original "ideas" simply because they could not be defined. That is, "If we cannot define what piety is, let us be impious," (Arendt, 1971, p. 435) but this, once again, means that we follow a set of rules like sleepwalkers. Thinking is dangerous because in order to think something through properly, one must negate "at least hypothetically" the "accepted opinions and values" (Arendt, 1971, p. 435). This means that one must seriously consider the question, "What is justice?" and accept that preconceived notions of justice are not or could not be true or correct without arriving at a new conclusion. However, if one says, "I can't figure out what justice is, so let's be unjust," one still accepts the preconceived notions of justice, just in negated form. This danger arises from the desire to find results and live according to strict doctrines, which allows one to return to the sleepwalker way of life. This consequence is particularly likely if the habit of simply following strict rules was previously particularly strong. "The more firmly people hold to the old code, the more eager they will be to adapt to the new one." (Arendt, 1971, p. 436). However, if people are merely taught not to think because of this inherent danger to thinking, this is equally dangerous, because by teaching to live an unexamined life, it is also taught to hold on to the beliefs by which are lived by.

To apply this in Arendt's more modern context, this means that, similar to Eichmann, this set of rules can easily change, like "a new set of language rules." "How easy was it for the totalitarian rulers to reverse the basic commandments of Western morality – "Thou shalt not kill" in the case of Hitler's Germany, "Thou shalt not bear false testimony against thy neighbor" in the case of Stalin's Russia." (Arendt, 1971,

p. 436) This means that whether or not our society is made up of thinking beings is highly relevant, because it bears to be relevant on the question of whether people within that society are likely to accept or refuse such changes. “The sad truth of the matter is that most evil is done by people who never made up their mind to be either bad or good.” (Arendt, 1971, p. 438) For if someone does not think, i.e., does not "decide" whether or not to do something, they will follow what is currently being done, i.e., follow the behaviors and codes of society that are given but are potentially destructive in their consequences - hence evil.

As has been made particularly clear in the explanation here, is that, in a sense, thinking itself has its dangers. Or, rather, the beginning of the thinking process holds dangers if it is not continued and terminated after the initial beginning. For when concepts are taken apart, this necessarily implies that the negation of the previous rule must at least be considered, and this is where the danger lies. But this also shows that non-thinking or in this case more precisely the interruption of thinking turns into actual actions, which can be dangerous for a society or in Arendt’s' example for a polis, meaning that thinking then would have 'prevented this catastrophe'. This underscores the reasoning presented in the prior section.

2.4.2 Eros as the driving Force

Regarding the following section, it must be said that it should be considered rather as an aside to Arendt’s general argument in this essay, rather than a weighty point to support the fundamental point she is making. As already mentioned, in a footnote in section 1.2.2 Arendt’s arguments are not straightforward, but rather placed in a general argumentative context, which is rather confusing at this point of the essay. Because after explaining that Socrates thinking experience is representative, she states that this eros which he is driven by, is exactly not what we have been looking for, because only some, meaning, Plato’s “noble natures” are filled with, meaning it is reserved for the few. To recapitulate: in this part of Thinking and Moral Considerations, she wants to find out what the thinking experience looks like in order to determine how thinking might be able to “do” something, i.e., potentially ‘prevent catastrophes’. However, all of this saying with her having stated before that thinking is something that everyone is capable of, because it is to be distinguished from knowledge, as explained in section 2.1. In the next section of the essay, she then

discusses Socrates' two axioms, which he has handed down to us, or which have emerged quasi unintentionally from his thinking, but without going further into this previous declaration, which seems to leave us in the middle of her considerations. It seems that Arendt, despite this interruption, if you will, in the middle of this reflection, nevertheless continues to assume that thinking is possible and accessible for everyone, but she does not give any explanation for it at this point.

However, it seems, considering that Arendt must be understood out of the context in which she writes, we will here examine briefly the background of eros and where Plato suggests evil to be coming from. Plato bind's philosophy really with *desire* for the good (*to agathon*) and noble (*to kalon*). For him, the cause of evil is in "ignorance" of (a) the object (= not seeing evil *as* evil; seeing bad things *as* something good – like seeing pleasure *as* the chief good etc.) and of (b) oneself not being aware of one's own ignorance (Plato, 1989, p. 204a). Wisdom, therefore comes out being aware of one's own ignorance and, therefore, looking for what one is missing. Socrates says he is filled with this striving, which is the reason why he behaves in this way, why he questions the people around him and leaves them with perplexities, questioning all concepts themself.

Arendt sees a problem in this, because she claims that this reserves this striving for Plato's "noble natures". And she argues that "this was precisely what we were not looking" (Arendt, 1971, p. 438). Because, as aforementioned, for Arendt thinking is supposed to be something that is available for everyone. However, her comment at this place is confusing and perhaps not utterly necessary, for perhaps an alternative view point can be explicated.

For one, Arendt is resisting the point that 'everyone always desires to do good'. She critiques that in Plato's dialogues the question of evil is mostly left out, leaving people only with "the good", but at the same time the puzzlement of where evil, which exist comes from. But Plato states his reasons for where he believes evil comes from, meaningly ignorance. Arendt then states that rather than claiming that "Everybody wants to do good." (Arendt, 1971, p. 438) most evil is essentially coming from people, who "never made up their mind to be either bad or good." (Arendt, 1971, p. 438). But as could be seen in the above explanation of Plato, Plato is not entirely dissimilar. For

he does not claim that everyone does fulfill this striving, but rather that people are ignorant or seeing the wrong things as good.

A possible interpretation of this could be that whether to strive for the good and noble is connected to *choice*. Because a very apparent downside of thinking, why one would rather not choose it, is that quite some strain lies behind thinking. As could be shown in the previous sections, Socrates' way of thinking, of questioning all given things, is extraordinarily strenuous and, as Arendt also notes, impractical. For thinking always takes place alone at first and must, hence, as it were, be actively pursued. Thus, contrary to the "problem" that Arendt sees here, it is possible that thinking is simply not tackled by most people because it is easier and more practical. In this way choosing ignorance. If one does not enter the conversation with oneself, which will be discussed in more detail later, it is much easier to remain in the belief that one is actually "doing good".

In line with this then, everyone is desiring to be good, as Plato explicated, but this desire is connected to continuous efforts, which might be straining, hence, the easier way ‘to be good’ may be chosen more often, which is to go with the mere assumption and not the difficult continuous questioning. For Socrates or Plato do not exactly assert that everyone *pursues* this striving for eros. It is not addressed how Socrates fundamentally has come to “have” eros either and it stands to reason that Socrates eros is the *decision* to devote himself to love, wisdom, and the good. And this decision might well not be made by most people, for the above-named reasons. Nowhere is it stated that one might benefit from this activity in the form of it making one happy or content. Arendt even brings up the example of a conversation Socrates has held, with a relatively thoughtless fellow Hippias (Arendt, 1971, p. 443), who he argues must be much happier, because he is not awaited by doubts and questions ‘from the other fellow’, when he comes home. Therefore, there are quite a few reasons, why one might not want to enter this inner conversation. This conversation with oneself will be elaborated on later in this chapter, and then the aforementioned argument will become more apparent.

Nevertheless, it should be noted at this point that this is all an interpretation of Arendt's remarks at this point, because, as said before, she does not express herself

clearly here. Thus, it might be concluded that Socrates, the thinker chooses their striving for the good, chooses to enter the conversation with himself, which makes thinking available for everyone and it is not necessarily contradicting to Plato's assumption that everyone desires to be good, which makes it again an activity that is available to everyone.

2.5 Two Axioms

Thus, Arendt perhaps does not agree with the idea that thinking is reserved for the few, which Socrates thus in this sense Plato claims, but she agrees with the thinking process itself as Socrates conducts it. The latter has unintentionally brought forth two axioms, which also better explain the aforementioned inner conversation. For even though Socrates himself is not necessarily of the opinion that ignorance breeds evil, Arendt examines his thought process precisely to find this assumption confirmed. These two axioms contain an answer to the extent to which thinking is connected with evil, because one of them even states quite concretely:

„It is better to be wronged than to do wrong." (Plato, 1909, p. 474b)

and

"It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than that I, being one, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict me." (Plato, 1909, p. 483b)

Both axioms, characterize the thinking process, only with the subtle difference that Arendt, in contrast to Plato, claims that everyone carries this 'urge to think' (Arendt, 1971, p. 421) within himself, but not everyone necessarily gives in to it. These two axioms, in contrast to what they might seem at first, are not "cheap moralizing" as Arendt calls it, but are rather indicative of the thinking process itself. Because the second quotation clearly states that I want to be one with myself, that is, that there are two in me. Arendt calls this elsewhere also original duality, because I carry a duality in myself, and this split is at the same time also my consciousness. This split is consciousness and I always already carry it in me, and the actualization of this split is

thinking. *"Mental activities […] especially thinking – the soundless dialogue of the I with itself – can be understood as the actualization of the original duality or the split between me and myself which is inherent in all consciousness."* (Arendt, 1971, pp. 74-75) This means that in thinking one splits themselves into a 'me' and a 'myself': "the ego with itself", and engages into a dialogue with the split other side - *conscience*. Arendt calls this the "original duality" inherent in every human being, which means that technically every human being has the ability to think. Nevertheless, as the quote makes clear, this inherent duality, even though it is fundamentally given to everyone, must be "actualized".

And what Socrates specifically means by these two positive statements is that I carry this duality within me, which also implies that if I am a murderer, I split into two murderers, or if I am a nice person, I split into two times one nice person and then just converse with that person. Therefore, it is better to be wronged than to do wrong, because at the end of the day you always have to go home where you find yourself and have to give account to that other self. Producing a 'conscience'[4] is not the goal of thinking, but the conscience is a byproduct of actualizing the inner duality. In this conversation with oneself, as presented before, everything is questioned in a Socratic way, given concepts are taken apart, which leads to one's own actions being questioned by oneself.

2.5.1 Harmony and Solitude

Because of this constant inner questioning, doubting oneself, you could say, the thinker urges to be in harmony as Socrates states. It would be better for him, if "multitudes of men should disagree with [him]" rather than he should contradict himself, because at the end of the day he would always be 'leaving the marketplace' to come home to meet the other fellow. Which is why, thinking urges to be in harmony. The thinker wants to be in harmony with their inner interlocutor, which means that

[4] In English, the word conscience is used, which can be misleading because it refers to both the inner moral "purity" and generally the cognitive function of being aware of something or generally being aware that you are doing things and being someone. The first meaning, however, is meant here by Arendt, as is also evident in the German translation.

this conscience in each person is not exactly the same as me, as I would appear to others, for example in a conversation. Because when I enter a conversation with others, I am always One and when I actualize my inner duality, I am two. Also, harmony can always be created only by two different tones, not by twice the same tone. Then one has, so to speak, two different tones within oneself, which are not A and A, but A and B (Arendt, 1971, p. 183). With this other One – *the conscience* you have a conversation, and this conversation aims to be in harmony. "The only criterion of Socratic thinking is agreement, to be consistent with oneself, homologein autos heauto…" (Arendt, 1971, p. 186) because "…we can always raise objections to the outward word, to the inward discourse we cannot always object, because here the partner is oneself, and I cannot possibly want to become my own adversary." (Arendt, 1971, p. 186)

An interesting perspective raised by Larry May in her article "On Conscience" is that this ache to be in harmony is in fact an egoistic one, "which nonetheless leads to restraints on selfishness" (May, 1983, p. 57). Because Socrates argues that he has to go home at the end of the day where he will be "cross-examined [… by] a close relative, living in the same house" (Arendt, 1971, p. 443) which is the reason why he cannot make any 'wrong' decisions and always has to be in harmony with himself, for the other fellow will await him.

However, it must be said that Arendt asserts two things at the same time here, namely that on the one hand one talks to oneself, that is, that a murderer talks to a murderer and a friend also talks to a friend, and on the other hand that one has two different tones within oneself, an A and a B. These produce together a harmony, because they are exactly different. The question that arises here is, how can both be true at the same time, that on the one hand we converse with ourselves and on the other hand a certain diversity is introduced into this conversation? This diversity is addressed in the third chapter of the thesis and gives reason and the interpretive framework why thought and action may be more inherently connected than first suspected.

To briefly summarize these last two crucial sections again, it is thus that thinking means to actualize the inner duality i.e., to have a critical conversation with

the inner counterpart, about everyday events. Because this conversation wants to be conducted in a harmonious way, the thinker tries to behave accordingly "well", because they know that at the end of the day, they have to give an account to themselves.

2.6 SOLUTION

A very important part of these considerations is that thinking is not reserved only for Plato's "noble natures", but instead is a duality is given in everyone; everybody can actualize this original duality in themself, and thus can start to think – it is a ubiquitous possibility for all (Arendt, 1971, p. 445). But, if everyone can engage in it then everyone can also choose to withdraw from this conversation with himself, scientist not excluded. "We are not dealing here with evil, [...] but with the non-evil Everyman, who has no special motives and is therefore capable of infinite evil, unlike the villain who never meets his midnight disaster." (Arendt, 1971, p. 445)

Because as we could see in the opening quotation, too, "this indeed *may* prevent catastrophes" (my italics), meaning that thinking as it is presented by Arendt in *Thinking and Moral Considerations* does not insure the prevention of catastrophes. It mainly "does" two things in terms of its relation to action. Generally speaking, Arendt stresses on the last pages of her essay once again, that thinking really does not 'do' so much for society in general, because as said before in the chapter about thinking it does not aim for production, much in contrast to work and labor and, also, as we have learned now, it does not resolve anything, it is not a solution to problems or things, it just resolves all the unprecedented norms, but without replacing them after, hence, it does not have much 'good' to offer to society, nor an answer to the questions it asks. But then, in times of crisis, it may lead the thinker not to participate in the general actions, which might be evil, when the chips are down, and the world is falling apart, because at the end of the day they want to go home and be in harmony with themselves.

"When everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join is conspicuous and thereby becomes a kind of action." (Arendt, 1971, pp. 445-446) In this sense, thinking does not lead directly to action, and the question *Is thinking a*

moving principle for action? must be reconsidered in so far, as thinking here is rather a *restrictive* principle (perhaps similar to Socrates' *daimonion* (Plato, 1952, pp. 242b-c)) that *hinders* an action. The emphasis is here on "do not do it", "do not participate". It does not indicate what to do in a positive way. Therefore, the answer to the question of this paper, must here be *no*, it is not a *moving*, but a *limiting* principle.

The second point is the impact of thought on the faculty of judgment, which Arendt mentions at the end of the essay, but to which it must be said that the third part of Life of the Mind on the faculty of judgment was unfortunately never finished by her and therefore can largely only be speculated about.

"[J]udging, the by-product of the liberating effect of thinking, realized thinking, makes it manifest in the world of appearance." (Arendt, 1971, p. 446) Thinking - because it challenges all fixed opinions - has a liberating effect because nothing is fixed anymore, and it frees one from all beliefs, predetermined ideas, and values. This destruction of opinions has a liberating effect on the faculty of judgment. Judgment is meant in the way that one is able to "judge particulars." The particulars are the specifics in the world of appearances, something at-hand "without subsuming them under those general rules" (Arendt, 1971, p. 446).

Thus, thinking helps to avoid the creation of a general doctrine: judging only this particularity and not judging it because it falls under a general rule, under a social code that one merely applies. Thus, one judges these particularities without subsuming them under a general, fixed, unshakable law that can just as easily be transformed into another law that we then follow with our behavior and the course of our habits, which Arendt accuses Eichmann of doing. "[J]udgement is the most political of man's mental activities," (Arendt, 1971, p. 446), which necessarily means that thought is political by virtue of its connection with judgment, but not by virtue of itself.

This seemingly small connection, however, could be what transforms thinking from being a restrictive principle to being a freeing principle. However, it must be emphasized, that, as aforementioned these ideas remain speculative, for as stated, the part on judgment has not been finished. But, thus, it seems on the last pages of *Thinking and Moral Consideration* that Arendt is might conclude Judgment to be the

faculty which among other things translates thinking into the public sphere (Arendt, 1971, p. 446), thus it might be assumed that contradicting to thinking, judgment might be seen as a positive freedom to something, rather than a freedom from something, for how we have discovered it concerning thinking. Therefore, judging will be revisited in more thoroughly in chapter three.

To refer the synthesis of these elements all back to the initial question of whether the habit of Thinking can be a moving principle for action, we are at least able to gain some ground in acknowledging at the very least a potential *relationship* between them, even if this is achieved by intermediary process links. This is because when everything is questioned, first of all, one also questions one's own actions and behaviors, and a natural addition to this process is that one strives inwardly to be in harmony. This striving for harmony on the back of questioning one's own action suggests that thinking at least acts as a *prompt* for altered action. Secondly, through thinking, the faculty of judgment is liberated – the most political of all faculties, and thinking – via this detour, if you will – also makes it political and makes it possible to obtain actions or, to generate them.

Nevertheless, it must be said that action only comes to be restricted "when the things fall apart; the center cannot hold", that is, when catastrophes have taken over the world. This also means that when everything is normal, and "the center" is not exactly falling apart, the gap between thought and action remains, at least insofar as thought does not become "hugely politically relevant". And here, then, to return to the opening question: Thinking *may be* a *limiting* principle for Action *in times of catastrophe*.

3. JUDGMENT AS FREEDOM *TO* ACTION

As was shown in chapter one of this thesis, thinking and acting first appear to be distinct with the initial reading of Arendt's works that primarily deal with these concepts - *The Human Condition* and *Life of the Mind*. But in the essay from which the opening quote is taken, *Thinking and Moral Considerations*, it becomes evident that thinking can become politically relevant in extreme situations, when it moves the thinker to not participate in something, as a sort of restrictive principle. As aforementioned, judgment might be, contrary to thinking which presents a negative freedom from action, be a positive freedom to action. In the following whether or not such an assumption might be part of what Arendt intended Judgment to be, will be explored in more detail.

In the following the fragments on Judgment which we are left with and which stand in relation to the interpretation from chapter two will be explicated, while interlinking it with Kant's Aesthetics, where it is drawn from. For this undertaking, the essay Hannah Arendt on Judging by Ronal Beiner, who introduced Arendt's Lectures on Kant with a preface and concluded with this essay, which includes all passages in which Arendt touches upon judging, will be mainly used.

Beiner introduces a distinction between late and early Arendt in regard to Judgment, while acknowledging possible difficulties of such differentiation, such as no clear line and possible overlaps, the differentiation he makes is roughly at the time of *Thinking and Moral Considerations*. While the other major work in which she talks about Judgment after that is the first volume of *Life of the Mind* and her *Kant lectures*. The first two works are what has been worked with for the most part of this thesis. Therefore, the following outline of Judgment will largely focus on these outlines of judgment and in small parts on the Kant Lectures, for as Beiner states "one can [in these three works] discern a unity and consistency in the conception of judgment" (Beiner, 1982, p. 94). Arendt draws her notion of Judgment from Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgment and by going back to this work of Kant Beiner is able to create a convincing reconstruction of how Arendt's possible account on Judgment, by combining her works and parts of this work of Kant, could have looked like. All of this saying, that of course, this essay remains highly speculative.

It might be interesting to note that authors differ on how many trains of thought Arendt would have had in her potential account on Judgment. Ronald Beiner separates them roughly into two different two accounts, Seyla Benhabib names three (Benhabib, 1988, p. 30) and Andrew H. Tyner (Tyner, 2017, p. 523) then does not mention a clear differentiation at all. In the following, however, Beiner's differentiation is going to be applied, for he is picked up by Benhabib, which is then again quoted by Tyner, which suggest Beiner being the basis for most considerations, as his essay is mostly devoted to reconstructing Judgment aligned to Arendt's possible line of thought.

The key concept which is relevant for this thesis, taken from Kant's Aesthetics include the notion of the particular and the universal, for they are mainly pointed to at the end of Thinking and Moral Considerations. Therefore, in the following this concept and its translation into Arendtian terms with its connection to Chapter two will be briefly delineated.

3.1. THE UNIVERSAL & THE PARTICULAR

The universal and the particular which will be explicated in the following, Arendt has derived from Kant, as already touched upon before. Kant distinguishes between two different kinds of judging, at this point. So, there is on the one hand determinate judging, which means because of general rules to conclude a judgment for the specific and reflected judging, which means that the universal is not sufficient and therefore the specific must yield a universal (Beiner, 1982, p. 119). Arendt orients herself here along the lines of reflective judgment. This is to be considered, according to her, in such a way that first the specific thing, the particularity is considered. Arendt uses the example of a rose, to which she would not say that it is beautiful, because she has a general rule, like 'All roses of a certain cultivar are beautiful', but the rose evokes in her, so to speak, that she finds it beautiful and thereupon a general rule can then be applied. But these rules can only be understood through this very specific experience itself. One could say that the judgment is a judgment about this specific rose and only from this point, the judgment can be extended into a judgment about other roses as well.

This is fundamentally what Arendt also says at the end of her essay Thinking and Moral Considerations, and it seems that the possibility to judge in the way

described is liberated or at least facilitated by thinking. Nonetheless, this doesn't really advance us in relation to our question. Judging here seems to concern rather the framework of our understanding, and how this could even be connected to action, let alone constitute a moving principle for action, is not clear at this point. How exactly, Arendt has meant one of her last sentences "[…] then judging, the by-product of the liberating effect of thinking, realizes thinking, makes it manifest in the world of appearances" (Arendt, 1971, p. 446) remains unclear.

It can only be speculated that this judging, which was conducted in the manner described, consequently also causes a different behavior - insofar judging and acting would then be connected. But it seems here that judging would rather be a precondition for action and not so much a moving principle. At least this seems to be the case in Beiner's descriptions in Understanding in Historical Judgment, but it must be noted that this part of Beiner's essay is part of the first part of Arendt's account of judging, at least with the distinction Beiner makes.

In summary, the abovementioned argument does not clarify the question which we remained with after Chapter two. Neither thinking nor judgment can clearly be seen as a moving principle for action, at least not with the limits we are left with regarding judgment. It might be possible to trace judgments connection with action throughout all remarks Hannah Arendt has left, and which has been slight touched upon, however, this goes beyond the scope of this work.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the work, the claim was made that thinking can prevent catastrophes because it has the ability to distinguish beautiful from ugly, good from evil. Following on from this, the thesis asks whether thinking can actually lead to action, when the traditional way of reading Arendt perceives thinking as separate from action. In the first part of the thesis, chapter one, it was shown that this tradition is standing on solid ground. Thinking and acting move in spheres separate from each other, even very concretely separate from each other, where hence acting takes place in the world in-between people, which is formed by the various threads of newly beginning actions and performed actions, and thinking takes place in a world that is quite concretely detached from the sensory impressions there. In addition to that, thinking as well as acting quite concretely do not aim at causing anything. So here is a definite gap between the two activities and the initial question must be answered with a *no* so far: Thinking cannot be a moving principle for Action.

The second part of the thesis partly bridges this gap. Here it is pointed to the rules and doctrines we in our society often follow and which Eichmann unquestioning obeyed, merely following all the conventions thoughtlessly. Thinking, is thus portrayed as the Socratic activity which takes everything apart, leaving both conversation partners confused and without new conclusions. For people who decide not to think, these general rules can, without much ado, be transformed into other rules at any time, and therefore lack meaningful stability. Arendt clearly states that thinking is an activity that is fundamentally available to everyone, in stark contrast to what Kant calls *Verstand*, which has much more in common with the ability of gathering knowledge. For to demand that everyone has the capacity to acquire knowledge is not reasonable, whereas to demand that everyone has the capacity to think is, on the basis of this distinction, potentially reasonable. To actually Think would mean to actualize the Duality (the original Duality) in oneself, thus to divide oneself into 'two-in-one' and enter into conversation with ‘the Other’. Socrates, who is taken as an exemplary thinker, here, remarks that at the ed of the day he has to go home and “meet the other fellow”, who will in this aporetic way, described, question him.

This taking apart of given concepts leads to *possibly restrict* thinking in times of catastrophe. Meaning that the fact that everything given is questioned, leads to the

thinker possibly not going along with doctrines or rules which could cause evil, in times of catastrophe, when the world is breaking apart. In line with this then, after chapter one – the question: Is thinking a moving principle for action could be answered with – thinking can be a restrictive principle, in times of catastrophe. However, on these last two pages of her essay Arendt continues to talk about judgment being "the most political" of all mental faculties, making it seem, that contradicting to thinking, judgment could possibly have a freeing effect on action.

For this reason, in the last chapter judgment was interpreted more closely to assess whether this could be a possible claim to make, despite being aware that the parts of judgment we are left with, remain speculative, due to Arendt never finishing this last part of her book *Life of the Mind*. Ronal Beiner's essay, as an attempt to reconstruct judgment in the way Arendt could possibly have meant it, is consulted for this purpose. Beiner separates judgment here in roughly two different accounts, because he argues that Arendt has made a major shift in her thinking regarding this, where one outline starts with the beginning of *Thinking and Moral Considerations* and the *Life of the Mind*, which was then majorly focused on in chapter three, for these works of Arendt are majorly used in this paper. Here, mainly Arendt's train of thought, which she expresses at the end of Thinking and Moral Considerations, was revisited. This consisted in the fact that thinking frees judgment, which can thereby judge from the particular to the universal. However, on the basis of this concept of judgments it is not clear to what extent it could have a direct influence on action, it seems that this rather has an influence on the way we understand ultimately, contrary to direct influence on acting. Of course, this way of a different understanding of things could then also cause behavioral change, but this remains an idea and speculative, for Arendt does not state that clearly. In this respect, the answer to the initial question, or rather the modified question posed in this chapter, must once again be *no*.

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NOTE ON CITATION

Arendt published *The Human Condition* first in English in 1958 and the translated it herself into *Vita Activa: oder vom tätigen Leben* in 1960. Allegedly only a translation, however, the German Version merely being a translation on multiple occasions holds expansions and clarifications, which as T. Tsao puts it are "small but significant departures from the original, mostly in the form of discreet, clarifying additions—which remain all but undocumented. Not surprisingly, though, these revised passages, added by Arendt in her own native tongue, often illuminate her meaning at precisely the points where the English-language original is most dense and obscure" (Tsao, 2002, p. 3). Therefore, the quotations, which are found here in German are taken from passages which are not contained in the English version, and for reasons of the fluency of text in the above, translated in the above and included in their original form to be found here.

Beyond this in Chapter one of this thesis the German *Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung* book from Wolfgang Heuer is used repeatedly, which is written in German and hence, has been translated to English in the above and the original text can be found here as well.

[i] „allein ist das ausschließliche Vorrecht des Menschen“ (Arendt, 1967, p. 34)

[ii] „Handeln lässt sich am ehesten nach dem Muster der ausübenden Künste verstehen, bei denen die >> Leistung im Vollzug selbst und nicht in einem die Tätigkeit überdauernden und von ihr unabhängig bestehenden Endprodukt<< liegt.“ (Mahrdt, 2011, pp. 266-267)

[iii] “Das Faktum der menschlichen Pluralität, die grundsätzliche Bedingung des Handelns wie des Sprechens, manifestiert sich auf zweierlei Art, als Gleichheit und als Verschiedenheit.“ (Arendt, 1967, p. 213)

[iv] “Sprechen und Handeln sind die Tätigkeiten, in denen diese Einzigartigkeit sich darstellt [...] sie sind die Modi, in denen sich das Menschsein selbst offenbart.“ (Arendt, 1967, p. 214)

[v] Wenn man überhaupt von einem Resultat des Handelns sprechen will, dann hat es >>eher den Charakter einer Geschichte, die so lange weitergeht als gehandelt wird, deren Ende und Endresultate aber keiner, auch nicht der, welcher die Geschichte anfing, voraussehen und konzipieren kann<<“ (Mahrdt, 2011, p. 267) (Arendt, 1994, p. 224)

[vi] „Wesentlich ist, dass Handeln nicht auf Vernunft, sondern auf dem Faktum der menschlichen Pluralität gründet.“ (Mahrdt, 2011, p. 266)

[vii] „dieser Dialog nach außen nicht in Erscheinung tritt, ja sogar voraussetzt, daß alles nach außen gewandten Aktivitäten und Bewegungen stillgelegt sind, so ist er selbst doch immer noch eine Tätigkeit und sogar ein höchst intensives Tätigsein.“ (Arendt, 1967, p. 370)

[viii] „Die Konsequenz aus dieser frühen Unterscheidung zwischen Handeln und Verstehen liegt auf der Hand: als Zuschauer kann man die >>Wahrheit dessen verstehen, worum es in dem Schauspiel geht; doch der Preis dafür ist der Verzicht auf Teilnahme.“ (Arendt, 1977, p. 98)

[ix] „Nicht unsere Seele, sondern unser Geist verlangt die Sprache.“ (Arendt, 1977, p. 98)

[xx] „...verlangt das Denken mit seinem Sprechbedürfnis keine Zuhörer, setzt sie nicht notwendigerweise voraus.“ (Arendt, 1977, p. 103)

[xi] „Von allen menschlichen Bedürfnissen läßt sich nur das >>Bedürfnis der Vernunft<< ohne diskursives Denken nie völlig befriedigen, und diskursives Denken ist unvorstellbar ohne Wörter...“ (Arendt, 1977, p. 104)

[xii] “das Denken, obwohl es stets in Worten stattfindet, keine Zuhörer braucht.“ (Arendt, 1977, p. 103)

[xiii] „Gedanken brauchen nicht mitgeteilt zu werden, um stattfinden zu können, aber sie können nicht stattfinden zu können, ohne ausgesprochen zu werden – stumm oder hörbar im Gespräch, je nach den Umständen.“ (Arendt, 1977, p. 104)