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CARL SCHMITT'S LONELINESS AND HANNAH ARENDT'S ACTION
J. LYNNE NELSON

A DEPARTMENT HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE
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1 INTRODUCTION

Carl Schmitt's philosophy suggests a grandiose philosophy of history yet remains vague on the details. It is precisely his work's interdisciplinary nature—intellectual, constitutional, temporal, and a doctrine on domestic and international affairs—that lends itself to a vast network of contrary understanding, confusion, and, sometimes, elation. Additionally, Schmitt's relationship to Nazism and German Romanticism (although debated) either complicates or informs, depending on who reads it, his constitutional theory. Not only was Schmitt a thinker, but Schmitt was also a practitioner; he advised political leaders throughout and after the Weimar Germany period, participated in trials as a legal jurist, and motivated justification for political action.

Thus, although it would be easy to discount Schmitt's criticism of liberal constitutionalism as a doctrine of totalitarianism without merit of reflection or serious thought, Schmitt was, in his period, championed as one of the greatest political thinkers of his time, the "Crown Jurist of the Third Reich" (Stirk, 2005). However, Schmitt's grave historicity—his "pervasive sense of lack of orientation" of Republic politics and "distinction" politics—renders it an important focus in constitutional and power studies (Frye, 1966: 818). It follows why, in the wake of his disbarment from German academia and subsequent withdrawal from public life in the post-1945 era, Schmitt's work exerted discernible influence on a cadre of prominent thinkers, comprising Giorgio Agamben,

Alexander Kojève, Franz Neumann, Georg Lukács, and Leo Strauss.

Compared to the vast number of interpretations and reimagining of Schmitt's political and legal philosophy, there is little work that frames Schmitt's oeuvre with that of political philosopher Hannah Arendt (Herberg-Rothe, 2004; Moyn, 2008; Walter, 2016; Heuer and Greve, 2018; Jurkevics, 2017; Suuronen, 2023). Still, there are even fewer efforts, if any, to read Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction with Arendtian glasses.¹ Certainty, both Schmitt and Arendt aimed to understand totalitarianism, for their respective purposes, in a manner not limited to the German experience but in broader historical terms. As Arendt, Schmitt's postwar work dealt with "explaining the birth of Nazism retrospectively through European history" (Suuronen, 2023).² However, this work aims not to find similarities in their modes of thinking about totalitarianism and constitutionalism. Still, the emergent discourse elucidating a dialogue between Schmitt and Arendt is a relatively recent phenomenon within academic circles; Suuronen (2023) aptly characterizes their discourse as "hidden" until recent archival endeavors brought to light Schmitt's significant engagement with Arendt published texts from the 1950s through the 1980s.

Perhaps it is hindsight bias, but it feels disingenuous to say that—even without a concrete dialogue between the two—Arendt did not engage with Schmitt's theories in her grander work on critiquing totalitarianism. In Arendt's practice with totalitarianism and pluralist democracy, Arendt would *have* to engage (on some level) with Schmittian doctrines.³ Nevertheless, even if her work was tangential to Schmitt's philosophy, it is exceptionally clear that she possessed a familiarity with it; Arendt

¹Most works (Herberg-Rothe, 2004; Moyn, 2008; Walter, 2016; Heuer and Greve, 2018; Jurkevics, 2017) seek to uncover inherent contradictions or similarities between Schmitt and Arendt's constitutional theories. Kalyvas (2004) views Arendt and Schmitt as agreeing that decisionism is a threat (I disagree with Kalyvas' interpretation of Schmitt). Suuronen (2023) offers a comparative historical account of Schmitt and Arendt's understanding of totalitarianism in the context of Arendt's book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

²Suuronen (2023) accounts Schmitt's "fascination" with Arendt. Thus, Schmitt's later works may take on more of Arendt's philosophical approach and form. Recognizing Arendt as a fellow thinker, Schmitt wrote in a letter, "On this topic I must still ask you, whether you are familiar with the book from Hannah Arendt: *Origins of Totalitarianism* in the English edition: *The Burden of Our Time*. For your topic, it is in its entirety and especially to this question of democracy and Jewishness (Judentum) so tremendously important, that I must mention it here and ask you, whether it would be good to cite it. I own it and can loan it to you" (Burkhardt et al., *Schmitt und die Öffentlichkeit*, 127–8, quoted in Suuronen, 2023).

³Suuronen (2023) notes that Arendt owned "no less than ten" Schmitt books, including *The Concept of the Political: "Politische Romantik* (1919), *Politische Theologie* (1922), *Verfassungslehre* (1928), *Legalität und Legitimität* (1932), the 1933 edition of *Der Begriff des Politischen* [The Concept of the Political], *Donoso Cortés in gesamt-europäischer Interpretation* (1950), *Ex Capivitate Salus* (1950), *Die Lage der europäischen Rechtswissenschaft* (1950), *Der Nomos der Erde* (1950), and *Theorie des Partisanen* (1963)"

(1973/1951) made five distinct references to Schmitt's texts in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.⁴

Hence, it is apt to propose that Arendt's insights would shed light on the totalitarian ideology inherent in Schmitt's Weimar-era discourse on the Political.⁵ In the following paper, I argue that Arendt's work on activity and thinking positions Schmitt's concept of the Political—the inherent need of intensity to commit to sovereign decisions—as totalitarian thoughtlessness. Importantly, thoughtlessness follows from loneliness and isolation in the world.

First, I engage with Schmitt's theses of the Political and the state of exception. Following this, I embark on a comparative reading Arendt and Schmitt. Here, I delve into Arendt's historical dialectic of totalitarianism. Subsequently, I explain Arendt's conception of totalitarian loneliness, a concept profoundly reshaped by her reflections following the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. Within this context, the themes of isolation and loneliness provide fertile ground for Arendt's innovative notion of thoughtlessness, diametrically opposed to thinking and action. Throughout this discourse, I integrate Schmitt's theses wherein their relevance intersects with the discussion. Notably, there is presently discourse that surrounds Schmitt's Weimar philosophy as justification for the rise of Hitler, or, at the very least, that Schmitt imagined the Nazi insurgence to be a favorable political revolution (Suuronen, 2022; Herberg-Rothe, 2004).⁶ This is not my projects aim. Ultimately, I offer a rationale (a "why") for examining Arendt alongside Schmitt: even under times of totalitarianism, the Political, or the state of exception, we have freedom.

⁴In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt (1973/1951: 168) writes in the footnotes, "For the romantic attitude in Germany see Carl Schmitt, *Politische Romantik* [Political Romanticism], München, 1925." On discussing the monopoly of the state in party representation, Arendt (1973/1951: 251) points to Schmitt in the footnotes: "Carl Schmitt, *Staat, Bewegung, Volk* (1934), speaks of the 'monopoly of politics which the state had acquired during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.'" Arendt 1973/1951: 262, 266) quotes Schmitt in-text. In the footnotes of "Totalitarianism in power invariably replaces all first-rate talents, regardless of their sympathies, with those crackpots and fools whose lack of intelligence and creativity is still the best guarantee of their loyalty," Arendt (1973/1951: 339) notes Schmitt's absolute cooperation and collaboration with totalitarianism: "Most interesting is the example of the jurist Carl Schmitt, whose very ingenious theories about the end of democracy and legal government still make arresting reading."

⁵Capitalizing "Political" will help distinguish between its general usage (and Arendt's usage) and Schmitt's specific concept of the Political.

⁶Suuronen (2022: 341) argues that "Carl Schmitt sees the 1933 Nazi seizure of power as a revolution that inaugurates an entirely new era of political-legal order."

2 SCHMITT AND HIS "POLITICAL"

Those who have observed Carl Schmitt's critical friend-enemy construction of the Political in *The Concept of the Political* come to agree, especially with his endorsement of National Socialism and antisemitism, that such a binary depends on signifying an enemy (Slomp, 2005; Galli and Fay, 2010). What receives less attention and is of greater interest is Schmitt's existentialist principle that gives real meaning to the enemy: *Totungsbereitschaft* or "preparedness to kill" (Schmitt, 2008/1932: 25).⁷ To Schmitt (2008/1932: 33), friend-enemy does not favor militarism nor war or "attempt to idealize the victorious war." Instead, friend-enemy asserts that its distinctions, whether a conflict is absent or present, are fundamentally political. It is "the real possibility of physical killing," real until the concept of the enemy is no longer valid that makes the Political concrete (Schmitt, 2008/1932: 33). It is not only the location of enemies that Schmitt's philosophy requires but that actualization of what comprises *friend* and what differentiates *enemy*.

As Schmitt describes in *Theory of the Partisan* (2012/1963: 91), it is not that the Political's essence is only in enmity, but instead in the possibility of distinguishing between the two classifications and understanding what differences they entail. Although easily adaptive to international politics, Schmitt's theory of Political deals with internal decisionism and exception; the creation of the enemy plays an ineradicable role in the creation of internal order and "constituent power" (Slomp, 2005: 1). Schmitt's political theology stems from his critique of liberalism's attempt at a positive purification of legal theory wherein liberalism contends neutrality and a capability to judge in scientific objectivity. For Schmitt (2008/1932: 2), any decision about what is not political is itself *political*: "the political is the total."

If anything, Carl Schmitt's philosophies heighten the friend-enemy distinction observed throughout politics and, significantly, require the state—and individual—to know not only enemies but who are friends. This is under the supposition that one is "motivated by an existential threat to one's own life" (Schmitt 2008/1932: 49). To put

⁷Schmitt's (2008) translator George Schwab translated *Totungsbereitschaft* to an "unhesitatingly to kill enemies" (46). I prefer "preparedness to kill."

Schmitt's existentialist principle more bluntly, if not *more real*, Schmitt's understanding of political distinctions requires the potential for a human being to kill another human being, a friend to kill the enemy. It requires one to familiarize oneself, to categorize and align with those who share interests in persevering a sort of living, and to be prepared to commit violence on behalf of the preservation of the norm. At some point, Schmitt's philosophy necessarily requires categorization; the Political requires concrete power to operate upon differentiation. As Max Weber long ago posited, the quintessential attribute of the state resides in its capacity to invoke superior force when confronted with internal or external adversaries. In the context of Weber and many academic theories (including Schmitt, a legitimate Weberian), violence is crucial to the state; it manifests as either active, in the sense of adversaries and international war, or disciplinary, in terms against its citizenry.

Nevertheless, Schmitt's intention (and many other political realists) is that there is, to use Geoff Waite's (2008: 116) term, always a "high hand of violence." In extreme circumstances, under times of uncertainty (Schmitt's state of exception), political decisions shift to the sovereign. It is in the state of exception wherein the sovereign—the high hand of violence—reveals itself; the Political wages its existence. In *The Politics of Friendship* (1998), Jacques Derrida (1994: 67) emphasized "Schmittian decisionism" as a "theory of the enemy." The creation of the enemy is the most defining instance for the Political being. The willingness to die on behalf of the enemy's negation marks the intensity of the commitment to the (sovereign's) decision. As Bernhard Radloff (2007), Matthias Schmitz, and Derrida concurred, the enemy is an "objective correlative of the intensity of commitment to our decision," not about ideological or material content. Simply, the enemy is about the intensity of commitment to the self-preservation and the norm in states of exception; the high hand of violence, the sovereign, decides when an enemy should fall (e.g., to be willing to kill or to die).⁸

⁸The state of exception need not be brought about by the enemy; it is the stripping of internal rights for self-preservation (homogenous state). However, in practice, the state of exception deals with the threat of the enemy. To my point, Giorgio Agamben writes an entire book about the state of exception (*State of Exception*) in relation to life and death. For Agamben, in the state of exception, *homo sacer*, a human reduced to bare life, is "included in the community" as the figure "who may be killed but not yet sacrificed" with impunity (Agamben, 2016: 82, 8). That is, the law only applies in that their right to life is suspended; life is threatened by the bare form of law (Kant's *die bloße Form eines Gesetzes*). Deciding the state of the exception is the original activity of the sovereign, and it is in these moments that purported internal enemies—threats to existence—are negated.

Yet, the issue of the sovereign and its fundamental framework is not solely in dramatic declarations of exception; it lies in the connection between law and its enforcement and, therefore, in the very structure of decision-making. Thus, it is not merely that a decision establishes a state of exception; rather, the structures of decision-making and exceptionality are one of the same.⁹ Schmitt (2008/1932: 18) writes, “The connection of actual power with the legally highest power [a mere signal] is the fundamental problem of the concept of sovereignty”; power, whoever makes decisions, animates law but is not reducible to it. Schmitt (2008/1932: 34) again, “What matters for the reality of legal life is who decides... it arises precisely from the juristically concrete.”

Thus, decision and law are sides of the same coin, as “no norm... interprets and applies, protects or guards itself” (Schmitt, 2008/1932: 54). The state of exception acts within and beyond its legal capacity; in this sense, it is paradoxical. Although Schmitt (2008/1932: 31, 35) purports that exceptional decisions appear “new and alien” and defy “general codification” in comparison to normal legal order or norm, it is never absent of its legal structure: the exception “reveals a juristic element—the decision in absolute purity.” More plainly, the law enables a capacity to suspend the norm; for Schmitt (2008/1932: 13), there “exists no norm that is applicable to chaos.” For a legal order to make sense, a normal situation must exist, and it is the sovereign who decides whether this normal situation actually exists. The state of exception only differs from normal decisions in terms of the intensity of response; Schmitt’s state of exception—a *break* from the norm—can only be observed after the fact.

There is a necessity to (further) clarify! Schmitt (2008/1932: 12) writes: “The existence of the state is undoubted proof of its superiority over the validity of the legal norm. The decision frees itself from all normative ties and becomes, in the true sense, absolute. The state suspends the law in the exception on the basis of its right of self-preservation, as one says.” So, the decision of exception *is* outside of the norm but remains in the norm insofar that that the sovereign—endowed with the power—decides on behalf of self-preservation and preservation of the norm. In all, “the state thus has the first and the last word in Schmitt’s theory of sovereign” (Weber, 1992: 10).

⁹An exceptional decision brings about a certain intensity that is not in the “norm.”

Walter Benjamin (2021/1921: 89) argues that if a decision is for or against violent action (*gewalthaftes Handeln*), the decision cannot be “envisaged *in abstracto*”; a “truly *subjective* decision arguably seems to be imaginable only in view of determinate goals that one wishes to accomplish.” For example, *if* the state decides on the enemy—the enemy poses a threat to existence—it must be on *subjective* grounds. For Schmitt (2008/1932: 54) and Benjamin, “nothing that is normatively valid enforces itself.” A moment of “pure power of willfulness” (Scheuerman, 1999: 26) finds itself in every legal decision.¹⁰ Thus, the questions of “Who decides?” and, consequently, “Why follow?” rest not only in every political decision but also in decisions that deal with death.

To summarize Schmitt’s philosophy that deals with Arendt’s doctrine of action (activity and thinking), Schmitt purports that the Political is the distinction between friend and enemy. Contrary to these prevalent criticisms characterizing Schmitt for reducing politics to matters of power without “normative meaning,” he is unexpectedly consistent in proving a normative relationship (following *subjective* decision) between the sovereign and their subjects. Political unity—collective categorization—presupposes the enemy and the real possibility of killing or being killed. Unity in a political form arises out of self-recognition upon entering political conflict: we are *friends*; they are *enemies*. This is a distinction (*Unterscheidung*) of a public enemy (*nur der öffentliche Feind*), not a mere difference nor without a relationship with “the collectivity of man.”

3 ARENDT AND SCHMITTIAN THOUGHTLESSNESS

First, to understand thoughtlessness (but first, loneliness) in Schmitt’s *The Concept of Political*, we must work through Arendt’s arguments about the masses and the mob. Arendt’s two in-text references to Schmitt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* address the central critique under consideration in terms of the Political’s totalitarian masses; both follow her historical dialectic of totalitarianism through imperialism.

The breakdown of the European party system into permitting Nazism was from

¹⁰No two legal cases (normative or not) are the same or can be direct in law. One may only “point” to the law in precedence. Walter Benjamin understood that politics, as Max Weber and Schmitt, and class relations as domination; he works to recover violence (*Gewalt*) as holding form and force yet no specific content: a distinction between legal and illegal that maintains itself and distinctions through (violent) coercion. Law is naked and without consent.

“the neutrality of the army, its willingness to serve every master, eventually left the state in a position of [quoting Schmitt] ‘mediation between the organized party interests. It was no longer *above* but *between* the classes of society.’ In other words, the state and the parties together defended the status quo” (Arendt 1973/1951: 262–263). Against the disintegration of traditional European parties, a “clear-cut unity” and “curious uniformity” to totalitarian parties resulted from “the appeal of movements”—“meaningful to their adherents”—aimed to “restore” an unannounced and ambiguous “status quo” (*norm*) of the nation-state: (Arendt 1973/1951: 265–266):

The “totalitarian state” is a state in appearance only, and the movement no longer truly identifies itself even with the needs of the people. The Movement by now is above state and people, ready to sacrifice both for the sake of its ideology: [quoting Schmitt] “The Movement . . . is State as well as People, and neither the present state . . . nor the present German people can even be conceived without the Movement” (Arendt 1973/1951: 265–266).

Schmitt’s quoted “Movement,” the willingness to serve, uniformity to totalitarian party ideals of normalcy and appearances proved to organize the sheer number of people in the *masses* until “the movement [imperialist expansion, expulsion, sovereignty] seized power” (Arendt 1973/1951: 308).

Importantly, Arendt (1973/1951: 311) posits that the masses operate on “indifference”; there cannot be a shared “common interest” across “sheer numbers.” This was characteristic of the Nazi movement in the 1930s: “their members from this mass of apparently indifferent people whom all other parties had given up as too apathetic or too stupid for their attention” (Arendt 1973/1951: 311).¹¹ The totalitarian party involved their members (masses) to the “point of complete loss of individual claims and ambition” and had succeeded in “extinguishing individual identity permanently” (not just for “the moment of collective heroic action”) (Arendt 1973/1951: 314). Thus, the masses were susceptible to totalitarian “[fiction, mystic] kinds of propaganda” (Arendt 1973/1951: 351). Their submission to the “fictitious consistency of an ideology” was a response to their selfishness and isolation; the masses were selfish insofar that they themselves—*oneself*—did “not matter”; the “feeling of being expendable” was a “mass

¹¹Masses in this part of *Origins*—although the same in her critique of totalitarianism at large—sprung from political indifference *to more* political indifference; they were and remained “truly neutral” (Arendt 1973/1951: 311).

phenomenon" (Arendt 1973/1951: 315). The "fictitious consistency of an ideology" offered an "escape from reality is a verdict against the world in which they are forced to live" (Arendt 1973/1951: 353).

Yet, the mob in totalitarianism is different from the masses; the mob, comprised of people of all classes, is but a caricature of "the people" who "always will shout for the 'strong man,' the 'great leader'" (the one who absolves their fear and uncertainty of being free) (Arendt 1973/1951: 107). In parliamentary politics, the mob "hates society [because it is] excluded as it is from society and political representation" and turns out of "necessity to extra-parliamentary action" (Arendt 1973/1951: 108). "Ready to cleanse itself of viciousness by openly admitting criminals and by publicly committing crimes," the mob normalizes criminality to place others as "an object lesson for all the things they detested... a symbol for the hypocrisy and dishonesty of the whole system" (Arendt 1973/1951: 88, 108, 354). Different but a part of the same in upholding the totalitarian government, the mobs and the masses operate underneath totalitarian power.

Two facets of Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* are in Arendt's understanding of totalitarian ideology and loneliness thus far: 1) the relationship between the masses and the mob with the sovereign and 2) the friend-enemy distinction. For Schmitt, the Political, the friend-enemy distinction, defines politics and presupposes the creation of the state. Again, Schmitt's theory rests on the state's inherent heterogeneous *internal order*; liberal constitutionalism falters to pluralism. Schmitt's heterogenous internal order necessitates categorization with the friend-enemy distinction; it entails self-identification with either friend or enemy. In Arendt's totalitarianism, the masses and the mob self-identify with the Nazi state "revolution" (the creation of a totalitarian state) (Suuronen, 2022).

However, this does not mean that the mob or, more specifically, the masses are in vehement opposition to the enemy on moral or ideological grounds; in fact, according to Schmitt, they *are not*. The negation of the enemy, and accepting the state of exception, depends on the commitment to self-preservation and the norm. Who decides on (subjective) negation, exception, and normalcy? The sovereign does. Although the Political

is a precondition of the state, it is only through the state (and the sovereign's decisions) that war—the negation of the enemy and commitment to kill or die to preserve normalcy—wages. Often, as with *Kristallnacht* and throughout Nazism, the decision of war opens a state of exception. If this line of reasoning is charitable to Schmitt's intention in *The Concept of Political*, then Arendt's understanding of the totalitarian-abetting masses and mobs fits into Schmitt's Political state; the sovereign has the first word and final say, and the masses and mobs commit to the sovereign's decisions.

For Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the absolute commitment to the sovereign's decisions (to use Schmitt's words) brings about isolation. I have alluded to this previously on the topic of the masses: absolute unity—a distinction (*Unterscheidung*) between the public enemy (*nur der öffentliche Feind*) in relationship with the state collective—extinguishes individual identity. Because tyranny leaves the “productive [labor]” capabilities of man intact but destroys the public realm of plurality), it isolates man from political activity (Arendt 1973/1951: 475). In isolation, “man remains in contact with the world as the human artifice; only when the most elementary form of human creativity, which is the capacity to add something of one's own to the common world, is destroyed, isolation becomes altogether unbearable” (Arendt 1973/1951: 475). Yet, totalitarianism also destroys private life, fashioning totalitarian forms of government “the most radical and desperate experiences of man” (Arendt 1973/1951: 475).¹² While isolation only concerns the public realm, loneliness concerns the public and private.

Thus, “loneliness concerns human life as a whole” under totalitarian forms of tyranny (Arendt 1973/1951: 475). Loneliness, different from solitude, is the common ground for terror. Contrarily in solitude, man is alone and can “therefore... ‘be together with himself” (Arendt 1973/1951: 477). A two-in-one dialogue exists between “me and myself” (Arendt 1973/1951: 477). Thinking in solitude requires that one's identity is intact—there cannot be two if one's identity is destroyed—and the activity realigns the identity with the person (the whole). Arendt says that when identity is intact, a person may speak as the “single voice of one unexchangeable person” (Arendt 1973/1951:

¹²Arendt's private real is the realm of necessity. There is no room for freedom because there is no room for (political) action or speech.

476).

Totalitarianism, which casts one into isolation in political tyranny and abolishes the private realm, destroys identity via submission to absolute unity. What makes totalitarian loneliness so unbearable is that we cannot be in solitude; we can only be lonely because of the “loss of one’s own self,” i.e., the loss of one of the two in dialogue. Totalitarianism forces “inner coercion” and confirms identity not by the companion of equals but “outside of all relationships with others” (Arendt 1973/1951: 478). This loneliness—the inner commitment to cohesion—drives the totalitarian subject to look for a “suicidal escape from this reality” (fictions) (Arendt 1973/1951: 478).

Nevertheless, totalitarianism functions so that the person is never *truly* alone; the two-in-one becomes one-and-one, so to speak. By destroying all space—the public and private realms—the “productive potentialities of isolation are annihilated” (Arendt 1973/1951: 478). However, even more precarious, totalitarian loneliness produces an “anti-social” situation contrary to action. Loneliness harbors “a principle destructive for *all* human living together”: they *can’t* (emphasis added, Arendt 1973/1951: 478). It is a precursor for the domination of the self and the active world.

Here, we could continue to work Schmitt’s thesis into Arendt’s loneliness. However, I hold that I have sufficiently explained Schmitt’s clear-cut unity, and it would not take much thought to connect it with Arendt’s conclusions. However, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was not Arendt’s absolute answer to *what* Nazi totalitarianism truly was. She adjusted her thesis on totalitarianism after traveling to *Schutzstaffel* Officer Adolf Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem. Until the first day of the trial in 1961, Arendt had never seen an orchestrator of the Final Solution; Eichmann revealed the “word-and-thought-defying *banality of evil*” (Arendt 2006/1963: 252). Claims of ordinariness and thoughtlessness superimposed her original thesis in *Origins*, in which she fixed totalitarian evil as radical, “unpunishable, unforgivable [and] absolute” (Arendt 1973/1951: 459). This does not mean that Arendt dissolved her arguments on the mob, masses, and historical dialectic of totalitarian evil in *Origins*; instead, *all* those who are subject to totalitarianism are thoughtless.

Considering her new conclusions, Arendt did not do away with her thesis on lone-

liness, and she should not have. She argued that Eichmann wanted no more to be recognized by others, to “be a member of something or other” (Arendt 2006/1963: 32). Arendt quotes Eichmann, who said that if he did not join the Nazi party, he would “have to live a leaderless and difficult individual life... receive no directives from anybody, no orders and commands... a life never known before” (Arendt 2006/1963: 32). Throughout the trial, Eichmann sought out moments that filled him with a “sense of elation” (Arendt 2006/1963: 32). These moments coincided with Jerusalem’s search for his own conscious and the story of Jewish elimination: the turning points of his career. Eichmann was an “idealist” in the sense that he “lived for his idea,” prepared to sacrifice “everything” and “everybody”; it did not matter the extent to which he was under orders because his identity—an “inner rapport with his work”—rested on his ability to obey them (Arendt 2006/1963: 42, 57).

To Schmitt’s thesis and worse to Arendt’s dismay, Eichmann appeared to have no insane hatred of the Jews. He had “private reasons” not to hate the Jewish people (Arendt 2006/1963: 30). In the Sassen interview tapes that reached trial discovery, Eichmann emphasized that his hatred rested not against the Jews individually, but everything “that was against the German people.”¹³ The Nazi movement gave significance to Eichmann’s insignificant life, but in no way does that mean totalitarians *can* provide identity; it is one-and-one, an illusion. In view of Schmitt and Arendt, you could also say that Eichmann traded identity for the absolute unity of the Political’s friend. Moreover, Eichmann traded identity for selfishness; he was “expendable” because of his willingness to die on behalf of the enemy’s negation (an enemy worthy of negation not by normative differences but because it was *against the preservation of the friend*) and indifference to the state of exception.¹⁴ Ultimately, all of Eichmann’s “trades” with his identity amounted to a trade with loneliness; Eichmann traded identity for and chose to self-identify with the masses.

Yet, what bridged Eichmann with Arendt’s new dimension of totalitarianism with the former doctrine of loneliness was his thoughtlessness. While Jerusalem strained to

¹³View documents here: Adolf Eichmann, interview by Willem Sassen, “Texts of the tapes of the interview held by Willem Sassen with Eichmann in Argentina, Part One, 1956–1957,” 1956–1957, Record Group 0.65, File 85, 10622517, Collection of Jacob Robinson, Jurist and Diplomat, Yad Vashem Archives, Jerusalem, Israel, 32–33, 6.

¹⁴Remember, selfishness is a “decisive weakening of the instinct for self-preservation” (Arendt 1973/1951: 315).

get Eichmann to speak his supposedly “hideous thoughts,” he rambled and repeated word for word “stock phrases” and “clichés” when he could not surmise an original sentence; his memories and stories were “always the same” (Arendt 2006/1963: 49). Uninterrupted by courtroom officials, his dialogue was one-and-one; he could not speak in the “single voice of one unexchangeable person” (Arendt 1973/1951: 476). Eichmann’s inability to speak exposed an “inability to think” (Arendt 2006/1963: 49). His choice to self-identify with the masses—the internal organization of homogeneous friends—left “no communication... possible” (Arendt 2006/1963: 49). He could not enter two-in-one dialogue between him and himself nor could Eichmann enter dialogue in “the presence of others” (Arendt 2006/1963: 49). Here, others is not simply another person, rather “an *other*” in the pluralistic sense; Eichmann was, for the first time in a long while, “surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards,” the law (Arendt 2006/1963: 49). Namely, Eichmann could not “think from the standpoint of somebody else” because there is no “else” in totalitarianism or the Political (Arendt 2006/1963: 49).

Arendt never imagined Eichmann’s thoughtlessness nor malicious men to be novel. Thoughtless men and malicious men have and always will exist. Instead, Arendt’s worry centered on a (actually) novel historical era: the decay of tradition. Human plurality is the manifoldness of tradition (Arendt 1981/1977: 201). Tradition takes “forms and shapes”; it “permit[s] us to look on the past with new eyes” and connects us to everything that is “raw experience without being bound by any prescriptions” (Arendt 1981/1977: 12, 201). Our plurality functions on “cherishing different memories” and “having different habits and customs” (Arendt 1981/1977: 12, 201). Tradition roots us in our plurality, i.e., our shared public and active world. Because tradition roots itself in the public world, and “new series of acts and states” erased tradition—our plurality—we are rootless; it interrupts our “mind and its position in the world” (Arendt 1981/1977: 30, 34). We long for nothing more than an “adequate home in the world” (Arendt 1981/1977: 23).

Therefore, when we focus our attention outside our position in the world (present) or escape to the future, we lose our ability to think. Our soul demands that the mind

predicts the future and confirms “either hope or fear” (Arendt 1981/1977: 35). When our mind is focused on the future, we “will” instead of think. Although thinking and willing are mental activities, they are at odds; we cannot be *here*, in the present with others or in solitude. When willing, we react to “the future in fear and hope” and believe that our “I-can” (act freely, decide, and take initiative, to *think for oneself*) is not guaranteed (Arendt 1981/1977: 35). We can only “quiet” the will’s worry and “release” the mind from its dominance” through I-can-and-I-do (Arendt 1981/1977: 37).

Prima facie, isolation from the *now* world is freedom; one “stands apart... isolated from everyone else... due to free will” because “nobody,” including Eichmann and the rest, “can be held responsible for it but me myself (Arendt 1981/1977: 196). However, the will with its “projects for the future challenges the belief in necessity”—to categorize friend and enemy and relinquish rights for self-preservation—falls into “the arrangement of the world which it calls complacency” (Arendt 1981/1977: 196). According to Arendt, “mental activities... all testify by their *reflexive* nature to a *duality* inherent in consciousness”; one cannot act except “by acting, implicitly or explicitly, back upon himself” (Arendt 1981/1977: 203). We cannot move our arms if we do not (implicitly) use our minds to move our arms. Thus, loneliness and isolation under complete unity, absent of plurality, can only be mended through (thinking and) action; “action is love of freedom” (Arendt 1981/1977: 203).¹⁵ Arendt means love of freedom is the negative sense, as in liberation from oppressors, and the positive, “Freedom as a stable, tangible reality... freedom that arises out of the spontaneity of beginning something new” (Arendt 1981/1977: 203).

The connection between the two—negative and positive freedom—were the two “foundational” traditions for Western political thought (Arendt 1981/1977: 203). It appears that with the loss of tradition in the novel political crises, we have lost our *action* and, therefore, our love for freedom. *This* is why thoughtlessness begs totalitarianism; one becomes “so isolated from the rest of thought” that they (selfishly) believe they cannot think, therefore, act for oneself (Arendt 1981/1977: 188). In many ways, totalitarianism is self-sustaining; it strips its subjects of solitude, their thinking space.¹⁶

¹⁵Love of freedom in the negative sense (fighting oppressors) and the positive sense (“Freedom as a stable, tangible reality”) (Arendt 1981/1977: 203).

¹⁶This is a play off *Lebensraum*, the Nazi’s desired “living space.”

Can we not say the same about Schmitt's sovereign and Political? Does it not demand *Unterscheidung* (distinction)? Does it not demand isolation, loneliness, and thoughtlessness? There are too many ways to illuminate Schmitt's work through Arendt's doctrine of thinking and action. As discussed previously, the (will)ingness to serve and the (will)ingness to relinquish rights—not only under the state of exception but also submit to the sovereign's prescription of "normalcy," whatever that may be—plagues Schmitt's idea of the Political. If Schmitt believes that "the [P]olitical is the total," then it would render our political world, as Eichmann, entirely thoughtless.

More dire, the Political deals in terms of life or death; the "real meaning" of the Political demands the categorization of enemies—the (will)ingness to commit killing and the (selfish) acceptance of death—and absolute unity. Even more dire, the Political rests solely on *commitment* to the sovereign's decision, which is not limited to the state of exception but also on what constitutes normalcy, i.e., whatever *deserves* to be persevered. With Arendt, we can understand how Schmitt's Political and state of exception adheres to totalitarian ideology and practice—isolation, loneliness, and thoughtlessness—yet Arendt offers a solution: *thinking as action*. While the world may once again render itself to the unlawfulness and normalization Nazism or the Political champions, Arendt holds to true to the possibility of action. To stand apart from *friends* does not mean I stand alone: I have me and myself.

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