A Political Practice of Worldliness and Visibility: A reconsideration of Arendt's critical and emancipatory potential

Willemsen, Charlie

A Political Practice of Worldliness and Visibility

A reconsideration of Arendt's critical and emancipatory potential

Charlie Willemsen
S3036634

MA thesis – Philosophical Perspectives on Politics and the Economy
Supervisor: Dr. Thomas Fossen
22-01-2024
Words: 19280

Table of Contents

Introduction

In our modern age, we seem to be losing interest in leading a public life. We are more and more retreating into our own private lives and interests, losing our public selves in the process. Our interest in leading a meaningful public existence together with others, has been replaced by a more isolated, private interest in personal wealth, happiness, and entertainment (Dietz, 1994, p. 244; Arendt, 1998, pp. 46 & 47). As a result, the public space in which we can come together as a political community is shrinking as we are losing our connection as people to a shared sense of reality and to each other. Instead, we all live in our own realities, our own worlds, created by our own beliefs, ideas, and needs. Hannah Arendt's analysis and political theory can help us make sense of this new 'modernity' that arose in the aftermath of World War II and the predicament that we find ourselves in now: a state of every-increasing world-alienation characterized by thoughtlessness and loneliness (Schaap, 2021, p. 42). Arendt calls the phenomenon that has caused this world alienation 'the rise of the social'. The emancipation of the labouring activity has brought the private needs and interests of labour into the public realm, creating a new sphere altogether that absorbs both the private and the public: the social sphere, dramatically changing the world we inhabit (Arendt, 1998, p. 47). As we find and affirm our freedom by coming together in the public realm, the disappearance of the public realm affects our conception of ourselves and our ability to consider ourselves freely acting human beings.

Arendt's mission is simple, to understand what lies at the root of the problems troubling modern society and formulate from this understanding a new kind of political practice that can help us revitalize public life and thus, reconnect us to the world and each other. This kind of political practice is at risk of being lost to us in the modern world, a practice through which people can reaffirm their freedom and find expression of their self as truly human. Primary to this objective is the revitalization of the public sphere, the sphere in which all political activities make their appearance. The world is of essential importance to Arendt as the only thing that makes meaningful activity possible. After all, activity can only attain meaning in a world that we know we inhabit with others; it is the presence of others that bestows meaning onto activities, creating history (Arendt, 1998, pp. 9 & 22).

Politics then, is a vital component to a meaningful, fully human life and can only appear in a public realm in which others testify to the meaning of the words and deeds that occur. Subsequently, in this public realm, a common sense of reality is generated. The durability of the public realm is generated, not by actors to whom the political faculty of action belongs, but by those who witness, spectators who possess the political capacity for

judgement. Judgement is a difficult faculty to bring into view because it is the work Arendt never got to write due to her untimely death. Yet, many attempts have been made to reconstruct her account using her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* and the broader context of her work, an approach I will take myself as well. Judgement is the critical faculty when it comes to matters of political nature, yet its political potential is often overlooked as people find her theory of political action in her earlier work hard to reconcile with her theory of judgement (Beiner, 1982, p. 138; d'Entrèves, 2002, p. 130). I will argue that judgement is the political faculty that allows us to take on different perspectives and thereafter form an opinion about a certain phenomenon. Linda Zerilli describes it as the ability to be and think from one's own identity into places where one is not. Conceptualized as such, judgement has the potential to build a shared sense of reality and enlarge our conception of common world. It helps us 'get the world in view' (Zerilli, 2016, pp. 38 & 39). Arendt's account of judgement provides us with an interesting starting point for thinking about a democratic practice that can revitalize the democratic public sphere. It appears to have emancipatory potential by connecting a strong public sphere with the inclusion of a multitude of perspectives. It has critical potential as well, as this enlarged thinking inherent to judgement suggests a revitalization of thought and action in an age of thoughtlessness and inertia.

There is, however, a strong and widespread objection to using Arendtian politics as the starting point for formulating a new democratic praxis; namely, the fact that she draws up her conceptualization against the conceptual background of the public-private and subsequent political-social separation (Pitkin, 1994, p. 281; Wolin, 1994, p. 289). Arendt conceptually defines the rise of the social - this newly created, world-destroying social sphere- as the permeation of private matters into the public sphere. Subsequently, she banishes all matters of private interest, most significantly matters of a socio-economic nature, from the public realm - ergo politics- in order to protect it, creating a social/political separation. This has, understandably so, generated a lot of critique. How can a conception of politics where all talk of socio-economic issues is banned, ever become the base for forming a democratic, emancipatory, and critical praxis?

When one isolates Arendt's treatment of the social question from the rest of her theory, her public/private division seems rather rigid and perhaps even supportive of an elitist conception of political action as a heroic, individual endeavour (Pitkin, 1994, p. 281). However, her focus on the common world, narratives and spectators suggests otherwise (d'Entrèves, 2002, p. 65). Her account of judgement is particularly puzzling in relation to the social question. How can we reconcile an account of judgement as democratic world-building

that helps us reveal new parts of the world and make visible new perspectives of people with her banishment of issues of a socio-economic nature? I argue that the critique of the social is largely focussed on Arendt's account of political *action*, ignoring her account of political *judgement* as an equal component to Arendtian politics. I propose that we must understand judgement as an essential complementary component to her account of political action, with judgement and action together constituting a political practice that is equipped with a critical and emancipatory potential. Theorized as such, it could shine a new light on her critique of the social question and redefine its relation to the political realm, departing from Arendt's own conceptualization of this issue and retrieving a hidden critical and emancipatory potential. Thus, this thesis aims to answer the question: *To what extent can a reconceptualization of Arendt's political practice have critical, emancipatory potential in the public sphere?*

I will answer this question in three parts. In the first chapter I will look into Arendt's concept of judgement and its relation to Arendt's theory of political action. This chapter will establish a firm conceptual foundation for an emancipatory and critical practice by showing that judgement is an equal component of the political practice, already necessitated and implied by political action. It will explicate the ontological base from which Arendt operates - specifically with regards to reality and the common world- and the role that perspective plays in this world-building practice. Above all, it will lay the foundation for a formulation of judgement as a distinctly *political* praxis co-constitutive to Arendt's theory of political action.

The second chapter will engage more deeply with the so-called 'problem of the social'. It will provide an explication of the main obstacle to theorizing a truly critical and democratic political practice from Arendt's concept of judgement, namely the relation between the political and the social. I will do so by first giving a succinct overview of Arendt's problem with the social, ontologically rooted in her public/ private distinction and then diving into her concrete objections with the economic and cultural uniformity generated by the rise of society and subsequent exile of the social from the political realm. Thereafter, I will look at the main problems that have been identified with this conceptualization of 'the social' and its relation to the political, that is: the problem of substance and the problem of power which invite us to rethink the relation between social and political.

To shed a new light on the political/ social relation in Arendt's work, I will return to the critical and emancipatory potential of the political practice in the third and concluding chapter. In this chapter I will flesh out the political practice including both action and judgement as one of visibility and worldliness. The critical and emancipatory potential of the

political practice will come into view by explicating how 'visibility' and 'worldliness' allow us to engage with socio-economic issues in the public sphere. I will explore how the conceptualization of a practice of visibility and worldliness can reiterate the relation between the social and the political and address the problems raised in the second chapter. Lastly, I will consider how this interpretation of the political practice as emancipatory and critical affects the relation between private and public, political, and social, in Arendt's theory. All in all, I aim to show that a reconceptualization of the Arendtian political practice as one of visibility and worldliness can carry a -previously untapped- critical and emancipatory potential to address socio-economic issues in the public sphere.

Chapter 1: A Political Practice of Action and Judgement

In this first chapter I will argue that we can distil a political practice that includes both action and judgement from Arendt's theory by first establishing the theoretical foundation of this practice and then showing how this practice has critical and emancipatory potential. The first half of this chapter will focus on Arendt's action-centred theory of politics and its main pillars. Here, I will first show why theorizing politics is necessarily theorizing *practice* over *system* for Arendt, using the juxtaposition between her own theory and the Platonic tradition. Then, I will elaborate on what this practice looks like for Arendt by explicating its core concept of 'political action' and its implications for freedom, sovereignty, and the public sphere. In the second half of this chapter, I will demonstrate how this action-centred political practice implies and necessitates a practice of political judgement. I will do so by first investigating the role of perspectives, an essential component to the faculty of judgement, in the constitution of the common world and a shared reality. Then, I will go on to demonstrate in how judgement is necessitated and implied as an active, political faculty in Arendt's theory and as such, is complementary to political action in an Arendtian political practice.

An Action-Centred Theory of Politics

Arendt and the Western Platonic Political Tradition

In order to illustrate what Arendt considers to be 'politics' we can look at the two types of political theory drawn up by Bonnie in her book *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (1993). It is a distinction for which she is partially inspired by Arendt's juxtaposition of her own account of politics against the western philosophical-political tradition starting with Plato. Honig states that on the one side there are political theorists who, in the Platonic tradition, aim to solve dissonance in politics and devise a perfect political system that can serve as the institutional blueprint for how to solve political issues. On the other side, there are political theorists who believe that there can be no such perfect political system, and rather advocate for the perpetuity of political *activity*, such as Arendt. They argue that -while it is tempting to think of democracy as something that can be figured out and then be done with- political thinking that wants to only establish a certain kind of 'order' or 'rule' can be threatening to the perpetuity of political activity, and that political system thinking ends up hostile to the practice of politics itself (Honig, 1993, pp. 3, 6 & 7). We can use this framework to better understand how an Arendtian politics comes to be *action-centred*, developed in relation to her criticism of the Platonic tradition.

Politics then, for Arendt, is always about political *activity*, not a political *system*. In fact, there is no such thing as a 'political system' for Arendt. It is actions that constitute politics, not the sedimentation of a specific kind of order or rule. It is not political theory's task to 'fix' politics, in fact, she does not think that there could be a singular answer to the many perplexities of our modernity. She clarifies her position on the relation between political theory and practice:

> Such answers are given every day, and they are matters of practical politics, subject to the agreement of many; they can never lie in the theoretical considerations or the opinion of one person, as though we dealt here with problems for which only one solution is possible… What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing. (Arendt, 1998, p. 5).

Arendt's political theory is a response to history and the modern age; it is 'a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and most recent fears' (Arendt, 1998, p. 5) which urges her to put 'action' at the centre of politics.

Arendt develops her conception of politics as action-centred specifically against the Platonic tradition because this tradition can account for the disappearance of action from the centre of politics. She argues that political action has been banished from political theory because of the rise of a hostility towards its unruliness and boundlessness that started with Plato. Plato substituted the act of 'doing' with the act of 'fabrication'. There is a certain uncontrollability in human affairs, which led Plato to introduce the metaphysical idea of a separation between 'being' and 'appearance', the belief that one could strive for a higher truth, which was obscured by its mere appearance in the human world (Benhabib, 2003, p. 113). What appears to us might seem uncontrollable, but if we find the truth about that which actually *is*, we can regain control over the messy reality of appearances. Thus, in Arendt's reading of Plato, he separated knowing -related to finding higher truths- from doing -related to appearances- which meant that action from here on out could be reinterpreted as fabrication. Action as fabrication was the execution of a plan thought of by those who strive for knowledge of higher truths, no longer an unruly and boundless practice. Fabrication always has an instrumental mentality as it is not something intrinsically valuable, but rather a means to achieve an end (Arendt, 1998, p. 225 & 228).

This begs the question: how did action come to be seen as such an unruly, boundless, and uncontrollable political practice? According to Arendt, action as the core activity of politics is rooted in plurality and natality, both ineradicable conditions of our human existence. Put shortly, natality means that every act is the birth of a new beginning over which we do not

retain control after its spontaneous initiation. Plurality refers to the fact that all actions take place among others to whom are equal, yet who are completely distinct from us (Arendt, 1998, p. 175 & 248). This entails that all new acts are inserted into a pre-existing web of human relationships which means that we cannot control how others respond our acts, how they interpret us, what meaning people give to our words and what deeds they inspire. Hence, rooting a conception of politics in these two conditions means that the political practice can be unruly, unpredictable, and boundless (Arendt, 1998, p. 191). This relation between the natality/ plurality and its consequences for the notion of action, I will further develop when I later elaborate on Arendt's conceptualization of political action.

The substitution of action with fabrication meant that the plurality in which the unruly character of true political action is rooted, was now seen as something that ought to be controlled and tamed, and its power to be harnessed towards achieving a certain goal (Villa, 1992, p. 278). The Platonic tradition of politics tries to find a substitute for the instability of plurality and natality. It is hostile to putting action at the core of any conception of politics precisely because of action's disruptive nature and its boundlessness (Arendt, 1998, p. 220). A perfect system of politics cannot function when political acts cut across its boundaries, disrupt its rules, and constantly reconfigure its web of relations. Hence, this Platonic tradition, which has a strong legacy in modern political philosophical thought[1], is hostile to political action itself. The reason Arendt is critical of this tradition is because the calamities that this tradition tries to eradicate –those of unpredictability, unruliness, and boundlessness– are not born from action, but from action being rooted in our human conditions of natality and plurality. An attempt to eradicate these calamities is not only an attack on action, but also on plurality and natality and as such, on diversity and freedom (Honig, 1993, p. 78). Arendt's conception of political action is one of non-sovereignty. Once we act, there is no telling what the consequences of such an act are, whatever our intentions would be. Yet, all these risks are rooted in the condition of human plurality: non-sovereignty is cost of true plurality (Arendt, 1998, p. 220). In order to fully understand this decision to vindicate action as a political activity we must now turn to Arendt's theory of action and its relation to the conditions of plurality and natality.

[1] An example of such modern theory that is hostile to free, boundary-crossing action is John Rawls' theory of justice, who aims to draw up a perfectly closed system of social justice. Thinking politically is separated from acting politically in this theory and action becomes the mere execution of a theoretical imperative. In Rawls' case, that imperative is given by the theoretically arrived principles of justice under the veil of ignorance.

Arendt's Theory of Action

Having established that to theorize politics is to theorize practice, we need to further look into the kind of activity that constitutes this practice. For Arendt, that activity is action. The importance that Arendt places on political activity being in the shape of action is because it is only in this activity that people can find freedom. Freedom is not a phenomenon that can be attached to the self for Arendt, it is constituted only in a certain kind of activity. (Honig, 1993, p. 79). Being free is not something one *is*, it is something one *does* in the company of others. Arendt famously differentiated between three kinds of human activities: labour, work, and action. While in labour and work, we perform essential tasks for sustaining of life and building of the world, these are not activities in which we can find freedom. They are either conditioned by the necessities of life (labour), or by an instrumental means-end mentality (work). Thus, the only activity in which we can truly be free is action: the political activity (Arendt, 1998, p. 7). The loss of our ability to act would mean the loss of our freedom which is very dangerous. It is this danger -with which Arendt was always concerned in the aftermath of World War II- that makes the need to give priority to the political so urgent for her (Kohn, 2000, p. 117). In summary: "The raison d'être of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action." (Arendt, 2017, p. 58).

Why is action the activity in which we find freedom? Well, to act is to begin something anew, which is closely related to the phenomena of 'natality' and uniqueness. It is our uniqueness that gives us the capacity to do the unanticipated when we act, to perform a miracle, 'give birth' to the unexpected (d'Entrèves, 2002, pp. 67 & 68). Natality is the practice of beginning and it is only this practice that can disrupt the endlessly repetitive natural cycle of life which constantly moves towards death and destruction. As such, it is action that bestows meaning and significance onto the lives of individuals.

> The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural", ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. (Arendt, 1998, p. 248).

Imagine a life without possibility for beginning or the disruption of the cycle of nature. Life itself would become cyclical too: a repetitive and predictable Groundhog Day where nothing is ever created or destroyed, no imprint left behind. It would be stable and safe, but meaningless. Action creates the stories that make our lives meaningful. Without it, the possibility to be free is lost to us. True freedom also means that our capacity to act comes with risks, and it was these risks that the Platonic tradition wanted to tame. Due to action's

nature as beginning something unexpected, it is inherently unpredictable and boundless. However, this is the inevitable cost of freedom and Arendt encourages us to pay this price: we ought to embrace the fact that political life is a tangled web of human affairs that is inherently fragile and unstable (Arendt, 1998, p. 191).

Seeing our political life as a tangled web of human affairs already implies that action occurs under another condition besides natality: plurality, which does not only entail that life is lived among others but also has the seemingly paradoxical twofold character as encompassing both distinction and equality: "Because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live." (Arendt, 1998, p. 8). This paradoxical character belies a more complicated tension at the heart of this condition from which Arendt draws her normative attitude in political theory: our political actions ought to have an intrinsic equal appreciation for all human life while at the same time acknowledging and respecting the distinction and uniqueness of every human being. It is in respecting human plurality that we find the space to disclose our distinctiveness to each other in action while recognizing that to understand this distinction revealed to us, we require full political equality (Arendt, 1998, p. 175). Arendt sees distinction and equality not as opposites, but as two mutually constitutive components of human plurality; we gain our political equality and human dignity by virtue of all being 'universally unique', not by virtue of being the same.

Human plurality being the basic condition of action makes action the only activity that is necessarily done amongst other people; it cannot be done in isolation. "To be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act" (Arendt, 1998, p. 188). Actions are a performance, a disclosure of one's identity, which means they need to be seen and heard by others, not just 'done'. Action requires an audience; without it, it does not have meaning. In order for the political world to come into being, actors as well as spectators are required. Where the actor's role is action, the prerogative of the spectator is judgement. A plurality of actors also means a plurality of spectators, witnesses to a certain act who all have a different perspective on this act (d'Entrèves, 2002, p. 70). The importance of the spectator and their perspectives for the existence of the political world, can be traced back to Arendt's ontology of the political world which is an ontology of appearances. As mentioned earlier, the Platonic tradition separates appearing from being. Arendt argues that there can be no such separation: "For us, appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves- constitutes reality." (Arendt, 1998, p. 50). A theory that separates being from appearance devaluates

appearances. As these appearances constitute our reality, the Platonic metaphysical tradition compromises the reality of the world itself.

Here the true nature of the political realm comes into view, and we see how the presence of others is essential to the existence of a public realm. The Arendtian public realm is a space of appearances. We are assured of the reality of the world and of who we are in that world by the fact that there are others present who see and hear us (Arendt, 1998, p. 50; Kohn, 2000, p. 125). Without their plurality of perspectives that brings the common world into view, we cannot conceive of a notion of 'reality' based on which we relate to one another. It is the spectators and their capacity for judgement that give this sense of reality to acts by judging that which appears to them (Tavani, 2013, p. 467). The theory of action thus implies and necessitates a theory of judgement in order to conceptualize a political practice in the public sphere. It is at this point that I will turn to this theory of judgement to see how it is complementary to the theory of action in the conceptualization of a political practice.

Political judgement in the political practice

The Role of Perspective and the Common World

A healthy political community requires a public realm where political acts can occur -be seen, heard, and given meaning- in the same way that a performance needs a stage. A public realm that can be the site of political engagement can only come into being against the backdrop of a 'common world': a place where we are connected to a shared sense of reality and thus to one another. As Arendt's ontology of the common world is one of appearance, public reality is created by our words and deeds that are seen and heard by all. Reality is not metaphysically 'given', nor can it be discovered in the pursuit of certain truths. In a world that consists of appearances, we can only ever find a shared sense of reality in these appearances. It is this connection to the same reality that gives our world its character as being a 'common world' (Zerilli, 2016, p. 28). Judgement is an essential part of the constitution of this public sphere as it is closely connected with the plurality of perspectives that constitute and ensure our common world and reality. In order to understand the relation between judgement and politics, we must first dive into how exactly perspectives constitute a shared sense reality and common world according to Arendt.

The common world is constituted through a *plurality* of perspectives, and this means that it relies on both equality and distinction. As Arendt states: "If men were not equal, they could

neither understand each other… nor plan for the future… If men were not distinct… they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood." (Arendt, 1998, pp. 175 & 176). Hence, there are two aspects to this common world that form the basis for Arendt's conceptualization of the public realm as a site of politics: *communicability* and *distinctness*. Communicability is our ability to recognize and communicate the 'sameness' of an object that makes it a part of the world: it is no longer only a subjective and personal reality, but rather a worldly, objective reality (Arendt, 1998, p. 57). Distinctness means we recognize sameness coming from distinctly *different* positions in the world. While the reality of public life is rooted in our seeing and hearing the same thing, this 'seeing' happens from different places. True *worldly* reality rises out of a sum of aspects of a singular thing presented by a plurality of witnesses who inhabit different locations in the world. Arendt formulates this in the following manner:

> If the sameness of the object can no longer be discerned, no common nature of men… can prevent the destruction of the common world… The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective. (Arendt, 1998, p. 58).

While a shared conception of reality might seem to be something that is given, Arendt shows us that the opposite is true. Sharing 'reality' itself with others, the sense that we live in the same world, is a vital part of any kind of political practice taking place. In order to talk about the world, we must first live in the same world. The common world is something that has to be carefully cultivated and protected. We all have different realities and to bring these together into a shared conception of 'the common world' is a tricky task. The common world is not a transcendentally given realm but something at stake. The faculty of judgement in our modern world arises as a vital political ability because it helps us to create and maintain the public space in which we can both express and judge a plurality of values and opinions (Zerilli, 2016, p. 28). Worldly reality is created, not given, that means that it can be lost to us.

If the common world is constituted in discerning a kind of sameness in objects and this sameness is the base for our sense of reality, that means that reality itself is dependent on others acknowledging objects' appearances in the same manner (Zerilli, 2016, p. 28). However, we just established that everyone sees from a different position. In fact, a 'oneness' in perspective is what would destroy the common world. How do we differentiate between sameness and oneness? The key to understanding the difference lies in the conceptualization of 'perspective', a concept that is recovered by Linda Zerilli in her book *A Democratic Theory of Judgement* (2016). She explains that Arendtian perspective has a specific relation to

notions of both objectivity and subjectivity which elucidates its differentiation from 'oneness'. She argues that perspective is not being confined to subjectivity, but rather the way to overcome being restricted to a specific location in the world (Zerilli, 2016, p. 32). Beiner agrees with this reading of Arendt, stating that subjectivizing our human experience means isolation and being deprived of the free and meaningful life that can only be experienced in the public realm (Beiner, 1997, p. 22). Perspective escapes such isolation by subjectivity because it is the exchange of different points of view on the world and taken as such, it allows us to bring the world as a common whole into view. In providing our own perspectives and understanding those of others, we aim to understand their position in the world (Zerilli, 2016, pp. 32 & 33). When perspectives on an object are exchanged in an intersubjective exercise, it comes into existence as a common object, and attains an objective and worldly character. It is this objective character that gives a world full of such objects the characteristic of being a common world.

Perspective is situated between objective and subjective because it does not exist independently of the object, but rather interacts with its existence and meaning. It is constitutive to the appearance of the object, to the reality of the object itself. It can neither be seen as objectivist, nor as subjectivist, as both those terms assume that an object exists independently of perspective. Subjectivism sees perspective as solely located in the subject which alienates us further from the possibility of a shared world, and objectivism views perspectives as inherently distorting of a reality that exists independently of our perspective on it (Zerilli, 2016, pp. 36 & 37). Perspectives create objective relations amongst people, and between people and the world. In this way, a common world comes into view. As our public political realm has an aesthetic character, our shared sense of reality being at stake is a *political* problem. The disintegration of the fabric of reality that constitutes the world as 'common' means the disintegration of the objective relations that connect people to one another in this world. Retrieving this common world is an essential part of imagining the revitalization of any kind of political practice that can involve political actions rooted in plurality and natality. It is at this point that I will turn to Arendt's conception of judgement because it is this political faculty that gives us access to the plurality of perspectives that can bring this common world back into view.

Political Judgement in the Public Realm

Judgement is one of Arendt's most elusive concepts because a clear explication of the concept by her is missing. Nevertheless, or perhaps consequently, Arendtian judgement is a

popular topic that has been discussed by many, and opinions diverge strongly. Yet, most authors recognize that there is some kind of bifurcation that can be observed in Arendt's writing when it comes to judgement. While in her earlier work she seemed to approach the concept from the more political angle of *vita activa*, in her later consideration of judgement she seemed to approach it from the angle of *vita contemplativa* (Beiner, 1982, p. 138; d'Entrèves, 2002, p. 130). The extent to which these understandings have to be mutually exclusive or even distinct is a point of discussion that informs how we look at Arendtian politics. At stake in this discussion, is the extent to which we can take judgement to be an active part of a political *practice*, complementary to political action. I will argue that not only judgement is an active part of a political practice, but rather, that any conceptualization of an Arendtian political practice necessarily *requires* an active faculty of political judgement.

Whether or not judgement has this kind of practical political potential, is something Zerilli engages with in her book on democratic judgement. She argues that any interpretation of judgement separated from the political realm -as a strictly contemplative interpretation of the faculty demands- makes the false assumption that an object can be deemed 'political' in Arendt's theory by being a political object *an sich*. Only then would it be possible to separate judgement from politics conceptually. She makes the case that this is not possible since an object can only appear as political by being subjected to the process of judging itself. It is only through the process of 'judging' that objects appear as public and political and, in turn, when we judge we are always engaged in a specifically political exercise (Zerilli, 2016, pp. 7 & 8). There is a solid basis in Arendt's earlier work on politics to support this reading of judgement, which makes the interpretation of judgement as complementary to action not anachronistic. In her essay *The Crisis in Culture* (1961) for instance, Arendt states:

> …the capacity to judge is a specifically political ability… namely, the ability to see things not only from one's own point of view but in the perspective of all those who happen to be present; even that judgement may be one of the fundamental abilities of man as a political being insofar as it enables him to orient himself in the public realm, in the common world. (Arendt, 2006, p. 218).

Her sensibility to the phenomenon of judgement is also already present in *The Human Condition* (1958), where she describes the commonsense that is the starting point for what later would be developed into 'judgement':

> The only character of the world by which to gauge its reality is its being common to us all… It is by virtue of common sense that the other sense perceptions are known to disclose reality… A noticeable decrease in common sense in any given community and a noticeable increase in

> superstition and gullibility are therefore almost infallible signs of alienation from the world. (Arendt, 1998, pp. 208 & 209)

Thus, my own understanding of judgement will build on Zerilli's interpretation as it is not only the most convincing reading of Arendt in my opinion, but more importantly, the one with the most critical potential for rethinking a political practice of visibility that relies on both political action *and* political judgement. After all, my concern here is not to reconstruct Arendt's view on judgement, but to find the potential in her political practice that enables us to engage with socio-economic issues critically in the public sphere.

Judgement then, appears as a distinctly political ability. Arendt observes an implied political philosophy in Kant's critiques and uses it as a starting point for developing her concept of judgement as an essentially political faculty. She says that 'it is clear that the art of critical thinking always has political implications.' (Arendt, 1989, p. 38). This is because when it comes to critical thinking, we expose our opinions to the test of public examination. Only when it is examined under the bright light of publicity, is opinion formation even possible, and politics is the realm of opinions (Arendt, 1989, pp. 39 & 40). This understanding of politics as the realm of opinions, not a realm of truths, can help us to understand better the exact role that judgement plays in Arendt's conception of politics. As stated earlier, political action is subjugated to the condition of human plurality. In this realm of plurality, truth becomes a despot, Arendt states, as it compels and forces people into agreement. Truth states things that are beyond agreement and thus has a coercive nature. This does not mean that factual truths hold no importance, on the contrary, truths frame our sense of past and present and ought to be preserved. As such, they have a political significance and function, but one that can only be performed *outside* of the political realm. It is important to the protection of the political that the coercive nature of truths is kept outside of the public realm, but it is equally important for the protection of truth itself because as truth can destroy plurality, the publicity of the public realm has the ability to destroy truth (Arendt, 2006, pp 254 & 255; d'Entrèves, 2000, p. 254).

The political realm is not about the past nor the present, but about the new and uncertain future. Politics as a realm of freedom can therefore never be the realm of truth. Politics happens in the space of appearances which requires the rejection of any singular notion of truth. It would constrict our freedom and tame the plurality that gives birth to free actions in the public realm (Arendt, 2006, p. 236). Rather, the essence of political life is debate and this debate is generated by considering the opinions of others. This is the hallmark of all political thinking. An opinion is not something that exists before it is exposed to publicity, rather it is

something that can only be formed by considering an issue from different points of view (Arendt, 2006 p. 237; d'Entrèves, 2000, p. 254). It is in this exercise of consideration that the capacity of judgement finally comes into play.

Judgement is the consideration of an issue from different sides by both being and thinking in your own identity, as well as making the standpoints of others present to your mind. Arendt borrows the Kantian concept 'enlarged mentality' in order to describe this. The more viewpoints one manages to represent to oneself, the stronger the opinion formed. The quality of a political opinion depends on the degree of impartiality one is able to reach when engaging in this activity of enlarged thinking (Arendt, 2006, p. 237). Enlarging one's thought requires the use of 'imagination', visiting the positions of others with whom you are in the public realm and imaging how a certain issue appears from their perspective: "to think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one's imagination to go visiting." (Arendt, 1989, p. 43). This means that even when one thinks in solitude, one never forms an opinion in isolation because opinion formation requires the representation of the standpoints of others to one's own mind. During this 'exercise', you abstract from your own private conditions, those subjectivizing idiosyncrasies of your situation that limit you from seeing the general point of view and thus are able to arrive at an opinion that pertains that which is common in the world (Arendt, 1989, p. 43; d'Entrèves, 2000, p. 252).

However, we must not think that Arendt is implying here that we can arrive at a general, universal standard by engaging in a purely passive, contemplative exercise of enlarged thinking. To draw such a conclusion would be to overvalue the contemplative life by separating knowing from doing, to devalue the active life in which we can find freedom through acting. Furthermore, there is no guarantee of arriving at a unity in worldviews by judging as that would imply that opinions, when arrived at through the right kind of 'contemplation', can assume a universal character. Opinions can never be universal, only persuasive, and there is no guarantee of unity in diversity (Zerilli, 2016, p. 34). Hence, judgement is not only about what is 'common' to us. Arendt underlines this when she emphasizes that the objects of judgments are always political which makes judging a part of the political practice, taking place in the public realm of speaking and acting; consequently:

> Wherever people judge the things of the world that are common to them, there is more implied in their judgments than these things. By his manner of judging, the person discloses to an extent also himself, what kind of person he is, and this disclosure… gains in validity to the degree that it has liberated itself from merely individual idiosyncrasies. (Arendt, 2006, p. 220).

Hence, the relation between the political life of action and the philosophical life of contemplation is not one of mutual exclusivity. One cannot say that judgement as the prerogative of the spectator is the sole constituent of the public realm. Nor can one say that the actor is primary to the spectator as it is her actions that create the appearances that provide reality to the public realm for "no one in his right mind would ever put on a spectacle without being sure of having spectators to watch it" (Arendt, 1989, p. 62). Rather, the relation between the actor and the spectator is one that resides within every being that participates in the public sphere. Arendt herself perhaps phrased this most clearly:

> The judgement of the spectator creates the space without which no such objects could appear at all. The public realm is constituted by the critics and the spectators, not by the actors or the makers. And this critic and spectator sits in every actor… without this critical, judging faculty the doer… would be so isolated from the spectator that he would not even be perceived (Arendt, 1989, p. 63).

The faculty of judgement is one that the spectator and the actor share. It is present in our political actions, as well as the perceptions of the political actions of others. While it is true that in her later work Arendt planned on including judgement as a mental faculty, part of the *vita contemplativa*, this does not necessitate it being a purely contemplative and unworldly faculty. Arendt's political practice clearly requires a co-constitutive force, next to action, that bestows meaning to words and deeds, respects plurality, preserves reality and most of all, evokes and maintains the public realm. An Arendtian political practice relates us to each other by envisioning an intersubjective activity that builds connection and at the same time respects our unique identities within these bonds. Such a political practice can only be conceived when actions are inserted into a public realm where people consider these acts. The very condition of politics being plurality necessitates a plurality of spectators connecting us to the public realm.

In conclusion, I argue that both faculties of action and judgement can be reconciled in one political practice by seeing that the two do not refer to different roles occupied by different people. Rather, they co-exist in each of us who participate politically in the public realm. While some argue that the Arendtian political practice is caught in an unstable combination between oppositional narrative and expressive features (Benhabib, 2003, pp. 124 & 125; d'Entrèves, 2002, p. 84), I argue that these features, in the form of judgement and action, implicitly necessitate each other in order to constitute a political practice. Our ability to act gives us access to freedom and allows us to express our distinct identities. However, that which gives rise to those actions becoming a part of our common world, of appearing in a

public realm in which we relate to one another, is our assurance that those actions are *judged*. Not merely seen and heard but genuinely *understood* as part of the fabric of the common world. We can find this specific kind of understanding in the faculty of judgement as our ability to inhabit the perspectives of others in an exercise of enlarged thinking through imagining (representing to our mind) their view on the world.

We can see how such a conceptualization of a political practice including both action and judgement suggests a critical potential to provide us with a basis for formulating a democratic political practice of visibility in which socio-economic issues can be brought into view. First of all, because through judging an issue it comes into view as something political i.e., part of the common world; and secondly, because judgement is strongly connected to critical thinking and the exposure of an issue to the bright light of publicity. However, before I further develop this idea, I will first need to elaborate on the biggest obstacle to developing such a politics: Arendt's analysis of the rise of society and separation of the political and social.

Chapter 2: The Problem of the Social

There is an obstacle to developing a critical and emancipatory politics from Arendt's theory due to her conceptualization of a phenomenon she calls 'the rise of the social' which leads her to ban issues of a social nature from politics. This has, rightly so, sparked the question: how can we argue that there is any critical potential in Arendt's political practice when she seemingly does not allow socio-economic issues to appear in the public sphere? In this chapter I will explore this issue more deeply by elucidating the dual meaning of 'the problem of the social'. Firstly, I will outline Arendt's problem with the concept of the social by showing its conceptual rootedness in Arendt's public/ private distinction and its relation to the modern phenomenon that is rise of mass society. Secondly, I will examine more closely the critical response that this part of Arendt's theory has generated and look at the problem of Arendt's conceptualization of the social for the development of an emancipatory, democratic politics. These critiques will set the scene for the need to rethink the relation between the social and the political in Arendt's theory.

Arendt's Problem with the Social

The Public/ Private Distinction and the Rise of Society

Before we can dive into Arendt's problem with the social, we have to understand the conceptual background against which this phenomenon emerges, which is her distinction between public and private. In order to illustrate this distinction, she refers back to the ancient Greek polis where the private realm corresponded to the household and the political realm to the polis (Arendt, 1998, p. 28). The household is dominated by the force of necessity and therefore it is strictly unequal and unfree. You are unfree in the private realm because you are subjected to your needs. It is concerned only with the necessities of life, sustaining oneself, the private interests of yourself and your family. Belonging to the private realm are emotions and basic needs such as pain and hunger. It is unequal because it is only possible to free oneself from necessity by exercising violence over others, forcing them to fulfil your needs. The private realm is also pre-political; it is necessary to have a protected private sphere in which one can take care of one's needs before venturing out into the public world. The public realm is the realm of freedom, the private realm is the condition for this freedom (Arendt, 1998, pp. 30 & 31).

Freedom then, is found in that other realm: the public sphere, where political action occurs. The public realm is opposed to the private realm. One is not subject to any command, not of necessity, others, or oneself. It is the realm where one is equal to one's peers (Arendt, 1998, p. 33). The public realm in Arendt's work is closely connected to the political practice. The 'space of appearances' that political action requires, where we come to share a sense of reality, is the public realm. As our sense of common, shared reality depends on our judgement of political actions in this public sphere, it is not a space that is given. The public realm needs to be formed as a space for us to move into as equals (Tavani, 2013, p. 473). In order for this public realm to be formed, the actualization of power is required. Arendt's definition of power is something that springs up between people when they choose to act together in concert. The moment people disperse is the moment power vanishes; it is not something that can be possessed or materialized (Arendt, 1998, p. 200). The kind of power that brings the public realm into being, is a potentiality, thus, the public realm itself is a potentiality. Constantly at risk of being lost to us. After all, when we stop acting in concert, the public realm ceases to exist.

The public and private sphere are both important areas of life and where essential human activities take place. Arendt's objective with setting up this distinction is not to devaluate either the private or the public sphere, but to emphasize the importance of locating human activities in the *right* sphere. "The distinction between the private and public realms… equals the distinction between things that should be known and that should be hidden." (Arendt, 1998, p. 72). Some things require the privacy and protection that the private sphere only has to offer. Other activities need to be seen and heard by others to attain meaning; those are the activities that belong to the public sphere. The task lies in recognizing where in the world the different human activities find their proper location (Arendt, 1998, pp. 71 & 73). In modern society, the line between public and private has shifted, as well as our meaning of the two terms. The rise of 'society' in the modern age has blurred this distinction (Canovan, 1992, p. 116).

If public and private are the two realms where the human activities *ought* to be placed, society is where the public and private have become indistinguishable (Kloeg, 2022, p. 200). 'Society' has a highly idiosyncratic meaning in Arendt's work. She describes it as "that curious, somewhat hybrid realm between the political and the private in which, since the beginning of the modern age, most men have spent the greater part of their lives." (Arendt, 1959, p. 51). It is an ineradicable sphere because it is where we take care of our private needs collectively, for instance, it is where we go to make a living. However, in the modern age, this

sphere has started to dominate the public and private spheres more and more, which has destructive consequences for these spheres. Activities previously located in the private sphere are now exposed to the light of public life (Arendt, 1998, p. 38). Relations characterized by conformity and egocentrism are being expressed in public life. 'Mass society' is what happens when private concerns and needs are being brought into publicity. In the openness of public life, these private concerns demand to be catered to collectively, transforming the people partaking in public life from equal and distinct individuals into a uniform herd (Canovan, 1992, p. 117). Society is a distortion of the authentic public realm. Where an authentic public realm brings people together while respecting their plurality, society forcefully demands unity through conformity, only binding people together based on a similarity of private needs. Where the authentic public realm brings about a shared sense of reality by finding the common through a plurality of perspectives, society eradicates such equality and commonness through its egocentric focus on private needs (Canovan, 1992, p. 117).

Equality in society is different from equality in the public realm. Society demands conformity to its unanimous opinions, strengthened by the force of numbers. It transforms the people into one big family with the same interest and the same opinion. In this regard, society resembles the household, previously located in the private sphere, in which the rule of the head of the household is now replaced by the rule of the 'common interest and the right opinion' (Arendt, 1998, pp. 39 & 40). All members of society are embraced with equal strength by this dominating interest. It is the eradication of distinction and difference in the public realm, the victory of conformity (Arendt, 1998, p. 41). The reason that this conformity should be viewed with such suspicion and alarm is because conformity is always violent to the plurality in which the political practice is rooted. As such, mass society is hostile to the practice of politics itself.

Economic and Cultural Uniformity

Society attempts to eradicate plurality through its demand for conformity. Margaret Canovan discerns two strands of uniformity that Arendt addresses, and each come with their own set of problems: an economic- and a cultural strand (Canovan, 1992, p. 117). The economic strand of societal uniformity refers to the increasing concern for material needs in the public sphere. The rise of the social necessarily coincided with the rise of the market economy. The social first started to infringe on the public sphere when a demand for the public protection of private interests arose (Arendt, 1998, p .68). Arendt here specifically does not refer to the protection of private property. Private property is important as it is the right to

citizenship, a place in the world that is entirely your own. This is distinct from the concept of 'wealth' which was the concern that was brought into the public sphere: a call for the public protection of and support for the accumulation of wealth (Arendt, 1998, p. 61). Private material interests becoming the collective concern of the nation meant that an overwhelming concern for life and its necessities started to dominate the public sphere almost completely (Canovan, 1992, p. 118).

The cultural strand of uniformity in mass society that Arendt critiques, addresses the conformism that has crept into society's mass culture. Arendt shows how it was encouraged to lead a highly visible life in front of an audience. However, this was not an authentic public life concerned with political action in the public sphere, but rather the acting out of life processes in publicity (Canovan, 1992, p. 119). One is not truly acting, but rather 'behaving': acting according to predictable and desirable patterns, judging one another by the 'oneness' of mankind, rather than their uniqueness. We are together in oneness because necessities are identical to us all, people are together as mere living organisms, not as unique *humans* (Arendt, 1998, pp. 212 - 214). When the public sphere became engulfed by 'society', it became the public organization of the life-process itself, and in its focus on the oneness of mankind, gained a monolithic character (Arendt, 1998, pp. 45 & 46). The public sphere was infected with the spirit of conformity. Cultural public life became obsessed with social status, fashion, consumption, and trends. When private interests are brought into the public sphere, the visibility of the public sphere will cause people to focus on a harmony of these private interests (Canovan, 1992, p. 119).

Both economically and culturally, the rise of society has led to the distortion of the public sphere. It has created a public sphere in which the room for the political and action has shrunk, and the room for the social and behaviour has grown. In the modern age, politics has become a function of society: almost solely concerned with issues of production, consumption, and other facets of the life processes. This kind of politics sees individuals as interchangeable because everyone is identical when it comes to the facets of life processes. Politics becomes overly concerned with bringing about a collective life with a monolithic character in which the people are no more than a herd of human animals. Society's sole public function is to protect and cultivate the mutual dependence we have on each other for the sake of life and nothing else (Canovan, 1992, pp. 119 & 121).

In its blurring of the distinction between the two realms and the displacement of private necessities in the public sphere, the social sphere is destructive to both the public and private realm. To be deprived of an authentic public life means to be deprived of the reality of

the world guaranteed to us through the objective relationships to others. To be deprived of a private life means to have one's sheltered home invaded by blinding publicity. When both spaces are effectively destroyed by the social, the mass phenomenon of loneliness emerges (Arendt, 1998, p. 59). Loneliness settles in when one is not only isolated in the public realm, but also alienated in the private realm. This happens in mass society because one is disconnected from both the world and one's own understanding of oneself. It is such isolation from others in the objectivity of the common world and in the limited reality of family life that forms the breeding ground for totalitarianism (Arendt, 1973, p. 315; Schaap, 2021, p. 42). Arendt's fear of the social is a fear of the shrinkage of the space for thought, action, and judgement; creating the space for banal, thoughtless evil to thrive. Society's egocentrism and conformism creates a lack of commitment to the common world and to one another as citizens. It is this fear that is the basis for her championing of distinction and equality, of human plurality and its expression in a space with one's peers above all else.

Consequently, she advocates for a revitalization of the political practice in the public sphere by drawing a rigid distinction between public and private: between what ought to be seen, and what ought to be hidden. In the public sphere, we must above all think of ourselves as mutually engaged citizens concerned with the world, not life, as unique beings capable of action and speech, not as expendable, herdlike animals with material needs. The public realm is not in need of the uniformity of the social, but rather of the (political) solidarity that can only be engendered when a diverse group of individuals is mutually engaged (Dietz, 1994, pp. 244 & 248). Arendt's critique of the rise of society and the social sphere contains a powerful critique that reveals a connection between the lack of a genuinely political public sphere and the current phenomena of loneliness, emptiness and conformism produced by mass society. Yet, at the same time, this analysis' implication that all issues that pertain to the life process - all that are social and not political- are pre-emptively to be kept out of the public realm has generated a lot of criticism, and rightly so.

The Problem with Arendt's Account of the Social

Arendt's strict public/ private distinction and specifically the expulsion of socio-economic issues from the public realm and political scene has been one of the main sources of critique regarding Arendt's political theory. I see this critique of Arendt's conception of the social as essentially two-pronged: its lack of emancipatory potential, and its lack of critical potential. First of all, there is the substantive problem of how to formulate a conception of

politics when socio-economic issues are denied access to the political realm. If politics cannot be about social issues, the question remains: what should it about? And how could it be emancipatory? Secondly, there is the issue of Arendt's short-sighted conception of power and her conception of the economic realm as a neutral unit which supposedly stops her politics from developing any critical potential. These two problems invite us to reconsider whether Arendt's rigid public/ private distinction is at all tenable and how a reconceptualization of her political practice as critical and emancipatory ought to rethink the relation between the political and the social.

The Problem of Substance

The first part of the critique on Arendt's conception of the social focusses on her insistence that the social question must be kept out of the public realm which raises the bigger question of what then politics ought to be concerned with? While she goes into the theoretical underpinnings of this issue in *The Human Condition*, Arendt gives her most concrete thoughts in *On Revolution*. In this volume, she speaks directly on the place of 'the social question' or "what we may better and more simply call the existence of poverty" in politics (Arendt, 1963, p. 60). She investigates this social question by comparing the success of the American Revolution to the relative failure of the French Revolution. She argues that the problem of the French Revolution was its driving factor being necessity due to poverty rather than a political aim. In contrast, the American Revolution was driven by the political goal of founding a new political community. Put simply: the French Revolution was driven by a social goal, the American Revolution by a political one (Arendt, 1963, p. 68). According to Arendt, the French Revolution was destined to fail at building a lasting political foundation when its revolutionary activities opened the public realm to the social. The need of the French revolutionaries was necessary and hence burst onto the public scene with pre-political violence (Arendt, 1963, p. 91). This leads her to conclude that social goals should always be kept separate from political means.

> All rulership has its original and most legitimate source in man's wish to emancipate himself from life's necessity, and men achieved such liberation by means of violence, by forcing others to bear the burden of life for them... Nothing, we might say today, could be more obsolete than to attempt to liberate mankind from poverty by political means; nothing could be more futile and more dangerous. (Arendt, 1963, p. 114).

Seyla Benhabib shows that Arendt makes an ontological distinction here between liberation and freedom. Liberation is related to the inherently violent process of emancipating oneself

from necessity. Freedom is the exercise of power when one acts politically among equals in a public realm (Benhabib, 2003, p. 159). There is an ontological separation between freedom of political action and the necessity inherent to socioeconomic conditions. The appearance of the issue of poverty onto the political scene invades the political realm with a destructive urgency (Pitkin, 1994, p. 269).

Naturally, an account that seems to insist that the poor and their urgent needs ought to be kept out of the political realm, has been met with resistance. Hanna Pitkin offers a scathing criticism of the expulsion of the exploited, needy, and downtrodden from the political realm, claiming that the exclusion of necessity "means simply the exclusion of the exploited by their exploiters" (Pitkin, 1994, p. 270). However, this problem of justice is only a part of the larger problem with Arendt's account we see here, which is the problem of substance. If politics cannot be about material or social issues, what do citizens talk about when they 'distinguish themselves' in the public realm? What is to be the content of action and speech? (Pitkin, 1994, p. 271). Pitkin effectively shows an ambivalence that emerges in Arendt's insistence on divorcing political action from any kind of motive or purpose. Action as a spontaneous expression of freedom cannot be subsumed under any kind of means-end category of thinking, it would lose its predicate as 'free'. Yet when we exclude goals of social justice from the political realm, are we not denying action its substance which would make politics nothing more than trivial vanity, posturing, or an empty display of heroism? (Pitkin, 1994, p. 281). The only topics that would be left for politically engaged citizens to talk about seem to be warfare or the quest for immortality, and while Pitkin recognizes that this is probably not what Arendt intended, it is incredibly hard to get a concrete answer out of Arendt on what she *did* intend. It leads Pitkin to conclude that something has gone wrong in Arendt's account of public life and action as it has divorced the content from the act which requires us to reconsider the issue of substance in Arendt's politics.

> No account of politics or the public realm can be right that wholly empties them of substantive content, of what is at stake… Public life… never occurs in the abstract, without content; it always affects the lives of real people. (Pitkin, 1994, p. 277).

The Problem of Power

Benhabib adds another critical note to this discussion of Arendt's concept of the social by stating that Arendt fails to see that the realm of necessity is always permeated by power relations. Arendt's limited conception of power as 'the potentiality that is only actualized when people act together in concert' does not equip her with the conceptual tools to critically

analyse the sedimented, oppressive social power structures that are often present in the private sphere. Contrarily, Benhabib claims that there can never be a 'neutral' organization of the economic. To understand the economic realm as purely private and anti-political, is to wrongly depoliticize a realm that is always already highly political in nature (Benhabib, 2003, p. 158). Such an understanding puts questions of for instance sexual division of labour in the family unit -located in the private sphere- beyond the scope of politics (Benhabib, 1992, p. 109). Sheldon Wolin elaborates upon this critique and argues that it is precisely the task of democracy to override the distinctions made between political and social as these distinctions are always a sedimentation of political power. To decide what is political and what is not, is already a political power move.

> Democracy is the attempt of the many to reverse the natural cycle of power, to translate social weakness into political power… It is at odds with the emphasis on authority, ambition, glory and superiority that figured so importantly in Hannah Arendt's conception of authentic political action. (Wolin, 1994, pp. 289 & 290).

This leads Wolin as far as to conclude that Arendt's political-social opposition represents an 'anti-democratic' strain in her thought. However, the problem of power in Arendt's work is not, as Wolin seems to suggest, that Arendt does not understand that there is oppression in the private sphere. If anything, she is particularly sensitive to this issue as she identifies the private sphere as *the* sphere of oppression and violence. However, she does not see these issues of oppression and violence as a viable democratic *source* to challenge or solve these issues because the only way to rid oneself of the oppressive urge of necessity for her, is through either technological advancement, or more violence. Social issues of oppression and violence simply *cannot* be fixed by political means, Arendt rigidly claims, and inviting the social into the public-political realm, will only invite disaster. The question is, should we go along with her on this point? And what are the implications for the political status of social issues in the public realm?

Perhaps the most controversial example of an application of this rigid expulsion of the unjust social power structures from the political realm by Arendt is her essay *Reflections on Little Rock* (1959). In this instance, her strict separation between social and political proved to be misleading when it led her to take a stand against the forced desegregation of public schools in the South of the United States. She does so based on the idea that the school is an area of life that belongs to the social sphere. It is not a public-political sphere guided by equality, nor is it a private sphere of exclusion, rather schools are hybrid social spheres guided by the principle of discrimination. As it is our social right to discriminate, to freely associate

with those we want to associate with, there is no rightful basis for government intervention in these areas of life (Arendt, 1959, p. 51). Arendt by no means wishes to defend the legalization of social prejudice. On the contrary, such legalization would mean that the social prejudice of society and the principle of discrimination rule the public sphere rather than the political principle of equality. However, the government cannot interfere with societal *practices* of discrimination in spheres that are entirely social, meaning having the sole purpose of congregating together (Arendt, 1959, p. 52). The public dimension of the issue, legislation of human- and political rights, must be addressed politically, but the social dimension of the issue ought to remain untouched in the public sphere. This position taken by Arendt rightfully drew a lot of criticism: applying Arendt's outlook on the public, private and social on concrete situations seems to leave us with very little conceptual tools to address socio-economic power issues critically in the public sphere. It begs the question: where does that leave us with regards to the general value of her public-private distinction for her politics?

What is Political? What is Social?

Arendt's public-private distinction which separates the political from the social seems to come with a substance- and power problem. There have been different responses to this issue in academic literature. Pitkin states that while Arendt rightly fears the destruction of political freedom, she misunderstands the task in relation to this fear. It is not a subject-matter or particular issue that the public realm needs guarding against; it is rather a particular spirit or attitude (Pitkin, 1994, p. 276). Public life should not be centred around the substantive consequences it has for people, but it cannot be entirely divorced from substantive issues either. Public life should offer the possibility to join as a community, exercise political power and take responsibility over the social forces that dominate our lives (Pitkin, 1994, p. 279). This kind of thinking about public life requires a linkage between the private and public domain. While Pitkin admires Arendt's intent, she believes her strict separation between the private and public realm to be counterproductive to the revival of public life Arendt is trying to achieve: "It is no use banishing the body, economic concerns, or the social question from public life; we do not rid ourselves of their power in that way, but only impoverish public life." (Pitkin, 1994, p. 281).

Benhabib takes a different position, arguing that it is not the economic or social issues that must be abandoned in politics, but rather the self-interested principles underlying some of these issues. When one engages with issues in the public sphere, one must put forward a generalizable standpoint and fight for principles on a basis that can be generally

communicable to all members of a collectivity. The struggle for justice must be fought from a perspective that serves the entire political community. In a Habermasian turn she states that: "the process of public-political struggle transforms the attitude of narrow self-interest into a more broadly shared public or common interest." (Benhabib, 2003, p. 145). In making the choice of what is public-political, Arendt should not draw the lines across different issues or contents, but rather, across the generalizability and communicability of the reasons given in public debate. Her conception of the political must be given a normative core, namely, the creation of a common world in the form of a constitution of the public sphere that can mediate between the private and public (Benhabib, 2003, pp. 156 & 166).

While both accounts give interesting alternatives to Arendt's theory neither seems to be able to retain the full power of Arendt's original critique of society or stay faithful to her account of political action as rooted in genuine human plurality. Pitkin rightly points out that social justice has received too little attention in Arendt's theory, but her alternative divorces the conceptualization of citizenship and politics completely from Arendt's original private/public distinction which undermines the critical power of this distinction. It is her distinction between public and private that allows Arendt to poignantly analyse the modern phenomena of loneliness, consumerism, and loss of solidarity that seem now more relevant than ever. As Honig puts this: "Pitkin fails to appreciate the promise… in Arendt's unwillingness to allow political action to be a site of representation of 'what' we are." (Honig, 1993, p. 124). We want to retain the promise in Arendt's vision that allows us to rethink a political practice of solidarity and engagement for all citizens in the public sphere and reclaim politics from state-centred theory. This promise is closely connected to her criticism of society and while it may not have map on neatly to a rigidly sedimented public-private distinction, it cannot be divorced from it entirely either. Furthermore, Pitkin's fear that in Arendt's politics "citizens begin to resemble posturing little boys clamouring for attention… wanting to be reassured that they are brave, valuable, even real." (Pitkin, 1994, p. 272) seems to be generated by her interpretation of Arendt's theory of political *action*, wholly overlooking her concept of judgement as an essential part of this political practice. It is namely this faculty that saves the Arendtian political practice from the presumed emptiness, an argument I will develop in the last chapter.

Benhabib's response, on the other hand, deviates substantially from Arendt's theory towards a more Habermasian perspective in her insistence on finding the 'political' in the discourse on a certain issue being *communicable* to others rather than viewing it as an expression of *distinction*. Benhabib herself recognizes that Arendt was sceptical about the

ability to have a set of moral beliefs or principles guide politics in a way that would be compatible with true human plurality and that the addition of a normative core is a very un-Arendtian move (Benhabib, 2003, p. 193). I believe Benhabib's insistence on a normative guideline for political action fails to understand the true nature of the *freedom* of political action. The normative standards for communicability developed will end up being hostile to the freedom of spontaneous, political action because their rootedness in normativity ultimately reverts back to the building of a closed and stable system, albeit a system for how to *practice* politics. Dana Villa's similarly critiques such deliberative, Habermasian interpretations of Arendt's work. He argues that they fail to see that the intersubjectivity they are trying to retrieve from Arendt's theory is a part of a broader project to decentre political action by emphasizing its non-sovereignty, non-instrumentality, and general non-autonomy. The de-centred freedom that lies at the core of her theory puts her conceptualization of political action 'beyond good and evil' in a way that fundamentally distances her from any normative core (Villa, 1992, pp. 275 & 287).

The challenge here seems to be how to navigate Arendt's objective of revitalizing the political practice in the public sphere in a way that respects rather than supresses human plurality while at the same time establishing a political community rooted in democratic principles where political action can have the critical and emancipatory potential to gain a substance and critical power beyond an empty heroic form. The public/ private distinction and critique of rise of the social has critical value, but these critiques compel us to engage with a power and substance issue. How do we give substance to the political without falling prey to the dangers of the social? How do we challenge oppressive social structures without opening the gates of the public-political realm to violence? In the following chapter, I will offer an alternative response to those given above by focussing on the emancipatory and critical properties the Arendtian political practice *can* have when one includes judgement as a political faculty. I will use this practice, including both judgement and action, as a starting point to develop a critical and emancipatory politics of worldliness and visibility. This will allow us to retain the critical power of the public, private distinction while at the same time reconceptualizing the relation between the political and the social, challenging Arendt's expulsion of the social from the political realm.

Chapter 3: A Worldly Political Practice of Visibility

Arendt's objective is to stimulate people to engage in a political practice that will revitalize a public life built on a respect for human plurality. However, any reconceptualization of her political practice needs to face the power and substance issue raised in the previous chapter in order to actualize its critical and emancipatory potential. In this chapter I will demonstrate that the conceptualization of the Arendtian political practice containing both action and judgement can provide us with a starting point to address these issues and actualize this potential in her work. I will start by conceptualizing the political practice as one of both 'worldliness' and 'visibility'. Afterwards, I will use this reiteration of a worldly political practice of visibility to look at how this formulation can help us tackle the two issues generated by her conceptualization of 'the social' raised in the previous chapter. I will address the substance critique through the lens of 'worldliness' and the power critique using the concept of 'visibility'. In order to illustrate its critical and emancipatory potential, I will use the examples of the political predicament of the poor and the stateless refugee. All in all, I aim to establish that a worldly practice of visibility, encompassing both political action and judgement, can critically address socio-economic issues in the public realm. Lastly, I will re-evaluate the public/private distinction and the relation between the political and the social as this reconceptualization of the political practice necessitates.

Worldliness and Visibility in the Political Practice

At the end of the first chapter, I stated that including judgement already hints towards a more critical and emancipatory potential in Arendt's political practice. This was, firstly, because of the fact that subjecting issues to the process of judgement makes them come into view as political; and secondly, because judgement has a strong connection to critical thinking in the exposure of issues to the brightness of the public realm. These two abilities of judgement are connected with two properties of the political practice that constitute its critical and emancipatory potential: worldliness and visibility. In this first half of this chapter, I will further expand on these two properties. I will argue that worldliness and visibility are generated by Arendt's choice to anchor her political practice firmly in the conditions of human plurality and natality. Therefore, I will first look into the effect that those two conditions have on her formulation of politics being characterized by the 'frailty of human affairs'. This frailty will raise the question of how to think about the site and aim of politics. I will answer this question by expanding upon the properties of worldliness and visibility in the

political practice, investigating specifically how these come into view in connection to both action and judgement. These two properties will then provide us with a solid theoretical basis to further explicate the critical and emancipatory potential of the Arendtian political practice.

Frailty of Human Affairs

In order to illustrate the components of 'worldliness' and 'visibility' in the political practice, we first need to look again at the conditions of natality and plurality and how they generate the frailty of human affairs. Natality is the condition that in life, new beginnings are constantly born, as new people are constantly born. Plurality is the condition that these new beginnings need to insert themselves into an already existing web of human relations, as all people and things are born into a world that already contains other people and things (Arendt, 1998, pp. 176 & 177). Plurality creates a 'web of human relations' but natality ensures that this web can never be solidified or sedimented in any way. This creates an issue that Arendt refers to as 'the frailty of human affairs':

> Action… has an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries. Limitations and boundaries exist within the realm of human affairs, but they never offer a framework that can reliably withstand the onslaught with which each new generation must insert itself. The frailty of human institutions and laws… arises from the human condition of natality (Arendt, 1998, pp. 190 & 191).

Patchen Markell argues that the issue of frailty vs. stability creates a 'paradox of rule' in democratic theory: on the one hand, political theory wants to provide stability and security to democracy by coming up with a legitimation for the exercise of control, but on the other hand, we want to legitimize the popular (democratic) insurgence that can break political bonds of control when these are oppressive. It raises the question of what is truly democratic? Is democracy a system of a certain kind of command and obedience, or is democracy the act of disruption and novelty that is necessarily opposed to subjugation? (Markell, 2006, p. 2).

Arendt is fully aware that with her conceptualization of political action as free, it is performative, spontaneous and miraculous, and therefore necessarily also unruly, boundless, and unpredictable. In acting politically, one begins something, but one does not have control over it. Freedom being the 'raison d'être' of politics means putting action at its centre, and this conceptualization of politics is inherently antithetical to sovereignty or control. However, at the same time, Arendt is quick to emphasise that at the other side of this boundless characteristic of action resides a "tremendous capacity for establishing relationships" (Arendt, 1998, p. 191). Political action does not merely pertain to deeds that are opposed to a structure

of power or a political system; it establishes relations and foundations just as well as it disrupts and breaks ones. Arendt does not define democratic action as antithetical to all forms of rule, but rather establishes that all political action as beginning has an unruly capacity for both creation and destruction and which always emerges in the prior context of a web of human relations (Arendt, 1998, p. 184).

Political action is not necessarily the subversion of existing patterns nor is it the reinforcement of stable regularities (Markell, 2006, p. 2). Arendt's conceptualization of a political practice is not conditioned by rule one way or another. If it was, it would be a reactionary practice, rather than the starting of something truly *new*. The risk of action being theorized without any referral to a form of rule, is that the theorization of a political practice can fall into a vacuum. If politics is not about establishing a specific system of rule, or disrupting a specific system of rule, then how can we even begin to think about the site or aim of politics? It risks becoming an empty space where political action is "starting from nowhere and encountering or engaging nothing at all" (Honig, 1993, p. 123). This is where the problems of substance and power come in: how can we think of the site and content of Arendtian politics when she does not theorize her practice in terms of rule?

Worldliness and Visibility

Reading Arendt's work in light of the paradox of rule theorized by Markell, provides insight into how we can see her conceptualization of the political practice not as devoid of content but rather as oppositional to structuring of political phenomena according to the matrix of rule (Markell, 2006, p. 2). Consequently, political practice is not devoid of content at all; on the contrary, it *only* exists in its relatedness to the world and its content.

> Arendt's aim is not simply to rehabilitate those phenomena that, within that matrix, are positioned as rule's opposites: on her use, "beginning" picks out not the spontaneous disruption of existing patterns, but the sense in which action, whether disruptive or not, involves attention and responsiveness to worldly events; and what threatens "beginning" thus understood is not the enforcement of regularity, but the erosion of the contexts in which events call for responses and, thus, in which it makes sense to act at all. (Markell, 2006, p. 2)

The political practice cannot be conditioned by its content, or it would not be free. Yet, being attached to specifically the conditions of plurality and natality, the site in which it occurs is never empty, as all forms of beginning are always interwoven into the web of human relationships (Arendt, 1998, p. 182).

Thus, the biggest threat to political action is the loss of context in which we make sense of the political together. The loss of politics is a loss of a space that enables responsiveness to events: the common world. Without a common world, there can be no political-public sphere in which we act. Arendt states that while action and speech go on between people "their content is exclusively 'objective', concerned with the matters of the world of things in which men move… out of which arise their specific, objective, worldly interests." (Arendt, 1998, p. 182). It is these worldly interests that connect us to one another in the public sphere because it is what objectively lies between us. Hence "most words and deeds are *about* some worldly objective reality in addition to being a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent." (Arendt, 1998, p. 182). Conceptually, this means that there is a dual dimension to that which lies between us in the world generated by the duality in the condition of plurality. Words and deeds concern the *objective*, worldly physical reality as well as the *subjective* web of human relationships that is produced by the disclosure of actors. This connection to objectivity ensures that the political practice remains *worldly*, while the connection to subjectivity and the disclosure of individual actors to others makes the political practice one of *visibility* as well. Andrew Schaap strikingly summarizes the fine line an Arendtian political practice rooted in plurality needs to walk, by illustrating the dangers of politics being overly objective or subjective:

> On the one hand, politics risks imposing a single, unambiguous identity on individuals (conformity or "being absolutely one"). On the other hand, it risks social atomization in which individuals float freely between all roles (loneliness or "being no one"). (Schaap, 2021, p. 43).

The importance of judgement as a complementary to action in constituting a political practice comes fully into view here. We can see this in the substance of political action being so-called 'worldly interests'; these can only come into view in a 'common world' that is constituted by the multitude of perspectives in judgement. As outlined in the first chapter, being subjected to the process of judgement is what brings objects and interests into view as common and political, and thus 'worldly'. Moreover, the disclosure of the agent in political action is only observed by virtue of judgment, as the subjection to the judgement of others makes issues and people become 'visible' in the brightness of the public realm. The web of human relationships is actively initiated by words and deeds, but it cannot be construed unless there are spectators witnessing those acts, giving meaning and visibility to them (Arendt, 1998, p. 184). Judgement gives us the political ability to assess the objective dimension of the reality presented to us all, while at the same time preserving the subjective dimension of the disclosure of the agent.

When we view the Arendtian political practice against the backdrop of the frailty of human affairs, we can see that Arendt shifts the meaning of politics away from the establishment of a certain set of laws and rules and towards a focus on a practice of beginning that occurs in a web of human relationships. Then, we will see that a practice is political to the extent that it is both worldly and visible, meaning responsive to worldly events and affairs and in this response making the distinction of actors visible to others. As such, both properties of worldliness and visibility have come into view as a part of the Arendtian political practice that includes both action and judgement. I will now turn to how these two properties can illustrate a critical and emancipatory potential in the Arendtian political practice by illustrating their responsiveness to the substance and power problem.

The Social in the Public Realm?

In this final section, I want to touch upon the two issues that the critiques of Arendt's concept of the social have compelled us to engage with, using the retrieved concepts of worldliness and visibility. These responses show that in an Arendtian political practice the social does not necessarily have to be antithetical to the political, as Arendt herself suggests. Firstly, I want to go into the point of politics being 'an empty space' by elaborating more extensively on how action and judgement are responses to worldly events. Worldliness is closely connected with the notion of visibility and together, these two properties of the political establish its critical and emancipatory potential. Therefore, I will address the notion that there is lack of critical and emancipatory potential to challenge oppressive structures of power and violence by expanding upon the notion of 'visibility'. Lastly, I will go into the implications of such a reconsideration of the relation between the social and the political for the private-public distinction in Arendt's work.

Substance in Worldliness

As mentioned, democratic politics is not conditioned by its content for Arendt. She means to exclude the means-end mentality from the public, political realm as well as the attitude of private subjective interest. This has led some to argue, as explicated in the second chapter, that there is a lack of 'substance' to the Arendtian vision of politics. Pitkin, as one of the most prominent critics of this area of Arendt's theory, questioned 'what is at stake in her vision of politics?'. The short answer would be: 'the world'. Arendtian politics does quite the opposite from 'starting from nowhere and encountering or engaging nothing at all'. It is not

conditioned by its content, but this does not mean that it is not *concerned with* content. After all, the political practice is only 'political' by virtue of its existence as a response to the affairs of the world.

Political practices exist as responses to the worldly contexts in which they appear, meeting both an objective standard of showing the common world reality, and a subjective standard of revealing or disclosing oneself in the act. The importance here, lies in the essence of theorizing about what is 'political' in this political practice. The political does not pertain material interests and is not connected to 'what' we are in society. Rather it concerns the world that lies between us, our making sense of our reality together and constituting the commonness of the world in which we live. When speaking politically, one does not put forth an opinion reducible to her social condition, but rather brings her own unique perspective based on her own unique personhood (Schaap, 2021, p. 45). Arendt refuses to define what makes politics 'political' on the basis of a certain means-end or normative content. This does not mean that the political practice cannot have a use or purpose, it just means that it cannot be reduced to a utility-based content. Arendt herself states this in the following way:

> …man's capacity to act, and especially to act in concert, is extremely useful for purposes of self-defence or of pursuit of interest; but if nothing more were at stake here than to use action as a means to an end, it is obvious that the same end could be much more easily attained in mute violence, so that action seems a not very efficient substitute for violence (Arendt, 1998, p. 179).

The issue is not, we come to see, that too little is at stake in Arendtian politics. It is rather that too much is at stake, namely our shared sense of reality and our sense of personhood or human dignity. It is through a renewal of a genuinely political practice that we can revive togetherness, solidarity, and citizenship in a time where the rise of mass society has isolated us from one another. Arendt wants to stimulate us to venture out into the world, to no longer retreat into our private homes, with our own private needs and interests, but to look outside and beyond. To take on the perspectives of others in our world and speak on the issues that then come into view; to listen to others as they speak and try to comprehend their view on reality. This practice is not a means to end, nor is it a device that finds a flawless political system for communication, or an airtight moral conception of social justice. It is a continuous practice of civility, exercising one's citizenship of one's political community.

Hence, when it comes to founding a political community, this is a continuous task for Arendt. Civility, rights, and togetherness are not given, neither can they be solidified once achieved. Arendt's theory in no way provides us with a stable context that can mediate

between our subjectivities and the objective world (Klein, 2014, p. 859). However, it does show us that our political community is inherently fragile and thus confronts us with the reality of political theory: no theory can ever find a foundation for a practice that can truly be safe from the unruliness of action, without at the same time robbing it of its power as a free beginning. Stability is the price we pay for political freedom. It is our task to attempt to cultivate our specific political identities amidst this fragility in order to reclaim our political agency that we have lost in mass society (Schaap, 2021, p. 47). With such a practice, we would move away from an idea of democratic politics as mere representation, in which only our 'what-ness' can be represented, and towards a more active conceptualization of politics as performance, where we can disclose our unique 'who-ness'. In this act, we establish relationships with others in the world.

It would follow from such a practice that various kinds of socio-economic issues can come into view in their 'worldliness', as a part of our common world. The political pertains that which lies between us, the common world, and judgement is the faculty that brings this common world into view. Objects come into view as political, as part of our shared reality, only when they are subjected to the process of judging. Judging is not only a passive faculty of perception but also an active faculty that has the power to make things visible, to bring things into view politically, to deem certain interests 'worldly'. An object is not deemed suitable for the political arena prior to political judgement, as Arendt herself sometimes suggests, but becomes political by virtue of being judged. Judgement has the power to not only judge visible objects but also to specifically bring new issues, including those of a socio-economic nature, to light. To *make* them (politically) invisible, visible, and as such, it has an emancipatory quality. Thus, we can counter the critique of substance as we find a very rich source of potential substance for politics in the notion of 'worldliness'. This notion of 'worldliness' is very closely bound up with the notion of 'visibility'. That which is worldly, part of shared reality, is that which appears to us, becomes visible. It is this notion of visibility and its further critical and emancipatory potential that I will now finally turn to.

Visibility as a Critical Tool

The real political struggle, according to Arendt, is one for a public political space in which we can appear. Visibility is essential because she who appears and is seen in all her uniqueness can never be superfluous. Visibility is what protects us from becoming alienated from others, from becoming part of an isolated, superfluous mass, from losing our connection to a shared sense of reality. However, this does not mean that all visibility is considered as

'good' and invisibility as 'bad'. Depending on how it is applied, it can be a powerful or dangerous concept. Visibility is intertwined with the original public/ private distinction: the public sphere is where things ought to be seen, and the private sphere where things ought to be hidden. Public and private are not opposites in Arendt's work but rather co-constitutive components that together encompass all areas of life. Public visibility and private invisibility are sides to the same coin, mutually constitutive of a healthy political community and form the precondition for any occurrence of political action and judgement. The opposite is the pathology of the political that is caused by the rise of the society: public invisibility and private visibility (Borren, 2008, p. 224). These are harmful to the political because public invisibility means that genuine protective privacy, turns into obscurity. Private visibility is similarly harmful because it exposes a person to the public in a way that is not participatory and equal; rather, someone is exposed in their 'naturalness' seen for 'what' they are, no longer for 'who' they are (Borren, 2008, p. 225). Two examples can demonstrate how the notion of visibility has a critical and emancipatory function in the Arendtian political practice with regards to concrete, substantive issues: the example of the poor and the case of the stateless refugee.

Arendt expands on the idea of visibility in *On Revolution* when she controversially discusses the issue of poverty. While she decisively finds the material needs and wants of the poor to be apolitical, she does recognize that the poor find themselves in a political predicament: obscurity. The political problem for the poor is that they find themselves in darkness in all areas of human life. They are insignificant and overlooked. That is their true political, worldly issue: their exclusion from the public realm (Arendt, 1963, p. 69). Hence, there is a political course of action available when it comes to the issue of poverty. It is not the predicament of the poor that Arendt expels from the public realm, it is the apolitical force of their aggressive, primordial want. She advocates for a focus on their political issue: their lack of visibility and possibility for equal participation in the public realm. This is generated, not by the unequal and fickle feeling of pity but rather by the worldly and equal feeling of solidarity which is a lot more sustainable. This feeling of solidarity can be generated by suffering but will not be guided by it which means it can actually try to get rid of suffering and misfortune, unlike pity, which is dependent on it.

> pity, in contrast to solidarity, does not look upon both fortune and misfortune, the strong and the weak, with an equal eye; without the presence of misfortune, pity could not exist, and it therefore has just as much vested interest in the existence of the unhappy as thirst for power

> has a vested interest in the existence of the weak… solidarity is a principle that can inspire and guide action… pity is a sentiment. (Arendt, 1963, p. 89).

The issues of the poor can be made political by focussing on their worldly dimension: the issue of visibility of people. What should be admitted to the public realm is not their wants and needs but rather they *themselves -who* they are, not *what* they are- in full equality with others.

The stateless refugee similarly highlights the problem of public invisibility as well as the issue of private visibility. Whereas the poor that Arendt describes in *On Revolution* are in darkness in all areas of life, completely obscured, the stateless refugee is visible to the political community, but only in the way she is supposed to be hidden. She is exposed in her natural givenness. Being reduced to her naturalness, she is almost seen as an animal, a thing with wants and needs, not a human being with dignity and an identity. She is deprived of a home in the world that offers private protection, as well as denied access to the kind of citizenship that ensures her a public life in which she can participate, where her rights are ensured (Borren, 2008, p. 225). Marieke Borren describes this in the following way:

> The political catastrophe of statelessness is comprised by the reduction of individuals to the naked naturalness of being-nothing-but-human… Human dignity… does not refer to some natural quality, but only flourishes under conditions of plurality and publicity: in public visibility and natural invisibility. (Borren, 2008, p. 219).

Without it these two conditions, one is denied a political existence which means to be denied fully human life. One is not part of the fabric of the world but floating somewhere in-between, exposed to public opinion without a place to hide from it and unable to participate in it, legally rightless without a political community to protect them. "The stateless refugee is the exemplary non-citizen" (Borren, 2008, p. 219). It is an example that demonstrates to us why a political existence is so essential. It does not only allow us participation in public life, in the first place, it allows us to lead a fully, dignified *human* life.

Visibility then, is a vital part to our conceptualization of a democratic politics. Putting the concept at the centre of our reconceptualization of a political practice comprised of action and judgement, allows us to see how Arendt's political practice is not only substantive, in its responsiveness to worldly contexts, but also critical and emancipatory in its ability to address unjust power structures in society, such as poverty and statelessness. Political judgement is essential to bringing visibility to the obscured and exposed groups in society. As an active faculty, judgement can pull things into the public sphere, *make* things part of our shared reality and common world that were previously hidden. The actor and spectator are mutually

conditional for that participatory visibility in the public world. Judgement brings people's perspectives into view as a part of our common world, and in doing so, removes them from obscurity. Most importantly, judgement is not dependent on a pre-political existence of a public realm and private/ public distinction. The ability to act can in some way be impeded or frustrated by an overwhelming and demanding private life. The poor, rightfully pre-occupied with their pressing material needs, often cannot venture out into the public world. Judgement can initiate emancipation of those whose ability to act has been frustrated. It brings them, and their obstacles, into view and critically evaluates those structures that cause such impediments. Judgement is the basis for the generation of the abovementioned feeling of solidarity that can create new worldly and equal bonds that cut across the existing foundations in political communities.

The Public-Private Distinction, Revisited

These notions of worldliness and visibility, brought on by a proper incorporation of judgement into the political practice, allow us to bridge the separation between the social and the political which urges us to revisit the public-private distinction. After all, while there is space for the emancipation from obscurity for oppressed groups, a rigid distinction between public and private still creates certain obstacles to this political practice coming to fruition as truly emancipatory and critical. A few questions remain: what about the pressing material and private issues those in poverty and statelessness face? Can these not to be taken care of politically? And what about other matters of, supposedly, private identity such as gender or race? Where do these fit into this vision of politics, if at all? Before I get into these concerns, I find it important to highlight that, as mentioned earlier, while utility can never be the core value that *directs* action, this does not mean that action cannot be *useful* in the pursuit of private interests. For example, bringing into view of the predicament of the poor could inadvertently have positive effects for their material situation as well as their political one. However, in order to sufficiently answer the questions raised, we must turn to the public/private distinction itself.

As the case of Little Rock illustrated, there is still an issue with keeping the societal fully out of the political realm when it comes to addressing unjust power structures and bringing socio-economic issues into the public-political sphere. Taking the worldly practice of visibility seriously as a critical and emancipatory political tool inevitably has implications for the rigid binary of the public/private distinction. In order for a political practice to have the emancipatory and critical power to make the invisible visible as 'part of the common world',

we need to think of the boundary between public and private as more dynamic than Arendt's theory allows. In cutting off certain areas of life completely to the power of political action, she foregoes the tremendous potential her political practice has to politicize the worldly dimensions of social issues. It is strange that while she recognizes that the influence of the social sphere has grown at the expense of both the public sphere, she is not willing to extend and strengthen the public sphere at the expense of the social. Why leave such a source for politicization and strengthening of public life untapped?

In her essay on Little Rock, she argues for the protection of social rights of discrimination as she is afraid of the consequences of misplacing the equalizing force of the political (Arendt, 1959, p. 53). "The question is not how to abolish discrimination, but how to keep it confined within the social sphere, where it is legitimate" (Arendt, 1959, p. 51). She does not want to extend the political principle of equality beyond that which is already public but fails to understand that the principle of the political-public sphere is *not* equality (as she states in this essay), but plurality, which contains both equality *and* distinction (Arendt, 1959, p. 53; Arendt, 1998, p. 175). A true revitalization of public life and the political practice needs to channel this equalizing *and* distinguishing political force to actively challenge the boundaries of visibility and worldliness in our society. To determine what is visible and what is invisible is a political act -as judging is what makes an object a part of the common public world- not a pre-political sedimented division. Only when we allow the boundaries of public and private to be contested and shifted by our political practice can politics realize its ability to actively *make things visible* and a part of the common world.

I do not mean to suggest here that we ought to completely do away with the public/private distinction or to not take seriously Arendt's suggestion that some things in life ought to be hidden while others ought to be seen. As the case of the stateless refugee has illustrated, there is protective value in this distinction. It is important when we think and act politically to consider and reconsider what requires the protection of privacy and what requires the emancipatory light of publicity as this is constantly shifting. It is Arendt's own concept of natality that points us to ever-shifting boundaries and foundations. We need to decide, when we act politically, where the private ends and the public begins: this is a political act. It does not mean we blur the distinction between private and public, or do away with it, but rather, that we consider the boundary between private and public as a site of politics. That will allow the political practice to come to fruition as emancipatory and critical as we are constantly deciding what the worldly dimensions of issues are and in doing so critically evaluating societal structures. In the case of Little Rock and forced desegregation in

schools, this would mean that we would consider the school and education as space that has a public-political dimension in the shaping of new citizens for the world, while at the same time recognizing that education has a private function in offering protection and safety to children. While I agree with Arendt that it is sad that a safe space for children is the site of conflict, publicity and even violence, she fails to appreciate the political importance given to a civic issue, that of discrimination, by the *visibility* of this conflict. How to exactly to balance these two dimensions, that of public visibility and private protection, is a complicated task and it is up to us as political citizens, as well as to the schools themselves, to adjudicate on this issue.

A political practice that comprises both action and judgement with at its centre a concern for proper (in)visibility can have the critical and emancipatory potential to both problems of (socio-economic) substance and power. The refugee crisis, lack of political equality of the poor and oppressed and the case of Little Rock are socio-economic issues that a critical political practice of visibility can help us understand and bring into the common world. The isolated focus on *action* as the sole component of the political practice fails to understand its full emancipatory and critical potential. This is due to the fact that this potential consists in the notions of worldliness and visibility being central to the political practice and these notions essentially rely on political *judgement*, as well as action, bringing the common world into view.

Conclusion

My objective was to find an answer to the question: *To what extent can a reconceptualization of Arendt's political practice have critical, emancipatory potential in the public sphere?* I have set out the argument that formulating a political practice that incorporates both political action and judgment as a political faculty can give a critical and emancipatory potential to Arendtian politics when faced with social issues. This argument has been set up in three parts by first outlining the compatibility of action and judgement in theorizing a political practice, then explicating the problem of the social more deeply and lastly by formulating an answer to this problem by returning to the political practice of worldliness and visibility.

Firstly, the connection between judgement and action was established by diving into the political and practical dimensions of judgement, a faculty often considered merely contemplative in Arendt's work. In drawing up the theory of action, it became clear that politics for Arendt is *practice* and its activity political action. However, political action alone cannot call into being and maintain the public sphere and common world in the context of which action must appear. Thus, the existence of a political practice in public sphere necessitates political judgement provided by the spectator as well as the political action as the prerogative of the actor. Judgement is situated between the subjective and the objective, and -with the ontology of our public world being a space of appearances- provides meaning to political words and deeds. Viewing judgement and action as equal co-constituents of a political practice points to a critical and emancipatory potential in this practice as judgement can make things come into view *as* political while also subjecting these visible issues to the scrutiny of the brightness of the political-public sphere.

However, the obstacle to such a development of critique and emancipation within Arendt's theory is her theorization of the social. In the subsequent chapter, I pointed out two main issues that her theorization of the public, private and social sphere brings up: the substance problem and the power problem. While Arendt's commentary on the rise of the social is critically powerful and shows us the dangers of the rise of mass society, it also creates issues for a politics of emancipation and visibility. The substance problem argues that with Arendt's separation of social goals and motives from political action, politics cannot directly engage with issues of social justice. The problem of power highlights that, while Arendt is sensitive to the visibility of oppressive social structures, she does not seem to provide us with the tools to challenge these structures. This creates a new direction of inquiry when it comes to the conceptualization of a political practice of visibility, namely, how can it

concretely respond to this strange relation of mutual exclusivity between the social and the political?

In the last section of this essay, I finally touched upon this complicated issue, by developing fully the political practice of visibility against the backdrop of the abovementioned issues. Firstly, I showed how a political practice that contains both action and judgement is firmly anchored in our political reality being characterized by a frailty of human affairs. As a practice rooted in plurality and natality, it avoids both issues of social atomization and social conformity and embraces human plurality. The political practice being rooted in this duality generated by plurality allows the two critical and emancipatory properties to come into view: *worldliness*, in preserving the relation of the political to the common world, and *visibility*, preserving the relation of the political to the intersubjective web of human affairs. As a practice that is based on the principles of worldliness and visibility, a politics can come into view that has the power to be both emancipatory and critical in a way that does not risk sliding into powerlessness or emptiness as the critics of the second chapter suggested. Worldliness, the extent to which political action is responsive to the context in the world, is the standard that provides the practice with its content. Visibility, the extent to which political action makes the public visible and the private invisible, is the standard that gives the practice its critical power to challenge oppressive social structures. These two standards taken to be an essential part of the Arendtian political practice demonstrate the applicability of this conceptualization of politics to socio-economic issues. This applicability was found not by putting the social at the centre of a conceptualization of politics, but rather, in the political practice's ability to *politicize* social issues by giving visibility to their worldly dimensions, thus, reclaiming and enhancing the public sphere, at the expense of the social.

This reconceptualization of an Arendtian political practice has implications for the original public-private distinction she draws up. It challenges the idea that the social and the political are mutually exclusive areas of life and that the public and private and be pre-politically defined. While it does not challenge the existence of a differentiation between the public and the private, it does argue for a more hybrid approach to this distinction. A political practice that truly wants to revitalize and strengthen the public sphere, needs to be willing to critically examine the visible and invisible and have the courage to actively bring visibility to certain socio-economic issues and make them political. Certain issues can be politicized, social areas can become political; the tight grip of society over our lives can be loosened and our public life can be given a new impulse. Thus, a reconceptualization of Arendt's political

practice that gives proper space to judgement as a political faculty as an equal complementary faculty to political action has a great potential, both for critique and emancipation, when it comes to addressing issues of a socio-economic nature. At the same time, such a concept retains its original power as a practice that can fulfill Arendt's original and primary objective: to revitalize a public life of civility and solidarity under the eroding circumstances of mass society in the modern age. As this was largely a theoretical project, it would be interesting for future reference to consider more concretely how such a reconceptualized practice engages with contemporary issues in mass society.

References

Arendt, H. (1959). Reflections on little rock. *Dissent*, *6*(1), 45-56.

Arendt H. (1963). *On revolution*. New York: Viking Press.

Arendt, H. (1973). *The origins of totalitarianism* [1951]. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Arendt, H. (1989). *Lectures on Kant's political philosophy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Arendt, H., & Kohn, J. (2006). *Between past and future*. New York: Penguin.

Arendt, H. (2017). Freedom and politics. In *The Liberty Reader*, 58-79. London, England: Routledge.

Arendt, H. (1998). *The Human Condition*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Beiner, R. (1982). "Interpretive Essay: Hannah Arendt on Judging," in Hannah Arendt, Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Beiner, R. (1997). Rereading Hannah Arendt's Kant Lectures. *Philosophy & social criticism, 23*(1), 21-32.

Benhabib, S. (1992). *Situating the self: Gender, community, and postmodernism in contemporary ethics*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.

Benhabib, S. (2003). *The reluctant modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Borren, M. (2008). Towards an Arendtian politics of in/visibility: On stateless refugees and undocumented aliens. *Ethical Perspectives: Journal of the European Ethics Network*, *15*(2), 213-237.

Canovan, M. (1992). *Hannah Arendt: A reinterpretation of her political thought*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Dietz, M. (1994). Hannah Arendt and Feminist Politics. In Hinchman, L. & Hinchman, S. (Eds.). *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays* (pp. 231-255). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

d'Entrèves, M. P. (2000). Arendt's theory of judgement. In Villa, D. (Ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (pp. 245-260). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

d'Entrèves, M. P. (2002). *The political philosophy of Hannah Arendt*. London, England: Routledge.

Honig, B. (1993). *Political theory and the displacement of politics*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Honig, B. (2007). Between decision and deliberation: political paradox in democratic theory. *American political science review*, *101*(1), 1-17.

Klein, S. (2014). "Fit to Enter the World": Hannah Arendt on Politics, Economics, and the Welfare State. *American Political Science Review*, *108*(4), 856-869.

Kloeg, J. (2022). Where is education? Arendt's educational philosophy in between private and public. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *56*(2), 196-209.

Kohn, J. (2000). Freedom: the priority of the political. In Villa, D. (Ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (pp. 113-129). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Markell, P. (2006). The rule of the people: Arendt, archê, and democracy. *American Political Science Review*, *100*(1), 1-14.

Pitkin, H. (1994). Justice: On Relating Private and Public. In Hinchman, L. & Hinchman, S. (Eds.). *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays* (pp. 261-288). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Schaap, A. (2021). Inequality, loneliness, and political appearance: Picturing radical democracy with Hannah Arendt and Jacques Ranciere. *Political Theory*, *49*(1), 28-53.

Tavani, E. (2013). Hannah Arendt—Aesthetics and politics of appearance. P*roceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics, 5*, 466-475.

Villa, D. R. (1992). Beyond good and evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the aestheticization of political action. *Political theory, 20*(2), 274-308.

Wolin, S. (1994). Hannah Arendt: Democracy and the Political. In Hinchman, L. & Hinchman, S. (Eds.). *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays* (pp. 289-306). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Zerilli, L. M. (2016). *A democratic theory of judgment*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.