

## Hannah Arendt and the 'freedom' to think

### Abstract

Dissatisfied with the Western tradition of political philosophy, Arendt maintained a tension between the political, which she associates primarily with the freedom to act, and the philosophical, which she associates primarily with the activity of thinking, throughout her works. Whilst Arendt's work is underpinned by a focus on political action, her work on the thinking/non-thinking dichotomy is of significant educational value. Taking a broadly phenomenological approach, and reading Arendt through an educational lens, this paper seeks to demonstrate how the thinking/non-thinking dichotomy and the perils of 'non-thinking' reveal the wider dangers of instrumentalism and the performative models of education that accompanies it. It is suggested here that Arendt's work exposes 'non-thinking' as a form of instrumental thinking which is not only a threat to the development of the capacity for critical thought but also to the development autonomy and the capacity for moral judgement.

Key words: Thinking; non-thinking; freedom; activity; autonomy; plurality

### Introduction: The importance of the political: plurality, natality and freedom

Hannah Arendt's primary interest lies in the political realm and action. Whilst the topics covered in her work are extensive, Arendtian thought was, in various ways, informed by the fundamental political events and catastrophes of the twentieth Century, most notably Nazism and the Holocaust. However, in the early 1960's through her interest in the Eichmann trial and the writing of *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* that followed, the 'thinking/non-thinking' dichotomy and its significance for political action and freedom, became an important aspect of Arendt's work. In her final work, *The Life of the Mind* (published posthumously), Arendt acknowledges that, whilst she had neither 'claim nor ambition to be a "philosopher"', she did have a 'preoccupation with mental

activities' (1978: p3). When interviewed by Gunter Gaus in 1964, Arendt maintained that her profession was 'political theory' (2013: p3) and when asked to explain the difference between political philosophy and political theory she referred to the tension 'between man as a thinking being and man as an acting being' (2013: p3). Arendt argues that the objective nature of the philosopher's claims (or at least the presupposition of the objective nature of philosophical thought) signifies the fundamental difference between the two disciplines. For Arendt, whilst 'the philosopher can be objective with regard to nature, and when he says what he thinks about it he speaks in the name of mankind... he cannot be objective or neutral with regard to politics' (2013: p4). The political realm is characterised by contingent happenings, contexts and relations and thus is characterised by plurality rather than objective truth.

Arendt's conception of the political is complex and requires one to think of the political in terms of action, citizenship and civic engagement through shared (although not necessarily equal or similar) forms of recognition and deliberation. Political activity, for Arendt, collectively maintains, re-news, and (re)produces a public world and political community which, rather than advocating collective agreement or a shared notion of the 'right' or the 'good', recognises, emphasises and values, plurality.<sup>1</sup> It is the paradox of plurality, that is between the universality of being human and the particularity of the unique individual, that each human being *is*, that political life and action is realised. Arendt clarifies this thus: 'Plurality is the condition of human action 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' (1998: p8). Thus, the full value of engagement in political activity is realised in the way the

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<sup>1</sup> See: Arendt, H. (1998) *The Human Condition*, Chicago: Chicago University Press (Chapter One).

political realm qualifies the individual citizen to exercise his or her own autonomy and agency as an 'I' that is distinguishable from all others.

In *The Human Condition* Arendt argues that public life, where we are constantly 'in the presence of others' (1998: p51) is aligned with reality. Whilst the private sphere houses the solitary, philosophical activity of thinking, it is not, for Arendt, to be confused with the reality of political action. It is only in appearing and existing with others, that is, in 'being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves' (1998: p50), that the 'I' gains recognition of and for itself as a political person. For Arendt, it is the world itself that is both 'common to all of us *and* distinguished from our privately owned place in it' (1998: p52 author's emphasis). Thus, in 'relat[ing] and separate[ing] men at the same time' (1998: p52), it is political life in the public sphere of action that not only 'constitutes reality' (1998: p50) but provides the conditions for, and freedom to, engage in political life and thus to effect the renewal of a shared public space.

To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an "objective" relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of a common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself (1998: p58).

In this sense, Arendt sees the public realm as the mediator of and for men because it is political life that signifies each person's humanity, to the world, to others and to itself.

Thus, it is the political sphere that authenticates the subjective, thinking individual who is, as a political person, at least potentially free to act anew in the world.<sup>2</sup>

At the heart of Arendt's work lies the desire for each citizen to develop the capacity for moral judgement and political worth. This vision is an educational one through which the thinking individual must learn and re-learn not only of the world as it is and of his or her place within it, but also of the world's potential for renewal and their own capacity to act anew within it. Birth qualifies the political person to contribute to the renewal of a world which 'never remains as it is but continuously renews itself through birth, through the arrival of new human beings' (1993: p185). Renewal is only possible because each 'newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting' (1998: p9). This is fundamental to Arendt's theory of natality which is, for her, both 'the essence of education' (Arendt, 1993: p174) and 'one of the conditions of political action' (Levinson, in Gordon, 2001: p13). Natality not only reveals moral judgement but also presupposes the freedom for political action. Each politically qualified, thinking individual must not only grow 'into an old world', (1993: p177) but must also learn from it in order to act afresh.

For Arendt, freedom, or at least the right to assume one has it is, on the one hand, essential for educational activity precisely because it is the possibility of one's capacity for action in the world and, on the other, because it is the essence of political life. But Arendt's notion of educational freedom, should not to be confused with the 'inner freedom' of the liberal notion of educational freedom associated with Western educational and philosophical traditions. The liberal notion of freedom is premised on the value of thinking in and for

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<sup>2</sup> See Arendt's essay 'What is Freedom?' in Arendt, H. (1993) *Between Past and Future*, London: Penguin

itself, rather than explicitly on the value of thinking in and for: political life; the development of public attitudes; and action in the public realm. The tradition of liberal education and the notion of freedom that accompanies it, as Michael Oakeshott says for example, presupposes the free man as the thinking 'human being [who] is "free" not because he has "free will," but because he is in himself what he is for himself' (Oakeshott, 1989:4). In her essay 'What is Freedom?' Arendt argues against such a liberal notion of freedom stating that the 'field where freedom has always been known, ...as a fact of everyday life, is the political realm' (1993: p146). For Arendt, the practical freedom of political life is 'the very opposite of "inner freedom"' which only ever exists in 'the inward space into which man may escape from external coercion and *feel* free' (1993: p146). Therefore, without political recognition and qualification, such a *feeling* of freedom has no ground in political life but is rather indicative of the retreat from the reality of the political sphere 'where freedom was denied, into an inwardness to which no other has access' (1993: p146). Thus, for Arendt, the ungrounded freedom of liberal education signifies a withdrawal to a space bereft of the possibility of real freedom which is rooted in one's attitudes and political actions.

This *feeling* of freedom that occurs in the 'inward space where the self is sheltered against the world' (Arendt, 1993: p146) was, argues Arendt, 'discovered in late antiquity by those who had no place of their own in the world' (1993: p147) and must not be 'mistaken for the heart or the mind, both of which exist and function only in interrelationship with the world' (1993: p146). For Arendt, it is only within an interrelationship *with* the world that the freedom to make moral judgements and to exercise one's public attitudes in ways that contribute to the renewal *of* the world can be realised. This is the essence of education for Arendt. Thus, the inward, insular *feeling* of 'freedom' which only appears to itself by

'freeing' itself from the political space is, for Arendt, an illusory freedom which resists engaging in the action of political life by prioritising the activity of thinking. Whilst the inward activity of thinking is vital to the development of the capacity for moral judgement, the retreat from the political realm stands counter to Arendt's notion of freedom. Arendt understood the precarious nature of freedom. She knew that the totalitarian political regimes of the twentieth Century with their 'consistent misrecognition of civil rights... makes us doubt not only the coincidence of politics and freedom but their very compatibility' (1993: p149). But she also maintained that abstraction from political life curtails the possibility of freedom for '[w]ithout a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance' (1993: p149). Arendt is clear that freedom does not begin where politics ends but that the political is the condition of possibility for freedom. That is, for the freedom to act, to participate, as a recognised political person, in the renewal and re-creation of a shared world. If this is the essence of education, it demonstrates the necessity to consider the implications that educational systems and education administration hold, not only for the freedom to think, but also for the freedom of the autonomous individual to participate in the renewal of the world. The relevance of this becomes far more explicit in Arendt's critique of the thinking/non-thinking dichotomy (particularly in relation to the Eichmann trial), which is explored further below.

#### Distrust in inwardness: the contradiction of the thinking/non-thinking dichotomy

Arendt's distrust in 'philosophical truth [which] concerns man in his singularity' (1993: p246) was rooted in her concerns over the dangers of prioritising the unpolitical, private activity of thinking over the sphere of shared public actions and the interactions of political life.

Communications and relations with others are political activities which are intrinsic to the development of political thought. Contra the presupposed objective nature of 'philosophical truth', the opinions of the political, public person or 'political thought', are not objective but, as Arendt states in her essay, 'Truth and Politics', are 'representative' (1993: p241). It is through relating with and to others in the public sphere that the thinking individual learns about the world and his place within it and to form opinions of and about that world. In expressing opinions one not only represents the world as it is, but indicates one's potential to express and represent anew, that is, to re-engage, to re-consider, to revise and thus to develop renewed and better informed opinions. The potential for the renewal of opinions is not nurtured in isolation but in political life. For one can only

form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to [one] mind the standpoints of those who are absent; that I represent them. This process of representation does not blindly adopt the actual views of those who stand somewhere else, and hence look upon the world from a different perspective;... [But] [t]he more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinion (Arendt, 1993: p241).

It is important to acknowledge here that not all 'others' (groups or individuals), represent reasonable standpoints or positions but Arendt reveals two important points here. First, is the necessity to recognise the plurality of political life and the necessity to engage with ways of thinking and being other than one's own. Second, is the necessity to realise the centrality

of the thinking/non-thinking dichotomy in Arendt's educational thought. The activity of thinking, as Arendt understood it (as opposed to the inactivity of 'non-thinking'), does not necessitate the passive acceptance of alternative viewpoints and position, but the capacity to make judgement upon them. It will become clearer below, that the freedom to think means that such judgements do not issue from the 'other', but from one's own capacity to think in ways which develop one's own public attitudes and standpoints in the world.

### The paradox of freedom in the thinking/non-thinking dichotomy

In *The Life of the Mind* Arendt states that 'there are no dangerous thoughts; thinking itself is dangerous' (1978: p176). Yet this is an inescapable danger for Arendt because the alternative, that is, to not think (or at least to not think critically). It is not-thinking that 'shield[s] people from the dangers of examination... [and] teaches them to hold fast to whatever the prescribed rules of conduct may be at a given time in a given society' (1978: p177). That is, not (or non)-thinking, lies counter to, and prevents the development of, self-criticality. It is essential that the moral conscience of the private individual be distinguishable from the political life of the public realm which, whilst validating one's 'feeling for reality' (1998: p51), does not facilitate the necessary conditions for the mind, and thus one's conscience, to call itself into question. For Arendt, the possibility of and potential for critical thought, and thus for self-criticality, lies in the 'inner dichotomy' of the private self. It is only when at home with itself, that the 'individual in his singularity' (2003: P97) can speak to and answer to itself in a way that reveals the capacity to develop moral conscience and moral judgement to it. As Arendt says:



This living-with-myself is more than consciousness, more than the self-awareness that accompanies me in whatever I do and in whichever state I am. To be with myself and to judge by myself is articulated and actualized in the processes of thought, and every thought process is an activity in which I speak with myself about whatever happens to concern me (2003: p97-98).

This does not occur completely independently of one's political self of course and the political realm is still important here, for the things that concern one do not arise in the solitude of the private sphere but in the interrelations of the public world. Nonetheless, thoughtfulness itself is, for Arendt, a solitary activity and the 'solitude' of the activity of thinking is distinct from 'other modes of being alone, particularly and most importantly loneliness and isolation' (2003: P98). Solitude signifies a mode of being alone in which 'I' am together with 'myself' where 'I am two-in-one' (2003: p98) in dialogue with 'myself' which calls my own thoughts and actions not only into question but demands, whether obtainable or not, answers. The answers that are demanded are not of others or of a political self, but of the private self. It is within and from the dialectical movement that self-consciousness exercises on itself that recognition, not only of its own thoughts and actions occur, but also of the potential consequences of them. In other words, in solitude, thought cannot escape the questions it asks of itself and thus it is called to face the possible consequences of its actions. This is an educational movement for Arendt because it marks the mind's capacity not only to think, but having called itself into question, to re-think itself and thus to call itself, the judgements it makes, into question. Thus it is in the relation between 'myself' and 'I' that one engages in the activity of the kind of thinking that develops not only self-criticality but the capacity to develop moral conscience and judgement. The freedom to

think that Arendt advocates here stands in opposition to the forms of instrumental thinking of the audit culture that, all too often, dominates educational systems and practices. The passive nature of instrumental reason closes down the freedom to think and the possibility of moral judgement in ways which in turn compromise one's freedom to act in the political space.

Unlike the passive 'non-thinking' of instrumentalism, thinking is an activity that culminates in the making of moral judgements on 'what I ought to do' (2003: P97) which in turn determines, or at least contributes to, the subjective actions of political life. It is within the internal, solitary dialogue that 'I' undertake with 'myself' that 'I decide with regard to myself [and thus with regard to others]. In other words, I cannot do certain things, because having done them I shall no longer be able to live with myself' (2003: p77). Thus one takes responsibility for oneself, for one's own thoughts as well as one's actions because the work one undertakes on oneself in solitude not only calls the actions 'I' participate in into question but also the thoughts 'I' *think* about them. When the solitude of this 'internal dialogue' is broken or interrupted 'I become one' (2003: p98), that is, 'I' step out of my private self as the public self, whose inner dichotomy, at least temporarily is overshadowed by the plurality of political life and action. Whilst the self as 'one' possesses 'self-awareness, that is, consciousness, [it is] no longer fully and articulately in possession of [it]self' (2003: p98). It is the public world that draws thought out of itself and into the sphere of political action (the space of potential freedom). But in moving into the public world, which requires, at least for a time, the suspension of the internal dichotomy, thought becomes vulnerable to the dangers of 'non-thinking' and thus to the suppression of self-criticality and

the continued capacity for the development and renewal of moral conscience and judgement.

However, rather than resolve the freedom/unfreedom dichotomy in Arendt's work, the internal dichotomy of thought complicates it further. The following and final section suggests that in recognising the necessity for the freedom to think, Arendtian thought demonstrates, not only the paradoxical nature of freedom but also the extremes and consequences that 'non-thinking', or the instrumental form of reason epitomised by Eichmann, can reach.

#### Overcoming the inner dichotomy: Eichmann's 'stupidity'

*Eichmann in Jerusalem* (published in 1963) is perhaps Arendt's most criticised work. Following its publication, criticisms tended to fall into two general categories. First, Arendt's suggestion that the 'darkest chapter of the whole dark story' (1963: p117) of the Holocaust was that Jewish leaders had been complicit 'in the destruction of their own people' (1963: p117). This caused outrage in some quarters leading, at times, to Arendt being accused of blaming the victims rather than the perpetrators.<sup>3</sup> In an interview with Joachim Fest in 1964, Arendt clarified her meaning on this point<sup>4</sup> but it is not until her later works, such as *Responsibility and Judgement*, that she undertook a deep analysis of the relation between thinking/non-thinking, responsibility and the capacity for the development of moral judgement. It is only when these works are read in relation to each other that the educational value of the claims made in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* become clear. When read in

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<sup>3</sup> See for example: Benhabib, S. in Villa, D. (2000) *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

<sup>4</sup> See: Arendt, Interview by Joachim Fest, Translated by Andrew Brown, in *The Last Interview and other conversations*, Brooklyn and London; Melville House Publishing

relation to the thinking/non-thinking dichotomy examined in *Responsibility and Judgement*, rather than serve to blame the victim, the issue of complicity raised in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, calls the inadequacy of the victim/perpetrator dichotomy into question. The educational value of this lies in requiring one to think beyond the binary of guilt and innocence in order to seek to comprehend the ways in which the action of political life and the activity of private thinking coincide with moral conscience, personal responsibility and judgement.

This leads to the second and related category of criticism that Arendt received for her reading of Eichmann; the nature of evil she attributed to him. Arendt's claim, that Eichmann was not a 'monster' but merely 'unthinking' and 'outrageously stupid'<sup>5</sup>, was not intended to diminish his responsibility or guilt for his crimes. Arendt was clear that she agreed with the final verdict of guilt. But she did seek to understand,<sup>6</sup> which in this case meant seeking to comprehend the incomprehensible horrors of the Holocaust with which, she argues, 'we cannot reconcile ourselves' (2013: p23).

Central to Eichmann's defence was his presentation of himself as a law abiding citizen. In a sense Eichmann's argument was very straightforward, he 'did his duty... he not only obeyed orders, he also obeyed the law' (1963: p135). But his misinterpretation and distortion of the Kantian categorical imperative<sup>7</sup> that he called upon to justify his actions, enraged Arendt. Surprisingly, for Arendt, Eichmann's definition of duty and law were tied to his argument that he had lived his life, prior to his decision to unquestioningly follow orders and to do his

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<sup>5</sup> See: Arendt, Interview by Joachim Fest, Translated by Andrew Brown, in *The Last Interview and other conversations*, Brooklyn and New York: Melville House Publishing

<sup>6</sup> See: Arendt, Interview by Gunter Gaus, Translated by Joan Stambaugh, in *The Last Interview and other conversations*, Brooklyn and New York: Melville House Publishing

<sup>7</sup> See: Kant, I. *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*,

'duty' for the Reich at least, according to Kantian moral precepts. When pushed for further detail, Eichmann clarified "I meant by my remark about Kant that the principle of my will must always be such that it can become the principle of general laws" (1963: p136). The significant point for Arendt however, was his claim that, on being 'charged with carrying out the Final Solution, he had ceased to live according to Kantian principles; he had known it and he had consoled himself with the thought that he no longer "was master of his own deeds,"' (1963: p136). It is here that Arendt's focus turns to consider the nature of thinking in relation to Eichmann and the banality of evil. There was no doubt for Arendt that Kant's moral philosophy 'rules out blind obedience' (1963: p136). Kant himself was clear that 'there is... only one categorical imperative. It is: Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law' (1997: p38). Thus the categorical imperative is intrinsically tied to the development of moral autonomy which is rooted in thinking for oneself. What this demonstrated, for Arendt, was not only Eichmann's misunderstanding of Kant's moral precepts but also the ease with which the philosophical concept can be distorted. Eichmann could only claim to have relinquished his own moral autonomy in the name of 'duty' as his defence, because, rather than cease to live by Kantian principles, he had distorted them in line with Hans Frank's "categorical imperative in the Third Reich," to read "Act in such a way that the Fuhrer, if he knew your action, would approve it" (1963: p136).

In order to demonstrate the distortion of Kant's moral philosophy further, Arendt distinguishes between practical reason as the source for duty, autonomy and moral judgement and the notion of duty followed by Eichmann in which the source 'was the will of the Fuhrer' (1963: p137). For Arendt, this relinquishment of moral autonomy not only

signifies the basic premise of totalitarian politics but also a new type of evil. Arendt clarified the significance of this further in her interview with Joachim Fest in 1964 when she said that Eichmann signified 'a new type of criminal' (2013: p43). Arendt's point here is poignant for she clarifies further that Eichmann's 'criminal motives', rather than being what is 'usually understood by criminal motives' (2013: p43) were rooted in his desire 'to say "we,"' (2013: p43). What Arendt indicates here is not only the dangers of the refusal to think for oneself, but, whether relinquished or overcome, the loss of subjective freedom. It was not only Eichmann's willingness to go 'along-with-the-rest' (2013: p43), but his personal desire to do so that, for Arendt, was 'enough to make the greatest of all crimes possible' (2013: p43). Arendt's point is that the collective produces power whereas as 'long as you're alone, you're always powerless, however strong you may be' (2013: p43). It is this distinction that Arendt links to the banality of evil. It is banal because it is ordinary. The desire for power gained at the expense of one's own moral conscience is, she argues, not necessarily an inhuman desire but 'is generally a human feeling' which is 'absolutely not wrong in itself' (2013: p43) but 'it's not good either' (2013: p43). Thus, whilst quite ordinary in itself the danger lies in its neutrality and it is here that the form the relation between internal and external dichotomy of the self as political and the private person becomes paramount. For Arendt, the important point is that duty and therefore moral action is dependent on one's own judgement, not that of any other. Eichmann's notion of duty not only turned the definition of duty on its head, but, for Arendt, eradicated the inner dialogue of moral conscience. Whilst, autonomy and totalitarian politics sit in opposition to each other it did not, in any way, diminish Eichmann's guilt or responsibility for his actions and crimes for Arendt but in fact demonstrated that his guilt was rooted in his conscious decision to not think for

himself, driven by the desire of 'wanting-to-say-we' (2003: p43) and the willingness to abandon his own conscience to do so.

In the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt argued that 'wherever [totalitarianism] has ruled' it has not only attempted to destroy all forms of subjective and political freedom but, the very "essence of man". (1994: pxxvii). In distinction to such extreme forms of totalitarianism which aimed to consume the political self and private life, that is, to consume thought and action and therefore to deny the very possibility of freedom, maintaining the distinction and 'vital tension' between them becomes imperative. The totalitarian State makes no distinction between public and private life, there is no recognition of a tension between political activity and private thinking and, in the most extreme context the only possible distinction made is the one between the citizen of the State and the victim. Overcoming the contingent nature of the individual's relations with the world and others; eradicating the self-criticality that issues from calling oneself into question in one's private dialogue with oneself; and destroying the very possibility of plurality, is fundamental to the success of the total state.

Contrary to many of the charges made against her, Arendt did not see the supposed loss of subjective freedom as a defence for the perpetrator. Whilst astounded by Eichmann's 'total absence of thinking' (2003: p160), it did not absolve him of blame or responsibility for his crimes. Rather, for Arendt, it demonstrated the way in which reconciling the inner dichotomy of thinking results in the most dangerous form of instrumental 'thought' or what Arendt called 'non-thinking'. It is this that she aligns with the banality of evil which facilitates the capacity for 'ordinary' individuals to undertake extraordinary actions. For

Arendt, it is only such a form of evil that can enable those who otherwise possessed apparently 'normal' levels of humility, who were not 'psychopaths' or 'sadists' and who conducted their everyday lives in a fashion that would otherwise, be regarded as normal, participating in the most inhuman crimes.

Thus, for Arendt, the evil of the Nazi Holocaust, in part at least, took a banal form. Underlying Arendt's concept of the banality of evil is the very point that she held the perpetrators responsible for their own individual actions. She clarifies this further when she argues against the demonization of the perpetrator arguing that to demonize can 'provide an alibi' for if you 'succumb to the Devil incarnate... you're not guilty yourself' (2013: p45).

The evils of the Holocaust were 'banal', for Arendt, not because they were 'commonplace' nor because 'there's an Eichmann in all of us' (2013: p47) but precisely because they were housed in the 'normality' of the political action of the 'citizen'. Put quite simply the banality of evil is rooted in the misrecognition of what it is to be a citizen. For Arendt, Eichmann's 'stupidity' and that of others like him came to fruition in the banality of evil because of 'the reluctance to ever imagine what the other person is experiencing' (2013: p48). It is here that the 'inner dichotomy' of the private thinking individual becomes central to seeing or seeing the other. For Arendt, refusing to be alone with oneself is to refuse the 'other' and is thus an overcoming of the external as well as the internal dichotomies that characterise one's public and private self. The public consequence of such overcoming is that, externally, one fails to comprehend 'others' as fellow citizens whilst internally one fails to recognise one's own otherness as the call of conscience. Not only does this overcoming have consequences for one's own actions, but also for one's own thoughts and the judgements



that accompany them. Arendt does not, suggest that *all* evil associated with Nazism, or any other form of totalitarianism, is 'banal'. Nor does she deny that evil also issues from fanaticism, sadism, hatred, Anti-Semitism or any other source. But she does suggests that, when the success of a political regime such as Nazism is dependent upon mass participation of its citizens for the realisation of its vision, banal evil is perhaps the most effective and, therefore perhaps the most dangerous, form of evil. Eichmann, for Arendt, stands as the most extreme example of the banality of evil that issues from the failure to think for oneself, from the purposeful relinquishment of autonomy and of the responsibility for one's own judgements and public attitudes that accompanies it. But the value of Arendt's work on non-thinking and instrumentalism has far wider reaching significance for education. When read through an educational lens, Arendt's work on the banality of evil, reveals not only the necessity to think but the banality of instrumental reason more generally.

### Conclusion

If Arendt is correct and banality is characterised by 'not thinking' which becomes manifest in the public space through an overcoming of autonomy and the kind of personal responsibility that issues from moral judgement, then her work on 'banality' has a particular educational significance. The form of evil that Arendt attributes to Eichmann stands as an extreme example of the consequences of the banality of thought rather than the only possibility of it. In exploring the thinking/non-thinking dichotomy that Arendt presents in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in the wider context of Arendtian thought the educational value of her work is revealed in the application of the concept of banality in the wider sense. When banality is revealed and comprehended, not as an issue of 'evil' per se, but as an issue of 'thinking' evil,

rather than inevitable, is just one of the possibilities that can issue from it. In less extreme political contexts banality becomes manifest in other, less extreme forms. In this way it becomes possible to draw on the Arendtian concept of 'banality' in relation to the forms of instrumental reason that lie at the heart of the audit culture and the forms of domination it exercises over educational systems and processes of administration today. If education is to work for the development of self-criticality *and* for the capacity for the development of moral judgement and public attitudes which result in a thinking, political person who can contribute to the renewal of the world, then the freedom to think in ways which recognise the 'vital tensions' that characterise private and public life, is an educational necessity.

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