Political Judgment Confronts Ideology: Hannah Arendt’s Contribution

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Commonplace intuitions tell us that possessing judgment is a political virtue, while inflexible ideological thinking is a sort of political vice. Yet this everyday practical dichotomy has no real expression in academic discourse. The closest body of literature involves critical theory’s controversial notion of ideology critique, whose traditional framing is widely considered antideliberative and epistemically suspect. In this essay, I reconstruct Hannah Arendt’s account of the relationship between political judgment and ideology, which I suggest aligns closer with commonplace intuitions than any extant literature. Arendt understood ideology as a failure to recognize the distinctive validity of political judgment, a validity which, because of its perspectival character, does not provide objective answers to political questions, although it can assess the quality of such judgments. Ideology represents a politically pathological attempt to inappropriately attribute to one’s judgment the objective validity of truth. Building on recent Arendt-inspired critical theory, I conclude by sketching a version of ideology critique that appeals to intersubjective validity but also affords a vital role for radical social critique.

Keywords: ideology, political judgment, Hannah Arendt, political epistemology, critical theory, ideology critique

The unusual degree of indifference to factual reality recently witnessed in American politics has no doubt disturbed many scholars. Of course, playing loose with the truth is hardly a novel phenomenon in politics, and the last century was witness to far more flagrant such abuses. But it is that fairly recent history of ideologically driven abuse of factuality and the ensuing rise of tyrannical governments that prompts the present anxiety. In this essay, I want to consider to what extent this anx-

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iety is warranted, by engaging with Hannah Arendt’s work. Specifically, I will focus
on her account of the relationship between political judgment and ideological thinking. I believe her understanding of this relationship can help us make sense of the
motivations behind political abuses of truth and their potential dangers.

For those of us who follow politics closely, there is surely an intuitive appeal in a
theoretical framework such as Arendt’s. Thoughtful observers commonly view judg-
ment as a political virtue entailing clear-sighted engagement with reality, while ideo-
logical thinking is commonly perceived as a political vice involving stubborn attach-
ment to political opinions, regardless of their concrete relevance or factual validity.1

It may therefore come as a surprise that this commonplace notion has no real place in
contemporary scholarship; indeed, Arendt’s is the only serious engagement with this
idea that I am aware of. During the thirty or so years of her mature work, Arendt
progressively developed a sophisticated account of ideology and political judg-
ment, one that aligns closely with these commonplace notions. A reconstruction
of her account should be of particular interest to many Arendt scholars and critical
theorists. Arendtian judgment is an increasingly vibrant area of scholarship, espe-
cially for those interested in the possibility of intersubjective validity in democratic
politics.2 However, what might be called her broader political theory of political
judgment—that is, how she understood this account of judgment to address mod-

1. To take a very prominent example, Barack Obama, especially during his first presidential
campaign, often attacked Washington’s “ideological gridlock” while presenting himself as an
exemplar of “good judgment” possessing the capacity to transcend the Capital’s ideologically
/article/2007/08/14/AR2007081401939.html.

2. A very abbreviated list of significant recent work in this area of political theory and phi-
losophy includes Albena Azmanova, The Scandal of Reason: A Critical Theory of Political Judg-
ment (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Marieke Borren, “‘A Sense of the World’: 
Hannah Arendt’s Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Common Sense,” International Journal of
in the Paradigm of Judgment (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Shmuel Lederman, 
“Philosophy, Politics and Participatory Democracy in Hannah Arendt’s Political Thought,” His-
story of Political Thought 3 (2016): 480–508; Mihaela Mihai, “Theorizing Change: Between Re-
flexive Judgment and the Inertia of Political Habitus,” European Journal of Political Theory 15
(2016): 22–42; Tracy B. Strong, “Without a Banister: Hannah Arendt and Roads Not Taken,” ch. 8 in his Politics Without Vision: Thinking Without a Banister in the Twentieth Century (Chi-
cago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 325–69; Jonathan Peter Schwartz, Arendt’s Judgment: 
Freedom, Responsibility, Citizenship (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Linda
M. G. Zerilli, A Democratic Theory of Judgment (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016). In-
terest in Arendtian judgment has also spread well beyond political theory and philosophy, with
scholars employing the theory in fields as diverse as sociology, psychology, educational studies,
legal studies, information technology, and empirical political science.
ern political circumstances—has received much less attention. This essay offers an interpretation of this broader theory, arguing that it was centrally concerned with understanding the problem of ideology and its connection to modern citizens' growing incapacity to judge politically. I will argue that this broader political theory of political judgment can potentially refine and sharpen ongoing debates in critical theory over the nature of ideology critique and its relevance to deliberative democracy.

A brief overview of current scholarship on political judgment and ideology will be helpful for situating what follows. The judgment literature in political theory arguably began with Ronald Beiner's work on the topic in the early 1980s, and may now be considered a significant area of study within the subfield.


with this project—although Wittgenstein and Frankfurt School critical theory also play a role in several judgment theorists’ work. However, the judgment literature’s goals often have been rather different from those of the general communitarian literature—less focused on the status of justice per se, and more democratic in its aspirations. In part, the judgment literature tries to draw the boundaries of the activity of political theory by examining the faculties and activities of moral and political judging. Yet there is also a strong practical drive in this work that seeks to mine political thought for insights to improve the deliberations of democratic citizens and their leaders.

Perhaps surprisingly, the judgment literature rarely broaches the concept of ideology in a systemic way. This is likely due to the concept’s complex and multivalent history. At least four perspectives on ideology currently exist, although none have historically conceptualized it in terms of the commonplace understanding discussed earlier. The first perspective is the anthropological outlook, which, of the four views, understands ideology in the broadest sense. Largely originating in Clifford Geertz’s work on cultural symbols as complex ordered systems, it refers to the entire range of discursive and non-discursive symbolic meanings that express the beliefs, practices, and values of a cultural group. In the anthropological sense, ideology extends far beyond politics and is as universal as human culture itself. The second perspective is the somewhat ad hoc approach of empirical political science, which uses data on ideological preferences in its modeling. While this perspective does not have a formal account of ideology, it could look to the third perspective for a fairly robust theoretical grounding. This third perspective—a comparative, analytic, and morphological approach—historically has been associated

5. Alessandro Ferrara, who has turned to the Kantian concept of exemplary validity to develop a “judgment paradigm” for liberal justificatory reason, is a strong exception to this characterization. See Ferrara, Force of Example, ch. 1, “Judgment as a Paradigm” (see note 2 above).

6. This generally has been the case since Beiner’s Political Judgment (see note 2 above), including Steinberger’s authoritative The Concept of Political Judgment and even the work of Habermas (e.g., Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action) and Benhabib (e.g., Situating the Self), who, as critical theorists, would have had a longstanding interest in the nature of ideology (see note 4 above for all sources).


8. Approaches to the concept of ideology in political science have taken a number of turns during the discipline’s history. For a recent account of this history, see Kathleen Knight, “Transformations in the Concept of Ideology in the Twentieth Century,” American Political Science Review 100 (2006): 619–26.
with sociology, but now is closely associated with comparative political theory. Current research has been heavily influenced by Michael Freeden’s method of “ideological analysis.” Freeden’s approach is interpretive and morphological; he is strongly influenced by Geertz’s theory of ideology as systems of symbolic meaning, although he limits it to the activity of political thinking. Ideologies are maps of the political world, providing heuristics for understanding how that world works. Although ideologies such as liberalism, feminism, fascism, and socialism are not monolithic entities, he argues that their underlying rational structures may still be extracted and analyzed. Thus, for Freeden, ideology as such has no pejorative connotation; rather, it is simply a cognitive structure that humans universally employ when they think politically.

Because they treat ideology in an analytical sense, and therefore as normatively neutral, the anthropological, empirical political science, and comparative political theory approaches to the concept of ideology are not very helpful in understanding it as a problematic form of political thought. However, the fourth perspective—that of critical theory, historically originating from Marxism and the Frankfurt School—is much closer to commonplace intuitions about ideology. Unfortunately, there are long-standing questions surrounding its political epistemology that complicate its usefulness. Traditionally, critical theory has had an unambiguously pejorative outlook on ideology. Far from providing heuristic support about the political world, the critical perspective viewed ideology as an insidious system of political logic with the capacity not only to win moral consent to social domination by privileged members of society, but also to achieve internalization by the general citizenry, including marginalized groups who are often thought by critical theorists to support their own repression. The traditional role of critical theory, then, was to bring about


12. Theodor W. Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 345; see also his Negative Dialectics (New York: Continuum,
emancipation and enlightenment, unmasking the veneer of legitimacy that ideology provides and revealing to the repressed their true interests. For any political theory concerned with the capacity of everyday citizens to pass effective political judgments, this notion of ideology is profoundly disconcerting. It implies that the ideological presuppositions and normative logic of virtually any political judgment citizens pass is potentially infected by structurally instituted relations of domination and inequality that may be psychologically "reified"—that is, hardwired into the very affective makeup of the citizenry at large.

Ideology as false consciousness has been a major focus of debate for critical theory since Habermas, Geuss, and other critical theorists challenged its political epistemology in the late 1970s and 1980s. These second generation critical theorists raised two primary objections. First, they questioned on what grounds the critical theorist claimed to have a privileged position for diagnosing society’s ideological delusions. How can the critical theorist claim to understand the true interests of others better than those individuals themselves? Moreover, how can a critical theorist be certain that they are not also trapped in false consciousness? Early critical theorists such as Adorno and Marcuse sought to establish their privileged position in part by attacking what they called the dominant “positivist" theory of knowledge, claiming they were theorizing a unique type of knowledge concerned with human emancipation and rational autonomy, which standard epistemic theories could not capture.

This leads to the second criticism. Members of the second generation were skeptical that ideology critique really was an alternative form of knowledge. They argued that any epistemic elements that critical theory offers should be accessible and verifiable to any rational citizen, regardless of their political views. Any other type of claim should instead be viewed as non-epistemic interpretive or evaluative.


components of the theory. After the second generation’s critique, while some critical theorists have sought to produce revised conceptions of ideology critique, many began searching for an intersubjectively valid political epistemology that did not require a privileged theoretical position. Habermas developed a sophisticated philosophy that distinguished between various forms of instrumental rationality and communicative rationality, and that developed a Kantian system of discourse ethics derived from communicative rationality which emphasized consensus and generalizability of norms. After this Kantian turn, Habermas seemed to have little interest in the topic of ideology, and in general the nature of ideology has since been fairly ambiguous and controversial in critical theory literature.

Current scholarship thus has produced little guidance about standard notions of ideology. Is the common sense notion of ideology a real phenomenon? Or is it simply a misleading commonplace idea that rigorous scholarship has long since disposed of? I believe the common sense notion of ideology is a real phenomenon, and indeed that it presents an ongoing and profound challenge to democratic politics. I hope to make a case in this article that the time is ripe to develop a theoretical account of the common sense notion of ideology. Recent critical theory, and work closely aligned with it, has turned to Arendt’s theory of political judgment for a form of intersubjective validity that is an alternative to discourse ethics. However, it is fair to say that an account of how ideology relates to the form of intersubjective validity found in Arendtian political judgment has not been systematically developed to this point. Though Arendt herself had a sophisticated account of both ideology and political judgment, for various reasons

17. Habermas, Lifeworld and System, 382 (see note 13 above).
19. See Azmanova, Scandal of Reason, and Ferrara, Force of Example. Zerilli’s Democratic Theory of Judgment should also be included, though her work is located in the broader discourses of critical theory, especially in feminist and democratic theory, and has been more distant from the Frankfurt School than these others. (See note 2 above for all sources.)
20. Azmanova is one of the few theorists who have pursued this topic. See her Scandal of Reason, 217–21 (see note 2 above).
she rarely wrote explicitly about their relationship, and therefore understanding her account requires a certain amount of textual synthesis. As a result, her own understanding of this relationship has not been significantly pursued even among Arendt scholars, let alone by non-specialists interested in Arendtian judgment.

The lynchpin of the following argument explaining Arendt’s account of this relationship will be a defense and application of her much discussed “Truth and Politics” essay,21 whose importance I believe can only be fully appreciated when read in view of her broader work on ideology and political judgment. Arendt understood ideology as a pathological form of political judgment, arising from a failure to appreciate judgment’s distinctive validity. Because political judgment is inherently perspectival and deliberative, its form of validity allows us to decide when some judgments are better than others, but it does not provide objective answers to political questions. Ideology arises when individuals seek to close down debate on political questions by asserting that their political opinions are not just better than their opponents’ opinions, but instead objectively true while all others are false and mistaken. As I will argue in the conclusion, I believe this theoretical framework can help to clarify the nature and possibility of ideology critique, and its relationship to intersubjective critical theories.

Ideology and Common Sense

Ideology and political judgment were deeply intertwined in Arendt’s thought, forming a problematic that began in The Origins of Totalitarianism and continued throughout her mature work. This relationship was anchored in a conceptual lynchpin of her political thought: the concept of common sense, and the political consequences of its erosion among modern citizens.22 Ideology’s subversion of common sense served as a kind of shadow of political judgment—a pathological form of judgment, em-

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ploying many of its faculties in disastrous modes. Yet Arendt rarely wrote directly about the relationship between ideology and judgment, instead often writing about one idea while implicating the other. Additionally, there is a distinctive trajectory to her reflections on judgment and ideology. In the early years, just after Origins, ideology was her primary focus, while her thinking on judgment developed rather slowly during the 1950s, proceeding through a number of stages until she arrived at her later Kantian account of judgment. This trajectory seemed to reach a pivot point in 1957, when she wrote her only explicit account of the relationship between ideology and judgment. In this section, I will trace the development of her theory of ideology up to that pivot point.

In Origins, Arendt refers to ideology as a "supersense" developed by ideological political movements to replace common sense.23 Supersenses are sets of propositions intended to explain the underlying principles of the political world—for example, race or class struggle—as they appeared in the totalitarian ideologies of her time. She characterized these ideological replacements for common sense as the "purely negative coercive logic" of ideas such as racism or class struggle, a "dialectical device [that] can explain away factual contradictions as stages of one identical consistent movement."24 Such ideologies sought to replace the typical differences of opinion that characterize normal politics, which are always governed by the distinctive common sense of individuals. They presume to eliminate such differences of political opinion by appealing to the laws of nature or history on which the legitimacy of political regimes and their positive laws are thought to depend. Thanks to their supposed superior insight into the laws of politics or world history, they claim to offer objective principles for political practice.

This conscious attempt to subvert and replace common sense—the faculty Arendt understood as essential to the ability to understand one’s self-interest—led to the often bizarre political calculations and practices of totalitarian regimes.25 She viewed formal ideologies as largely impotent through most of modern political history, with even the most ideologically oriented parties typically giving way to interest-based modus vivendi agreements.26 It was only when ideologies achieved political dominance that the underlying totalitarian logic of their political theories was revealed in practice. Arendt noted that this totalitarian political logic tended to

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23. Arendt, Origins, 458–64, at 458 (see previous note).
24. Ibid., 469.
26. Ibid., 254, 457, 470.
be characterized by an odd disconnect from self-interest. The trouble with totalitarian regimes is not that they play power politics in an especially ruthless way,” she wrote, “but that behind their politics is hidden an entirely new and unprecedented concept of power. . . . Supreme disregard for immediate consequences rather than ruthlessness; rootlessness and neglect of national interests rather than nationalism; contempt for utilitarian motives rather than unconsidered pursuit of self-interest. . . .”

Arendt believed it was only on the basis of these types of political calculations that a bizarrely absurd racist conspiracy theory such as early twentieth-century anti-Semitism could have exercised such an outsized influence on world affairs. What lay behind it was a collapse of common sense ushered in by World War I. The Great War initiated a sequence of events characterized by what she viewed as “seemingly absurd disparities between cause and effect which have become the hallmark of modern history.” The ensuing economic, political, and social collapse of the European world resulted in a loss of confidence among political agents and their constituencies that any political initiatives could reliably serve their interests. To replace these gaps in practical reason, ideological leaders offered theories of historical movement that they believed could explain these disparities between cause and effect, to guide practice—if not directly in the interest of their followers, then at least toward some dimly perceived utopia. While T.E. Lawrence was no totalitarian, Arendt viewed him as exemplifying the mentality that would finally be expressed in totalitarian politics. “I had pushed my go-cart into the eternal stream,” she quoted him writing, “and so it went faster than the ones that are pushed cross-stream or up-stream. I did not believe finally in the Arab movement: but thought it necessary in its time and place.”

Given the almost polar divergence of ideological political practices from those of common sense, one may naturally think they bear no relationship to one another. Arendt, however, argued that the two were in fact essentially related—indeed, that all ideologies originated from what was once common sense. She drew this link in a set of writings composed primarily in 1956 and 1957, which was edited and published posthumously in 2005 as part of the essay "Introduction into Politics." To my knowledge, this remains the only place that Arendt explicitly discussed the relationship between judgment and ideology. There, she refers to com-

27. Ibid., 417–19, 436, 470.
28. Ibid., 417–18.
29. Ibid., 131.
30. Ibid., 220.
mon sense as “prejudices,” which she means in its more or less positive hermeneutic sense. 32 She notes that judgments start off from prejudices and must return to revise them when a considered judgment is reached, a practice similar to Gadamer’s slightly later formulations. 33 All ideologies were once prejudices—that is, common sense—that have been ” ossified ” and turned into ” pseudotheories, which, as closed worldviews or ideologies with an explanation for everything, pretend to understand all historical and political reality.” 34 Affirming her earlier analysis linking ideologies to modern gaps in practical reason, she argues that this transformation of prejudice into ideology results from “historical crisis” in which ” prejudices . . . begin to crumble first and can no longer be relied upon.” 35 Rather than abandoning their crumbling prejudices, ideologists instead hold even more tightly to their now defunct common sense, accoding them an objective theoretical status that they never before possessed. This new objective status allows the ideology to assume the stringent ” tyranny of logicality ” that Arendt had earlier argued it tends to display in totalitarian contexts. 36

After the 1957 writings, Arendt does not seem to have discussed ideology at length again, instead focusing much more on the nature of judgment. However, even as Arendt developed her well-known theory of judgment in later years, she clearly still remained committed to her earlier account of ideology, evidenced by the fact that “Ideology and Terror,” an article written to develop her theory of ideology in 1953 37 and later incorporated as the conclusion to the 1958 second edition of Origins, remained in the 1966 third edition. Thus, to understand Arendt’s final conclusions on the relationship between ideology and political judgment, it is necessary to understand how she developed her ideas on judgment after her last direct statements on the relation of ideology and judgment in 1957, and to place that development into dialogue with her accounts of ideology.

The Hermeneutic Origins of Arendtian Common Sense

Arendt’s account of the origins of ideologies suggests that she viewed the two standard ways of thinking about the status of political opinions as dangerous: ei-

32. Arendt, Promise of Politics, 101 (see previous note).
34. Ibid., 103.
35. Ibid., 102.
36. Arendt, Origins, 469–70, 473; quotation at 473 (see note 22 above).
ther they are arbitrary and idiosyncratic, or they must be shown to have objective validity as philosophical truths. In her theory of judgment, she sought to show that political opinions have a validity that is neither arbitrary nor objectively true. In other words, Arendt believed that it is possible to claim there are better and worse political opinions, even though we can never truly say anyone’s opinion is objectively true. The attempt to achieve the supposed higher form of objective validity for political opinion was not just a hopelessly unrealistic standard. It was a fundamental misunderstanding of the very nature of political opinion—a category error characterized by the attempt to apply an inappropriate standard to the phenomena under examination. She believed that the failure to recognize the distinctive validity of political opinion leads either to the nihilistic belief that all opinions are equality arbitrary, or into dangerous ideological fanaticism.

There were two distinct phases of Arendt’s account of judgment: an earlier hermeneutic phase heavily influenced by Heidegger, and a mature phase that drew on elements of Kant’s third Critique. While the later, Kantian phase has received much attention from scholars of Arendt’s theory of political judgment, she never abandoned the earlier, Heideggerian phase, which is therefore just as crucial for understanding her theory of judgment. This early account, set forth in a 1954 essay called “Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding),” strongly conveyed her Heideggerian philosophical background. Relying heavily on sections 31–34 of Being and Time, which are commonly recognized as the foundational text of hermeneutic philosophy, “Understanding and Politics” strongly anticipated Gadamer’s slightly later formulations in Truth and Method. In this essay, Arendt refers to judgment as “understanding,” describing it as a “process which never produces unequivocal results.” 38 She characterizes it as “an unending activity, by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world.” 39 The results of understanding are not knowledge but meaning, which always “precedes and succeeds” knowledge. 40 Throughout the essay, Arendt outlines the well-known hermeneutic relationship between the implicit and explicit, in the forms of both knowledge claims and considered judgments. Understanding is always based on knowledge, yet knowledge “cannot proceed without a preliminary, inarticulate understanding.” 41 However, the concluding result of the process always remains better, clearer

39. Ibid., 307–08.
40. Ibid., 311.
41. Ibid., 310.
judgment, which she refers to here as true understanding. She writes, "preliminary understanding, which is the basis of all knowledge, and true understanding, which transcends it, have this in common: They make knowledge meaningful."42

The faculty which allows this circular process of understanding is common sense, which she refers to as an "Ariadne thread" allowing us to revise our original understanding in view of new knowledge.43 As she did many times elsewhere, often in the process of discussing judgment, Arendt describes common sense as a sixth sense that fits our other five senses into a common world.44 When Arendt referred to common sense, she clearly meant this in a way similar to that done by others in the tradition of hermeneutic philosophy, who have generally characterized human agency as already depending on what Charles Taylor calls a “background” of cultural practices and shared meanings.45 However, in her writings Arendt emphasized an important distinction between the background prejudices that condition agency, and the distinctive way in which each individual agent relates to that background, that is, their common sense.

Her general account of background prejudices—what she calls the common world—famously comes in The Human Condition. There Arendt distinguishes between two elements of the common world: the human artifice and the web of human relationships.46 The human artifice is the result of the activity of work, which always results in finished products that have objective existence in the common world outside the experience of any particular individual. Thus, the artificial human world is more than mere technology. It constitutes everything that gives durability to a civilization’s culture and public realm: its laws and institutions, enduring monuments, art, literature, technologies, scientific research, historical documents, and narratives.47 The web of relationships is more subjective and intangible than the human artifice, but Arendt insists it is no less real. She refers to it as the “overgrowth” of human relationships upon the human artifice.48 This web of relationships seems clearly to refer to the cultural meanings, traditions, moral intuitions, and social aspirations of a society—the evaluative background, so to

42. Ibid., 311.
43. Ibid., 311, 316–18, at 311.
44. Ibid., 318.
46. Arendt, Human Condition, 52, 182–83 (see note 22 above).
47. Ibid., 167–74.
48. Ibid., 183.
speak, in which all of a society’s relationships make sense. We should note that in articulating this web-like character, Arendt is highlighting the political and perspectival nature of society’s evaluative background—that there is no monolithic culture as such, but rather a broad set of distinctive ways individuals evaluatively relate to the common world. Thus, in sum, agents must use their common sense to navigate a common world that has objective instrumental and strategic elements as well as intangible evaluative elements.

Arendt is very consistent in how she defines common sense itself. It seems to be very similar to what Joseph Nye calls “contextual intelligence.”49 She consistently defines it in spatial rather than cognitive terms, using one of two definitions that are more or less interchangeable. She calls it “that sixth sense that we not only all have in common but that fits us into, and thereby makes possible, a common world.”50 Elsewhere she says that it is “our mental organ for perceiving, understanding, and dealing with reality and factuality,” while in The Life of the Mind she calls it our feeling for “reality” or “realness.”51 This consistent association with what Heidegger called comportment and attunement to worldliness extends throughout her mature work beginning with Origins. Common sense, in other words, is the unique way that we as individuals perceive and understand the social context or common world we share with others—more a skill, ability, know-how, or talent than a type of knowledge. It is our ability to grasp the contextual background of the common world in both its objective instrumental elements as well as its intangible evaluative and relational elements, and to effectively operate within it.

The Intersubjective Validity of Political Opinion

This was Arendt’s understanding of ideology and judgment during the mid-1950s, through the completion of the manuscript of The Human Condition in 1957. Her account of judgment was heavily hermeneutic in character, while her account of ideology drew on that theory of judgment’s understanding of how humans orient themselves through common sense, positing that the erosion of reliable common sense in the modern world lay behind the rise of ideological political thought, which led to totalitarianism. However, around the time she was completing the composition of the book manuscript, Arendt significantly revised her understanding of judgment

50. Arendt, “Philosophy and Politics,” 451; cf. Human Condition, 283 (see note 22 above); Between Past and Future, 175 (see note 21 above); Origins, 475–76; ”Understanding and Politics,” 318 (see note 22 above).
51. Arendt, On Violence, 8; ”Thinking,” 51 (see note 22 above for both sources).
and common sense. Going forward, her account would now always be framed in terms drawn from Kantian aesthetic philosophy, employing language such as taste, impartiality, representative thought, enlarged mentality, and sensus communis.\textsuperscript{52} Her journal notes from August 1957 show that she was fascinated with a unique kind of validity proposed by Kant in his account of aesthetic judgment. Writing mainly in German, she finds that Kant referred to a "subjektive Allgemeinheit," that is, a subjective kind of universal validity.\textsuperscript{53} Arendt claims here that Kant means by allgemein not "universal," but rather "general" (allgemein can mean either in German). In the notes, she alternates between using various references to the Gültigkeit (validity) associated with subjektive Allgemeinheit (e.g., "subjektiver allgemeiner Gültigkeit")\textsuperscript{54} and simply Gemeingültigkeit, which she seems to believe would more commonly be translated as general validity.\textsuperscript{55} Moreover, at one point she places this form of Gültigkeit or validity explicitly in opposition to "universal validity" ("im Gegensatz zu universaler Geltung").\textsuperscript{56} According to Arendt, judgment’s subjective general validity, as opposed to universal validity, "lays claim to validity but without in the least being able to compel."\textsuperscript{57} And crucially, this intersubjective validity is connected to the faculty of common sense.\textsuperscript{58}

Given its evident importance to the philosophical outlook of The Human Condition and elsewhere in her mature work, Arendt clearly never abandoned the earlier hermeneutic approach. Her turn to Kantian judgment should thus be viewed as a refinement to the earlier hermeneutic theory, rather than as a departure. This refinement must have been motivated by problems in the earlier theory that relate to intersubjective validity. Arendt, at this point, had just completed the manuscript of The Human Condition, where she presented the common world in spatial terms, heavily emphasizing the idea that the public realm "relates and sep-


\textsuperscript{54.} Ibid., 575.

\textsuperscript{55.} Ibid., 574.

\textsuperscript{56.} Ibid., 572.

\textsuperscript{57.} Ibid., 572. Author’s translation of "Das Urteilen erhebt Anspruch auf Gültigkeit, ohne doch im mindesten zwingen zu können."

\textsuperscript{58.} Ibid., 579.
arates” the inhabitants of that common world.\textsuperscript{59} This Kantian version of intersubjective validity offered a way for individuals to have different perspectives on the common world, yet still be able to redeem the validity of their opinions with each other. The relevant normative ideal that Arendt consistently invokes is the notion of “impartiality.”\textsuperscript{60} As standard intuitions surrounding this ideal suggest, Arendt’s account of political judgment does not propose to direct us definitively toward specific answers to political questions; rather, it proposes to offer an account of the qualities that good political judgments possess.

In describing these qualities, Arendt always used terms drawn from Kantian aesthetics evoking a kind of spatial sensibility. Though Kant employed terms such as “generality,” Arendt pointed out that Kant had something more limited in mind than the universality commonly associated with the concept of the general. Nevertheless, this more limited notion of generality was more robust than empirical consensus—it was not “counting noses,” she wrote.\textsuperscript{61} Instead, it was what Kant called having a “general standpoint.”\textsuperscript{62} Of course, to have a standpoint means that one still has a perspective of some sort, yet Arendt believed there was no contradiction in calling this standpoint “general.” Following Kant, Arendt believed the human capacity for reproductive imagination could allow those who practice political judgment to engage in what she called representative thought.\textsuperscript{63} She defined representative thinking as “making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent . . . ”\textsuperscript{64} This process of representative thinking allows one to assume a standpoint that extends beyond one’s personal interests or private perspective—a much more broad-minded perspective that she, again following Kant, calls “enlarged mentality.”\textsuperscript{65} Indeed, Arendt suggests that this process of cultivating an enlarged mentality means that the more diverse perspectives one consults, the better the resulting judgments will be.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{59} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 52 (see note 22 above).
\textsuperscript{60} Arendt, \textit{Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy}, 68 (see note 22 above); “Truth and Politics,” 237 (see note 21 above); “Concept of History,” 51–52 (see note 52 above); “Thinking,” 94 (see note 22 above).
\textsuperscript{61} Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” 237 (see note 21 above).
\textsuperscript{62} Arendt, “Thinking,” 71 (see note 22 above).
\textsuperscript{63} Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” 237 (see note 21 above).
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 237.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 237; \textit{Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy}, 73 (see note 22 above).
During her most advanced discussion of judgment, in the 1970 lectures on Kant’s political philosophy, Arendt goes as far as to suggest that this notion of intersubjective validity potentially extends to a hypothetical cosmopolitan community. Adopting a distinction often invoked by philosophers of aesthetics, and more systematically developed by Kant in the third Critique, she distinguishes between the natural uncultivated judgment that relies on “community sense”—that is, the unreflective prejudices and common sense that our socializing natural community endow us with—and that of sensus communis, the kind of judgment that draws on an enlarged mentality that has consulted the widest possible collection of perspectives. Following Kant, she appears to view sensus communis as hypothetically applicable to all humanity. "But in the last analysis, one is a member of a world community by the sheer fact of being human; this is one’s ‘cosmopolitan existence.’ When one judges and when one acts in political matters, one is supposed to take one’s bearings from the idea, not the actuality, of being a world citizen and therefore, also a Weltbrachter, a world spectator.”

In essence, the process of representative thought that Arendt describes is a kind of deliberative process of consulting the perspectives and viewpoints of others in order to expand the horizon of what she had called our prejudices or common sense. But the key to Arendt’s position is that no matter how broad-minded and impartial my judgment becomes, I can never escape the reality that it will always still be my own perspective. She writes: “While I take into account others when judging, this does not mean that I conform in my judgment to theirs. I still speak with my own voice and I do not count noses in order to arrive at what I think is right. But my judgment is no longer subjective either, in the sense that I arrive at my conclusion by taking only myself into account.” Thus, political judgment for Arendt is not arbitrarily stipulated, yet it also does not demand the assent of all other rational beings for its validity. What Arendt is seeking to demonstrate is not the answers to political questions themselves, but rather the qualities that good answers to these questions possess. The category that po-

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67. Arendt, Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy, 70–76 (see note 22 above). Arendt’s distinction between sensus communis and community sense may lead to some confusion for those unfamiliar with the history of aesthetic philosophy. The concept of sensus communis is typically left untranslated in many works of aesthetic philosophy where the notion of taste is explored. This idea extends back to Cicero, and both Kant and Arendt adopted the traditional practice of leaving it untranslated. It is meant to denote a sense of taste that transcends the cultural prejudices one is born with. By contrast, “community sense,” as used by Kant and by Arendt following him, refers to the parochialism that results from our natural socialization.

68. Ibid., 75–76.

69. Arendt, Responsibility and Judgment, 140–41 (see note 52 above).
political judgment appeals to, in other words, is not that of objectivity, but neither is it merely arbitrary personal preference. For something to have validity, it must still be possible to draw distinctions, so that even if no political opinions are objectively true, some judges’ opinions must still remain better than others. Thus, it will always be the case that even the most impartial judges may still honestly disagree with each other. This should not be viewed as a flaw or inadequacy in the nature of political judgment, but rather as simply an elemental feature of judgment as such.

Truth, Politics and Ideology

Arendt did not write about the relationship between ideology and political judgment after 1957, though as noted, she made her “Ideology and Terror” piece the conclusion to the 1966 third edition of The Origins of Totalitarianism. Thus, even as she continued to develop her Kantian account of political judgment in later years, it is highly likely that she still avowed her earlier theory of ideology. Given that her accounts of both ideology and judgment were anchored in the nature of common sense—and moreover, given that she discovered her Kantian theory of judgment in the same year she wrote the piece dealing with the relationship between ideology and judgment—it seems very likely that she continued to understand ideology and judgment as essentially related. While it is unfortunate that she never again wrote on the question, this is not necessarily surprising. Though Arendt was an extraordinarily fertile thinker, she rarely has been accused of having too much concern with systematizing her thought in the way, for instance, that Kant has been, and she left many theoretical loose ends when she died. However, Arendt’s “Truth and Politics” can help us to reconstruct how she ultimately understood the relationship between ideology and political judgment.

In that essay, Arendt sharply distinguished between truth and political opinion. Readers have sometimes found this distinction problematic, for surely good political judgments must rely on solid facts. However, a careful reading shows that Arendt fully agreed that good political judgment requires solid facts, and, if anything, was unusually rigorous in demonstrating why the establishment of reliable facts is of crucial importance for any functional political regime. Though Arendt does say at one point in the essay that truth and opinion are “opposed” to each other, she means this in a very specific sense. The opposition in this case involves

“their mode of asserting validity.” 71 In claiming that political opinions employ a different type of validity from truth, she does not mean that political opinions do not rely on solid facts and rational truths. Rather, she was simply noting that, even though they are dependent on facts, the type of validity that opinions appeal to is of a different nature than factual truths. As shown above, political opinions are functions of our contextual grasp of the common world, involving our own distinctive perspective on that context. The mode of validity it appeals to is persuasive. One does not seek to compel assent with this kind of validity; rather, one appeals to another judge’s “enlarged mentality” in hopes that they will see the common world in a similar way. 72

Conversely, the validity that truth appeals to has a coercive effect on the mind, according to Arendt. 73 More than anything else, it is her characterization of truthful validity as coercive that has bothered prominent critics of the essay, who have even suggested that Arendt maligned truth. 74 Yet if anything, Arendt strikes a defensive position toward truth, noting the essay’s genesis in what she characterized as a campaign of lies surrounding Eichmann in Jerusalem, and even feeling the need to apologize for the unusually negative light that she casts on politics and its at times uneasy relationship with truth. 75 She thus did not appear to understand truthful coercion in a pejorative sense. She noted that the essay considers truth from the perspective of politics, which she believed requires certain settled truths in order to function properly. In its political capacity, Arendt understood truth as an element of what in The Human Condition she called the human artifice, which, as previously noted, results from the activity of work, whose purpose is to bring stability and endurance to the political realm.

In this sense, those who produce truths for the political realm—whom she refers to as “truth-tellers”—are contributors to the stabilizing effect of the human artifice. 76 She emphasizes that, as with all work, truth-tellers employ objective procedures that can only be performed outside of the political realm, where opinion dominates, and that without reliable truths to ground itself, politics is pointless. 77 This is

71. Ibid.; emphasis in the original.
72. Ibid., 235–38.
73. Ibid., 235–36.
76. Arendt, Human Condition, 167–74 (see note 22 above).
particularly the case with factual truth, which is more easily abused by political power. Indeed, Arendt notes that modern republics have over time learned the value of creating institutions, such as universities and the judiciary, whose sole political purpose is to establish reliable truths, with explicit guarantees against political interference.78 “Facts and opinions,” she writes, “though they must be kept apart . . . belong to the same realm. Facts inform opinions, and opinions . . . can differ widely and still be legitimate as long as they respect factual truth. Freedom of opinion is a farce unless factual information is guaranteed and the facts themselves are not in dispute.”79 Political life, in other words, requires stable facts and truths in order to exist at all, just as much as it requires stable laws, institutions, and economies.

Arendt clearly believed that it was dangerous to fail to distinguish between these two modes of validity. In “Truth and Politics,” she primarily examines the dangers associated with treating truth claims as if their mode of validity were that of opinion. This is particularly the case with what she characterizes as factual truth, as distinct from rational truth.80 For while the rational truths of science and philosophy exist independently of human perception and memory, factual truths would simply cease to exist if all historical and journalistic record, documentation, and eyewitnesses were repressed or eliminated by a political regime. Arendt notes that this common dependence of factual truth and political opinion on human perception and memory often leads to the belief that there is no difference between them.81 Factual truths have a curious status due to their “contingent character”: unlike the inherent necessity of rational truths, factual truths can actually be mistaken or even changed by politically motivated campaigns of lying, especially in totalitarian contexts.82 Nevertheless, like rational truths, they have a “peculiar opacity” that is characteristic of “factual reality itself.”83 Arendt insists that they do not appeal to the intersubjective validity of opinion, but rather are established through objective procedures by historians, journalists, and other truth-tellers who appeal to the validity of truth.84 Thus, there is no “justification for blurring the dividing lines between fact, opinion, and interpretation. . . . Even if we admit that every generation has the

78. Ibid., 256.
79. Ibid., 234.
80. Ibid., 235.
81. Ibid., 232-5.
82. Ibid., 245–53; quote at 247.
84. Ibid., 235.
right to . . . rearrange facts in accordance with its own perspective; we don’t admit the right to touch the factual matter itself.”

While Arendt justifiably focused on the dangers posed to truth by state power, one can only guess what she would have thought of our current political landscape. As modern profit incentives and the decentralized nature of Internet news and social media have increasingly fragmented political information along partisan lines and blurred the distinction between entertainment and journalism, the very possibility of a common set of facts presently seems almost utopian. Indeed, as the debate over climate change indicates, Arendt may have been naïve to assume that rational truth claims could less easily be characterized as mere political opinions.

However, what Arendt does not discuss in “Truth and Politics” are the dangers that flow in the opposite direction: that is, when a political opinion is treated as if it possesses the same validity as truth claims. As I try to show in the discussion of ideology earlier in this article, Arendt believed that this mistake was even more dangerous than the error of mistaking truth for political opinion. This was because Arendt believed the error of treating political opinion as truth is the origin of ideological politics and eventually totalitarianism. Arendt, as I have tried to show, believed that ideologies are political opinions that have been reified and attributed universal validity. In seeking to establish the intersubjective validity of judgment, Arendt was suggesting that ideologists who claim their political opinions are universally true have failed to recognize the ultimately bounded and perspectival form of validity that is the most that any political opinion can ever aspire to. Such a forceful attack on the idea of appealing to objective standards in the arena of political opinion making may at first seem oddly counterintuitive.

Doesn’t conventional wisdom tell us that the absence of respect for rational objectivity and factuality is one of the outstanding features of contemporary political pathologies? Isn’t, for instance, skepticism of climate change science symptomatic of crude political outlooks that consider everything a matter of opinion? While the contemporary media landscape has no doubt contributed to this situation, one could surmise that Arendt would have seen deeper ideological motivations driving these circumstances. The problem may very well be not a total collapse of belief in factuality and rationality, but rather the belief that opinions have the same rationality as factual and rational truths. In other words, the political polarization that characterizes much of contemporary politics and discourse may

85. Ibid., 234.
well have come about primarily because some citizens have come to believe that their political opinions are objectively true, and thus that all other facts or opinions that contradict their political views must by definition be false. This, as we have seen, is what Arendt understood ideology to be.  

Just how dangerous ideological thinking truly is probably varies at any given time. As noted previously, Arendt believed all ideologies have totalitarian tendencies, which tend to emerge only after a group achieves control of a political regime. Moreover, the most obvious cases of totalitarian ideological tyranny involved ideologies that appealed to philosophies of history, such as classic Marxism, or to anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. Whether these characteristics are required for the emergence of totalitarian politics in the future is probably impossible to determine, although even now it is common to find ideological thinking leading its adherents to embrace conspiracy theories as an alternative to inconvenient factual realities, or to appeal to reductive histories. Examples of the latter include the various political theologies espoused by religious political actors, and modernist and capitalist progressivisms that assume liberal democracy and capitalism will inevitably be victorious in human history regardless of what individual human beings do.

What can be said with more confidence, however, is that anyone responsible for exercising political judgment will always be in danger of ideological thinking, simply because the two are so intimately connected to the human faculty of common sense. As a result, ideological thinking will likely remain a threat to democratic politics, one that can be mitigated to an extent but never truly eliminated. How such mitigation can be carried out probably varies from case to case. The well-documented political polarization in America, for instance, is clearly associated with an ideological trend that has numerous causes. Political parties and geographical regions of the country have increasingly sorted themselves into competing ideological camps. The polarized nature of contemporary news media sources has increasingly allowed citizens to consume only those sources of information that support their worldview, thus leading to a self-reinforcing echo

86. In the essay, Arendt does note the link to modern ideologies (ibid., 231), but does not pursue the topic. For a discussion illustrating her ongoing interest in the problem of ideology and its relationship to factual truth, see her essay “Lying in Politics,” in Hannah Arendt, Crisis of the Republic (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1972), 1–47.
chamber effect. Work and careerism consume increasing shares of contemporary citizens’ lives, while community life and civic engagement have increasingly eroded. Finally, the forces of modernity that Arendt highlighted in Origins should not be underestimated. As Arendt noted, modern social change occurs at a very rapid pace, and this has always presented immense challenges to political judgment.

Realistically, there are no easy solutions to such problems. Reforming political institutions along more deliberative and participatory lines likely would be helpful. Greater investments in social safety nets and reductions in work hours would free citizens for more civic activity. Campaign finance reform and some type of publicly informed regulation of news media would at the very least help contribute to productive public deliberation by providing institutional incentives to debate a common set of facts, although it is doubtful whether either is politically realistic at this point. In lieu of such reforms, giving citizens incentives and greater access to advanced liberal education and training in critical thought would at least provide tools for disentangling the confusing modern information landscape.

Conclusion

Since Raymond Geuss published Philosophy and Real Politics, interest has grown in exploring the realist elements of critical theory. In concluding, I want to offer a sketch of how the account of ideology and judgment presented here can be thought to represent an effective realist form of ideology critique that both recognizes the need for intersubjective validity and gives appropriate weight to radical criticism of dominant discourses of legitimation. As noted, while earlier intersubjective approaches focused on discourse ethics and Kantian normative generalizability as a


91. Raymond Geuss, Philosophy and Real Politics (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008). For recent discussions of critical theory as a form of political realism, see Azmanova, Scandal of Reason, 5–7, 27 (see note 2 above); Prinz and Rossi, “Political Realism as Ideology Critique” (see note 15 above).
regulative idea, recent democratic and critical theorists such as Linda Zerilli and Albena Azmanova have turned to Arendt’s theory of judgment for an alternative form of intersubjective validity. Arendt’s approach is attractive because, while it posits a form of intersubjectivity anchored in the human faculty of judgment itself, it is thought to be more politically realistic because it allows differing opinions and perspectives on political questions to be the essential feature of democratic politics. While deliberation among these differing perspectives is not assumed ultimately to lead to consensus, even in an idealized sense, they do have a politically productive capacity to help citizens arrive at more democratically cultivated and broad-minded political judgments. Conversely, other critical theorists have recently returned to a more refined version of the first generation’s position, expressing skepticism that any form of intersubjective validity can escape the problem of false consciousness and ideology. Michael J. Thompson is among the most sophisticated articulators of this perspective. He argues that power-laden structures of social life encode relations of domination in the very language and affective responses of modern subjects. Because this socialization creates prejudices rooted in the deep ontology of modern subjectivity, intersubjective approaches are unlikely to escape false consciousness, and their procedural appeal to democratic will-formation will unavoidably arrive at judgments that presuppose these socialized power relations. As a result, there is simply no way to avoid affording the critical theorist a privileged theoretical position in the practice of social critique.

In my view, any plausibly realist version of ideology critique must abandon such aspirations to a privileged theoretical position. Geuss perhaps best highlights the political logic that has historically driven critical theory toward what he calls “the obsession with whether or not we may call it ‘true,’” going on to point out that critical theories feel they must claim to be true “because the legitimizing ideologies of the society claim to be ‘true.’” While this is probably an undeniable political reality, Arendt’s approach suggests that, in fact, the attempt to raise any political opinion to the level of truth is ultimately a pyrrhic and self-defeating goal, for in seeking

to challenge ideology on its own fallacious epistemic terms, critical theorists can po-
tentially become entangled in ideological thinking themselves. Nevertheless, when
correctly understood, the idea of enlarged mentality may very well imply that rad-
cial critique has a unique role to play in political deliberation.

In an Arendtian framework, ideology critique would be approached very differ-
ently from the traditional false consciousness model. Ideology, as we have seen, re-
results from a category error that seeks to attribute the objective validity of truth
claims to political judgment. What may give many scholars pause about this notion
of ideology critique is that, prima facie, it implies a certain agnosticism regarding a
variety of potentially illiberal political stances. In other words, illiberal political
judgments such as racism, sexism, anti-LGBT attitudes, or religious intolerance
would not automatically be viewed as ideologies, but rather as political judgments
of some sort. This is a clear departure from traditional treatments of ideology,
which would typically classify such positions directly as ideologies and instances
of false consciousness. Arendt, by contrast, saw such political views as providing
fertile ground for potential ideological systems, but not unambiguously as ideolo-
gies themselves.

This distinction between illiberal political views and ideologies, as I have tried
to show, is evident in her 1957 discussion of ideology and judgment,95 but it has
roots in Arendt’s thought extending as far back as the distinction she drew be-
tween “race-thinking” in politics and ideological racism in Origins.96 Since these
discussions of the nature of ideology all occurred before her discovery of Kantian
intersubjective validity in judgment, we may infer that Arendt ultimately came to
view the development of ideologies as a complex, two-step process. This process
would involve first the passing of illiberal political judgments and then their pro-
gressive transformation into ideologies through a dysfunctional confrontation with
the normal process of public political deliberation in the contemporary modern
world.

I would specify such a process as follows: Because judgments are inherently per-
spectival, contextual, and hermeneutic, the form of validity they appeal to asks
whose judgment is better or worse, not whose judgment is objectively correct,
and there can be little doubt that such illiberal judgments would be viewed as very
poor indeed from the perspective of an enlarged mentality. It is this reality of their
poor quality (as defined by the point of view of an enlarged mentality) that forces

95. Arendt, Promise of Politics, 99–103 (see note 31 above).
96. Arendt, Origins, 158–70, quote on 158; Arendt also extended this distinction to "class-
thinking" and, presumably, to vulgar Marxism at 159 (see note 22 above).
proponents with illiberal views to either abandon such stances or turn them into ideologies when confronted by the crucible of pluralistic political deliberation. There are two reasons why such a choice would be inevitable. First, to say that the validity to which political opinion refers is not objective is slightly misleading in an epistemic sense, since it is certainly possible for political opinions to rely on false or inaccurate information. As I have tried to show, this was a crucial point for Arendt. Since virtually all illiberal political stances have at their foundations antiquated or tendentious epistemic beliefs, it is difficult to see how they could survive the crucible of pluralistic deliberation without turning themselves into ideologies in order to discount opposing factual evidence simply in principle. But secondly, the fundamentally deliberative process of cultivating a politically enlarged mentality all but guarantees that only by adopting an ideological stance can illiberal political judgments survive deliberation in the contemporary pluralistic and cosmopolitan world. Because an enlarged mentality involves cultivating a broader and deeper understanding of the evaluative and instrumental political context that we find ourselves in, the more diverse and sophisticated political opinions we expose ourselves to, the better—that is, more impartial and broad-minded—our judgment becomes.

Obviously, this forces us to rethink the basis for certain liberal commitments. For instance, while this account of judgment does not afford human rights the status of a moral truth or law, this is ultimately only a procedural issue, having to do with Arendt’s insistence that political opinion is a matter of free persuasion, and not the compelling force of truth. However, the result of such an Arendtian deliberative process is for all intents and purposes the same as that of an appeal to moral truth in the context of human rights. Human rights—as the most basic of liberal political stances—is an all but unavoidable conclusion of the cultivation of an enlarged mentality, especially in the modern pluralistic and cosmopolitan world where human rights assume such importance. One might say that the idea of human rights is the expression of the broadest possible enlarged mentality. Conversely, illiberal political positions are caught in a deep procedural dilemma, involving either a refusal to expand their mentality or to abandon their views in the face of honest deliberation. Because illiberal political positions are virtually by definition opposed to the cultivation of such an enlarged mentality, they would seem to have no choice but to turn themselves into ideologies in order to avoid this crucible of deliberation.

What, then, is the status of radical social critique in the process of cultivating a politically enlarged mentality? Radical critique, in fact, assumes a vital role. After all, Arendt insisted that cultivating an enlarged mentality is not about counting noses. We are not searching for generalizability or consensus, and certainly not
for majority opinion. Rather, we are each, as judges, seeking to expand and deepen our own distinct view of the common world. As a result, simply appealing to mainstream political views is likely to lead to a relatively narrow comprehension of the common world. Radical critique has the capacity to dramatically expand and deepen our perspective, and thus it is fair to say that although critical theory does not have a privileged theoretical position—and certainly is not the sole bearer of dialectically achieved truth—radical social theories would seem to possess greater perspectival weight than the relatively small spectrum of mainstream political views. Nevertheless, the ultimate lesson that Arendt’s reflections on judgment and ideology must teach us is that however compelling our political position is, we can never sidestep the necessity to deliberate with and try to persuade those with whom we disagree.

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