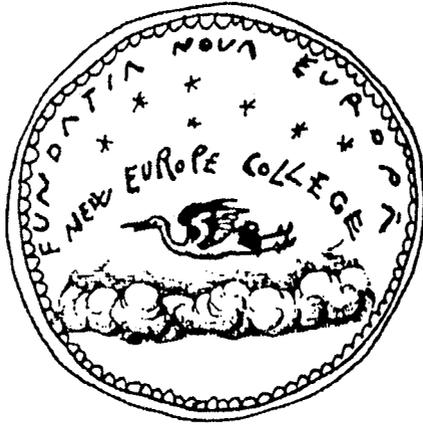


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DÓRA MÉRAI
JOSEF SCHOVANEC
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BÁLINT VARGA
WILLIAM DANIEL JÖEL TALLOTTE

Editor: Irina Vainovski-Mihai

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New Europe College
Str. Plantelor 21
023971 Bucharest
Romania
www.nec.ro; e-mail: nec@nec.ro

Tel. (+4) 021.307.99.10, Fax (+4) 021. 327.07.74



DANIEL KUCHLER

Born in 1981, in Germany

Ph.D. Candidate, State University of New York at Albany, Rockefeller College
of Public Affairs & Policy

Dissertation: *The Grammar of Republican Political Theory. A Critical
Discussion of Arendt and Habermas*

Grants & Fellowships:

Stipend and Tuition Scholarship, State University of New York at Albany,
2007-2011 Travel Grant, Graduate Student Organization (SUNY Albany), 2010
Travel Grant, Department of Political Science (SUNY Albany), 2009 and 2010

Areas of Specialization:

Hannah Arendt, Critical Theory and Critical Marxism (Habermas, Lukacz,
Gramsci, Luxemburg, Korsch, Bloch)

Methodology of the History of (Political) Thought

Modern Political Philosophy, Ancient Greek Political Philosophy
(Plato, Aristotle)

Further Research Interests:

History of Political Thought, Philosophy of Social Science, The relevance of the humanities and social sciences to political philosophy

Paper presentations at conferences in Germany, USA, UK, Canada

Published several articles, book chapters, book reviews

A CRITICISM OF ARENDT'S CONCEPT OF IDEOLOGY

Abstract

Hannah Arendt provides what could be called a *narrow* account of ideology: in it, ideology is mainly a feature of totalitarian or proto-totalitarian regimes and as such opposed to politics as Arendt understands it. After a brief discussion of Arendt's understanding of ideology and the benefits of such an understanding of the concept, I will introduce a concept of ideology that establishes ideologies to be a part of political life. Implicitly, this will highlight some aspects of political reality that are ignored by Arendt's political theory. In the end, I will suggest how Arendt's theory could be amended accordingly.

Keywords: Arendt, Gramsci, Ideology, Politics, Political Theory, Political Philosophy, Republicanism

1. Arendt's Understanding of Ideology

Hannah Arendt has an entirely negative understanding of ideologies as misguided and deceptive perspectives. Instead of understanding ideology in the context of group perspectives or otherwise socially established epistemic frameworks, as it is common in now-contemporary literature,¹ Arendt's emphasis is on individual perspectivalism that however acknowledges context as guiding perception.

In contrast, more inclusive accounts assigning ideology great epistemic relevance. I will discuss this conceptual difference to Arendt using the example of Gramsci, an Italian Marxist who provided a detailed treatment of ideology.

I will use Gramsci's account to show the short-comings of Arendt and will suggest an account of Arendtian perspectivalism that is embedded in an understanding of ideology that enables us to capture both the individual

perspective but also understand how this perspective is strictly bounded by group processes in an epistemic process that is essentially societal. Before I turn to a criticism of Arendt, I will now try to situate her narrow concept of ideology in her overall political theory.

1.1. Freedom and Politics

Arendt's political theory is probably best understood from the vantage point of a *political* conception of freedom. To Arendt, freedom means freedom "from the necessities of life and from compulsion by others" in order to engage in politics.² Politics is thus the fulfillment of this freedom, and neither a necessary evil nor a tool to arrive at some trans-political way of life.

Arendt's concept of politics is thus diametrically opposed to understandings of politics that reduce it to production of a desirable societal outcome and accordingly show a strong preference for a well-ordered and privatized citizenry, in order to control the chaos of politics.³

Following Arendt's train of thought, such a reduction of politics to administration⁴ has disastrous results as it means undermining freedom as such: freedom is undermined if not linked with public action. In this sense, both labor⁵ and fabrication are not activities to which "freedom" is applicable:

The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action. This freedom which we take for granted in all political theory and which even those who praise tyranny must still take into account is the very opposite of "inner freedom", the inward space into which men may escape from external coercion and feel free. This inner feeling remains without outer manifestations and hence is by definition politically irrelevant. [...] The experiences of inner freedom are derivative in that they always presuppose a retreat from the world, where freedom was denied, into an inwardness to which no other has access.⁶

Moving freedom into the private realm would thus render it politically irrelevant, or even non-existent from a political perspective. Arendt thus emphasizes the "[t]he differentiation between the private household and the public political realm, [...] between activities which should be hidden in privacy and those which [...] [are] worth being seen, heard, and remembered".⁷

Freedom outside of the public space can thus only be possible in the more limited liberal but not the *political* (Arendtian) understanding: if freedom is restricted to private affairs, the free and equal dialogical exchange (*ἰσηγορία*) between citizens is impossible. This means that re-defining freedom as a private condition (instead of a characteristic of public-political life) undermines politics itself.

1.2. Plurality as Condition of the World

Arendt understands the world as a plural space in which citizens can appear before others in speech and deed. This means that anyone who decides to act politically, has a chance of being heard by their fellow citizens, or even initiate political action that is then carried out in conjunction with others. The *human condition* is thus characterized by life among others, in a world that exists only because it is constantly recreated by the plurality of humans. Accordingly, Arendt sees plurality as both a central dimension of the human condition as well as a value of the political community.⁸ As a result, politics is intrinsically linked to the world: Arendt suggests accordingly that caring (“Sorge”) for the world is at the center of politics.⁹

The world as Arendt understands it shows distinctive characteristics. It is (a) constituted through acting; (b) it is further a space of appearance in which (c) all citizens have the equal right to address the assembly (*ἰσηγορία*), (d) that is physically delimited and (e) separate from necessity (localized in the household, or *οἶκος*).

(a) The world is constituted through the actions and speech of the citizens as a system of human relations. Arendt thus relates to the world as talking and talked-about history (“redende und beredete Geschichte”).¹⁰ This further links politics to the world because acting and speaking – according to Arendt – are the genuinely political activities. They are *political* because they are situated outside the necessary and useful.¹¹ Arendt thus emphasizes the pluralism of voices in the assembly – opinions (or, *δόξαι*) – as constitutive of politics.

In this sense, freedom lies in action and thus, can only exist in relation to the political:¹² politics is therefore not a means to freedom. Rather, “to live in the polis” and “to be free” is identical.¹³ Freedom is thus constituted by a space in which every citizen can move among and interact with equals.¹⁴ Arendt accordingly understands equality as the equal right to

political action, which includes freedom of speech in the sense of equal right to address the assembly of citizens (*ισηγορία*).¹⁵

In Arendt's understanding, freedom is thus neither freedom from the worldly affairs, nor from the political. It is not refraining from action but rather to be understood in the sense of *ἀρχεῖν* (to begin, to rule, to be free) and *αγερε* (to begin something). These activities equally constitute citizenship for all citizens.

(b) Against colloquial perceptions of 'politics' in which acting is reserved for a select group of people, Arendt understands politics as a *space* in which citizens *appear* as *actors* and that can provide human affairs with the property of permanence.¹⁶ This permanence of the *polis* can also enable the individual citizen to gain immortality in song or story if one distinguishes oneself through word or deed.

(c) The political space is thus not marked by equalizing ("Gleichmacherei") but by distinguishing oneself from the masses. At the same time, the political space provides each citizen equally with the opportunity to stand out from the masses.¹⁷ It is thus a life amongst equals in which no one rules and no one is ruled over but in which everyone is engaged in a competitive (not to say *agonistic*) environment, attempting to prove that they have qualities above the average.¹⁸

(d) Here, "political *space*" is not only used metaphorically: instead, politics is understood to be delimited by the *walls of the polis*.¹⁹ Only within the space of the polis, a commonly shared world exists. This means that a community establishes a narrative context and makes action possible and meaningful.²⁰ This delimitation is necessary, as Jones points out:

[...] political action in the *polis* depends on face-to-face interaction in speech, so that its numbers must remain small.²¹

Like Rousseau before her, Arendt is thus convinced to have a truly participatory polity, it may not be allowed to grow too large. This however also means that the understandings reached between the citizens are always contingent on the political space in which they were reached. Universal notions may not be reached through politics. This is a point that will become important in my later discussion of ideology.

(e) Furthermore, politics, because it is distinguished from necessity is based on the distinction between the public and free *polis* of equal citizens and the *οἶκος* that provides for the necessities of life and in which relations are hierarchical.

The political space is to be distinguished from the *οἶκος* because *freedom* as an essential property of the ‘political’ can only exist in a realm beyond necessity. The *οἶκος* on the other hand is primarily concerned with providing the necessities of life.²² What is more, the polis can only consist of citizens that are equal in the sense of *ισηγορία*, while the *οἶκος* is based on a hierarchical relationship between the head of the household (who is a citizen in the polis) and *his* wife, *his* children and *his* slaves. The *οἶκος* is thus based on a fundamental inequality. To speak of freedom here, would not only be wrong, it would constitute a category-mistake: in the *οἶκος* there is no freedom (for noone – not even for the head of the household)²³ because freedom can only exist in a space where there are only equals engaged in a public discussion. Still, by providing the necessities of life and thus removing necessity as such from public life, the *οἶκος* provides the foundation for the freedom of the polis.²⁴

In this way, Arendt brings the question of socio-economic conditions back in through the back door as enabling conditions for genuine politics. Still, politics itself has to be independent of economic and, ideally, politics is not to concern itself with social questions. Arendt maintains in *On Revolution* that it was the emphasis on the social question that undermined *the political* in the French revolution.

However, Habermas correctly criticizes Arendt:

Wir können die Bedingungen politischer Freiheit sinnvoll nur im Zusammenhang einer Emanzipation von Herrschaft diskutieren. Diese Kategorie der Herrschaft darf politische Gewalt und soziale Macht nicht trennen, sondern muss sie als das zeigen, was beide sind: als Repression. Unter Bedingungen sozialer Abhängigkeit bleibt das Recht auf politische Freiheit Ideologie.²⁵

By assuming that the socio-economic conditions *should be* as such that they enable genuine politics, Arendt provides a powerful counter-image to contemporary politics. Yet, by assuming these socio-economic conditions as given (in the ideal world of genuine politics) and thus, by excluding the socio-economic conditions from actual *political* consideration, Arendt at the same time deprives herself of the opportunity to understand the complete picture of domination.

1.3. Imagination

In order to understand Arendt's concept of politics, it is important to consider her concept of *imagination*. Due to the fact that each human has a unique view on the world and the resulting plurality of possible perspectives, it is important to be able to consider (or, imagine) other points of view. In her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt criticizes Eichmann for his inability to think: he could sit in front of victims of the *shoah* and discuss at length details of organizing deportation with a certain pride in his organizational skills. While Arendt uses "thinking" in different ways,²⁶ this "*inability to think*" refers to Eichmann's lack of *imagination*.²⁷ 'Imagination' is understood as the ability to see something from the perspective of somebody else.²⁸ It is this ability of imagination, which reconciles the different individual perspectives, provided by the *δόξαι* of the citizenry but does not resolve them. It enables them to discuss and argue and eventually evaluate opinions. Still imagination is based both on multiple perspectives perceived in political dialogue. It then tries to retrace these perspectives before the shared background of the community. In this regard, imagination is based on a shared perception. As such, it enables further political speech and action.

However, imagination does neither sort out the one true statement from the opinions nor does it unify them into a *volonté generale*. Arendt sees this as a distinctive quality of the *polis* and for this reason, she rejects all attempts to subdue politics under a universalist notion. One specific type of these universalist notions would be ideologies, on which I will focus in the following pages.

1.4. Universalisms

Arendt criticizes universalist thought.²⁹ She believes that understanding the world from a universalist perspective would prioritize uniformity and necessity over contingency.³⁰ Conceptualizing the world through a universalist framework would moreover lead to an understanding of politics as a means to produce pre-determined goals.

Arendt interprets reliance on such foundations as the attempt to free thought from uncertainty, and therefore to establish a predictable end of politics and a reduction of action to production.³¹ One way to do so is through ideology.

In contrast, the plural world of Arendt's understanding of politics appears as a lunatic asylum from the perspective of understanding politics as a type of producing the results dictated by a universal notion.

Yet, from an Arendtian perspective, such attempts to control the fluid space "between past and future" through the introduction of universalisms that allow to construct laws of movement (or at least a trajectory of historic development) have a devastating effect of politics and public life.

According to Arendt, critical and free thinking can neither rely on history, nor on logic or ideology.³²

Instead, Arendt emphasizes the importance of a plurality of phenomena to politics. She thus rejects any universalist position because she believes universalism to reduce the phenomenal to a derivative of something that does not appear itself. This assumption of a unitary *Seiendes* would do away with the pluralism of phenomena. In contrast, to Arendt, a phenomenon only stands for itself.³³

Arendt therefore rejects what she calls metaphysical thought, which is (α) the assumption that there is something behind the world that appears in the world (e.g. human nature or the telos of history) and (β) that which is behind appearance also causes it ("Seiendes" causes phenomena), thus establishing a unidirectional relationship of foundation.

Accordingly, Arendt writes that

[t]he elementary logical fallacy of all theories that rely on the dichotomy of Being and Appearance is obvious and was early discovered and summed up by the sophist Gorgias in a fragment from his lost treatise *On Non-Being* or *On Nature* supposedly a refutation of Eleatic philosophy: "Being is not manifest since it does not appear [to men: *dokein*]; appearing [to men] is weak since it does not succeed in being."³⁴

In sum, the Platonic-Heideggerian *ontic-ontological difference* between essence and appearance, eternal and fugitive is rejected by Arendt: asking about the metaphysical prevents assessing that which is genuinely political because there is no essence independent of human behavior, no unitary being behind political appearance, no independent point to assess the world.³⁵ Rejecting all universals, Arendt instead focuses on the particular.

1.5. Ideology in Arendt's Political Theory

To Arendt, ideology is a specific type of subsuming interhuman reality under a universal claim: Arendt writes that (a) ideologies too, aim to produce a reality according to an idea, (b) in absolute disregard of phenomenal experience or existing reality. Instead, they (c) rely on the logicity of the process, with devastating results.

(a) In Arendt's understanding, ideological thinking orders facts into a procedure of absolute logic, which starts from axiomatically accepted premises, deducing everything from them. In other words, ideological thought claims to be able to explain everything and every actual occurrence by reducing it to conclusions drawn from a single set of premises.

Ideology thus proceeds with a consistency that exists nowhere in reality. In this sense, ideological argumentation is a kind of logical deduction. For example, Arendt suggests that Hitler and Stalin proceeded to drive ideological implications into extremes of logical consistency. In this sense, ideology is the logic of an idea applied to history.³⁶

Ideologies start from an abstract idea and then proceed deductively. They promise a desirable outcome similar to utopias but in contrast to them, they suggest a process that is to unfold from the present point in time into the future *with necessity*. Ideologies thus claim to understand the logic of the process through past, present and future. History is not to be *interpreted* through the schema of an idea but rather to be *calculated* by it.³⁷ Ideology thus does not enable one to make statements about historical facts. Instead, it suggests the ability to predict a process that is the logical unfolding of *the idea*.³⁸ As such, it is not subject to change through human action; in an ideological system, freedom in the Arendtian sense does not exist.

(b) Rather than to adjust thinking to the realities of the world, in ideological thought, the attempt is made to change reality according to ideology – in trying to stay ahead of developments that are to happen with *necessity* or to accelerate a *necessary* process. Thus, ideology gives primacy to thought and ideas over the shared human reality.³⁹

Because ideological claims are reduced from ideas that are external to reality (because they are *yet* to be realized), they are independent of all experience. This marks the emancipation of thought from experience and reality. As a consequence, ideological thinking ruins all relationships with reality, making us unable to experience or imagine other perspectives. The result is the isolation of humans that in turn prevents forming a web

of relationships and undermines the continued recreation of the shared world.⁴⁰

(c) In the end, the logicity of the process becomes more important than the idea itself, Arendt claims. This has potentially murderous consequences:

You can't say A without saying B and C and so on, down to the end of the murderous alphabet.⁴¹

If one accepts the ideological procedure of starting with a premise and then deducing conclusions with necessity, these conclusions can again become premises for further logical deductions. Humans thus only play a role in making history adequate to automatons: they play a pre-defined part with a fixed outcome and are thus absolved of all judgment and also all responsibility: if history is like a force of nature, no one can stop it or change its course. What is more, this conception of history would not only escape all judgment but also leave no room for freedom in the Arendtian sense.

This way of looking at the world thus not only negates all human freedom but also proves to be inhuman as it leaves no room for humanitarian considerations. If ideology dictates it, any mass-murder is beyond even the need for legitimation (as if such legitimation was actually possible) because it is just another *necessary* conclusion from the ideological premise-set.

Since Arendt's critique of logic is important to her critique of ideology, I will now discuss it in greater detail.

1.6. Logic

Arendt thus further criticizes logic, not only as a characteristic of ideology but also in-itself. She claims a (a) coercive quality for logic that (b) makes it anti-plural and (c) worldless and, as a consequence, (d) moves it close to totalitarianism.

(a) According to Arendt, the appeal of logicity is based on our fear of contradicting ourselves. Arendt calls this the "coercive force of logicity" which results in the submission of the mind to logic as a never-ending process.⁴²

In contrast to the “coercive force of logicity”, free thought is free of such coercion but marked by the desire to be coerced by no one and wanting to coerce no one “either by force or by proofs”.⁴³ This belief in coercive necessity has disastrous results because it undermines the ability to act. With it, it threatens the phenomena themselves as well as their composition into an “actual story” with an internal meaning.⁴⁴

(b) The coercion of logicity relies on the isolation of humans⁴⁵ or their unification into a cohesive whole with similar thought patterns. Only under these circumstances, logic could even operate, since multiple perspectives would undermine any given premise set. Therefore, the “negative coercion of logic” entails the “prohibition of contradictions”⁴⁶ and thus an end to pluralism. The result again is solitude:

Luther says: “A lonely man, a man in complete solitude, always deduces one thing from the other and always arrives at the worst conclusion.” Logicity, that is mere reasoning without regard for facts and experience, is the true vice of solitude.⁴⁷

(c) Like ideology, logic ignores facts just as well as appearances. As a result, logic turns out to be entirely *worldless*. It cannot replace the connection with reality because it is not capable to capture the world and distinctness of the “new” as it enters the world. Meaning to logic is then not a result of a human web of relations but derived from a presupposed structure that serves as premise.⁴⁸

In this sense, logic is not bound to a community.⁴⁹ Paradoxically, by departing from a premise that ultimately cannot be based in anything and by losing connection with the world, the entire process turns out to be arbitrary. No moral claims can be secured because beginning from arbitrary premises, depending on the premises, any conclusion is possible.

(d) This has dramatic political consequences, as the coercion through logic is highly dangerous to the political space itself.⁵⁰ Canovan asserts that here that Arendt suggests logical deduction to be a possible link between philosophy and totalitarianism.⁵¹ This should not be overstated: Obviously, the fact that all totalitarian regimes proceed logically, does not make logic totalitarian. However, the arbitrariness that results from world-detachment and the necessity with which it draws its conclusions always carry the possibility of turning totalitarian, given a wrong premise.

In the following section, I will now turn to the connection of logicity to totalitarianism.

1.7. Totalitarianism

Arendt suggests that the understanding of politics from an ideological standpoint carries within it the risk of turning into a totalitarian system. Instead of thinking of freedom and politics as co-constitutive, as suggested by Arendt, ideology reduces politics to the sphere of necessity. Citizens in this conception would not be free actors but rather controlled by circumstances external to them.⁵²

Further, the replacement of plural action by a singular, unitary will that is produced by ideology and directed at the idea that is to be realized is at the core of ideological thinking.⁵³ Insofar as “singular, unitary will” is a characteristic of totalitarianism, ideology appears structurally similar to totalitarianism.⁵⁴

As we have seen, while the capacity to logic is common to us all, it does not rely on the common world but rather undermines it.⁵⁵ Young-Bruehl explains that

[Arendt] had noted the ingredient or element of totalitarianism [...]: contempt for the factuality of the world. In their drive to change the world, the Nazi totalitarians came to worship logicity, reasoning deductively from a premise to a logical conclusion, with complete disregard for how things are, with concern only for how they were inevitably going to be when Nature had worked its way to the triumph of the Aryan race. In her understanding, totalitarians were liars not in the usual or mundane sense that they set out intentionally to mislead or deceive with untruths [...] but in the sense that they set out to override reality, to lead people to detach themselves from reality [...] [It] was a speciality of their “philosopher-kings”, Hilter [*sic!*] and Stalin, both of whom wrote in praise of logicity or ideological consistency [...].⁵⁶

While it is of key importance to note that Arendt acknowledged that totalitarianism constituted an entirely new phenomenon, it is also significant that there are elements of continuity with logic: first, there is the shared disregard of the pluralistically established world in favor of some deductive view of history. Instead of building and securing the *political* space, the shared world between different people, both logic – as applied by ideologists – and totalitarianism seek to deny the citizens access to the public realm. Accordingly, Arendt writes that “Logicity, that is mere reasoning without regard for facts and experience is the true vice of solitude.”⁵⁷

This means that logic works to detach humans from the world in a two-fold mechanism: first, there is a direct personal effect, the “slide from solitude into loneliness”.⁵⁸ In contrast to solitude, loneliness is a condition of isolation that Arendt identifies as a precondition for totalitarian rule.⁵⁹ As a result, one who subjects oneself to logic is always in danger of becoming atomized. If this atomization happens on a larger scale this could provide fertile ground for totalitarian rule.⁶⁰

Second, as Arendt writes, logicity ignores facts just like appearances. Therefore, logical thought is disconnected from the shared world. Based on any arbitrary premise set (which is exchangeable), any arbitrary conclusion could follow. On this basis, no moral judgment can be possible. This mechanism is similar – if not identical – to the one Arendt later identifies in the Eichmann trial: detachment from a shared world is what only makes Eichmann’s behavior possible. On the one hand, his *inability* to see anything from another’s perspective⁶¹ has its foundation in this detachment; on the other hand, Eichmann was part of the (German) collective that created its own logically consistent reality that differed from that of the non-criminal world and that enabled them to commit industrialized mass-murder on a previously unknown scale.⁶²

This deep intrinsic compatibility of logic with totalitarian thought allows that logic becomes a means to totalitarian thought.

1.8. Arendt’s Concept of Ideology

This now leads us to the question of ideology. Arendt primarily understands ideology as a feature of the totalitarian states – the Stalinist USSR and the so-called “Third Reich” as well as the pseudo-political movements that preceded them. Ideology is clearly anti-political and thus works to undermine any political community.

Ideology is further dangerous because – combined with logicity – it enables one to demand anything that can be deduced from its premise-set; seemingly legitimizing *shoah* and *gulag*.

Arendt here presents what from a contemporary perspective might be called a *narrow definition* of ‘ideology’. Other writers have used ideology much more broadly to signify somewhat closed belief-systems in general, as a general feature of politics.

Naturally, it is impossible to imagine Arendt’s narrow concept of ideology as a feature of her understanding of politics because it is by definition antithetical to it. Arendt’s political actors cannot be conceived

as *actors* if they are entangled in ideology (in the narrow, Arendtian sense of the word). However, this would not rule out that ideology more broadly understood (and maybe called by a different name) could be incorporated into Arendt's political theory.

However, this broader conception is also ruled out by another aspect of Arendt's political theory. As we have seen before, Arendt's entire conception of political life relies on what could be called perspectivalism: the insight that everything can be seen and actually is seen from different perspectives, that further every citizen has a unique perspective and that no one has legitimate claim to possessing a superior perspective. However, through discussion and imagination we can attempt to gain access to other perspectives. Arendt further accounts for a limited amount of coherence by every citizen's desire to become part of the city's narrative and thus situate themselves in it. In so far, one would understand the world from the vantage point provided by the political community. This could be called an ideological limitation (if ideology is understood more broadly than Arendt does). Yet, for Arendt's theory to work (and not to break down into relativism), this limitation of perspective can only be minor.

Moreover, Arendt rejects the dichotomy of essence and appearance; instead, to Arendt, all there is, is appearance. Yet, a broader understanding of ideology would presuppose that there was an *real* world from which ideological thought diverges. To be sure, given that Arendt embraces her narrow version of ideology still suggests that invalid perspectives on the world could be identified: what would make a perspective invalid would be its incapability to be exposed to political debate. In fact, invalid perspectives would undermine or preclude debate.

What is more, if perspectivalism was significantly limited by such ideology, politics in the Arendtian sense (that relies on true plurality) would cease to exist. Arendt's normative account of politics therefore prevents it from being a framework for the critique of ideology in the broader sense.

Arendt's understanding of politics clearly has its merits: it enables her to understand the political space as composed of free citizens that all enter discussion with their unique perspective. Yet, it appears to be blind to an understanding of political thinking as delimited by axiomatically and communally accepted assumptions about the world – something we might call ideology in the broader sense: ideology in this broader sense – as a semi-closed belief system shared by all or at least most citizens that is a feature of all political systems as opposed to something that is to be overcome – is incompatible with perspectivalism.

2. Gramsci

I will now turn to Gramsci's account of ideologies to further emphasize what aspects of politics are potentially missed by Arendt's political theory.

According to the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, every society is based on a consensus. This consensus is produced by ideology; ideology is thus to be understood as a specific perspective on the world that generates according behavior. It stabilizes society by reducing plurality and thus creating social coherence through a centripetal momentum. This obviously works counter to Arendt's notion of genuine politics as this latter concept is based on plurality. At the same time ideology also serves to stabilize those socio-economic relations that are beneficial to few and detrimental to most. As such, ideologies are an instrument of indirect rule and of major importance for the functioning of modern industrial society.

By including socio-economic relations, Gramsci here puts a central focus of his political theory on what Arendt had excluded as private. Gramsci identifies three sets of structural elements of ideologies, which to him are intertwined with everyday knowledge: (1) the language as a set of knowledge and concepts, (2) everyday knowledge and bon sens, as well as (3) popular religion.⁶³ Any ideology delimits discourse by establishing some claims as true. It materializes by forming institutions and producing subjects. Through this, ideologies produce certain behavioral norms and by this undermine or preclude the plurality of Arendt's genuine politics. Ideologies thus guarantee coherence of history, philosophy and politics with the established social order and thus produce behavioral norms, a shared history, popular beliefs and the framework of political life. This makes it prerequisite for the exercise of political power.⁶⁴ In this sense, ideologies in Gramsci's broader conception produce ideology in Arendt's narrower understanding of ideologies.

The ideology that serves as a foundation of the *superstructure* is initially based on the consciousness of the dominant social group ("ruling class"). This self-consciousness is not a new creation but rather an evolution of preceding world-views. It is modified to fit everyday knowledge and amended by aspects of other classes' self-consciousness.⁶⁵ This process of amending is necessary for a class to become hegemonic: to create a hegemonic ideology, a social class has to include national-popular ideological elements in the hegemonic principle and thus accommodate the other social groups so they can identify with the ideology. Consequently, a social class can be called dominant, if it succeeds in

gathering support from a sufficiently large portion of the population for an ideology that accords to the dominant group's interests at least in key aspects. In order to accomplish this, it however has to recognize interests of other social groups as well.⁶⁶ Thus, ideologies are never the product of one single social group but rather the product of relations between rival hegemonic forces. They undergo a perpetual process of transformation.⁶⁷

A class is hegemonic when it is able to create and maintain its dominant role in a unified and coherent ideological discourse.⁶⁸ Thus, ideology is far from being monolithic and yet, in the last instance, it guarantees hegemony of the ruling class over the *subaltern* classes.

In order to achieve this goal, culture is a means to manufacture social unity⁶⁹ through the distribution of ideas that are accepted as true. In other words, culture to Gramsci is a means to distribute the dominant ideology.⁷⁰ Culture is thus understood as a type of thinking that has become manifest in morals, customs, philosophy and religion. Through this it serves to reproduce ideology but also to provide an ideational structure to secure societal order.

Also, ideologies manifest themselves in producing a material structure. This includes elements that constitute the cultural environment and thus human consciousness: schools, churches, clubs, mass media, theaters, libraries, museums, architecture, even streets and their names. These structural expressions of ideology are influential because they are very enduring and cannot be changed in the short term.⁷¹

Still, culture is not deliberately produced by those who rule; it is therefore much more than the Marxian "opium". Yet, a functioning culture produces the prevailing opinion that the given order is the best possible order, or at least without any real alternative.

Because of this, to Gramsci, ideologies are instruments of rule.⁷² As such, they not only hide the specific coercive character of rule of humans over humans but masquerade themselves in order not to appear as ideologies. This means that ideologies appear as the natural structure of the human world while in fact they provide a structure to the world that is not naturally there.⁷³

Any culture needs such an ideological structure to function in the world. In other words, since categorization is necessary to understand reality and since categorization does not happen in a vacuum but rather along societally accepted lines, cognition has to be ideological. Reality does not exist as a transcendental instance that exists 'an und für sich' but is rather a set of phenomena that is functionally categorized. In this

way, through categorization the perspective on the world is (to a certain degree) pre-determined.

To Gramsci, ideologies thus constitute human-social reality.⁷⁴ They construct mental patterns that performatively influence our view of the world.⁷⁵ The perceived reality is therefore just a mere construction based on the phenomena and their societal interpretation.

Yet, it is important to emphasize that these structures – ideologies – provide a specific perspective on the world that reproduces the status quo and thus benefits the dominant social groups.

3. Conclusions

Admittedly, Gramsci's account of ideology relies heavily on Marxist underpinnings. After all, it is a variation on Lenin's theory of imperialism combined with a revision of the Marxist structure-superstructure model. However, as has become clear in our brief elaboration on Gramsci's concept of ideology, Gramsci's model of politics is critical and flexible (and realistic) enough to provide an amendment (or even alternative) to Arendt's concept of ideology.

Gramsci presents us with an intriguing suggestion: for any political system to work, it requires a certain amount of coherence within which the plural perspectives are situated. This coherence can hardly be spontaneous, specifically not in large-scale modern, industrialized societies. It also cannot be forced – to Gramsci, the application of force is always a sign of a failed consensus, an eroding ideology and as a result, of a state that is on the brink of failing. This however is not to say that violent suppression of minorities is always an option for the state as long as the minority is small enough to be excluded from the consensus and their violent submission can be explained to the majority as something they brought upon themselves.

This opens up a critical dimension that is not present in Arendt. In fact, a comparison with Gramsci's account of ideology shows a gap in Arendt's political theory that makes it somewhat idealist. From a Gramscian point of view, all those different perspectives in political debate would always be delimited by the ideological consensus. Thinking outside the consensus would be "unthinkable" for most and those who resist ideology would most likely be ridiculed or considered politically radical. From the Gramscian

perspective, political debate can function because of these pre-discursive exclusions.

This reminds one somewhat of Arendt's concept of narrativity, as the narrative of the *polis*, too, provides the context that only makes debate and action possible. Yet while to Arendt narrativity is positive because it enables political action, to Gramsci, (who calls it ideology) it is how rather negative as it can at least potentially be used to secure domination. Yet, Gramsci would agree that even non-dominating socio-economic relations would require a narrative or ideological superstructure (in the broader sense), to ensure the stability of the republic and its citizenry. It is thus important to note that ideology in the broader sense can be both, it can enable politics, as Arendt suggests but it can also undermine it, as Gramsci maintains. In our current situation, it tends to be the latter.

Gramsci's perspective therefore points to an important amendment to Arendt's political theory. A republican understanding of politics would always have to consider both: an understanding of ideology in the Arendtian sense – a proto-totalitarian factor that necessarily undermines the very possibility of politics, and an understanding of ideology in the Gramscian sense – as a necessary socio-ideational force that delimits discourse but does not *necessarily* prevent it; in fact, it can both enable and undermine it. Understanding the Gramscian concept of ideology and incorporating it into a republican theory is thus necessary to understand the boundaries of discourse that *de facto* exist in society. It is further necessary to use Gramsci's political theory to incorporate a focus on socio-economic domination (that is – at least – less developed in Arendt's theory).

A republican conception of the state – if it wants to be critical of the state – thus has to acknowledge that societal cohesion is brought about by identifiable ideational structures. This however, is not to mean that it should not emphasize perspectival plurality as a key feature of ideal political debate. In fact, by acknowledging discourse's limitations in ideology, republican theory can actually contribute to widen the discursive boundaries, instead of further narrowing discourse and thus slowly slipping into what could be described as *Arendtian* ideology.

In this way, using Arendt's political theory as a counter-image to the current *real existing politics* provides a perspective on what politics should (and could) be. Striving for an Arendtian ideal genuine political discourse would be a start to deal with the socio-economic domination described by Gramsci.

NOTES

- 1 See for example the works of Michael Freeden.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 3 Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Search for a New Political Philosophy*, 16.
- 4 I have described Arendt's critique of the reduction of politics to administration in detail in: Kuchler, *Republikanismus im Spannungsfeld zwischen Politik und Verrechtlichung*.
- 5 cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 12.
- 6 Arendt, "What Is Freedom," 145.
- 7 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 85.
- 8 This suggests an important political distinction between Arendtian pluralism and liberal pluralism because the former is inherently connected with human interaction and political participation while the latter lacks the characteristics. See Klockars, "Plurality as a Value," 64.
- 9 Arendt, *Was Ist Politik?*, 24–26.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 89f.
- 11 Arendt, *Vita Activa Oder Vom Tätigen Leben*, 35; Arendt generally attributes competence to act politically to the people. See Arendt, "What Remains? The Language Remains': A Conversation with Günther Gaus," 22.
- 12 Arendt, *Was Ist Politik?*, 34f.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 40.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 14f. Hull points out that appearance has both ontological and political significance. On the ontological level, it means that all things have the same property of appearing. Politically speaking, appearance signifies the distinction of private and public. To be political, things have to appear. See Hull, *The Hidden Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, 60–61; as well as Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 1: Thinking:19.
- 17 Arendt, *Macht Und Gewalt*, 69.
- 18 Arendt, *Vita Activa Oder Vom Tätigen Leben*, 52f.
- 19 Arendt, *Was Ist Politik?*, 40f.
- 20 Arendt, *Vita Activa Oder Vom Tätigen Leben*, 33f.
- 21 Jones, "Heidegger the Fox: Hannah Arendt's Hidden Dialogue," 186.
- 22 Arendt, *Was Ist Politik?*, 41.
- 23 Arendt, *Vita Activa Oder Vom Tätigen Leben*, 42.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 40f.
- 25 Habermas, "Die Geschichte von den zwei Revolutionen", 227.
- 26 In my forthcoming dissertation thesis on Arendt's and Habermas' conception of Republican Theory, I distinguish between at least three different concepts that Arendt denotes by the term "thinking".

- 27 There indeed is a tension between *Thinking and Moral Considerations* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. In the former, Arendt suggests that “inability to think” is the result of avoiding intercourse with ourselves (Cf. Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” 445). while in *Eichmann* it is used as the inability to see the other perspective.
- 28 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 124–126.
- 29 However, it might be argued that her assumption of humans as ζῷον πολιτικόν constitutes such a universalism.
- 30 Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Search for a New Political Philosophy*, 6–7.
- 31 Vollrath, “Politik Und Metaphysik,” 37.
- 32 Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts About Lessing,” 8.
- 33 Schmitz calls this *phenomenalist radicalism*. See Schmitz, “Die Perspektivische Konstitution Des Politischen. Überlegungen Zu Hannah Arendts Wirklichkeitsbegriff,” 22–24.
- 34 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 1: Thinking:25.
- 35 Breier, “Hannah Arendts Politische Wissenschaft,” 51, 52.
- 36 Arendt, “Ideology and Terror,” 468–471.
- 37 Arendt, “Ideology and Terror,” 469, 470.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 469.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 470–471.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 470–471, 474.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 472.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 472–473; Arendt, “Hermann Broch: 1886-1951,” 134.
- 43 Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts About Lessing,” 8; See Heuer, “Zwischenmenschlichkeit,” 121.
- 44 Vollrath, “Methode Des Politischen Denkens,” 69.
- 45 Heuer, *Citizen*, 106.
- 46 Arendt, “Ideology and Terror,” 469–470.
- 47 Arendt, “On the Nature of Totalitarianism,” 16–17 (Second Manuscript).
- 48 See Vollrath, “Methode Des Politischen Denkens,” 75.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 79.
- 50 Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts About Lessing,” 8.
- 51 Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation*, 261.
- 52 Arendt, *Vita Activa Oder Vom Tätigen Leben*, 229.
- 53 See also Vollrath, “Politik Und Metaphysik,” 32.
- 54 Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation*, 261.
- 55 For example, cf. Arendt, “Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding),” 317.
- 56 Young-Bruehl and Kohn, “Truth, Lies, and Politics: A Conversation,” 1051f.
- 57 Arendt, “On the Nature of Totalitarianism,” n.d., Second Manuscript, 17. Nye is further correct to suggest – as I will discuss later – that Arendt’s rejection

of philosophy is linked to her choice of essayism and story-telling as form of her writings.

58 Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation*, 262; In "Socrates or Heidegger?," 146–147 Canovan also comments on the relationship between solitude and preference for strong government and distaste for plurality.

59 Arendt, "On the Nature of Totalitarianism," n.d., Second Manuscript, 14.

60 It is important to note that – of course – atomism-through-logic is neither a sufficient nor necessary condition for totalitarian rule. Isolation can be brought about in different ways, and isolation alone does not automatically lead to totalitarianism.

61 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 124–126.

62 *Ibid.*, 129.

63 Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte. Kritische Gesamtausgabe.*, n. N.11 §12 (Vol.6 pp.1375ff.).

64 *Ibid.*, n. N.10.2 §2 (Vol.6 p.1255); N.10.2 §17 (Vol.6 pp.1268f.); N.11 §37 (Vol.6 p.1447)).

65 Kramer, "Gramscis Interpretation Des Marxismus. Die Bestimmung Von Basis Und Überbau Als "historischer Block," 173ff.

66 Kramer, "Gramscis Interpretation Des Marxismus. Die Bestimmung Von Basis Und Überbau Als "historischer Block," 173ff.; Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," 194f.

67 Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," 194.

68 *Ibid.*, 195.

69 Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte. Kritische Gesamtausgabe.*, n. N.11 §12 (Vol.6 pp.1377f.).

70 *Ibid.*, n. N.11 §12 (Vol.6 p.1377).

71 Kramer, "Gramscis Interpretation Des Marxismus. Die Bestimmung Von Basis Und Überbau Als "historischer Block," 174.

72 *Ibid.*, N.10.2 §41 (Vol.6 pp.1324f.)

73 Accordingly, to Gramsci objectivity does not necessarily mean the congruence of consciousness with reality but only the universal acceptance of an idea. The idea is not true 'an sich' but only for a community.

74 *Ibid.*, N.11 §30 (Vol.6 pp.1436f.)

75 *Ibid.*, N.10.2 §42 (Vol.6 pp.1333)

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