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## Thinking, Meaning, and Truth: Arendt on Heidegger and the Possibility of Critique

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### Recommended Citation

Gaffney, Jennifer. Thinking, Meaning, and Truth: Arendt on Heidegger and the Possibility of Critique. *Constellations*, , : , 2022. Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, Philosophy: Faculty Publications and Other Works, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12647>

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# Thinking, meaning, and truth: Arendt on Heidegger and the possibility of critique

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Few topics in Arendt's corpus have garnered more attention than her analysis of the dangers inherent in Adolf Eichmann's inability to think. Eichmann revealed what Arendt describes as the banality of evil, a new kind of evil born not of monstrous or demonic motives but of thoughtlessness (Arendt, 2006, p. 54).<sup>1</sup> Yet, while Eichmann made clear the urgent need we have to think, scholars remain at odds as to whether Arendt succeeds in demonstrating that thinking itself has a role to play in preventing evil-doing (Bernstein, 2000; Biser, 2014; Formosa, 2016). My aim is to give new orientation to these debates by reconsidering Arendt's critical reception of Martin Heidegger in *The Life of the Mind* in relation to her claim that thinking must be understood terms of the quest for meaning rather than truth (Arendt, 1978, Vol. 1, p. 15).<sup>2</sup> By developing Arendt's emphasis on meaning this way, I argue that she introduces to thinking a distinctive capacity for critique, one that she takes to be absent in Heidegger and that helps to distinguish her conception of thinking in its ability to intervene in the dangers of thoughtlessness.

While recent commentators have highlighted this capacity for critique in Arendt's notion of thinking, it has yet to be developed in relation to her critical reception of Heidegger in *The Life of the Mind* (Minnich, 2017; Shuster, 2018; Snir, 2020). Arendt is typically portrayed in her later writings as distancing herself from Heidegger by adding to thinking a worldly or political dimension that prepares the way for judgment (Fine, 2008; Koishikawa, 2018; Maslin, 2020; Taylor, 2002; Zerilli, 2005). Yet, in his well-known and largely unanswered criticism of Arendt, Richard Bernstein argues that this is not enough to show that she has distinguished adequately between the kinds of thinking that can prevent moral and political catastrophe and the kinds that cannot (Bernstein, 2000, p. 291). After all, Heidegger's thinking remains close to the world, rooted in concepts like *aletheia* and *Gelassenheit* that bring thinking back to earth for the sake of contravening the reductive and dominating will of modern technoscientific rationality. Bernstein thus identifies a decisive problem for Arendt, arguing that while she may demonstrate the moral and political dangers of Eichmann's thoughtlessness, she seems unable to answer the question of why Heidegger's thinking could not condition him against similar vulnerabilities. My aim is to provide a new basis to answer this question by considering the critical distance

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thinking achieves from the world in its quest for meaning rather than truth, a distance that she suggests Heidegger collapses in his analysis of thinking.

There is much to be said about Heidegger's notions of thinking and truth no less than the many ways in which Arendt is influenced by him in her own discourse on thinking. The goal of this inquiry is simply to highlight the precise point in Heidegger's argument that Arendt challenges, as it is this point, particularly as she develops it in *The Life of the Mind*, that has yet to be considered in response to Bernstein's objection. To this end, I argue that Arendt criticizes Heidegger not by focusing on whether his thinking is worldly or political enough; instead, she is concerned with the way in which he draws thinking into a dangerously submissive relation to the world by locating its end in the event of truth or disclosure. While Arendt gestures toward this criticism in the second volume of *The Life of the Mind* on willing, I maintain that her argument for it comes into view in her analysis of thinking in the first volume of this text.<sup>3</sup> Turning first to Arendt's criticism of Heidegger's claim that "Meaning of Being and Truth of Being say the same," I argue that she positions her conception of thinking in response to a peril that she suggests arises when the distinction between truth and meaning collapses (LM I, p. 15).<sup>4</sup> I then consider how she develops this distinction and its relation to thinking's critical capacity in her analysis of the confusion in the modern sciences between the task of thinking and the demands of commonsense.

Though Arendt follows Heidegger in criticizing the sciences for distorting the thinking activity, she formulates this distortion and the danger it poses differently. Heidegger's thinking answers principally to the threat that technoscientific rationality poses to our ability to stand in a more original relation to the truth (Heidegger, 1977b, p. 314).<sup>5</sup> Arendt, by contrast, problematizes the sciences for indexing thinking to the truth at all, which, in her view, renders it subservient to the demands of commonsense. As subtle as this difference may seem, Arendt's divergence from Heidegger on this point is significant. Arendt explains that the pursuit of truth is not first and foremost a function of thinking, as the modern sciences assume; instead, it is a compulsion of commonsense. Whereas commonsense needs to verify the sensation of realness we have with respect to the world of appearances, Arendt maintains that thinking is an altogether different activity. It harbors a freedom with respect to the world that is manifest above all in its ability to ask about the meaning of things rather than merely submitting to their truth. In its quest for meaning, thinking thus has the capacity to take pause and intervene in the impulse of commonsense to verify the reality that is given to us by the senses. When thinking is reduced to the quest for truth, this capacity for intervention dissolves, a capacity that is indispensable for resisting rather than acquiescing to a reality in which moral and political catastrophes like totalitarianism are possible.<sup>6</sup>

As I will suggest, the possibility for critique that Arendt locates in the thinking activity arises in its ability to intervene, not directly in worldly affairs, but rather in this compulsion of commonsense to acquiesce to the world. Upon considering Arendt's concern for the way in which scientific modes of thought endanger this possibility, I argue that Arendt identifies an analogous peril in Heidegger. While Heidegger may free thinking from the reductive and dominating notions of truth in the sciences, he does not liberate it from truth itself, leaving unquestioned the presumption that thinking reaches its ultimate end in the event of truth or disclosure. As such, he risks rendering thinking impotent to intervene in the native compulsion we have to go along with the world by virtue of our faculty of commonsense. Whereas Heidegger's thinking risks obedience to the world, Arendt's emphasis on meaning rather than truth liberates thinking from the worldly constraints of commonsense and the compulsion it creates to acquiesce. I therefore argue that Arendt does not neglect the problem that Heidegger's thinking poses in the face of Eichmann's thoughtlessness. On the contrary, she develops a conception of thinking that answers to it by recovering the freedom and critical capacity inherent in its ability to make meaningful propositions.

## 2 | THE BANALITY OF EVIL AND THE PROBLEM OF THINKING

While Arendt's diagnosis of the banality of evil is among her most enduring contributions, discerning how her own notion of thinking addresses this problem has proven notoriously difficult.<sup>7</sup> As Arendt announces in her introductory remarks to *The Life of the Mind*, the immediate impulse for her investigation into thinking came from her observation

of Eichmann's 1961 trial in Jerusalem (LM I, p. 3). She maintains that despite being responsible for the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Jews to ghettos and extermination camps, Eichmann's disposition throughout his trial suggested that he was not a maniacal evil genius, but rather that his crime consisted most fundamentally in the fact that he was thoughtless (EJ, p. 54). As she explains in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, "That such remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts...inherent in man—that was, in fact the lesson one could learn in Jerusalem" (pp. 287–288). The question of how we might respond to such a problem thus becomes paramount for Arendt after Eichmann's trial, shaping the trajectory of much of her later work, and especially her final inquiry in *The Life of the Mind*.

As Arendt explains, her central concern in this text is to confront the question that she believes Eichmann's thoughtlessness imposed:

Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil doing or actually 'condition' them against it? (LM I, p. 5)

Though we might expect the answer to this question to be yes, Arendt turns in the epigraph of this text to a passage from Heidegger's *What is Called Thinking?* to illuminate the definitive problem that thinking poses. Thinking, Heidegger says, does not yield knowledge like the sciences, nor does it solve the riddles of the universe. Perhaps most notably, it does not directly empower us to act (LM I, epigraph). Hence, while Eichmann's thoughtlessness appeared to reveal the necessity of thinking, it also raised the question of whether thinking—an activity of sheer quietness that is meditative and withdrawn—has any power to intervene in the moral and political crises of the world.

That Heidegger appears not only in this epigraph but throughout Arendt's examination of the role that thinking might play in conditioning human beings to abstain from evil doing warrants our attention. Arendt undoubtedly regarded Heidegger as among the most important thinkers of the 20th century. As she famously remarks on the occasion of Heidegger's 80th birthday, students were drawn to study with him because he had envisioned the task of thinking anew. She says:

The rumor about Heidegger put it quite simply: thinking has come to life again; the cultural treasures of the past, believed to be dead, are being made to speak, in the course of which it turns out that they propose things altogether different from the familiar, worn-out trivialities that they had been presumed to say. There exists a teacher; one can perhaps learn to think. (Arendt, 1971, para. 11)

Though Arendt engages critically Heidegger's project throughout her corpus, she nevertheless seems to hold in high regard the model of thinking that he introduces.<sup>8</sup> Yet, while Heidegger might have been a thinker of unparalleled significance, Arendt also recognizes that this did not prevent him from joining the Nazi Party in 1933 nor did it prompt him to intervene in the subsequent catastrophes of this period.<sup>9</sup> Hence, the question that Eichmann's thoughtlessness imposed—of whether thinking can condition human beings to abstain from evil doing—becomes exceedingly difficult to answer when considered in light of Heidegger.

In consequence of this, scholars have struggled to identify the source of Arendt's critique of Heidegger's notion of thinking in her effort to answer this question. Some have interpreted this critique as centering not on Heidegger's failure as a thinker but on his failure of judgment (Bernstein, 2000; Minnich, 2003; Sjöholm, 2021). Others have simply set Heidegger to the side in order to derive a positive account of Arendt's notion of thinking that is responsive to the banality of evil (Kateb, 2007). In nearly every case, scholars have turned to writings that precede *The Life of the Mind*, such as "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy" and "Thinking and Moral Considerations," to distinguish Heidegger's notion of thinking from the model of thinking that Arendt associates with Socrates in these texts, contrasting him rather than Heidegger with Eichmann's thoughtlessness (Arendt, 2003a, 2003b).<sup>10</sup>

Richard Bernstein offers perhaps the clearest articulation of the problem that Heidegger poses for Arendt in his seminal critique of her effort to establish a relationship between thinking and moral life. As Bernstein (2000) says, “Arendt’s most novel and striking thesis—that there is an intrinsic connection between our ability or inability to think and evil—depends on discriminating the thinking that may prevent catastrophes from the thinking that does not. And I do not think that Arendt ever gave a satisfactory answer to this” (p. 291). In Bernstein’s view, Arendt is unable to account, in particular, for the difference between the thinking of Heidegger and the thinking of Socrates. Though Arendt claims to locate this difference in Socrates’ willingness to enter the marketplace in order to liberate thinking for the faculty of judgment, Bernstein suggests that Arendt does not account for why Heidegger’s thinking could not do the same. Bernstein argues that Heidegger himself did not stay “at home” in the permanent abode of “pure thinking” but instead “[got] involved in the world of human affairs” (p. 290). Yet, unlike Socrates, Bernstein says, “It certainly cannot be said of Heidegger that at the moment of crisis, when things fell apart, his thinking *liberated* his faculty of judgment... For he failed to exercise the type of judgment that Arendt describes—the judgment that enables us to discriminate good and evil and which can prevent catastrophes” (p. 290). Bernstein thus maintains that while it is necessary to account for the differences between the thinking of Heidegger and the thinking of Socrates, “Arendt, who excelled in drawing distinctions, never turned her attention to an explicit analysis of the differences that really make a difference” (p. 290). In consequence of this, he argues that Arendt does not leave us with an answer to the question of whether thinking can condition human beings to abstain from evil doing, but rather with a paradox of thinking that she is unable to resolve.

Ashley Biser (2014) takes up Arendt’s critical engagement with Heidegger in an effort to address Bernstein’s concern that Arendt fails to distinguish adequately between Heidegger and Socrates (p. 522). Biser maintains that we can preserve this distinction by considering how Arendt’s notion of thinking, in contrast to Heidegger’s, enables us to gain our bearings in the world (p. 520). Biser argues that whereas Heidegger’s notion of thinking in such texts as “Conversations on a Country Path about Thinking” is pure and, in this way, always keyed to an experience of disorientation with respect to the world, Arendt distinguishes pure thinking from representative thinking, positing the latter as that which enables us to orient ourselves toward the world. Drawing together the role that disorientation plays in Arendt’s analysis of totalitarianism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Biser thus argues that Arendt adequately distinguishes between Heidegger and Socrates by emphasizing the orienting force of thinking that is missing in Heidegger’s account.<sup>11</sup> Biser maintains, too, that capturing this difference depends on theorizing thinking’s capacity for orientation in its own right without collapsing it into Arendt’s notion of judgment so that we can see the dangers in Heidegger’s notion of thinking without reducing these dangers to a failure of judgment (p. 521).<sup>12</sup>

I follow Biser, both in her claim that Arendt’s conception of thinking is not aporetic, as Bernstein suggests, as well as in her concern for resisting the tendency to absorb Arendt’s discourse on thinking into her account of judgment. Yet, I wish to take a different angle of approach to developing Arendt’s critical engagement with Heidegger. Rather than continuing to focus on whether Arendt has adequately distinguished between Heidegger and Socrates, it is perhaps more fruitful to consider what Heidegger’s thinking shares with Eichmann’s thoughtlessness. This can be brought into view by reformulating Arendt’s critical reception of Heidegger in *The Life of the Mind* in light of her concern for conceiving of thinking in terms of the quest for meaning rather than truth. In so doing, it becomes possible to illuminate a point of contact between Heidegger and Eichmann that turns on that way in which each, albeit in distinct ways, distorts the relation between thinking and meaning. After all, Eichmann exhibited his thoughtlessness during his trial not by failing to tell the truth, but by failing to grasp the meaning of his deeds in his inability to speak about them in anything other than stock phrases and clichés (EJ, p. 41).<sup>13</sup> As Arendt suggests in *The Life of the Mind*, it is not that Heidegger’s thinking is too pure, but rather that he locates its end in the event of truth or disclosure, thereby dissolving the freedom and critical capacity inherent in its quest for meaning. While recent scholars such as Itay Snir (2020) and Martin Shuster (2018) have drawn attention to the importance of this critical capacity, it has yet to be considered in relation to Arendt’s critical reception of Heidegger as this takes shape in her distinction between truth and meaning in *The Life of the Mind*. By developing thinking’s critical capacity in light of this distinction, it thus becomes possible to reconstruct the response that Arendt’s notion of thinking offers not just to Eichmann but also to Heidegger. While Eichmann was

thoughtless and Heidegger a thinker, it is perhaps in virtue of their common distortion of the relation between thinking and meaning that both could be accomplices to totalitarianism.

### 3 | ARENDT'S RECONSIDERATION OF HEIDEGGER IN *THE LIFE OF THE MIND*

Arendt's critical engagement with Heidegger in her later writings tends to be framed in terms of her concern for adding to thinking a worldly or political dimension that prepares the way for judgment. Kimberly Maslin (2020) offers such an interpretation, arguing that the "two-in-one" that Arendt associates with self-reflection is fundamentally other oriented. It thus constitutes the condition under which it becomes possible to care (*fürsorge*) for the world and others in the right way (p. 125). In addition to Eichmann, Maslin suggests that Heidegger lacked this capacity for other-oriented self-reflection, which prevented him from being in the world in a way that enabled him to care properly for others. She says, "Engaging the other in self-reflective thinking might have enabled Eichmann (or Heidegger) to connect his actions to world events, render judgment and imagine a course of action either heroic (Anton Schmidt) or creative (Danish dockworkers)" (p. 128).<sup>14</sup> To be sure, Maslin highlights an integral feature of Arendt's conception of thinking, particularly as it concerns enlarged mentality and political judgment. It is also consistent with Arendt's earlier critiques of Heidegger, which center on what she perceives as his inability to realize fully the worldly, communal, and political potential of his early formulation of the project of fundamental ontology (Villa, 1995, p. 232; Taminioux, 1997, pp. 4–5).<sup>15</sup> Yet, in the first volume of *The Life of the Mind*, where Arendt isolates and addresses the thinking activity most directly, the focal point of this critique seems to shift. Though much has been said about the movement of Arendt's thought from the question of political life to the question of contemplative life in the wake of her encounter with Eichmann, far less has been done to consider how her critical reception of Heidegger evolves in response to these developments. In consequence of this, Arendt's earlier critiques of Heidegger tend to be imposed on her later writings concerning thinking, leading to an emphasis on the question of the marketplace and the paradox of thinking that Bernstein and others identify. Arendt's concern for conceiving of thinking in terms of the quest for meaning rather than truth in the first volume of *The Life of the Mind*, however, suggests that this critique unfolds along different lines. Rather than problematizing Heidegger's thinking for not being worldly or political enough, Arendt's emphasis on meaning indicates instead that she is concerned with the way in which he draws thinking into a dangerously submissive relation to the world by locating its end in the event of truth or disclosure.

That this shift has been overlooked is unsurprising given that Arendt agrees with so many aspects of Heidegger's conception of thinking. Arendt appears, for instance, to be sympathetic to Heidegger's claim that "most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking" (Heidegger, 1964, p. 5).<sup>16</sup> She agrees that addressing this problem depends on distinguishing thinking from opinion, logical reasoning, and systematic metaphysics, following his suggestion that thinking must instead be associated with our capacity to question and be receptive to something that is irreducible to calculative procedure. She also finds compelling his assertion that poetry is far closer to thinking than philosophers like to admit and is inclined toward his view that thinking is not a part of everyday life, repeating his claim throughout *The Life of the Mind* that such an assumption is "out of order" with regard to the question of thinking (LM I, p. 78). Perhaps most importantly for our purposes, she follows Heidegger in maintaining that thinking does not produce results or knowledge like the sciences and suggests, in much the same way as he does, that "science does not think" (Heidegger, 1964, p. 8).

Yet, Arendt insists on one crucial distinction in her own conception of thinking that offers a decisive challenge to Heidegger and a response to the question of whether thinking can play a role in confronting the moral and political dangers of thoughtlessness. As Arendt says, "The need of reason [or thinking] is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same" (LM I, p. 15). Arendt explains that while the Western philosophical tradition has generated a great number of metaphysical fallacies, the tendency within this tradition to neglect the distinction between meaning and truth is the most basic of them all. Significantly, she believes that it is precisely this fallacy to which Heidegger has fallen prey. She says:

The latest and in some respects most striking instance of this interpretation occurs in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which sets out with 'raising anew the question of the meaning of Being.' Heidegger himself, in a later self-interpretation of this initial question, says explicitly: "Meaning of Being' and 'Truth of Being' say the same." (LM I, p. 15)

In this passage, Arendt problematizes Heidegger for collapsing the distinction between truth and meaning, suggesting that he has implicated himself in the metaphysical tendency to interpret thinking according to the model of truth. Yet, as provocative as this claim might be, Arendt does not develop the stakes of these remarks in direct reference to Heidegger here, reserving this for the second volume of *The Life of the Mind* on willing (LM II, pp. 188–193).<sup>17</sup> For this reason, determining what these claims entail for her conception of thinking requires a more indirect interpretive approach. This can be done by drawing together her remarks on Heidegger with her own emphasis on thinking's quest for meaning as this takes shape in her critique of modern scientific modes of thought. Whereas Heidegger's thinking answers to the way in which the reductive and controlling power of technoscientific rationality threatens the possibility of a more original relation to the truth, Arendt is concerned with the way in which the sciences, in reducing thinking to the quest for truth, render it a passive and compulsory mechanism for satisfying the demands of commonsense. By considering how Arendt repositions this danger, it thus becomes possible to bring into focus an analogous peril to which Heidegger's thinking may remain vulnerable.

#### 4 | HEIDEGGER ON THINKING AND THE DANGER OF TECHNOSCIENTIFIC RATIONALITY

To clarify how Arendt repositions the danger of the modern sciences, it is necessary to consider briefly Heidegger's account of the "supreme danger" that he associates with technoscientific rationality and the response that his conception of thinking offers to it (QCT, p. 314). While there is much to be said about the enduringly important and complex themes of thinking and truth in Heidegger, it is beyond the scope of the present inquiry to offer an exhaustive analysis of research on these topics. By focusing on Heidegger's response to the dangers he perceives in scientific thinking, this brief account is meant only to highlight the decisive point in his argument with which Arendt diverges in her own discourse on thinking.

As Heidegger explains in "The Question Concerning Technology," technical and scientific modes of thought have been guided since the Scientific Revolution by the presumption that:

Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means. We will, as we say, 'get' technology 'spiritually in hand.' We will master it. The will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control. (QTC, p. 289)

Yet, he argues that this presumption of mastery is an illusion that not only obscures the essence of technology but that also covers over its true danger for the modern age. Technology, Heidegger argues, is not merely an instrument or tool at our disposal, nor is it something that we can opt in and out of at will. Instead, he says, "Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth, happens" (QCT, p. 295). While human beings may participate in this mode of unconcealment, they do not control it. Rather, as a mode of disclosure, modern technology prefigures them and every effort they make to pursue nature and undertake scientific inquiry (QCT, p. 301).

Heidegger takes the mode of disclosure that characterizes modern technology to be dangerous because it reveals beings not as what they are in their essence but rather as "ordered to standby, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered in this way has its own standing. We call it the "standing-reserve" [*Bestand*]" (QCT, p. 296). Modern technology thus structures experience in such a

way that all beings, including human beings, are only able to appear in their reality as having already been reduced, dominated, and ordered to just stand by. Heidegger describes this way of seeing and appearing as enframing [*Ge-stell*] and says, “Where enframing reigns, there is *danger* in the highest sense” (QCT, p. 296).

Able only to appear under this reductive and controlling rubric, Heidegger argues that modern individuals thus find themselves “continually...pursuing and pushing forward nothing but what is revealed in ordering, and of deriving all [their] standards on this basis” (QCT, p. 307). This, Heidegger argues, has led to “the very brink of a precipitous fall... where [modern individuals] will have to be taken as standing reserve” (QCT, p. 307). In response to having their existence threatened in this way, human beings in the modern age thus deploy technical and calculative modes of thought to reassert the illusion of their dominance. In other words, Heidegger says, it is in virtue of having already been reduced and ordered as standing reserve that modern individuals cannot help but “exalt [themselves] to the posture of lord of the earth... In this way, the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his to construct” (QCT, p. 307).

Insofar as these modes of thought only amplify and reinforce the reductive and controlling power that characterizes the essence of modern technology, Heidegger argues that it is necessary to develop “a way of thinking by which we might be saved from its controlling power” (Blitz, 2014, p. 63). Significantly, what he perceives as most dangerous about this controlling power is that it risks denying human beings the possibility of “[entering] into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth” (QCT, p. 314). Heidegger thus responds by conceiving of thinking in terms of what he describes as *Gelassenheit* or releasement, understood as a receptiveness to the call of being that lets beings shine forth as what they are more originally rather than under a pregiven, reductive rubric. As he says in “Conversations on a Country Path about Thinking,” it is only “when we let ourselves into releasement to that-which regions, [when] we will non-willing,” that thinking most essentially happens (Heidegger, 1966, p. 79). As Bret Davis explains, *Gelassenheit* thus consists in releasement from the willful scientific objectification of beings for “an openness to the mystery’...an openness to the concealment that accompanies and enables any unconcealment” (Davis, 2014, p. 393).<sup>18</sup>

In conceiving of thinking this way, Heidegger thus elucidates the conditions under which it becomes possible to receive the call of a more original truth. This more original truth, he argues, consists not in traditional conceptions of truth as correctness and correspondence that signify “accord... of a matter with what is supposed in advance,” or agreement between the intellect and some material thing (Heidegger, 1977a, p. 121).<sup>19</sup> Instead, he maintains that truth more originally takes shape as *aletheia* or unconcealment whereby beings show themselves from themselves as what they are from out of their concealment. That is, he says, “‘Truth’ is not a feature of correct propositions which are asserted of an ‘object’ by a human ‘subject’ and then ‘are valid’ somewhere, in what sphere we know not; rather, truth is disclosure of beings through which an openness essentially unfolds [west]” (ET, p. 129). Understood this way, truth is not merely a characteristic of our assertions about things, but rather a determination of beings themselves, which provide the measure by which we, in our open comportment toward this self-showing, are able to speak of them as true (ET, p. 124).<sup>20</sup>

There is, of course, much to be said about the development of Heidegger’s discourse on truth from his earlier formulation of *aletheia* in *Being and Time* as a wresting of being from out of its concealment to his later conception of truth in relation to his idea of “letting be” in such works as “On the Essence of Truth” (Dahlstrom, 2001; Wrathall, 2011). Equally important is the complex relationship that Heidegger establishes between truth and meaning from his earliest formulation of the question of the meaning of being to his later writings on language, poetry, and art (Powell, 2013; Ziarek, 2013). While there is certainly more work to be done to develop these themes, the relevant point for elucidating Arendt’s argument is clear. Heidegger is led by his critique of the reductive and dominating will of technoscientific rationality to reconsider the notions of truth, thinking, and the relations between them. He thus argues that the proper relation of thinking to truth is an open one, freed from the constraints of scientific rationality and metaphysics. As radical as Heidegger’s rethinking of thinking is, however, he leaves unquestioned the prejudice that indexes thinking ultimately and exclusively to the truth. Hence, while Heidegger may very well liberate thinking from the reductive conceptions of truth found in the sciences, commonsense, and the history of Western metaphysics, he never liberates



thinking from the constraints of truth itself. Whether this concerns the experience of truth as *aletheia* or the failure of the history of Western metaphysics to think this truth, for Heidegger, “the matter of thinking...*Aletheia* remains for us what is first of all to be thought” (Heidegger, 1998, p. 335).

Notwithstanding Arendt’s agreement with many aspects of Heidegger’s thinking, it is here that she departs most decisively from him. Whereas Heidegger locates the supreme danger of technoscientific rationality in the threat it poses to our ability to stand in a more original relation to the truth, Arendt repositions this danger in her analysis of what she describes as the confusion in the modern sciences between the task of thinking and the demands of commonsense. In turning to this confusion, she is led to focus not on the reductive and controlling mode of disclosure that characterizes technoscientific rationality but rather on the way in which the modern sciences, in reducing thinking to the quest for truth, dissolve the freedom and critical capacity inherent in thinking’s quest for meaning (LM I, p. 61). Arendt may therefore be interpreted as responding to a danger that she perceives in the sciences, along with an analogous peril that she perceives in Heidegger, by insisting that “the matter of thinking” is not truth, and not even truth as *aletheia*, but rather meaning.

## 5 | REPOSITIONING THE DANGER OF THE SCIENCES: THINKING VERSUS COMMONSENSE

In problematizing the scientific quest for truth, Arendt wishes to show, in much the same way as Heidegger, that the modern sciences have distorted the thinking activity. Yet, she portrays this distortion and the danger it poses differently than Heidegger, tracing it to the tendency in the modern sciences to confuse the task of thinking with the demands of commonsense. Arendt suggests that this tendency is evident in the presumption that technology and its practical applications are mere by-products of science’s loftier pursuit of truth (LM I, p. 57). She explains, however, that neither the most highly refined theoretical sciences nor their applied counterparts are reducible to sheer thinking. Instead, both produce knowledge that is useful for finding our way in the world and are therefore most properly a function of commonsense.<sup>21</sup>

Arendt is clear that this confusion, no less than the dangers it entails, is not something to which only scientists and engineers are susceptible. Instead, it is a vulnerability of the thinking activity itself insofar as the experience of thinking is so similar to the experience of commonsense. Commonsense, she explains, operates as a sort of “sixth sense” that makes it possible to explain the sensation of realness we have with respect to the world of appearances (LM I, p. 52). This feeling of realness is not perception in the ordinary sense. Rather, it is associated with the experience of being in the world as a part of a unified context. Our perception of “realness” can never be localized; it is entirely private, even though it seems to be shared and confirmed by others. Thus, in much the same way as thinking, commonsense is not itself real or sensible, but is instead invisible, and it is in virtue of this that the two are so easily confused.

Arendt explains, however, that while we do expect commonsense to confirm that the things given to us by the senses are real, we do not expect the things we think about to be sensible. Thinking, she argues, distinguishes itself from commonsense insofar as it has no need for place or materiality; not only is thinking itself invisible, but so too are the objects of thought (LM I, p. 52). When thinking withdraws from sensory life, it also withdraws from reality. Hence, whereas commonsense remains bound to the reality of the world of appearances, Arendt argues that thinking, by its very nature, always involves a loss of reality. She explains that this is a matter of course for thinking that is experienced not just by “professional thinkers” but by anyone who reflects (LM I, p. 53). She maintains, too, that this retreat from reality is so dramatic that it would easily become dangerous if it were not for the fact that the thinking ego can only assert itself temporarily. That is, she says, “Every thinker, no matter how eminent, remains...an appearance among appearances equipped with common sense and knowing enough common-sense reasoning to survive” (LM I, p. 53). Hence, while the feeling of realness to which commonsense refers is indeed invisible, commonsense always remains constrained by the sensible world in a way that thinking never does. It is therefore a mistake to confuse thinking with

commonsense, since thinking “bears no such matter-of-fact relation to reality” and can “neither prove nor destroy the feeling of realness as it arises out of the sixth sense” (LM I, p. 52).

Upon bringing this distinction into view, Arendt argues that commonsense and not thinking is the most proper region of the sciences insofar as the sciences are concerned with the world of appearances, seeking results on the basis of evidence given to the senses. While science certainly needs thinking, it can only ever use it as a means to develop new and more promising methods for confirming the world of appearances. She says:

Science, in this respect, is but an enormously refined prolongation of common-sense reasoning in which sense illusions are constantly dissipated just as errors in science are corrected. The criterion in both cases is evidence, which is inherent in the world of appearances. (LM I, p. 54)

Because the world of appearances always reveals and conceals itself, Arendt argues that nothing in science guarantees that new evidence given to the senses will prove more reliable. She insists that truth is rooted in the world of appearances, and thus, all truths, regardless of whether we are compelled to know them by sheer brain power or by evidence given by the senses, are provisional and may be exchanged for more accurate verities as our knowledge advances (LM I, p. 61). Moreover, she argues that because the commonsense reasoning of the sciences is always linked to the world of appearances, it can only ever withdraw from the world for the sake of producing results that help to confirm its realness. Whereas sheer thinking withdraws for its own sake, the reasoning of the sciences can only ever withdraw as a means to an end in seeking to satisfy the demands of commonsense.

Significantly, while we might expect Arendt to follow Heidegger in emphasizing the will-to-mastery that underlies the means-end schema of technoscientific modes of thought, she does not. For Arendt, what is most dangerous is not that the sciences use commonsense reasoning to pursue the truth. After all, Arendt is clear that we need commonsense to find our way in the world and could not survive without it. Rather, what is most dangerous is that they have confused this activity with thinking.<sup>22</sup> As important as commonsense might be, Arendt argues that we are compelled by it to confirm the feeling of realness we have with respect to the world of appearances. For this reason, she says, commonsense lacks “the safeguards inherent in sheer thinking, namely, thinking’s critical capacity” (LM I, p. 56). Insofar as thinking always involves a retreat from reality, it harbors a freedom with respect to the world of appearances that enables it to doubt and question reality in ways that commonsense never can. In other words, as Snir (2020) explains, “[Thinking] demands taking distance from the world... The thinking person raises herself to a position from which she can suspend all direct demands of reality, disregard the ways she is expected to behave and ignore the views she is expected to hold in order to think afresh” (p. 63). When thinking is reduced to the quest for truth, it loses this critical capacity and becomes a mechanism for carrying into commonsense invisible generalities that presume an impossible certainty with regard to the world of appearances (LM I, p. 56). Hence, by developing the distinction Arendt draws between truth and meaning, we find that she interprets modern scientific modes of thought as dangerous not because they deprive us of a more original relation to the truth, but because they presume a relation between thinking and truth in the first place.

## 6 | THE QUEST FOR MEANING AND THE CAPACITY FOR CRITIQUE

To clarify thinking’s critical capacity and the danger involved in losing it, Arendt turns not to Heidegger’s notion of *aletheia*, but rather to Kant’s distinction between the intellect (*Verstand*) and reason or pure thought (*Vernunft*) (LM I, p. 57). In appropriating this distinction, Arendt wishes to show that whereas the truths that science seeks are most proper to the domain of commonsense, thinking is guided by an altogether different quest. Arendt argues that the intellect, which pursues scientific knowledge, seeks to grasp what is given to us by the senses. As such, the criterion by which these truths are derived is based on evidence given in the sensible world (LM I, p. 58). Reason or thought, by contrast, asks about *the meaning* of what is given to the senses. Whereas the goal of scientific knowledge is to dispel

error with respect to what one sees and knows through the senses, and, in this, is the most highly refined form of commonsense reasoning, Arendt says, “The questions... which thinking raises, and which it is in the very nature of reason to raise, the questions of meaning, are unanswerable by common sense and its refinement we call science” (LM I, p. 58). She thus argues that to expect truth from thinking is to confuse the need to think with the urge to know (LM, p. 61).

Yet, Arendt explains that it is precisely this confusion to which the modern sciences have fallen prey. She argues that in order to avoid contingency as far as possible, we have allowed thinking to invade the sciences, presuming that we can achieve a level of certainty whereby the truths that science produces are able to compel with the force of necessity. Arendt argues that the compulsory force of this quest for truth and certainty is no more apparent than in the tendency to associate mathematics with pure thought. Mathematical reasoning, she explains, has long been upheld as the paradigm of thought because it produces “truths of reasoning” rather than the “truths of fact” associated with the natural sciences (LM I, p. 69). Whereas truths of reasoning are “necessary and their opposite impossible,” truths of fact are contingent to the extent that their opposite is possible, even though they are compelling to anyone who witnesses them (LM I, p. 59). Arendt argues that the key difference between these two kinds of truths lies not in their relation to pure thought but rather in their force of compulsion. Truths of reasoning compel with the force of necessity, a force that she suggests is stronger even than violence. They are irrefutable truths, the kind that human beings, insofar as they are rational, are not free to reject. Hence, in their irrefutable necessity, the truths of mathematical reasoning are presumed to be the loftiest of all, associated with the purest kind of thinking and the highest end of scientific rationality.

Arendt maintains, however, that the source of mathematical truths is the human brain, which “is no less natural, equipped to guide us through an appearing world, than our senses plus common sense and the extension of it that Kant called the intellect (*Verstand*)” (LM I, p. 60). She argues that the greatest evidence of this may be found in how effective mathematics has been in advancing science’s exploration of the universe (LM I, p. 60). While we are easily deceived into believing that mathematical truths arise from pure thought because they compel with such force, these truths, just like the factual truths of the natural sciences, help us grasp the appearing world. In consequence of this, Arendt argues that there are no truths above contingent, factual truths regardless of how abstract these truths become. Thus, the modern sciences have not overcome this contingency by reducing thinking to the quest for truth; instead, they have mistakenly sought refuge from it in the violence of necessity.

Arendt argues, however, that “the opposite of necessity is not contingency or accident but freedom” (LM I, p. 60). This freedom, she suggests, is a function of thinking that arises not from its ability to produce truths that compel with the force of necessity. Instead, it arises because thinking can take pause in the face of even the most irrefutable evidence to ask about the meaning of things rather than acquiescing to their truth. Arendt argues that while our senses may tell us that we are nothing more than random accident, we nevertheless find ourselves able to say in response: “Random my bottom! A true miracle, say I, for who is not certain that he was meant to be” (LM I, p. 61). Of course, the proposition “I was meant to be” is not true in the sense of being verifiable in the appearing world. It is, however, a highly meaningful proposition, one that Arendt insists is possible only insofar as we can think. In her view, it is thinking’s capacity to make these propositions—propositions that might not be true but that are highly meaningful—that differentiates it from the commonsense reasoning of the sciences. She explains that while “truth is what we are compelled to admit by either the nature of our senses or of our brain,” thinking distinguishes itself insofar as it can never be compelled in this way (LM I, p. 61).

While sheer thinking might not intervene directly in the world of human affairs, Arendt’s emphasis on meaning indicates that it can undertake a different kind of intervention, one that pushes back against the native tendency we have to go along with the world by virtue of our faculty of commonsense. Thinking is not natively compelled by the force of necessity that governs the scientific quest for truth. Instead, Arendt argues, thinking always demands a “*stop-and-think*” that interrupts “whatever... belongs to the world of appearances and to those common-sense experiences I have in company with my fellow men and that automatically guarantee my sense of realness of my own being” (LM I, p. 78). This interruption is no doubt displacing and can even become paralyzing in requiring so radical a departure from

the orienting forces of the world. Yet, Arendt suggests that it is precisely this kind of reflection—the kind that “does not seek knowledge and is not guided by practical needs and aims”—that has the capacity to intervene in the impulse to go along with the reality given to us by the senses (LM I, p. 78).

Arendt explains that the disorienting effect of thinking’s radical displacement has led some to suggest that nihilism is an ever-present danger of thinking that is disassociated from the truth. Yet, she argues that while “the quest for meaning, which relentlessly dissolves and examines anew all accepted doctrines, can at any moment turn on itself,” the end station of thinking can never be nihilism (LM I, p. 176). She maintains that nihilism does not arise from the quest for meaning itself, but instead from “the desire to find results that would make further thinking unnecessary” (LM I, p. 177). While thinking may be dangerous to all creeds and pose a threat to the stability afforded by commonsense, it does not propose new creeds or truths and therefore cannot undertake a nihilistic reversal of values. Such nihilism is possible only when thinking has already been reduced to the quest for truth and the freedom and critical capacity inherent in its quest for meaning snuffed out. Hence, while thinking may produce no answers or results, Arendt argues that it is nevertheless the condition under which it becomes possible to “make up your mind anew” (LM I, p. 177).

When all other opportunities for interruption and spontaneity have been destroyed, as, for instance, in the case of totalitarianism, thinking’s capacity for intervention thus proves indispensable. In the face of a such reality—a reality in which the world has been reduced to the necessary movements of nature and history—thinking remains the one faculty that can take pause and interrupt the compulsion to go along with it. As Shuster (2018) argues, it is precisely “[this] power to dissolve and undermine established patterns of thought, action, and language” that Arendt associates with the capacity some had to resist the prevailing norms of Nazi Germany, creating the conditions under which it became possible for them to say, “I can’t” (p. 3). That thinking has this capacity, however, depends on the fact that it is guided by the quest for meaning rather than truth. Hence, if thinking is reduced to the quest for truth, this capacity for intervention dissolves, and thinking can only be deployed in the service of producing “a string of verities, each one in its time claiming general validity even though the very continuity of the research implied something merely provisional” (LM I, p. 55). Unable to intervene in the demands of commonsense, thinking that is interpreted according to the model of truth thus becomes vulnerable to dangerous possibilities, operating as a mechanism that compels us with the force of necessity to give over to the reality that commonsense needs to confirm.

This, of course, does not mean that there is no relationship between thinking and knowing. In fact, Arendt says that it is precisely because of how closely related thinking and knowing seem to be that “philosophers have always been expected to accept the criterion of truth—so valid for the sciences and everyday life—as applicable to their own rather extraordinary business as well” (LM I, p. 60). Yet, she argues that it is only because thinking is able to ask unanswerable questions—questions that seek meaning rather than truth—that we can begin to ask the answerable ones. In other words, it is only because thinking can pose unanswerable questions that we establish ourselves as question asking beings who can take pause to ask about the meaning of the reality to which we would otherwise be natively compelled to submit.

## 7 | AN ANALOGOUS PERIL IN HEIDEGGER

By considering how Arendt repositions the dangers of the modern sciences, it thus becomes possible to make more vivid the distinction she draws between the kinds of thinking that can prevent moral and political catastrophe and the kinds that cannot. Whereas Heidegger locates the end of thinking in the event of truth or disclosure, Arendt turns to Kant’s distinction between *Verstand* and *Vernunft* to clarify the importance of liberating thinking from the criterion of truth. This distinction, Arendt argues, makes clear that Kant denied knowledge not to make room for faith but to make room for thinking and the freedom inherent in this activity (LM I, p. 63). She explains that while those who followed Kant in the German tradition had the opportunity to seize upon this distinction, they did not. Instead, they conflated thinking and knowing, meaning and truth. In so doing, Arendt says that these thinkers, in much the same way as the sciences, fell prey to the hunt for certainty, taking the results of their speculations to compel with the force of necessity

while denying the freedom and critical capacity inherent in thinking's ability to make meaningful propositions (LM I, pp. 63–64). It is therefore worthy of our attention that Arendt takes Heidegger to be the latest and perhaps most striking example of this confusion.

Heidegger's thinking not only makes a radical intervention in traditional conceptions of thinking and truth but also shapes in decisive ways Arendt's own conception of thinking. Yet, in emphasizing the freedom and critical capacity inherent in thinking's quest for meaning, Arendt nevertheless seems to identify an analogous peril to which his thinking remains vulnerable. In leaving unquestioned the event of truth or disclosure, Heidegger draws his thinking into a dangerously obedient relation to the world of appearances. In so doing, he collapses, perhaps even more forcefully than the sciences, the distance thinking needs from reality to retain its critical capacity with respect to the world of appearances.

Though Arendt does not develop this directly in her analysis of thinking in the first volume of *The Life of the Mind*, she does gesture toward it in the second volume of this text on willing. She argues here that for Heidegger, "Technology's very nature is the will to will, namely, to subject the whole world to its domination and rulership, whose natural end can only be total destruction" (LM II, p. 178). This, she explains, leads Heidegger to insist that "the alternative to such rulership is 'letting be,' and letting-be as an activity is thinking that obeys the call of Being" (LM II, p. 193). Whereas Heidegger takes this "letting-be" to subvert the will-to-mastery of modern technoscientific rationality, Arendt argues that "the Will as destroyer appears here, too, though not by name" (LM II, p. 193). As she says:

Heidegger is now no longer content to eliminate the willing ego in favor of the thinking ego...Now he desubjectivizes thinking itself, robs it of its Subject, man as a thinking being, and transforms it into a function of Being in which all 'efficacy rests...flowing from there towards the essent [*das Seiende*],' thereby determining the actual course of the world. "Thinking, in turn, lets itself be claimed by Being...in order to give utterance to the truth of being." (LM II, pp. 174–175).<sup>23</sup>

Though it is beyond the scope of this essay to develop the implications of these remarks for Arendt's conception of willing, they can nevertheless be read back into her concern for thinking's quest for meaning. Heidegger may free thinking from the will-to-mastery of technoscientific rationality. Yet, Arendt suggests that his notion of thinking ultimately gives over to another master, namely, the truth of being. Therefore, while Heidegger may challenge in myriad ways the will-to-mastery of the sciences, his thinking breaches the same barrier between meaning and truth that Arendt believes the sciences breach, thereby dissolving thinking's capacity to intervene in the urge we have to go along with the world by virtue of our faculty of commonsense.

## 8 | CONCLUSION: A WAY BETWEEN EICHMANN AND HEIDEGGER

By developing Arendt's critical reception of Heidegger in *The Life of the Mind* in relation to her concern for thinking's quest for meaning, it thus becomes possible to clarify how her own conception of thinking answers the question of why it is that not only Eichmann but also Heidegger remained vulnerable to totalitarian possibilities. While Eichmann was thoughtless and Heidegger a thinker, both distort the relation between thinking and meaning that Arendt's own conception of thinking works to preserve. In the case of Eichmann, we find that he was thoughtless not because he lied, but rather because "he was genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché" (EJ, p. 48). In other words, Eichmann was thoughtless not because he failed to tell the truth, but because he could not utter a single meaningful sentence (EJ, p. 49). As Arendt explains:

The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected to his inability to think. No communication was possible with him, *not because he lied*, but

because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against worlds and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such. (EJ, p. 49)<sup>24</sup>

Whereas Eichmann's thoughtlessness signaled his remoteness from reality and his radical separation from its meaning, Heidegger's thinking seems to represent the other end of this dangerous extreme.<sup>25</sup> It was not that Heidegger was unable to leave the abode of pure thought in order to enter the marketplace; instead, he collapsed the distinction between truth and meaning, leaving thinking beholden to the world given by the senses and diminished in the freedom and critical capacity inherent in its quest for meaning. Hence, while Eichmann was thoughtless and Heidegger a thinker, there nevertheless seems to be a common denominator between them that turns on the way in which both distort the relation between thinking and meaning. In view of this, we might interpret Arendt as offering a way between the dangerous extremes that these two figures represent. Through her emphasis on meaning, Arendt develops a notion of thinking that is neither divorced from the world and the meaningful nexus of relations that constitute it, as it is for Eichmann, nor beholden to the truth and given over entirely to the world, as it is for Heidegger, but that is rather free and preserved in its capacity for critique.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter EJ.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter LM with a corresponding roman numeral to indicate the volume number.

<sup>3</sup> While some may wonder why I do not start with Arendt's discussion of *Gelassenheit* and the "will-not-to-will" in LM II, my analysis suggests that her criticism in LM II is buttressed by a less appreciated argument regarding the critical capacity inherent in thinking's quest for meaning in the first volume of this text. While I will return to LM II at the end of this essay, the bulk of my analysis will focus on reconstructing her argument in LM I.

<sup>4</sup> This quotation appears in "Introduction to 'What is Metaphysics?'" (Heidegger, 1998, p. 286).

<sup>5</sup> Hereafter QCT.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Shuster (2018) has drawn a similar connection between Arendt's notion of thinking and this capacity for resistance. Whereas I develop this in the context Arendt's critique of Heidegger and the distinction she draws between truth and meaning in *The Life of the Mind*, Shuster offers a compelling and resonant account of the other side of this problem in Eichmann, connecting it to Arendt's conception of personhood.

<sup>7</sup> These interpretive difficulties arise in part from the fact that at the time of her death, Arendt had only completed the first volume of *The Life of the Mind*, "Thinking," but not the other two volumes, "Willing" and "Judging." For more on the relation of the three parts of this text, see Fine (2008). For more on the interpretive challenges posed by its posthumous publication, see Hahn et al. (2019).

<sup>8</sup> Arendt explicitly praises Heidegger's philosophical discourse on thinking in such works as *What is Called Thinking*. As she says, "For an acquaintance with Heidegger's thought, *What is Called Thinking?* is as important as *Being and Time*. It is the only systematic presentation of his later philosophy and... it is perhaps the most exciting of his books" (Arendt, 1964).

<sup>9</sup> For more on Heidegger involvement with the Nazi Party, see Wollin (2016) and Mitchell and Trawny (2017).

<sup>10</sup> While these two texts are perhaps the most commonly cited, there are others that should not be overlooked such as "Truth and Politics" (1967) and "The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man" (1963). Both offer important early iterations of Arendt's notions of truth and her critique of the sciences that anticipate her argument in LM I.

<sup>11</sup> See also Arendt (1976, p. 477).

<sup>12</sup> In addition to Biser, Roger Berkowitz has also pointed to the importance of interpreting Arendt's account of thinking in its own right, developing this with reference to the related concept of solitude. See Berkowitz (2010).

<sup>13</sup> For more on this interpretation of Eichmann's thoughtlessness and his inability to speak meaningfully, see Shuster (2018), Cassin (2016), and Gaffney (2015).

<sup>14</sup> See also Sjöholm (2021) and Koishikawa (2018) who similarly emphasize this dimension of Arendt's thinking.

<sup>15</sup> Villa and Taminaux offer the most classic interpretations of Arendt's critical reception of Heidegger in this respect. More recent interpretations include Tchir (2017), Yeatman (2018), and Maslin (2020).

<sup>16</sup> Hereafter WCT.

<sup>17</sup> As important and understudied as this aspect of LM II is, Arendt's concerns here do not answer the question of why Heidegger's thinking cannot prevent moral and political catastrophe. Her critique of Heidegger's inability to distinguish truth from meaning in LM I, by contrast, does offer a ground to answer this question.

<sup>18</sup> For more on Heidegger's understanding of non-willing and his efforts to subvert the "domain of the will" through his notion of *Gelassenheit*, see Davis (2014).

<sup>19</sup> Hereafter ET.

- <sup>20</sup>Of course, as Daniel Dahlstrom says, “[Heidegger’s] appreciation of truth as unhiddenness is...far from the end of the story. For, as its privative nature suggests, ‘un-hiddenness’ (*a-letheia*) supposes a hiddenness” (Dahlstrom, 2010, p. 116). In privileging unhiddenness, Heidegger argues that the Greeks failed to think the hiddenness or self-concealment that sustains the clearing [*Lichtung*] within which what is unhidden and our openness to it becomes possible. There is certainly more to say about this idea in his discourse on *Ereignis* and his historical interpretation of being, particularly in relation to *Gelassenheit* (Vallega-Neu, 2015). Yet, whether we focus on Heidegger’s phenomenological understanding of *aletheia* or his hermeneutic and historical interpretation of the truth of being, the point remains the same. His conception of thinking is bound to truth and being, and it is this association that Arendt wishes to sever.
- <sup>21</sup>Scholars have debated whether Arendt’s notion of commonsense in her later writings remains consistent across her corpus (Degryse, 2011; Peeters, 2009). Itay Snir has addressed this tension by reading Arendt’s notion of commonsense in her later writings in terms of her effort to draw connections between *phronesis* and the Scottish school of commonsense (Snir, 2015, p. 363). My interpretation aligns with that of Snir. It also suggests that the consistency he highlights becomes possible when commonsense is understood in relation to thinking, where thinking harbors a critical capacity with respect to commonsense in the context of both the sciences and political judgment.
- <sup>22</sup>To be sure, Heidegger offers his own opposition to commonsense, challenging its “[appeal] to the unquestionable character of ... beings” (ET, p. 138). Yet, while Heidegger deploys thinking against this, describing it as a questioning and resolute openness, it nevertheless remains keyed to “the original truth of being” (ET, p. 138). This association of thinking and truth, an association that Heidegger leaves unquestioned even as he radically reformulates it, is what Arendt challenges.
- <sup>23</sup>Arendt is not alone in offering this interpretation. In defense of Nietzsche, Robert Pippin (1999) develops a similar critique of Heidegger that is especially resonant with Arendt’s remarks in LM II. His critique of Heidegger’s antimodernist tendencies also has notable parallels with Arendt’s interpretation of Kant and the counterpoint he offers to Heidegger in LM I.
- <sup>24</sup>Italics added.
- <sup>25</sup>I have developed the argument regarding the relationship between Eichmann’s empty talk and his separation from the world at length elsewhere. See Gaffney (2015).

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**How to cite this article:** Gaffney, J. (2022). Thinking, meaning, and truth: Arendt on Heidegger and the possibility of critique. *Constellations*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12647>