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Common Core for Social Justice?: Arendtian Critical Thinking and the Common Core State Standards

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

COMMON CORE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE?:

ARENDTIAN CRITICAL THINKING AND THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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BY

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

When confronted with a situation for which such routine procedures did not exist, [Eichmann] was helpless, and his cliché-ridden language produced on the stand, as it has evidently done in his official life, a kind of macabre comedy...It was the absence of thinking—which is so ordinary an experience in our everyday life, where we have hardly the time, let alone the inclination, to *stop* and think—that awakened my interest.¹

Critical thinking is a highly pursued and increasingly imperative skill to be learned by America's school-aged youth. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) directly state that critical thinking is one of three specific skills needed for youth to be successful both during and after compulsory education.² While the CCSS do not explicitly define what critical thinking is, it is evident that the justification for using critical thinking is rooted in the belief that all youth must be successful after school and in the workplace. In this capacity, critical thinking happens to find itself tangled with other stylish words in the educational landscape; words such as: marketability, global competition, and accountability. *The Foundation of Critical Thinking*, a nonprofit whose aim is to connect research on critical thinking to education reform, maintains that "it is a seminal goal which, done well, simultaneously facilitates a rainbow of other ends. It is best conceived

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977-1978), 4-5.

2. "What Parents Should Know," *Common Core State Standards Initiative*, accessed September 29, 2015, <http://www.corestandards.org/what-parents-should-know/>.

therefore, as the hub around which all other educational ends cluster.”³ This type of focus leads many to the conclusion that learning critical thinking could be the single most important take-away from the schooling process. Following this same understanding, the CCSS have shown the importance of critical thinking by making it the desired outcome of the standards. Critical thinking is a cornerstone of the CCSS, and, clearly, it has some importance that permeates many parts of society.

From the Greeks to the present day, countless thinkers and philosophers have attempted to dig up the root of what thinking is and cement its place in society. Political philosopher Hannah Arendt dedicated much of her late life to thoughtfully dissecting the thought process. Arendt regularly questions what thinking is, what relationship this important action has with democracy, and what both have to do with living in a less evil world—thus her work became a catalyst of my curiosity in conducting this research.

Arendt takes up the problematic and fascinating affairs of Adolf Eichmann, conducts in-depth studies of Kant’s political philosophy, and pens *The Life of the Mind*; in each she examines what it means to think critically and deconstructs the taken-for-granted action of thought.⁴ This paper is premised by the same guiding question that Arendt first proposes in *The Life of the Mind*: Could thinking be a condition that allows

3. “Higher Education,” *The Critical Thinking Community*, accessed September 29, 2015, <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/higher-education/431>.

4. See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 2006).; Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).; and Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*. All of these works, when viewed as a whole, provide the reader with a clearer understanding of not only Arendt’s research on thinking, but on her understanding of evil, morals, political theory, and much more.

people to abstain from or be conditioned against committing injustice? Arendt, building on Kant's political philosophy, certainly thinks it is possible; arguing that Eichmann is not purely wicked or laced with stupidity (as he presents himself to be), but that the "macabre comedy" he lands a starring role in is a result of simple thoughtlessness.⁵ It is Eichmann's entirely human inclination to not think about what he was doing allowed him to easily follow the deplorable methods of the Nazi regime. The true "banality of evil", as Arendt describes it, is a direct result of this thoughtless behavior. Arendt argues that "such thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc than all evil instincts taken together...— that was, in fact, the lesson one could take from Jerusalem."⁶ It is this human predisposition to stop thinking, she contends, that is incredibly dangerous.⁷

Arendt has much to say about the act of thinking, and her work provides a more robust understanding of critical thinking than that of the CCSS. To Arendt, thinking represents an important activity to the philosopher and to humanity alike. Much of her life's work is dedicated to the joint importance of thinking and action, and *The Life of the Mind* is no different.⁸ But one must ask oneself: Why use Hannah Arendt to answer the questions surrounding critical thinking? To answer this question one must recognize that Arendt has a firm understanding of Kantian philosophy. Kant's work on judgment, ethics,

5. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 4-5; Max Deutscher, *Judgment After Arendt* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), ix-x.

6. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 287-288.

7. For more on the "Banality of Evil" see Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

8. For more on action see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

and thinking serves as Arendt's foundation, on top of which she builds a comprehensive and moving case that argues thinking for reason's need is both dangerous and misguided. While Arendt often agrees with Kant and puts his work in conversation with Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle, she diverges from Kant in several key areas. Apropos to my research is her divergence from Kant's work on the faculties of thought and reason. Arendt suggests that Kant has some major shortcomings when discussing the action of thought. She, therefore, bridges these shortcomings by making an important distinction between *vernunft* and *verstand*.⁹ This distinction, as well as Arendt's views on a common world and judgment, will show that she can provide a more robust understanding of critical thinking than Kant and, certainly, the CCSS.

While a majority of this paper is a philosophical analysis of *The Life of the Mind* and other key works, it is also important to explicate the CCSS's focus on critical thinking. Our nation is in a crisis, or so the CCSS has you believe. According to the CCSS, "for years, the academic progress of our nation's youth has been stagnant, and we have lost ground to our international peers...One root cause has been an uneven patchwork of academic

9. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 4-16.

standards that vary from state to state and do not agree on what youth should know.”¹⁰

Thus, the CCSS were created as a life ring to throw out to what the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Gates Foundation (the founders and funders of the CCSS) would best describe as a drowning educational system. Not only do the CCSS advocate for national education benchmarks, but the standards have chosen the promotion of critical thinking as the vehicle to accomplish a majority of its goals. Using this thinking curriculum, youth are encouraged to use higher order skills such as problem solving, application, synthesis, and evaluation, rather than rote memorization, task-mastering, and simple understanding.¹¹ By using and teaching these cognitive skills the goal is to contribute to the continued success of youth after compulsory education—making sure America’s youth obtain jobs and contribute positively to society.

With the exception of critical thought, it would seem that the CCSS and the works of Arendt may not share many similarities—leaving the reader to question why, exactly, a stakeholder should care to invoke Arendt when creating policy. The answer is that Arendt

10. “About the Standards,” *Common Core State Standards Initiative*, accessed October 20, 2015, <http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards>. While it may be true that the United States lags in key areas behind many other areas of the world it is important to note that both the method of testing and the testing data used for such comparisons is subject to some scrutiny. For example, while we may lag in reading and math it cannot be disputed that American schools have shown great progress in passing rates, school enrollment, and other various areas. In fact, testing achievement, when looked at by state, shows some states are averaging 3.5% annual gains. For more on recent academic trends in the United States see: “The Nation’s Report Card,” *National Assessment of Educational Progress*, accessed January 4, 2015, <http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>; “Public School Enrollment,” *National Center for Educational Statistics*, accessed January 4, 2016, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cga.asp; and Eric A. Hanushek, Paul E. Peterson and Ludger Woessmann, “Is the U.S. Catching Up?,” *Education Next* 12, no. 4 (2012), accessed on January 4, 2016, <http://educationnext.org/is-the-us-catching-up/>.

11. “Critical Thinking,” *Literacy*, accessed October 20, 2015, <http://www.literacyta.com/critical-thinking>.

helps us understand the relationship between thinking, freedom, and the greater field of politics. To Arendt, human action is related to, or at least invokes, the public. Part of political life includes creating policies, such as school standards, that are thoughtfully engaged with the task of creating a better, shared way of life. Arendt's work on thinking lends itself to policy-making because sound, informed thought can necessarily lead to a society capable of making correct, socially just, decisions and a society more capable of participating in the policy process. Education plays a critical and political role in the preparation of youth to participate in a democratic life. The problem arises when critical thinking is adrift from its social justice implications and becomes critical reasoning, and this is what Arendt helps us see. Therefore it is my belief that if we encourage our youth to invoke an Arendtian conception of critical thinking, then a de facto form of social justice will be promoted. Our educational policies and leadership must mirror and encourage this image.

Research Questions, Methods and Methodology, and Limitations

For this paper I wish to investigate the answers to the following three interrelated research questions:

1. If we correctly assume that Arendt's theoretical and philosophical work on thinking is important, then what exactly does Arendtian critical thinking look like? Further, how, if in any way, does Arendtian critical thinking relate to social justice?
2. What exactly do the CCSS say about what critical thinking is, and do they invoke social justice? If so, in what sense?

3. Why should one invoke the work of Arendt to determine if the CCSS should be changed, with respect to critical thinking, to better meet the demands of social justice?

This research largely falls within the realm of philosophical inquiry. Through an analysis of *The Life of the Mind* I use exegetical tools to investigate the connection between critical thinking and social justice and offer insight into Arendt's reasoning. While exegeses have largely been used to interpret scripture, the tools of this method are appropriate to my paper for two reasons. Firstly, the purpose of conducting an exegetical analysis is to have a more informed understanding of a particular text and of the author that penned it.¹² Secondly, it is of utmost importance that I am objective and understand the thought process of the author in order to better inform my own thoughts on both critical thinking and Arendt's philosophic lens—and exegetical instruments give me that capability. Therefore, to properly understand the author I must employ the analytical philosopher's tool of exegesis.¹³ While this paper itself is not a true exegesis, the methods that I employ are exegetical.

12. Pascal Engel, "Analytic Philosophy and Cognitive Norms," *Monist* 82, no. 2 (1999): 225-226, accessed January 3, 2016. <http://ejournals.ebsco.com.flagship.luc.edu/Direct.asp?AccessToken=7DTD3T9B3T0MJ5O3X09JTLXITFRNBJTNN&Show=Object>; John Hayes and Carl Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginners Edition* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1987), 131-132.

13. "Exegesis," *DePaul University*, accessed on December 23, 2016, http://condor.depaul.edu/writing/writers/Types_of_Writing/exegesis.html. It is important to note that while some authors suggest that an exegesis is done on an entire work, for this paper I will only be conducting this method of research thematically. For example, while Arendt offers much to say on the faculty of the will, it is not wholly within the scope of this paper. Thus, while I may reference those sections I do not expect my references to act as a full representation of that part the text. This study focuses on several specific chapters instead of the entire work.

The drawing out of meaning, in opposition to attributing meaning, to text allows one to find the contextual meaning of the work studied. Closely studying the text allows one a chance to concisely summarize the relevant sections of text and offer insight into a contemporary use of the text.¹⁴ I argue that this analytical tool is akin to a one-sided interrogation, in which the result is a reconstruction of the argument of a text. This method suits a writer like Arendt exceptionally well—as she often employs similar strategies in her own work. Those findings, along with secondary sources, will strengthen a base on which I may articulate an Arendtian definition of critical thinking and observe its connections to social justice.

To understand the current state of critical thinking in the CCSS I conduct a critical reading of the national English and Language Arts standards, literature surrounding the CCSS as a whole, and situate the topic within current discussions in education. This type of research allows me to better understand the circumstances in which something was created. Thereby I investigate the deeper meaning behind the Common Core movement and its use of critical thinking. I hope to reconcile the found differences between critical thinking as presented by the CCSS and what Arendt has to say about this important action. To accomplish this task, I return to the study I completed on Arendt and put it into conversation with the critical readings of the CCSS and the discourse surrounding it. With this conversation I put theory into practice. I argue that the CCSS's focus on critical thinking must be defined, refined, and expanded if we choose to use Arendt as a

14. Engel, "Analytic Philosophy and Cognitive Norms," 226.

concrete theoretical foundation. It is my thesis that the CCSS fail to properly address both a notion of Arendtian, dispositional critical thinking and social justice, and therefore we must rethink the standards to better meet the demands of both.

While the scope of this paper is fairly large, it does come with a couple of limitations. Firstly, while Arendt sufficiently argues what thinking is, how one thinks, and what it means when one thinks, the purpose of my research is to fully understand Arendt's definition of thinking and not to refute, to affirm, or to suggest alternatives to the act of thinking as it is conveyed by Arendt. However, I do wish to further define what the CCSS believe critical thinking to be, especially in relation to social justice, as they have not succinctly argued what critical thinking is or its implications for our youth's future. Secondly, I do not wish to talk about what is, but only about what can be. For example, I do not wish to argue that we are, or are not, promoting our youth to use and learn critical thinking skills—but to investigate the ways in which the CCSS say critical thinking is invoked and how it could be changed to better meet the needs of an Arendtian conception of thinking and social justice.

CHAPTER TWO
THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING, APPEARANCE, AND JUDGMENT
IN ARENDTIAN CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking—or thinking in general—is an oft employed, but severely taken-for-granted, skill that permeates multiple areas of our educational environment. Countless thinkers, school teachers, administrators, and policy wonks alike have debated its significance and frequently come to the same correct assessment—we ought to be encouraging our youth to think critically, and not only for their own benefit, but for the greater common good. But what exactly does critical thinking entail and why is it important to talk about a skill that is universally accepted as important? Is it acceptable to say that something so important goes without further explanation? While youth are told that they must learn to think critically if they have any interest in succeeding, we must ask ourselves if we ever fully explain to them what it really *means*.

Arendt, like Kant before her, spends a lot of time theorizing about thinking, and provides a thoughtful and provoking investigation into how we think. In fact, Arendt goes so far as to say that the action of thought is possibly the most active of all human activity.¹ She oft employs the same skills that constitutes critical thought; thoughtfully

1. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 170-171.

examining the works of her predecessors, exposing her thoughts in a shared world so that she may judge and be judged, and is consciously aware of the world that surrounds her and the issues that plague it. As such, she is an exceptional critical thinker. Her examination of how we think, what critical thinking is, and what that means for the world provides a strong foundation on which to build my own investigation of critical thinking and the CCSS. This chapter addresses my first research question: If we correctly assume that Arendt's theoretical and philosophical work on thinking is important, then what exactly does Arendtian critical thinking look like? Further, how, if in any way, does Arendtian critical thinking relate to social justice? I answer this question in the following two ways. First, I build an Arendtian definition of critical thinking by focusing on her work on thinking in *The Life of the Mind* and *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. This includes her understanding of the significant differences between *verstand* and *vernunft*, where we are when we think, how thinking is both a solitary and common activity, her understanding of judgment, and how important thinking is for the prevention of evil. Secondly, I determine if an Arendtian understanding of critical thinking invokes a semblance of social justice through a close reading of *The Life of the Mind* in concurrence with her work on natality and several secondary authors.

Taking Issue with Kant

Through Arendt's discussion of Kant's work on the faculties of intellect and reason it becomes clear that these two actions are, indeed, incredibly different. For Kant, the need for reason is much more important than the simple yearning to know something.

This is, perhaps, the area in which Arendt believes Kant is the most preoccupied with the metaphysical tradition. She believes that Kant spends too much time arguing for the promotion of reason. Since reason demands that we must investigate the truth beyond what can be known, Arendt says we must first have sound thinking if we aspire to be a sound reasoner.

Arendt's point of departure from Kant rests on a firm recognition of the differences between *verstand* and *vernunft*. Kant argues that *verstand* is intellect, or what he calls thinking. Contrastingly, Kant posits that *vernunft* is cognition, or reason, which is found through thinking. *Verstand*, the more inferior faculty, is how we organize perceptions and is the a priori concept of logic. In this sense, *verstand* squarely deals with science because it is what we can know from the experiences we have. *Vernunft*, to Kant, represents the higher of the two faculties and is the endpoint a sound thinker should arrive at. He argues that *vernunft*, in a metaphysical sense, is a speculative process to think about absolute truth and is a posteriori. This process goes beyond what Kant calls conditional understanding and judging, and, in an effort of transcendence, moves towards an unconditional realization of the world. Breaking from the classical notion that man can think about the concepts that undergird reality, Kant rewrites the meanings of *verstand* and *vernunft* that had been understood in German and Greek philosophy because he argues that only God can think intuitively.² Kant's break with the classics is

2. Donna Tussing Orwin, *Tolstoy's Art and Thought, 1847-1880*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) 130-132.

where Arendt becomes particularly concerned. Recognizing Kant's sudden and precarious departure, she calls for a return to Plato and the classical philosophy to understand the difference between, and to finally get right, the meanings of these two faculties.

Arendt argues that Kant and his successors fail to pay close attention to the faculty of thought (*verstand*) because they focus too greatly on the criteria for reason (*vernunft*).³ In *Judgment After Arendt*, Deutscher highlights Arendt's difficulties with Kant's critique of *vernunft*; Deutscher argues that Kant's "idea of pure reason" cannot be truth because it relies too heavily on *verstand* to provide a scaffolding of a schema.⁴ It is also significant that Arendt is displeased with Kant's translation of *verstand*. Kant equates the German *verstand* to the Latin *intellectus*, instead of the literal German root *verstehen*, or, in English, *to understand*. Thus, Arendt argues that Kant's translation is misguided and if he would properly translate *verstand* to understanding, then, he would be able to attribute thinking to finding meaning instead of intellect.⁵

Like Kant, Arendt believes truth and meaning are two very different things. However, unlike Kant, she argues that attributing meaning to thought holds the key to finding the truth. According to Arendt we must search for meaning before we can know—we must understand what is before we can find the ultimate truths that Kant is

3. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 14-15, 56-57.

4. Deutscher, *Judgment after Arendt*, 17-18.

5. See Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 13-15 to understand more of Arendt's issues with Kant's distinction. For example, she argues that Kant incorrectly translates *verstand* to mean thinking and not understanding. By acknowledging that Arendt attributes understanding to *verstand*, it is much easier to see her line of thought and the importance of the faculty of thought.

searching for.⁶ Since Arendt all but throws Kant's definitions by the wayside, she therefore argues that *verstand* aligns with perception and science; and that *vernunft* is the quest towards reason driven by the unknowable. Arendt, responding directly to Kant, posits:

The great obstacle that reason (*Vernunft*) puts in its own way arises from the side of the intellect (*Verstand*) and the entirely justified criteria it has established for its own purposes, that is, for quenching our thirst, and meeting our need, for knowledge and cognition...The need of reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same.⁷

Demanding the criteria and evidence for certainty that come from cognition, Kant fails to recognize the urgency in thinking. This allows Kant to work backwards, first finding the truth and then filling in the blanks for how he got there. The above excerpt from Arendt also further highlights the importance she puts on her own translation of *verstand*; if Kant had chosen to translate *verstand* into understanding, Arendt may have not taken issue with this.⁸ The distinction between Arendt's understanding of *verstand* and *vernunft* is important to keep in mind when the CCSS are later investigated and their focus on critical thinking refined—we must determine whether the CCSS equates critical thinking to Arendt's understanding of *verstand* or if they wrongly focus on Kant's translation of *vernunft*. It is safe to contend that to Arendt the greater of the two is *verstand*, as it is the key to *vernunft*. As such, the first part of an Arendtian definition of critical thinking is

6. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 15-16.

7. *Ibid.*, 15.

8. *Ibid.*, 15-16.

premised on the proper understanding and translation of *verstand*—which is, to Arendt, understanding.

Other Building Blocks of Arendtian Critical Thinking

According to Arendt, parsing out the important action of thought requires that one understands not only what one is trying to accomplish when one thinks, but also where one is *not* when this happens. Thus, understanding the world of appearances and the fact that we must withdraw from it when thinking is the second step in determining an Arendtian definition of critical thinking. Without going into exhaustive detail on the precise action of thought, Arendt argues that for thinking to happen we must remove ourselves from the world of appearances. By doing so, we are able to unhinge ourselves from the practicality of the seen world and embrace the abstractness of a wandering mind; thereby we are able to interact with our own dialogue and begin meaningful conversations with ourselves— or simply, we are able to think.¹

While Arendt argues it is not the place for thinking, I contend that the world of appearances is where what we think about links itself to what we do. For Arendt, the space in which we appear is necessarily political and is a space for action.¹⁰ Arendt, using her own reading of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, argues that being and appearing coincide. In other words, we must *be* part of the world we *appear* in. Thus, I suggest that

9. Karin A. Fry, *Arendt: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 80-83.

10. Burke, "Voegelin, Heidegger, and Arendt: Two's a Company, Three's a Crowd?," 83.

when we begin to think, we cannot simply retreat into the shadow of wandering thought, but we must have a careful awareness of the way in which we appear to others and the ways in which we occupy this world of appearances.¹¹

If we conceive the present as happening in the world of appearances, then we may need to conceive of the past and future, or at least think of what those were or could be, as happening in an invisible world of imagination. To use your imagination is to train your mind to go visiting, to investigate, and to judge and be judged from the standpoint of all others.²¹²

This echoes my argument that to think critically we cannot fully ignore the world of appearances. To Arendt, and unlike Heidegger, being is disclosed when we are in relation to others; arguing that this dynamic space for political action is only accessible when we position ourselves in the standpoint of all humanity. Given that understanding, the world of appearances, as Arendt names it, is of utmost importance to this research because it is the exact place where the action of thinking can be linked with some semblance of togetherness. I am arguing that the action of thinking needs the world of appearance in order for the thinker to understand that while a solitary activity, the action of thought should always be linked to a semblance of togetherness. It is only in that world of being and appearing that one can engage others, and thus humanity at large.

11. Ibid.

12. John Francis Burke, "Voegelin, Heidegger, and Arendt: Two's a Company, Three's a Crowd?" *Social Science Journal* 30, no. 1 (1993): 83.; Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 34.

Furthermore, since we inhabit the world of appearances when we think—and then act—and that world is in the standpoint of others, there is a purposeful and powerful conception of plurality in Arendt's argument. Plurality is the condition of humanity that is the connector; we share a call to action, a collective purpose, a reason to live. Arendt beautifully suggests, "We are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live."¹³ This plurality is an important part of action, which ensures that the action of thought cannot be done in pure isolation, but must be done in the presence of those of difference perspectives.¹⁴ It is from this location that we put ourselves to be judged by others for the thoughts and actions we commit.¹⁵ The shared place of judgment, generated by the personal activity as thinking, joins thinking and community.

Further, Arendt argues that Socrates himself taught people how to "talk to themselves", thereby accompanying themselves through their own thought process. This two-in-one theory, first brought to the world by Socrates, provides Arendt with a personal definition of thinking and the conscience. That is, man is in constant intercourse with himself.¹⁶ According to Deutscher, Arendt purposefully resurrects Plato's conception

13. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 8.

14. *Ibid.*, 7-8.

15. Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves, "Hannah Arendt," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last Modified April 14, 2014, accessed on February 4, 2016. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/arendt/>.

16. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 179-193; Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*.

of thinking in order to further break down the metaphysical tradition that so many, like Kant, focus on too greatly. Moreover, by recalling Plato Deutscher effectively argues that this internal dialogue prepares the mind for active imagination.¹⁷ Thus, and agreeing with both Duetscher and Arendt, thinking in its first sense represents this very personal dialogue. It is also important that Arendt became very skeptical of what Heidegger called “pure thought”, as it becomes almost a trap in which the thinker is completely isolated. To Arendtian scholar Jon Nixon, this is nearly as bad as thoughtlessness, and has no place in the world, as Arendt configures it. Like Arendt, Nixon firmly believes that thought must always result in a dialogue with others, and when it does not the thinker lacks the ability to execute proper judgment and thus only conscience is produced.¹⁸

As suggested, part three of determining what exactly critical thinking is means that while it is an action done in solitude, it does invoke a sense of togetherness. Arendt’s dedication to keep the action of thought connected to the phenomenality of the political life is yet another testament of the belief that thinking must have something to do with togetherness.¹⁹ Furthermore, while Arendt believes the act of thinking is personal, it always reflects outward. It is the simple act of thought that all people share; this commonality is the connecting thread of all men. Not only do all people in the world of

17. Deutscher, *Judgment After Arendt*, xxi.

18. Jon Nixon, “Hannah Arendt: Thinking Versus Evil,” accessed January 5, 2016. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/hannah-arendt-thinking-versus-evil/2018664.article>.

19. Divide Pangaea, “The Politics of Appearance,” *The Hannah Arendt Center*, accessed on January 28, 2016, <http://www.hannaharendtcenter.org/?p=8380>.

appearances share a similar context (common sense) and the ability to think, but also the appearances that we present when we think, in fact, matter. To be sure that these appearances matter, I turn to a common analogy, and one that Arendt uses herself, to better show that the world of appearances is indeed connected to the nature of associative living. To be alive, in the sense of sheer appearance, means to yearn for self-display—therefore seeing our own appearance. But it does not end here; this self-display is open for the inspection of others, such as actors on a stage. All actors share a common space—the stage—but each depends on the others to make their appearance justified and for others to react to the other’s appearance.²⁰ Additionally these very appearances and displays to others lead to the faculty of judgment, which will become important later.

An Arendtian Definition of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is possible only where the standpoints of all others are open to inspection. Hence, critical thinking, while still a solitary business, does not cut itself off from ‘all others.’ To be sure, it still goes on in isolation, but by the force of imagination it makes the others present and thus moves in a space that is potentially public, open to all sides; in other words, it adopts the position of Kant’s world citizen. To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one’s imagination to go visiting.²¹

I have shown that there are three specific concepts we must consider if we are to construct an Arendtian definition of critical thinking: the difference between *verstand* and *vernunft*, the importance of the world of appearances, and understanding thinking as

20. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 19-22.

21. Immanuel Kant, cited by Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 43.

a semblance of togetherness. By using these three building blocks, and coupling them with Arendt's work on judgment and the imagination, the following section shows that an Arendtian definition of critical thinking is complex, yet simple in its purpose. Critical thinking via an Arendtian understanding can best be conceived as thinking, using Arendt's translation of *verstand*, with an enlarged mentality. It means that through a concept as togetherness, and by opening your appearance and the appearances of others to examination, we may be able to more critically and impartially understand the world that both precedes and surrounds us. What's more, I argue that the end result, as I believe Arendt would imagine, is that it is our obligation to think critically. By doing so we challenge the assumptions of the world and make a difference in it. That is, we have an obligation to honor the world we are born into and exist within by making it more just, more moral, and less evil.

To highlight my conception of Arendtian definition of critical thinking, I highlight a passage in her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. This brief three part excerpt on critical thinking is the most direct reference Arendt gives to her readers, and it holds the key to what I argue is an Arendtian conception of critical thinking. The first section of this quote: "Critical thinking is possible only where the standpoints of all others are open to inspection" shows the important action of inspection. This inspection and the implications of it is the basis of all critical thought. It is this dialogue, internal and external, that is important; to judge and be judged; to apply critical standards to one's own thoughts and to the thoughts of other's. From this standpoint, in the public realm,

we are able to “enlarge [our] own thought as to take into account the thoughts of others.”²² In the second part of the excerpt Arendt shows her propensity to link the ‘togetherness’ with judgment, Kant, and the public sphere. Arendt, again channeling the Socratic understanding of thought, argues that thinking is necessarily social and that this un-teachable action cannot exist entirely in isolation.²³ In the text’s final words: “To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one’s imagination to go visiting,” only further solidifies her work on the Kantian world citizen and social necessity of thought. To enlarge one’s mind means to compare all possible judgments of others. It means, figuratively, trying on the shoes of others by way of the imagination.²⁴ This enlarged mentality is the public sphere—where we must ‘visit’ in order to be in a space of judgment. Using Arendt’s understanding, the public sphere is tis best conceived as the place in where our public life occurs and shared space where common concerns are voiced, judged, and resolved.²⁵ For Eichmann, the failure to recognize the plurality of the world led to his lack of judgment and thoughtlessness—and ultimately is failure to be a critical thinker. As a critical thinker it is one’s duty to interject oneself into the public sphere and to make it a better and more just place. Thus, critical thinking must take place

22. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 42.

23. Ibid., 43; Thomas H. Warren, “Critical Thinking Beyond Reasoning: Restoring Virtue to Thought,” in *Re-Thinking Reason: New Perspectives in Critical Thinking*, ed. by Kerry S. Walters (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 223-224.

24. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, 42-43.

25. For a more compressive understanding of the public sphere see Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

in the public realm.

Expanding past the aforementioned text, critical thinking is also not the same as empathy. According to Arendt, empathy essentially squashes critical thinking. The empathic person tries to actually determine what precisely is going on in someone else's mind.²⁶ Hannah Arendt Center fellow, Jennie Han argues that when we allow empathy to pervade thought it stifles our ability to respond critically. Han submits that the way to recognize the suffering of others is by way of critical thinking and not empathy. If we are to make others present as Arendt demands, then that does not mean that we imagine what the other is thinking, but rather that we use our imagination to construct a public space in which their actions are open to inspection by others. It is this place that others occupy where we ourselves are members and is the place where we consider the responses to those judgments made against us.²⁷

Another important aspect of Arendtian critical thinking is found in her interpretation of Kant's understanding of *verstand* and his preoccupation with *vernunft*. Thomas Warren summons Arendt's reformulation of Kant's *verstand/vernunft* argument to say that in contemporary society critical thinking is too heavily reliant on the use of reasoning, the efficient measuring, or calculating of evidence to come to an immediate answer. In doing so we forget that thinking in its most simple form is a way to imagine, to

26. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 43.

27. Jennie Han, "Critical Thinking, Judgment and Empathy," *The Hannah Arendt Center*, last modified April, 1, 2013, <http://www.hannaharendtcenter.org/?p=10002>.

wonder, and speculate a range of judgments to cast. Warren's thesis is that the greater critical thinking movement in American schools focuses completely on critical reasoning and not on thinking at all. Further, this absence of critical thinking could come at a great cost: the stagnation of the development of moral consciousness in our youth.²⁸ Thinking and reasoning are clearly different. The focus on reason subverts the practical need to stop and think. Arendt could not possibly have pictured the state of schools that Warren paints, but she gives grave warnings that thinking for reason's need is particularly dangerous. Warren was right in the 1990's, as was Arendt in the 1950's; critical thinking is important and when we choose to think for reason's need it can be both bad for us personal and even worse for society.

Concluding Thoughts on Arendtian Critical Thinking

It has been shown that critical thinking rightfully holds an important place in current society, and that the German political philosopher Hannah Arendt has much to say about this important action. Through an exegetical study of *The Life of the Mind* and *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, I have shown that critical thinking has something to do with getting the definition of thinking itself correct. Secondly, I have shown that critical thinking hinges on the understanding of where we are when we think and that thinking is linked to togetherness. Lastly, critical thinking, according to Arendt, is deeply related to Kant's world citizen. Thus, I have answered the first half of my first research

28. Warren, "Critical Thinking Beyond Reasoning: Restoring Virtue to Thought," 221-222.

question by building an Arendtian definition of critical thinking

When the above research is put into conversation with Arendt's vast amount of work on political theory I argue that we can safely assume that to Arendt, critical thinking must have something to do with social justice, or at least the prevention of evil. Through the examination of primary sources and the review of secondary sources I will argue that an Arendtian conception of critical thinking is necessarily built on an understanding that the world is shared space and that mankind is on a collective journey—this idea is found in Arendt's numerous discussions on natality.²⁹

Natality, from the French *natalité*, in its simplest and most literal form means to be born. However, to Arendt the conception of natality undergirds all humanity and, as such, her works are purposefully conceived around this important notion. Arendt uses this concept in a variety of ways from the connection the three activities of life in *The Human Condition*, to working for the renewal of the world. At the heart of Arendt's understanding is the idea that all humanity is rooted and weaved together in birth, and, therefore, is rooted in freedom. It is freedom that is a basis for a conception of an Arendtian form of social justice. Arendt further relates natality to social justice by arguing that the miraculous renewal of the world is a virtue of man upon being born. It is this capacity that gives man hope and faith in humanity and our shared world.³⁰

I also wish to further relate this Arendtian conception of social justice to natality

29. For more on natality see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

30. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 246-248.

through her work on human dignity. In the *Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt attempts to mediate the discourse between the Nazi, communist ideology and the people they sought to marginalize. She concludes that the world's understanding of evil is inadequate and that "radical evil" seeks to usurp humanity, thus stripping it of its inherent dignity—or, simply, its right to have rights.³¹ By combining a Kantian understanding of the intrinsic value of dignity, an Aristotelian connection of humanity to social politics, and a Burkian argument that rights are bestowed from "within the nation" Arendt is uniquely able to argue that even when stripped of a home, the actor does not lose their freedom to appear. This egalitarian concept gives man the capacity to begin and is shared by all humanity. Arendt argues that this basic freedom bestowed upon us at birth, actualized in action, and gives humanity plurality. With this understanding, humanity cannot be stripped of its potential to be political if given a public space to exist. That is, because we are human, we are naturally political beings.³²

Numerous scholars have taken issue with Arendt's minimization of the social sphere and her rejection of inalienable rights. It is my intention to simply state that to Arendt all forms of discourse are political—to the point that all standpoints have valid

31. "Hannah Arendt (1906-1975)," *Encyclopedia of Action and Social Justice*, ed. By Gary L. Anderson and Katheryn G. Herr, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007), 189-191.; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1951).; and John Helis, "Hannah Arendt and Human Dignity: Theoretical Foundations and Constitutional Protection of Human Rights," *Journal of Politics and Law* 1, no. 3 (2008): 73.

32. Ibid.

interests in navigating a shared way of life in preserving the world.³³ Furthermore, synthesizing Han's rejection of empathy in critical thinking to recognize suffering, Warren's key difference between critical reasoning and critical thinking, and Arendt's own belief that judgment is important in recognizing the standpoints of others, I argue that that Arendt's work on political judgment is of the utmost relevance in determining if social justice has a place in Arendtian critical thinking. If we do not have a representative standpoint of judgment it is impossible for us to recognize the suffering of others and validate those concerns.³⁴ To arrive at this standpoint we must be able to think critically at all times, and not just when required. It is my conclusion that when looking at both the primary and secondary sources for Arendtian thinking it is nearly impossible to come to a conclusion where critical thinking does not invoke some semblance of social justice

33. For more on the conversations surround Hannah Ardent and the Social Sphere see Dana Villa, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 234-235.

34. Han, "Critical Thinking, Judgment and Empathy."; Warren, "Critical Thinking Beyond Reasoning: Restoring Virtue to Thought."; and Villa, *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*.

CHAPTER THREE

TURNING TO A THINKING CURRICULUM

The movement towards a critical thinking curriculum has been in motion for nearly three decades. More recent is the conception, speedy rise, and subsequent fall from grace of the CCSS. These standards, which have chosen critical thinking as the appropriate vehicle to ensure America's place in the world, construct a very disconcerting educational system. This chapter addresses my second research question: What exactly do the CCSS say about what critical thinking is, and do they invoke social justice, and if so, in what sense? I answer this question in the following two ways. First, I investigate how we got to the place where we are now in terms of critical thinking as a vehicle of education. Secondly, I conduct a critical reading of the CCSS to determine the ways in which critical thinking is being conveyed in the standards and if they invoke a semblance of social justice.

Foundations of the Critical Thinking Movement and the Common Core State Standards

The critical thinking movement predates the CCSS and has had great impact on America Schooling. The focus on critical thinking began in the 1970s as a practical way to indoctrinate logic in our youth by way of simple courses in compulsory schooling. While the main focus of critical thinking in schools began in the 1970s, the push for defining the skill and determining its importance has been debated for centuries. Beginning in the

middle 20th century the research on critical thinking gained steam, and over the next 50 to 60 years the field grew and a movement was born.¹

The academic research on critical thinking in education is vast; authors and policy-makers have touted its importance in the educative environment by way of pedagogy and practice. Tracing critical thinking's history back to the Greeks, scholars use critical thinking as the skill that undergirds nearly the entire educational sphere. Scholars like Ennis, Siegel, Scheffler, and Paul dedicate much time to determining what, exactly, critical thinking is and how it manifests in curriculum.² The critical thinking movement begins with a capacity-based argument. Early in the movement the purpose was to assign specific taxonomies of what skills critical thinkers should possess and that these skills should be reflected in the sciences.³ Over time, the focus moved away from only the sciences and towards other areas of life. Scheffler recognizes the importance of critical thinking in instilling impartial, rational beliefs that inspire curiosity in our society. Thus, he sees the importance of the intersection of critical thinking with morality, philosophy,

1. Richard Paul, "Critical Thinking Movement: 3 Waves," *The Critical Thinking Community*, accessed on February 8, 2016, <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/critical-thinking-movement-3-waves/856>.

2. Nicholas C. Burbules and Rupert Berk, "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits," in *Critical Theories in Education: Changing Terrain of Knowledge and Politics*, ed. by Thomas S. Popkewitz and Lynn Fendler (New York: Routledge, 1999), 48.

3. Robert H. Ennis, "A Concept of Critical Thinking," *Harvard Educational Review* 32, no. 1 (1962): 161-178.

education, and politics.⁴

Beyond the capacity model of critical thinking, a focus on the dispositional model of critical thinking should also be highlighted. This model of critical thinking, propagated by Arendt, Paul, Ennis, and Siegel, argues for the disposition that comes with critical thinking and each author brings a unique piece of the puzzle to the table. Ennis believes that being well informed and having the skill of critical thinking should not be the endpoint, but only the beginning; he argues that critical thinkers should have a tendency to look at the world critically by default, not just as a tool that is being used for a specific purpose.⁵ For Paul, the difference between the capacity and dispositional models is a form of weak and strong senses of critical thinking. A weak-sense of critical thinking is akin to pulling a specific skill out of a hat when specifically required to do so. In the strong-sense, critical thinking is when someone incorporates this skill into all areas of life in which they constantly examine and re-examine their assumptions in search of “clarity, accuracy, and fair-mindedness.”⁶

While diverse in their respective research, the authors of this movement lead to the following area of understanding: critical thinking, as both a capacity and disposition,

4. Wouter Van Haften and Ger Snik, “Critical thinking and Foundational Development,” in *Reason and Education: Essays in Honor of Israel Scheffler*, ed. by Harvey Siegel (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 1997), 19-41.

5. Robert H. Ennis, “A Taxonomy of Critical Thinking Dispositions and Abilities” in *Teaching Thinking Skills: Theory and Practice*, eds. Joan Boykoff Brown and Robert J. Sternberg, (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1987), 9-26.

6. Richard Paul, “Teaching Critical Thinking in the Strong Sense,” in *Re-Thinking Reason: New Perspectives in Critical Thinking*, ed. by Kerry S. Walters (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 181-198.

is linked to rationality, and encouraging youth to use their rationality is one, if not the first commandment of the educative process. Fast forwarding to current literature, there is no shortage of research surrounding critical thinking and the importance it has in education.⁷

Research on critical thinking pedagogy has several implications, which nuance the greater critical thinking movement. Foundations such as *The Critical Thinking Community* have built an entire business and philosophic enterprise on the importance of instilling this important ability in our youth. Thus, it is their assertion that a teacher must be properly trained in critical thinking pedagogy and the foundation provides data driven professional development to accomplish this goal.⁸ While most agree on the general importance of critical thinking, some authors have taken it a step further by arguing critical thinking has important manifestations in educational policy. Clearly favoring the dispositional critical thinking championed by Paul and Ennis, Burbules and Berk look at the intersection of critical thinking and critical pedagogy. They stress the importance of *criticality*; suggesting that critical thinking and critical pedagogy may have a shared concern: creating more critical citizens that are able to have a humanizing effect on the world. It is their contention that while both movements have separate, and valid,

7. Nicholas C. Burbules and Rupert Berk, "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits," 48-49.

8. For more on this business enterprise see "Our Mission," *The Critical Thinking Community*, accessed on February 17, 2016, <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/our-mission/599>.

concerns, each have a shared interest in helping citizens become better critical thinkers. This allows people “to see the world as it is and to act according.”⁹ Echoing this belief, Warren suggests that critical thinking alone allows one to be morally conscious and recognize evil and injustice.¹⁰ It is this form of dispositional critical thinking that I believe Arendt channels when invoking a notion of social justice.

Outside of academia, critical thinking has further cemented its place in American education by becoming the preferred vehicle of the CCSS to secure America’s bright future via today’s youth. Over the last eight years the road to, and from, the CCSS has been contentious to say the least. Teachers, students, parents, legislators, and executives all have an opinion on these national benchmarks ranging from unequivocal support to flat out rejection. The CCSS can be traced back to a report released by the National Governors Association’s Educational Policy Division in late 2008. This report concluded that the United States trailed in key areas and that the nation as a whole could no longer lead the international community with respect to innovation. It also predicted that with an uncompetitive educational system that has no national benchmarks of success, the United States, would soon fall behind other developed nations.¹¹

9. Barbules and Berk, “Critical thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits,” 45-46.

10. Warren, “Critical Thinking Beyond Reasoning: Restoring Virtue to Thought,” 226.

11. “Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education.” *N.G.A. Centers for Best Practices*. Accessed on February 21, 2016. <http://www.nga.org/cms/home/nga-center-for-best-practices/center-publications/page-edu-publications/col2-content/main-content-list/benchmarking-for-success-ensurin.html>.

This report caused greater concern for policy-makers and became the foundation of the CCSS. Over the next year, this state-lead initiative submitted standards for public review and finally released the finished product in June of 2010.¹² While solid, state-created standards and achievement were at the forefront of the NGA's call to action, that was not always the impression received by the masses. Critics not only took issue with the far-reaching standards, but also wrestled with the intrusion of the federal government into an area in which many believe is the state's sole right to regulate.¹³ By the end of 2013, 45 states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense schools, and several territories had adopted the standards and began their individual implementation processes. However, faith in the CCSS began to diminish. As such, in the fall of 2014 Indiana became the first state to officially withdrawal from the initiative in favor of self-created benchmarks. This contentious debate made the CCSS a controversial topic in educational, social, and political circles. Today, 43 states and several other entities are part of the initiative and it would seem the CCSS have weathered the storm. However the forecast for the benchmark standards remains cloudy and uncertain.¹⁴

12. "Development Process," *Common Core State Standard Initiative*, accessed on February 18, 2016, <http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/development-process/#timeline-2009>.

13. Allie Bidwell, "The History of the Common Core State Standards," *US News & World Report*, accessed on February 19, 2016, <http://www.usnews.com/news/special-reports/articles/2014/02/27/the-history-of-common-core-state-standards?page=2.>; Diane Ravitch, "Exploring the Origins of the Common Core," *Diane Ravitch's Blog*, accessed on February 19, 2016, <http://dianeravitch.net/2013/01/27/13491/>.

14. "Development Process," *Common Core State Standard Initiative*.

The Common Core State Standards and Critical Thinking

The CCSS advocate for national educational benchmarks and have chosen the promotion of critical thinking prime skill to encourage. Using what many call a thinking curriculum, students are encouraged to tap into higher order skills such as problem solving, application, synthesis, and evaluation, rather than those of a lower order such as rote memorization, task-mastering, and simple understanding.¹⁵ It is obvious that the intent of the NGA and the CCSS is to centralize critical thinking, but are they accomplishing this? In this section I summarize the CCSS's focus on critical thinking by conducting a close reading of the English and Language Arts (ELA) standards. Additionally, I use the findings from that close read and put them into conversation with the Arendtian definition of critical thinking.

The CCSS act as a call to arms to save American education, and these standards choose critical thinking as the vehicle to accomplish that feat. But one must ask what kind of critical thinking is the CCSS promoting and does that form of critical thinking solve the vast problems they seek to eradicate? It is my intention to show that through the lack of direct references to dispositional, strong-sense critical thinking; through the promotion of specific critical reasoning skills; and through the minimization of other critical thinking skills, the CCSS do not invoke the same type of critical thinking Arendt believes to be superior and instead invokes a form of critical reasoning more aligned with an Kantian

15. "Critical Thinking," *Literacy*.

understanding of *vernunft*. That we simultaneously teach our youth specific reasoning skills to be used in the classroom and lack a deep concern for social justice is my primary concern. If we are to encourage our youth to have a dispositional, critical outlook—and to eradicate injustice because of this very disposition—we must be able to encourage them to invoke an idea of critical thinking beyond when they are merely called on in the classroom.

The first major issue with the CCSS is that there is little to no direct reference to critical thinking throughout the CCSS's entirety, let alone the dispositional form Arendt and others champion. In fact, the only direct reference to critical thinking by the CCSS is not part of the official standards at all. The "what parents should know" information page of the website demonstrates the only explicit statement of critical thinking: "The Common Core focuses on developing the critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills students will need to be successful".¹⁶ That said there are several indirect references that the reader can derive when reviewing the standards. However, it is the simple minimization of these important critical thinking skills that is of the great concern. For example, in the introduction to the ELA standards it states that in-school youth must be able to evaluate and understand other cultures critically and constructively through vigorous reading of world literature with the hope that they can "inhabit worlds and have

16. "What Parents Should Know," *Common Core State Standards Initiative*.

experiences much different than their own.”¹⁷ This would appear to possibly reference the “enlarged mentality” or the use of imagination championed by Arendt, but given its only location in the CCSS’s introduction, there are no specific standards that address this concept. The minimization of the other important skills does not encourage any form of strong-sense critical thinking and instead encourages a weak-sense of critical thinking.

Along with the above reference, there are also a few allusions to imagination in the CCSS, but, again, its importance is depreciated through the concentration on specific reasoning skills by the standards. For example, in the writing standards for middle school students are asked to use their imagination to build a narrative of a fictional or real experience with a conclusion that follows clear, logical reasoning.¹⁸ The use of imagination is shrouded in the importance of logical reason—a common theme for many non-reasoning skills in the CCSS. If you use Arendt’s belief that to think critically we must follow the *verstand-vernunft* hierarchy, then the imagination would be a key to unlocking critical reason. Furthering the excessive focus on reasoning, the research components are built on a scaffolding of logic. While there is a strong focus on research throughout the standards, the focus is on making a logical argument that uses findings from your own research. However important these skills may be, the focus on critical reasoning by the CCSS hijacks most, if not all, efforts to encourage critical understanding.

17. “Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects,” *Common Core State Standards Initiative*, accessed on February 11, 2016, http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA_Standards1.pdf, 7.

18. *Idib.*, 42-44.

It is easy to see that many higher-level skills promoted by the CCSS are actually tools of critical reasoning and not thinking. Returning to Warren, he argues that the difference between reason and thinking can be traced back all the way to Plato's "Divided Line" and that the *noesis*, or intuition guided by dialectic, is the correct connotation of thinking. According to Warren *dianoia* is reasoning to find an accurate measurement.¹⁹ Warren's argument is that critical thinking pedagogy is entirely limited to *dianoia*. These standards largely promote logic, truth finding, fallacy recognition, quantitative reasoning, and information processing—all skills of *dianoia*. That is not to say some thinking skills are not being benchmarked by the standards. In fact, the CCSS for "Vocabulary Acquisition and Use" dictate that school-aged youth should know how to determine multiple meanings of a word based on the context of the text, thus they must apply thinking skills to find one of many, correct answers.²⁰

It is my contention that when only looking at the benchmarks, the standards appear to advocate for the use of overly generalized higher-level reasoning skills with the assumption that weak-sense critical thinking will be a byproduct of the educative experience. As such, the CCSS do not encourage long-term, dispositional criticality, and they certainly do not directly promote the activity. It is also my contention that if the CCSS want to truly focus on dispositional critical thinking, then they must intentionally

19. Warren, "Critical Thinking Beyond Reasoning," 222.

20. "Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects," *Common Core State Standards Initiative*, 55.

incorporate specific skills that build on critical thinking and not just critical reasoning. It is through these types of skills that youth can grasp the complexities of the world and be better prepared to issue critical judgments against it.

Do the Common Core State Standards Make the World More Socially Just?

In this section I have given a brief history of the critical thinking and common core movements. The critical thinking movement can best be summarized as an organized adoration of a skill important to all citizens, especially school-aged youth, with a cohesive focus on encouraging that very skill. While cohesive in mission, the movement is anything but in its practice and methods. Some researchers have argued that we may not actually be encouraging critical thinking at all, but rather critical reasoning. The greater common core movement can be similarly described. All actors are rightfully concerned with academic achievement, rigor, and innovation, and have determined that critical thinking is the linking key to unlock all of them. Nonetheless, while the same in mission, what and how we are promoting these standards in the classroom can vary based on a variety of factors. Additionally, it cannot be succinctly determined how, exactly, the CCSS and dispositional critical thinking truly fit together. Therefore, I contend that the CCSS do not promote, and certainly do not teach critical thinking—at least when using the understanding of dispositional critical thinking given by Arendt.

The absence of long-term criticality by the CCSS is very concerning. But what is of more concern is the lack of focus on social justice. The CCSS seek to ‘level the playing field’ by way of promoting equity so that education, as a whole, can reach a more social

just position fairness. This I cannot dispute and I greatly agree with, and however well or poorly that this is happening is irrelevant to this thesis. What is relevant, and a point I take very seriously, is the ignoring of teaching our youth to be socially just and not just a passive recipient of critical thinking's hopeful byproduct. Nowhere in the standards is there a call for youth to be taught to recognize injustice. Nowhere is there a bullet point for teachers to encourage our youth to take corrective action when they confront these injustices. Nowhere is there a standard telling us that it is okay to resist those that seek to put us in a lesser position. Furthermore, I cannot confidently maintain that the CCSS invoke social justice in any specific ways. It is my contention that if we teach our youth to be dispositional critical thinkers, and we include specific standards based on social justice, then our youth stand to be better citizens, will be better able to recognize and correct injustices, and be able to think critically beyond the requirements of the classroom. It is clear that there is a discernible gap between what Hannah Arendt says what critical thinking is and what the CCSS want to accomplish—but do not actively promote. The greater area of concern is that the CCSS do nothing to invoke an understanding of social justice, and, therefore, do not teach our youth to mirror these important dispositions.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION: COMMON CORE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

It is unquestionable: the CCSS attempt to fill a perceived hole in American schooling, and by vowing to encourage critical thinking they have chosen an important skill to emphasize. What is questionable is if they are encouraging dispositional, strong-sense critical thinking and if what they are promoting has any chance of making the world more socially just. In this final chapter it is my primary concern to address my final research question: Why should one invoke the work of Arendt to determine if the CCSS should be changed, with respect to critical thinking, to better meet the demands of social justice? The answer to the first half of that question has been answered across the first three chapters. The lingering question is how to fill the gap between Arendtian critical thinking and the CCSS with respect to social justice. To fill the gap and encourage our youth to use critical thought not just critical reasoning our first responsibility is to understand our terms. By encouraging our youth to be morally conscious, critical thinking promotes social justice, de facto. The shift from reasoning to critical thinking will impact our collective future and the possibility of a more socially just world.

The Need for Arendtian Critical Thinking in the Common Core State Standards

By using an Arendtian conception of critical thinking we not only have a more robust definition this action, but we also encourage youth to be morally consciousness

and, therefore, stand to make the world more socially just. This concluding section is predicated on my personal and critical assessment of the current state of education; it is my argument that American education, when looked at as a single entity, may be failing to encourage our youth to think critically beyond what is required in the classroom and certainly does not promote the dispositional critical thinking advocated by Arendt. Given this perceived failure, it is quite possible to assume that American schools have not entirely fulfilled their duty to contribute to the renewal of the world and, as such, may very well be failing America with respect to teaching and promoting social justice.

Though the exegesis conduction in the second chapter of thesis, and the subsequent critical reading of the CCSS, it would seem that the standards successfully attempt to correct the failures of American education they point out. However, it is also clear that the CCSS channel Kant more than Arendt—and at a great moral cost. Arendt would certainly have concerns about the preoccupation of the CCSS with rationality, logic, and argue that they are clearly aligned with *vernunft*. It is my contention that the CCSS take for granted *verstand* and improperly assume that the masses are readily able to obtain *vernunft*. Kant is right that *vernunft* is the higher of the two faculties, but Arendt sends dire warning that we must not forgot about the simple action of thought—and this is what the CCSS done.

Let me be clear, the critical reasoning skills that I have argued CCSS seek to emphasize are important. However, it is the lack of emphasis on dispositional critical thinking and social justice that is of paramount significance. That the lack of a skillset for

critical thinking has the potential to lead to the absence of morality is of particular concern. Putting the specific skills of thinking aside, Jane Roland Martin suggests that it is the dispositions associated with critical thinking that are related to moral perspectives and values. Martin argues that the motivating factor behind critical thinking should be a concern for a more humane world, because even when one uses the soundest critical reasoning, he/she may not arrive at a morally or socially just conclusion.¹ By dropping a moral anchor instead of an epistemological one, we are better positioned to be critically engaged with others on the shared journey to develop a better world and arrive at a moral and socially just destination. The CCSS advocates for the dropping of an epistemological anchor and as such does not facilitate the cultivation of moral perspectives encouraged by Martin and Warren. This must be corrected.

In addition, the CCSS fail to appropriately encourage the use of imagination. The use of the imagination in judgment and critical thinking is of significant importance to Arendt. Imagination, to Arendt, is a prerequisite of understanding—that is a bridge between reality and judgment. Using one’s imagination gives one the ability to find the real things missing in the past, determining what may go missing in the future, and finding ways to fill each of these voids.² It is this skill we use to allow our mind to go

1. Jane Roland Martin, “Critical Thinking for a Humane World,” in *The Generalizability of Critical Thinking: Multiple Perspectives on an Educational Ideal*, ed. by Stephan Norris. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), 163-180.

2. Wolfgang Heuer, “‘Imagination is the Prerequisite of Understanding’”(Arendt): The Bridge Between Thinking and Judging, accessed on February 24, 2015, http://www.wolfgang-heuer.com/wp-content/uploads/heuer_wolfgang_imagination_bari.pdf.

visiting, and to recognize the standpoint of others. Because the CCSS does not cultivate this skill, it does not fully encourage youth to recognize the possible past, current, and future injustices in the world.

If we strive to rework the CCSS to better encourage critical thinking, we stand to encourage a de facto form of social justice. Here social justice means caring for, cultivating, and taking responsibility of the world we collectively share and the people that inhabit it—we start doing this by stopping to think. When we do this, we have the opportunity to better recognize the injustices that stand in our way of achieving more socially just and moral world this goal and offers a change to prevent them from happening again. Arendt warns that failing to stop and think about what we are doing can result in great injustices to our world, and we ought to take her warning seriously. Furthermore, we must incorporate direct references to social justice in our standards and teach our youth that those references are important.

Stopping to Think

One must wonder what a shift towards an Arendtian conception of dispositional critical thinking by the CCSS accomplishes in the long term and what potential areas of conflict arise when doing so. What happens when we ‘stop and think’ about what we are doing and we return criticality to thought in education? What happens when we start caring about, and protecting, our world as a result of this return?

Certainly, the inclusion of Arendtian critical thinking requires a reworking of the current standards, but it also requires a cultural shift in American education. The focus of

American education is tied to international superiority, innovation, and personal advancement. We must break from that trajectory and find middle ground between this current focus and teaching for social justice. By doing so we will allow Arendtian critical thinking to take hold, thus turning the long term focus of education to the renewal of the world.

Even if a rewrite of the standards to include this focus is accomplished, it is the shared responsibilities of school level administrators and educators to uphold these new standards and to devise pedagogy to support those goals. That, perhaps, is the greatest challenge we face—and one far beyond the scope of this paper. It is because of this challenge, I argue, that we must encourage our youth to ‘stop and think’ about what they are doing, so that they can better meet the demands of critical thinking and limit the injustices they encounter.

We must make time to incorporate Arendtian critical thinking into education, and in turn our youth must make time to think about what they are learning and what they are doing. It is my contention that an inclusion of Arendtian critical thinking by the CCSS will encourage our youth to do this very thing. Through this pause of daily life our youth position themselves to become more morally conscious and socially just. As Arendt notes, “It was the absence of thinking—which is so ordinary an experience in our everyday life, where we have hardly the time, let alone the inclination, to *stop* and think”—that awakened her interest, and it is my wish to share this awakening with both educators and

youth who will renew this world in due time.³

3. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 4-5.

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