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Abstract

The author argues for bringing the work of Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt into dialogue with respect to the links between power, subjectivity, and agency. Although one might assume that Foucault and Arendt come from such radically different philosophical starting points that such a dialogue would be impossible, the author argues that there is actually a good deal of common ground to be found between these two thinkers. Moreover, the author suggests that Foucault's and Arendt's divergent views about the role that power plays in the constitution of subjectivity and agency should be seen as complementary rather than opposed.

Keywords: power; subjectivity; agency; Arendt; Foucault; Habermas

Connections between the work of Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault are being noted with increasing frequency as the current Arendt renaissance reaches its apex. However, up to this point, their work has not been brought into a serious and sustained dialogue. One possible explanation for this fact is that it is assumed that Arendt and Foucault are on entirely different metaphysical and epistemological planes. Indeed, at first glance, the differences between their philosophical assumptions and theoretical, not to mention political, agendas are striking: Foucault is an anti-metaphysical, anti-essentialist post-structuralist, whereas Arendt's Aristotelianism seems to commit her both to essentialism and to metaphysics; Foucault is the prophet of post-modern bodies and pleasures, whereas Arendt is the champion of the pre-modern polis; finally, in life, Foucault was often on the side of the post-modern left, whereas Arendt seemed, at times, dangerously close to the anti-modern right. Taken together, these considerations make it difficult to see how the insights of these two thinkers can be brought together in a coherent and convincing way.

However, this initial characterization is altogether too hasty. For one thing, although Arendt's philosophical lineage can be traced back to Aristotle and Augustine, her work is also heavily influenced by the work of Kant, Nietzsche, and Heidegger – three thinkers who left an indelible

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mark on Foucault.[1] Similarly (and perhaps surprisingly), in volume 1 of *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt notes rather matter-of-factly that she has 'clearly joined the ranks of those who for some time now have been attempting to dismantle metaphysics, and philosophy with all its categories, as we have known them from their beginning in Greece until today'.[2] Thus, it isn't obvious that her philosophical starting point is that different from Foucault's anti-metaphysical stance. Finally, the number of themes and concerns that are common to both Arendt and Foucault is striking: they share a commitment to historicizing philosophical inquiry, a rejection of Hegelian/Marxist philosophy of history, a critique of normalization and mass society, an appeal to an aesthetic model as the basis for ethical or political judgment,[3] a rejection of traditional metaphysical accounts of truth and foundationalist epistemologies, and, finally, a central concern with the interrelationships among the concepts of power, subjectivity, and agency. It is the last of these shared concerns that I shall focus on in what follows. My aim is to bring Arendt and Foucault into dia-logue on the question of the relationship between power, subjectivity, and agency and to see what of value we might learn about this relationship from such a dialogue.

Let me note at the outset that, although Arendt and Foucault develop different ways of conceptualizing power, each conception is ultimately rooted in a critique of one and the same understanding of power, an understanding that Foucault labels the juridical model and Arendt refers to as the command–obedience model.[4] This model equates power with the rule of law and presupposes that the paradigmatic power relation is that by which a sovereign imposes his will on his subjects. When power is conceived of in this way, the primary sphere in which power is seen as operating is that of the State. Furthermore, insofar as this model views the exercise of power as the imposition of the will of a powerful individual on that of a powerless one, it tends to conceive power as a fundamentally restrictive, repressive, negative force. As Arendt puts it, the command–obedience model rests on the assumptions that power 'is an instrument of rule',[5] that 'the essence of power is the effectiveness of command',[6] and 'that men can lawfully and politically live together only when some are entitled to command and the others forced to obey'.[7] Similarly, Foucault claims that this model views power in terms of 'an essentially negative power, presupposing on the one hand a sovereign whose role is to forbid and on the other a subject who must somehow effectively say yes to this prohibition'.[8] Both Foucault and Arendt begin their own analyses of power by challenging this notion of power as sovereignty; in short, both strive to cut off the head of the King.

Foucault has two main complaints about the juridical model of power. First, he is critical of its assumption that power is restricted to a very limited sphere within social and political life. On this model, power resides

in the hands of the sovereign and is extended outward in social space only by being wielded over individuals in and through the sovereign's commands. As a result, it is assumed, rather optimistically, that wherever individuals are out of the reach of the sovereign, they are free from power. Foucault's aim is to invert this mode of analysis, and, in so doing, to call attention to 'not the domination of the King in his central position, ... but that of his subjects in their mutual relations: not the uniform edifice of sovereignty, but the multiple forms of subjugation that have a place and function within the social organism'.[9] In order to accomplish this aim, the analysis of power

> should not concern itself with the regulated and legitimate forms of power in their central locations, with the general mechanisms through which they operate. ... On the contrary, it should be concerned with power at its extremities, with those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional forms and institutions.[10]

Of course, this methodological resolution does not commit Foucault to denying that there are regulated (and perhaps even legitimate?) forms of power in those central locations; all it does commit him to is the claim that the peripheral relations of domination and subjugation that are obscured by a narrow focus on such legitimate forms must also be given their due.

Foucault's second major criticism of the juridical model is that it views power as an essentially negative, repressive, and prohibitive force. According to Foucault, the juridical conception of power 'enables power never to be thought of in other than negative terms: refusal, limitation, obstruction, censorship. Power is what says no.'[11] And, once again, Foucault maintains that this only tells part of the story. As he put it in a 1977 interview:

> If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.[12]

Again, it is important to notice here that Foucault does not say that power never functions repressively, nor does he say that the repressive function of power is unimportant or uninteresting. On the contrary, his point is simply that the repressive model is too narrow (power 'doesn't *only* weigh on us as a force that says no'; my italics).

In the wake of these criticisms, Foucault introduces a new model for the study of power, one that views power as diffuse and capillary,

omnipresent, and both productive and repressive. However, this is not to say that Foucault's aim is to eradicate the juridical model which views power as sovereign and repressive and replace it with the disciplinary model which views it as peripheral and productive. Instead, he maintains that both juridical and disciplinary power are endemic to contemporary Western societies, and strives to expose the ways in which the former has come to obscure the latter. According to Foucault, disciplinary power 'ought by rights to have led to the disappearance of the grand juridical edifice created by that theory'.[13] But this is precisely what hasn't happened. Instead, the notion of sovereignty has been superimposed upon disciplinary techniques in such a way that the dark and nefarious nature of these techniques has been concealed. In the modern era, sovereign power has not disappeared, but has simply changed forms: no longer vested solely in the person of the King, it has been democratized, transformed into the foundational and legitimating power of the people, a power that is codified in the principle of popular sovereignty. However, this democratization has functioned to conceal the disciplinary power that is actually the seamy underside of such democratized sovereign, juridical power. As Foucault puts it:

> in our own times power is exercised simultaneously through this right [grounded in the notion of popular sovereignty] and these [disciplinary] techniques and ... these techniques and these discourses, to which the disciplines give rise, invade the area of right so that the procedures of normalisation come to be ever more constantly engaged in the colonisation of those of law.[14]

The colonisation of sovereignty puts us in a difficult position if we want to criticize the effects of disciplinary power, since according to Foucault the only resources we have to do so are those provided by a theory of right that is itself grounded in the notion of sovereignty. Thus, Foucault notes,

> [i]f one wants to look for a non-disciplinary form of power, or rather, to struggle against disciplines and disciplinary power, it is not towards the ancient right of sovereignty that one should turn, but towards the possibility of a new form of right, one which must indeed be anti-disciplinarian, but at the same time liberated from the principle of sovereignty.[15]

In keeping with his second criticism, Foucault maintains that power involves more than constraint and repression. For Foucault, power is both productive and repressive, both enabling and constraining. Moreover, it is the intertwining of the productive and repressive aspects of power that

is the key to understanding the relationship between power, subjectivity, and agency in Foucault's work. Foucault became famous for claiming that the individual subject is one of the primary effects of this productive/repressive, enabling/constraining power. The juridical model, given its assumption that power is always and only repressive, could only conceive of the individual who is subject to the power of the sovereign as 'a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fashion or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues or crushes [the individual]'.[16] In other words, the juridical model presupposes a conception of the individual subject/agent as a fully formed, stable and unified entity that then gets caught up in power relations which are external to its own constitution. By contrast, in Foucault's view,

> it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not the vis-à-vis of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects.[17]

For Foucault, individual subjects/agents don't come into the world fully formed; they are constituted in and through a set of social relations, all of which, as I noted above, are imbued with power. Thus, power is a key element in the very formation of individuals. For Foucault, individuals are subjected, and this in a dual sense; they are *subjected to* the complex, multiple, shifting relations of power in their social field and at the same time are enabled to take up the position of *a subject* in and through those relations. In other words, for Foucault, power is a condition for the possibility of individual subjectivity.

Unfortunately, Foucault himself isn't very careful with the distinction between subjectivity and agency; he tends to use the two terms almost interchangeably. However, it seems clear to me that subjectivity is a precondition for agency; after all, one cannot have the ability or capacity to act without having the ability or capacity to deliberate, that is, without being a thinking subject. Thus, if power is a condition for the possibility of subjectivity for Foucault, then it will follow that it would be a condition for the possibility of agency as well. Foucault indicates that he might accept such a view when he speaks of the exercise of power as

> a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action.[18]

Many of Foucault's critics take him to be committed to the death of the subject and thus to a denial of the possibility of agency. The interpretation of Foucault that I am suggesting here counters this standard reading; I submit that Foucault's claim that the individual is an effect of power does not commit him to the much stronger claim that the individual is *merely* or *nothing more than* an effect of power. Instead, my interpretation of Foucault suggests that his account of power offers an analysis of the historically and culturally specific conditions of possibility for subjectivity and agency in modern, Western, industrialized societies. And although I would agree that the account of subjectivity and agency that Foucault offers is not fully adequate (for reasons I shall discuss below), I would nonetheless insist that the claim that Foucault embraces the death of the subject and a denial of agency is incorrect and based on an overreaction to things he actually said.[19]

Like Foucault, Arendt begins with a critique of the juridical or, to use her terminology, command–obedience model of power. Also like Foucault, Arendt has two main criticisms of this model. First, she claims that the model leads its adherents to misconstrue the nature of politics by reifying the messiness and uncertainty that are an ineradicable element of the political into the calm stability of the rule of some over others. She argues that the command–obedience model came about when two interdependent aspects of action – beginning or leading (*archein*) and seeing an action through or achieving (*prattein*) – were separated. When this happened, the beginner or leader became the ruler who gives commands, and action became identified with the mere seeing through or executing of those commands on the part of his subjects that was originally characteristic of *prattein*.[20] According to Arendt, this separation of the originary unity of action into ruling on the one hand and obeying on the other represents nothing less than an escape from politics altogether.[21]

In other words, once power began to be understood on the command–obedience model and action began accordingly to be identified with the execution of the ruler's commands, the true natures of action and power were covered over and forgotten. One of Arendt's main aims in her *locus classicus*, *The Human Condition*, is to recover the originary understanding of action as beginning something anew, an understanding which is bound up with the human condition of natality – the sheer fact that all human beings are born into this world. According to Arendt, 'the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting'.[22] In other words, natality derives its significance from the fact that the newcomer is capable of action. Arendt claims that the converse holds as well; the impulse to act, to begin anew, is a function of the condition of natality: it 'springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something anew on our own initiative'.[23]

This beginning something anew that Arendt calls action is constitutive of the individual as an agent. Action discloses who (as opposed to what) the actor is: 'In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world.'[24] This does not mean that action merely expresses a pre-existing identity, nor does it mean that the identity of the actor is purely performative;[25] instead, the identity of the actor is in part constituted through the action itself. Indeed, Arendt's account of the dialectical constitution of the individual agent through action seems to prefigure Foucault's account of the constitution of the subject through subjection. She writes,

> nobody is the author or producer of his own life story . . . the stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is not an author or producer. Somebody began it and *is its subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely its actor and sufferer*, but nobody is its author.[26]

On Arendt's view, action is Janus-faced; one always acts and suffers simultaneously, and acts by virtue of suffering just as one suffers by virtue of acting. By its very nature, action is unpredictable because actions produce unintended consequences by being acted upon by others. As Arendt puts it, 'action acts upon beings who are capable of their own actions'; thus, 'because the actor always moves among and in relation to other acting beings, he is never merely a "doer" but always and at the same time a sufferer. To do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin.'[27] For Arendt, action always takes place within a web of relationships with other actors,[28] and it serves to establish and maintain that web of relationships.[29] Arendt's agent is always at the same time both sufferer and doer, both subject to the constraints of the actions of others and made into a subject with the capacity to act by the web of social relationships within which one must act.

Arendt's recovery of the originary notion of action goes hand in hand with her recovery of the originary notion of power, and this leads to her second criticism of the command–obedience model of power. If power is fundamentally about rule, then it follows that violence is only the most extreme form of the exercise of power.[30] Arendt rejects this conflation of power with violence; whereas violence relies on implements and is fundamentally instrumental in nature, power relies on numbers and is, Arendt claims, an end in itself. Instead of viewing violence as an extreme manifestation of power, Arendt maintains that where violence reigns supreme, power cannot be fully realized:

> Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where

> words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.[31]

Moreover, unlike the instruments of violence, which can be acquired and stored up for future use, power is not a possession. Power, according to Arendt, 'exists only in its actualization'; it 'is always . . . a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity'; it 'springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse'.[32] In other words, power is a function of collective action; it emerges out of the kinds of actions that we engage in with others when we strive to achieve common ends. However, while power is the result of action (specifically, collective action), it is also, in turn, a condition for the possibility of action. Arendt maintains that power, defined as 'the human ability not just to act but to act in concert',[33] both makes possible and preserves the public, political realm in which individuals act. As Arendt puts it, 'the political realm rises directly out of acting together, the "sharing of words and deeds". Thus action not only has the most intimate relationship to the public part of the world common to us all, but is the one activity which constitutes it.'[34] Acting together in concert is constitutive of the public, political realm in which action itself takes place.

Insofar as one's identity as an actor is only fully realized in and through action in the public, political realm, and the public political realm is constituted by power, it turns out that, for Arendt, power is a condition for the possibility of (the full achievement of) agency. In addition, Arendt maintains that power 'preserves the public realm and the space of appearance, . . . without power, the space of appearance brought forth through action and speech in public will fade as rapidly as the living deed and the living word'.[35] For Arendt, power is generated continually through action in the public space, which space power in turn both constitutes and preserves. Thus, although power emerges out of individuals acting together, it also *makes possible* such collective action by providing the space within which such actions can be carried out. And, insofar as power is constitutive of public space, it also serves as a precondition for agency, since one's identity as an actor can only be fully achieved through action in public.

Moreover, in *The Human Condition*, Arendt goes beyond claiming that power is a condition of possibility for agency: she also claims that it is a condition of possibility for subjectivity itself. The conditions necessary for being a thinking subject are only in place when there is a public space constituted and preserved by the power that arises out of the sharing of words and deeds. As Arendt puts it:

> without a space of appearance and without trusting in action and speech as a mode of being together, neither the reality of one's self,

> nor the reality of the surrounding world can be established beyond doubt. ... The only character of the world by which to gauge its reality is its being common to us all, and common sense ... is the one sense that fits into reality as a whole our five strictly individual senses and the strictly particular data they perceive.[36]

Even our ability to perceive and process sensory data, among the most fundamental capacities of the thinking subject, is dependent upon our common sense (*sensus communis*), and this common sense can only be had if there is a common, public space in which such sense can be rooted. Without an intact public space in which the world can be shared with a plurality of others, the thinking subject's common sense is eroded, and the result is a dangerous distortion of its ability to perceive reality.[37]

In the essay 'Truth and Politics', Arendt describes the relationship between thinking and the public sphere in similar terms. She notes that 'human reason needs communication with others and therefore publicity for its own sake'; and quotes approvingly Kant's claim that 'the external power that deprives man of the freedom to communicate his thoughts publicly, *deprives him at the same time of the freedom to think*'.[38] When we put Arendt's embrace in this essay of Kant's view of public reason together with her earlier analysis of the role that power plays in the constitution and preservation of the public realm, the result, once again, is that the power that constitutes and nourishes the public space is not just a condition for the possibility of agency, but also a condition for the possibility of subjectivity. However, things get a bit more complicated in this essay when Arendt makes a distinction between political thinking, which is representative, and thus involves taking into account (by literally re-presenting to my mind) the standpoints of others before I arrive at my final conclusions about what opinion I should adopt, and philosophical thinking, which is solitary, and thus involves a silent internal dialogue of me with myself which aims at the truth (rather than 'mere' opinion). Arendt notes that 'since philosophical truth concerns man in his singularity, it is unpolitical by nature'.[39] In 'The Crisis in Culture', Arendt puts the distinction this way:

> The power of judgment rests on a potential agreement with others, and the thinking process which is active in judging something is not, like the thought process of pure reasoning, a dialogue between me and myself, but finds itself always and primarily, even if I am quite alone in making up my mind, in an anticipated communication with others with whom I know I must finally come to some agreement.[40]

Arendt goes on to make it clear that political thinking has its roots in the *sensus communis* that fits us into the common world with others whereas philosophical thinking transcends common sense.[41]

In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt's account of thinking grows still more complex. Her earlier distinction between political and philosophical thinking has been sharpened and has assumed much greater prominence, such that Arendt now equates the term 'thinking' exclusively with philosophical thinking and reserves the term 'judgment' for what she formerly called political thought. The result is that, given what she has said about the fundamentally solitary and unpolitical nature of philosophical thought, it might seem as if her considered view is that power, understood as that which constitutes, preserves, and nourishes the public space, is not a condition for the possibility of such thought, though it certainly is for the political thinking that she comes to call judgment. Even if this were true, it would not be devastating for my thesis that power is, for Arendt, a condition for the possibility not just of the agent but also of the thinking subject. I would simply point out, in response, that thinking is one of three fundamental mental abilities that Arendt discusses in *The Life of the Mind*, that, for Arendt, a subject is one who is capable of thinking, willing, and judging (whereas an agent is one who is capable of action in Arendt's sense of beginning something anew), and that if power is a condition for the possibility of judging, then it is a condition for the possibility of being a subject, even if it is unrelated to the activity of thinking, construed in the narrow, philosophical sense. However, I would like to maintain that it is still the case that there is an important relationship between power as Arendt understands it and thinking even in the relatively narrow sense in which she uses the term in *The Life of the Mind*. In order to make this case, I shall have to look a bit more closely at Arendt's account of thinking.

The central distinction in this account is Kant's distinction between reason (*Vernunft*) and the intellect (*Verstehen*). Arendt reserves the term 'thinking' for the operations of reason, which are speculative and which aim not at truth but at meaning; the job of the intellect, by contrast, is mere cognition or knowing of objects that are given to the senses, and thus the intellect aims at truth (a true representation of the objects that appear). Like Kant, Arendt wants to guard against the basic fallacy of 'interpret[ing] meaning on the model of truth', which involves a conflation of the operation of reason (thinking) with that of the intellect.[42] The operations of the intellect, like those of political thinking or judgment, are dependent upon our common sense, which is in turn dependent upon the preservation of a public space within which individuals can come together and act, which is in turn dependent on power for its constitution and preservation. As Arendt had maintained in *The Human Condition*, our very sense of reality (which is a function of the intellect) is dependent upon others.[43] Thinking (the operation of reason), by contrast, is not dependent (at least not directly) on others. The questions raised by thinking cannot be answered by common sense, and the activity of thinking itself, according to Arendt,

necessarily involves a withdrawal from the common world that we share with others.[44]

However, this is not the end of the story, for Arendt makes an important connection between thinking and speech. The activity of thinking is invisible; it can only become manifest through speech. Moreover, she goes so far as to suggest that 'thought without speech is inconceivable',[45] that 'no speechless thought can exist',[46] and that 'language ... enables us to think'.[47] Thus, it turns out that, like political thought (judgment) and the intellect, 'reason, too, wants communication and is likely to go astray if deprived of it'.[48] In other words, there is, in the end, an inherent connection between thinking (conceived of here in the narrow, philosophical sense) and plurality, the fact that men and not Man inhabit the earth. This connection is exemplified nicely by the fact that when we think, we carry on a dialogue with ourselves, and thus we are split into a duality; as Arendt puts it, 'nothing perhaps indicates more strongly that man exists *essentially* in the plural than that his solitude actualizes his merely being conscious of himself ... into a duality during the thinking activity'.[49] The inherent duality of thinking, she goes on to say, 'points to the infinite plurality which is the law of the earth'.[50]

Not only does the activity of thinking point beyond itself to plurality, but it also turns out that thinking, though not as directly a political faculty as judging is, nonetheless has an irreducible political dimension. Thinking is a dangerous activity, according to Arendt, in that it enables us to call into question fixed values and conventions. But if thinking is dangerous, non-thinking is even more so. Non-thinking leads individuals to accept values and conventions blindly, which means that a radically different code of values or set of conventions can be substituted for the existing ones and no one will complain or even much notice.[51] In times such as this, the importance of thinking comes to the fore:

> When everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join in is conspicuous and thereby becomes a kind of action. In such emergencies, it turns out that the purging component of thinking (Socrates' midwifery, which brings out the implications of unexamined opinions and thereby destroys them – values, doctrines, theories, and even convictions) *is political by implication*. For this destruction has a liberating effect on another faculty, the faculty of judgment, which one may with some reason call the most political of man's mental abilities.[52]

In other words, it turns out that pure, speculative, philosophical thinking is indeed linked to the public world that we share with others and thus to the power that constitutes and preserves that public space in two

ways: first, thinking has a liberating effect on our faculty of political judgment, in that it clears a space for judgment by calling into question received values, opinions, and conventions; and second, because of the inherent connection between speech and thought, thinking needs communication with others which takes place in the public space that is constituted and nourished by power to keep it from going astray.[53] Thus power is for Arendt, as it was for Foucault, a condition for the possibility of both subjectivity and agency.

Let me make explicit the two broad similarities between Foucault's and Arendt's political thought that I have been trying to draw out, similarities which at the same time point to important differences. First, both Foucault and Arendt reject the assumption that power is a thing or a kind of stuff that can be acquired, stored up, and/or possessed by the sovereign and then wielded in a negative or repressive fashion over his subjects in the form of a legitimate or illegitimate exercise of the rule of law. Instead, each stresses the relational nature of power, the fact that power emerges out of interactions among agents and that it exists only in its exercise. Furthermore, they agree that power is not merely negative or repressive; each insists on viewing power as, in some sense, a positive, productive force. However, for Foucault, saying that power is positive and productive is not to say that it is normatively positive. Instead, Foucault tends to view power in solely strategic terms; in a late interview, he defines relations of power as the 'means by which individuals try to conduct, to determine the behavior of others'.[54] Moreover, such strategic power relations are always normatively suspect; to paraphrase Foucault, his point is not that power is always bad, but that it is always dangerous. Arendt, by contrast, views power as solely communicative (rather than strategic) and maintains that such communicative power relations are always normatively good (power, for Arendt, is an end in itself).[55] In short, though Foucault and Arendt have some similar reasons for rejecting the juridical or command–obedience model of power and though they share a similar view of how power circulates in social space, they seem to have diametrically opposed views about power's normative valence.[56]

Second, Foucault and Arendt agree that power (strategic power, in the case of Foucault, and communicative power, in the case of Arendt) is a condition for the possibility of both agency and subjectivity. As I have tried to show, each understands subjects/actors in a dual sense, as both doers and sufferers, as sufferers because they are doers and as able to do only insofar as they suffer. Moreover, each is committed to the view that power plays a crucial role in the formation of individual subjects/agents. To be sure, in keeping with his view of power as strategic and dangerous, Foucault's account of this relationship between power and subjectivity/agency is a dark and disturbing one; it raises worries about whether it is possible to break free of the forces that simultaneously constrain and

enable us. By contrast, and in keeping with her view of power as communicative and an end in itself, Arendt's account of this relationship is a hopeful one; Arendt's account of the relationship between power, subjectivity, and agency offers a possible antidote to the peculiar evils of the twentieth century – totalitarianism and the rise of what she calls mass society.

In my view, provocative and insightful as Foucault's and Arendt's ways of conceptualizing power are, each is unsatisfactory and inadequate on its own. On the one hand, because Foucault views power in solely strategic terms, it is impossible, using a strictly Foucaultian understanding of power, to explain and analyse the power that binds together social movements – the explosive and invigorating power of the people that is let loose in revolutionary movements, that helped to bring down the wall in Eastern Europe,[57] and that emerged recently in protests against the World Trade Organization.[58] In short, it is impossible to have a strictly Foucaultian account of what I would call solidarity. The account of solidarity that I defend presupposes that power can emerge out of concerted, reciprocal, consensual action, whereas Foucault himself insisted that power as he understands it 'is not a function of consent'[59] and, although it 'can be the result of a prior or permanent consent . . . it is not by nature the manifestation of a consensus'.[60] Of course, it is precisely this analysis of power as the manifestation of a consensus that is at the heart of Arendt's account. However, this account has its own difficulties. As I noted above, Arendt views power as an end in itself, and thus as an intrinsically normatively positive phenomenon. But since Arendt equates power in this sense with action and, thus, with the domain of the political itself, she tends to neglect ways of exercising power that are oriented toward strategic or nefarious ends. As Jürgen Habermas has put the point, Arendt's analysis of power 'screens all strategic elements, as force, out of politics'.[61] Although Habermas praises Arendt for recognizing that 'strategic contests for political power neither call forth nor maintain those institutions in which that power is anchored',[62] he nevertheless worries that Arendt's attempt to exclude strategic action from the domain of the political altogether paints too rosy a picture of our political life. This suggests that Arendt's account of power needs to be supplemented with one that does pay sufficient attention to instances of strategic interaction; I hope by now to have shown that Foucault's analysis of power is a viable candidate for such a supplementation, especially given the myriad assumptions and commitments that Foucault and Arendt share.

Similarly, Arendt's account of the relationship between power, on the one hand, and subjectivity and agency, on the other, is less than wholly satisfactory. For one thing, Arendt's focus in that account is on the public realm and the role that publicly constituted power plays in the formation of individual subjectivity and agency. One might object that many aspects

of our identities as subjects and agents are formed outside of and in some sense prior to our entry into the public realm, in private and semi-private peripheral social institutions – particularly families and schools. In order to be complete, Arendt's account would need to make sense of the role that power plays in these institutions. Of course, Foucault was interested in exploring the role that power (in his sense, of course) plays in just such institutions, so there is reason to think that his account nicely complements hers on this point. Also, since Arendt is blind to exercises of power that are strategic, she misses the nefarious and normatively problematic side of the relationship between power and subjectivity/agency that Foucault so brilliantly exposed. By contrast, Foucault's analysis of this relationship has been widely criticized for being too dark, too nefarious; specifically, critics have charged that Foucault's account seems to leave us locked in an iron cage, that he fails to offer an adequate account of the conditions that make individual and collective resistance to and transformation of power/knowledge regimes possible. My comparison of Arendt and Foucault suggests, however, that Arendt's analysis of the relationship between power and subjectivity/agency provides a possible antidote to Foucault's, enabling us to understand how the collective power that is generated in public spheres can serve as a resource for individuals who are struggling to resist the kinds of problematic and disturbing power relations that Foucault exposed.

One might object at this point by claiming that Foucault's analysis of power actually undermines Arendt's, that Foucault's deep and abiding distrust of collective action commits him to a rejection of Arendt's account of power, thus making the kind of synthesis that I am striving for impossible. In my view, however, it is not obvious that Foucault's view of power is incompatible with Arendt's; moreover, and perhaps surprisingly, Foucault himself seems to have agreed with me on this point. In a Roundtable discussion at Berkeley in April of 1983, he notes that 'sometimes we have to rely on such and such type of community in order to resist a greater danger which comes from another community'.[63] Foucault would no doubt have rejected too facile a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' power relations and reminded us to be suspicious enough to keep in mind that even normatively positive instances of collective power are or can become dangerous in their own way. Nevertheless, it seems clear in this late interview that he is not opposed to the general idea that I am putting forward (even though he himself never articulated this point in quite this way): namely, that one may well have to rely on communities of resistance and the collective power and normative resources that are generated in and through them in order to resist the normalizing/disciplinary power about which he was so concerned. Similarly, Foucault notes in a late interview that his analyses of power are analyses of specific sorts of power relations and 'can in no way . . . be equated with a general analytics of every

possible power relation'.[64] Thus, he explicitly leaves room for the possibility that other ways of conceiving of power, including specifically consensual modalities of power, are not precluded by his analysis.[65]

Let me emphasize two conclusions that follow from this analysis. First, we require a broader view of power than either Foucault or Arendt offers, one that resists the temptation to define power as exclusively strategic or exclusively communicative, as always dangerous or as always revolutionary. Second, an analysis of the relationship between power, on the one hand, and subjectivity and agency, on the other hand, should analyse power as a condition for the possibility of subjectivity and agency in two complementary senses. As Foucault claimed, we are formed as subjects and agents by being subjected to dangerous strategic power relations (e.g. sexism, racism, class oppression, and heterosexism, to name a few of the most salient in contemporary Western societies). However, this does not leave us trapped in an iron cage in part because, as Arendt saw, we are also formed as subjects and agents by the normatively positive, communicative power that is generated through action in concert (e.g. in feminist, anti-racist, socialist and/or gay rights social movements). Moreover, the latter sort of power relations provide us with resources on which we as individuals can draw in our struggles to resist the strategic, dangerous power relations that, in part, have made us who we are.

In closing, I would like to suggest that this comparison could have important ramifications for the direction of contemporary Continental philosophy. Although the Foucaultian idea that subjects/agents are constituted through strategic and dangerous relations of power has become widely accepted in Continental thought, the Arendtian idea that subjects/agents are also at the same time constituted through the positive, reciprocal, communicative power that emerges out of action in concert has not. Arendt's way of conceiving of the relationship between power, agency, and subjectivity provides a much-needed counterpoint to the fairly common view of the subject as thoroughly subjected. Integrating Arendt's insights into the role that power plays in the constitution of the subject/agent with Foucault's may offer us a fruitful analysis of the constitution of subjectivity through power relations in which the subject retains the critical capacities necessary for moral and political agency.

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Notes

1 For example, in her work on Augustine, it is clear that Arendt reads ancient and medieval texts through the lens of the German Existenz philosophy in which she was trained. See Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

2 Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind, Volume 1* (one-volume edition) (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1977), p. 212.
3 I discuss these first four similarities in greater detail in Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance, Solidarity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), pp. 89–91.
4 Morris Kaplan notes this similarity between Arendt and Foucault in *Sexual Justice: Democratic Citizenship and the Politics of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 154.
5 Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1969), p. 36.
6 Ibid., p. 37.
7 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 222.
8 Michel Foucault, 'Power and Strategies', in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 140.
9 Michel Foucault, 'Two Lectures', in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 96. Incidentally, it is the expansion of the role that the concept of power plays in social and political theory, coupled with the thematization of the peripheral power relations that pervade the social body, that brings Foucault's conceptualization of power in line with that of many feminist theorists. On this point, see Allen, 'Foucault on Power: A Theory for Feminists', in Susan Hekman (ed.) *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), and chapter 2 of Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory*.
10 'Two Lectures', in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 96.
11 Michel Foucault, 'Power and Strategies', in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 139.
12 Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 119. See also Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 12.
13 Foucault, 'Two Lectures', in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 105.
14 Ibid., p. 107.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 98.
17 Ibid.
18 Michel Foucault, 'Afterword: The Subject and Power', in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 220.
19 I develop this line of argument in greater detail in Allen, 'The Anti-Subjective Hypothesis: Michel Foucault and the Death of the Subject', *Philosophical Forum*, 31(2) (Summer 2000), pp. 113–30.
20 Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 189.
21 Ibid., p. 222.
22 Ibid., p. 9.
23 Ibid., p. 177.
24 Ibid., p. 179.
25 Contra Bonnie Honig's imaginative reading of Arendt in 'Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity', in Honig (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995). I argue against this reading in more detail in Allen, 'Solidarity After Identity Politics: Hannah Arendt and the Power of Feminist Theory', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 25(1) (January 1999), pp. 97–118.

26 Ibid., p. 184, my italics.
27 Ibid., p. 190.
28 Action 'is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act'. Ibid., p. 188.
29 'No matter what its specific content, [action] always establishes relationships.' Ibid., p. 190.
30 As Arendt puts it, 'if the essence of power is the effectiveness of command, then there is no greater power than that which grows out of the barrel of a gun'. Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 37.
31 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 200.
32 Ibid.
33 Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 44.
34 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 198.
35 Ibid., p. 204.
36 Ibid., p. 208.
37 Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism suggests just how dangerous this distortion can be. A key aspect of that analysis is the idea that the Nazis' totalitarian regime functioned by breaking down the conditions necessary for common sense via a systematic dismantling of the common world. On this point, see Jerome Kohn, 'Evil and Plurality: Hannah Arendt's Way to the Life of the Mind, I', in Larry May and Jerome Kohn (eds) *Hannah Arendt: Twenty Years Later* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), p. 159.
38 Ibid., p. 234. Arendt, 'Truths and Politics', in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 234. Quoting from Kant's 'What is Enlightenment?'; Arendt's italics.
39 Arendt, 'Truth and Politics', p. 246.
40 Arendt, 'The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Political Significance', in *Between Past and Future*, p. 220.
41 See ibid., p. 221.
42 Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 15.
43 See ibid., p. 46.
44 See ibid., p. 78.
45 Ibid., p. 32.
46 Ibid., p. 101.
47 Ibid., p. 110.
48 Ibid., p. 99.
49 Ibid., p. 185.
50 Ibid., p. 187.
51 See ibid., p. 177.
52 Ibid., p. 192, my italics.
53 Dana Villa has argued quite persuasively that this account of the relationship between thinking and publicity is behind Arendt's rather veiled critique of Heidegger at the end of volume 2 of *The Life of the Mind*. Villa maintains that Arendt sees Heidegger as a foil for Socrates, whom she holds up in volume 1 as a true thinker. The difference between Socrates and Heidegger, on Villa's reading of Arendt, is that, while both were brilliant philosophers, Socrates maintained and Heidegger eschewed a link to 'the world of appearances, the *public* world of plural human being' (Dana Villa, 'The Anxiety of Influence: On Arendt's Relationship to Heidegger', in Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 84). Unlike Heidegger, 'Socrates performed his thinking in the agora: the aporetic arguments of the dialogues are deployed by a "citizen amongst citizens" '; by contrast, Arendt viewed

Heidegger's thought as 'utterly divorced from the world of appearances which is, for Arendt, the world of politics' (p. 84). The point of Villa's comparison of Arendt's estimations of Socrates and Heidegger is that the activity of thinking must retain its connection to the world of appearances, the public realm which is constituted and preserved by power, lest the thinker lose his ability to judge. As Villa puts it, 'her surprising thesis is that pure thought is the death of judgment' (p. 85). Thus, Heidegger becomes, in the end, the foil for Eichmann as well: whereas Eichmann's inability to judge was caused by his sheer thoughtlessness, Heidegger's was caused by his adherence to pure thought, divorced from the communication with others in the public realm that is needed to prevent reason from going astray.

54 Foucault, 'The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom', in James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (eds) *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), p. 18.

55 Interestingly enough, Jürgen Habermas has criticized both Foucault and Arendt for overemphasizing only one of the normative dimensions of power relations. On Arendt, see Habermas, 'Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power', in Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman (eds) *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), and on Foucault, see Habermas, 'Lecture X', in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987). This raises the possibility that Habermas's analysis of power might be just the Hegelian *Aufhebung* that my argument may seem to demand. I have my doubts as to whether or not this is the case, but, at any rate, that will have to be the topic of another paper.

56 It is important to note, however, that Foucault at least does not seem to think that his account of power rules out the sort of analysis offered by Arendt. I shall discuss this point more fully later on.

57 For a firsthand account of this phenomenon, see Vaclav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe* (New York: Palach Press, 1985).

58 Richard Lynch has suggested to me in conversation that perhaps a non-strategic account of power could be reconstructed from Foucault's late works on practices of the self. I am sceptical about whether or not this is the case, but this will have to be the topic of a future essay.

59 Foucault, 'Afterword', pp. 219–20.

60 Ibid, p. 220.

61 Habermas, 'Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power', p. 220.

62 Ibid., p. 222.

63 Discussion with Michel Foucault, 21 April 1983 (with Paul Rabinow, Bert Dreyfus, Charles Taylor, Robert Bellah, Martin Jay, and Leo Lowenthal), p. 7 of transcript housed in the Fonds Michel Foucault, Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine, Paris.

64 Foucault, 'Politics and Ethics: An Interview', in Paul Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 380.

65 Ibid. It is interesting to note that when Foucault says that his approach to the study of power does not rule out other possible approaches, he appears to have Arendt's conception of power as action in concert specifically in mind. His remarks about only offering an analysis of a specific configuration of power, not of power in general, come in response to a question from an interviewer about Arendt's work, and, more specifically, about whether or not there is room for something like Arendt's conception of power in Foucault's thought. For this, one has to look at the original transcript of the interview

because the interviewer's question about Arendt and the first few lines of Foucault's answer to it are left out in the published version of the interview. See 'A Propos de Nietzsche, Habermas, Arendt, McPhearson', Interview with Michel Foucault (conducted by Paul Rabinow) at Berkeley in April 1983, p. 28, transcript housed in the Fonds Michel Foucault, Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine, Paris. An edited translation of this interview appears as 'Politics and Ethics', in *The Foucault Reader*; the passage in question occurs on p. 380.