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## **Considering the Public Private-Dichotomy: Hannah Arendt, Václav Havel and Victor Klemperer on the Importance of the Private**

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the political significance of discursive activity in the private sphere in the thought of Hannah Arendt, Václav Havel, and Victor Klemperer. Against criticisms of Arendt which claim that she pays too much attention to the public sphere and consequently misses the importance of the private sphere in her analysis of political action, this paper highlights important insights in Arendt's writing on family and friendship and the ability of these relationships to act as havens where discourse can thrive. What emerges from the analysis is a rich agonistic discourse ethics. The paper employs the respective thought of Havel and Klemperer to highlight Arendt's work on the political significance of private virtues for promoting an awareness of responsibility. This position is then defended against the criticisms of discourse ethics offered by Chantal Mouffe.

### **The Distinction between the Public and the Private in Arendt**

This paper defends aspects of Arendt's conception of the private sphere against criticisms made respectively by Julia Kristeva and Seyla Benhabib who claim that Arendt overplays the value of the public sphere and ignores important contributions that private life can make to a political reality. In this paper, I demonstrate Arendt's celebration of the rich possibilities for promoting pluralism that are found in the private sphere. For Arendt, plurality is a key feature of human discourse, as people come together in public spaces to share through agonistic discourse a variety of perspectives that give shape to reality. That is, a common world is created through shared conversation about the nature of things. The fluidity of a political situation is generated through the motion of continued conversation which constantly updates the shared understanding of the world. Arendt diagnoses certain oppressive political conditions which inhibit the flourishing of pluralistic views by restricting the possibility of public action. In such situations the motion of the political situation is halted, as hegemonic domination turns the political sphere into a stagnant space. In such a situation, there is a possibility of rescuing the political, that is of restoring the citizen created motion, through private discursive activity between individuals which re-creates the possibility of public action. The respective thought of Václav Havel and Victor Klemperer will be employed to provide illustrative examples of Arendt's thought on the political significance of private discursive activity. To demonstrate the uniqueness of Arendt's idea that agonistic discourse in the private

sphere can, in dark times, prepare the soil for political rejuvenation, a contrast will be made to Chantal Mouffe's work on political agonism.

Shiraz Dossa argues that one can't properly understand Arendt's political thought unless one considers her dichotomy of the private and the public (Dossa 1984). The public realm is the realm of politics and action – it is the space where individuals show themselves to each other. It is the sphere of community where people come together and act in joint appearance and judgement of each other (Arendt 1998, p.22-23). The private on the other hand is presented as the sphere of instinct and naturalistic concerns where individuals are free from politics insofar as they hide themselves from others. The household is the domain of the private (Arendt 1998, p.30). The public is the sphere of human activity where the creation of politics is possible; the private sphere is the sphere of necessity. As people come together as a public, the antagonistic discourse that is the hallmark of this coming together creates the possibility of freedom. In other words, when an individual appears in a pluralistic public space that appearance can be challenged or nurtured, and thus the participants in public life recognize that difference constitutes reality. Thus freedom, for Arendt, is the possibility of changing appearance through engagement with differing perspectives. Freedom is realized through public action, when citizens change social reality through the agonistic interplay of ideas which creates a new shared public reality. Freedom is usually thought of as being a feature of the public sphere, whereas the private sphere, concerned as it is with survival and necessity, lacks the ability to promote the exercise of freedom.

Arendt writes that one of the establishing features of totalitarianism is the destruction of the divide between private and public (Young-Bruehl 2006, p.52). Arendt warns that a common contemporary view of the state, as an unavoidable evil for the creation of social freedom, is that individuals are left without a public sphere (Arendt 2005, 142). That is individuals are duped into taking the satisfaction of their biological needs within the private sphere as the most important life project. Dossa argues that such an elevation of private concerns for security and basic desires, as they become matters of public concern, removes the private moral space which is indispensable for private human beings (Dossa 1984). Elisabeth Young-Bruehl argues that in today's world this privatizing of the public sphere can be found in examples of ideological indoctrination in schools (she uses the example of religious education) and also in policies that regulate the family and reproduction such as in China's one child policy or in religious attempts to regulate birth control etc. (Young-Bruehl 2006). Young-Bruehl's point with these examples is to demonstrate that without a public space that challenges ideology through robust discourse individuals are left obeying an ideology which has command even over our biological concerns. That

is, if the public space becomes a space where citizens are primarily concerned with matters of necessity, then the actualization of freedom ceases.

A key insight of Hannah Arendt's thoughts on the private sphere of human activity is that private actions can play a role in restoring pluralism to the public sphere. That is, for Arendt, activity in the private sphere which aims at restoring the possibility of individuals thinking has political impact. Arendt describes the process of thought as the two-in-one (Arendt 1978, p.188). That is when an individual is alone, thought occurs as a dialogue with oneself. The dialogue of thought actualizes difference. If one honestly engages in a dialogue with oneself then one challenges one's understanding of the appearance of the world and consequently challenges one's sense of self identity. For Arendt, the way in which has discourse with oneself is mirrored in the way in which discourse operates between friends, as discourse with a friend requires the recognition that the friend is another self. (Arendt 1978, p.189). The ability of friendship to hold thought is thus important for encouraging the return of thought to a social situation where thinking is oppressed – such as in Arendt's description of a totalitarian state where the private sphere is colonized by ideological concerns which inhibit self-dialogue. That is, if the private sphere has become colonized by ideological forces, then it might be possible within the private sphere to resist those forces. As the private sphere is the usual nurturing space where care for others is first learned and later nourished, the colonization of this sphere by instrumental concerns for things such as economic gain, inhibit the growth of such care which could be displayed in the public sphere. Hence by paying attention to the function of the private sphere some beneficial political theory for encouraging a pluralistic and thus flourishing public sphere can be ascertained.

Arendt argues that human nature is essentially pluralistic. We are human together, never alone.

If someone wants to see and experience the world as it “really” is, he can do so only by understanding it as something that is shared by many people, lies between them, separates and links them, showing itself differently to each and comprehensible only to the extent that many people can talk *about* it and exchange their opinions and perspectives with one another, over and against one another (Arendt 2005, 128).

Thus, for Arendt there is no difference between living in the real world and talking about it. When individuals are coming together to discuss the world through antagonistic discourse the public sphere can be said to be healthy. That is a healthy public sphere is a space with a robust expression of a plurality of views. This space is the best engine of political creativity as the free expression of pluralistic viewpoints, which allows individuals to

convert others to help them in their projects, is the condition for political action (the highest form of human activity for Arendt). Ideological indoctrination denies the possibility of talking about the world as there is no possibility of offering a contradictory perspective or opinion. Similarly, if citizens are more by necessity than a care for appearances, then the public sphere can be said to be impoverished as the absence of public discourse creates the condition for ideological indoctrination. Thus, it is vital for the future of any political situation where people must come together to survive and flourish that the public sphere be a place of appearance and judgement.

## **Private virtues in the Family and in Friendship**

Individuals in a healthy public space are not necessarily motivated by care for each other. The sharing of opinions can be an emotionally traumatic experience depending on one's investment in a challenged opinion. Thus, how individuals engage with each other in a public sphere is as important as the fact of their engagement in the first place. Hence, it is important to consider Arendt's thoughts on how individuals learn to appear to each other in public in a way so that violence is avoided. An often overlooked nuance to Arendt's thoughts on the private sphere is that in private discourse between friends, and in certain households, individuals can learn how to share their opinions. That is, there is an aspect of care to opinion sharing which is found in the family and in friendship. I locate care as a feature of friendship in Arendt's insistence that an important feature of thought is that one is friends with oneself (Arendt 1977, p.188). For Arendt, friendship, is the extension of thought and discourse. Friendship will be discussed in more detail later in this paper. However, for friendship to flourish the individual must first learn to experience and value pluralistic conceptions of the world. This opening to the value of pluralism is first encountered in the organizational unit of the family. The family is the unit in which ideas such as kinship help people to recognize that their concerns can also be another's (Arendt 2005).

Arendt draws her views on the family from a study of ancient differences between the family and the polis. Consequently, as Karin Fry points out, a diverse range of thinkers, such as Wendy Brown, Adrienne Rich, Mary O'Brien and Mary Pitken, have criticized Arendt for privileging the 'male' form of political expression over the 'female' concern for the private (Fry 2009, p.125). I would add to this list Seyla Benhabib and Julia Kristeva, whose respective criticisms will be discussed below. However, such claims miss Arendt emphasis on the importance of the family for nurturing and developing a consciousness before it enters a public space. That is, before one is a citizen one is a family member. It is in the family that one learns to populate a pluralistic space. Suzanne Jacobitti argues forcefully that the dark household is not all that Arendt means by the designation of 'private' (Jacobitti 1991). Jacobitti demonstrates that for Arendt there is an inseparable relationship between

these two spheres of human life. That is, political action requires for its existence private virtues for respecting difference. The family is thus the origin of a shared morality. This is a claim consistent with recent arguments from the field of care ethics. Stephanie Collins describes care ethics as relational ethics which comprises both an ethical value and a political value (Collins 2015). The essential claim underlying most care ethics is that obligations derive from relations (Collins 2015). Hence one is both with others politically and how one behaves towards others also has an ethical dimension. I mention this as I see Arendt's attention to the learning of care in the family as an important move for developing future public action. My claim is not that individuals appearing in the public sphere are in a care relationship with each other; rather, my argument is that if the public sphere is not operating as a pluralistic space, there is potential for rescue through care relationships which preserve and rejuvenate a shared concern for pluralism. Thus, there is an element of public significance for the kinds of care that one learns in the family insofar as care relationships bestow individuals with a concern for appearing to each other.

In 'Introduction *into* Politics' Arendt does write scathingly of a particular household which does not generate a concern for pluralism (Arendt 2005, p.91). Such a household is patriarchal, where the father dominates the expression of opinions. The control that the father exerts over this household inhibits the expression of pluralistic views. This is the private sphere that Julia Kristeva has in mind when she criticizes Arendt's political theory. Kristeva notes that this conception of the household is especially poignant in the contemporary age when politics has become a bureaucratic sphere rather than a real contest of ideas (2001). However, Kristeva laments that Arendt's distinction between the public and private spheres is too reductive and does not consider the position of women and others in the household who are not always living merely for the necessities of life. Kristeva argues that if Arendt was more attuned to the reality of the household then she would find that what she endorses in the political sphere is already present in the household (Kristeva 2001, p.160-162). However, Kristeva's criticisms of Arendt are not valid. Arendt *does* point us to the private for the roots of political freedom (Jacobitti 1991, p.287). Kristeva is too focused on the public in Arendt's writing to recognize that the private and the public remember each other as structures in which people learn to care for the expression of a plurality of views. This is most obvious in Arendt's thoughts on friendship.

Friendship is the driving theme of Arendt's book *Men in Dark Times* (Arendt 1995). In this work Arendt presents intellectual biographies of major thinkers who, while under oppressive political conditions, used friendship to make hope. The political importance of friendship is in the expression and acceptance of plurality that defines friendship. Friendship (or humaneness), is found in the willingness of an individual to share the

world with a friend. This sharing is done through discourse. For Arendt, thought halts once one believes that one has an answer. Thus, discourse is essentially a human process for keeping thought in motion. Praising the character of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Arendt writes that he was happy with “the infinite number of opinions that arise when men discuss the affairs of this world” (Arendt 1995, p.26). For Lessing, when philosophy utters a truth it reduces it to one truth amongst many that is therefore contestable and variable. Hence for Lessing, friendship and discourse allow one to be human and celebrate the pluralistic opinions of the shared world (Arendt 1995, p.29-30). It is important to point out that friends might care for each other, but this does not preclude disagreement from their discourse. Lessing, Arendt writes, “was concerned solely with humanizing the world by incessant and continual discourse about its affairs and the things in it” (1995, 30). Lessing’s practice of friendship manifested through this discourse. Friendship is hence a microcosm of a public space insofar as private friends are still sharing the world even when not exposing themselves publicly. Such friendship is possible, though more difficult, in a totalitarian society which has closed the public sphere. In such dark times, friendship, by necessity, becomes a private matter; however, within friendship, the seed of a future return to plurality can be nurtured. Patrick Hayden writes that friendship, for Arendt, is one of the most significant forms of human association that can foster the capabilities required for a publicly shared world made through public action (2015, 752). What is important for Hayden is that friendship is not itself political, yet it can have great political significance.

The work of Jeffrey Goldfarb describes the impact that friends in private can have on a political situation (Goldfarb 2006). For Goldfarb there are many examples of Arendt’s views on friendship and its ability to ‘birth’ a potential source of rescue from dark times. One such was found in the meeting of friends around the kitchen table in Soviet Poland. Goldfarb describes the kitchen table as a shield of privacy where friends could speak with free interaction (Goldfarb 2006, p.10). For Goldfarb, as it is for Arendt, friends meeting around kitchen tables provide a place for the possible expansion of the bounds of friendship, as groups of friends are not usually closed off islands. Each member of the group is friends with other people, who through inquiries about these acquaintances can serve as the grounds for creating a larger meeting of friends. Goldfarb’s insight is that in these kitchen table interactions there is a revival of judgement as a key part of everyday interactions. That is the kitchen table is a space to generate and maintain respect for plurality even in conditions which prohibit expressions of plurality in a public (Goldfarb 1996, p.21). With Arendt, Goldfarb insists that the table is political insofar as the plurality that emerges around it can be carried to other table conversations providing a spark for future acts of civil disobedience or public actions.

## Discourse Ethics and Political Agonism

A strong critic of Arendt is Seyla Benhabib for whom Arendt's political theory is found lacking because her division of the public from the private ignores the acts of exclusion which prohibit minorities from joining in public discussion (Benhabib 2007, p.90-91). Instead, for Benhabib, it is in the language of discourse ethics that the real nature of democratic life is best theorized. Benhabib writes that discourse ethics loses the narrow conception of the public space. Benhabib claims that the meaning of participation can be altered by exploring three forms of participation in democratic societies that are not accounted for in Arendt's public space discourse ethics: the realm of institutions, the realm of personality formation, and the appropriation of cultural traditions (Benhabib 2007, p.104). For Benhabib, creative engagement with each of these spheres creates the norms which permeate a democratic society (Benhabib 2007). For Benhabib, this public space is not an agonistic space as it is for Arendt. Instead,

it is viewed democratically as the creation of procedures whereby those affected by general social norms and by collective political decisions can have a say in their formulation, stipulation and adoption (Benhabib 2007, p.105).

Such a political theory for Benhabib is respectful of society's institutions despite the contestability of those institutions. Rather than subjecting society to agonism, the contesting of social norms and practices in the discourse theory of politics she endorses means that the existence of those institutions needs to be respected in the contest.

Benhabib describes discourse in the three spheres as being like rules of a game which are generally accepted and adhered to and which can be contested as the game is played. For Benhabib, a tyranny of sorts results when the rules are abandoned. The norms of discourse presuppose an autonomous individual who can enter into discourse and challenge the given consensus, hence, there is a necessity for private autonomy for individuals to make opinions public through discourse. Such autonomy allows matters of will formation to actualize. For Benhabib, reference to discourse ethics is a far more responsible vision of a democratic theory than Arendt's "agonism" as discourse ethics allows a greater focus on private individuals forming an opinion and then voicing it in reasonable discourse that respects minority voice (2007). However, this seems a lot like Arendt's conception of politics elaborated above. Arendt is of the view that the cultivation of pluralism in the private sphere has a significant political effect. This can be demonstrated through a consideration of Arendt's thoughts on Socrates efforts to improve the minds of young Athenians through friendly discourse (Arendt 2005, p.83). Aaron Schutz and Marie Sandy point out that Arendt's description of Socrates friendly, yet still agonistic discussions, reveals



that his interlocutors are equal partners in a shared world (2015, p.29). Furthermore, Schutz and Sandy stress that in Arendt's analysis of Socrates, friendships are supposed to cultivate the ground from which public action could spring (2015, p.29). Thus, Benhabib's claim that Arendt's thought lacks attention to filial social ties is clearly false.

That Benhabib and Arendt are not in opposition is further clarified when considering the similarity of their respective analysis of contemporary society. Benhabib laments the shift from autonomous citizen to consumer citizen in modern times (2007). She accepts that a major problem facing the west is a concurrent rise of surveillance and voyeurism with a colonization of the life world by a neoliberal ideology. For example, issues to do with reproduction, such as child rearing and associated campaigns for reproduction, along with a certain culture of reproduction, have become public issues. Benhabib claims that when reproduction is a public issue a corresponding "patriarchal-capitalist-disciplinary bureaucracy" results (Benhabib 2007, p.113). The problems of such a bureaucratic state are exacerbated by the additional problems of a surveillance culture and a diminished life-world. For Benhabib discourse ethics offers an emancipatory framework for challenging the suppositions that colonize the life-world and privatize the public. What Benhabib is essentially arguing for is social discourse that allow minority or oppressed views to challenge existing norms whilst still respecting the legitimacy of existing institutions. That is, through conversations, Benhabib hopes to change institutions from within. There is nothing here that is not in Arendt's analysis. Arendt stresses the political implications of discourse in non-public spaces. It is through a rich engagement with others, at the kitchen table, in the work environment, and in public spaces, about the shared understanding of the world that institutions can be improved –this holds true for Benhabib and Arendt. Jacobitti writes,

Whereas the private individual (including the thinker) cares for personal interest and the citizen cares for country, Arendt would balance both perspectives with care for "the world" which is neither self nor other but the space between, a space which will only exist as long as thinking friends or colleagues in political action exist (Jacobitti 1991, p.289).

There is something rich in Arendt's conception of the private world which some scholarship has missed. This richness encompasses some of the best aspects of discourse ethics but does not fall into a trap of arguing for consensus building. Consensus is a major component of many deliberative democracy theories and is effectively criticized by Chantal Mouffe. For Mouffe any consensus is an expression of hegemony. This is because there is an inherent and unsolvable tension between the logic of equality that permeates democracy and

the logic of liberty that permeates liberalism. Hence in liberal democratic theory a paradox results which produces a hegemonic solution as a stabilizer (Mouffe 2005, p.5). Mouffe claims that the language of consensus is usually presented as a framework that protects human rights by infringing on the rights of some part of society. Hence there is a hegemonic element to the expression of consensus that is open to be challenged. Mouffe argues for an agonistic politics in the form of a radical democracy. Radical democracy is not a democracy aimed at the slow construction of consensus. Instead Mouffe proposes a democracy that promotes agonism as the end in itself. She rejects the possibility of a rationally constructed consensus and instead wholeheartedly accepts the fundamental difference between an 'us' and a 'them'. Her aim is not to overcome that difference but to set up the conditions where that difference is celebrated and given voice in the public sphere. That is, as long as there is argument between vested opinions, where no aim at consensus is on the cards, the positions allow each participant in the democracy to have their positions changed. Mouffe is of the view that one's position is constructed through hegemonic battles; hence her politics has, as its aim, the expression of those battles to facilitate the fluid nature of identity rather than allowing a particular hegemony to fix identity (Mouffe 2005).

On the surface, Mouffe's emphasis on the importance of resisting hegemony through the expression of pluralism seems to be in line with Arendt's thinking. However, there is a radicalism to Mouffe's understanding of discourse which separates her from Arendt. Mouffe claims that there is a negative side of discourse which Arendt does not recognize. Mouffe accuses Arendt of presenting an idealized view of discourse where the coming together and sharing of ideas removes violent conflict (Mouffe 2005, pp.129-130). For Mouffe, conversation is at heart antagonistic, and the idea that conversation shines light on the best way forward misses the antagonistic heart of discourse – the violent defense of difference. Mouffe illustrates her claim by analyzing decision making. In Mouffe's estimation Arendt posits a rationality to the decision maker – they share their opinion publicly, gain confidence if it survives challenge, and then act with faith in the reasonableness of their position (Mouffe 2005, 130). What such a view misses, for Mouffe, is that decisions are at heart irrational – the decision maker abandons reason and chooses instead to simply act. Decisions, in the political sphere, are for Mouffe, at heart an expression of force and violence (2005, p.130).

If we explore the agonism inherent in Arendt's political theory we find the conclusion that the focus of political theory should not be on an agonism that allows the interplay of hegemonic forces to continually overturn each other, as it is for Mouffe. That is the focus should not be on the '*agon*' of agonism but instead on creative aspects of action. Arendt understands action as the movement of freedom and plurality. Action is thus

the actualization of freedom and plurality which allow new situations to develop out of existing ones. Mouffe doesn't necessarily disagree with this sentiment; however, what sets Arendt apart is the fact that the public actions which have this creative element are formed through private interactions nourished through care by families which give the first insight into the nature of plurality and friendship which is a caring home for dispute. To generalize, for Mouffe it is important that we struggle with each other. For Arendt, it is important that we care for each other and struggle to give that care political form by respecting pluralism. Arendt's agonism is thus infused with a sense of being responsible to and for those we struggle as expression of difference is something we should care about. This responsibility comes out of continued discourse, which is a constituent feature of friendship, and which requires all parties being able to see each other as equal interlocutors (Hayden 2015, p.752). Arendt recognizes that dispute, rather than being an expression of violence, can be an expression of friendship as two friends learn to dispute the world through discourse.

#### **Václav Havel and Victor Klemperer as Illustrators of Arendt's Position**

The political theory of Václav Havel and the analysis of language in the Third Reich by Viktor Klemperer provide illustrative examples of Arendt's thoughts on the political significance of private friendship for plurality. The picture of friendship that I have been defending in this paper is a major concern of Havel's more philosophical letters, essays and plays. That there is a similarity between Arendt and Havel's thought has been previously remarked upon by Jean Bethke Elshtain (Elshtain 1992). Elshtain notes that Havel shares Arendt's concern for resisting claims of ideological certainty – that is, Havel promotes plurality. Interestingly Havel's argument for a 'non-political politics,' a politics which is based on small, seemingly apolitical acts which provide the foundation for ideological coercion of behavior, seems to suggest that the basis for all action is the private sphere. Havel is referring to the unguarded moments in which a person is not performing a public role, such as at the kitchen table. Both Havel and Klemperer could have sections dedicated to them in Arendt's *Men in Dark Times* for their employment of critical self-analysis and use of friendship in oppressive conditions. Hence their thinking is interesting here because it maintains a sense of the value of conversation without needing to be overly pessimistic about the human propensity to slip into group thinking.

Robert Pynsent argues that Havel's political philosophy is built around the question of identity and responsibility (Pynsent 1994). Pynsent claims that for Havel, personal identity is obliterated under totalitarian conditions. Totalitarian governments in the twentieth century pushed a view of collective responsibility rather than individual responsibility for events. This is problematic for Havel as it allows a person to sink into a lie that the world is not their responsibility but the group's – that is one feels that the abstract notion of a public should

do something about an oppressive phenomenon, however, the individual is not required to. Group responsibility hence allows a person to escape responsibility. Havel as a dissident and as a politician wants to restore awareness of responsibility back to the individual. For Havel, any real public action begins when an individual privately accounts for their own actions to themselves and to their friends. This is a key feature of Arendt's position outlined above. For Havel, identity and responsibility are intrinsically linked in a way that Arendt would accept. Responsibility is revealed in the careful process of thinking about the world that reveals the pluralistic nature of reality. In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt claims that thought reveals constituent difference that defines the identity of things (Arendt 1978, p.191). Havel is consistent with this idea suggesting that knowledge of the world pluralistic constitution reveals to individuals their responsibility for others. Thus, responsibility, the moral imperative of action, is revealed through private discourse as much as through public discourse. Perhaps even more so through private discourse as one is better able to reflect when in conversation with oneself or friends.

For Havel, responsibility gives life its meaning. This is evident in the following passage from Havel's collected letters to his wife Olga, composed during a lengthy prison stay.

My family, friends, acquaintances, fellow prisoners, the unknown weather woman, my fellow passengers in the streetcar, the transport commission, those who go to see my plays, the public, my homeland and the state power structure; countless relationships, tensions, loves, dependencies, confrontations, atmospheres, milieus, experiences, acts, predilections, aims and things with which I am loosely or closely connected - all of that forms the "concrete horizon" of my relating, because all of it is my world, the world as my home, the world in which I am rooted in a complex way, to which I ceaselessly relate, against the background of which I define myself, through which I simply am. It is the world of my existing, such as it presents and opens itself to me, as I make myself at home in it, as it constitutes itself for me through my experiences and I - in one way or another - make it meaningful. Thus my 'I' creates this world and this world creates my 'I' (Havel 1989, p.356)

Havel's understanding of responsibility is clearly phenomenological. In analyzing the content of phenomena's appearance to consciousness, Havel begins with the understanding that consciousness is intentional. Hence the I is always of something and with something. Responsibility involves asking without prejudice in what way the I affects the world and things in the world. Responsibility is therefore intrinsic to identity because responsibility is

about understanding how one is in the world. In fact, my identity is made through my consideration of my embeddedness in the world and what and whom I am with (Havel 1989). Thus, for Havel, identity is simultaneously privately curated and publicly shown. This is an important point in supporting the analysis of Arendt in this paper. Havel, like Arendt, is keenly aware that if the public sphere of activity has been compromised it is through a greater attention to private virtues that encourage a rejuvenation of pluralism that there is any hope of political rescue.

Responsibility means vouching for ourselves, and doing so even in the wider perspective of “what everyone should do.” It means vouching for ourselves in time, knowing everything we have ever done and why, and what we have decided to do. It means standing behind everything we do and being prepared to defend our position or existentially bear witness to it anywhere and at any time. (That is why responsibility is also the main key to human identity) (Havel 1989, p.232-233).

With such an understanding of responsibility after the collapse of communism, Havel spoke to the Czechoslovak nation of a shared guilt for maintaining the socialist ideology and its manifest evil. For Havel, there is real importance in taking the public presence of ideological state apparatus and making them private concerns for thinking. Havel argues that ideology sustains itself through citizen’s actions which give it legitimacy (Havel 1997). Havel's famous essay 'The Power of the Powerless' is based on this insight (Havel 1985). In this essay Havel argues that there is no real distinction between public and private - for Havel, all actions have political effect. In his first speech as President Havel announced that all citizens were co-creators of the totalitarian system (Havel 1994, p.4). Havel agrees with Arendt that the indoctrination of the private sphere by ideology has the effect of destroying the private virtue of caring about the expression of plurality; hence the result is a stagnation of the public sphere. Havel’s solution for the recovery of the public sphere is to ask citizens to cultivate their private self-reflections to generate a care for being the kind of person who can share their opinion in public. Havel, like Arendt, sees the need to replenish the spaces in which individuals can learn to think by themselves and with each other.

Tony Judt writes that the effectiveness of Havel's dissent lies in his (and other central European dissidents) ability to redirect discourse back to the individual (Judt 1988). This is achieved through the language of rights which Judt argues is a lever for generating discussion about pluralism.

Rights detonize. They are things possessed by the individual, not by the state – they can be abused and they can be ignored, but they cannot be removed... they are in their very existence witness to the space between individuals and the state, and are thus constitutive of civil or bourgeois society (Judt 1988, p.192-193).

By returning language to the area of rights, Havel and other dissidents could reconsider the role of the individual and furnish a hope in dark times. Judt writes, for Havel the system has an outpost in every citizen; hence it is the people who need to be “replenished” (Judt 1988, p.196) What Judt means is that for Havel citizens recovering a language of rights engage in a discourse which brings their responsibilities back into focus. By insisting on the language of rights Havel ensures that individuals see themselves as thinking individuals with responsibilities for upholding the rights of others.

Action which is neither public nor private, for Havel, is called non-political politics. This idea is common to central European dissidents from the nineteen-seventies who were dissenting against revisionist Marxist ideas (Judt 1988). Non-political politics involves acting as if the system were not there. One ignores state expectations of behavior and instead acts as if one lived in a parallel polis. Non-political politics avoids the 'dark side' to human communication that Mouffe critiques because the rigorous self-scrutiny that non-political politics entails ensures that one is fully accountable, in front of others, for one's position. In other words, non-political politics understands that one is being political when one gives attention to the cultivation of private practices which although not necessarily public contribute to the political situation. For Havel, responsibility charges one to act *as if* free. In acting as if one were free one creates a space for freedom. This is the freedom that Goldfarb describes as existing between friends at the kitchen table. Around the table one resists the coercive forces which attempt to colonize the thoughts of private people and direct them towards ideological ends. Such discourse around the table is the kernel of resistance. There is an interesting example of Havel creating and exercising this freedom found in the film, *Citizen Havel Goes on Vacation* (2005). In 1985 Havel went on a vacation around Czechoslovakia visiting friends. He was followed by a documentary film maker and approximately three hundred secret police. The film shows Havel living as if the police were not instruments of state terror (Novak 2006). He is shown opening doors for them and generally ignoring their eerie presence. Havel of course is not advocating that all citizens become such courageous actors; instead Havel propounds that the retreat into the private that permeated Czech life after the period of 'normalization' following the 1968 invasion is best dealt with by following the individual into the private and reinvigorating that sphere.

Havel shows, consistent with Arendt's theory outlined above, the power that exists in private action for influencing the public. In fact, the distinction between the public and private is only useful in Havel's political theory when there is a poisoning of the private through ideological coercion. If something is rotten with the public, it is rescued through the private. Conversely if the private sphere is colonized by ideological concerns, the public sphere is adversely affected. Because of this continued effect between the two spheres of social life one needs to be eternally vigilant in terms of thinking about one's actions. Like Arendt, Havel also sees the importance of vigilance not only when one is in public and showing oneself, but also when one is in spaces which are not distinctly political, such as private conversations with friends and family.

For Havel, one of the most significant forces of ideological colonization of the private sphere is through the political manipulation of language. That language can be manipulated through political misuse is dangerous because language infects the private as well as the public. For Havel one of the mechanisms in which citizens live in a lie, or live without responsibility is by making identifications through ideological language that avoids responsibility by offering another (ideologically constructed) identity in which the self can hide. Ideological language distorts the appearance of a phenomenon by distorting the understanding of the I and its relation to the contents of consciousness. Thus, the world looks different to the ideologue, who remains closed to the possibility of challenging that appearance. This is clearly the same concern that Arendt displays in writing on the dangers of a private sphere that doesn't acknowledge a plurality of views. Thinking, discourse with friends, teaching family members that others have different views and public discourse all share the constituent feature of language interplay. Thus, the actual words that people use when in discourse are of great importance. Victor Klemperer's work in *The Language of the Third Reich* adds another dimension to this discussion as he has documentary evidence that the words that friends choose to use in discourse can have the most devastating public effects (Klemperer 2006).

Klemperer is important for this discussion as his experience with the political manipulation of language is illustrative of Havel's distrust of politically homogenous language and, more importantly, of Arendt's concern that friends who stop engaging in agonistic discourse with each other can lose the ability to think. Unlike Arendt, Klemperer was a Jewish scholar who did not think the Nazis would win power or at least would not stay in power; hence he stayed. Staying gave Klemperer the unique perspective of an observer of a complete change in a nation's private living and of course its political situation. Klemperer avoided the concentration camp as he was married to an 'Aryan'; however, he was banned from university life (he was a scholar of French history), owning books, and even from reading a newspaper. Klemperer's naturally curious academic mind turned its

attention to how the German language was becoming infected by Third Reich ideology and what effect that was having on citizens, close friends, and even on himself. Steven Aschheim describes this attention to the codes of everyday life that Klemperer employs as constituting the real strength (and future popularity) of his diaries from which Klemperer's critique of language is based (Aschheim 2001, p. 71-72). Klemperer does not abstract his theorizing from the world he lived in. "Klemperer records and illuminates public life... from a most personal perspective and in remarkably detailed, quotidian, humanizing fashion" (Aschheim 2001, p.72). Thus, Klemperer is interested in just how discourse traverses the boundaries of public and private.

Throughout the diaries Klemperer's attention to the impact of public life on his private projects such as finishing a house, maintaining a car, digging a garden etc. highlights the significance of the private sphere in understanding a political situation. For Klemperer, the conversations people have in their private projects supplies the mortar for public events to develop. Klemperer's conclusions form something close to a political theory in that he argues for a greater responsibility and carefulness for how and why one uses certain phrases to promote the sustenance of a pluralistic political sphere. Klemperer thinks that it was through language that the Third Reich was "able to permeate flesh and blood" (Klemperer 2006, p.14). That is once private individuals adopted changes to the language made popular by Nazi propaganda, their private lives changed, once those lives changed the political situation changed with it. This demonstrates the closeness of the private and public spheres.

Klemperer demonstrates throughout his work the moral impoverishment of the language of the Third Reich. This analysis gives excellent support to Arendt's thought. The private, rather than fostering a respect for plurality became like the patriarchal microcosm of a totalitarian state. On the diminishment of language Klemperer writes:

It was poor not only because everyone was forced to conform to the same pattern, but rather – and indeed more significantly – because in a measure of self-imposed constraint it only ever gave expression to one side of human existence (Klemperer 2006, p.20).

This one-sided language made no distinction between public and private. He finds many examples of the language of public speeches made by Goebbels, or Hitler. Klemperer is in agreement with Arendt when he claims that language is not just a means of giving expression to identity, it also "dictates [our] feelings and governs [our] entire spiritual being the more unquestioningly and unconsciously [we] abandon [ourselves] to it" (Klemperer 2006, p.14). Klemperer argues that the starting point for resisting a linguistic colonization of the



private sphere has to be fundamental human attitudes. Klemperer's diaries are full of instances where former friends, initially through the adoption of the language of the Third Reich, came to take on extreme anti-semitic views.

At this point Mouffe's criticism of conceptions of political discourse, such as those we are advocating here, might seem valid in that there is evidence of a strong hegemonic force putting pressure on our discourse. However, as Klemperer notes, simply recognizing that a political situation can get overrun by ideological language, when people mimic that language without critical thought, does not necessarily mean that this is always the case, or even is the usual state of affairs. Thus, Klemperer is in support of Arendt's position that the maintenance of friendship is vital for rescuing a fallen public sphere.

Klemperer claims that during the Third Reich, the word 'fanatic' gained a new and positive meaning it previously did not have. People fanatically celebrated achievements of Hitler and the Reich. People also privately used the word to denote doing something with passion. For example, one could write fanatically. Fanaticism lost its negative tone and became a normalized word meaning a "happy mix of courage and fervent devotion" (Klemperer 2006, p.55). That is the dark side that Mouffe refers to - mimicry without a corresponding responsibility. However, after the war had ended, Klemperer notes that the word immediately had its negative connotation returned (Klemperer 2006, p.56). He writes that the change is evident of people's awareness throughout the Third Reich's reign that the word was being used incorrectly - "that a confused state of mind, equally close to sickness and criminality, was for twelve years held to be the greatest virtue." This awareness can be utilized. Klemperer implies that one can resist ideological coercions by being aware of them. In Arendt, Havel and Klemperer, one is made aware of the extent to which ideology has permeated one's thinking through discourse. The dilemma that Klemperer describes has resonance for this discussion of Arendt as Klemperer laments a society where friends have stopped challenging each other's worlds, a place where children are not raised to see discourse as being fundamentally about challenging the dominant view. That is, the world they share is not created through agonistic interplay, but through blanket acceptance of a single identity.

## Conclusion

I offer a final example to begin the concluding remarks. In his analysis of the moral history of the twentieth century, Jonathan Glover describes the Italian resistance to carrying out Germany's request to exterminate the Jewish population of Italy (Glover 1999, p.389). The Italians used bureaucratic inefficiency to momentarily thwart the final solution in Italy. For Glover, it is because the primary virtue for Italians was a respect for

humanity that Italian soldiers found their orders so distasteful. Greater detail to this resistance is provided by Jonathan Steinberg (2002). Steinberg explores the diaries of Italian and German officers camped together and notes that in these private musings Italian officers wrote of the horror of what they had been asked to do. On the other hand, German officers remained silent about their task. Steinberg suggests that what separated the two nationalities was that the Italian officers displayed a deep concern for how they would appear to their friends and families if they carried out the dreadful task. That is the private concern for how one would appear to members of their household had a great bearing on how the officers chose to act in public.

Arendt's, Havel's and Klemperer's thoughts on how the small interactions in the private sphere between friends have significant impacts on the possibilities that exist in the public sphere are important for our time as well as their own. Non-political politics, as a process of considering the political significance of all social interactions, in the private sphere as well as the public sphere, is a significant contribution for addressing concrete political problems insofar as non-political politics preserves an important moral dimension to private sphere interactions. That is, the view that the private sphere is only a space where biological needs are satisfied is resisted in non-political politics as actions in this sphere have political significance. When considering Havel's thought in light of Klemperer's diaries, which demonstrate the need for a careful attention to the words we use, it is easy to imagine the impact that every action has on the sustenance of ideology – that insight illustrates the importance of the private realm in Arendt's thought. Whether in the private realm or the public, each citizen either supports or changes the apparatus that props up the ideological machine. In Havel's view, we are always political. When we elevate private concerns to the level of political concerns the political is thereby diminished. However, it does not disappear. This is because for Havel, the private sphere is essentially political because all of our actions have political effect. For Havel, we need to be constantly on guard considering the impact of all of our actions. Thus, for Havel, in times where political life is in crisis it is a significant political act to consider one's responsibilities to others in one's private life. This private articulation of care, for Havel, has significant public impact. This is not to say that public action is only possible when private citizens decide to take their private concerns to the street, rather it is to suggest that the small acts of responsibility between friends and family have a constitutive effect on the political sphere. For Havel, how one acts privately impacts on how one can act publicly, hence acting responsibly in private carries the potential for responsibility in public life. This point was illustrated through reference to Klemperer's analysis of language usage during the Third Reich where Klemperer notes that in public, no one was paying that much attention to the speeches of Hitler and Goebbels on the radio while they drank their beers in bars or other public places; however subtle changes to

language in these speeches permeated everyday private speech laying the ground for massive public changes. As everyone took on the language of the Third Reich, only one side to human existence was spoken about, publicly, and at home between friends and family (Klemperer 2006, p.20). The results were, obviously, catastrophic.

This paper has argued that attention to friendship and relationships of care can create the conditions for a sharing of ideas between individuals which can revitalize a stagnating political situation by encouraging a respect for pluralism. Pluralism is not only a concern for the public sphere, as some critics of Arendt have accused Arendt of advocating, but instead for Arendt the private sphere offers public life a home in which to find nourishment. Illustrative examples of this nourishment were described in the writings of Václav Havel and Victor Klemperer. These thinkers demonstrate that a political situation in which citizens are responsible to one another requires a great deal of self-reflection on how one acts towards those in one's immediate vicinity, and even how one uses words. What has been demonstrated is a theory of the private sphere in which a rich discourse ethics encourages the scaffolding of a healthy polity through attention to care and encouraging pluralism in interpersonal relations. It is clear then that when Arendt thinks about public action, friendship and the family are always already there in the background.

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