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CHAPTER I

Reconciling Oneself to the Impossibility
of Reconciliation: Judgment and
Worldliness in Hannah Arendt's Politics

Roger Berkowitz

Hannah Arendt's *Denktagebuch* begins with a reflection on how to respond to wrongs: "The Wrong that one has done is the burden on the shoulders, what one bears, because one has laden it upon himself"¹ (*D* I.1.3). The strange phrase of a "burden upon the shoulders" refers to the poetic fragment "Reif Sind" by Friedrich Hölderlin. Arendt and Martin Heidegger had discussed Hölderlin's poem months earlier while walking in the Black Forest on Arendt's first trip to Germany since fleeing the Nazis. Upon returning to New York, she wrote Heidegger and requested the citation. Heidegger provided the citation in a letter of May 6, when he writes: "I am happy for you that you are surrounded by your books again. The line with 'the burden of the logs' is in 'Ripe and dipped in Fire'—around the same time you probably wrote it [presumably a lost letter], I had been thinking about the burden of logs."² Just weeks later, Arendt inaugurated her *Denktagebuch* with a reflection on the proper response to past wrongs.³

In calling upon Hölderlin's poem, Arendt raises the problem of memory and of how to respond to past wrongdoings. The stanza Arendt cites announces her theme:

*Und vieles
Wie auf den Schultern eine Last von Scheitern ist
Zu behalten.*

And as
A load of logs upon
The shoulders, there is much
To bear in mind.⁴

We must remember our past wrongs and sufferings and bear them as our burden. At the same time, Hölderlin insists, we need to let go of the past and to taste the ripeness of the present. Ripe hanging fruit may have deep roots, but we cannot live looking backward. We need to forgo the temptation of nostalgia as well as the security of knowing what was. Instead, Hölderlin writes, we should “Let ourselves rock, as on a boat, lapped by the waves.” Without disavowing the past, “Reif Sind” is a clarion call to grasp the fruit now while it is ripe.

In Arendt’s opening entry of her *Denktagebuch* in 1950, she names the embrace of the now over and against the past “reconciliation” (*Versöhnung*). Reconciliation, she writes, “has its origin in a self-coming to terms with what has been given to one” (*D*, I.1, 4). To reconcile with the given is a willful act—a judgment—to love the world as it is. Reconciliation with a wrongful act or an evil world is “only possible on the foundation of gratitude for what has been given” (*D* I.1.4). It is a judgment that amidst pain, injustice, and heartbreak, we must love the world as it is. As an act of loving the world—what Arendt later in the *Denktagebuch* calls *amor mundi*—reconciliation is at the very core of political judgment.

Arendt’s *Denktagebuch* begins and ends with reflections on reconciliation. For those unfamiliar with Arendt’s *Denktagebuch*, her decision to begin with a discussion of reconciliation may seem circumstantial, a mere accident. Reconciliation appears sporadically in Arendt’s published writing. It does not appear in *On Revolution* (although the problem of revolution—the imperative of a new beginning to meet the challenge of living together in a world without authority—is to be understood within the guiding framework of reconciliation). In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the idea is present, but is spoken under the name “comprehension.” In *The Human Condition*, reconciliation is mentioned only once, although the discussion of forgiveness in the section on Action is heavily influenced by Arendt’s approach to reconciliation. Arendt’s book most indebted to the thinking of reconciliation is *The Life of the Mind*, her unfinished final book, which contains important passages on reconciliation, many of which origi-

nate in the *Denktagebuch*. Most important, however, reconciliation figures prominently in numerous published essays such as “Understanding and Politics,” “The Gap Between Past and Future,” “The Crisis in Education,” “Truth and Politics,” “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts About Lessing,” and “Isak Dinesen 1885–1963.”⁵ To look simply at Arendt’s published texts reveals Arendt’s account of reconciliation to be meaningful, but not central to her larger effort to rethink the practice of politics in the modern age.

All this changes when one opens Arendt’s *Denktagebuch*. Beyond the opening entry, Arendt energetically returns to the theme of reconciliation over the two decades that she actively engages with her *Denktagebuch*. Reconciliation is one of the recurrent ideas in the *Denktagebuch*, showing deep resonances with Arendt’s development of action, thinking, understanding, comprehension, forgiveness, politics, and the love of the world. In conversation with her readings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, Arendt reworks the question of reconciliation into one of the fundamental if hidden questions of her work. To follow the thread of reconciliation through the *Denktagebuch*, as I do in this essay, is to see that Arendt both begins and ends her inquiry into reconciliation in relation to her engagement with Heidegger.

I argue in this essay that reconciliation is a central and guiding idea that deepens our understanding of Arendt’s fundamental conception of politics, plurality, and judgment. I also show that the judgment to reconcile with world is inspired by Arendt’s engagement with Heidegger on the questions of thinking, forgiveness, and reconciliation, as well as by her own efforts to think through her personal and intellectual reconciliation with Heidegger. Arendt characterizes Heidegger’s fundamental “error” to be his refusal of reconciliation with the world. His wakeful standing-in-the-clearing of being leads him to attend to being as that which withdraws. By focusing on the presence of what is absent, Heidegger’s thinking retreats from the world of appearances in its concern with the unseeable and the unsayable. It is against Heidegger’s unworldly escapism—his refusal of reconciliation with the world as it is in a standing-in the clearing of being—that Arendt embraces reconciliation as one way to name politics, the worldly standing-in amidst the battle that is man’s struggle to make a home on earth.

I present nine theses that Arendt advances around the theme of reconciliation found in her *Denktagebuch*. Theses 1–4 address reconciliation—as distinct from forgiveness, guilt, and revenge—as a political act of judgment, one that affirms solidarity in response to the potentially disintegrating experience of evil. Thesis 5 situates Arendt’s discussion of reconciliation

in her critiques of Hegel and Marx. Thesis 6 considers the central role of reconciliation in Arendt's book *Between Past and Future* and argues that the "gap between past and future" is Arendt's metaphorical space for a politics of reconciliation understood as the practice of thinking and judging without banisters, as she put it, in a world without political truths. Theses 7 and 8 turn to Arendt's engagement with Heidegger on the question of reconciliation, arguing that her embrace of reconciliation within an evil world is a response to the errors of Heidegger's worldless thinking. Finally, Thesis 9 turns to Arendt's final judgment of Adolf Eichmann, arguing that her refusal to reconcile herself with Eichmann exemplifies the limits of reconciliation; Arendt's decision not to reconcile with Eichmann and to demand his death is Arendt's paramount example of political judgment. Judgments for reconciliation and nonreconciliation are judgments that can reenlive and reimagine political solidarity in the wake of great acts of evil.

Not one of these theses encompasses all the others. Reconciliation is not a single or controlling concept in Arendt's work; it is, however, a multifaceted idea that touches nearly every aspect of Arendt's work. Attention to the depth of Arendt's engagement with reconciliation in the *Denktagebuch* offers new insights into her fundamental ideas of politics, solidarity, and judgment. Read in this way, the *Denktagebuch* shows that Arendt places the question of reconciliation—and at times nonreconciliation—at the very center of her inquiry into the activities of thinking and judging in politics.

Thesis 1: Reconciliation is an act of political judgment affirming solidarity in response to a wrong.

Arendt develops her understanding of reconciliation by setting reconciliation against forgiveness and revenge as one of the three possible responses to wrongdoing. When confronted with a wrongdoer who has done a wrong, she writes, forgiveness and revenge both are incapable of political judgment. Forgiveness—at least human forgiveness as opposed to divine forgiveness—proceeds on the Christian assumption that what the wrongdoer has done is something that anyone could have done. "Forgiveness is perhaps possible insofar as it is only the express recognition that we-are-all-sinners, thus it claims that everyone could have done anything, and in this way it produces an equality—not of rights, but of nature" (*D* I.1.4). In order to forgive, we assume that "but for the grace of God" we could have committed similar wrongs. Forgiveness therefore erases the difference between the one who forgives and the wrongdoer; thus, forgiveness erases the distance necessary to judge and makes judgment impossible.

Revenge similarly follows the Christian precept of a natural equality of all, but in the reverse direction. If forgiveness assumes we are all equally sinful and fallen and thus might have committed a wrong, revenge presumes we all have the right to do wrong. Revenge proceeds from out of a concept that “we are all born poisoned” by our vengeful lusts (*D I.1.5*). The avenger asserts his equal right as a human animal to take the law into his hands instinctively and without reflection, just as the wrongdoer has done. To avenge a wrong is to claim the same passionate right as the wrongdoer. Acting on unthinking passions, revenge also negates judgment.

Both revenge and forgiveness, Arendt writes, “spring from the Christian solidarity between mankind, that all are equally sinners and all are capable of everything just as their fellow man, even the greatest evil” (*D I.1.6*). For Arendt, this Christian solidarity with all men is “grounded on the fundamental mistrust in the human substance” (*D I.1.6*). Since revenge and forgiveness imagine all people to be the same in their sinfulness, both erase human plurality and difference. Christian solidarity is a “negative solidarity, which springs out of the idea of original sin” (*D I.1.6*). In such a Christian solidarity, we are all the same by nature. If everyone is the same, no one can judge another. Neither forgiveness nor revenge allow for political judgment that could articulate a positive ideal of a common world that might gather a plurality of persons into a political world.

Reconciliation is different from forgiveness and revenge in two ways that are crucial for politics. First, the political power of reconciliation proceeds from its ability to create and affirm solidarity in the face of a wrong that threatens to dissolve that common sense of belonging to a common world. By affirming one’s acceptance of the world with the wrong in it, reconciliation accepts the wrong in its difference—for example, for Arendt to reconcile with Heidegger means to accept that what he did was wrong and yet still affirm that the world is better with him and his wrongdoing in it than without them. Politically, reconciliation means to accept and affirm the reality of people whose acts we consider to be fundamentally wrong; thus, while Arendt disagrees with anti-Semites and racists as well as communists and laissez-faire capitalists, she believes that they and their opinions are part of the common world. Reconciliation is thus open to radical plurality in a way that forgiveness and revenge are not.

Second, reconciliation has a specifically political judgment at its core. Reconciliation is an act of solidarity; unlike the presumptive solidarity of Christian forgiveness and vengeance, however, reconciliation is a political judgment that first brings solidarity to be. The “solidarity of reconciliation is firstly not the foundation of reconciliation (as the solidarity of being

sinful is the foundation of forgiveness), but rather the product [of reconciliation]” (*D I.1.6*). When I decide to reconcile with the world as it is, I affirm my love for the world and thus my solidarity with the world and those who live in it. In this sense, reconciliation is the precondition for the being of a *polis*: It is the judgment that in spite of our plurality and differences, we share a common world. To reconcile with a wrong is to affirm one’s solidarity with the world as it is and is, therefore, to help bring into being a common world. Arendt thus turns to reconciliation as a more properly political response to wrongdoing, one that might help to build “a new concept of solidarity” (*D I.1.6*).

The fact that solidarity is connected to political judgment means that it includes a judgment about the constitution of a people, a “we.”⁶ The “we” appealed to in solidarity is not a pregiven essence but is the result of a judgment that finds something common among a plurality. Solidarity, for Arendt, offers a unity that emerges not out of sympathy or pity, both of which develop togetherness based upon a feeling for depersonalized others, the poor. In the judgment to reconcile with others out of solidarity, people “establish deliberately, and, as it were, dispassionately a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited.”⁷ Solidarity moves beyond pity and embraces “the strong and the rich no less than the weak and the poor.”⁸ Solidarity, therefore, is a conceptual judgment of reconciliation that is open to uniqueness and meaningful differences (of opinion, status, religion, and race), a judgment that appeals to a “common interest” not in majority opinion but in “the grandeur of man,” or “the honor of the human race,” or the dignity of man. Political solidarity is the outcome of reconciliation insofar as we reconcile ourselves to faction, disagreement, and plurality.

Thesis 2: Reconciliation replaces guilt with mutual release.

In order to reconcile and find solidarity with the human world inclusive of wrongdoing, reconciliation must not confront all wrong as proceeding from guilt. Reconciliation focuses less on the wrongdoer subjectively and instead confronts the wrongful act itself—as an act, rather than as the doing of a guilty person. “*Reconciliation* has its origin in the coming to terms with [*Sich-abfinden*] what has been sent one as given [*dem Geschickten*]” (*D I.1.4*). Reconciliation addresses not the sin of the wrongdoer but the fact of the wrong itself—that factual act or doing that has happened, that has been given.

Arendt expands upon her point that reconciliation avoids the assignment of guilt in a later *Denktagebuch* entry from April 1951. The wrong, she writes, is different from guilt. She distinguishes “the mere wrong-doing”

from “the reality of being-guilty” (D III.22.69). Guilt gives the wrongful act permanence and continuity in the world. She writes: “What is so difficult to understand is that wrong can have permanence and even continuity. We call this guilt—wrong as continuity of the that-which-cannot-once-again-be-undone”¹⁰ (D III.22.69). Where guilt is something that attaches to a person and lasts in the world, the permanence of wrong in the sense of guilt cannot be overcome. Lasting guilt rends the body politic and disrupts the solidarity amid a plurality that is the essential achievement of politics. This is because the “actually guilty—and not those who have done a wrong—are expelled by society and must be thrown out of society, because with such guilty people history is no longer possible”¹¹ (D III.22.69). Guilt poisons politics. With guilty people, one cannot share a common world unless one punishes them or forgives them. While guilt is important for punishment and is the common foundation of Christian forgiveness, it is destructive of politics, which requires that we discover that common thing around which we affirm our solidarity.

Arendt finds a way out of the problem guilt poses for politics by turning to reconciliation, which she develops from the example of Jesus Christ. Against the Christian conception of a guilty and a “perverted nature,” “Jesus seeks to dissolve being-guilty into a merely having-done-of-a-wrong [*blosses Unrecht-ge-tan-Haben*]” (D III.22.69). The result is that the wrong does not stick to the wrongdoer himself, and the wrongdoer can be freed from the permanence of guilt.¹² By separating guilt from wrong, it is possible for the wrong to be politically overcome and thus not allowed to persist as a rip in the body politic. The removal of wrong from the person to the world, while not sufficient for reconciliation, is a condition of its possibility.

Arendt argues two further activities are required for reconciliation to reestablish solidarity in the wake of a wrong. First, the wrongdoer must show himself ready to immediately correct his wrongdoing. Second, the wronged person must be ready to no longer insist that a wrong has occurred—that is, must no longer comport himself as if a wrong has occurred. “This,” she writes, “is the sense of reconciliation, in which, in distinction from forgiveness, always both parties are engaged” (D III.22.69). There is in reconciliation a “mutual release,” the sense that both the wrongdoer and the wronged affirm their willingness to accept the wrong, albeit in different ways. The wrongdoer accepts the wrong and changes his action, and the wronged accepts the wrong as something that has happened, as simply a part of the world. They thus both make the judgment that continued coexistence in a shared political world is preferable to persisting in the doing or naming of a wrong.

To explicate what she means by the mutual release of reconciliation, Arendt enlists two sayings of Jesus. Jesus, she writes, had reconciliation—and not forgiveness—in mind when he wrote, in the Lord’s Prayer, “And forgive us from our sins, as we forgive our sinners,” and second, from the book of John, that the sinners must “go forth and sin no more” (*D III.22.69*). The very “sense of reconciliation” is this two-sided approach in which both wrongdoer and wronged are engaged. The wronged person must release the wrongdoer, but only if and when the wrongdoer admits and repents his wrong.

Even though the English translation of the Lord’s Prayer speaks of forgiveness, Arendt argues that Jesus’s teaching is better understood as counseling reconciliation. We do not make peace with the wrongdoer who does not repay; that wrongdoer has done a wrong, and we neither erase that guilt nor affirm that we might have acted in the same way. What Jesus calls for, in Arendt’s interpretation, is that we focus not on the wrongdoing of the debtor but on the fact of his wrong. To reconcile, she writes, means to judge that the wrongful act is something the wronged person can live with. Reconciliation means that one make a judgment not to hold the very-real-and-not-forgiven wrongs of the wrongdoers against them. But reconciliation is just only when the wrongdoer also admits and repudiates his act.

When both parties reconcile themselves—the one by admitting error and ceasing further wrongdoing and the other by accepting the wrongdoing as something he can live with—they can and *do* affirm their willingness to live together in a world of common understanding amidst their plurality and disagreements. It is in this way that reconciliation offers to rebuild political a common world together, a world that is threatened by wrongful acts. Reconciliation as the mutual release leading to an affirmation of solidarity is what Arendt means when she says that reconciliation is at the very core of political judgment.

Thesis 3: Reconciliation is the political side of forgiveness that rebuilds a broken common world.

Arendt picks up this sense of reconciliation as a mutual release when she writes about forgiveness in *The Human Condition*. Once again, Arendt turns to Jesus: “The discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth.”¹³ Arendt cites numerous sources from the New Testament where Jesus preaches that the power to forgive is foremost a human power and not a prerogative of God. Thus in Matthew, Jesus says: “The Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins,” and Arendt adds that “the emphasis being ‘upon earth.’”¹⁴ She cites Matthew, again, where

Jesus says, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”¹⁵ Her point is that “the power to forgive is primarily a human power.”¹⁶ It is humans, not God, for whom forgiveness is a fundamental capacity.

Arendt traces the reason for Jesus’s insistence on human forgiveness to the insight that men “know not what they do.” Since human action is irreversible and unpredictable, forgiveness is necessary to enable action. The human capacity to forgive becomes an ontological ground for action and politics. Since no man can know the distant and unpredictable consequences of his action, he is “‘guilty’ of consequences he never intended or even foresaw.”¹⁷ Without the capacity to forgive and thus free man from the burden of the irreversibility and unpredictability of his actions, man would cease all action: “The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility—of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing—is the faculty of forgiving.”¹⁸ Forgiveness, in Arendt’s telling, offers the solution to the predicament of action.

Arendt’s use of the word “forgiveness” in *The Human Condition* is deceptive. Even as she insists on the need for forgiveness in politics, she limits the province of forgiveness. Human forgiveness, she writes, “does not apply to the extremity of crime and willed evil, for then it would not have been necessary to teach in the Gospel of Luke: ‘And if he trespass against thee seven times a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.’”¹⁹ If we usually think of forgiveness as a response to willful wrongs, Arendt here uses it otherwise. She is not talking about forgiving sins or crimes, but mere “trespasses.”

The emphasis on trespasses rather than on wrongs is important. If wrongs are rare, “trespassing is an everyday occurrence.”²⁰ Trespass is simply part of action, the fact that every human act will create “new relationships within a web of relationships” that will inevitably lead to some wrongs. It is in this sense that forgiveness is necessary for action, and forgiveness is addressed not to intentional or willful wrongs but simply to the trespasses that inhere in human actions in the public realm.

Arendt’s attention to Luke’s limitation of forgiveness to everyday trespasses allows her to clarify her idiosyncratic understanding of forgiveness. The original Greek word in the Gospel that is traditionally translated as “forgiveness” is *aphienai*, which Arendt suggests means to “‘dismiss’ and ‘release’ rather than ‘forgive.’”²¹ By forgiveness, then, Arendt does not mean the act of forgiving one his sins—the Christian act of finding solidarity in a

human sinfulness—but rather the “constant mutual release” that allows men to continue to act in the world. As Arendt argues: “Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power that to begin something new.”²²

In turning to the language of “mutual release” in her redefinition of forgiveness, Arendt surreptitiously points back to her understanding of reconciliation developed in the *Denktagebuch* and discussed earlier here. Her discussion of forgiveness in *The Human Condition*—often mistakenly thought to address questions of criminal and moral wrongs—is actually an argument about the possibility of political action; political action is possible only insofar as those whose acts lead to wrongs ask to be released from their past decisions and those who have been wronged agree to release them. This mutual release is what Arendt understands to be reconciliation as opposed to forgiveness, a distinction Arendt once made in a letter to W. H. Auden.²³

Why, in defining forgiveness as a “mutual release,” does Arendt collapse the distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation that occupied much of her earlier work? One possible answer is that Arendt actually integrates forgiveness into her political idea of reconciliation. This is possible because reconciliation and the act of forgiveness are, as Arendt wrote already in a 1953 note in the *Denktagebuch*, two sides of a single coin: “Therefore no action is possible without mutual forgiveness (what is called reconciliation in politics)” (*D VIII. 17.303*). Mutual forgiveness, or mutual release, is actually called reconciliation in politics, even if in *The Human Condition* she leaves out the word “reconciliation” itself. “Forgiveness” is the name for the ontological possibility of action based in mutual release, while “reconciliation” names the political impact of the possibility of mutual release.

Both forgiveness and reconciliation are human capacities that make action possible, albeit in response to different kinds of wrongs. Forgiveness is what makes human action possible in light of the unavoidable fact that all human action carries with it the uncertain risk of transgression, of intentionally or not, causing harm and doing wrong. Forgiveness is geared to trespasses. Reconciliation, as opposed to forgiveness, is what makes human action possible when the offending action is elevated from a mere transgression to a sin or a crime. Once the transgression becomes crime and inserts itself in the public realm to demand a political response, forgiveness remains politically impotent.

In criminal law, the question is neither forgiveness nor reconciliation, but punishment—although punishment is itself a version of reconciliation in which the criminal's accepting of his punishment allows for him eventually to be reintegrated into political society. But in response to certain crimes—such as the Nazi genocide and the trial of Adolf Eichmann—even punishment becomes impossible because Eichmann's wrongs are of such an enormity as to explode the possibility of political solidarity with a world in which actions such as bureaucratic genocide can exist. In extreme cases, legal judgment must cede to political judgments of reconciliation or non-reconciliation.²⁴

It is in this sense that reconciliation offers an understanding politics based upon a conceptual solidarity that attends to “‘the grandeur of man,’ or the ‘honour of the human race,’ or the dignity of man,’” as opposed to a politics based upon pity that aspires to unity only of the unfortunate and poor.²⁵ Reconciliation is what makes possible the political reconstitution of a common world that includes a meaningful plurality. Thus, Arendt can say that no political action is possible without reconciliation.

Thesis 4: Reconciliation is an act of understanding and imagination that enables politics amidst plurality.

One essential difference between forgiveness and reconciliation concerns the question of understanding. Forgiveness, Arendt writes, “has so little to do with understanding that it is neither its condition nor its consequence.”²⁶ Take the example of totalitarianism: “To understand totalitarianism is not to condone anything, but to reconcile ourselves to a world in which such things are possible at all.”²⁷ Instead of forgiveness, understanding is connected to both reconciliation and action.

As Arendt elaborates in the *Denktagebuch*: “In understanding happens the reconciliation with the world that first makes possible all acting” (*D XIV.16.331*). Writing in 1953, one year before “Understanding and Politics” was published, Arendt emphasizes that understanding is an “a priori condition for acting.” In reconciliation and understanding, we “come to terms with” what is in the world and thus “come to terms with my belonging to that reality as an acting person” (*D XIV.16.331*). In other words, in understanding, one reconciles with what is even when it is not what it ought to be; understanding commits oneself to acting in the world as one tries to make it anew. This is why “Understanding is the specifically political way of thinking (‘the other fellow’s point of view!’)” (*D XIV.16.332*). Only someone who is reconciled with the world even when it is not as he or she would

have it—someone who accepts the world as it is and comes to terms with the world with others in it—can politically act in that world among people who are unique and thus have divergent opinions. It is in understanding that we experience the political virtues of friendship and respect for others with whom we differ. Thus do understanding and reconciliation open the door to politics amidst a world of plurality.

When Arendt publishes her account of reconciliation and understanding in “Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding),” in *Partisan Review* in 1954,²⁸ she raises the core question of reconciliation with regard to evil: How can one reconcile with a totalitarian world and with individuals who bring it about? Understanding means reconciling and facing up to totalitarianism, and making knowledge of totalitarianism meaningful. Understanding is a “strange enterprise,” and an “unending activity” by which we “come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world.”²⁹ But why should we make totalitarianism meaningful? Why reconcile with evil? Arendt argues that by making what it understands “meaningful,” and reconciling with what we hate, understanding “prepare[s] a new resourcefulness of the human mind and heart.”³⁰ Reconciliation does not mean embracing evil, but understanding it and accepting it as real. Pursuing further the example of totalitarianism, understanding means seeing that totalitarianism is a new governmental form that has ruined “our categories of thought and our standards of judgment.”³¹ It is only such a reconciling understanding—a facing up to the new and unprecedented in totalitarianism—that makes a space for “a being whose essence is beginning” to respond to totalitarianism by judging “without the customary rules” of morality; only understanding and reconciliation can rebuild a new home amidst others with whom one disagrees in a political way.³²

Both understanding and reconciliation, as political judgments, depend upon imagination. Arendt explains the importance of imagination to reconciliation through a discussion of King Solomon’s prayer asking God for the gift of an understanding heart. Solomon prayed for this gift “because he was a king and knew that only an ‘understanding heart,’ and not mere reflection or mere feeling, makes it bearable for us to live with other people, strangers forever, in the same world, and makes it possible for them to bear with us.”³³ Imagination, “which actually is understanding,” is what “allows us to take our bearings in the world.”³⁴ It is through imagination that we take the world we are given, even a world of totalitarianism and evil, and make ourselves at home in this world. That is what it means to reconcile oneself to the world.

Thesis 5: Reconciliation travels “the Path of Wrong.”

One frequent heading under which Arendt explores reconciliation is “the Path of Wrong” (*Der Pfad des Unrechts*)³⁵—a title that Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann, editors of the *Denktagebuch*, tell us Arendt at one point considered for the German edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (D III.2.2 n. 1.937). In one passage on “The Path of Wrong,” Arendt says that “the cardinal question” is to understand and reconcile ourselves to the importance of wrongs.

“The Path of Wrong”—anti-Semitism—imperialism—world historically—totalitarianism—. How is it that only the paths of wrong have been accessible (*gangbar*), have been relevant, above all still had a relation to the actual questions, difficulties and catastrophes and that there are never paths of right and cannot be? This is the cardinal question. (D III.27.72)

Arendt makes the same point about the privilege of wrongs in history at the end of her preface to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.³⁶ The path of this evil is no doubt harrowing and inhuman, but “it is also true that without it we might never have known the truly radical nature of Evil.”³⁷ This is not to defend totalitarianism or deny its wrongness—and just to be clear, she is speaking of totalitarianism, which is different from the Final Solution. Arendt does say that wrongs like totalitarianism are important events in human history. They are tragedies. But tragedies, for Arendt, are part of human history, even the main parts.

Tragic wrongs are the only meaningful events of human history. Arendt quotes Hegel’s maxim that “a ripped stocking is better than a darned stocking,” which she glosses to mean, “being ripped first makes noticeable the original unity. . . . The stocking thus appears as a ‘living unity’ in the ripped stocking precisely then when it proves its uselessness for life” (D XXVI.28.726). As Arendt writes, “Hegel’s original personal experience is of being ripped, his first worldly-experience is the French Revolution. Both lead 1) to negation as the beginning and the power that brings forth thinking, and 2) to the ideal living within thinking—reconciliation, and reconciliation with thought itself and with the world” (D XXVI.27.725). The root of Hegelian reconciliation is the profound need to make whole in thought a world that is broken in reality. In thinking and reconciling with the wrongs of the world, we can reaffirm the unity and goodness of a common world.

There are obvious limitations to Hegel’s account of reconciling with what is. Hegel’s refusal of politics and his reconciliation with the present—

his claim that what *is* what is rational—can justify inaction in the face of even the worst injustice. As Arendt writes, “Hegel’s satisfaction with the present may be risible (*empörend*)” (*D* III.28.72). But Arendt rightly insists that Hegel’s “purely contemplative” political method is actually born from utterly correct “political instincts” to heal the real world in thought and to remove philosophical concepts from the political will to improve the future. That is why Hegel has better political instincts than does Marx, as she explains in a later entry on the “Path of Wrong.” Arendt repeats the thought-chain of wrongs linking anti-Semitism, imperialism, and totalitarianism, while also adding to the list “Marxist world history” (*D* III.22.68). A few entries later, Arendt explains what she means by the addition of Marxist world history. There is, she writes, “only one essential difference between Hegel and Marx, one that has in any case a catastrophic and decisive significance.” The difference is that Hegel’s world-historical view is only backward-glancing, ending in the present, while Marx’s history is “‘prophetic,’ projected to the future and understands the present only as a springboard” (*D* III.28.72). It is Marx’s forward-looking world history, his effort to mobilize philosophy for politics, which “introduced the truly deadly anti-political principle into politics” (*D* III.28.72).

The antipolitical principle that Marx introduces to politics is scientific materialism, the “tyrannical” principle of logic. Plato, in Arendt’s telling, was the first to corrupt politics with the antipolitical principle of logic. Leibniz and Descartes brought politics into the scientific age with their declaration “*adequatio rei et intellectus*,” insisting that the world conform to laws of reason and science.³⁸ Hegel’s political logic followed, holding the world to logic and reason. For Plato, Leibniz, and Hegel, the rationality of world was a perpetual limitation on human freedom and thus on politics: “Against the unalterable laws of logic there is no freedom” (*D* II.20.45). All human action is, when seen under the rationalist perspective, simply a working out of rational laws. Scientific politics thus cannot allow for either freedom or plurality.

Marx goes further, however. Under Marx’s world history, it is the singular laborer (the sovereign individual) who in the service of his own freedom sets out to master and remake the world of plurality that both confronts and frustrates his own plans. It is this “plurality, which since Plato (and through until Heidegger) is in the way of the [individual] man—in the sense that it does not allow him his sovereignty” (*D* IV.1.79–80). In the name of the sovereignty of the individual laborer or politician, “everything is permitted that serves the end.” For Marx, “The statesman produces the ideal society, for which he uses and abuses all others only as a helper”

(D IV.1.80). Marx's unwillingness to reconcile with the wrongs of the world leads him, Arendt argues, to justify the ultimate wrong of tyranny and totalitarianism.

What all these wrongs from totalitarianism to Marxism show us—if we are willing to truly face up to them—is the antipolitical face of evil in our world today. Modern evil is the ideological, thoughtless, and superficial denial of human action and human judgment encapsulated in all theories and ideologies that offer a single and all-inclusive explanation of human events. What evil requires is not escapism, but that we face up to the seductiveness of modern evil in an age of scientific explanation. Wrongs call for comprehension, “the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality—whatever it may be.”³⁹ The path of wrong requires thinking and understanding and, in Arendt's words, reconciliation.

Thesis 6: Reconciliation beyond Hegel requires settling down in the gap between thinking and the world.

In *Between Past and Future*, Arendt writes: “The task of the mind is to understand what happened, and this understanding, according to Hegel, is man's way of reconciling himself with reality; its actual end is to be at peace with the world.”⁴⁰ In *Truth and Politics*, Arendt again raises the problem of a thoughtful reconciliation to reality alongside a reference to Hegel: “Who says what is always tells a story. To the extent that the teller of factual truth is also a storyteller, he brings about that ‘reconciliation with reality’ which Hegel, the philosopher of history *par excellence*, understood as the ultimate goal of all philosophical thought.”⁴¹ And in *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt addresses the Hegelian foundation of reconciliation in two places. Reconciliation, she writes in the section on “Willing,” “is at the center of the whole Hegelian system.” It is a “*reconciliation* . . . between the ‘Divine,’ with which man spends his time while thinking, and the ‘secular,’ the affairs of men.” The importance of reconciliation is that it gives meaning to human life that has been severed from the meaning of truth and tradition. Reconciliation, for Hegel, affirms that “the course of history would no longer be haphazard and the realm of human affairs no longer devoid of meaning.”⁴²

The touchstone for Arendt's own thinking about reconciliation is Hegel. Hegelian thinking, as a kind of reconciliation with the world, is the activity in which human beings work to understand and comprehend the world around them. This understanding-reconciliation is necessary because without it we would not live in a world that we could understand or make our way in. Objects for which we have no understanding and no language to describe them are nonexistent. There is a basic truth to Hegel's

idealism: that the real world only is for humans insofar as we humans think that world and reconcile ourselves to it.

Even as she finds her approach to reconciliation on Hegel's thinking, it is also clear that Arendt finds Hegel's view of reconciliation incomplete and in need of revision. There is a hint of her critique in one sentence from "The Gap Between Past and Future;" after the lines quoted earlier grounding her thinking on Hegel's view of reconciliation, Arendt adds a caveat: While reconciliation is necessary to be at peace with the world, we thinkers of politics may no longer be in position to seek peace in the world: "The task of the mind is to understand what happened, and this understanding, according to Hegel, is man's way of reconciling himself with reality; its actual end is to be at peace with the world. *The trouble is that if the mind is unable to bring peace and to induce reconciliation, it finds itself immediately engaged in its own kind of warfare.*"⁴³

Arendt explicitly questions whether reconciliation and the peace it would bring are possible. Against Hegel, Arendt asks: What happens when reconciliation fails?

The problem Arendt grasps hold of under the title of reconciliation is that the "break in tradition" and the "death of God" disrupt the traditional philosophical effort to rationalize politics. The Marxian response—to force reality into a new progressive reason guided by science—is part and parcel of totalitarianism. Instead, Arendt councils a new idea of reconciliation: reconciliation to a world without political truths, one in which politics is closer to a kind of warfare—one specifically suited to the human mind.

Arendt reiterates her worries about Hegelian reconciliation in a passage from *The Human Condition*:

The idea that only what I am going to make will be real . . . is forever defeated by the actual course of events, where nothing happens more frequently than the totally unexpected. . . . The political philosophy of the modern age, whose great representative is still Hobbes, founders on the perplexity that modern rationalism is unreal and modern realism is irrational—which is only another way of saying that reality and human reason have parted company. Hegel's gigantic enterprise to reconcile spirit with reality (*den Geist mit der Wirklichkeit zu versöhnen*), a reconciliation that is the deepest concern of all modern theories of history, rested on the insight that modern reason foundered on the rock of reality.⁴⁴

The political philosophy of the modern age "founders on the perplexity" that reconciliation—the effort to prove and sustain the rationality of the world—has finally been shown to be impossible. Hegel's "gigantic enter-

prise,” Hobbes’s scientific reconceptualization of reason as interest, and Marx’s scientific materialism are all heroic yet futile efforts to submit reality to rationality and thought. They represent a striving to have the political world make sense. To institute peace.

In questioning Hegelian reconciliation, however, Arendt does not abandon reconciliation. Rather, she reimagines reconciliation as a facing up to the basic fact of the modern world: That Hegelian reconciliation fails to institute peace and that politics in the age of the death of God is necessarily a battle. Arendt insists we reconcile ourselves to the fact that there is no truth in politics, and all politics is a struggle among opposing opinions, or *doxai*. This does not mean there are no political facts or that truth is politically irrelevant, but there are fewer political facts than most people think. Further, such facts as there may be are themselves cemented only by persuasion and opinion. They are settled political facts that come, by weight of overwhelming persuasiveness, to be part of the shared common world. Political truth, in Arendt’s poetic formulation, is “the ground on which we stand and the sky that stretches above us.”⁴⁵ We must reconcile ourselves, she argues, to a world of plurality absent authority and absent all but the most foundational truths.

The *Denktagebuch* offers a path toward deepening our understanding of the scattered comments about reconciliation in Arendt’s published writings. This is especially true with regard to Arendt’s understanding of and her critique of Hegel’s theory of reconciliation. In an entry from 1953 titled “Concerning Hegel’s Historical Philosophy,” Arendt writes:

This rests on the concept of reconciliation. The central sentence stands at the end of the Philosophy of World History and reads: “That the History of the World, with all the changing scenes which its annals present, is the process of development and the realization of Spirit—this is the true *Theodicea*, the justification of God in History. Only *this* insight can reconcile Spirit with the History of the World—viz., that what has happened, and is happening every day, is not only not ‘without God,’ but is essentially His Work.”⁴⁶ Hegel’s philosophy says ultimately: Only if “the infinite is the truth of the finite” (Philosophy of Religion), can I bear that I am finite; only if “world history and actuality” is the “work of God himself,” can I bear to live in them. That is reconciliation.” (*D* XIV.23.337)

In a later passage from 1970, Arendt points toward certain passages from Hegel’s *Encyclopedia* that are central to her reading of reconciliation. Hegel clarifies the specific importance of reconciliation in his philosophical system with these words from his *Encyclopedia*:

“The highest and final aim of philosophic science is to bring about . . . a reconciliation of the self-conscious reason with the reason which *is* in the world—in other words, with actuality.”⁴⁷ What this means, Hegel writes in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, is that “the ultimate aim and business of philosophy is to reconcile thought or the Notion with reality.”⁴⁸

For Hegel, reconciliation means all that is *is* only insofar as it is thought. This is “completely correct,” Arendt adds, this is true at least subjectively (*D XXVII.50.776–777*).

Arendt’s response to Hegel appears in another entry from the same year. She asks: “What makes us think? Hegel’s answer: Reconciliation. Reconciliation with what? With things as they are. But this we do constantly anyhow by establishing ourselves in the world. Why repeat it in thought?” (*D XXVII. 58.782*). For Hegel, reconciliation is experienced as a response to his fundamental experience of the world ripped asunder. In other words, the world appears to man as that which is foreign, wrong, and in need of rationalization. Man stands against the objects and things of the world, which are separate from him. And man’s dream and drive is to reunite himself with the world. But if reconciliation is almost unconscious and natural, why then, Arendt asks, do we have to repeat this reconciliation in thought?

Arendt’s rethinking of reconciliation follows her conviction that sometime in the early part of the twentieth century, philosophy and thinking ceased to be able “to perform the task assigned to it by Hegel and the philosophy of history, that is, to understand and grasp conceptually historical reality and the events that made the modern world what it is.”⁴⁹ For Arendt, somehow, the “human mind had ceased, for some mysterious reasons, to function properly.”⁵⁰ In other words, what happens in the twentieth century is that a gap emerges between reality and thinking. This gap between thinking and reality itself, Arendt writes, is not new. It may be, she supposes, “coeval with the existence of man on earth.” But for centuries and millennia, the gap was “bridged over by tradition.” At a time when our efforts to understand the real world forever fall short, reconciliation assumes a different and distinctly non-Hegelian sense. Reconciliation demands that we forgo the will to absolute knowledge or scientific mastery of the world. We must instead reconcile ourselves to the reality of the gap between thinking and acting. We must, in other words, reconcile ourselves to our irreconcilability to the world.

Thinking today requires accepting the irreconcilability of the world that Arendt names “settling down in the gap between past and future.” It demands that we continually recommit ourselves to the loss of a knowable and hospitable world and instead commit ourselves to the struggle of thinking and acting in a world without banisters. Only if we think and reconcile ourselves to the reality of our irreconcilable world can we hope to resist the ever-present possibility of totalitarianism.

Thesis 7: Arendt’s reconciliation is a response to Heidegger’s worldless thinking.

Unlike Hegel, Heidegger is not known as a thinker of reconciliation. And in Arendt’s published writings, there is no discussion of Heidegger in connection to reconciliation. In the *Denktagebuch*, however, the connection between Heidegger and reconciliation is powerful and explicit. The *Denktagebuch* reveals that Heidegger is the silent partner in Arendt’s life-long reflection on reconciliation.

As discussed earlier, Arendt begins the *Denktagebuch* with an essay on reconciliation that was inspired at least in part by her visit with Heidegger in the winter of 1949. In the same letter in which Heidegger answers Arendt’s query about the Hölderlin poem “Reif Sind,” he adds: “Hannah, reconciliation is rich, but apparently we must wait for a turning point, when the world changes and overcomes the spirit of revenge.”⁵¹ In another letter one week later, Heidegger continues: “But you remember: on a walk in a valley, we talked about language. You are right about reconciliation and revenge. I have been thinking about that a great deal. In all this thinking, you are so near.”⁵² Invoking Nietzsche’s reflections on revenge and reconciliation⁵³ in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Heidegger offers wariness about reconciliation, suggesting that redemption from revenge would be very nearly superhuman or, as Nietzsche expressed it, “the bridge to the highest hope, and a rainbow after long storms.”⁵⁴ What is clear, however, is that Arendt’s earliest thinking about reconciliation emerges out of a conversation with Heidegger.

Twenty years after her original conversation with Heidegger, Arendt resumes her meditation, this time thinking through the place of reconciliation in Heidegger’s own thought. The occasion is her preparation for her speech honoring Heidegger on his eightieth birthday. In her longest entry on Heidegger in the *Denktagebuch* that concludes with a discussion of reconciliation, Arendt takes her bearings from Heidegger’s book *Zur Sache des Denkens*.

The question she takes up is: “What is it that most properly goes on in thinking?” For Heidegger, thinking means to hearken to Being (“*Sein vernimmt= Denken*”). Such a “pure thinking, thus thinking as thinking” is timeless. It is, as Heidegger writes, standing-in (*einstehe*n) in the time in which Being is most properly heard. What is decisive, Arendt writes, is the experience of thinking as standing-in; as an experience, thinking is not a process or a method but simply that which brings a person to himself. To be human is to have the experience of thinking, that is, of standing-in in the nearness of Being. It is the Heideggerian claim that “I become a self qua self first and most properly insofar as I think” that Arendt argues is the “error of *Being and Time*” (D XXVI.27.723).

Heidegger’s “error,” Arendt writes, is the error of all professional philosophers. It is to imagine that “insofar as I think I cease to be a being. I am ageless, without qualities, etc. It is as if I am not a man, but man” (D XXVI.27.723). Thinking thus becomes a kind of Kantian “thing in itself,” a non-thing: It is “worldless.” Thinking is something we cannot talk about. It has the character of a retreat or an evacuation from the world.

Once she has established Heidegger’s error with regard to thinking, Arendt contrasts Heidegger and Hegel on the question of thinking. For Hegel, thinking is reconciliation. From out of Hegel’s “original personal experience” of being-ripped and separated from the world, he develops the ideal of thinking as the reunification of the self with the world. Arendt then returns to Heidegger and writes: “For Heidegger instead of reconciliation: to erect oneself in the finite as what is most properly given to one: the *Ereignis* as the manifestation of this finitude (being limited) qua property” (D XXVI.27.725). Unlike Hegel, whose original experience is negation, from which follows the need for thinking as a reunifying reconciliation, Heidegger’s “fundamental experience” is the “seeing and hearing of what is absent” (D XXVI.27.725–726). Thinking for Heidegger is a standing in the presence of what withdraws: “The Matter of Thinking: To transform the absent into the present” (D XXVI.27.726). In all thinking there is an act of transcending, of stepping beyond oneself into the clearing of being.

In a much earlier entry from 1950—one of the many in the *Denktagebuch* titled “Acting and Thinking”—Arendt argues that Heidegger’s idea of thinking is a “fulfilled concentration” or “absolute wakefulness.” It is a waking to the experience of the world; thus, thinking is understood as a way of being for men that is also active: “Thinking would then be the being-freed-for action in man” (D I.11.12). Understood in this way Heidegger’s activity of thinking can be seen as one precursor for Arendt’s reconciliation with thinking as the settling down in the gap between past and future.

By the 1970s, however, Arendt is clear that Heidegger's approach to thinking goes wrong insofar as the thinker withdraws from the world. "In thinking," she writes in 1970, there is a partial "pulling of oneself back out of the world of appearances" (*D* XXVII.76.792). Thinking, in other words, can be apolitical and unworldly. Thinking is trapped within itself: "The activity of thinking is as relentless and repetitive as life itself, and the question whether thought has any meaning at all constitutes the same unanswerable riddle as the question for the meaning of life."⁵⁵ As a seeing into the unseeable and the unsayable, thinking is even analogous to death in its rejection of the world.

Thesis 8: Reconciliation is thinking as the battleground between past and future.

If Heidegger chooses a worldless thinking instead of Hegelian reconciliation of world and thought, Arendt comes by the late 1960s and 1970s to see reconciliation as a facing up to the fact that politics is a battle. Arendt repeatedly invokes Kafka's parable of "He" who is pushed forward by the past and who is pushed backward by the future. The parable illustrates, metaphorically, "the activity of thought."⁵⁶ Elsewhere, Arendt writes that the metaphor names "the location of thought."⁵⁷ The place of thinking, Arendt writes, is "a battleground."⁵⁸ "This battleground for Kafka is the metaphor for man's home on earth."⁵⁹ The dream of the "He" in Kafka's parable is the ability to jump outside of the "Now" where the forces meet, to become an umpire, spectator, or judge, to be able to judge the battle from "outside the game of life."⁶⁰ That is the "old dream Western metaphysics has dreamt from Parmenides to Hegel, of a timeless region," the dream of Hegelian reconciliation. But man, Arendt insists, "Man lives in this in-between."⁶¹

The battleground of the past and future as well as the place and time of thinking between them is not something true. There is no one true and eternal space of thinking. It proceeds from what Arendt calls her "basic assumption of this investigation": that metaphysics and philosophy must be dismantled because "the thread of tradition is broken and that we shall not be able to renew it."⁶² Reconciliation is no longer possible. Or, in other words, the act of reconciliation—of thinking the unity of thought and action—requires today a reconciliation to the irreconcilability of the world with thought, which is another way of saying that reconciliation becomes a question amidst the break of the tradition and the failure of the metaphysical effort to subordinate the world to truth. This may be why Arendt embraces for reconciliation Kafka's metaphor of a battleground and

abandons Hölderlin's image from "Reif Sind" of a boat rocking on the waves of the hear and now, having let go of the past and the future.⁶³

We have, in the end, only one judgment and decision before us. Here is Arendt: "Finally, we shall be left with the only alternative there is in these matters—we either can say with Hegel: *Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*, leaving the ultimate judgment to Success, or we can maintain with Kant the autonomy of the minds of men and their possible independence of things as they are or as they have come into being" (LOM, 216). This is the judgment we have before, us, our burden. To reconcile ourselves with the break in our tradition and with the loss of the guarantee of dignity and of truth. To follow what Arendt calls the "path of wrong" to its conclusion means that we must love the world with wrong in it and without the now shattered promise of truth and solidarity.

The challenge of reconciliation is to love the world as it is, that is, as potentially irreconcilable and inclusive of evil. It is well known that Arendt considered calling the book that would become *The Human Condition* by the title *Amor Mundi*—For the Love of the World. In 1955, there are at least three entries in the *Denktagebuch* dedicated to *Amor Mundi*. The first asks simply: "Amor Mundi—Why is it so difficult to love the world?" (D XXI.21.522). The answer is clear enough: anti-Semitism, racism, totalitarianism, poverty, corruption, and a feeling of utter powerlessness to make change. What reconciliation and understanding require is a commitment to politics and plurality that can come about only through a dedication to the world as it is.

Thesis 9: Arendt's final judgment of Adolf Eichmann is a judgment of nonreconciliation and a paramount example of political judgment.

Arendt began thinking about reconciliation in the aftermath of World War II during her first return to Germany and her reunion with Heidegger. In distinguishing reconciliation from forgiveness, she was clearly grappling with her own response to the wrongs of her friends and acquaintances. Arendt determined that she could reconcile with even those people she could not forgive. If they would admit their error, she could make the effort to live with them in a common world. Reconciliation names this power to face up to wrongs of the world and still commit oneself to living with them in a political community.

The case that tested Arendt's limits of the power of reconciliation was that of Adolf Eichmann. In Eichmann she confronted someone who did not admit his error in participating in the machinery of genocide—or, to the

extent he did repent of his errors, so fully misunderstood his error to be that he simply followed the wrong side. Eichmann could be neither reconciled with nor forgiven. Faced with a wrong and a wrongdoer who refuses to repent, reconciliation would preserve the existence of the wrong and persistence of the wrongdoer. Reconciliation, therefore, would be powerless to remake the shattered human community.

In cases such as Eichmann's, there is another choice beyond reconciliation, forgiveness, or punishment. In the face of that which is irreconcilable, one can choose to deny reconciliation. This is the choice that Arendt makes in her own judgment of Eichmann: to act beyond the boundary of reconciliation's power to inaugurate a common world. "Reconciliation has a merciless boundary," Arendt writes, a boundary that "forgiveness and revenge don't recognize—namely, at that about which one must say: This ought not to have happened" (*D I.1.7*). Arendt explains what she means by reference to Kant's discussion of the rules of war, where Kant says that actions in war that might make a subsequent peace impossible are not permitted. Such acts, like pogroms and genocides, whether in war or peace, are examples of "radical evil"; they are "what ought not to have come to pass." Such acts are also those that cannot be reconciled, "what cannot be accepted under any circumstances as our fate" (*D I.1.7*). Nor can one simply silently pass by in the face of radical evil.

Arendt cannot forgive Eichmann. But neither can she reconcile either with him or with what he has done. That is the meaning of her final judgment offered in the epilogue, the one she says the judges in Jerusalem should have "dared" to offer. Arendt's judgment reads:

You admitted that the crime committed against the Jewish people during the war was the greatest crime in recorded history, and you admitted your role in it. . . . We are concerned here only with what you did, and not with the possible noncriminal nature of your inner life and of your motives. . . . Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that it was nothing more than misfortune that made you a willing instrument in the organization of mass murder; there still remains the fact that you have carried out, and therefore actively supported, a policy of mass murder. For politics is not like the nursery; in politics obedience and support are the same. And just as you supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations . . . we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang.⁶⁴

The reason Eichmann must hang is that no human being must be expected to share the earth with him. He must hang, in other words, because what he did was so horrific that it must simply be rejected, eradicated, and said no to. This does not mean it should be forgotten, not at all. Rather, the world in which Eichmann's crimes could and did happen must simply be said no to. In short, Eichmann must hang because his crimes are irreconcilable with a civilized world.

In an interview with Günter Gaus, Arendt says that Eichmann's role in the Final Solution exceed the bounds of what is reconcilable.⁶⁵ She describes how she and her husband, Heinrich Blücher, originally could not believe the reports emerging from Auschwitz, reports based on the testimony of two escapees Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler. Once the facts were confirmed and irrefutable, her response was: "Well, one has enemies. That is entirely natural. Why shouldn't a people have enemies? But this was different. It was really as if an abyss had opened."⁶⁶ The abyss that opened separates the Nazis involved in Auschwitz from humanity.

Most wrongs can be reconciled. Before she knew of the mass killings in administrative massacres, Arendt tells Gaus, she "had the idea that amends could somehow be made for everything else, as amends can be made for just about everything at some point in politics." But the administrative terror and genocide in Auschwitz was something new and different, something that, in her words, "*ought not to have happened.*" What ought never to have been is not the number of victims, but the "method, the fabrication of corpses and so on." These horrors, these abominations, meant that "something happened there to which we cannot reconcile ourselves. None of us ever can."⁶⁷ It is the irreconcilable nature of simply inhuman and unbelievable crimes that, for Arendt, is the lesson she takes from the Holocaust. And it is this irreconcilability to the crimes that underlies Arendt's judgment of Adolf Eichmann.

Arendt's embrace of reconciliation as a response to the wrongs of the world is not absolute. Not every wrong and not every wrongdoer can or should be reconciled. And some wrongs, while not irreconcilable, are bad enough that they do not merit active reconciliation. This indeed is the framework through which she approaches her judgment of Eichmann. While Eichmann himself and thousands like him "were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal," while his subjective will was banal rather than consumed by willful evil, it is nevertheless the case that his deeds—his willing participation in the machinery of genocide—are horrific and radically evil. Arendt condemns Eichmann to be banished from the Earth. Even if the memory of Eichmann's deeds is inextinguishable, the judgment

to banish Eichmann and refuse reconciliation to a world with him and his actions in it is a political judgment that affirms one's solidarity with a world in which Eichmann's actions are not simply criminal, but unimaginable.

Eichmann and his crimes are incapable of reconciliation. Such an act of nonreconciliation is—as is forgiveness in the private sphere—a spontaneous and unexpected act. Unlike a legal judgment grounded in precedent, an act of reconciliation or nonreconciliation has the revolutionary quality of a break, a crisis, a new beginning, one that makes a claim either to reaffirm a common world (reconciliation) or to reimagine and reform our common world (nonreconciliation). Just as politics might depend on reconciliation as a way of binding oneself to a common world, so too may politics at times demand that actions and persons be excluded from that world so that it might remain a world we can share.

Reconciliation and nonreconciliation both are judgments made on the battlegrounds of past and future and thought and action. Both affirm a political solidarity inclusive of plurality, but with limits. The great decision facing all of us is whether we can and will reconcile ourselves to the world as it is. In this sense, judgments of reconciliation and nonreconciliation are exemplary actions of political judgment in a world without banisters.

NOTES

1. "Das Unrechte, das man getan hat, ist die Last auf den Schultern, etwas, was man trägt, weil man es sich aufgeladen hat." All internal references are to Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, ed. Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann (Munich: Piper Verlag, 2003).
2. Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger, *Letters: 1925–1975*, ed. Ursula Ludz, trans. Andrew Shields (New York: Harcourt, 2004), 85.
3. See Roger Berkowitz, "Bearing Logs on Our Shoulders: Reconciliation, Non-Reconciliation, and Building of a Common World," *Theory & Event* 14 (2011).
4. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, ed. Eric L. Santner (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1990), 274–275.
5. See Hannah Arendt, "Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt, 1994); Hannah Arendt, "The Gap Between Past and Future," "The Crisis in Education," and "Truth and Politics," in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking Press, 1968); Hannah Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts About Lessing" and "Isak Dinesen 1885–1963," in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, 1968).
6. I am indebted to Michal Eldred for this formulation in a comment he made on a draft version of this essay posted on academia.edu.

7. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Penguin Books: New York, 1965), 89.

8. *Ibid.*

9. “*Versöhnung dagegen hat ihren Ursprung im Sich-abfinden mit dem Geschickten.*”

10. “*Was so schwer zu verstehen ist, ist, dass Unrecht Permanenz und sogar Kontinuität haben kann. Dies nennt man Schuld—Unrecht als Kontinuität des Nicht-wieder-ungeschehen-machen-Könnens.*”

11. “*Den wirklich Schuldigen, nicht den, der Unrecht getan hat, stößt die Gesellschaft aus ihrer Mitte und muss es tun, weil mit ihm Geschichte nicht mehr möglich ist.*”

12. In this way, reconciliation potentially speaks to a Jewish as opposed to a Christian conception of forgiveness, one tied to judgment as opposed to the unilateral forgiveness. I am indebted to Julia Lupton for this insight.

13. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 238.

14. *Ibid.*, 239 n. 76. Note that Arendt is citing Matthew 9:4–6: “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.”

15. Matthew 6:14–15 (KJV, Cambridge Edition).

16. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 239 n. 77.

17. *Ibid.*, 233.

18. *Ibid.*, 237.

19. *Ibid.*, 239–240.

20. *Ibid.*, 240.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

23. On Arendt’s refusal of Christian forgiveness, see Julia Lupton, “Judging Forgiveness: Hannah Arendt, W. H. Auden, and *The Winter’s Tale*,” *New Literary History* 45, no. 4 (2014): 641–663. Lupton writes: “Auden communicated his concerns directly to Arendt, who followed up with a formal typed letter dated February 14, 1960 (St. Valentine’s Day). There, she takes issue with several points raised in ‘The Fallen City.’ First, she uses the Gospels against Auden to argue that even in Christianity, forgiveness is not unconditional: ‘Jesus said, “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.”’ Whereas Auden wants forgiveness to flow freely regardless of the attitude of the one being forgiven, Arendt insists on the transactional character of the gesture, which demands consideration of the comportment of the transgressor as well as the moral judgment, not just the moral attitude of the absolver.” As Lupton sees it, for Arendt, forgiveness is not the Christian forgiveness of sins but the conditional mutual release of reconciliation.

24. See the following section.
25. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 88–89.
26. Hannah Arendt, “Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding),” in *Essays in Understanding*, 308.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*, 307 ff. Originally published in *Partisan Review* 20, no. 4 (1954). The essay, as Kohn notes, is based on a long manuscript called “On the Nature of Totalitarianism: An Essay in Understanding.”
29. *Ibid.*, 308.
30. *Ibid.*, 310.
31. *Ibid.*, 318, 321.
32. *Ibid.* 321.
33. *Ibid.*, 322.
34. *Ibid.*
35. See, e.g., Arendt, *Denktagebuch*, XXVI.27.725; III.27.72; III.22.68; III.28.72.
36. Listing the same series of grievous wrongs—“Antisemitism (not merely the hatred of Jews), imperialism (not merely conquest), totalitarianism (not merely dictatorship) . . .”—Arendt again concludes that political thought must focus on wrongs, not the good. “We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion.” See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1973), ix.
37. *Ibid.*
38. See Roger Berkowitz, *The Gift of Science: Leibniz and the Modern Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).
39. *Ibid.*, viii.
40. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 7.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 2:46. See also an unsourced remark reported by Melvyn A. Hill in which she says, “I can very well live without doing anything. But I cannot live without trying at least to understand whatever happens. And this is somehow the same sense in which you know it from Hegel, namely where I think the central role is reconciliation—reconciliation of man as a thinking and reasonable being. This is what actually happens in the world.” See *Hannah Arendt, The Recovery of the Public World*, ed. Melvyn A. Hill (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979).
43. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 7 (italics added).
44. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 300–301.

45. Arendt, "Truth and Politics" in *Between Past and Future*, 259.
46. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. John Sibree (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 1956), 457.
47. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), §6, 107–108.
48. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1993), 3:455.
49. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 8.
50. *Ibid.*
51. Arendt and Heidegger, *Letters*, 85. This letter is from Heidegger to Arendt, 5/5/1950. The reference is here to Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. See Roger Berkowitz, "Bearing Logs on Our Shoulders: Reconciliation, Non-Reconciliation, and the Building of a Common World," *Theory & Event* 14, no. 1 (2011).
52. Arendt and Heidegger, *Letters*, 88.
53. For a discussion of Arendt's account of Nietzsche as it relates to reconciliation, see Berkowitz, "Bearing Logs on Our Shoulders."
54. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (New York: De Gruyter, 1993) 128.
55. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 171.
56. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 12.
57. Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 1:210.
58. *Ibid.*, 203.
59. *Ibid.*, 205.
60. *Ibid.*, 207.
61. *Ibid.*, 205.
62. *Ibid.*, 212.
63. I thank Samantha Hill for inspiring this insight.
64. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 279.
65. Hannah Arendt, "What Remains? The Language Remains: A Conversation with Günter Gaus," in *Essays in Understanding*, 14.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.* (both quotations).