THE TROUBLE WITH MORAL DECISION-MAKING: WHEN RATIONAL-CHOICE JUDGMENT MEETS HANNAH ARENDT

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List Of Abbreviations – works by Hannah Arendt:

EJ Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil
HC The Human Condition
LK Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy
LM The Life of the Mind
LMT The Life of the Mind Vol. I – Thinking
LMW The Life of the Mind Vol. II – Willing
RJ Responsibility and Judgment

I

Moral decisions and actions have been a central concern of political thought since the days of Socrates and through to our time, accentuated in the last century by the challenge of the Holocaust. However, few twentieth century political thinkers have approached this subject on a cognitive level, trying to understand what are the cognitive mechanisms we employ in actual moral decisions, and what are the mechanism we ought to employ for such decisions. This paper is part of my ongoing attempt to explicate and evaluate such an understanding out of the thought of Hannah Arendt. Late in her career, Arendt came to be concerned with the cognitive[1] aspects of moral decision-making, as part of her life-long attempt to try and understand the Holocaust, and particularly how the Germans, of all people(s), were the ones to carry it out. Unfortunately, she did not live to complete this endeavor. In work already presented elsewhere I explicate and develop a theory of moral decision-making out of Arendt's extant works, the key aspects of which I present in the next section. My main aim in this paper is to begin a process of critically examining this theory by looking at it from the perspective of other theoretical approaches. In this paper I will look at this Arendtian theory from the perspective of rational choice theory[2].

In sections III and IV of this paper I will explain what I refer to as 'rational choice theory'. I will then draw out Arendt's critique of the role of rationality in moral decision-making, and explain why rational choice theory is still useful for a critical dialogue with the Arendtian theory, despite Arendt's this critique. In sections V, VI, and VII I will develop a critique of the Arendtian theory stemming from the perspective of rational

[1] Arendt used the term 'mental' rather than 'cognitive', to which she would probably object because it etymologically evokes 'cognition', a term for which she has a specific meaning. I believe the term 'cognitive', as currently used in the social sciences, does not carry an association to what Arendt understands as 'cognition'. As a result, and because it is prevalent in the psychology literatures I have used for this paper, I will generally use 'cognition' when explicating my development and critical discussion of Arendt, and 'mental' when explicating explicit statements by Arendt.

[2] The rest of this paper draws on my development of Arendt, and not only on her explicit statements. I have tried to indicate places where I draw on my own development by using the phrase 'on Arendt's terms' rather than 'According to Arendt' and similar phrases, used to indicate Arendt's explicit statements.

choice theory and explore the extent to which the Arendtian theory protects itself from this critique.

II

To begin, then, let me introduce the cognitive theory of decision-making found, I believe, in Arendt.

First, the world is a world of appearances, comprised of objects, animate and inanimate, that appear in the world and thereby disclose themselves to the rest of the world (LMT: 19-23). All living creatures thus have an innate urge to appear and display themselves, in their distinctiveness, in the world (LMT: 21, 29-30). All living creatures, therefore, also observe these appearances, each from their own unique perspective (LMT: 19).

Second, human life is conditioned by three life-conditions. Like all other living creatures, human beings are conditioned by the biological life-process; they are mortal creatures with biological needs (survival, reproduction, nourishment etc.) that have to be satisfied. Any activity that, directly or indirectly, seeks to satisfy these needs is seen as determined by the demands of the life-process (HC: 7, 79-93). Unlike any other living creature, however, human beings are also conditioned by the fact that they are plural and natal beings: they exist as a multitude of distinct persons, different from each other yet sharing their world with each other (LMT: 19; LMW: 200-202), and they are each born into the world as distinct persons, coming into the world as new beginnings, and therefore having the capacity of bringing about new beginnings, of starting hitherto nonexistent causal chains, in the world (LMW: 109-110, 216-217).

Third, there is an inherent tension within the human condition between the life-process, the condition we share with all other creatures, and the uniquely and distinctly human conditions, plurality and natality. Both plurality and natality are alien to, and hence inimical to, the life-process: from the point of view of the life-process, no human being is distinct from another as we all have the same biological system (LMT: 37-39), and nothing in the world is truly and radically new as the life-process proceeds automatically, causally, routinely, and predictably (LMW: 30, 171). If human beings are to appear, as they have an inherent urge to do, in their distinct humanness, such appearance is inherently in opposition to the life-process: each person must appear in their individualized distinctness, appearing out-of-nowhere (that is, in interruption of routine causal chains) and bringing about new causal chains, again out of nowhere (LMT: 213; LMW: 30). This unnatural interruption of the life-process must be suppressed by it so that things can go back to normal.

Fourth, plurality and natality are actualized through political action, the performance, in the search for fame (*doxa*, in the Athenian sense of the term), of exceptional words and deeds worthy of future emulation and remembrance as exemplars (HC: 192-199). The need for a moral decision arises when plurality and natality are endangered, and making this decision correctly serves to protect and thus to actualize plurality and natality in the world[3]. As a result, both political action and morality are also in tension with the life-process, which would naturally tend to obscure the need for them.

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[3] Both of these points emerge out of an analysis of Arendt I conduct elsewhere. In a nutshell, political action is shown to actualize plurality and natality by considering Arendt's reasons for seeing political action as inherently superior to the other major types of action, work and labor, in HC. Morality is shown to

Fifth, human beings possess three distinct mental faculties[4], further sub-divided into a mundane[5] faculty and a proper one. Thinking is divided into 'Cognition', our faculty for attaining (seeking, collecting, analyzing, and calculating) knowledge of the world (and other people) around us, and into 'Thinking' (proper), our faculty for seeking out the meaning of the world (and of individual objects in the world) around us (LMT: 13-14, 26-27, 54-59, 75-77, 85). Thinking equips us with an internal voice that alerts us when something in what we are about to do is morally wrong so that we need to 'think about it' (LMT: 184-190); once triggered, thinking sweeps away all of the existing categories associated with the object of thought (LMT: 174-175, 192); then thinking proceeds to examine the object of thought to understand its meaningfulness (LMT: 14, 57-58). Willing is divided into *'Liberum Arbitrium'* ('Freedom-of-choice'), our faculty for fitting and choosing the best pre-given means for a pre-given end, and into 'Free-Will' (Willing proper), our faculty for spontaneously initiating new beginnings in the world (LMW: 19-20, 28-29). Judging is divided into 'Determinant Judgment', our faculty for subsuming particulars under pre-defined general categories, and into 'Reflective Judgment' (Judgment proper), our faculty for evaluating and classifying particulars where no pre-defined general categories are given (LK: 13-15; LMT: 69, 192-193). In exercising 'reflective judgment', I must examine the object of judgment *qua* particular, and then validate my potentially idiosyncratic judgment by imagining the judgments of other judges, situated at different vantage points and therefore having other perspectives than me, and seeing if my judgment would achieve the consent of these judges. This is the exercise of an 'enlarged mentality' (LK: 40-44, 67-68; LMT: 93-94). These faculties are aided by imagination, which re-presents objects from the physical world in mental form amenable to then be processed by the various mental faculties (LK: 79-85; LMT: 75-77), and memory, which stores these mental images and recalls them when needed (LK: 66-67; LMT: 76-77, 85).

Sixth, daily, ordinary decision-making is conducted through the application of the three mundane faculties. Arendt does not make this move herself, but as I show elsewhere, it becomes obvious if we apply the above conceptualizations to the way we approach a normal decision situation, where we need to choose between a given set of action options. Note that in such a decision-making process, the decision depends on, and thus is determined by, its end (purpose), for which the actions under consideration are possible means. In ordinary decisions, this end stems from, and is therefore determined by, the needs of life and the life-process.

Seventh, the sheer number of decisions that need to be made in daily life means that, if we were to stop and fully consider each and every one of them, we would overload our mental capacity. As a result, we take care of most of our decisions in a routine and habitual manner, through the aid of customs and habits, rules of conduct and expression

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protect and actualize plurality and natality when we consider why, on Arendt's terms, we should act morally even when that endangers our life.

[4] We of course also have drives, emotions, and senses, including a sixth, 'common' sense, which unites all are other sense perceptions into one coherent and experientially real picture, thereby enabling us to meaningfully communicate with each other (LMT: 49-53).

[5] 'Mundane' is my term, not Arendt's. Her discussion of the faculties proceeds through distinction – she develops and explains the proper faculties, highlighting how they are distinguished from the faculties we normally call thinking, willing and judging. I call them 'mundane' because, in my view, Arendt considers them as the faculties we employ for day-to-day decision-making.

collected into standardized codes, clichés, stock phrases and provisional judgments (prejudices), and other pre-existing mental 'labels' and categorizations[6](LMT: 4, 71, 177; LMW: 32-33). This makes our ordinary decision-making habitual and routinized, and therefore perfectly in tune with the life-process which it thus actualizes, and by which all of our mental shortcuts are, as a result, determined.

Eighth, ordinary decision-making, while useful and necessary in daily decision-making, is ill fitted to making moral decisions. Since it actualizes the life-process, it tends to submerge plurality and natality and thus obscures any danger to them. As a result, it causes us not to notice that something in the world around us, and as a result in the cognitive short cuts we are using, is morally wrong[7].

Ninth, the mechanism that alerts us to the fact that something is morally wrong with the choice we are about to make exists, according to Arendt, in the activity of thinking proper. The proper faculty of thinking is equipped with an inner voice which always exists within me, and with whom I always have to live in peace. As this other fellow in me is wholly internal, it does not act in the real world and therefore is not caught up in the needs of the life-process, and is thus equally attuned to the other conditions of human life, plurality and natality. It does not, in itself, proscribe any action[8], but merely serves to alert us that something is wrong in what we are about to do, and by extension, in the shortcuts ands categories we are employing, thereby causing us to stop and consciously think about what we are doing (LMT: 184-190).

Tenth, once alerted to the fact that we are faced not with an ordinary decision, but with a moral one, a different cognitive mechanism, fitted to moral decisions, kicks into gear. The sweep of thinking detaches the options we have from the categories that we would usually apply to them. Reflective judgment then takes these options, *qua* particulars, and determines which are good and therefore morally right, and which are morally wrong and therefore evil. Free-will, finally, determines to carry out that course of action which had been judged moral and good.

Eleventh, through the employment of this alternative decision-making mechanism, moral action becomes determined by the conditions of plurality (through the employment of the enlarged mentality as part of judging as well as through the inner dialogue of thinking) and natality (through the use free-will), and therefore serves not only to protect but also to actualize them in the world and its life-process. Note that this actualization of plurality and natality is inherent in the correct employment of the proper decision-making

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[6] The list is of things explicitly mentioned by Arendt, but I believe that she would have included many of the cognitive shortcuts identified by psychology (stereotypes, heuristics and rules of thumb, etc.), had those occurred to her. Such an inclusion would be perfectly in keeping with the logic of her analysis on this point.

[7] This is, of course, the clear outcome of the previous points, taken together. It is supported from within Arendt when we superimpose her conceptualization of our mental faculties on her criticisms of the conduct of most Germans under the Nazi regime (EJ: 85-86, 135-138, 148, 231-233; RJ: 22-25, 29-30, 35-48, 53-55, 60-62, 78-79, 159-161, 177-178, 250-252). As I show elsewhere, it is clear that theirs was the failure to recognize that a moral issue had arisen, stemming from the fact that they continued to make decision habitually, using the categories and shortcuts they have always used, convinced that this ensured they were acting morally, not realizing that the Nazis had subverted the content of these categories.

[8] This is how, for Arendt, this inner friend is distinguished from conscience (which, I assume, though Arendt never explains, cannot serve as this triggering mechanism because it stems from socialization and is as such determined by the life-process. Arendt needs this inner voice to be undetermined – or at least, not determined by the life-process.

mechanism, without requiring (in fact, as discussed below, forbidding) that we consciously determine to make the decision that best serves plurality and natality.

Twelfth, the same cognitive mechanism we employ in moral decision-making is also the one we employ when, as spectators, we generate meaning for human society by observing the actions of actors in the public sphere, selecting those worthy of remembrance, for better or worse (using reflective judgment), coming up with a story about them that places them in a meaningful context (using proper thinking), in which form they are passed to future generations, once we determine to pass the story on by writing it down (using free-will). Elsewhere, where I develop this idea, I argue that while the employment of this mechanism differs when we employ it under its moral and meaning-generating capacities, each capacity does influence the employment of this mechanism under the other capacity, thereby interlinking moral decision-making and meaning-generation.

III

How compelling is this cognitive theory of moral decision-making? What are its strengths and weaknesses? How can it be clarified and developed even further? One way of answering these questions is to pit this theory against other leading theories in contemporary political thought, trying to draw challenges to this Arendtian theory from them, then trying to meet those challenges from within the Arendtian theory. This is what I propose to do in this paper, turning for this purpose to rational choice theory.

Given that the label 'rational choice', for me, carries neither a laudable nor a derogatory association, I define it in the most commonsensical manner: a rational choice theory is any theory that holds, as a core assumption, either that people make choices, judgments, and decisions rationally, or that people ought to make choices, judgments, and decisions rationally. I include within the scope of rational choice theory both approaches that state these assumptions explicitly, and approaches that subscribe to them implicitly, by employing rationality as a normative standard against which actual human choices, judgments, and decisions, are weighed.

Furthermore, I understand 'rationality' as the cognitive tool that enables us to correctly make mathematical, statistical, and logical calculations, and which as a result enables us to derive the probable costs and consequences of different actions (singly, in combination, and in comparison), so as to best fit these actions as means to our own chosen ends – in short, to borrow a label from Hobbes, rationality is the cognitive tool of 'reasoning with consequences'[9]. This understanding of rationality incorporates the various understandings of rationality found in rational-choice theories in political science and in approaches that use rationality as a normative standard within psychology[10].

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[9] This might be controversial in the eyes of those who believe one is not rational if they are not utility maximizers. I am not convinced that being a non-utilitarian rationalist is necessarily a contradiction in terms, but thoroughly exploring this issue extends beyond the scope of this paper. I therefore chose an understanding of rationality that leaves this issue open.

[10] Within psychology, I am mainly referring to research into decision-making and judgment under uncertainty, which has focused on mapping out the cognitive shortcuts (heuristics) we employ in decision-making and the errors (biases) they make us prone to. This research is mostly grouped under the Heuristics and Biases (hereafter HB) heading (Kahneman et al, 1982; Gilovich et al, 2002), its main critics, the Fast and Frugal Heuristics (hereafter FF) approach (Gigerenzer & Selten, 1999; Gigerenzer et al, 1999), and the

Obviously, this understanding of rationality places it squarely within what Arendt saw as the mental faculty of cognition. The radical implication is that, on Arendt's terms, rationality has no place in moral decision-making; when it comes to moral decisions, rationality is part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Rationality fails in moral decisions because rationality, in and of itself, *cannot* tell the individual that something is morally wrong[11]. Being a tool of cognition and therefore determined by the life-process, rationality proceeds along inevitable or probable causal tracks. Given a starting point, rationality, employed correctly, will derive its inevitable or probable consequences; given an end point, rationality will derive the inevitable or probable ways (means) of arriving at it. But when confronted with this given starting point, rationality – if operating solely on its own terms – must either take it as given or analyze it, that is, try to understanding its causes, transforming it in this way into a given end. When confronted with a given end, similarly, rationality must either take it as given or analyze it as a means for another end. If asked to generate a starting point, rationality requires a starting point for that process, and again, until it arrives at a 'first cause'; if asked to generate an end, it must have an end for which this end serves as a means, and again, until it arrives at an 'end in itself'. But this 'first cause' or 'end in itself' cannot be generated by rationality itself and therefore, from the point of view of rationality, come out of nowhere – that is, from outside rationality, chosen either arbitrarily or on faith[12].

This fact is perfectly in tune with the causal orderliness of the life-process, already noted above. The first cause of life, and its ultimate end, are outside of the experiential scope of the life-process: questions like 'how it all began' and 'what is it all for' are questions of meaning, useless from the point of view of the life-process (LMT: 58-59, 88), because they do not serve to satisfy any biological need – our bodies could carry out their life span if these question never crossed our minds. Such questions, then, have no strictly rational answer, and are thus alien to rationality – they belong to the domain of thinking, not cognition, and their introduction necessarily interrupts cognition in its day-to-day activity. If they are to occur to cognition and rationality at all, they would occur from outside rationality, and outside the life-process.

Moral issues, for Arendt, function in a similar way[13] – they stem from outside the life-process, and to be noticed by us, must intrude on rationality from outside rationality. Rationality itself, left to its own devices, would be oblivious and therefore blind to

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recent Dual System theories that attempt to reconcile the two by seeing them as focusing on two different cognitive systems, one associative and automatically, taking care of most of our decisions (System I), the other (System II) reflective and careful, with the capacity to override System I (Sloman, 2002). For more elaborate historical and thematic surveys of these approaches and the debates they engendered, see Goldstein & Hogarth (1997); Gigerenzer & Todd (1999); Gilovich & Griffin (2002); and Samuels et al (2002).

[11] This is evidenced, in Arendt, in the moral failure of Germans during the Nazi era, as exemplified in Eichmann (see sources in footnote 7 above). These Germans were perfectly capable of employing their rationality, and their rationality never alerted them that what they were doing was morally wrong.

[12] I have here drawn on two separate discussions of Arendt, neither of which mentioning rationality explicitly. Both are drawn by her from earlier sources, namely, Hume's critique of causality (HC: 312) and Lessing's critique of utilitarianism means-end utilitarianism (HC: 153-157).

[13] As noted above, I believe that on Arendt's terms, moral decision-making and meaning-generation are cognitively interlinked.

them[14]. Human beings, however, to be distinctly human, must take heed of moral issues, because they point to our extra-natural conditions – plurality and natality. Once they have determined to act morally, human beings may very well find rationality a useful tool for carrying out this determination – turning a decision arrived at in the mind into an action (or inaction) that occurs in, and therefore influences, the world and the life-process. As part of this transformation of mental decision to physical action, a cause or an end might be generated out of the decision-making process, and the consequences of different courses of action may be weighed against this cause or end, but all this is part of moral action, not of moral decision-making. Moral decision-making, if it is to be fully and distinctly human, must, on Arendt's terms, avoid rationality. A moral choice cannot, psychologically speaking, be a rational choice.

IV

This conclusion may seem to entail a severe condemnation of rational choice theory, and such condemnation, on a rhetorical level at least, would not be out of place: there is indeed something impoverished about a theory that claims to provide a universal understanding of human decision making and a normative standard for it, and yet cannot even hope to explain something like the moral failure of Germans during the Nazi regime beyond identifying the set of ends that replaced morality-derived ends for these Germans and providing data as to the relative prevalence of each end.

But to the credit of rational choice theorists, once we move beyond the rhetorical pronouncements of their ambitions to looking at how they actually design and conduct research, we realize that in fact most rational choice theorists implicitly acknowledge this limitation of rationality, and therefore do not purport to explain moral decision-making, as opposed to moral action. With the exception of those few who still adhere to the normative model of *homo economicus* operating under an objective conception of utility, most rational choice theorists in political science limit the extent to which they pass judgment on the goals, preferences, and interests that individuals pursue, and focus instead on evaluating the means individuals employ to attain them. In cognitive psychology, most rational choice theorists design experiments in a way that the problems posed to subjects have a correct answer regardless of subjects' utilities. Both, then, limit the applicability of rationality to the application of a norm without applying it to the choosing of a norm or to determining to act on the norm (and by extension, to acting on a moral decision rather than to making that decision).

Furthermore, even given the limitations of rationality in the domain of moral decision-making, implicitly accepted by rational choice theorists themselves, rational choice theory may still contribute to a critical discussion of this Arendtian cognitive theory of moral decision-making. One such contribution was already evident – thinking through the issue of rationality required that I distinguish between what I called 'moral decision-

[14] Even HB's more limited conception of rationality as probabilistic thinking in the face of uncertainty fares no better on Arendt's terms. Underlying it is the assumption of regularity, that things will be as they have been, which stems from the experience of the life-process. But to the extent that human beings are natal beings, they not only have the capacity for unpredictable action – they actualize their distinct humanity through unpredictable action. In the natural world, indeed, statistical regularities always prevail; in a world with human beings appearing and acting as distinctly human, the only possible law of probability is 'expect the unexpected'.

making' and 'moral action' in my own explication of the theory I derive out of Arendt. But it would also be, I believe, in perfect keeping with Arendtian thinking to at least give serious consideration to the possibility that rational choice theory, because it looks at the world from a unique perspective, might see things that other approaches, including an Arendtian one, does not see so clearly because its own particular perspective is, like any and all perspectives, partial and partially obscured (LMT: 38). In the remainder of this paper, then, I discuss some potential and actual weaknesses in the Arendtian theory highlighted by a rational choice perspective.

V

To say that this separation is not sustainable is to question whether the cognitive mechanism of moral decision-making can remain uncontaminated by aspects of the ordinary decision-making mechanism, even on Arendt's terms. Specifically, I contend here that the cognitive mechanism I believe to be proposed by Arendt would find it difficult to avoid any consideration of consequences in decision-making, or to remain free of any cognitive shortcuts, unless its applicability were limited to an extremely narrow span of situations, resulting in a severe limitation of the guidance it can provide us.

To the extent that rationality is 'reasoning with consequences', consequences are at least part of what rationality must take into account, and what a rational choice perspective would therefore pay close attention to. On Arendt's terms, however, consequences cannot be taken into account in moral decision-making. If I am faced with a Jewish (or Gypsy) family seeking shelter from my country's Nazi government, I must choose to harbor them even if the act is likely to be revealed, bringing my own death as well as that of the family. If this is the right choice, it is the 'right thing to do', regardless of its consequences.

This conclusion would extend to any consideration of consequences, so that even the question of whether the proposed action would protect plurality and natality, or whether it would attain me a claim to fame, cannot be allowed to enter the decision-making process. Fame, the driving force of the political actor, might enter moral decision-making because the meaning-generating spectators do accord it to right moral action (e.g., Janusz Korczak), but once it does, on Arendt's terms, the action would be political rather than properly moral[15]. Plurality and natality, of course, are protected and actualized by the proper decision-making mechanism, but this is done through the correct employment of the mechanism, not through consciously treating plurality and natality as the ends of the process, in which case they would require the ordinary decision-making mechanism which, because under the sway of the needs of life, is inimical to them.

However, to the extent that the moral decision must be taken without regard to consequences, I must take it even if it is likely to bring about my death. This means, obviously, that the correct moral decision is one 'worth' dying for. Of course, the mechanics of proper decision-making require that I disregard this when making my decision. But in circumstances where the demands of morality and the demands of the

[15] It is through the employment of the enlarged mentality, which takes me out of my parochial perspective and to a quasi-external one, that moral decision-making is supposed to keep my moral decision from becoming a political one. Of course, that is contingent on the correct, unbiased application of an enlarged mentality, and as I argue in the next section, this may not always be guaranteed.

life-process do not point in the same direction (and these, for Arendt, are exactly the circumstances that call for moral decision-making), it is highly unlikely that the mental alarm bell of 'this course of action might lead to your death' will not sound, bringing with it the performance of a balancing act – 'is this course of action really worth dying for?' – that would be carried out by cognition, not thinking.

The only way, on Arendt's terms, for this consideration to not enter the proper decision-making process, is if the sweep of thinking erases not only any data pertaining to the dangers of the object we are contemplating, but also any considerations pertaining to raising the question of danger itself, with the fact that the decision is being made while detached from the physical world ensuring the constant nagging of the life-process is blocked out. Such an intervention, then, is only likely to occur once I have determined to carry out my moral decision and set about doing so – that is, at the beginning of moral action – in which case I must always, categorically, prefer the moral consideration over the life consideration.

But as I show elsewhere, the only grounds in Arendt that I could have for such a categorical action-preference is the protection of plurality and natality, of which – as noted above – I am supposed to be unaware while making my decision. The only cognitive things to make me prefer the moral consideration are the meaning-generating activity of thinking, or a moral rule requiring that I always do so, both of which are not part of moral decision-making, but of moral action. The moral decision-making mechanism proposed by Arendt, then, is seen to be applicable only to the decision on the general course of action to be taken (e.g., 'it is morally right for me to try and save this fugitive family'), but not to any derivation of ways and means of actualizing this course of action.

VI

A similar limitation of applicability becomes evident if we consider another potential weakness in my Arendtian theory underscored by a rational choice perspective, in this case, the rational choice cognitive psychology perspective specifically. This is the problem of the Arendtian mechanism's cognitive costs. Both HB and FF agree that the cognitive costs of decisions matter – that in practice we cannot afford the time necessary to give all of our decisions full consideration, searching out and processing all relevant information, and therefore must often take recourse to rules of thumb (heuristics) that serve as cognitive decision-making shortcuts for us. Only a few decisions require the intervention and override of our more reflexive cognitive mechanism (System II). But the price to pay for this increased cognitive efficiency is an increased danger of getting the decision wrong.

Arendt herself would not object to this account. On the contrary, as noted above, she herself notes the likelihood of cognitive overload if we were to 'stop and think' about every decision we make in life, and she also sees cognitive shortcuts as our practical solution for this predicament, although her understanding of what these shortcuts are is broader than cognitive psychology's, encompassing laws, customs, and norms. Her solution is also along the lines of cognitive psychology – a second cognitive system that, in certain circumstances overrides the ordinary, more automatic one. Of course, the second system that Arendt implicitly proposes is not the rational System II proposed by

cognitive psychology –on Arendt's terms, both the intuitive System I and the rational System II are part of ordinary decision making. Even more importantly, while cognitive psychologists acknowledge that even their System II is not, in practice, bias-free, and the few applications of HB thinking to moral decisions (Baron, 1993, 1994, 1995; Sunstein, 2005; and sources cited by these authors) indeed show that this is the case in such decisions. The Arendtian theory, on the other hand, seems to insist that this moral decision-making system must be bias-free. Is this demand sustainable, on Arendt's terms?

To prevent the heuristics and biases that permeate ordinary decision-making from being carried over into moral (proper) decision-making, moral decision-making has four lines of defense. The requirement that we radically detach ourselves from the world – stop everything we are doing and withdraw into ourselves in order to think – makes a conscious switch away from the considerations of life and thus the life process. The sweep of thought then erases all associations the object of decision carried with it in the physical world, so that no products of its processing by cognition carry over. The requirement that the object then be judged on its own terms, *qua* particular, regardless of its causes and outcomes serves to clear away biases tied with causality and means-ends thinking. Finally, the requirement of exercising an enlarged mentality during judgment serves to clear away any parochialism, self-interest, or idiosyncrasy that may still have remained thus far.

The first and third of these lines of defense, as well as the functioning of free-will, are instantaneous and therefore cognitively undemanding. As Arendt paints it, because thought, once triggered, inherently and necessarily sweeps everything in its path, it seems as if the sweep of thought is also cognitively undemanding. What is demanding about thought, on the face of it, is thinking's attempt to then find the meaning of the object under contemplation, but this activity, while potentially useful when I will need to figure out how to 'translate' my moral decision into a practical course of action, is not needed for the decision-making process itself.

Judgment, because it requires exercising an enlarged mentality, however, is indeed cognitively demanding. To exercise the enlarged mentality is to re-present within my mind the various judgments of various other judges with perspectives other than my own. These re-presentations do not come out of nowhere – the imagination does not create something that did not exist, in whole or in parts (e.g., a centaur is part man part horse), in memory (LK: 79). Thus, they must be selected and sometimes constructed out of data in stored memory, and there must be at least enough data about them for us to determine they indeed come from a different perspective than ours – and than each other. Furthermore, if the enlarged mentality requires access to information stored in memory, then such information cannot be destroyed by thought. This is not a problem conceptually – we can still conceive of the sweep of thought as destroying everything in its path that is associated to the object of the decision – but it does mean that the sweep of thought cannot be unselective and therefore cognitively effortless – it must, in the least, determine what in its path is directly associated with the object of the decision.

This opens up two potential avenues for heuristics and biases to enter the process of proper decision-making. We are potentially susceptible to heuristics and biases in moral decision-making, first, to the extent that the tool that is employed for the selection and retrieval of memory-data needed for exercising an enlarged mentality is a tool of

cognition, and second, to the extent that the decision situation does not give us the time needed to exercise an enlarged mentality.

On the first possibility, it is unclear in Arendt whether this enlarged mentality information selection and retrieval function is conducted by a tool of judgment, thought, or cognition; Arendt never mentions such a tool – in fact, she never really explains how the enlarged mentality selects its represented judges. Such a tool is clearly active in ordinary decision-making as part of cognition, but we have no reason on Arendt's terms to say for sure that it would need to be used in exercising the enlarged mentality, other than the fact that she never specified an alternative tool specifically for proper decision-making. It is clear, though, that if we do have to employ a tool of cognition in order to exercise the enlarged mentality, then the exercise of the enlarged mentality might be plagued by a variety of cognitive heuristics that could cause us to not exercise it properly, either by overlooking some perspectives (e.g., through the Availability heuristic, which causes us to retrieve information that comes quickly to mind) or by distorting the ones not overlooked (e.g., through the Representativeness heuristic, which causes us to retrieve information according to its similarity to the object or situation at hand).

On the second possibility, it is indeed rather likely that real-life situations requiring a moral decision would demand a quick, perhaps instantaneous decision – I may want to thoroughly exercise an enlarged mentality in deciding whether to harbor the fugitive family, but if I take my time about it the Nazi police will find them, and the decision would be moot. Moral decisions are often required in similarly time-pressing circumstances. Thus, I would need to take recourse to cognitive shortcuts, either ordinary ones or specifically moral ones, to be applied to either the exercise of the enlarged mentality or to the moral decision-making process as a whole, and, for reasons already explored here, these would be seen, on Arendt's terms, as extremely dangerous and problematic.

One potential moral heuristic, however, is closer to Arendt's terms and therefore merits further consideration. We could potentially take recourse to moral exemplars, past examples of right moral action, as heuristics when conditions do not allow full employment of an enlarged mentality. This is dangerous because these moral exemplars would often be provided by, and therefore filtered through, the society and culture that surround us – in Nazi Germany, Korczak would be presented as morally wrong and Mengele as morally right, so we can't take our bearings from them unless we know this presentation is itself wrong. But in a society that has not undergone a totalitarian transformation of valuations and in which meaning-generation is functioning relatively properly, exemplars would work well enough given cognitive constraints.

Of course, Arendt was more worried about the more extreme cases of moral decision-making under totalitarianism (as she understood the term), but if her theory is to focus strictly on this worry, it would become of rather limited scope and applicability. If one were to make the point that requiring full employment of an enlarged mentality even at the risk of the fugitive family being arrested in the meantime is problematic because of the latter consequence – that is, on consequentialist grounds – we could maintain on Arendtian grounds that even this decision, then, belongs to moral action, not moral decision-making. This, however would limit the scope of moral decision-making only to those very rare situations where morality goes against society, and particularly to figuring out what morality really entails – that is, **only** to moral decision-making in societies that

have overtaken and obscured true morality by reversing or transforming existing moral heuristics, and **only** to figuring out what is the general course of action required by morality. In all other circumstances, heuristics would have to enter decision-making, but this decision-making would be part of moral action, of translating moral insight into practical terms.

In other words, this Arendtian theory of moral decision-making does not provide us with direct guidance for most cases of moral decision-making. As long as meaning-generation is working fairly well, our moral exemplars would be useful heuristics – but if our moral exemplars are generally good ones, so are likely to be the laws and norms that we have, our moral rules of thumb, and so on. We wouldn't need the proper decision-making mechanism in such circumstances. We would need it only when the society around us had gone morally awry, and only for the purpose of pointing us in the morally right direction, setting us on the right moral course (e.g., telling us that the Nazi regime is morally wrong so that one ought to act in the opposite way to how it demands that we act, from which saving the fugitive family follows as entirely a matter of moral action). Specific moral choices will then be decided based on this moral course, but that would be done through ordinary decision-making.

VII

This conclusion, of course, would be highly problematic from a variety of perspectives, including that of rational choice theory. Rational choice theory is usually not satisfied with merely identifying, describing or even satisfactorily explaining a problem, but strives to also provide some guidance – which is often, but does not have to be, in the form of particular policy suggestions – as to how the problem can be solved or avoided. And from a rational choice perspective, it is much more ambitious to try to do this with common phenomena rather than with a phenomenon that only occurs in very specific and rare circumstances. Thus, from the perspective of rational choice theory, the fact that the Arendtian theory tells us very little about moral action in most circumstances is as problematic as the fact that rational choice theory tells us very little about moral decision-making.

Of course, on Arendt's terms, the danger of deterioration to the conditions in which proper moral decision-making is required is ever-present, and the stakes in such deterioration and in getting moral decision-making wrong, are very high – no less than the loss of what is distinctly human about human beings. Because of this, on Arendt's terms, the fact that moral decision-making is required only under rare circumstances does not make understanding it a trivial matter. What it does mean is that what guidance the Arendtian theory does give us about moral decision-making is found less in its explication of the cognitive mechanism involved and more in its explication of the conditions that make it necessary. In other words, if there is explicit guidance to society in Arendt it is not so much on 'how to make better moral decisions' but more on 'how to avoid the circumstances that require recourse to proper moral decision-making'. Enabling a public sphere on which plurality and natality can be actualized through action, and enabling the writing and promulgation to the younger generations of the stories told about such action, would be topmost on the list of general directions Arendt would recommend.

Not surprisingly, what particular guidance we can draw from her conception of proper decision-making as to what would make decision-making in general better or worse, is inexorably linked to plurality and natality. Her conception of proper decision-making implies that conformity and parochialism are problematic for decision-making, and that instead one is better off taking into account a variety of perspectives and then fearlessly speaking (or rather, acting) in one's own unique voice. The protection and encouragement of both of these serve simultaneously to help us make better moral decisions under regular circumstances and to promote and encourage an appreciation of plurality and natality within society. Education and socialization, and particularly the choice of exemplars to use in them, are important components of such social encouragement.

As to the moral decision-making mechanism itself, it cannot be taught, nor need it be. All human beings, by virtue of being human beings, can properly think, properly judge, and properly will, and all have the triggering mechanism that would tell them to employ it. What distinguished, in Nazi Germany, those who did from those who didn't was that the former listened to the call of the triggering mechanism while the latter ignored it, and that is at the root of the formers' claim to moral praise and the latters' claim to moral blame. But beyond telling us that we ought to listen to the voice of the friendly fellow inside us when he or she is compelled to speak, Arendt provides no way of making us listen – as otherwise, our moral decision would be neither free nor an act of will. On Arendt's terms, ultimately, this is not a matter for society to either teach or proscribe.

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