Embodied Judgment and Hannah Arendt: From Boethius and Huck Finn to Transnational Feminisms

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Feminists are increasingly drawn to the potential of Hannah Arendt's philosophy for feminist theorizing.¹ Her concepts of freedom, power, uniqueness, and natality offer insight into how feminist politics can appreciate difference without dissolving into identity politics. And yet, the specter of the body still haunts Arendt's work, in her seeming philosophical disinterest in embodiment. Feminists who are drawn to Arendt's thought are pushed to ask how her philosophy relates (if at all) to embodiment, attention to which is necessary for feminist politics.² In this paper, I focus on embodiment and Arendt's theory of Judgment. My purpose is two-fold. First, I join feminists such as Seyla Benhabib and Linda Zerilli in finding Arendt helpful in understanding Judgment across cultural differences.³ In this respect, I will argue for a conception of

¹ See for example the volume edited by Bonnie Honig, and the papers by Markus, Benhabib, Cutting-Gray, and Vasterling.

² See Honig for a discussion of feminist interpretation of reproduction in Arendt, and the relation between gender and identity. See Zerilli ("Arendtian Body") for a discussion of some of the ways in which the Arendtian body has eluded feminists and political theorists. See O'Byrne for a discussion of how reproduction in Arendt is a relational, situated (not merely a physical) event.

³ When I use the phrase "Judgment across cultural differences," I mean to capture three important points. First, I use the phrase to respond to work of Uma Narayan, who has argued that anti-oppression theorists should not leave Judgments about a culture to those inside that culture. To take Third World women as serious subjects requires engagement with their Judgments. Thus, Judgment across cultural differences is about feminists engaging with women of other geographic and cultural locations to better understand what oppression is like for women across the globe (Zerilli makes this same point). Second, "Judgment across cultural differences" requires, as Chandra Mohanty charges, attention to the historical production of hierarchies of power (106-07). Although I call it a feminist project, it is feminist, anti-racist, and anti-(neo)colonialist. Further, my discussion of Judgment across cultural differences is consistent with scepticism about feminism as a set of political projects. This scepticism is usually grounded on the claim that feminism is too narrowly defined or has been imperialistic itself (see Mohanty 49-53). Third, I understand the different geo-cultural locations women occupy as including

embodied Judgment, rooted in Arendt, which may be useful for feminists and others engaging in cross-cultural dialogue. Second, I am interested in how the body might appear in Arendt's work, despite her resistance to talking about it explicitly.⁴ These two purposes come together: by furthering the discussion of how it is that Judgment (at least sometimes) requires embodiment, I also show how such a theory of embodied, feminist Judgment might be helpful in understanding women's agency in non-Western contexts.⁵

In section one of the paper, I will outline the main points of Arendt's theory of Judgment. Two features of her work have particularly attracted feminist attention: enlarged mentality and intersubjectivity. Less has been said about how embodiment might be important for Judgment, with the focus in the existing literature being on enlarged mentality (see Nedelsky, "Embodied Diversity"; Moynagh). But, this emphasis leaves underexplored how embodiment relates to Arendt's conception of "thinking," and the impact embodiment may have for Judgment. I suggest that examining untheorized connections between thinking and embodiment will deepen an Arendtian approach to Judgment, especially for feminists working in cross-cultural or transnational contexts.

In section two, I show how embodiment and thinking can be understood as precursors to, or conditions of, enlarged mentality. Further, I offer an account of how Arendt's conception of thinking might, in some cases, be enriched by an account of embodiment. I draw on Arendt's analysis of Boethius and a discussion of Huckleberry Finn's moral psychology to show how lived contradictions in a person's experience can lead one to make Judgments. Lived contradictions, in my view, occur

their position within global capitalism and the hierarchies of gender, class, race, and nationality that ensue from global capitalism. Many feminists have argued for the need to analyze capitalism along with gender and race (see Mohanty for one example).

⁴ When accepting the Lessing prize, Arendt reflects on the meaningfulness of her Jewish identity. Arendt states, "For many years I considered the only adequate reply to the question, Who are you? To be: a Jew" (*Men* 17). And yet, this reduction of her identity to a mere category was an obstruction to agency, particular in how others recognize her as an agent. She continues, "In saying, 'A Jew,' I did not even refer to a reality burdened or marked out for distinction by history. Rather, I was only acknowledging a political fact through which my being a member of this group outweighed all other questions of personal identity or rather had decided them in favour of anonymity, of namelessness" (18). In this case, ethnicity got in the way of more complex and interesting relations. Similarly, the body can be seen as "getting in the way" of who a person is.

⁵ By "non-Western contexts" I include Third World contexts as well as contexts within the US or Canada that are influenced by non-Western cultures or by cultures in the global South. For instance, I want to capture the experiences of immigrant women in the United States and Canada. The critiques of Western feminists' treatment of women's agency that are in the background here are those levied by Mohanty and Saba Mahmood.

when one's experiences fail to be interpretable according to the dominant norms in a society or culture.

In section three, I deepen this argument by considering a recent claim that Arendtian Judgment requires receptivity (understood as mindfulness), which is a stance of non-Judgment that prepares a person to judge (Nedelsky, "Receptivity"). At first, this appears to pose a problem for feminist Judgments across cultural differences because oppression undermines a person's ability to cultivate receptivity. However, I suggest that lived contradictions allow a person to be receptive to Judgment without necessarily cultivating a stance of mindfulness. Oppressed people must live constantly in the world of the privileged, as well as in their own worlds. The contradictions they experience prepare them to judge. Mindfulness is important, but I suggest it might be more important for persons in privileged positions who are not forced in their daily lives to consider perspectives of oppressed persons.

I. Arendtian Judgment and its feminist receptions

Judgment on Arendt's view is the capacity "to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly" (Arendt, *Responsibility* 160). Her starting point is Kant's discussion of aesthetic Judgment. Judgment begins with an evaluative claim that a person holds. This evaluative claim is irreducibly subjective, yet, it can gain intersubjective validity. A "spectator" (the word Arendt uses for the person who judges, to distinguish it from the agent in action) then subjects this evaluative claim to critical scrutiny by engaging in "enlarged mentality," that is, by considering the perspectives of others. Enlarged mentality is not about considering the actual views that other people have. Adopting other people's actual opinions would only amount to empathy, which is not sufficient for enlarged mentality in which we must consider a claim from the broader perspective of the standpoint of others (Arendt, *Lectures* 43, 71). In this respect, thinking through enlarged mentality is still an individual activity (43). However, Judgments are meant to be shared and communicated within a community (40-41, 59, 62-63, 69-70, 75).

Moving away from the idea that Judgment is simply a solitary activity, some commentators have suggested that thinking through enlarged mentality is best understood as requiring actual engagement with others when considering their perspectives (Benhabib, "Arendt, Politics" 49; Nedelsky, "Embodied Diversity" 243). How would someone else's social location—being different from the spectator's in various ways—shape a person's Judgment? By engaging in enlarged mentality, a person's Judgment can be intersubjective because it is grounded in common sense, also called a community sense. Further, common sense is what allows a spectator to judge from the perspective of others. It is what is shared

between people, what makes communication and understanding possible. In other words, common sense is a sixth sense, a way of representing the world that people within a community share.

For Arendt, being a spectator implies being a cosmopolitan citizen, and thus a spectator of the entire world (Arendt, *Lectures* 76). This claim is an extension of her view of plurality, that all humans share in the life of a species, and yet each is a unique individual. However, it is consistent with her view that there is not a single community of Judgment, but overlapping communities.⁶ For example, women's consciousness-raising groups can constitute a community of Judgment in which men can legitimately be excluded as not sharing in the common sense of that group, at least for a time (Nedelsky, "Communities" 252). However, all genders of one society can also form a community of Judgment. What is enlightening about this discussion is that common sense is contextual. Communities of Judgment can be multiple and overlapping. But, hearkening back to plurality, all people share in the human condition and have a basis for understanding because of this shared common sense. Out of common sense, which is the foundation for speech in the first place, comes the possibility of intersubjective validity, or coming to agreement about a Judgment (Arendt, *Lectures* 70).

A person's Judgment is meant to appeal to others, to woo them into accepting one's point of view. This "wooing" is significantly different from reasoning, in which the force of logic compels us to accept a conclusion. A Judgment cannot be "right" in the way a deduction is. In contrast, a spectator shares her Judgments and attempts to persuade others to align their Judgments with her own (72). She relies on exemplary cases to show other people the validity of her Judgment. Rather than categorize a particular case under a universal, a Judgment is about a particular, in all its complexity, without reducing it. For example, one might say that "courage is like Achilles," rather than defining Achilles as courageous (77). The point is that we do not completely subsume Achilles under the universal concept of "courage" (as Plato might), but that we see something exemplary in the unique individual Achilles that reveals to us what it means to be courageous. This Judgment appeals to others' common sense, asking them to judge the example against their own experiences of courageousness and accept it (or reject it). This wooing emphasizes the dialogic nature of Arendtian Judgment. I am sceptical about "agreement"

⁶ In "Karl Jaspers: Citizen of the World?" Arendt argues that a world citizen cannot exist as a citizen of a world government. Rather, a world citizen is situated within her particular, historicized national locations. As citizens share their histories with each other, their distinctness is emphasized even as what is shared between them as human beings is emphasized (*Men*, 89-90).

within and between feminisms. Thus, for me the significant point about Arendt's view is not coming to agreement *per se*, but that a community collectively negotiates the meaning of a phenomenon (see also *Men* 90).

The intersubjective character of Judgment with enlarged mentality has attracted many feminist thinkers. For example, Linda Zerilli argues that Arendt's conception of Judgment can serve as the basis of a feminist theory of Judgment that appreciates differences without importing a Western- or Northern-centric hierarchy of values. In this argument, Zerilli sets herself apart from feminists who revise universalism to better appreciate difference across cultures; however, Zerilli argues that these new universalisms (particularly those formulated by Susan Moller Okin, Martha Nussbaum, and Seyla Benhabib) merely attribute Western- or Northern values to other cultures ("Theory of Judgment" 302-03). Zerilli adapts the Arendtian spectator as being the "outsider," a person who judges a culture from outside it, and is aware of how geographic, historical, cultural, and economic differences affect individual standpoints. An outsider must continually refine her own beliefs while scrutinizing another culture (310-14). I would add to Zerilli's point by emphasizing that feminist politics will require overlapping communities of Judgment. As she states, there will be a community of Judgment that speaks across cultures, such as a community of anti-oppression thinkers located in different geographic and cultural locations. In addition, there will be intra-cultural communities of Judgment that respond to differences among women (or other oppressed peoples) within a culture. Intra-cultural difference is important to recognize, lest our politics slip into homogenizing generalizations or identity politics (see Dietz; Mohanty).⁷

Attending to differences across and within cultures is a crucial task for feminist politics. Both Zerilli and the "new universalists" share a desire to account for difference and to shift away from political theories that rely on an abstract, universal, disembodied masculine perspective. Some theorists are uncertain that Arendtian Judgment answers the critique of the disembodied, ultra-rational perspective. Arendt tends to keep personal and social identities out of politics (Marso 167). This goal might partially explain Arendt's hesitancy about (or hostility to) the feminist politics of her time.⁸ Lori Marso points out how, in Arendt's discussion of Eichmann

⁷ Putting the universalism debate to the side, Benhabib and Zerilli agree that enlarged mentality is the cornerstone for Judgment. In offering a phenomenology of moral (Arendtian) Judgment, Benhabib stresses that Judgment requires moral imagination to explore the possible narratives that others will use to interpret the agent's actions. Moving from moral imagination to intersubjectivity requires "actual or simulated dialogue" ("Arendt, Politics, and the Self" 44).

⁸ See Honig and Dietz for the relation between Arendt and identity politics.

as failing to exercise thought and Judgment, Arendt distances herself from talking about the embodiment of Holocaust victims (179). Eichmann's crime, in Arendt's view, was not one of blatant anti-Semitism. If the suffering of Jewish (or other) victims of the Holocaust were to be emphasized, it would undermine that claim. According to Marso:

While the Arendtian "we" on behalf of worldly plurality could be interpreted as a commitment beyond a specifically Jewish solidarity, at the same time Arendt's focus on plurality remains an abstract formal condition for the possibility of politics rather than an embodied description of the pluralist human community actually engaged in political struggle. (184)

Following from Marso's discussion, one might suggest that enlarged mentality is too abstract and is not strong enough to require that embodiment be taken seriously.

In contrast, there are at least two ways in which feminist thinkers have found Arendt's theory of Judgment as amenable to embodiment: through enlarged mentality and through affect. With respect to affect, paying attention to how our bodily and/or emotional reactions direct Judgment can lead us to recognize ways our Judgments might be more sensitive to difference (see Nedelsky; Diprose). With respect to enlarged mentality, Patricia Moynagh suggests that engaging enlarged mentality allows embodiment to appear in contrast to political theories, such as early Rawlsian liberalism, that seem to make embodiment irrelevant (49). The broad strokes of Moynagh's argument are as follows: Enlarged mentality requires a person to consider the perspectives of others, without reducing those perspectives to a homogeneous or single view. When a spectator allows for the experiences of others to be varied, then she is able to attend to embodied differences (Moynagh 41-44). That is, considering the unique perspectives of others will require us, at times, to consider how embodiment shapes their perspectives. According to Arendt, each person is unique and one's identity cannot be captured by saying "what" you are. This includes identity categories—saying that someone is a queer woman does not determine that person's unique identity. Arendt is more interested in how unique individuals are revealed through their actions, not because they belong to various identity categories (Arendt, *Human* 176-86).⁹ Further, because action is spontaneous, identity categories cannot be taken to be determinative of how a person will engage in the world (191-93). What I take Moynagh to be arguing is that even though a unique person cannot be reduced to a set of identity categories (being a queer woman),

⁹ See also note 4.

her experiences as a member of these groups will impact her unique perspective.

To summarize, feminists have taken enlarged mentality to provide a resource for better attending to differences among people. I find these points helpful in thinking about a feminist politics that seeks to appreciate differences across geo-cultural locations; however, there is a missing discussion in the feminist literature on the activity that Arendt calls “thinking,” which refers to an individual’s reflection that allows her to subject her beliefs to critical scrutiny, to examine what assumptions or biases may lurk beneath.

Perhaps most discussions of Arendtian Judgment do not pay much attention to thinking because, on Arendt’s view, it is an autonomous and conceptually distinct activity from Judgment (Arendt, *Life* 70). Most notably, thinking is about the general, whereas Judgment is about the particular (75, 192). Yet I suggest it is crucial to consider thinking when we talk about Judgment because thinking prepares a person for Judgment. Thinking is a faculty that helps a person, for herself, uncover assumptions in beliefs and make meaning of our circumstances. By uncovering assumptions, a person can recognize dogmatic or otherwise unjustified beliefs or norms. Arendt describes this reflection as the “two-in-one,” which is also described as an inner dialogue with oneself (185-86). Thinking begins at the examination of sensations, which as Arendt notes are private (Arendt, *Lectures* 70). Through thinking, we come to understand these sensations. This exercise is important because it allows a person to come to her own, unique point of view.

This faculty is an important support for Judgment. Arendt describes thinking as having a “liberating effect” for Judgment, which “realizes thinking, [and] makes it manifest in the world of appearances” (Arendt, *Life* 192-93). Thinking prepares a person for Judgment in at least two ways. First, as previously mentioned, thinking allows a person to uncover assumptions or biases that underlie certain norms or beliefs. Reflecting on our own beliefs, having one’s own point of view, is an important part of dialogue with other perspectives. Second, thinking cultivates within a person the aptitude or the desire for critical dialogue.¹⁰ Arendt notes that a person may reject or ignore thinking as a way of engaging with the world (191). But for at least some people, the thinking process yields an appreciation of itself (see May 58, 63). The process of uncovering assumptions helps instill in a person the aptitude to engage in critical dialogue, not only with herself through the inner dialogue, but also through critical engagement with other perspectives in Judgment. This

¹⁰ Arendt calls this by-product of thinking “conscience.” In what follows, I do not attempt to discuss Arendt’s account of conscience in depth or in all its importance.

attunement to critical dialogue is, in part, what I take Arendt to mean when she describes judging as “the by-product of the liberating effect of thinking, [which] realizes thinking, and makes it manifest in the world of appearances, where I am never alone and always too busy to think” (*Life* 193). This is how thinking might play a role in political action; it prepares a person to take up the perspectives of others in Judgment, and to act. In this respect, Arendt suggests, “Thinking ceases to be a politically marginal activity. And such reflections will inevitably arise in political emergencies” (192). Paying attention to thinking, then, may reveal new insights about how embodiment is crucial for Judgment.¹¹

II. Thinking as an embodied activity

As mentioned in the previous section, an account of feminist Judgment across cultural differences should challenge the assumption that the political subject is conceived of in terms of an abstract, universal, disembodied masculine perspective. In this section, I aim to show that Arendtian thinking need not (at least in all cases) be predicated upon disembodiment.

Arendt uses the term “thinking” in a particular way to describe the process of an individual challenging the meaning of an event or phenomenon for herself. Thinking challenges already held beliefs or norms, but as an activity it does not yield any positive, deterministic claims (77, 192; Diprose 42). This “quest for meaning,” as Arendt describes it, begins the process of challenging and renegotiating meaning that lies at the core of Judgment. Arendt explores various existential conditions that have prompted humans to think: seeking immortality, wonder, consolation, and a quest for meaning (which includes the desire to be at home with one’s self, or conscience). Each of these conditions reveals something about thinking and contributes to Arendt’s view, which culminates in the quest for meaning and Socrates as the model thinker. In this section, I examine evidence in *The Life of the Mind* that suggests that thinking, when it aims at consolation, is an activity that seeks to escape embodiment. In addition, drawing on the figures of Boethius and Huckleberry Finn, I show how thinking can be prompted by lived contradictions in a person’s experience. What begins as an attempt at consolation can transform into a quest for meaning.

Thinking as a quest for meaning has two key features, (1) a withdrawal from the world and (2) an inner dialogue with oneself. The

¹¹ It is worth noting that thinking and Judgment, as conceptually distinct mental faculties, may not be distinct in our experience of them. My reflection of my experiences may entail reflection on the experiences of others.

inner dialogue is the “essence,” or fundamental structure of thinking (Arendt, *Life* 185). It is a relational structure, albeit a self-relation. Because thinking takes the form of an inner dialogue (a duality, in her terms), it prepares the individual to judge through enlarged mentality when she moves from her own reflections to considering the perspectives of others (which is connected to plurality). Arendt compares the inner dialogue to musical tone; to harmonize, which is a kind of unification, you need at least two units (183). Thus, in the inner dialogue there is recognition of multiple units working together, the difference that is inherent in our identities and comes together in a unique “who” (185-87).¹²

Withdrawing from the world might seem problematic for a feminist theory of embodied Judgment because it seems indicative of an abstract agent who is not connected to a situation or to the world. Yet it cannot be jettisoned; the ability to withdraw is the “only essential precondition” for thinking (78). To be able to withdraw from the world implies that one must already be in the world. As Arendt states, “Thinking always implies remembrance; every thought is strictly speaking an after-thought” (78). Facts and experiences are still relevant to thinking. Withdrawing from the world allows a person to put her normative commitments in the interrogation room, to reflect on how they are understood by her as an agent, to reflect on the material implications of her commitments, and so forth. But the beginning point is always situated and relational. Thus, a withdrawal from the world does not entail a rejection of plurality; rather, plurality is foundational for thinking. For this reason, we can reject the claim that thinking is individualistic in the way characteristic of an abstract (understood as masculine) political subject.

But what of the question of embodiment and its relation to thinking? Embodiment is a condition of experience; that is, it frames how an individual experiences the world (Merleau-Ponty; Young, *Throwing*). Aspects of embodiment, such as emotions, help delimit possibilities for experience, as do environmental factors (Shusterman 151, 190). But the body is not merely physical, it is also social. Social norms condition how people think and how our bodies respond to our moral-political environment (though these norms cannot fully determine our bodily

¹² One might claim that a duality, the inner dialogue, does not require a view that identity is multiply constituted. What is important in the description of thinking as a duality is the (self) relational structure. This relationality is able to connect thinking with a more robust view that identity is historically conditioned, multiply-constituted, that it is formed by a number of relationships. The self cannot be reduced to overdetermined identity categories—that an agent is a unique “who,” not merely a collection of “what” categories they may belong to or to which a person may be attributed.

comportment) (Diprose 45-47; Shusterman 127-34; Young, *Throwing* 11, 141-43).

In other words, bodily comportment becomes habituated to social norms, and this habitual comportment connects a person and her world (Crossley 147). These connections are more or less dynamic. Some change easily, while other habituated dispositions may be deeply ingrained and difficult to change. Nevertheless, because there is always an engagement of an embodied person in the world, bodily comportment is subject to some change.

According to Richard Shusterman, being more aware of habituated bodily comportment can help a person better live up to moral commitments. He gives the example of a person who wants to be tolerant but who has a (seemingly involuntary) disgust reaction to homosexuality (Shusterman 131-34). Let me assume that this person has a pre-reflective disgust reaction because she has been raised in an intolerant society that stigmatizes queer sexualities. In this example, the individual's affective response does not align with her rational belief. Her disgust indicates to her that she still has intolerant tendencies. However, Shusterman suggests, attending to one's bodily responses may help a person reflect upon and transform them.

Similarly, Matthew Weidenfeld argues that habituated bodily comportment can prompt a person to deliberate.¹³ On his view, bodily responses may constitute Judgment, albeit a pre-reflective, non-deliberative mode of Judgment. Persons may know how to respond appropriately in certain situations without having to deliberate. (His term for this phenomenon is "know-how"¹⁴). "Respond appropriately" in this context refers to a person's ability to conform to accepted social standards (Weidenfeld 238-40). Non-deliberative knowledge is not instinctive; rather, it is instilled in us through our relationships and contexts. Nevertheless, Weidenfeld argues that our reliance on such knowledge is a mode of Judgment. It structures our reactions to what we have judged, or would judge, to be good or bad, or right or wrong:

These performances are intelligent, they are organized by self-understandings, but none of this comes along in the way that a focus on the mental and deliberate thinking would lead us to believe. We usually, then, know-how [i.e., know without

¹³ Weidenfeld puts Arendt with intellectualists who have failed to appreciate comportment in Judgment, because of her reliance on Kant. Yet, his argument is influenced heavily by Arendt and his working definition of Judgment is taken from her (Weidenfeld notes 2 and 8).

¹⁴ Weidenfeld's use of "know-how" comes from Heidegger.

deliberation] to tell the expedient from the inexpedient, the right from the wrong, the beautiful from the ugly in the way that a focus on understanding as coping would lead us to think; that is, we know-how to make our way about in a world of diverse appearances. (240)

For Weidenfeld, a person does not always engage in deliberative Judgment; however, deliberative Judgment can be prompted when a person fails to act according to accepted standards (that is, when her actions fail to conform to pre-deliberative knowledge). Bodily awareness may be what triggers deliberation. One example is cringe-moments, which are experiences of embarrassment or discomfort that occur when someone commits a social faux pas. Take Weidenfeld's example of a person (I will call this person "Alex") responding to a friend who has told an inappropriate joke (240). Let me explore this example by giving it some additional context; let me stipulate that the joke Alex hears is inappropriate because it is racist. The social standards that pre-deliberative knowledge conforms to is that racist jokes are oppressive and morally inappropriate. Alex hears her friend tell a racist joke and cringes, but she does not confront her friend. Had she acted in conformance with the standard that telling racist jokes supports oppression, Alex would have called her friend out for doing so. The cringe moment she feels prompts deliberation on her reaction to the joke, and she judges that she acted inappropriately.

What is important about Weidenfeld's argument is the way comportment prompts Judgment. A cringe-moment occurs when one's comportment fails to match one's pre-deliberative knowledge, which in Weidenfeld's example aligns with non-racist norms.¹⁵ But sometimes accepted standards and pre-deliberative knowledge support oppression. Recall Shusterman's example of the disgust reaction to queer sexualities: being aware of one's bodily responses helps a person challenge an oppressive norm. Using these ideas as a point of departure, I suggest that in instances where dominant norms support oppression, embodied experiences of lived contradictions can prompt deliberative Judgment. I understand lived contradictions to be moments in which a person cannot make sense of her experiences when interpreting them according to dominant norms. Her understanding of herself presents a counter-narrative to the dominant norm. Lived contradictions arise from a person's lived experiences and are situations that (I will argue) invite deliberation so that a person can gain a sense of meaningfulness in relation to them. There are

¹⁵ Know-how would not have to align with dominant norms. For example, a child raised by lesbian parents in the United States may know-how to respond to homophobia, even though the dominant norms in US society are often heterosexist or homophobic.

accepted or dominant norms in a person's social context which shape how she interprets her experiences. For example, in Weidenfeld's example of the racist joke, Alex interprets her experiences within an anti-racist framework. Some experiences, however, are not interpretable within socially accepted frameworks. There may be biases or assumptions within socially accepted frameworks which conflict with how a person views her own experiences.

I take Sojourner Truth's speech "Ar'n't I a Woman?" which is about the hypocrisy of racial distinctions, to exemplify a lived contradiction. Norms of femininity in nineteenth-century America dictated that women were naturally good care-givers and responsible for maintaining the home (Wellman 204, 209-10). Truth's speech illustrates how her experiences of womanhood are not interpretable within the dominant framework of white, upper-class femininity. In her words, "I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that?" (Truth 113). The concept of a lived contradiction is not meant to be precise. I think it is a common experience of people under oppression that the meaningfulness of their life stories cannot be captured by accepted points of view. Lived contradictions do not require a person to reflect on this mismatch between experience and dominant norms; however, I suggest that such contradictions create conditions which foster and invite thinking. (At the end of this section, I will show how we can understand Indian surrogates as being prompted to think by a lived contradiction.)

Keeping these arguments in mind, I want to make the case for why thinking is not necessarily disembodied. Consider Boethius, who engages in thinking as a means of "escaping" from physical imprisonment, and from the theological doctrines that operated in Roman society (Arendt, *Life* 160-61). I read Boethius as being prompted to think by lived contradictions in his experience of evil and their tension with theological doctrines of evil. Sentenced to death and imprisoned without a trial, the futility that motivates Boethius to turn to philosophy is strong; in dire circumstances from which there is no possible physical escape, the only meaning-making avenue left is a retreat into thinking. For Boethius, this entailed a complete retreat from his embodied, lived experiences. But Boethius' retreat is not indicative of what thinking entails in all cases. He represents, for Arendt, a trend in Western philosophical tradition of separating mind and body. But she does not endorse this trend:

The unawareness of the body in the thinking experience combined with the sheer pleasure of activity explains better than anything else not only the soothing, consoling effects certain thought-trains had on men [sic] of late antiquity but also their curiously extreme

theories of power of mind over body—theories clearly refuted by common experience. (163)

From this discussion, we see that Arendt does not endorse a mind-body dualism. However, this point only shows that Arendt was not explicitly against the idea that there is an embodied quality to thinking. Boethius turns to thinking as consolation, not as a quest for meaning. Consolation prompts a withdrawal from the world because the world is painful and causes one to suffer. Once withdrawn and able to think, a person may “reconcile” herself to her horrible situation and seek comfort from the material pain she faces. However, paying attention to the embodied experiences that lead to reconciliation may prompt thinking as a way of making sense of one’s circumstances (that is, as a quest for meaning).

I understand Boethius’ turn to thinking as a reconciling of contradictions in his lived experience. Boethius’ physical suffering (and perhaps his psychological anguish, though this is not cited by Arendt) prompted him to think, and his reflections revealed that the accepted theological conceptions of God and goodness upheld in his society did not fit his lived experience of evil (161). What I want to draw attention to is how consolation is motivated by embodied, lived experience and how such experiences might help a person not only escape from the world, but might also prompt a quest for meaning. Instead of becoming intentionally unaware of the body, perhaps the body can help us find meaning. The crucial transition for the self in thinking, understood as consolation, is that the self develops from a “simple I-am-I” to an “I-for-myself” (156-57). A simple I-am-I is not prepared to think as Socrates does, to engage in an inner dialogue with oneself; however, an I-for-myself acknowledges the self-relation, which will be important for the “quest for meaning.”

The lesson in Boethius’ story for a feminist theory of embodied (Arendtian) Judgment is that one’s embodied feelings of fragmentation and disunification are able to prompt critical reflection about the sources of this fragmentation. When a person realizes that accepted norms are inadequate for finding meaning in her experiences, she is prompted to deliberate. Consider the fictional example of Huckleberry Finn. I take Jonathan Bennett’s work on Huck Finn and the connection between sympathy and bad morality as a starting point. Bennett suggests that the character of Huck Finn displays a failure to think about morality. It would be too dismissive to claim that Huck did not think at all. Instead, I suggest that we read Huck’s moral dilemma as a (partial) exercise in Arendtian Judgment that is motivated by embodied, lived experiences.¹⁶

¹⁶ My discussion is meant to show how embodiment can prompt thinking and should not be taken as a critique of Bennett. Moreover, I admit that I am only touching on part of the moral and epistemic complexity in Huck’s situation.

As Huck travels upriver with Jim, a slave escaping to freedom, Huck feels conflicted between aiding Jim, with whom he sympathizes a great deal, and doing what is right according to the dominant moral code—which would be returning Jim to his owner, Miss Watson. Huck does not turn Jim in but finds this to be a moral failing. According to Bennett, Huck's legitimate moral failing is not thinking reflectively about his moral commitments: "What Huck didn't see is that one can live by principles and yet have ultimate control over their content. And one way such control can be exercised is by checking one's principles in light of one's sympathies" (132). On this view, if Huck would have thought, he would have realized that racist moral principles are revisable.

I suggest that we can understand Huck as having engaged in Arendtian thinking. First, Huck is prompted to think by the contradiction between his sympathetic feelings toward Jim and his moral principles. Second, this contradiction motivates Huck to have a dialogue with himself, which is presented as an inner dialogue between Huck, who takes the perspective of his moral sympathies, and his "Conscience," which adopts the role of accepted moral principles (Bennett 125-26, 131). Through the inner dialogue, Huck's previously held commitments, that slaves are rightfully the property of white folks and that this institution should be upheld, are questioned, and Huck can imagine new possibilities for belief and action. Specifically, Huck comes to reject moral systems as a whole (Bennett 131; Twain 157). Though perhaps not the exemplar of thinking that Arendt finds Socrates to be, Huck does seem to resist socially accepted norms by thinking.

With respect to the first aforementioned point, Huck's conflict about whether or not to turn in Jim arises from their growing camaraderie, which manifests emotionally and physically in Huck. Over the course of their adventures, Huck comes to view Jim as a person who deserves respect. In one instance, Huck plays a joke on Jim, saying that their experience of being separated in the fog (Huck in a canoe, Jim on their raft) was just a dream Jim had. After Jim rebukes him for the lie, Huck feels ashamed for being mean and confesses, "It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself [. . .] but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way" (Twain 150).

These sympathetic feelings are at odds with "Conscience." As Jim begins to display his own subjectivity, Huck's guilt over being complicit in Jim's escape increases. Huck complains, "I got to feeling so mean and so miserable I most wished I was dead. I fidgeted up and down the raft, abusing myself to myself" (153-54). When Huck decides, briefly, to betray Jim, he breaks out in a sweat. Jim expresses his faith in Huck's loyalty, to which Huck says, "Well, I just felt sick." In the end, Huck does

not turn in Jim because his body fails him. When asked if his traveling companion is white or black, Huck states, “I didn’t answer up prompt. I tried to, but the words wouldn’t come. I tried, for a second or two, to brace up and out with it, but I warn’t man enough—hadn’t the spunk of a rabbit. I see I was weakening; so I just give up trying, and up and says—‘He’s white’” (155).

To the second point, Huck’s experiences of being sick, fidgety, hot, and speechless prompt him to deliberate about the clash between the dominant norms (to turn Jim in) and his friendship with Jim. About his hesitancy to turn Jim in, Huck remarks, “*Thinks I*, this is what comes of my not thinking” (quoted in Bennett 125; Twain 154). Bennett argues that Huck’s failure is “not thinking” in the sense of not realizing ways of negotiating his moral dilemma, that his moral framework might be one of bad morality that is revisable (Bennett 131-32). However, in this quotation from Huck, Arendtian thinking is revealed in the “thinks I.” The “not thinking” in the quotation is a failure to act according to accepted norms without pause, not a failure to reflect upon a lived contradiction. I agree that Huck’s conclusions about morality are immature. But just as it would be too quick to argue that Huck is a shining example of Arendtian Judgment, it is also too quick to use his failure to recognize the reversibility of his moral commitments as a counterexample to the potential of thinking, and of Judgment, to destabilize oppressive meanings. Huck’s thinking is motivated by his feelings for Jim and his inner tensions (which manifest bodily). His thinking reveals a new understanding of the demands of a racist morality—they are vacuous. The structure of his reflection, especially in his inner dialogue with “Conscience,” prepares him to engage in Judgment through enlarged mentality.

Paying attention to bodily comportment or to emotional states, such as Huck’s feelings of being sick or hot, helps reveal contradictions between dominant norms and a person’s understanding of her experiences. Negotiating the meaning of one’s own experiences is part of the larger picture of engaging enlarged mentality. In this respect, embodied thinking sets one on the path towards Judgment.

Bolstered by a greater appreciation of the role embodiment can play, an Arendtian account of thinking can respond to two worries about a feminist theory of Judgment across cultural differences. First, the term “Judgment” may have troubling connotations when understood within a liberal framework that conceptualizes it as the activity of an abstract, autonomous agent, given that the value of autonomy has been criticized as

overly Western- or Northern-centric.¹⁷ However, as the example of Huck demonstrates, thinking is an activity all humans can undertake to make sense of their situations. On Arendt's view, thinking and Judgment are faculties available to everyone, and, indeed, faculties everyone ought to exercise (Arendt, *Life* 191; *Responsibility* 187-88).

Second, some feminists may question whether women whose lives are extremely constrained by oppression have adequate structural supports to make Judgments at all. (I consider a version of this claim in the next section). In response, feminists such as Mohanty respond that too little attention has been paid to the agency of Third World women:

Numerous feminist scholars have written about the exploitation of Third World women in multinational corporations. While a number of studies provide information about on the mobilization of racist and (hetero)sexist stereotypes in recruiting Third World women into this labor force, relatively few address questions of the social agency of women who are subjected to a number of levels of capitalist discipline. In other words, few studies have focused on the women workers as subjects—as agents who make choices, have a critical perspective on their own situations, and think and organize collectively against their oppressors. (Mohanty 72)

As Mohanty points out, Third World women (and other groups of women whose agency may have been ignored by past feminist work) do make Judgments. For example, take the case of women who act as surrogates gestating embryos for residents of the global North in Anand, Gujarat, India. According to a study by Amrita Pande, surrogates at one clinic were able to make an improvement to their contracts: instead of the surrogate paying the recruitment fee to the person who connects the woman with the fertility clinic, the party commissioning the surrogacy must pay it.

The idea of Judgments motivated by lived contradictions may be a helpful way to acknowledge the agency of the surrogates. The dominant rhetoric wielded by industry professionals minimizes the role of surrogates as workers and emphasizes instead their roles as nurturing mothers (Pande 976). Surrogates live together in clinics or clinic-sponsored housing, which allows industry professionals to control women's activities and reinforce the rhetoric of motherhood (983). Industry professionals appeal to motherly virtues and counsel women to not ask for too much compensation: "But I teach my surrogates one crucial thing: don't treat it

¹⁷ I do not make a claim about the correctness of understanding autonomy to be Western- or Northern-centric. It suffices that many theorists find it to be Western-centric, making it an implausible and impractical basis for a feminist theory of Judgment.

like a business. Instead, treat it like God's gift to you. *Don't be greedy*" (978-79; emphasis added by Pande).

In contrast to these dominant norms, surrogates' experiences resist the reduction of their paid labor to motherhood. They turn to surrogacy because it provides significantly higher pay than comparable work. In Pande's study, the median family income equals approximately US\$60 per month (974). Another report cites that a surrogate previously earned US\$25 per month working in a factory (Haworth). Although many surrogates express valuing the altruistic aspects of surrogacy, their motivations are primarily financial.

Reflective Judgment is revealed, in this example, around a dining table. As surrogates in the hostel share a meal, they discuss the unfairness of having to pay the recruitment fee from their own wages. Their experiences prompt them to reflect upon aspects of their situations: "This Nirmala, she takes Rs 10,000 [\$200] from us for getting us to the clinic. We take all the pain, and she earns so much money. See, we come here because we are desperate, but she has made a business out of this. This shouldn't be allowed to happen" (quoted in Pande 989). From the reflection and deliberation amongst themselves, the women were effectively able to move their complaint up the ladder, so that their contracts now include a clause about the recruitment fee being paid by the commissioning party (989).

To Mohanty's point, although these women are situated within problematic hierarchies of capitalism, gender, race, and class, they are not passive victims of oppression. They make Judgments from within their oppressive contexts, and are moved to do so by mismatches between dominant norms operating in their social-cultural context. With the recognition that these women are subjects, a feminist theory across cultural differences is enriched. These women are not objects of theories but fellow spectators whose perspectives should be included in Western women's exercises of enlarged mentality.

III. Lived contradictions and receptivity

I want to refine my account of lived contradictions as a pathway to Judgment by considering a potential difficulty. In a recent paper, Nedelsky has suggested that Arendt's incomplete theory of Judgment requires a stance of receptivity. To engage in enlarged mentality, a person must first be open and receptive to another's point of view, at least to some extent. Nedelsky states, "To engage optimally in the enlarged mentality requires a kind of receptivity that suspends Judgment (a suspension that will be inevitably partial, and intentionally temporary)" ("Receptivity" 243). Although she recognizes that there are different levels of receptivity,

Nedelsky's argument concerns receptivity as "being mindful." Mindfulness comes in degrees. The discipline of meditation incorporates a high degree of mindfulness, whereas having a mindful stance in daily activities incorporates a lesser one. Whatever the degree of mindfulness, the modes share an intentional focus of attention (234). Being mindful is an especially fruitful way to gain this receptivity (239). For example, mindfulness entails a recognition or affirmation of plurality, of our "fundamental interconnection with each other" (246).¹⁸ Further, it allows a person to better recognize their emotive and bodily states (244).

Nedelsky's argument that Judgment requires receptivity is well supported by Arendt's account of thinking, and mindfulness seems to be a good candidate for receptivity.¹⁹ Mindfulness is described as a kind of non-doing (241). One must take time out from a busy schedule to be mindful. It entails a kind of withdrawal, and withdrawal is at the core of thinking. Similarly, although thinking is a mental activity, it is also contrasted with doing something (in the world). Thinking is an interruption, a stop from one's normal activities (Arendt, *Life* 78). And yet, if one must be mindful to think or judge, then thinking is a limited activity because cultivating a mindful stance may not be equally accessible for people. In particular, Nedelsky is concerned that oppression obstructs receptivity:

Those in extremely oppressive conditions, whether poverty, war zones, or relations of intimate partner violence, may find attaining a stance of receptivity especially difficult, even if one can also see that such a stance could be particularly helpful in aiding the clear seeing that could assist in escape, mitigation, or deep transformation. One might say that one of the (many) harms of such oppressive conditions is undermining this capacity. Just as extremely oppressive conditions are generally inimical to autonomy, they also undermine one's ability to practice mindfulness. (Nedelsky 250)

If Nedelsky is correct that receptivity is necessary for Judgment, and if she is right that oppression makes it more difficult to be mindful, then the ability of oppressed people to make Judgments is compromised. I take this point to be a challenge for feminist Judgments across cultural differences, because it suggests that women who are not sufficiently "free" (who do not have some requisite degree of agency) may not have adequate

¹⁸ It is important that this recognition is entailed by being mindful, but it is not produced by taking up a mindful stance.

¹⁹ This connection is also supported by Shusterman, who advocates that cultivating mindful awareness of embodiment enables us to be better thinkers (8, 173-74).

relational supports to be receptive. Thus, they may be prohibited from Judgment. To be fair, this is not the claim Nedelsky makes. She is interested in institutions being structured in a way that fosters receptivity and empowerment. Nevertheless, it is a problem that confronts those interested in transnational feminist projects.

For the sake of argument, I assume that receptivity is necessary for Judgment, and that it is plausible that oppression may make it more difficult to cultivate mindfulness. Oppression undermines many aspects of well-being, including agency, autonomy, self-respect, and nurturing relationships, but it does not totally destroy them. I suggest that responding to lived contradictions is a different form of receptivity than mindfulness, and one that is available to people in oppressed circumstances.

Receptivity, at a general level, is characterized as an openness and as a stance of non-Judgment. If lived contradictions are to constitute a mode of receptivity, then they must be “open” and they must be “forms of non-Judgment.”²⁰ I suggest that oppressed people may be receptive to Judgment as a means of survival. When other opportunities for meaningfulness are removed for a person (say, by the structure of global capitalism and one’s place within it), a person may be receptive or open to thinking and Judgment as a form of meaning-making. In her essay on Lessing in *Men in Dark Times*, Arendt remarks that some groups are forced to withdraw from the world. These groups, such as Jews in World War Two-era Europe, were made stateless, rightless, and more significantly for my purposes, they were made worldless (13). I do not want to pursue her argument about how these people make a community together apart from the common world but I want to draw a connection between being barred from participating in the common world and being prompted to think. One danger of global capitalism, which is operative in surrogacy, is that it seeks to make workers superfluous and fungible (Pande 977-78, 985). Further, workers have often lost their juridical status. This is not because they have been made stateless, as were people within Nazi concentration camps, but because of a lack of effective international or national regulation (Arendt, *Origins* 447). Although draft legislation

²⁰ Weidenfeld argues that pre-deliberative know-how is a form of Judgment. I suggested that lived contradictions worked in an analogous way to cringe-moments and know-how. Yet, I also suggested that lived contradictions set people on the path towards Judgment (rather than mindfulness setting them on this path). Because receptivity is a stance of non-Judgment, it appears that I am caught in a contradiction. If I am, it is not a troubling one. Nedelsky and Weidenfeld agree that something other than cognition is at work in Judgment. For my purposes, it does not matter whether that constitutes Judgment (Weidenfeld) or is a stance of non-Judgment along the continuum of Judgment (Nedelsky).

was written in 2010 to govern assisted reproduction in India, there is still no national legal regulation of the surrogacy industry.²¹ Here is where lived contradictions can be useful. When persons are forced to withdraw from the world, what is important is that they “remember that they are constantly on the run, and that the world’s reality is actually expressed by their escape [from the world]” (Arendt, *Men* 22). Their escape from the world signals that it is structured so as to remove or hinder their opportunities to engage with others. When other opportunities for meaning-making are denied to a person, she can be receptive to what is available to her, that is, she can be prompted to think by how her experiences do not match dominant norms. Thinking and Judgment allow people in oppressed circumstances to share stories with each other, to better understand their collective problems. And, as the examples above show, Judgments and resistance do occur.

It seems to me that receptivity in terms of mindfulness is more appropriate for people with privilege. Numerous feminists, particularly feminists of color, have drawn attention to the way that a person of color must be able to move about in the dominant culture, as well as in her own (Lugones 11, 13-14; Lugones and Spelman 575-76; Young, “Five Faces” 12). They do not need to be receptive to difference because difference is part of their daily lives. Rather, it is those of us who live along more axes of privilege that often have to be reminded to stop and think about how our privilege masks the disadvantage that others face. This is not to say that mindfulness is not important for oppressed persons. I merely mean to show that for a theory of feminist Judgment across cultural differences, there are opportunities (other than through mindfulness) for women in the global South or other groups in constrained locations to judge.

In response, someone might say that Nedelsky’s point is not only that oppressive conditions can prohibit mindfulness, but that the ability to withdraw from the world can be precluded by extreme suffering. A person’s world might be destroyed by extreme pain (Scarry 29). If this point is lurking in Nedelsky’s argument, then my examples of Boethius, Huck, and Indian surrogacy seem cherry-picked. What follows is not a full response, but a sketch of how one might be developed. Arendt is certainly concerned about the loss of world for people in oppressive situations, especially in regimes with totalitarian qualities. With respect to the killing of the unique individual in German concentration camps, Arendt states:

The aim of all these methods [of the concentration camps, including torture], in any case, is to manipulate the human body—

²¹ The draft bill has yet to be introduced into Parliament. The Indian Council of Medical Research does have guidelines for assisted reproduction, but they are not legally enforceable (see Lakshmi).

with its infinite possibilities of suffering—in such a way as to make it destroy the human person as inexorably as do certain mental diseases of organic origin. (Arendt, *Origins* 453)

It is only with the concentration camps that human spontaneity might be wholly extinguished (438). Perhaps what would be most troubling about extreme pain is its capacity to render language meaningless (Scarry 4, 19-20, 54). Nevertheless, Arendt suggests that human spontaneity cannot be completely extinguished (Arendt, *Origins* 478-79). If extreme suffering does indeed preclude withdrawal, it wholly extinguishes the potential for it. For my purposes, what is important is that an Arendtian view of Judgment has the resources to acknowledge the agency of Third World women, which has often been ignored by Western feminists. Even if some women cannot withdraw due to oppressive constraints, the ability to withdraw is not totally suppressed. If extreme pain begins, at some level, to become shareable through metaphor, perhaps extreme suffering of any kind does as well (Scarry 15-16). In the example of Indian surrogacy, extreme desperation or economic vulnerability predominately motivates women to enter the business (Pande 974, 988-99). Yet in the shared space of the hostel, around a dining table, women are able to compare their experiences of being “just wombs” or “fishes in a dirty pond.” (985-86, 989). This community, even if small, indicates the potential for women to be able to withdraw and reflect on their experiences, and then engage in Judgment together.

Conclusion: Appreciating the agency of fellow-spectators

In this paper I have attempted to contribute to showing how an Arendtian approach to Judgment enriches feminist projects of speaking and judging across cultural differences. In doing so, I have uncovered how Arendt’s conception of thinking can be described as embodied (or at least amenable to embodiment). By looking at Boethius and Huck Finn’s withdrawals into thinking, I have suggested that lived contradictions, when a person cannot interpret her experiences through dominant norms, prompt a person to think and judge. This view of thinking is especially helpful in appreciating the Judgments that women in oppressed circumstances, such as surrogates in India, may make. Thus, feminists from the global North can better acknowledge women’s agency in the global South when encountering them as fellow spectators in communities of Judgment.²²

²² I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments, as well as Rita Gardiner for discussions about this paper over the course of many drafts, and to Jennifer Chisholm for comments on a previous version.

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