Hannah Arendt on Racist Logomania

Joshua M. Hall

William Paterson University

In this article I offer a new reading of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, specifically her argument that ideologies such as racism engender totalitarianism when the lonely and disenfranchised laborers of modern society develop a pathological fixation on formal logic, which I term "logomania." That is, such logical deductions, from horrifically false premises, are the closest thing to thinking that individuals can engage in after their psyches, relationships, and communities have broken down. And it is only thus that totalitarianism can achieve power, since it offers at least some form of connectedness and meaning, regardless how terrifying and violent. The danger persists, clearly, with the resurgence of the far Right, including in the extraordinary regime of Trump in the United States. From this I conclude that, along with the admirable calls to fight loneliness and rebuild our communities, we should also supplement all formal logical instruction and community education with instruction in creative thinking (including aesthetics), thereby discouraging the monomaniac reliance on formal logic as an inadvertent weapon of totalitarianism.

Keywords: Hannah Arendt, formal logic, racism

Arendt (1951/1973) ominously predicts, in the last sentence of *The Origin of Totalitarianism*'s section on the death camps, that "Totalitarian solutions may well survive the fall of totalitarian regimes in the form of strong temptations which will come up whenever it seems impossible to alleviate political, social, or economic misery in a manner worthy of man" (p. 459). Though this claim is perhaps less counterintuitive in the immediate aftermath of the Trump presidency than in 1951 (the original publication year of *Totalitarianism*), and though various news sources noted that Trump's election launched Arendt's book to bestseller status, it appears the press has ignored her final judgment on the nature of totalitarianism as much as academic philosophers have.[1] That is, the myth persists, despite Arendt's persuasive dispelling thereof, that the masses of supporters of

---

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Joshua M. Hall, Ph.D., 300 Pompton Road, William Paterson University, Wayne, New Jersey 07470. Email: j.maloy.hall@gmail.com

[1] See, for example, https://www.vox.com/conversations/2017/6/28/15829712/hannah-arendt-donald-trump-brexit-totalitarianism

totalitarianism are not logical enough. On the contrary, Arendt insists that they are too purely logical.

More precisely, these disenchanted adherents of far Right ideologies are too fixated on pure formal logic, unwilling to entertain falsifying new facts or experience, obsessively moving from premises to conclusion, with a fanatical faith in logical form pursued in isolation.[2] By contrast, the dominant scholarly interpretation of Arendt is that totalitarianism rests on either a lower degree of proficiency in logic, or else an alleged imperfect logic unique to ideology.[3] Whereas both of these explanations save logic itself — the neutral, universal version of logic, practiced with sufficient proficiency — Arendt condemns the total reliance on formal logic simpliciter. From the latter position, the solution to totalitarianism looks much different, and is certainly not a matter of progressives positioning ourselves as defenders of "pure logic" and browbeating students to be "more logical." We must embody and encourage creative thought.

Before turning directly to Arendt, however, it might be helpful to try and forestall the likely misperception that the present author holds (in one reviewer's words) "a particular grudge against logic." On the contrary, logic has been indispensable to my own life and work, including multiple articles on the philosophy of logic, and years of teaching undergraduate logic courses at top-tier United States universities.[4] On the other hand, the latter experiences also inspired, through close readings of foundational texts in the history of Western formal logic, the larger project of which the present article is an extension. As I have explored in two excerpts therefrom, Western formal logic (from Aristotle to Leibniz, J. S. Mill, and Frege) has been partially constituted by, and partially constitutive of, what has become known as racism.[5] My solution to this problem is not, however, to reject logic tout court, but rather to supplement it with other forms of reasoning, imagination, perception, feeling and experience (including aesthetic education and creative psychotherapy).[6] I will return briefly to this point, a promising area for future research, below.

---

[2] This is not to say that other (non-totalitarian) forms of racism do not rely on this logomania. Arendt herself unfortunately performs one example of the latter, as discussed in Belle, 2014.

[3] See, for three examples, Villa, 2001 (p. 3), Knott, 2015 (p. 93), and King and Stone 2008. The only exceptions, as far as I am aware, are found in Nye, 1990 (p. 169) and (in a brief mention) Canovan, 2001 (p. 128).

[4] See, for example, Hall, 2017, 2018.

[5] For two excerpts from this larger project, on racism and logic in J. S. Mill and Frege, see Hall, 2015, 2021.

[6] For an example of such creative psychotherapy, see Hall, 2022b. And for more on Arendt's constructive supplements to formal logical, drawing on *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and *The Life of the Mind*, see Hall, 2016.

Totalitarian Ideology as Logomania

Near the end of the penultimate chapter, "Totalitarianism and Power," Arendt offers an extended contrast between utilitarian commonsense and totalitarian logic. She introduces this distinction in the following claim: "Over and above the senselessness of totalitarian society is enthroned the ridiculous supersense of its ideological superstition" (p. 457). Note the neologism here, "supersense," where Arendt could easily have written "nonsense" (or, if she wanted to convey a lack of meaning, perhaps "subsense"). Instead, she chose a prefix meaning "above or beyond," thereby suggesting a kind of toxic excess of meaning (as in the concept "flight of ideas," a symptom attributed to people diagnosed with bipolar disorder or schizophrenia).

By contrast, "commonsense" implies a correct proportion of sense/meaningfulness (neither the "too little" of nihilistic neurosis, nor the "too much" of manic psychosis). In addition, in Arendt's oeuvre, "common sense" also suggests (a) the Aristotelian imagination, understood as the power to preserve (in memory) and manipulate (in creativity) traces of the sense-perceptions from the five senses; and (b) the Kantian schematizing power activated in disinterested aesthetic judgments of taste. As such, and as Arendt discusses later, this power in her view is essentially empirical and social, the embodied bedrock for creating a shared real world. Finally on this point, this Kantian aspect of "commonsense," which Arendt proceeds to pair with the term "utilitarian," suggests a temporary alliance between those two traditional philosophical enemies, united in opposition to the nonsensical supersense of totalitarian logic.

"Common sense trained in utilitarian thinking," Arendt continues, "is powerless against this ideological supersense, since totalitarian regimes establish a functioning world of no-sense" (p. 458). As with the sufferer of psychosis, the totalitarian's excess of meaningfulness suffices to create an entire new fantasy world. Unlike with individual psychosis, however, and more like what is now called "shared delusional disorder" (SDD; and formerly *folie à deux*, "madness for two"), this fantasy world is capable of being realized, at least on a temporary basis, since large numbers of people support the delusion. In this nonsense world, as in the logical system from which it is woven, "Nothing matters but consistency" (p. 458). Arendt elaborates as follows:

> Once [the ideologies'] claim to total validity is taken literally, they become the nuclei of logical systems in which, as in the system of paranoiacs, everything follows comprehensibly and even compulsorily once the first premise is accepted. The insanity of such systems lies not only in their first premise but in the very logicality with which they are constructed. The curious logicality of all isms, their simple-minded trust in the salvation value of stubborn devotion without regard for specific, varying factors, already harbors the first germs of totalitarian contempt for reality and factuality. (pp. 457–458)

This crucial passage has been passed over by many admirable scholars, so it is imperative that we attempt to read what is there, rather than project onto it something less troubling for scholars trained to fetishize our logical thinking skills. First, Arendt does not call these systems "pseudo-logical" or put scare quotes around "logical"; rather, they are logical simpliciter. Second, these ideologies are not flawed merely in terms of their horrific premises (such as "All non-Aryans are vermin"), but more fundamentally flawed because of applying the strictures of deductive reason so "mercilessly" (to use Stalin's praising self-description) in the human realm. In other words, ideological arguments are not bad simply qua unsound, but more fundamentally for striving for this form of validity in the first place.

Having isolated and removed the distorting lens of this pervasive misinterpretation, one can return to the passage with fresh eyes. Two points are most prominent and important. Note, first, the triangulated connotations of logic, religion ("salvation" and "devotion"), and madness ("paranoiacs"). Synthesizing these elements, the totalitarian society for Arendt amounts to an unsustainable vision of the hereafter, structured by obsessive logical deductions from insane premises, and supported by fervent devotion. It is partially to evoke this connection for Arendt between totalitarian logic and manic states that I have termed this phenomenon "logomania."

Second, and relatedly, Arendt identifies this psychosis as a purely logical method of totalitarianism, in contrast to the popular Foucauldian–Deleuzian identification of psychotic-type "madness" as a creative (antilogical) resistance to totalitarianism's more neurotic-type "madness." This matters chiefly because it challenges both the current liberal conventional wisdom that the answer to racism is advocating and performing more logical arguments, and the current Leftist conventional wisdom that the answer to ideologies such as racism is schizo-creative "madness."

I have put "madness" in quotation marks here, however, to emphasize what is for me a crucial point, namely my alliance with the Mad Pride Movement (and its related movements), including the psychiatric survivor's movement (or c/s/x, which stands for "consumer," "survivors," and "ex-patients" of psychiatry) and the antipsychiatry movement.[7] This is relevant to the present investigation because Arendt's description of logomania, which deploys the rhetoric of psychopathology, recalls the "redemptive–messianic vision" that Mad Pride activist Seth Farber identifies and celebrates as a distinctive feature of the thought of the "mad."[8] Despite this superficial similarity, the crucial difference is that the mad, as Farber documents and relates, present their vision of a better world with humility, humor, deference to a transcendent divinity, and a passionate love of all sentient beings (while totalitarian ideologists are obviously deadly serious, hold

---

[7] For a scholarly analysis of these movements, see Lewis, 2006 (especially pp. 63, 82–91).

[8] For more on Farber's vision and the future of Mad Pride, see Hall, 2022a.

their divinity as imminent to this natural/historical world, and are proud of their willingness to commit even genocide).

Arendt clarifies and sharpens this analysis further in *Totalitarianism*'s final chapter, beginning with the relationship of ideology's logomania to the law. Historically, she notes, one finds either (a) legitimate lawful power (as in a republic), or (b) illegitimate, arbitrary, and lawless power (as in a tyranny). Whereas totalitarianism (c) "operates neither without guidance of law nor is it arbitrary, for it claims to obey strictly and unequivocally those laws of Nature or of History from which all positive laws have always been supposed to spring" (p. 461). Just as totalitarians are not illogical — but super-logical — so they are also not lawless — but what I will term "super-lawful," where "super" means above and beyond, in a singular, absolute, and transcendent relationship. Put differently, if lawlessness is total freedom of motion (or chaos), and lawfulness is partial freedom (or order), super-lawfulness is total unfreedom (or motionlessness, death-in-life). In sum, if logic is to the mind what law is to society, then logomania is to the totalitarian what "super-lawfulness" is to totalitarian society.

In Arendt's elaboration, totalitarianism "applies the law directly to mankind without bothering with the behavior of men," thus effecting "a conscious break of that *consensus iuris* which, according to Cicero, constitutes a 'people'" (p. 462). The Latin phrase here, meaning "law by consent," refers to the mutual consent by a people to the law for their mutual benefit. Worse still, totalitarianism "does not establish its own *consensus iuris*"; instead, its "defiance of all, even its own positive laws, implies that it believes it can do without any *consensus iuris* whatsoever" (p. 462). The reason for totalitarianism's hostility to positive human laws is that, while the latter "are primarily designed to function as stabilizers for the ever changing movements of men," for the totalitarians, "all laws have become laws of movement" (p. 463). The inspirations for the latter, Arendt explains, are "Marx's historical and Darwin's naturalistic approach" (p. 463). In short, in "these ideologies, the term 'law' itself changed its very meaning: from expressing the framework of stability within which human actions and motions can take place, it became the expression of motion itself" (p. 464). The analogies here, between totalitarianism's super-lawfullness, its supersense, and its logomania, are very close to each other.

In all three cases — super-lawfulness, supersense, and logomania — there is an excess of what would, in proper measure, be good thing, and which is excessively controlled by the atomized individual. Whereas the good requires a moderate degree of meaningfulness, shared by others in a common world, guided by a reliance on formal logic as one method among others, and regulated by a limited and stable legal structure — there is too much meaningfulness (in the psychotic person), too much reliance on formal logic alone (in the lonely ideologist), and too much lawlike restriction on the community's plural mobility (in the totalitarian leader). In short, in totalitarianism, there is too much motion within, and monopolized by, one lonely individual, to the exclusion of the community.

It is precisely to facilitate this motion, Arendt writes, that totalitarianism deploys terror. The latter, she defines as "the realization of the law of movement," the "chief aim" of which "is to make it possible for the force of nature or of history to race freely through mankind, unhindered by any spontaneous human action" (p. 465). More precisely, she explains, "terror seeks to 'stabilize' men in order to liberate the forces of nature or history" (p. 465). The term "spontaneity" here is key. The most dangerous and frightening thing about this formulation is that not even the totalitarian leader is spared the loss of spontaneity (as reflected in what Arendt takes to be Hitler's and Stalin's genuine belief that they were merely humble vessels for the execution of transcendent natural–historical laws). That is, totalitarianism is capable of its unprecedentedly efficient and totalizing destruction because even its leaders "think" and act as though powerless to bend the ironclad laws of its ruthless logic.

Positive laws, Arendt elaborates, "are designed to erect boundaries and establish channels of communication between men whose community is constantly endangered by the new men born into it," because with "each new birth, a new beginning is born into the world, a new world has potentially come into being" (p. 465). Totalitarian terror, by contrast, "substitutes for the boundaries and channels" of positive laws, "a band of iron which holds them so tightly together that it is as though their plurality had disappeared into One Man of gigantic dimensions" (pp. 465–466). This is the logical extreme, the near-literalization, of Hobbes' Leviathan, or the body politic as macro-man: the lonely ideologist seeks to overcome his loneliness by ingesting the rest of the community, metabolizing it and using it to reproduce the image of his beloved ideology. For said digestion, finally, logic provides the dissolving acid, breaking the community apart into isolated, lonely, and fatalistic individuals, ready to be consumed.

This iron band is so dangerous, Arendt claims, because "the space between men as it is hedged in by laws, is the living space of freedom" (p. 466). Thus, by "pressing men against each other, total terror destroys the space between them," and in this way, terror "destroys the one essential prerequisite of all freedom which is simply the capacity of motion which cannot exist without space" (p. 466). This space is also necessary, I would add, for the power of representation, or imagination, since vision, memory, and creativity all require a certain distance between subjects, the space between presentation and representation. That is, not only the body, but also the mind, requires literal physical space for the freedom to come into the fullness of its powers.

Totalitarianism does not mourn such freedom, however, Arendt claims, because from its "point of view, the fact that men are born and die can only be regarded as an annoying interference with higher forces" (p. 466). To overcome this annoyance, therefore, "terror executes on the spot the death sentences which Nature is supposed to have pronounced on races or individuals who are 'unfit to live' or History [is supposed to have pronounced] on 'dying classes'" (p. 466). In

other words, formal logic is timeless, its deductions are universal and indifferent to the flow of consciousness, and its logomaniac ideologues impatient to remake (unmake) the world in the image of its conclusions.

Against this legal–political background, Arendt elaborates her analysis of ideology. "An ideology," she writes, "is quite literally what its name indicates: it is the logic of an idea," and its "subject matter is history, to which the idea is applied" (p. 469). More specifically, ideology treats "the course of events as though it followed the same 'law' as the logical exposition of its idea" (p. 469). Racism, for example, "is the belief that there is a motion inherent in the very idea of race" (p. 469). This motion is restricted, however, by ideology's logical nature. To wit, "the only possible movement in the realm of logic is the process of deduction from a premise" (p. 469). Arendt then elaborates. "As soon as logic as a movement of thought — and not as a necessary control of thinking — is applied to an idea, this idea is transformed into a premise" (p. 469).

For example, in the ideology of racism, if the idea is something like the following: "the world is composed of superior and inferior races in competition for global domination, which the highest race alone will achieve" — then the various aspects of this idea are singled out as premises (e.g., "all races are ranked in terms of superiority," "races inevitably compete for power," "the ultimate goal of any race is world domination"), and those premises are then roughly mapped onto phases in a historical sequence, with all subsequent effort focused on accelerating through each premise/phase as efficiently as possible. In Hitler's case, the idea "Jews are vermin" became a premise (along with the implicit premise that "Vermin should be exterminated") for Hitler's conclusion that the Jewish people should be "exterminated."

This example also illustrates the main problem with this logomaniac process. "Ideologies always assume," Arendt explains, "that one idea is sufficient to explain everything in the development from the premise, and that no experience can teach anything because everything is comprehended in this consistent process of logical deduction" (p. 470). Again, therefore, Arendt insists that the danger lies not merely in an ideology's ridiculous and horrific first premise (which she describes as "falling for some usually vulgar, always uncritical assumption") [p. 470.] More important is the danger of "exchanging the freedom inherent in man's capacity to think for *the strait jacket of logic with which man can force himself almost as violently as he is forced by some outside power*" (p. 470, emphasis added). Note the return of the clinical rhetoric here: what is most insane is to drive oneself insane by voluntarily surrendering one's own freedom to think, in a kind of masochistic, self-violence.[9]

Arendt then buttresses this analysis with a more schematic variation thereof, identifying "three specifically totalitarian elements that are peculiar to all ideological

---

[9] In this connection, see Etienne Balibar's (2014) discussion of Etienne de la Boetie.

thinking" (p. 470). First, ideologies "explain not what is, but what becomes, what is born and passes away," because ideologies are "concerned solely with the element of motion" (p. 470). Whatever is stable, whatever holds its position, whatever resists the flow, is for ideology not just expendable, but constitutively invisible. This can be seen in formal logic, which is not merely indifferent to what things are represented by the A and B of a modus ponens argument, but also vulnerable to its flow being undermined if the practitioner becomes distracted by real world referents.

Second, ideological thinking "becomes independent of all experience from which it cannot learn anything new," denying the five senses in deference to a "sixth sense" that "is provided by ideology" (p. 470). Returning to the case of formal logic, students are encouraged to focus on the symbols and patterns, bracketing their intuitions and experiences in order to attain and perfect a kind of sixth sense for sniffing out "tricks" embedded in the problems.

And third, since ideologies lack the ability to "transform reality," they instead "achieve this emancipation of thought from experience through certain methods of demonstration," which Arendt parses as "an absolutely logical procedure which starts from an axiomatically accepted premise, deducing everything else from it; that is, it proceeds with a consistency that exists nowhere in the realm of realty" (p. 471). In other words, since ideology is powerless to build a full new world, blooming with sense-perceptions experienceable with others, it settles for reducing this world to nothing but logical calculations, performable in total isolation. It is in this vein, Arendt notes, that Hitler "took pride in his supreme gift for 'ice cold reasoning,'" and "proceeded to drive ideological implications into extremes of logical consistency" (p. 471). Note again: Arendt is not saying "pseudo-logic," or "an attempt at logic," but logicalness simpliciter.

Since this logomania constitutes, according to Arendt, the core of ideology, it is thus also the core of totalitarianism, in all the latter's manifestations and phases. "This stringent logicality as a guide to action," she writes, "permeates the whole structure of totalitarian movements and governments" (p. 472). Thus, it is not merely ideology that is logomaniac, but the entirety of the ideologically-based totalitarian movement and society. What is new, ideologically, in totalitarianism, is "that it was no longer primarily the 'idea' of the ideology," Arendt claims, "that appealed to them, but the logical process which could be developed from it" (p. 472). In other words, totalitarianism takes ideology's latent or unconscious logomania and makes it conscious and explicit — it loves ideology, not despite, but because of its logomania. As a result, Arendt continues, "the real content of the ideology," which "originally had brought about the 'idea,'" is in totalitarianism ultimately "devoured by the logic with which the 'idea' is carried out" (p. 472). Accordingly, this logic is what creates the conditions for totalitarian practice.

Even using racism as the justification for destruction, for example, paled in importance to the Nazis, according to Arendt, compared to the logomaniac process of destruction itself. In other words, the racial dimension of the Nazis'

destruction was secondary to the destruction per se. Their society was, it may be helpful to recall, more excited about the IBM punch cards it used to bureaucratize genocide than in their millions of victims. "The preparation of victims and executioners which totalitarianism requires," Arendt claims, is "not racism" but "its inherent logicality" (p. 472). To repeat this crucial and counterintuitive point: the most effective way to ready people for becoming totalitarian is — not to make them more prejudiced, racist, etc. in the content of their views — but to make them more exclusively logomaniac in the form of their views (about any content whatsoever). Arendt quotes, as an example, "the argument of which Hitler like Stalin was very fond," namely "You can't say A without saying B and C and so on, down to the end of the murderous alphabet" (p. 472). In other words, totalitarian leaders love logic even more than they hate their victims, or perhaps their love of logic distracts from, compensates for, and justifies their genocidal hatred.

From this analysis, Arendt derives the following key insight. "Here, the coercive force of logicality seems to have found its source; it springs from our fear of contradicting ourselves" (p. 473). More precisely, using the example of the Bolsheviks who famously willingly confessed to "crimes" they did not commit, Arendt explains that the "coercive force of the argument" for supporting totalitarianism is: "if you refuse [to confess], you contradict yourself and, through this contradiction, render your whole life meaningless; the A which you said dominates your whole life through the consequences of B and C which it logically engenders" (p. 473). Put simply, totalitarianism forces racists to take their racism to its logical conclusion, namely the genocide of all allegedly inferior beings — even though, as Arendt details, this ultimately includes many of the racists themselves (as in Hitler's written plans to eventually eliminate even "Aryan" Germans if they had serious heart or lung illness) [p. 432.] No one is safe from ideology's logomania.

Arendt then diagnosis the fear-based psychology behind the logomania of ideological thinkers. "Totalitarian rulers," she claims, "rely on the compulsion with which we can compel ourselves," namely "the tyranny of logicality against which nothing stands but the great capacity of men to start something new" (p. 473). The only way to counter logomania, therefore, is with creativity; otherwise we bind ourselves to tyrannical servitude, to which the lonely masses succumb to the peril of all. "By this submission," Arendt writes of the lonely ideologist, "he surrenders his inner freedom as he surrenders his freedom of movement when he bows down to an outward tyranny" (p. 473). Logomania, by implication, is the self-imprisonment of the mind.

Restoring mental freedom, therefore, is Arendt's proffered solution to totalitarian logomania. "Over the beginning" per se, she declares, "no logic, no cogent deduction can have any power, because its chain presupposes, in the form of a premise, the beginning" (p. 473). That is, logic requires premises, which must have been created at some point in the past. Therein lie two things that are usually hidden by the logomaniacs, namely (a) the fact that logic ultimately relies on

creativity, and (b) a loophole for breaking the chains of logomania. In recognition of this threat to totalitarian power, Arendt writes, "the self-coercive force of logicality is mobilized lest anybody ever start thinking — which as the freest and purest of human activities is the very opposite of the compulsory process of deduction" (p. 473). Such creative thinking, Arendt goes on to claim, is empowered by interpersonal connection, which means that totalitarianism needs logomania to undermine those connections. In short, "the self-coercive force of logical deduction … prepares each individual in his lonely isolation against all others" (pp. 473–474).

Arendt's subsequent fine-grained analysis of loneliness and isolation reveals their hidden sociological dimensions. "Isolation," Arendt begins, "may be the beginning of terror; it certainly is its most fertile ground; it always is its result" (p. 474). That is, isolation tends to be terrifying, and thus the isolated are the most likely to succumb to terror, which only exacerbates their isolation. The "hallmark" of isolation, Arendt continues, "is impotence insofar as power always comes from men 'acting in concert' (Burke); isolated men are powerless by definition" (p. 474). Connecting this to Arendt's previous claim, the isolated are fearful-qua-powerless, vis-à-vis those who draw power from their connections, and who the isolated know might use that power to oppress them whenever they wish.

Isolation is not all bad, however, in Arendt's view. For one thing, it can be present without loneliness (and vice versa); for another, isolation "is required for all so-called productive activities of men" (p. 474). More specifically, "Man insofar as he is *homo faber* tends to isolate himself with his work, that is to leave the realm of politics … whether the result is a piece of craftsmanship or of art" (p. 475). Arendt describes such work as "the most elementary form of human creativity, which is the capacity to add something of one's own to the common world" (p. 475). In other words, too much togetherness keeps us from creating new things, and expressing ourselves thereby. When this capacity "is destroyed," however, then "isolation becomes altogether unbearable," as is the case "in a world whose chief values are dictated by labor, that is where all human activities have been transformed into laboring" (p. 475).

Such was the world of the Nazis, and such is our world today, which continues to create neo-Nazis. "Isolation," Arendt concludes of such worlds, "then becomes loneliness" (p. 475). This is already enough, historically, for the governmental form called tyranny to take hold, "destroying the public realm of life"; but totalitarianism requires more, and "destroys private life as well" (p. 475). More specifically, Arendt observes that totalitarianism "bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man" (p. 475). In short, the utterly world-less, if their numbers reach a critical threshold, ultimately choose a fantasy world that is built from, with, and on terror. "Only because we have common sense," Arendt explains, "only because not one man, but men in the plural inhabit the earth can

we trust our immediate sensual experience" (p. 476). Put differently, I trust myself because the others validate me; we imagine ourselves like each other, as belonging together; and only in that way can I even belong to myself.

In this spirit, having previously stressed the distinction between loneliness and isolation, Arendt then contrasts loneliness and solitude, a distinction whose initial creation she attributes to the enslaved Stoic philosopher Epictetus. "In solitude," Arendt writes of his view, "I am 'by myself,' together with my self, and therefore two-in-one, whereas in loneliness I am actually one, deserted by all others" (p. 476). In other words, free thought is a creative inner dialogue between my past self (myself) and my present self (I). "All thinking, strictly speaking" she asserts, "is done in solitude and is a dialogue between me and myself," which "does not lose contact with the world of my fellow-men because they are represented in the self with whom I lead the dialogue of thought" (p. 476). Put differently, isolation give me enough space from the others to reimagine them, and to imagine myself in their positions, in each case opening the possibility for a new beginning in thought.

Just as with isolation, however, despite the potential advantages of solitude, it too "can become loneliness," more specifically when, "all by myself, I am deserted by myself" (p. 476). The inner dialogue becomes a monologue, one relentless logic liable to deteriorate into the "madness" of totalitarian logomania. For most of history, however, this "danger of loneliness," according to Arendt, threatened only a few solitary individuals (prominent among whom were the philosophers, "for whom alone solitude is a way of life and a condition of work") [p. 476.] More precisely, this danger "became sufficiently great to be noticed by others and recorded by history only in the nineteenth century" (p. 476). In short, the world recently became drastically lonelier, because far too many have been trapped in solitude.

In a pre-nineteenth-century world, Arendt relates, "the great saving grace of companionship for solitary men," is that companionship "makes them 'whole' again, saves them from the dialogue of thought in which one remains always equivocal, restores the identity which makes them speak with the single voice of one unexchangeable person" (p. 476). Put differently, my interlocuter helps me to resolve the tensions and contradictions that arise in my inner dialogue, thus shaping me into the kind of person who can belong in precisely this time and place, in a community with these others. "What makes loneliness so unbearable," in Arendt's words, "is the loss of one's own self which can be realized in solitude, but confirmed in its identity only by the trusting and trustworthy company of my equals" (p. 477). In short, even that most seemingly solitary mental activity of human beings, pure thinking, is also covertly social, and based fundamentally on interdependence.

This also constitutes further evidence, in Arendt's view, that pure thinking is not identical to logic, her elaboration of which view bears quoting at length:

> The only capacity of the human mind which needs neither the self nor the other nor the world in order to function safely and which is as independent of experience as it is of thinking is the ability of logical reasoning whose premise is the self-evident. The elementary rules of cogent evidence, the truism that two and two equals four cannot be perverted even under the conditions of absolute loneliness. It is the only reliable "truth" human beings can fall back on once they have lost the mutual guarantee, the common sense, men need in order to experience and live and know their way in a common world. But this "truth" is empty or rather no truth at all, because it does not reveal anything. (p. 477)

No self, no other, no world — just mathematical tautologies that generate, for those who are lonely and deprived of both commonsense and imagination, a mere illusion of truth. In this vacuum, of companionship, otherness, world, and even truth, Arendt continues, the logically "self-evident … begins to be productive, to develop its own lines of 'thought'" (p. 477). More specifically, in the words Arendt quotes from Martin Luther, the lonely individual "always deduces one from the other and thinks everything to the worst" (p. 477). Precisely this is the logomaniac dimension of totalitarianism, which, Arendt affirms, "consists indeed in this 'thinking everything to the worst'" (p. 477).

The totalitarian world, therefore, is one where loneliness "has become an everyday experience of the evergrowing masses of our century" (p. 478). Here, Hitler's "ice-cold reasoning," in Arendt's words, "appears like a last support in a world where nobody is reliable and nothing can be relied upon" (p. 478). If, as Arendt's earlier metaphor has it, mere tyranny rules over a desert, a "lawless, fenceless wilderness of fear and suspicion," then with totalitarianism, she adds, "it seems as if a way had been found to set the desert itself in motion, to let loose a sand storm that could cover all parts of the inhabited earth" (pp. 466, 478). Or, in her more prosaic formulation, the "organized loneliness" of totalitarianism "is considerably more dangerous than the unorganized impotence of all those who are ruled by the tyrannical and arbitrary will of a single man" (p. 478). Finally, the "danger" is that totalitarianism "threatens to ravage the world as we know it — a world which everywhere seems to have come to an end — before a new beginning rising from the end has had time to assert itself" (p. 478). Nevertheless, "there remains also the truth that every end in history necessarily contains a new beginning; this beginning is the promise, the only 'message' which the end can ever produce" (pp. 478–479). More generally, "Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man's freedom" (p. 479). "This beginning," Arendt concludes, "is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every man" (p. 479).

To promote and preserve these beginnings, it has already been widely recognized in today's public discourse that we desperately need to fight the pandemic of loneliness today, and to rebuild the social and political infrastructure of our

communities.[10] To these admirable suggestions, I wish to add, by way of my own conclusion, one more. We should stop teaching and promoting formal logic in isolation, and instead supplement all such courses and community education initiatives with material and methods for creative and aesthetic thinking. For example, "logic" courses should become courses in "critical *and* creative thinking," or in "cognitive, imaginative, and affective reasoning."

We cannot, of course, afford to stop putting into people's hands a tool which — if used compulsively, and to the exclusion of less rigid forms of thought — can be weaponized by totalitarian ideologies such as racism. We can, however, at least provide people with additional tools and training in how to handle this weapon more safely, and how to defend oneself or disarm those who threaten harm with that weapon, including on a geopolitical scale. It is not sufficient to merely resist and defeat isolated instances of conventional totalitarianism. We must, additionally, destroy the sociopolitical conditions of totalitarianism's possibility, namely by nurturing spaces and resources for the promotion of creative thought, and thereby its consequent thoughtful togetherness.

References

Arendt, H. (1973). *The origins of totalitarianism*. New York: Mariner. (originally published 1951)

Balibar, E. (2014). *Equaliberty: Political essays* [J. Ingram, Trans.] Durham: Duke University Press.

Belle, K. (2014). *Hannah Arendt and the negro question*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Canovan, M. (2001). Arendt's theory of totalitarianism: A reassessment. In D. Villa (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Hannah Arendt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

De la Boetie, E. (2012). *Discourse of voluntary servitude*. New York: Hackett.

Farber, S. (2012). *The spiritual gift of madness: The failure of psychiatry and the rise of the mad pride movement*. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions.

Hall, J. (2015). Questions of race in J. S. Mill's contributions to logic. *Philosophia Africana, 16*(2), 73–93.

Hall, J. (2016). Twixt mages and monsters: Arendt on the dark art of forgiveness. In C. Lewis (Ed.), *The philosophy of forgiveness, Vol. 2: Dimensions of forgiveness* (pp. 215–240). Wilmington, Delaware: Vernon.

Hall, J. (2017). Logical theatrics, or floes on flows: Translating Quine with the shins. *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy, 8*(2). htt://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.661

Hall, J. (2018). A darkly bright republic: Milton's poetic logic. *South African Journal of Philosophy, 37*(2), 158–170.

Hall, J. (2021). A phenomenology of race in Frege's logic. *Humanities Bulletin, 4*(1), 52–69.

Hall, J. (2022a). Farber's reimagined mad pride: Strategies for messianic utopian leadership. *Journal of Medical Humanities, 43*(1) [forthcoming].

Hall, J. (2022b). Dancing-with cognitive psychology: Three therapeutic provocations. *Middle Voices, 3*(1) [forthcoming].

King, R., and Stone, D. (Eds.). (2008). *Hannah Arendt and the uses of history: Imperialism, nation, race and genocide*. New York: Berghahn.

Knott, M. (2015). *Unlearning with Hannah Arendt* [D. Dollenmayer, Trans.]. New York: Other.

Lewis, B. (2006). *Moving beyond prozac, DSM, and the new psychiatry: The birth of postpsychiatry*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

---

[10] See, for two fairly recent examples: https://aeon.co/essays/for-hannah-arendt-totalitarianism-is-rooted-in-loneliness,andhttps://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-political-consequences-of-loneliness-and-isolation-during-the-pandemic.

Nye, A. (1990). *Words of power: A feminist reading of the history of logic*. New York: Routledge.

Villa, D. (2015). Introduction: The developments of Arendt's political thought. In D. Villa (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Hannah Arendt* (pp. 1–24). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.