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## *Judging* in Hannah Arendt (1905–1975)

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Arendt's interest in the art of *judgment* concerned especially how it lets us say of a particular action, *This is good*, of a historical event, *This is important*. Comparing it to *taste*, by which connoisseurs say, *This is beautiful* but cannot prove it, Arendt holds that judging “has nothing in common with logical operations” (Arendt 1971: 215). If we are not then reduced to subjective assertions, how does this mysterious ability work? By what, if not objective or subjective standards, do we judge?

Arendt is concerned with how we answer for political as well as epistemological reasons. Importantly, to disagree with a valid deduction or a subjective pronouncement is to be in error, deviant, or foolish. However, disagreement is unavoidable and, for Arendt, desirable in a free public life where we encounter the paradoxical human condition that we “are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else” (Arendt 1958: 8).

But is this not an admission that, without general principles applied logically to individuals, public life would be chaotic? No: although different, if we are free to communicate our thinking publicly, we develop *inter-subjectivity*, imagination, and a “Common Sense” (Arendt 1971: 267) that give us shareable standards for persuasive, not coercive, judgment. Especially appropriate, Arendt says, are the common *exemplars* (such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks/courageous change-makers) that emerge as we judge who and what appears in the stories we tell about who we are.

Thus judgment, “the by-product” of thinking that dissolves certainties, sending us out to talk with others, emerges as “perhaps the most political of all man's mental abilities” (Arendt 1971: 188).

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