DOI: 10.1111/1467-8675.12345

WILEY Constellations

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Rethinking embodied reflective judgment with Adorno and Arendt

Claudia Leeb

Washington State University, Pullman, WA, USA

Correspondence
Claudia Leeb, Washington State University, Pullman, WA 99164, USA.
Email: leebclaudia@gmail.com

1 | INTRODUCTION

> *One wants to break free of the past: rightly, because nothing at all can live in its shadow, and because there will be no end to the terror as long as guilt and violence are repaid with guilt and violence; wrongly, because the past that one would like to evade is still very much alive. National Socialism lives on. (Adorno, 2010, p. 213)*

In this article I defend an account of judgment that I term embodied reflective judgment, which implies that thinking and feeling are interconnected and both are crucial for critical judgment. However, when I say that both thinking and feeling are important for reflective judgment, I do not mean to imply that they are separate and distinct entities. Rather, the idea of reflective judgment is based on the insight that thinking and feeling are not only connected, but entangled with each other. The way in which we think about something can prompt an emotional response, and that response can prompt further reflection necessary for critical judgment. In this article I clarify the relationship between thinking and feeling by foregrounding guilt feelings as a specific issue that individuals and political collectivities must deal with to make embodied reflective judgment a possibility.

If individuals and collectivities use defense mechanisms to evade their guilt feelings then their capacity to think critically is diminished and embodied reflective judgment remains diminished or altogether absent. I do not argue, however, that feelings trump thinking in my understanding of embodied reflective judgment. Rather, if guilt feelings are evaded via defense mechanisms then they cloud our ability to make critical judgments. A failure to live up to guilt feelings corrupts people's judgments in two ways. First, people make all sorts of flawed judgments to ward off having to deal with guilt feelings, and so thinking and rationality are used merely to fend off guilt feelings. Second, since it is guilt feelings that would prompt reflection, steps that ought to be taken to make reparations for the past and to prevent future injustices are less likely to be taken, because people don't judge that there's any need to take such steps. The emphasis here is specifically on how guilt feelings can impact on critical judgment. In developing this account of embodied reflective judgment I discuss Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) in which she documented and analyzed the trial of Eichmann, as well as well as her other work on responsibility and judgment. I also discuss passages of Theodor W. Adorno's *Guilt and Defense* (2010), which examines the remnants of fascist ideology in postwar group discussions with Germans, and which is part of a larger work titled *Gruppenexperiment* (group experiment) that examines the legacies of Nazi ideology among postwar West Germans, as well as his other works on fascism and capitalism.

This article shows the connection between guilt feelings and judgment and thereby answers the following three questions: First, what mechanisms contribute to a situation where people are unable to distinguish right from wrong and therefore commit crimes that have they have been ordered to commit from officials above them? I explain the ways in which stock phrases and clichés, along with over-identification with the collectivity, lead not only to a massive breakdown in thinking, as Arendt claims (1963, 1973), but also to a massive breakdown in adequate feelings, in particular the ability to feel guilt, which inhibits critical thinking, and as a result embodied reflective judgment is arrested.

Second, what allows those few individuals, even in the face of terror, not to follow orders from above? I develop the idea of *the moment of the limit* to expose the fact that totalitarian power fails to destroy completely thinking and feeling (guilty) and with that embodied reflective judgment and resistance to totalitarian power becomes a possibility. Third, what can we learn from this discussion so that what did happen does not happen again? I develop the idea of subjects-in-outline who confront their guilt feelings that pertain to a nations' past crimes, and that puts in motion their critical judgment. The mechanisms that aim at destroying embodied reflective judgment are prevalent not only in totalitarian contexts. They also crop up in liberal capitalist contexts, which underlines the necessity to identify such mechanisms and think about ways to resist them.

This article is composed of seven sections. The second section, "Judgment and Guilt," explores Arendt and Adorno's views on judgment and guilt feelings. The third section, "Undermining Embodied Reflective Judgment," discusses mechanisms that destroy thinking and feeling. The fourth section, "Resistance to Power," draws on the concept of non-identity to theorize *the moment of the limit* in power. The fifth section, "Working through the Past," discusses the importance of working through the past, instead of trying to master it, in order to live up to guilt feelings. The sixth section, "Subjects-in-outline and Identification," develops the idea of subjects-in-outline to allow us to deal with guilt feelings while preventing our over-identification with the political collectivity. The seventh section, "Conclusion," concludes with some thoughts about the importance of embodied reflective judgment in relation to the rise of the far right.

2 | JUDGMENT AND GUILT

Despite their similar experiences during the Nazi regime and their similar theoretical concerns, Arendt and Adorno do not draw on each other in their works and they are rarely brought into conversation with each other (for an exception, see Rensmann and Gandesha, 2012). One reason for this is their theoretical differences. Whereas Adorno combines psychoanalytic and Marxist thought, Arendt combines phenomenology with a reading of classical texts to understand why the Nazis came to power. Their theoretical differences are also salient in the ways they conceptualize how thinking relates to feeling. For Arendt, feelings exist apart from thinking, belonging to the social or private sphere, and are therefore not political. In particular, she rejects an engagement with collective guilt feelings of post-war-crime generations, which is for her nothing else but an attempt to "escape from the pressure of very present and actual problems into a cheap sentimentality" (Arendt, 1963, p. 251). For her, feelings, in particular guilt feelings, are not relevant for judgment.[1]

Adorno, unlike Arendt, insists that individuals and nations must confront individual and collective guilt feelings to make sure that the horrors of the past are not resurfacing in new forms of violence in democratic regimes. As he puts it, only the person who "experiences [her]/himself as guilty, even of those things for which [s/]he is not guilty in any immediate sense," can overcome the defense/guilt complex (Adorno, 2010, p. 183). Confronting guilt feelings instead of evading them is necessary to take responsibility for past crimes, show solidarity with its victims and their descendants (for example in reparations), and to do everything to prevent the crimes of the past from resurfacing in the present and the future.

Although we find in *Guilt and Defense* scattered remarks on how the failure to confront individual and collective guilt feelings is connected to the failure to make critical judgments, Adorno does not attempt to theorize judgment per se. Adorno is foremost a theorist of non-identity and non-conformity and not a theorist of judgment. While Adorno does not himself make this connection, nevertheless, these concepts are connected to embodied reflective judgment, which I show in this article. Moreover, his ideas are useful for developing an account of embodied reflective judgment, because

he shows us how thinking and feeling are entangled with each other.[2] A rationality, in which feelings are "scorned and rejected as something inferior" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1998, p. 247), leads to a situation where individuals and nations are unable to confront their guilt feelings, which impacts on their ability to think critically, and as a result embodied reflective judgment is diminished or arrested. Since guilt is an unpleasant feeling, people will often use defense mechanisms in order to avoid feeling it. Insofar as individual and collective guilt is a feeling, guilt is embodied. Being appropriately reflective and critical, though, requires that individuals and nations confront guilt feelings instead of suppressing them.

However, these theoretical differences between Arendt and Adorno do not mean that these thinkers are necessarily opposed to each other. Rather, Adorno's clarification of the relationship between thinking and feeling, in particular as it pertains to guilt feelings, may supplement Arendt's theorizing of judgment. Her theorizing of judgment, which implies the ability to think (and feel) from the standpoint of somebody else, and her idea of the banality of evil, supplements Adorno's ideas on the rise of fascism. And as I show in this article, both thinkers, in their own ways, assist me to theorize judgment that is embodied.

Karl Jaspers (1947) offers helpful distinctions to clarify my project.[3] He distinguishes four forms of guilt: first, criminal or legal guilt, which refers to individual perpetrators and is determined by the legal system; second, political guilt, which pertains to the current and past deeds of statesmen and women and the citizenry, for which all citizens become co-responsible; third, moral guilt, which pertains to people who support and cooperate with a criminal regime and which is determined by one's own conscience; fourth, metaphysical guilt, which refers to the guilt of inactively standing by when crimes are committed that we could have prevented. In my elaborations of embodied reflective judgment I am mainly concerned with legal, moral, and political guilt.

While legal or moral guilt cannot be inherited or transferred, political guilt can be passed on to future generations. Lars Rensmann does acknowledge intergenerational collective guilt feelings, but he appears to reject the notion that guilt per se is passed on, because one cannot be guilty of crimes committed by the collectivity before one is born (Rensmann, 2004, p. 170). The problem, though, is that it is not clear that it would make sense to have such intergenerational collective guilt feelings if upon reflection one realizes that one is not guilty in a political sense. That is, what would then ground the appropriateness of the guilt feelings? The feelings might not end up being anything more than what Arendt suspected was cheap sentimentality. In this article the notion of collective guilt feelings is grounded in the idea of political guilt. Only political guilt can be collective, and as such it is the only kind of guilt that can persist in an intergenerational form. Collective (or political) guilt signifies that individually experienced guilt feelings are related to group membership, which underlines the ways in which the personal feeling of guilt is connected to the public realm of politics. However, differences between individual and collective guilt are not clear-cut. The defensive mechanisms with which individual perpetrators aim to fend off their legal and moral guilt often parallel the mechanisms that post-war-crime generations use to fend off their political guilt. Furthermore, when individual perpetrators manage to evade their legal and moral guilt it often occurs in the context of a collectivity where such evasion is supported. Finally, the collective guilt of post-war-crime generations is connected to individual guilt, insofar as the collective is composed of individuals.

3 | UNDERMINING EMBODIED REFLECTIVE JUDGMENT

What are some of the mechanisms that contribute to a situation where people are unable to distinguish right from wrong, and therefore commit crimes ordered from above? Both Arendt and Adorno explain two such mechanisms: first, the prevalence and use of a particular form of objective language, namely stock phrases, clichés, and code names; and second, an over-identification with the collectivity. However, whereas Arendt focuses on showing how such mechanisms lead to a breakdown in thinking, Adorno allows me to show that such mechanisms also lead to a breakdown in feeling, and a combination of the two arrests embodied reflective judgment.

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt comes to the conclusion that totalitarianism does not produce evil monsters. Rather, with Eichmann we find a new type of criminal, "who commits [her/]his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for [her/]him to know or to *feel* that [s/]he is doing wrong" (Arendt, 1963, p. 276, my emphasis).

Whereas this quote is often used to show that Eichmann could not know that he was doing wrong, because of his inability to think, what is frequently left out is that Arendt acknowledges in this citation that he was also not able to feel that his actions were wrong. However, in Arendt's own expositions of the mechanisms that produce the banality of evil,[4] she merely exposes the ways in which totalitarianism promotes a massive breakdown in thinking, and never further develops her own hint that judgment is also dependent upon adequate feelings, and that both—the breakdown in thinking and feeling—produce a situation where people commit crimes ordered from above.[5]

As an example, the effect of the prescribed code names for Nazi mass killings, such as the final solution (*Endlösung*), evacuation (*Aussiedlung*), special treatment (*Sonderbehandlung*), or euthenasia (*Gnadentod*), was not "to keep these people ignorant of what they were doing, but to prevent them from equating it with the old, 'normal' knowledge of murder and lies" (Arendt, 1963, p. 86). The effect of code names was not only to prevent people from adequate knowledge (thinking) about the wrongness of their actions, as Arendt suggests. Code names were also effective in preventing people from feeling that what they did was wrong.

As the psychologist Albert Bandura points out, code names, stock phrases (*Redensarten*), and clichés lend themselves to "euphemistic labeling" (Bandura, 1999). Euphemistic labeling is a process by which new words and phrases are invented and substituted for the old ones that connote harmful behavior. Insofar as the new words and phrases lack the emotional connotations associated with the old ones, language is sanitized of its potential to indicate harm or wrongdoing. In other words, if the Nazis had not sanitized language and called the final solution what it was—mass murder—it could have triggered a feeling that what the Nazis did was wrong, which could have prompted reflection that we ought to do everything to prevent their actions instead of passively or actively supporting them.

However, for Arendt, the problem with Eichmann's use of stock phrases and clichés is that it led to a breakdown in his thinking. As she explains, Eichmann's "inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think, namely to think from the standpoint of someone else" (Arendt 1963, p. 49). Here we find the two core elements of Arendt's theory of judgment. First, as she puts it in the *Life of the Mind*, Eichmann was not stupid, but thoughtless, which can arise in the most intelligent people (Arendt, 1973, p. 177). Second, as she details in her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, judgment implies the ability to think from the standpoint of someone else, by imagining ourselves in that person's position (Arendt, 1996).

As an example, in the so-called Vienna episode, Eichmann explains that because the Jews "desired" to emigrate and the Nazis' desired to see the Reich *judenrein* (free of Jews), he could "do justice" to both parties. Eichmann kept on repeating that same cliché, although he admitted at a later point that since "the times have changed" the Jews might not be too happy about his attempt to do justice (Arendt, 1963, p. 48). Eichmann was clearly unable to think from the standpoint of the Jews. However, he was also unable to feel from their standpoint.[6] In this example we can see how feeling and thinking are interconnected, insofar as Eichmann's inability to feel from the standpoint of the Jews hindered his ability to understand (think) that his actions had nothing to do with justice, but led to the horror of forced emigrations, expropriations, and mass exterminations.

Although Arendt separates thinking from feeling in her theorizing of judgment, she provides hints in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* of how totalitarianism not only leads to a breakdown in thinking but also a breakdown in feelings—for example in her repeated (and surprised) assertion that Eichmann, instead of feeling horror at what the Nazis and he himself did, felt elated or even joyful. Let us take, as an example, the Storfer episode. Storfer, a representative of the Jewish community imprisoned in Auschwitz, asked to see Eichmann in the hope of obtaining his help. At his visit in Auschwitz, Eichmann told Storfer that that he was unable to do anything to help him out. However, during the trial Eichmann pointed out "that it was a *great inner joy* to me that I could at least see that man with whom I had worked for so many long years, and that we could speak with each other" (Arendt, 1963, p. 50, my emphasis).

Here we are not only confronted with a massive breakdown in thinking, as Arendt would argue, but also a massive breakdown in adequate feelings. As a result, instead of feeling guilt that his own actions contributed to the horror of Auschwitz and the suffering of Storfer, all we find is Eichmann's "great inner joy" that he could meet and speak with his "friend." His breakdown in adequate feelings (such as guilt) did not allow him to reflect (think) critically upon avenues to help Storfer, and as a result of the absence of embodied reflective judgment, "six weeks after this normal human encounter, Storfer was dead—not gassed, apparently, but shot" (Arendt, 1963, p. 51).

Adorno further explains how his discussants use stock phrases and clichés to evade feelings of guilt, and the effects of such an evasion upon judgment. As he puts it:

> *when the sore spots of guilt are touched on, it becomes especially clear how many of the respondents avail themselves, almost mechanically, of a ready-made stock of arguments, such that their individual judgment seems to play only a secondary role: that of a principle of selection from within that stock" (Adorno, 2010, p. 51)*

Whereas Arendt foregrounds the ways in which clichés and stock-phrases undermine thinking, Adorno creates room for me to show that objective language is also effective in leading to a breakdown in feeling.

Clichés and ready-made stock arguments were used by the discussants to avoid having to "touch the sore spot" of individual and collective guilt feelings, which impacted upon their ability to make critical judgments. As an example, in the discussions the cliché of "the Jew as a profiteer" prevailed. Whereas the Germans who sold items on the black market in postwar Germany "wanted only to live", the Jews, according to the discussants, only "wanted to get rich" (Adorno, 2010, p. 108). Here clichéd thinking served to fend off guilt feelings, which prevented critical reflection on the situation of Jews in postwar Germany. As a result, the possibility of embodied reflective judgment was foreclosed. Insofar as the ability to confront one's guilt feelings can trigger one to think in different terms about what one does, clichés were used to keep such feelings at bay and embodied reflective judgment was foreclosed, which underlines the ways in which feeling and thinking are interconnected in judgment.

However, not all feelings support embodied reflective judgment. The second mechanism, which both Adorno and Arendt elaborate, is what I call here over-identification with the collectivity. The Nazis skillfully manipulated certain feelings, particularly feelings of powerlessness, for their own ends. As Adorno puts it, over-identification with the Nazi collectivity "fulfilled the collective fantasies of power harbored by those people who, individually had no power and who indeed could feel any self-worth at all only by virtue of such collective power" (Adorno, 2010, p. 219).

Furthermore, over-identification allowed Germans to

> *feel so strong and at the same time so protected against everything coming from the outside that their rationality is switched off. One does not even need to discuss it or even think at all anymore. The judgment of the group usurps the judgment of reason" (Adorno, 2010, p. 83).*

Instead of feeling guilt and unease at the crimes of the collectivity, over-identification with the group allowed one to feel worthy and powerful. As a result, critical reflection and, with that, embodied reflective judgment remained absent.

Also, Arendt explains the ways in which over-identification with the "grandiose" Nazi collectivity shut off Eichmann's ability to make critical judgments. Before the Wannensee conference, where the details of the mass murder of millions of Jews and other vulnerable groups were discussed by the most prominent people of the Third Reich, Eichmann had some doubts about "such a bloody solution through violence." However, when he saw that these prominent people supported the solution, he over-identified with them and any such doubts vanished. "At that moment," as he puts it, "I sensed a kind of Pontius Pilate feeling, for I felt free of all guilt" (Arendt, 1963, p. 114). Here over-identification with the collectivity destroyed the non-identical remainder in Eichmann—his feelings of doubt and guilt at the "bloody solution through violence." As a result, his capacity to reflect upon the collectivity and its actions vanished, and for the first time he fully complied with the Nazis.

4 | RESISTANCE TO POWER

What allows the few individuals, even in the face of terror, *not* to follow orders from above? This question highlights the tension between the irreducible individuality of people even in the face of a totalitarian power on the one hand and the reduction of people to cogs in such societies on the other. In this section I develop the idea of *the moment of the limit* in power as a means to engage creatively with this tension. In this moment power fails to destroy thinking and feeling completely, and embodied reflective judgment becomes a possibility. Both Adorno and Arendt provide theoretical concepts that assist me to theorize *the moment of the limit*.

Arendt introduces the story of Anton Schmidt, a German sergeant, who helped the Jewish partisans by supplying them with forged papers and military trucks without asking for money. The lesson that Arendt draws from this is

> *that under conditions of terror most people will comply but some people will not, just as the lesson of the countries to which the Final Solution was proposed is that "it could happen" in most places but it did not happen everywhere. (Arendt, 1963, p. 233)*

However, Arendt does not have an answer to why, even under conditions of terror, some people will not comply and why the Nazi disaster did not happen everywhere.

The concept of non-identity coined by Adorno allows us to answer this question. In the introduction of *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno explains that "The name of dialectics says no more than that objects do not go into concepts without leaving a remainder" (Adorno, 1973, p. 5). Translated to the topic of non-compliance during the Nazi regime, this means that although totalitarian power aims at destroying fully thinking and feeling and, with that, embodied reflective judgment, it fails to do so completely, because it leaves a remainder, the moment of non-identity, which I call *the moment of the limit*. In this moment, the potentiality of individuals, such as Anton Schmidt, who did not follow orders from above, even in the face of terror, emerges.

The moment of non-identity is central to grasp the ways in which thinking and feeling are interconnected. Dialectical thinking is a thinking that embraces the moment of non-identity, in contrast to identity thinking, which aims to discard non-identity. However, non-identity also refers to feeling. In the section of *Negative Dialectics* entitled "Suffering Physical," Adorno argues that the moving force behind dialectical thinking is a set of physical impulses—pain and negativity. Physical impulses allow us to resist the negative consequences of identity thinking: "The physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different" (Adorno, 1973, p. 203).

At times when subjectivity and mental reflection is about to vanish, this material element of morality, the bodily moment of abhorrence, an "unbearable physical agony" at what happened during the Nazi regime, remains our only hope for arranging our thoughts and actions in such a way to prevent the repetition of Auschwitz. Adorno refers to this as the moral addendum, which is based on the historical experience of suffering, and goes "beyond the conscious sphere to which it belongs just the same" (Adorno, 1973, p. 228). It is experienced as a jolt (*Ruck*), an abrupt impulse that tells us that the world is wrong and that things should be different.

Feminist thinkers have also pointed at the connection between knowledge and suffering. Paula Moya, as an example, elaborates on the idea of "la facultad", which shows that theoretical insight is preceded "by fear, alienation, and pain. All too often, nonwhite women know that something is wrong: we feel it in our gut, in our spine, in our neck" (Moya, 2010, p. 476). However, the feeling that something is wrong does not necessarily provide an insight into the source of that wrong. Rather, since thinking and feeling are enmeshed, the gut feeling that there is something wrong needs at the same time critical reflection to generate knowledge about oppressive social structures.[7]

Although the feeling of suffering and pain is a subjective experience, it is not merely subjective. As Adorno puts it in *Negative Dialectics*, "the need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth. For suffering is objectively that weighs upon the subject; its most subjective experience, its expression, is objectively conveyed" (Adorno, 1973, pp. 17–18). The reason that subjective suffering is objectively conveyed is that such suffering is the result of objective power structures.

While lending a voice to such suffering may be the condition of all truth, Adorno does not mean to imply that feelings of suffering establish a "higher truth". As Renée Heberle explains, lending suffering a voice

> *is an imperative if we are to aspire to live in a world free of suffering. However, that experience in itself is subject to interpretation and will take on a life beyond the intention, will, or control of the teller. (Heberle, 2006, p. 230)*

Embodied reflective judgment acknowledges that the feeling that something is wrong, which suffering generates, is important to prompt critical reflection.

However, the idea of embodied reflective judgment does not proclaim a whole theory of judgment that tells us what is right or wrong once and for all. Such judgment merely eradicates the moment of non-identity and with that the inadequacies and contradictions in judgment itself, and leads to what Adorno called in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* "paranoid

judgment" (Adorno, 1998, p. 203). The idea of embodied reflective judgment acknowledges that any judgment remains necessarily non-whole.

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, we find one instance where a physical moment of suffering provided Eichmann with the possibility of self-reflection. Upon learning of the secret command that Jews and Gypsies were to be physically exterminated, he was ordered to examine the killing capacity of the camps. Having done so left in him "a certain inner trembling" (Arendt, 1963, p. 87). Perhaps this physical moment of inner trembling was the only moment where we can imagine the possibility of another Eichmann who did not comply. This example shows that feelings, while necessary, are not sufficient for embodied reflective judgment. The Nazis extinguished any such feeling for the victims by offering him over-identification with the grandiose Nazi collectivity at the Wannensee conference, which took place after this incident and which was the decisive moment when Eichmann fully complied.

Arendt's concept of the "wind of thought" provides another resource to theorize *the moment of the limit*. Language freezes thinking into inflexible concepts. As a result, we fail to examine the prescribed meanings of concepts and rules of conduct. However, the wind of thought has the capacity to unfreeze inflexible concepts. "When we try to define them, they get slippery," Arendt explains and continues, "when we talk about their meaning, nothing stays put anymore, everything begins to move" (Arendt, 2003a, p. 171). Moreover, the wind of thought has a "liberating effect on another human faculty, the faculty of judgment. . . . It is the faculty to judge particulars without subsuming them under those general rules" (Arendt, 2003a, pp. 188–189).

The wind of thought allows us to abstain from subsuming particular groups of people under a general concept, and instead perceive them in their particularity. Arendt's wind of thought parallels Adorno's concept of dialectical thinking. In identity thinking, the thinking subject aims to suppress non-identity, which freezes language into inflexible concepts. The particular is subsumed under the universal, which "liquidate(s) the particular" (Adorno, 1973, p. 265).[8] In contrast, in dialectical thinking, the thinking subject embraces the moment of non-identity, by which the universal abides by the particular instead of eradicating it, which is necessary to unfreeze frozen concepts.

However, whereas Arendt foregrounds thinking in her idea of the wind of thought, Adorno's notion of dialectical thinking, via non-identity, refers also to feelings. The moment of non-identity allows one to feel guilty, which can initiate a process of self-reflection that is necessary to examine and challenge identity thinking. Nonetheless, Arendt notes that when the wind of thought touches us, established meanings of frozen concepts can be destroyed. In other words, once we are touched by the suffering of the victims in the Nazi camps, we are also in a position to reflect critically upon how such suffering was brought on the world stage. Moreover, once we are touched we can also confront collective guilt feelings, which is a precondition for taking responsibility for their suffering—such as making reparations—to do everything possible to make sure that such crimes are not repeated.

5 | WORKING THROUGH THE PAST

> *The only one who is free from neurotic feelings of guilt and is capable of overcoming the whole complex is the one who experiences [herself/]himself as guilty, even of those things for which [s/]he is not guilty in any immediate sense. (Adorno, 2010, p. 183)*

What can we learn from this discussion that may contribute to making sure that what happened does not happen again? Adorno considers that working through the past (*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*) is central for preventing the abdication of reflective judgment. He distinguishes "working through the past" from "mastering of the past" (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), an approach that merely closes the books on the past, with the attempt to forget what has happened (Adorno, 2010, p. 216). Arendt, too, argues that mastering or undoing the past is impossible in the face of the horrors of the Nazi regime and she criticizes those who attempt to forget the negative aspects of the past, by acting as if the Nazi regime never existed.

Both thinkers argue that we need to work through the past instead of mastering the past. However, Adorno suggests that working through the past necessitates that post-war-crime generations live up to their guilt feelings, which

are the result of crimes committed by prior generations. In contrast, Arendt rejects such an engagement, because for her it leads to pardoning individual perpetrators, which she supports with her claim that "where all are guilty, nobody in the last analysis can be judged" (Arendt, 1994, p. 150). Arendt limits guilt to the doers of deeds who can be held personally responsible (which corresponds to Jaspers' form of the criminal guilt that is determined by the courts). However, as Jaspers points out, there are different forms of guilt, and collective guilt does not excuse the guilt of the individual, because one can be guilty in other senses, for example one can be guilty both in a political and in a criminal sense. Moreover, insofar as individuals are formed into collectivities by current and past political events, which imprint on their ways of life (which in turn affects political events), the deeds of our forebears concern us and politics today (Jaspers, 1947, p. 77).

Although Arendt rejects the concept of collective guilt, she asserts that a collectivity can be held responsible in political terms, which implies two conditions: (a) that we are responsible for what we have not done; and (b) that the reason for our responsibility is our membership in a political collectivity (such as a nation), which no voluntary action of ours can dissolve. As a member of a political community, I am responsible for its actions or the things done by individuals in the name of the political community (Arendt, 2003b, p. 149). Iris Marion Young is critical of Arendt's idea of collective responsibility, stating, "It is a mystification to say that people bear responsibility simply because they are members of a political community, and not because of anything at all that they have done or not done" (Young, 2013, p. 79).

I suggest that the mystification is not so much bearing responsibility for something one has not done, as Young argues. Rather, the problem is that Arendt separates collective guilt from collective responsibility. A reason for this is her favoring of the abstract concept of responsibility, which she believes pertains to the public realm and thinking, and to dismiss the "sentimental" concept of guilt, which she believes pertains to feelings and the private realm.[9] This separation does not allow us to see how guilt and responsibility are intrinsically connected. Post-war-crime generations take responsibility for the consequences of what prior generations did only if they feel collective guilt for such deeds. Furthermore, taking Jaspers' distinctions into account, one can have guilt feelings about what one's forebears did without being guilty in a criminal, juridical or moral sense. Post-war-crime generations are not guilty in a criminal or moral sense, because they were not present during the Nazi regime.

However, they are guilty in a political sense and it is this kind of guilt they must reckon with to take responsibility for the consequences of the crimes of their forebears. As Jaspers points out, "only consciousness of guilt leads to the consciousness of solidarity and co-responsibility without which there can be no liberty. . . . Political liberty begins with the majority of individuals in a people feeling jointly liable for the politics of their community" (Jaspers, 1947, pp. 120–21). As Adorno also shows those postwar Germans who displayed the most defense mechanisms in coming to terms with their guilt feelings were also those who denied any responsibility, showed no sympathy for the victims of crimes, and rejected any solidarity and offers of compensation to the victims of the Nazi crimes (Adorno, 2010).

Arendt herself experienced the absence of sympathy with the suffering that her family endured during the Nazi regime, when she revealed to Germans she encountered in a train compartment that she was a German Jew:

> *This is usually followed by a little embarrassed pause; and then comes—not a personal question, such as "Where did you go after you left Germany?"; no sign of sympathy, such as "What happened to your family?"—but a deluge of stories how Germans have suffered (true enough, of course, but beside the point); and if the object of this little experiment happens to be educated and intelligent, he will proceed to draw up a balance sheet between German suffering and the suffering of others." (Arendt, 1950, p. 345)*

Adorno shows us that this comparison between German suffering and the suffering of others is a defense mechanism, which he calls a balance sheet of guilt (*Aufrechnung der Schuldkonten*). This defense mechanism allows one to rationalize feelings of guilt as a means to fend them off and to avoid self-reflection, though in an irrational way:

> *As though Dresden compensated for Auschwitz. Drawing up such calculations, the haste to produce counter-arguments in order to exempt oneself from self-reflection, already contain something inhuman, and military*

> *actions in the war… are scarcely comparable to the administrative murder of millions of innocent people. (Adorno, 2010, p. 214)*

Although we would expect Arendt's story to elicit a feeling of sympathy from the listener, the response is rather one of fending off feelings of guilt for what happened. A failure to deal with such feelings leads us to use defensive mechanisms, such as making a balance sheet of guilt. Instead of feeling sympathy for victims and their families, the listener tries to draw sympathy for the perpetrators and their families, in rather irrational ways. Here we are confronted with both the inability to show sympathy for the victims, and an inability to reflect critically upon one's past and present.

Moreover, a failure to deal with guilt feelings generates what Adorno calls a "neurotic relation to the past," which leads to "defensive postures where one is not attacked, intense affects where they are hardly warranted by the situation, and absence of affect in face of the gravest matters" (Adorno, 2010, p. 214). The Germans in the above example exposed their neurotic relation to the past, in their strong defensive posture when encountering a German Jew who did not attack them. At the same time, such a neurotic relation revealed itself in the absence of any affect, expressed in their lack of sympathy at what happened to Arendt's family during the Nazi regime. This example demonstrates that we can take responsibility only for the crimes of our forebears if we deal with political guilt instead of evading it.

6 | THE SUBJECT-IN-OUTLINE AND THE POLITICAL COLLECTIVITY

To understand Arendt and Adorno's different views on guilt it is important to examine their different views on the concept of the subject. Adorno argues that a working through the past necessitates a turn "toward the subject, the reinforcement of a person's self-consciousness and hence also of [her/]his self" (Adorno, 2010, p. 226). In contrast, for Arendt, working through the past necessitates a turn away from the self towards the world. For her, "what is in the center of consideration is not the self," but a concern with "how things stand in the world" (Arendt, 2003b, p. 155).

Whereas Adorno defends the reinforcement of the self, which suggests that confronting guilt necessitates the creation of a strong self,[10] Arendt defends a turning away from the subject and his/her guilt feelings. In contrast to these thinkers, I suggest that we must rethink the idea of the subject as a subject-in-outline to address guilt adequately. A subject-in-outline identifies with a collectivity (such as nation or another political collectivity), because the ability to feel collective guilt about the crimes the nation perpetuated requires some level of identification. As an example, I can feel political guilt for the crimes Austria committed during the Nazi regime only if I identify to some extent with the collectivity of Austria. At the same time, there is the danger of over-identification with the collectivity. If I am over-identified with the collectivity, I discard the moment of non-identity, which leads me to harbor also strong feelings for the fatherland. With that, any attempts to shed light upon the topic of collective guilt, which implies a critique on the collectivity, becomes a threat to my own identity, because it is wholly bound up with the collectivity. As a result, I am more prone to use defensive mechanisms whenever the topic of collective guilt arises. This inability to feel collective guilt also hampers my ability to think critically about the deeds of the collectivity, and with that embodied reflective judgment becomes difficult if not impossible.

However, also a refusal to identify with the collectivity is problematic, insofar as such refusals lead to an absence of feelings for the collectivity, and can be used to avoid having to confront collective guilt. As an example, if I identify as a European instead of an Austrian, I do not have to confront collective guilt feelings about past crimes perpetuated by the collectivity, and with that also my ability to think critically about such past is reduced, and thus embodied reflective judgment becomes difficult if not impossible. As a result of both situations (over-identification with the collectivity and a refusal to identify), I am less likely to take responsibility for the crimes perpetuated by the collectivity, show solidarity with the victims, and make sure that such crimes are not repeated.

A way to deal with these situations is the idea of a subject-in-outline, which moves within the tension of a certain level of identification with the collectivity without wholly identifying with it. A certain level of identification with the collectivity allows one to feel collective guilt for the crimes perpetuated by the collectivity. But since my identity is not wholly wrapped up with the collectivity, critique of and reflection upon what the collectivity did does not become a

threat to my identity, and as such I am less likely to engage in defensive mechanisms to fend off such guilt feelings. I am then in a better position to engage constructively with such critique and the guilt feelings it generates. As a result, I am better able to take responsibility, show solidarity with victims and their claims for reparations and make sure that what happened then does not happen again. Since the subject-in-outline is in a better position to confront collective guilt feelings, she is also more likely to think critically, and embodied reflective judgment becomes a possibility, which underlines the ways in which the idea of the subject-in-outline is important for embodied reflective judgment.

The idea of a subject-in-outline challenges feminist thinkers who are skeptical about introducing suffering as central for political and feminist theorizing. Insofar as my idea of the subject-in-outline acknowledges the importance of the moment of non-identity, my focus upon suffering for critical reflection does not, as Wendy Brown thinks, imprison subjects in victim identities (Brown, 1995, p. 27). Insofar as the political subject-in-outline acknowledges the moment of non-identity in her own identity, she acknowledges that identification with a collectivity does not generate a whole subject or identity, because the collectivity is not whole itself. Instead she realizes that whenever she aims to eradicate the moment of non-identity and over-identifies with a collectivity, resolving guilt feelings and working through the past becomes difficult or impossible.

My idea of a subject-in-outline also challenges the concern of feminist thinkers such as Lois McNay, who embrace the idea of suffering for political and feminist theorizing, but are concerned that the "fetish of non-identity" leads to an abstract theorizing about disembodied subjects (McNay, 2010). However, since non-identity not only refers to thinking (in dialectical thinking), but also to the bodily moment of feeling, it leads to a theorizing of embodied subjects-in-outline, who are in a better position than subjects wholly, or not at all, identified with the collectivity to feel from the standpoint of (prospective) victims. Moreover, such subjects are also in a better position to resist identity thinking, which subsumes groups of people under rigid concepts, such as the Jew or the Gypsy and then brutally identifies people with the stereotypes these concepts imply.

As Adorno shows us, Germans who identified strongly with Germany as a collectivity displayed more defense mechanisms in coming to terms with guilt feelings (Adorno, 2010, p. 226). In contrast, Germans who identified less with the German collectivity, were less defensive and thus in a better position to resolve guilt feelings. Those less identified are thus in a position to "look guilt in the eye" and with that "their thinking renounces the construction of rigid group images" (Adorno, 2010, p. 170). Since the identity of these discussants remains an outline they were in a position to both feel collective guilt and respond with dialectical thinking, and as a result they were able to renounce rigid group images and reject anti-Semitic generalizations and racial theory. In other words, embodied reflective judgment became a possibility for them. As a result they could display a concern for the victims of the Nazi regime, and accept responsibility.

Arendt's idea of storytelling, which has some parallels with Adorno's concept of dialectical thinking, allows me to theorize further the idea of the subject-in-outline as best suited for embodied reflective judgment.[11] For Arendt, "storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it" (Arendt, 1968a, p. 105). Defining meaning once and for all would be a confirmation of identity thinking, but storytelling is an example of dialectal thinking as the story can be reworked over time.

If we attempt to tell a conclusive story, and with that achieve a whole identity, then one's abilities to feel guilt and be reflective are diminished, as we are led to ignore thoughts and feelings that challenge that story and identity. In storytelling and dialectical thinking, however, embracing non-identity allows us to narrate a story that is open for further reinterpretation. The outcome of such storytelling is a subject-in-outline who is in a position to work through the past and resolve guilt feelings, because her identity is not rigidly attached to one particular story (such as the story of a nation). This allows us to be critical of the stories a nation tells about itself, especially since there is a tendency in such stories to highlight its achievements while ignoring its atrocities.

Furthermore, in narrating a story the storyteller "can re-experience what has been done in the way of suffering" (Arendt, 1968a, p. 20). Through the story, a meaning is revealed about suffering which would otherwise "remain an unbearable sequence of sheer happenings" (Arendt, 1968a, p. 104). Insofar as Arendt's idea of storytelling exposes the relevance of suffering, it is similar to Adorno's view that non-identity refers to suffering and the feeling that things should be different. Although the idea of the subject-in-outline is grounded in the somatic it is not divorced from

thinking. Being able to work through the suffering can prompt critical reflection about the source of that suffering, which is helpful in unfreezing historical narratives that attempt to cover up crimes committed by the political collectivity.

The subject-in-outline, though, does not aim to tell a conclusive story about the past, as that would run counter to embracing the moment of non-identity. Rather, as Arendt puts it, the subject-in-outline

> *does not master anything once and for all. Rather, as long as the meaning of the events remains alive—and this meaning can persist for very long periods of time—"mastering of the past" can take the form of ever-recurrent narration. (Arendt, 1968a, p. 21)*

Arendt's idea of an ever-recurrent narration coincides with my idea about how a subject-in-outline does not aim at a conclusive story. A subject-in-outline achieves a working through the past, which is central to making sure that what happened does not happen again.

7 | CONCLUSION

In this article I have shown how thinking and feeling are interconnected in embodied reflective judgment. I have explained that we must confront individual and collective guilt feelings to be in a position to feel from the standpoint of victims and show solidarity with them, and reflect critically upon what we must do to repair past crimes and make sure that they are not repeated. It is also important to take steps to create a more just society to prevent related kinds of injustices from happening in the first place. Furthermore, I have exposed the ways in which guilt feelings are connected with responsibility, insofar as only a confrontation with such feelings allows us to take responsibility for the crimes of our forebears. Insofar as this article explains the ways in which critical judgment and responsibility depend upon resolving guilt feelings, it challenges the seemingly abstract character of these concepts and the assertion that these concepts belong solely to the public sphere. Furthermore, this article shows that we must confront guilt to ensure critical judgment and take responsibility, which exposes the political character of dealing with guilt feelings and challenges an understanding of guilt as belonging merely to the private, personal, and apolitical sphere.

However, I do not argue that all feelings advance embodied reflective judgment. Rather, it is particular feelings, namely guilt feelings, that we must confront to secure critical judgment and responsibility. If such feelings are cast aside and people resort to defensive mechanisms then we are confronted with a breakdown of adequate feelings, where people's affects are either too intense or altogether absent in the face of the gravest matters. Such inadequate affect can be easily manipulated by political forces for their own purposes.

Furthermore, today, as the failure of liberal capitalism becomes more evident, insofar as it does not allow a decent life or even the bare necessities for most people, particular feelings are resurfacing—feelings of powerlessness and anger at being cheated by liberal talk of freedom and equality. Like the Nazis, the far right has exploited with great skill the feelings that are the result of the contradiction of the later liberal society that on the one side the individual is responsible for herself and her material destiny, and on the other hand she is mostly rarely capable of such responsibility in reality. By branding certain groups via identity thinking as those who are responsible for our misery (today, in particular, immigrants and migrants), the far right, much like the Nazis, has re-introduced a bourgeois racism, which allow people's anger to be deflected onto these branded groups.

This displacement of feelings conveniently distracts attention away from those who are in fact responsible for people's misery, and conceals their domination in capitalist production. Furthermore, much like the Nazis, the far right has offered a strong collectivity that people can identify with to feel strong (or great!) again and get rid of their feelings of powerlessness. Unresolved collective guilt feelings (and most political collectivities are struggling with dark pasts) can assist such political groups to manipulate peoples' feelings effectively. Insofar as a failure to deal with guilt feelings contributes to our inability to feel from the standpoint of the prospective victim, the displacement of anger onto branded groups falls on fertile ground.

Here it is also important to remember that we cannot rely on guilt feelings alone to generate critical judgments, because guilt feelings without reflection may lead only to defensive mechanisms, which makes us want to master the past rather than working through it. We can achieve working through the past only though critical reflection upon the deeds of our forebears who have brought about our guilt feelings. Embodied reflective judgment needs us to live up to guilt feelings, which entails critical reflection. Such reflection is not divorced from feelings, insofar as critical reflection upon the horrors of the political collectivity's past, which is enmeshed with our own past, is painful. However, a confrontation with this past and the pain it generates is necessary for us to take responsibility for the crimes perpetuated by our forebears, show solidarity with the victims of crimes and their descendants, and to think constructively about how to avoid repeating such crimes. Both Adorno and Arendt are helpful in theorizing embodied reflective judgment as it pertains to guilt, which makes them indispensable for dealing with the political disasters we face today.

NOTES

[1] The secondary literature that draws on Arendt to theorize judgment also focuses on the ways she connects thinking to judgment. See, for example, Benhabib (2010) and Zerilli (2012, pp. 6–31), with some authors pointing out that Arendt's one-sided focus on thinking at the expense of emotion leads to problems in her conception of judgment. See Reeves (2009, pp. 137–164) and Marso (2012, pp. 165–193, 180).

[2] In particular, Adorno is critical of the form reason takes on under capitalism and which rigidifies in totalitarianism, which he calls instrumental rationality. Instrumental rationality is a form of identity thinking that aims to suppress the moment of non-identity—the bodily moment of thinking, and thereby disconnects thinking and feeling. His critique on rationality does not mean that he does away with thinking and rationality altogether. Rather, he makes clear that we need to think more, not less, to break the power of instrumental rationality. This kind of thinking, instead of suppressing it, embraces the moment of non-identity.

[3] Although there are many parallels between Jasper's *The Question of German Guilt* and Adorno's *Guilt and Defense*, particularly in their elaboration of defensive mechanisms, I do not attempt to bring Jaspers in systematic conversation with Arendt and Adorno, as this would explode the scope of this article.

[4] In the *Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt uses the notion of radical evil to stress that one of the most dangerous aspects of totalitarianism is that it treats humans as superfluous and expendable (Arendt, 1968b). In *Eichmann in Jerusalem* she coins the notion of the banality of evil to explain that evil is banal not because it is unimportant, but because it is the result of a massive breakdown in thinking.

[5] The secondary literature on Arendt that refers to this passage reiterates Arendt's own focus upon thinking (see Fray, 2009, p. 28).

[6] Feminist thinkers, such as Martha Nussbaum (1997, p. 90), have defined empathy as the process by which one feels one's way into another person's lived experience. In this article I show that feeling from the standpoint of the other is central for embodied reflective judgment. If I cannot feel from the standpoint of the other, what happens to the other has no impact on me.

[7] For Moya (2010) such critical reflection is advanced though education or consciousness-raising groups.

[8] For both thinkers Kant's contrast between determinant judgment (starting with universals and subsuming particulars under them) and reflective judgment (starting with particulars and trying to determine what the universal would be) is relevant.

[9] There is an extensive body of literature that critiques the public/private split in Arendt. See Pitkin (1998) and Canovan (1974).

[10] We find such over-identification with the German collectivity at times in Jasper's elaboration of Germanness that allows us to feel political guilt (Jaspers, 1947, pp. 79–81).

[11] Lisa Dish (1994, p. 109) describes Arendt's use of storytelling as critical thinking.

REFERENCES

Adorno, T. W. (1973). *Negative dialectics* (E. B. Ashton, Trans). New York: Continuum.

Adorno, T. W. (1998). Elements of anti-Semitism: Limits of enlightenment. In M. Horkheimer & T. W. Adorno (Eds.). *Dialectic of enlightenment* (pp. 168–208) (J. Cumming, Trans.). New York: Continuum.

Adorno, T. W. (2010). *Guilt and defense: On the legacies of national socialism in postwar Germany* (J. Olick & A. Perrin, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Arendt, H. (1950). The aftermath of Nazi rule: Report from Germany. *American Jewish Magazine Commentary*, *10*. 342–353.

Arendt, H. (1963). Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil. New York: Viking.

Arendt, H. (1968a). *Men in dark times*. San Diego, CA: Harvest.

Arendt, H. (1968b). *The origins of totalitarianism*. San Diego, CA: Harvest.

Arendt, H. (1973). *The life of the mind* (M. McCarthy, Ed.). San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Arendt, H. (1994). Organized guilt and universal responsibility. In H. Arendt *Articles in understanding: Formation, exile, and totalitarianism* (pp. 146–156). New York: Random House.

Arendt, H. (1996). *Lectures on Kant's political philosophy* (R. Beiner, Ed.). Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.

Arendt, H. (2003a). Thinking and moral considerations. In J. Kohn (Ed.) *Responsibility and judgment* (pp. 159–189). New York: Schocken Books.

Arendt, H. (2003b). Collective responsibility. In J. Kohn (Ed.) *Responsibility and judgment* (pp. 147–158). New York: Schocken Books.

Bandura, A. (1999). Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *3*, 193–209.

Benhabib, S. (2010). *Politics in dark times: Encounters with Hannah Arendt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, W. (1995). *States of injury: Power and freedom in late modernity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Canovan, M. (1974). *The political thought of Hannah Arendt. Men in dark times*. San Diego, CA: Harvest Jovanovich Press.

Dish, L. J. (1994). *Hannah Arendt and the limits of philosophy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Fray, K. (2009). *Arendt: A guide for the perplexed*. London: Continuum.

Heberle, R. (2006). Living with negative dialectics. In R. Heberle (Ed.) *Feminist interpretations of Theodor Adorno* (pp. 217–231). University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. W. (1998). *Dialectic of enlightenment* (J. Cumming, Trans.). New York: Continuum Press.

Jaspers, K. (1947). *The question of German guilt* (E.B. Ashton, Trans.). New York: Dial Press.

McNay, L. (2010). Feminism and post-identity politics: The problem of agency. *Constellations*, *17*, 515–525.

Marso, L. J. (2012). Simone De Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt: Judgments in dark times. *Political Theory*, *40*, 165–193.

Moya, P. (2010). Chicana feminism and postmodernist theory. In C. McCann & S. Kim (Eds.), *Feminist theory reader: Local and global perspectives* (pp. 463–481) (2nd Ed.). London: Routledge.

Nussbaum, M. (1997). *Cultivating humanity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Pitkin, H. (1998). *The attack of the blob: Hannah Arendt's concept of the social*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Reeves, C. (2009). "Exploding the limits of law": Judgment and freedom in Arendt and Adorno. *Res Publica*, *15*, 137–164.

Rensmann, L. (2004). Collective guilt, national identity, and political processes in contemporary Germany. In N. R. Branscombe and B. Doosje (Eds.). *Collective guilt: International perspectives* (pp. 169–190). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rensmann, L., & Gandesha, S. (2012). *Arendt and Adorno: Political and philosophical investigations*.Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Young, I. M. (2013). Guilt and responsibility: A reading and partial critique of Hannah Arendt. In I. M. Young *Responsibility for justice* (pp. 75–95). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zerilli, L. M. G. (2012). Value pluralism and the problem of judgment: Farewell to public reason. *Political Theory*, *40*, 6–31.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Claudia Leeb is Assistant Professor of Political Theory in the School of Politics, Philosophy, and Public Affairs at Washington State University. She is the author of *The Politics of Repressed Guilt: The Tragedy of Austrian Silence* (2018), *Power and Feminist Agency in Capitalism* (2017), *Working-Class Women in Elite Academia* (2004), and *Die Zerstörung des Mythos von der Friedfertigen Frau* (1998).

How to cite this article: Leeb C. Rethinking embodied reflective judgment with Adorno and Arendt. *Constellations*. 2018;1–14. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12345